



The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages provides the following information to assist the Illinois State Board of Education in setting in its administrative rules the threshold level of language performance for earning the Illinois Seal of Biliteracy.

Talking Points on Setting Level for Illinois' Seal of Biliteracy

- The WIDA Performance Definitions and ACTFL Proficiency Levels represent different purposes and scales. WIDA criteria are intended to measure academic second language development, content and subject area specific, representing a hierarchy of vocabulary and text type. ACTFL Proficiency Levels are intended to measure a broader usage of language, not limited to an academic context, representing a hierarchy of language functions.
- Since the Illinois Seal of Biliteracy will be representative of high school performance, another source of comparison is the College Board's Advanced Placement descriptions of Achievement Levels for the Language and Culture Exams, a measure of end of program performance. The Advanced Placement Achievement Level Descriptions address language functions and provide a close match for purposes of comparison with the ACTFL Proficiency Levels.
- Native speakers spend most of their life for everyday communication at the ACTFL Advanced level. The WIDA level 5 therefore is more like Intermediate High as it is defined as "approaching comparability to that of proficient English peers." The Intermediate High language user is able to produce Advanced level language, as they approach comparability, but are not able to do it all the time.

Comparison of ACTFL Proficiency Levels with WIDA Performance Definitions

- Language functions are not the basis of the WIDA Performance Definitions; language functions are at the heart of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Intermediate High language users are able to perform the functions of the Advanced level, but not all the time, showing more success with more familiar topics.
- The WIDA Performance Definitions mainly focus on text type: "variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity, extended oral or written discourse, including stories, essays, or reports"
- The WIDA Performance Definitions focus on a different context: "specialized or technical language of content areas" (which is generally based on familiarity with basic information for the subject area)
- The WIDA Performance Definitions emphasize comparability to oral or written language of English-proficiency peers (when presented with grade level material). Grade level material will be practiced within a unit of instruction, thus providing the element of familiarity for Intermediate High language users to be able to frequently perform like Advanced level language users and deal with vocabulary that is specialized. However, beyond vocabulary, it is important to identify the language functions and the degree of accuracy demonstrated.

Seal of Biliteracy Requirements in Other States

California: Not tied to a proficiency level (evidence includes years of study of a language)

New Jersey: Looking at Intermediate High, but maybe Intermediate Mid

New York: Criterion is “high level of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages, in addition to English.” 2014-15 will be a one-year pilot implementation program; 2015-16 will be full implementation with participating districts

States considering the Seal of Biliteracy:

Utah: Under consideration is having two levels for the Seal of Biliteracy (likely a basic “gold” Seal at Intermediate Mid; a “platinum” level of the Seal at Advanced Low)

Maryland is considering Intermediate High for the Seal of Biliteracy

Comparison of ACTFL Proficiency Levels with Advanced Placement Exams:

- The College Board’s Achievement Level Descriptions provide very detailed expectations for student performance at each AP score level for each of six learning objectives for the course and exam. These are published in each of the College Board’s re-designed courses’ *Course and Exam Descriptions*.
- Anecdotal evidence and examination of the scoring rubric indicate that students who are showing evidence of Intermediate Mid proficiency are likely to score a 3 (passing score) on the AP Language and Culture Exam; students showing evidence of Intermediate High proficiency are likely to score a 4 or 5; students showing evidence of Advanced level proficiency are the most likely to score a 5 on the AP exam. Intermediate High language users are able to function at the Advanced level, but are not able to sustain that performance across the tasks and contexts of the Advanced level.
- Here is a link to the current Achievement Level Descriptions in Spanish (see pages 8-29 of this document for the long and detailed descriptions):
<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/courses/descriptions/index.html>
- The College Board website provides sample activities from the AP Language and Culture exams, which are based on the National Standards’ three modes of communication (Interpersonal, Interpretive, and Presentational):
 - Listen to a radio or television broadcast and present its content and your own opinions about it to your class)
 - Read and discuss current events
 - Compare and contrast cultural perspectives between your community and those of a Spanish-speaking community

Supporting Materials:

Comparison of AP Achievement Level Descriptions (Level 3 – Passing) with ACTFL Proficiency Level of Intermediate High

