Today’s Agenda

- Background
- The Revision Process
- Goals and challenges
- NEW for Guidelines 2012
- Online support for Guidelines Text
- Next Steps
About the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

They are a global characterizations of integrated performance in each of four language skills:

- Speaking
- Writing
- Reading
- Listening

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines Describe

- Functional language ability
- The ability to **USE** language for real world purposes
  - Not what a learner knows about language
- What users of a language can and cannot do
  - Guidelines describe what a language user can do (say, write, understand) consistently at one level and cannot do at the next higher level
  - Descriptions are representative but not exhaustive for the level
  - Variety of linguistic profiles may be rated at the same level
  - Each rating describes a range of performance
The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines Provide

- “Common metric” for describing language abilities
  - Across all languages
- National (US) standard for proficiency testing and rating
- Framework for language assessment
  - Serve as rating criteria for ACTFL proficiency assessments (OPI, OPIc, WPT)
- “Washback” effect on curriculum and instruction
  - “Step ladder” for language learning
- Articulation across instructional levels and across languages

History of ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

- 1986 Publication
  - Derived from the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Language Skill Descriptions
    - Long government tradition of use
    - Since 1948
  - Government Scale adapted to academic context
  - 0+ to 5 changed to Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior
  - Novice and Intermediate divided into Low, Mid, High sublevels
ILR Descriptors and ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

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History of ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

- 1999 Revision of Speaking
  - Addition of Advanced Low and Advanced Mid sublevels
- 2001 Revision of Writing
  - Addition of Advanced Low and Advanced Mid sublevels
Why Revise The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines?

- A matter of evolving currency and relevancy
  - The more the Guidelines are used, the more they need to correspond to the realities of academic and workplace settings for which they are intended
- For Listening and Reading
  - Logical after 25 years
  - ACTFL’s desire to develop proficiency tests for reading and listening
- For Speaking and Writing
  - Critical borders needed to be revisited, clarified
    - Advanced High/Baseline Superior
    - Intermediate High/Advanced Low

Revision Process/ 1

- Began revisions in 2009
  - “time optimistic”
- Side by side analyses of
  - ILR Skill Level Descriptions
  - NATO STANAG 6001.3
  - Can-do statements as in
    - Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)
    - NCSSFL LinguaFolio can-do statements
Revision Process/2

- Developed a first draft version in early 2010
- Three separate rounds of review, feedback, and revision cycles
  - Concerns and criticism
  - Feedback was incorporated into subsequent drafts
- Vertical review within individual skills
- Horizontal review across skills
- Accessibility “jargon” review
- Created a General Preface and Prefaces for each skill

Reviewers

- Experts in proficiency testing
- Representatives from a variety of language groups
- Educators from K-12 and post secondary
- Government agency representatives
- Researchers
- Editors within and outside the profession
Goals for the 2012 Guidelines

- State clearly and succinctly the salient and differentiating features for major levels
- Update descriptions to reflect communication in the 21st century
- Define proficiency for the receptive skills
- Update descriptions to reflect current findings and research
- Limit negative statements to those necessary to define boundaries between major levels
- Ensure usability for lay populations
- Paperless dissemination
- Provide exemplars and rationales

State clearly and succinctly the salient and differentiating features for major levels

- **Distinguished**-level listeners understand speech that can be highly abstract, highly technical, or both, as well as speech that contains very precise, often low-frequency vocabulary and complex rhetorical structures.
- **Superior**-level listeners can follow linguistically complex extended discourse such as that found in academic and professional settings, lectures, speeches and reports.
- **Advanced**-level listeners can understand the main ideas and most supporting details in connected discourse on a variety of general interest topics, such as news stories, explanations, instructions, anecdotes, or travelogue descriptions.
- **Intermediate**-level listeners can understand information conveyed in simple, sentence-length speech on familiar or everyday topics.
- **Novice**-level listeners can understand key words, true aural cognates, and formulaic expressions that are highly contextualized and highly predictable, such as those found in introductions and basic courtesies.
State clearly and succinctly the salient and differentiating features for major levels

- **Distinguished**-level listeners understand speech that can be highly abstract, highly technical, or both, as well as speech that contains very precise, often low-frequency vocabulary and complex rhetorical structures.

- **Superior**-level listeners can follow linguistically complex extended discourse such as that found in academic and professional settings, lectures, speeches and reports.

- **Advanced**-level listeners can understand the main ideas and most supporting details in connected discourse on a variety of general interest topics, such as news stories, explanations, instructions, anecdotes, or travelogue descriptions.

- **Intermediate**-level listeners can understand information conveyed in simple, sentence-length speech on familiar or everyday topics.

- **Novice**-level listeners can understand key words, true aural cognates, and formulaic expressions that are highly contextualized and highly predictable, such as those found in introductions and basic courtesies.

