

WIDA Alternate Proficiency Level Descriptors

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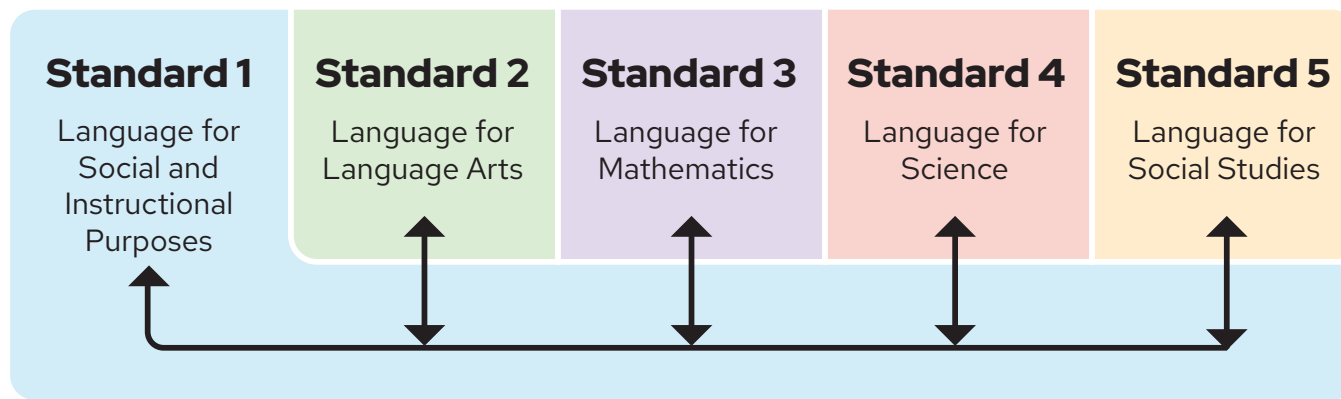
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Overview

The resources in this document are intended to support classroom instruction. As with all WIDA products and services, they address language proficiency in relation to five English language development (ELD) standard statements. Since 2004, these statements have emphasized the importance of providing multilingual learners with opportunities to understand how language works in the context of content-area instruction. The five ELD standards statements are abbreviated, as shown in Figure 1, to emphasize the use of language for thinking and acting in the ways of knowing prioritized by that content area.