Categories	AP – Level 3	Corresponding ACTFL Proficiency Level and Sub-Level
Interpersonal		
Strategies	Circumlocution and paraphrasing	Advanced (Low): able to use rephrasing and circumlocution; some evidence at Intermediate High
	Seek clarification by asking for repetition	Novice (High): with repetition or rephrasing, can generally be understood by those used to non-natives
	Use context to deduce meaning of unfamiliar words	Intermediate : Listeners rely heavily on redundancy, restatement, paraphrasing, and contextual clues; Advanced listeners compensate for limitations in lexical and structural control by using real-world knowledge and contextual clues
	May recognize errors; attempts at correction are only occasionally successful	Intermediate (Mid): speech may contain pauses, reformulations, and self-corrections
Opinions	State opinions on topics of personal interest	Intermediate : familiar topics related to their daily life (Advanced: topics of community, national, or international interest)
	Understand and respond to questions and statements on familiar topics	Intermediate (High): able to handle successfully uncomplicated tasks and social situations requiring an exchange related to work, school, recreation, interests, and areas of competence
Language structures	Narrations and descriptions characterized by strings of simple sentences and a few compound sentences; Most accuracy in the present time and some accuracy in other time frames	Intermediate (High): can narrate and describe in all major time frames using connected discourse of paragraph length, but not all the time; Intermediate Mid: produce responses typically consisting of sentences and strings of sentences
Vocabulary	Use vocabulary from familiar thematic word groups; Some culturally appropriate and idiomatic expressions	Intermediate : Recombine learned material in order to produce personal meaning
Pronunciation	Comprehensible to an audience accustomed to interacting with language learners, yet errors occasionally impede comprehensibility	Intermediate (Mid): generally understood by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives
Interpretive		
Comprehension of Content	Identify some main ideas and details on familiar topics	Advanced (Low): understand the main ideas and some supporting details; Intermediate High: occasional gaps in understanding due to a limited knowledge of the vocabulary, structures, and writing conventions of the language.

	Respond accurately to basic information questions	Intermediate: understand texts that convey basic information
	Can sometimes use context to deduce meaning of unfamiliar words and make limited inferences	Intermediate: Readers rely heavily on contextual clues
Vocabulary	Comprehend a variety of vocabulary on topics of personal interest	Intermediate (High): text that convey basic information and deal with personal and social topics
Presentational – Spoken or Written		
Discourse and development	Use strings of sentences and a few basic cohesive devices to express personal opinions, describe and narrate on familiar topics	Intermediate (High): can narrate and describe in different time frames when writing about everyday events and situations; often but not always of paragraph length
Language structures	Produce simple and compound sentences with the most accuracy in the present time; some accuracy in other time frames	Intermediate (Mid): their writing is framed in present time but may contain references to other time frames. Intermediate High: Narrations and descriptions are often but not always of paragraph length
	Errors may impede comprehensibility	Intermediate (High): even with numerous and perhaps significant errors, is generally comprehensible to native not used to the writing of non-natives.
Writing Conventions	Use of standard conventions of written language is inconsistent, which may cause confusion for the reader	Intermediate (Low): There may be basic errors in punctuation, spelling.

The redesigned Advanced Placement Spanish Language and Culture Exam requires students to demonstrate their ability to do the following tasks, which represent language functions across many different ACTFL Proficiency Levels; however, it is in the evaluation criteria that the performance expectations are defined for each rating (1-5):

- Identify and summarize the main points and significant details and make appropriate inferences and predictions from a spoken source, such as a broadcast news report or a lecture on an academic or cultural topic related to the Spanish-speaking world.
- Identify and summarize the main points and significant details and predict outcomes from an everyday conversation on a familiar topic, a dialogue from a film or other broadcast media, or an interview on a social or cultural topic related to the Spanish-speaking world.
- Identify and summarize main points and important details; make appropriate inferences and predictions from a written text such as a newspaper/magazine article or contemporary literary excerpt.
- Write a cohesive and coherent analytical or persuasive essay in reaction to a text or on a personal, academic, cultural or social issue, with control of grammar and syntax.
- Describe, narrate and present information or persuasive arguments on general topics with grammatical control and good pronunciation.
- Use information from sources provided to present a synthesis and express an opinion.
- Recognize cultural elements implicit in oral and written texts.
- Interpret linguistic cues to infer social relationships.
- Communicate via interpersonal and presentational written correspondence.
- Initiate, maintain and close a conversation on a familiar topic.
- Formulate questions to seek clarification or additional information.
- Use language that is semantically and grammatically accurate according to a given context.