

Student Performance Level (SPL) Descriptors

The information in this handout is intended to give you a general idea of your student’s English conversational abilities. Use the BEST Plus score to find the Student Performance Level (SPL) as shown in the following chart.

BEST Plus score range	SPL
Below 330	0
330 to 400	1
401 to 417	2
418 to 438	3
439 to 472	4
473 to 506	5
507 to 540	6
541 to 598*	7

* Learners “graduate” from the ESOL program once a score of 541 or above is achieved on the BEST Plus. At this point, the learner’s silent reading comprehension is assessed using the TABE (Test of Addult Basic Education).

The SPL descriptors indicate the strengths and limitations in each level as shown in the following table.

L	General Language Ability (Communication score)	Listening Comprehension (Listening score)	Oral Communication (Complexity score)
0	No ability whatsoever	No ability whatsoever	No ability whatsoever
1	Functions minimally, if at all, in English. Can handle only very routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral communication, and in which all tasks can be easily demonstrated. A native speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers can rarely communicate with a person at this level.	Understands only a few isolated words, and extremely simple learned phrases.	Vocabulary limited to a few isolated words. No control of grammar.

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L	General Language Ability (Communication score)	Listening Comprehension (Listening score)	Oral Communication (Complexity score)
2	Functions in a very limited way in situations related to immediate needs. Can handle only routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral communication, and in which all tasks can be easily demonstrated. A native English speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers will have great difficulty communicating with a person at this level.	Understands a limited number of very simple learned phrases, spoken slowly with frequent repetitions.	Expresses limited number of immediate survival needs using very simple learned phrases.
3	Functions with some difficulty in situations related to immediate needs. Can handle entry-level jobs that involve only the most basic oral communication, and in which all tasks can be demonstrated. A native English speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers will have great difficulty communicating with a person at this level.	Understands simple learned phrases, spoken slowly with frequent repetitions.	Expresses immediate survival needs using simple learned phrases.
4	Can satisfy basic survival needs and a few very routine social demands. Can handle entry-level jobs that involve some simple oral communication, but in which tasks can be easily demonstrated. A native speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers will have difficulty communicating with a person at this level.	Understands simple learned phrases easily, and some simple new phrases containing familiar vocabulary, spoken slowly with frequent repetitions.	Expresses basic survival needs including asking and responding to related questions, using both learned and a limited number of new phrases. Participates in basic conversations in a few very routine social situations. Speaks with hesitation and frequent pauses. Some control of basic grammar.

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L	General Language Ability (Communication score)	Listening Comprehension (Listening score)	Oral Communication (Complexity score)
5	<p>Can satisfy basic survival needs and some limited social demands. Can handle jobs and job training that involve following simple oral instructions but in which most tasks can also be demonstrated. A native speaker used to dealing with limited English speakers will have some difficulty communicating with a person at this level.</p>	<p>Understands learned phrases easily and short new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly with repetition. Has limited ability to understand on the telephone.</p>	<p>Functions independently in most face-to-face basic survival situations but needs some help. Asks and responds to direct questions on familiar and some unfamiliar subjects. Still relies on learned phrases but also uses new phrases but with hesitation and pauses. Communicates on the phone to express a limited number of survival needs, but with some difficulty. Participates in basic conversations in a limited number of social situations. Can occasionally clarify general meaning by simple rewording. Increasing, but inconsistent control of basic grammar.</p>
6	<p>Can satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands. Can handle jobs and job training that involve following simple oral and written instructions and diagrams. A native speaker not used to dealing with limited English speakers will be able to communicate with a person at this level on familiar topics, but with difficulty and some effort.</p>	<p>Understands conversations containing some unfamiliar vocabulary on many everyday subjects, with a need for repetition, rewording or slower speech. Has some ability to understand without face-to-face contact (e.g. phone, TV).</p>	<p>Functions independently in most survival situations, but needs some help. Relies less on learned phrase; speaks with creativity, but with hesitation. Communicates on the phone on familiar subjects but with some difficulty. Participates with some confidence in social situations when addressed directly. Can sometimes clarify general meaning by rewording. Control of basic grammar evident, but inconsistent; may attempt to use more difficult grammar but with almost no control.</p>

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L	General Language Ability (Communication score)	Listening Comprehension (Listening score)	Oral Communication (Complexity score)
7	<p>Can satisfy survival needs and routine work and social demands. Can handle work that involves following oral and simple written instructions in familiar and some unfamiliar situations. A native speaker not used to dealing with limited English speakers can generally communicate with a person at this level on familiar topics.</p>	<p>Understands conversations on most everyday subjects at normal speed when addressed directly; may need repetition, rewording, or slower speech. Understands routine work-related conversations. Increasing ability to understand without face-to-face contact. Has difficulty following conversation between native speakers.</p>	<p>Functions independently in survival and many social and work situations, but may need help occasionally. Communicates on the phone on familiar subjects. Expands on basic ideas in conversation, but still speaks with hesitation while searching for appropriate vocabulary and grammar. Clarifies general meaning easily, and can sometimes convey exact meaning. Controls basic grammar, but not more difficult grammar.</p>