Figure 1. Conceptual Relationships among the Five WIDA Standards

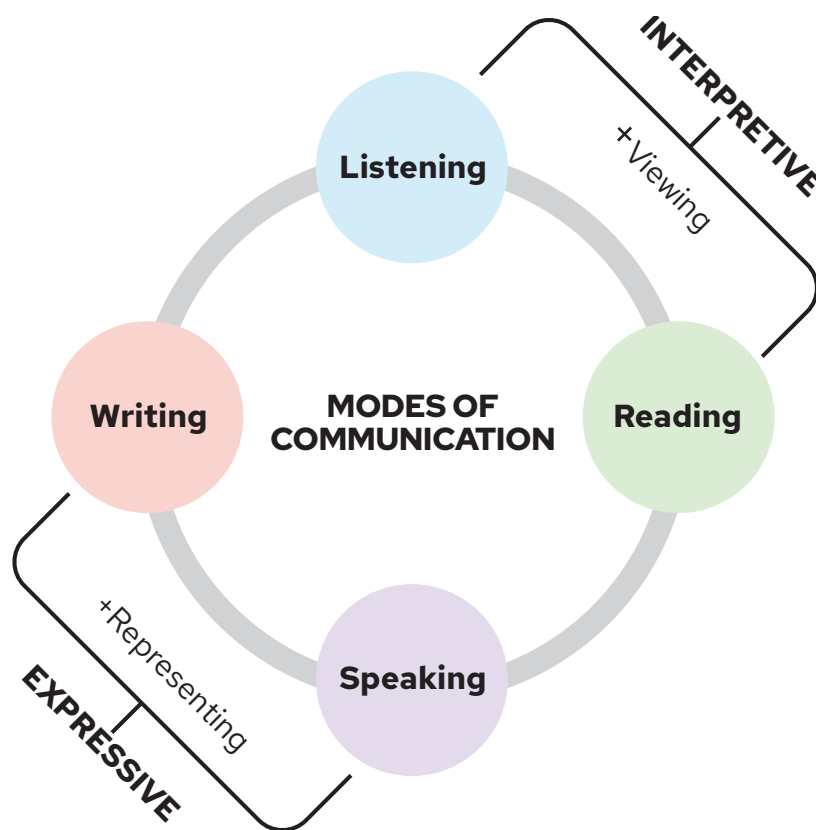


Conceptually, as illustrated in Figure 1, WIDA Standard 1 (Language for Social and Instructional Purposes) is designed to integrate with Standards 2–5 (Language for Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies), emphasizing the use of everyday language as a springboard to co-construct meaning making in academic discussions and explorations (Shafer Willner, Kray, & Gottlieb, 2021).

Organization of Alternate Proficiency Level Descriptors

The Alternate Proficiency Level Descriptors (PLDs) are organized into five levels of English language proficiency for two communication modes: interpretive and expressive (see Figure 2). The two communication modes encompass the four language domains (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), as outlined in federal requirements for language proficiency standards, and they spotlight the multimodal nature of both language development and content-area learning. They also position language as being more tightly integrated with other communication resources by including viewing and representing. These expanded communication modes invite multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression, thereby extending accessibility principles to all multilingual learners, including those with more intensive learning needs.

Figure 2. WIDA Modes of Communication



The Alternate PLDs describe how multilingual learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities use and understand English language and communication toward the end of each level of English language proficiency. Each end-of-level descriptor builds on previous proficiency levels (e.g., PL4 = PL1 + PL2 + PL3). In other words, English language development, as depicted by the Alternate PLDs, is cumulative. The Alternate PLDs are not grade-specific but rather can be applied across grade-level clusters and grade-appropriate alternate academic content.

The Alternate PLDs are written along three dimensions of language use: discourse, sentence, and word/phrase.

- The **discourse dimension** communicates overall meaning across an entire text, including how a language user constructs, communicates, or understands the overall message conveyed, including its organization, connectedness, and degree of detail.
- For multilingual learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities, this also includes the **sentence dimension** as an indication of grammatical complexity of clause structures (i.e., chunks of language, and simple, compound, or complex sentences).
- The discourse dimension is supported by the **word/phrase dimension**, which adds precision and specificity to communication. Like all language learners, multilingual learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities may often use high-frequency words, but as language develops, they can use and interpret cross-disciplinary and content-area specific language to express ideas and interpret concepts. The precision of student communication is also impacted by the degree to which it is embedded in context.

Educators can use the Alternate PLDs to understand characteristics of language development at various levels of language proficiency in interpretive and expressive communication. This can help educators to scaffold learning and resources across levels of English language and communication proficiency, by recognizing where students are now and where they need to go next. However, as the Alternate PLDs are not grade-level or grade-band specific, they must be interpreted with the lens of grade- and developmental-level appropriateness.

Listening

At each grade, toward the end of a given level of English language proficiency, and with individualized instruction, appropriate supports, accommodations, and communication tools, English language learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities will use English to interpret and respond to the Discourse and Word/Phrase Dimensions for each of the proficiency levels described below.

Proficiency Level	Discourse Dimension Linguistic Complexity	Word/Phrase Dimension Vocabulary Usage
5 Bridging	A variety of connected and complex statements or questions across academic topics. Organized, related ideas across academic content areas.	Specific content area language A variety of academic contexts (e.g., across content areas).
4 Expanding	Compound connected conveyed expression(s) through one or more representations of language. Related, familiar ideas characteristic of academic content areas.	General and increasingly specific content area language. Increasingly expanding familiar and novel contexts.
3 Developing	Simple connected statements or questions. A familiar idea with an example.	General content words and expressions. Expanding familiar contexts.
2 Emerging	Simple conveyed expression(s). A single idea in expanding familiar contexts.	General high frequency and content-related words. Routine, shared contexts.
1 Entering	Routine and familiar conveyed expressions. An idea conveyed within familiar contexts.	Single representations of a conveyed expression. Intentional communication in concrete, immediate contexts.