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Define Proficiency for the Receptive Skills

The ability to comprehend a text/passage for the purpose for which it was produced (written or spoken).

From Preface for Reading:

“These Guidelines do not describe how reading skills develop, how one learns to read, nor the actual cognitive processes involved in the activity of reading. Rather, they are intended to describe what readers are able to understand from what they read.”

Update to Reflect Communication in the 21st Century

Excerpt from Preface – Speaking

These Guidelines can be used to evaluate speech that is either Interpersonal (interactive, two-way communication) or Presentational (one-way, non-interactive).
Update to Reflect Communication in the 21st Century

Excerpt from Preface - Writing

These Guidelines can be used to describe written text that is either Presentational (essays, reports, letters) or Interpersonal (instant messaging, e-mail communication, texting). Moreover, they apply to writing that is spontaneous (immediate, unedited) or reflective (revised, edited).

Update Descriptions to Reflect Current Findings and Research

Ex: Degree to which familiarity with the subject matter impacts reading comprehension

- **Advanced Mid** Comprehension derives not only from situational and subject-matter knowledge but also from knowledge of the language itself.
- **Intermediate Mid** ...readers are able to understand short, non-complex texts that convey basic information and deal with basic personal and social topics to which the reader brings personal interest or knowledge, although some misunderstandings may occur.
Limit negative statements to those necessary to define boundaries between major levels

Ex: Intermediate High - Speaking

However, their performance of these Advanced-level tasks will exhibit one or more features of breakdown, such as the failure to maintain the narration or description semantically or syntactically in the appropriate major time frame, the disintegration of connected discourse, the misuse of cohesive devises, a reduction in breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary, the failure to successfully circumlocute, or a significant amount of hesitation.

NEW for the 2012 Guidelines

- Addition of a major level above Superior
  - Speaking and Writing
- Addition of a general level description
  - Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced
- Addition of a Glossary of Terms
- Publication in a downloadable pdf format

http://actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=5305
NEW
Addition of a Major Level above Superior

- The 1986 Guidelines included a Distinguished level for Reading and Listening
- Do we make all skills parallel?
  - Delete Distinguished from Reading and Listening or
  - Add Distinguished to Speaking and Writing
- Discussion
  - Is there a need? Is there a market?
  - Is this level appropriate for the ACTFL context and constituency?

Add a Level above Superior - NO

- What does it mean that an organization for foreign language teaching includes a level of language ability that even few educated native speakers of the language can achieve?
- Practical considerations for testing
  - Numbers of testers that are able to test beyond the Superior level
Add a Level above Superior - YES

- Create stronger connections between the educational system and post-education professional world
  - Demand for higher levels of proficiency in workplace to serve in a professional field as a highly articulate, well educated speaker of the language
- Target educational goals of higher linguistic proficiency
  - Students are reaching higher levels of proficiency
  - Ex: Language Flagship and Wharton School’s Lauder IMBA Program
- Coordinate definitions of proficiency at the highest levels with standards used by the government
- Better align with the highest level (C2) described in the Common European Framework of Reference
- Differentiate that which is Superior from that which is more than Superior

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NEW

Addition of a General Level Description for Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced for all Skills

- General descriptions of the major level provide the overall progression of the levels
  - Deal with the “big picture” before dealing with the details

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**Speaking**

**ADVANCED**
Speakers at the Advanced level engage in conversation in a clearly participatory manner in order to communicate information on autobiographical topics, as well as topics of community, national, or international interest. The topics are handled concretely by means of narration and description in the major times frames of past, present, and future. These speakers can also deal with a social situation with an unexpected complication. The language of Advanced-level speakers is abundant, the oral paragraph being the measure of Advanced-level length and discourse. Advanced-level speakers have sufficient control of basic structures and generic vocabulary to be understood by native speakers of the language, including those unaccustomed to non-native speech.

**INTERMEDIATE**
Speakers at the Intermediate level are distinguished primarily by their ability to create with the language when talking about familiar topics related to their daily life. They are able to recombine learned material in order to express personal meaning. Intermediate level speakers can ask simple questions and can handle a straightforward survival situation. They produce sentence-level language, ranging from discrete sentences to strings of sentences, typically in present time. Intermediate-level speakers are understood by interlocutors who are accustomed to dealing with non-native learners of the language.

**NOVICE**
Novice-level speakers can communicate short messages on highly predictable, everyday topics that affect them directly. They do so primarily through the use of isolated words and phrases that have been encountered, memorized, and recalled. Novice-level speakers may be difficult to understand even by the most sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to non-native speech.

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NEW
Glossary of Terms

Recombinations: The ways in which speakers put together linguistic elements (word, phrases, sentences) that they have learned to create in an original message.

Genre: Any category of literature, as well as various forms of art and culture, e.g., music based on a loose set of stylistic criteria.

