

# TESOL *Pre-K–12 English Language Proficiency Standards* Framework

The *Pre-K–12 English Language Proficiency Standards* are available in the TESOL Bookstore. The standards address concerns introduced by the No Child Left Behind legislation. It also presents detailed tables that show indicators of success at different levels of proficiency. The framework of the standards is available here for your convenience. For questions about using, reprinting, or quoting the *Pre-K–12 English Language Proficiency Standards*, see TESOL’s [Rights and Permissions](#) page.

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## 1. Presentation of a Clear Proficiency Standards Framework

The standards publication presents five language proficiency standards. They include both social and academic uses of the language students must acquire for success in and beyond the classroom. The English language proficiency standards are as follows:

Standard 1: English language learners **communicate** for **social, intercultural, and instructional** purposes within the school setting.

Standard 2: English language learners **communicate** information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of **language arts**.

Standard 3: English language learners **communicate** information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of **mathematics**.

Standard 4: English language learners **communicate** information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of **science**.

Standard 5: English language learners **communicate** information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of **social studies**.

## 2. Identification of Specific Grade-Level Clusters

The grade-level clusters for the English language proficiency standards reflect current educational configurations in the United States.

<b>PreK-K</b>	Grade levels preK-K are grouped together because the primary focus is on creating a learning environment that nurtures the development of young English language learners.
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<b>1-3</b>	Grade levels 1-3 are grouped together because in most elementary school programs, these grades are geared toward “learning to read.”
<b>4-5</b>	Grade levels 4-5 share the common goal of literacy skills application, often referred to as “reading to learn.”
<b>6-8</b>	At the 6-8 grade levels, English language learners face increased academic and social pressure to perform. In addition, at this level, there is a widening range of student performance.
<b>9-12</b>	Grade levels 9-12 reflect the traditional high school organization. The academic demands at the secondary level make reaching parity with grade-level peers increasingly difficult for English language learners.

### 3. Usage of Four Language Domains

Each of the five language proficiency standards is divided into the language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. While interaction naturally occurs between and among language domains, in this document, they are maintained as separate constructs as one way of thinking about curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

#### **Listening**

Listening is an active skill. By highlighting an assortment of listening tasks across standards, the need to involve students in active listening and purposeful listening skills development becomes clear.

#### **Speaking**

English language learners engage in oral communication in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes and in a wide spectrum of settings. As part of oral communication, students are constantly using language in meaningful interaction with others.

#### **Reading**

English language learners process, interpret, and evaluate written language, symbols, and text with understanding and fluency. Learning to read in a second language may be enhanced or hindered by students’ level of literacy in their native language. Students who have a strong foundation in reading in their first language bring with them skills that can be readily transferred in the process of learning to read in English.

#### **Writing**

English language learners use written communication for a variety of purposes and audiences. Writing can be used to express meaning through drawing, symbols, or text.

English language learners may come with writing styles influenced by their home cultures.

#### **4. Inclusion of Five Levels of Language Proficiency**

The use of five levels reflects the complexity of language development and allows the tracking of student progress across grade levels within the same scale. The five levels of language proficiency reflect characteristics of language performance at each developmental stage. The language proficiency levels are intended to highlight and provide a model of the process of language acquisition that can be adapted by individual districts and states.

##### **Level 1-Starting**

At L1, students initially have limited or no understanding of English. They rarely use English for communication. They respond nonverbally to simple commands, statements, and questions. As their oral comprehension increases, they begin to imitate the verbalizations of others by using single words or simple phrases, and they begin to use English spontaneously.

At the earliest stage, these learners construct meaning from text primarily through illustrations, graphs, maps, and tables.

##### **Level 2-Emerging**

At L2, students can understand phrases and short sentences. They can communicate limited information in simple everyday and routine situations by using memorized phrases, groups of words, and formulae. They can use selected simple structures correctly but still systematically produce basic errors. Students begin to use general academic vocabulary and familiar everyday expressions. Errors in writing are present that often hinder communication.

##### **Level 3-Developing**

At L3, students understand more complex speech but still may require some repetition. They use English spontaneously but may have difficulty expressing all their thoughts due to a restricted vocabulary and a limited command of language structure. Students at this level speak in simple sentences, which are comprehensible and appropriate, but which are frequently marked by grammatical errors. Proficiency in reading may vary considerably. Students are most successful constructing meaning from texts for which they have background knowledge upon which to build.

##### **Level 4-Expanding**

At L4, students' language skills are adequate for most day-to-day communication needs. They communicate in English in new or unfamiliar settings but have occasional difficulty with complex structures and abstract academic concepts.

Students at this level may read with considerable fluency and are able to locate and identify the specific facts within the text. However, they may not understand texts in which the concepts are presented in a decontextualized manner, the sentence structure is complex, or the vocabulary is abstract or has multiple meanings. They can read

independently but may have occasional comprehension problems, especially when processing grade-level information.

### **Level 5-Bridging**

At L5, students can express themselves fluently and spontaneously on a wide range of personal, general, academic, or social topics in a variety of contexts. They are poised to function in an environment with native speaking peers with minimal language support or guidance.

Students have a good command of technical and academic vocabulary as well of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. They can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured texts of differing lengths and degrees of linguistic complexity. Errors are minimal, difficult to spot, and generally corrected when they occur.

## **5. Proficiency Standards Background**

In the nearly ten years since the publication of TESOL's ESL Standards for Pre- K-12 Students, the standards movement has continued to grow and impact educational systems throughout the United States at the state, district, and classroom levels.

The provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) have also focused attention on the language needs of English language learners by requiring each state to develop English language proficiency standards.

Using TESOL's 1997 publication as a building block, the revised 2006 PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards

- Expand the scope and breadth of the ESL content standards by bridging them to specific core curriculum content areas, namely, English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies
- Use students' first languages and cultures as the foundation for developing academic language proficiency
- Provide an organizational structure that is synchronized with federal legislation.

In addition, the revised PreK-12 English Language Proficiency Standards build on and augment the World-class Instructional Design and Assessments (WIDA) Consortium's *English language proficiency standards for English language learners in Kindergarten through grade 12*.\*

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