Reading

At each grade, toward the end of a given level of English language proficiency, and with individualized instruction, appropriate supports, accommodations, and communication tools, English language learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities will use English to interpret and respond to the Discourse and Word/Phrase Dimensions for each of the proficiency levels described below.

Proficiency Level	Discourse Dimension Linguistic Complexity	Word/Phrase Dimension Vocabulary Usage
5 Bridging	Connected text with a variety of sentences (e.g., simple, compound, and complex sentences). Organized related ideas across academic content areas.	Specific content area language. A variety of academic contexts (e.g., across content areas).
4 Expanding	Simple connected text. Related familiar ideas across content areas.	General and specific content area language. Increasingly expanding familiar and novel contexts.
3 Developing	Simple sentence or sentences. A familiar idea an example.	General content words and expressions. Expanding familiar contexts.
2 Emerging	Multiple representations or short phrases. A single idea in expanding familiar contexts.	General high frequency and content-related words. Routine, shared contexts.
1 Entering	A single representation. An idea within words, phrases, or chunks of language in familiar contexts or in environmental print.	Single representations of letters or words. Familiar contexts or in environmental print.

Speaking

At each grade, toward the end of a given level of English language proficiency, and with individualized instruction, appropriate supports, accommodations, and communication tools, English language learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities will use English to produce the Discourse and Word/Phrase Dimensions for each of the proficiency levels described below.

Proficiency Level	Discourse Dimension Linguistic Complexity	Word/Phrase Dimension Vocabulary Usage
5 Bridging	A combination of short and expanded statements (at least two) across social and academic contexts with emerging complexity. New ideas in the context of familiar and novel content.	General and specific content area language. Increasingly expanding familiar and novel contexts.
4 Expanding	Two or more simple connected statements or questions. Expanded expression of one idea or emerging expression of multiple related ideas in particular content areas.	General content words and expressions. Expanding familiar contexts.
3 Developing	One or more simple statements or questions. Expression of one idea in particular content area.	General content-related words. Routine, shared contexts.
2 Emerging	Chunks of language or phrases (at least two). Emerging expression of a familiar idea.	General high-frequency and content-related words. Concrete, immediate contexts.
1 Entering	At least one intentional sound or word. Intentional communication of an idea.	Single representations of a spoken expression. Intentional communication in immediate contexts.

Writing

At each grade, toward the end of a given level of English language proficiency, and with individualized instruction, appropriate supports, accommodations, and communication tools, English language learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities will use English to produce the Discourse and Word/Phrase Dimensions for each of the proficiency levels described below.

Proficiency Level	Discourse Dimension Linguistic Complexity	Word/Phrase Dimension Vocabulary Usage
5 Bridging	Student writes at least two simple sentences or at least one compound sentence related to one or more ideas that reflect a coherent idea, concept, or experience. New ideas in the context of familiar and novel content.	General and specific content area language. Increasingly expanding familiar and novel contexts.
4 Expanding	The student writes one simple sentence related to an increasingly complex idea. Expanded expression of an idea in a particular content area.	General content words and expressions. Expanding familiar contexts.
3 Developing	The student writes one or more chunks of language, phrases, or clauses about an idea. Emerging expression of an idea in a particular content area.	General content-related words. Routine, shared contexts.
2 Emerging	The student writes a single word. Emerging expression of a familiar idea.	General high-frequency words. Concrete, immediate contexts.
1 Entering	The student writes one single representation of something (e.g., number, letter, symbol). Intentional written expression to convey meaning.	Single representations of words. Intentional communication in immediate contexts.