Abstract linguistic formulations: The use of abstract expressions to communicate abstract ideas. The structure used to convey an abstract idea is itself an abstract expression. Vocabulary choices beyond the basic word in a semantic field is one example. The phrase "beltway insider" to refer negatively to career politicians is an abstract formulation.
Online support for Guidelines Text

- Available via ACTFL Website (2012)
- Ability to navigate all skills and all levels
- Mouse-over glossing
- Level-specific exemplars for all skills
  - English
  - Annotations

Home Page with preface and acknowledgements

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Speaking - Preface

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012—Speaking describe five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The description of each major level is representative of a specific range of abilities. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels.

The Guidelines describe the tasks that speakers can handle at each level, as well as the content, context, accuracy, and discourse types associated with tasks at each.
Writing - Preface

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012—Writing describe five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The description of each major level is representative of a specific range of abilities. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The Guidelines describe the tasks that writers can handle at each level as well as the content, context, accuracy, and discourse types associated with the writing tasks at each level. They also present the limits that writers encounter when attempting to function at the next higher major level.

The written descriptions of writing proficiency are accompanied online by writing samples illustrating the features of each major level.

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Listening - Preface

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012—Listening describe five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The description of each major level is representative of a specific range of abilities. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The subdivision of the Advanced Level into High, Mid, and Low is new. This makes the Listening descriptions parallel to the other skill-level descriptions.

Listening is an interpretive skill. Listening comprehension is largely based on the amount of information listeners can retrieve from what they hear and the inferences and connections that they can make. By describing the tasks that listeners can perform with different types of oral texts and under different types of circumstances, the Listening Proficiency Guidelines describe how listeners process oral dis-

These Guidelines apply to listening texts that reflect the various types of listening: participative, non-participative, and overheard. The Guidelines do not describe how listening skills develop, how one learns to listen, nor the actual cognitive processes involved in the activity. Rather, they are intended to describe what listeners understand from what they hear.

The written descriptions of listening proficiency are accompanied online by authentic speech samples and the functional listening tasks associated with each major level.

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Reading - Preface

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012—Reading describe five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The description of each major level is representative of a specific range of abilities. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The subdivision of the Advanced level is new. This makes the Reading descriptions parallel to the other skill level descriptions.

Reading is an interpretive skill. Reading comprehension is largely based on the amount of information readers can retrieve from a text, and the inferences and connections that they can make within and across texts. By describing

The written descriptions of reading proficiency are accompanied online by authentic text samples and the functional reading tasks associated with each major level.

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Writing exemplar with rationale

Writing - Intermediate

Writers at the Intermediate level are characterized by the ability to meet practical writing needs, such as simple messages and letters, requests for information, and notes. In addition, they can ask and respond to simple questions in writing. These writers can create with the language and communicate simple facts and ideas in a series of loosely connected sentences on topics of personal interest and social needs.

Intermediate High
Writers at the Intermediate High sublevel are able to meet all practical writing needs of the Intermediate level. Additionally, they can write compositions and simple summaries related to work and school experiences. They can narrate and describe in different time frames when writing about everyday events and situations. These narrations and descriptions are often, but not always, of paragraph length, and they typically contain some evidence of breakdown in one or more features of the Advanced level. For example, these writers may be inconsistent in the use of appropriate major time markers, resulting in a loss of clarity. The vocabulary, grammar, and style of Intermediate High writers essentially correspond to those of the spoken language. Intermediate High writing, even with numerous and perhaps significant errors, is generally comprehensible to natives not used to the writing of non-natives, but there are likely to be gaps in comprehension.

Intermediate Mid
Writers at the Intermediate Mid sublevel are able to meet a number of practical writing needs. They can write short, simple communications, compositions, and requests for information in loosely connected texts about personal preferences, daily routines, common events, and other personal topics. Their writing is framed in present time but may contain references to other time frames. The writing style closely resembles oral discourse. Writers at the Intermediate Mid sublevel show evidence of control of basic sentence structure and verb forms. This writing is best defined as a collection of discrete sentences and/or questions loosely strung together. There is little evidence of deliberate organization. Intermedi- ate Mid writing, even with numerous and perhaps significant errors, is generally comprehensible to natives not used to the writing of non-natives, but there are likely to be gaps in comprehension.
Multi-media exemplars with rationales

Speaking » Advanced » Example » Grace

The following excerpts from an Oral Proficiency Interview are examples of speech at the Advanced Level.

The first excerpt shows that the speaker can narrate and describe with some details (That child um, that child's parents died in a fire and his siblings also got injured and now he ended up with no home) and can link sentences together smoothly (Umm, because I'm only there once a week, there isn't really much I can do. And because he's very withdrawn...). The second excerpt shows the speaker's ability to discuss a topic of current interest (the real estate market in her area) and the third excerpt, as a follow up to the second, shows the speaker's ability to provide elaboration as requested (I think it means that... so that's why it's called "mini-Manhattan."). The speaker tends to use general or generic vocabulary and possesses strategies to compensate for lexical and syntactic limitations (...housing uk, jump, uh, jumping high, and there... because there's no land to build more houses.)

