

Numerous schools and districts throughout the US are setting proficiency targets as a first step in redesigning language programs that are geared to produce results. Research (2009) released by Avant Assessment as a result of its STAMP Test shows that the largest percentage of test takers at the end of first year language instruction (high school and higher education) scored as Novice-High speakers. Unfortunately, so was the largest percentage of test takers for second year and third year. Only in fourth year, did a significant percentage of students reach Intermediate-Low speech production. The levels below presume that classrooms will reflect standards-based, performance-oriented language learning and set targets that reflect a more respectable—and attainable given best practice—level of proficiency for each level and are offered here for your information.

### ***Level One***

(Speaking: Novice-High; Writing, Novice-High; Listening, Intermediate-Low; Reading: Intermediate-Low)

By the end of your first year of language study, you can understand and say a lot. You can read and write in the language, as well. In general, you can confidently give personal information about yourself, as well as information about others; you can tell about your likes and dislikes, your preferences and your needs, and you can even begin to handle yourself using the language for some daily functions, like asking for or giving directions or maybe even buying things like food or clothing. You provide information--either by making statements or answering questions--using words, phrases or short sentences (sometimes memorized) based on the situation. When you hear the language, you may need to have it repeated, but you will probably be able to figure it out as long as the speaker remembers that you are a language learner. You can also ask easy questions to get information that you need. When you read, you will get the main idea(s) and some of the details of what you have read. In writing, you will find that you can write much of what you can say by making lists, writing short messages and notes and even writing brief Internet-based social communications. You will probably make some mistakes when you communicate, but you should keep in mind that these mistakes are a natural part of learning a new language. Just pay attention to them to see if you can begin to eliminate them.

## ***Level Two***

(Speaking: Intermediate-Low; Writing, Intermediate-Low; Listening, Intermediate-Mid; Reading: Intermediate-Mid)

As you wrap up this level of language learning, you are feeling better about your ability to say what you want to say rather than having to rely a lot on memorized or short expressions. You can handle, with a bit more confidence, normal daily routines using your language, like ordering food, making simple purchases, asking for or giving directions. You speak and write more often in sentences than in just words or phrases, but your sentences are fairly simple and are most often in present tense. You can sometimes use past and future tense to communicate information, but your accuracy tends to decrease as you use these tenses. You are able to ask questions to gather information that you need or want. Since you are now creating more of what you want to communicate, you notice that you sometimes have to pause to formulate your thoughts--this is natural at this stage of your language learning journey. Errors continue to be present as you speak or write but you may find that you notice them more readily and are actually able to make some repairs as you go along. Your listening ability is expanding to include not only the conversations that you have in class with your teacher and your classmates but also short, routine telephone conversations and simple announcements and reports that you can hear on the television, radio, or on the Internet. You can read simple, straight-forward information about things that you are interested in as well as simple informational readings found in daily life (signs, menus, announcements/advisories). When you read these texts, you generally always get the main idea and can pick out some details.

## ***Levels Three and Four***

(Speaking: Intermediate-Mid; Writing, Intermediate-Mid; Listening, Intermediate-High; Reading: Intermediate-High )

Having reached this level of proficiency, you are at a place where you feel confident to communicate about normal, everyday matters. You can describe people and places and provide personal information about yourself and others, family, home, daily activities, interests and personal preferences. You can get into, through and out of normal

daily situations that involve obtaining food, lodging, transportation and also taking care of health issues. You can ask a variety of questions to obtain simple information and take care of your basic needs, like getting directions, prices and services. When you speak or write, you generally don't just use one sentence. You often link two short sentences together using a connector (for example, *and*, *but*, *or*) and you even produce strings of sentences to communicate your thoughts. You are getting much better about using proper word order as you communicate basic ideas but find it more difficult as you try to express more complex thoughts. Much of what you say or write takes places in present tense--and you are mostly accurate in this timeframe--but you do occasionally use past or future tense, although you make more errors in these two timeframes. Sometimes you can't exactly think of the right word to use but you are now able to "talk around" the word and find another way of getting your point across. When you listen to the target language, you can generally follow what is being said for a longer amount of time, although you sometimes find that you didn't quite understand the main idea. You do notice that you can more easily understand when the speaker uses past and future tense. You can pretty much read simple passages with full understanding as long as the topic is something you know or are interested in. Your understanding gets a bit shaky, however, when you read material that is written in more complex language and/or is a topic about which you are less familiar. Several re-readings seem to increase your understanding of these passages.

*Compiled by Greg Duncan and adapted from ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*