Alternate Proficiency Level Descriptors

Glossary and Text Examples

Academic contexts: Settings, situations, or environments that relate to school, learning, or education. These contexts typically involve specific content, skills, and expectations associated with formal instruction.

Chunks: Groups of words that are used regularly together in the same (or nearly the same) order. Chunks include lexical phrases, set phrases, and fixed phrases.

Examples: "by the way"; "sounds exciting"; "paper and garbage; throw away"; "cars racing"; "play cars"; "big tree"; "no rain"; "in box" or "in the box"

Clause: A group of words that contains both a subject and a verb.

Examples: "Mina smiled"; "He wants to be a doctor"

Complex sentence: A sentence that contains one independent and at least one dependent clause.

Examples: "I like to ride my bike to school." "When it rains, I wear my boots."

Compound sentence: A sentence that has at least two independent clauses that have related ideas and can be joined by a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) or by a semicolon.

Examples: "Ula likes juice, and Diego likes milk." "Milo was tired, so he took a nap."

Connected statement: A sentence that connects various concepts (or ideas) and parts of speech and shows the relationship between them through the use of conjunctions (e.g., as, and, but, if, or, etc.), prepositions (e.g., at, by, to, etc.), and adverbs (e.g., then, next, soon, later, etc.).

Examples: "The grasshopper eats grass, and the bird eats the grasshopper."; "I ride to school and then play with my friends."

Connected text: A sequence of related sentences or paragraphs that form a cohesive whole, such as a story, article, or essay.

Expression: A thought, feeling, or idea that is conveyed through speech, gesture, or symbol system and understood by others.

Examples: "I like gym class."; "Tamales are good."

Emerging expression: One or more words used together to express a thought, feeling, or idea that is conveyed through speech, gesture, or symbol system and understood by others.

Examples: "red bird"; "math fun"; "sing loud"

Expanded expression: A series of two or more connected thoughts, feelings, or ideas that are conveyed through speech, gesture, or symbol system and understood by others.

Examples: "I take a computer class. I can learn about video games."; "I want to go to Vietnam. My mom went there."

Familiar contexts: Situations, topics, or settings that a student has prior knowledge or experience with.

Multiple representations: The use of more than one way to express an idea or concept. This can include a combination of words, gestures, symbols, pictures, or other forms of communication.

Examples: A student pointing to a picture of a cat while saying "cat"; writing the number "3" and showing three fingers; using a plus sign (+) and saying "add."

Phrase: A group of two or more words within a clause or sentence. A phrase may act as a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, or preposition within a clause or sentence. A phrase never contains both a subject and a verb.

Examples: "to the store"; "needing help"; "best friend"

Routine contexts: Familiar and predictable situations or activities that occur regularly.

Short statement: A brief expression of an idea or thought, often consisting of a simple sentence.

Examples: "I am happy."; "The book is big."; "It is raining."

Simple sentence: As sentence that contains, at minimum, a subject and verb; also may include a direct or indirect object.

Examples: "I learn math."; "Rain falls."; "Sun is warm."; "Rabbit is in grass."; "Window is square."; "She uses soap."

Single representation: A letter, number, sound or sign.

Examples: "b"; "4"; "/k/"

Support Strategies

Shared Reading: A process in which the student joins in or shares the reading of text while guided and supported by the teacher. In an assessment setting, this may include modeling by the test administrator and then prompting the student to complete the task.

Shared Writing: A process in which the student collaborates with the teacher to jointly construct a written text. In an assessment setting, this may include modeling by the test administrator and then prompting the student to complete the task.

References

Shafer Willner, L., Kray, F., & Gottlieb, M. (2021). What's the same and what's been updated in the WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 Edition. *MinneTESOL Journal*, 37(2). <https://minnetesoljournal.org/whats-the-same-and-whats-been-updated-in-the-wida-english-language-development-standards-framework-2020-edition/>

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