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Mouse-over glossing

Speaking - Advanced

Speakers at the Advanced level engage in conversation in a clearly participatory manner in order to communicate information on autobiographical topics, as well as topics of community, national, or international interest. The topics are handled concretely by means of narration and description in the major time frames of past, present, and future. These speakers can also deal with an unexpected complication.

Time frames
- General people in time, past, present, or future, but not necessarily tense, that indicate those specific times

Advanced High
Speakers at the Advanced High sublevel perform all Advanced-level tasks with linguistic ease, confidence and competence. They are consistently able to explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames. In addition, Advanced High speakers handle the tasks pertaining to the Superior level but cannot sustain performance at that level across a variety of topics. They may provide a structured argument to support their opinions, and they may construct hypothesis, but patterns of error appear. They can discuss some topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests and special fields of expertise, but in general, they are more comfortable discussing a variety of topics concretely.

Advanced High speakers may demonstrate a well-developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms
Glossary of Terms

Also in the works ...

- Language-specific annotations and samples
  - Arabic annotations and samples
  - Plan to add other language-specific annotations and samples in 2012
- Can-do Statements
  - ACTFL to align Lingua-Folio Can-do statements with 2012 Guidelines
- Tutorials
  - Guidelines’ applications and implications
  - Text typology
Arabic Annotations and Samples

National Arabic Consensus Project

The Arabic Oral Proficiency Testing Consensus Initiative is a collaborative, multi-year, project funded by the National Security Educational Program under the Language Flagship Diffusion of Innovation Grant Program. This project brought together language testing experts from the Arabic Flagship programs, ACTFL, the National Foreign Language Center, and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point to address a number of issues unique to testing spoken Arabic.

The original initiative was designed to focus on building consensus within the Arabic language teaching and testing communities on how to incorporate the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines - Speaking for the testing of Spoken Arabic, and how to provide more effective teacher and tester training in light of the unique challenges of testing spoken Arabic. The outcomes of the consensus building phase would then be disseminated in the form of Annotations to the current revisions of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

Early in the project, the Leadership Team, Mahmoud Al-Bata, Mahmoud Abdalla, Mahdi Akeen, Asa Elphilli, Jerry Lampe, and Elvira Swendner, made the decision to expand the work of the project to also include collecting samples and writing annotations for the three remaining skills described in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: Reading, Listening, and Writing.

A National Meeting in March of 2009 convened representatives from academia, government, and the private sector to discuss a number of issues critical to the teaching and testing of Arabic. The participants at the 2009 Consensus Meeting agreed that for instructional and assessment purposes, Arabic should be treated as one language — representing a continuum from colloquial to Modern Standard Arabic and various degrees of combination along the continuum. Skill-specific committees were formed and plans were made for gathering samples and writing Arabic-specific annotations that will accompany the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines which are undergoing revision.

The work of the four committees will be published electronically on the ACTFL Guidelines Website (currently under construction) in order to allow

Arabic-specific annotations

Novice Mid
At the Novice Mid Level, listeners can recognize and begin to understand a number of high frequency, highly contextualized words and/or phrases including cognates and borrowed words. Typically they understand little more than one phrase at a time, and repetition may be required. Sometimes, although rarely, Novice Mid listeners may derive meaning from Intermediate Level speech.

Novice Low
At the Novice Low Level, listeners are able occasionally to recognize isolated words and/or highest frequency phrases [3] when strongly supported by context. These listeners show virtually no comprehension of Intermediate Level discourse.

Arabic Specific Annotation
[1] This refers to novice-level-accessible listening texts.
[2] "Loosely organized" refers to texts that show no or limited elements of cohesion on the linguistic level. Context/ message is cohesive.
[3] Extralinguistic support in a novice-accessible text may include visual or aural cues including visual context, setting, gesture, music, etc. Incomplete cultural knowledge on the part of the listener may make some extralinguistic features inaccessible to novice level listeners.
[4] In addition to extralinguistic context, accuracy in comprehension depends heavily on the delivery of the message (articulation, background noise, accent, pauses, fillers). Comprehension depends heavily on the listener’s exposure to a particular dialect or register of Arabic. Because novice-accessible listening texts generally involve the most common day-to-day topics and language, exposure to informal registers of Arabic at this level is key to successful comprehension of authentic listening texts.

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Also in the works ...

- Can-do Statements
  - ACTFL to align Lingua-Folio Can-do statements with 2012 Guidelines
- Tutorials
  - Guidelines’ applications and implications
  - Text typology

Thank you

http://actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=5305