# ACTFL WRITING PROFICIENCY TEST **FAMILIARIZATION GUIDE**

# What Is the ACTFL Writing Proficiency Test?

The ACTFL Writing Proficiency Test (ACTFL WPT®) is a proctored, standardized test of Presentational Writing ability in a language, as described in the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*. It measures a test taker's ability to respond in writing to open-ended prompts, without access to revisions or editing tools. Each prompt consists of multiple related writing tasks provided in English, to which the test taker is required to respond in the language being tested. The ACTFL WPT can be provided in an online format, in which examinees type their responses using a keyboard, or in a paper and pencil format. On average, the ACTFL WPT takes 40 to 80 minutes to complete; the total allotted test time is 90 minutes.

The goal of the ACTFL WPT is to obtain a writing sample that a rater can evaluate in relation to the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024—Writing* in order to assign a rating. The completed writing samples are provided through a secure internet site to ACTFL-certified WPT raters. The ACTFL WPT measures a range of proficiency on the ACTFL scale from Novice to Superior.

The ACTFL WPT was developed in response to increasing demand for writing proficiency testing that is appropriate for both small-group and large-scale testing. It provides a valid and reliable writing proficiency assessment in a format that allows multiple examinees to take the test at the same time; it can be completed on demand from anywhere in the world, and at a time that is convenient for both the candidate and the proctor.

The ACTFL WPT is a valid and reliable assessment of writing proficiency. It has been externally evaluated by a number of studies, including Surface & Dierdorff, 2004, and Tschirner & Barenfenger, 2011. ACTFL assessments also undergo regular external reviews as part of the American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service (ACE CREDIT®) review process [ACTFL | College Credit]. A bibliography of ACTFL's ACE CREDIT Review studies can be found at ACTFL | ACE Review: Bibliography of Technical Reports.

Language Testing International (LTI) is the exclusive licensee of ACTFL assessments. As such, the WPT, like all ACTFL assessments, is available only through LTI.

# How Does ACTFL WPT Work?

Before beginning the ACTFL WPT, test takers are presented with the Assessment Integrity Policy (see below), which they must review and acknowledge before moving on.

## Assessment Integrity Policy

Check each box to indicate that you have read and understood each statement:

☐ I understand that the ACTFL WPT™ is an assessment of language proficiency. This means it is designed to evaluate spontaneous written language that is unique to me.

☐ I understand that consistently producing only memorized material, no matter how accurate or communicative, is a sign of Novice performance. As such, a rater will only award a proficiency level within the novice range in these cases.

### Test Taker Actions

☐ I understand that my responses to WPT prompts should be in my own words and will reflect my own writing abilities at the time of the test.

☐ I understand that if I use content that is memorized from another test taker, this is not permitted and is considered cheating.

☐ I understand that I cannot receive assistance from another person during the test. Collaboration with others during this test is not permitted and is considered cheating.

☐ I understand that I cannot use notes, books, dictionaries, websites, translators, cell phones, or any other electronic devices or written materials for assistance.

☐ I understand that I cannot share WPT test prompts or my responses to prompts after taking the WPT with anyone for any reason; the WPT is the copyrighted and protected intellectual property of ACTFL.

### Penalties

If I engage in any of the above actions, penalties will be applied.

Please check each box to acknowledge each statement below:

☐ I understand that my results on the WPT will be cancelled and listed as un-ratable for dishonesty/cheating.

☐ I understand that my results will be reported to third parties if the WPT was requested through an employer or institution of higher education.

☐ I understand that I will not be able to re-test for up to five years for academic dishonesty / cheating.

☐ I understand that there may be legal consequences for sharing WPT prompts or other violations of ACTFL's copyright and intellectual property rights.

☐ I understand that I will forfeit the ability to take an ACTFL assessment or be awarded an ACTFL certification on any ACTFL assessments in perpetuity if I share ACTFL test content or engage in any form of copyright infringement.

☐ I acknowledge that I have read and understood the ACTFL WPT Assessment Integrity Policy.

Examinees then complete an online Background Survey and Self-Assessment. The choices made in response to the Background Survey and the Self-Assessment ensure that each test taker receives a level-appropriate and unique test.

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Test takers also receive a complete explanation of ACTFL WPT test procedures and instructions, including a sample test question. These instructions are delivered in English.

## Background Survey: Selecting Topics for Writing

The Background Survey is a questionnaire that elicits information about the test taker's work, school, home, personal activities, and interests. The individual's responses determine the pool of prompts from which the computer will randomly select for the writing tasks. The variety of topics, the types of questions, and the range of possible computer-generated combinations allows for individualized assessments. Even if two test takers select the same combination of Background Survey responses, the resulting tests will not be the same.

## Self-Assessment: Defining the Level of the ACTFL WPT

The Self-Assessment provides six different descriptions of how well a person can write in a language. Test takers select the description that they feel most accurately describes their writing ability.

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**Self-Assessment**

Your response to this Self-Assessment will be used to generate an individualized test. Please read the level descriptions and then choose the one that best describes how you write.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | ◇ | I can write only a few words (fewer than 10). |
| **2** | ◇ | I can write or list basic objects, colors, days of the week, foods, clothing items, numbers, etc. I cannot always make a complete sentence or write simple questions. My writing is understood by readers accustomed to the writing of language learners. |
| **3** | ◇ | I can compose simple sentences to communicate limited correspondences on familiar topics. I can meet practical writing needs and requests for information. I can write compositions primarily in the present time frame. I produce mainly sentences. My writing is understood by readers accustomed to the writing of language learners. |
| **4** | ◇ | I can meet basic work or academic writing needs. I can relate events or describe people and places related to my life and work. I can write simple summaries and compositions and handle routine work or school-related correspondence. I can write several sentences of a paragraph in length. Most readers can understand what I write. |
| **5** | ◇ | I can meet a range of work or academic writing needs. I can organize ideas and write narrations, summaries, and descriptions of familiar topics or current events. I can easily produce writings of several paragraphs. My writing is easily understood by readers not used to the writing of language learners. |
| **6** | ◇ | I can produce most formal and informal correspondence, complex summaries, reports, and research papers on a variety of practical, social, academic, or professional topics. Through my writing, I am able to explain complex matters, provide detailed narrations in most time frames, and present and support my opinions. My writing is easily understood by all readers. |

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The Self-Assessment choice determines which ACTFL WPT test form is generated for the specific individual.

- Form 1 can provide a rating within the proficiency range of Novice Low through Intermediate Mid. The average administration time is 40 minutes.
- Form 2 can provide a rating within the proficiency range of Novice Low through Advanced Mid. The average administration time is 60 minutes.
- Form 3 can provide a rating within the proficiency range of Novice Low through Superior. The average administration time is 80 minutes.

## Introduction and Warm-up

The ACTFL WPT provides detailed instructions on how to navigate the test, test taking strategies, and a Novice-level sample question. The instructions are also made available in advance of the scheduled testing time. All instructions and prompts are written in English. Special accommodations may be requested when directions and prompts need to be provided in a language other than English. Approximately 10 minutes are allotted for this introductory section of the test.

## ACTFL WPT Test Administration and Keyboard Options

To ensure that the ACTFL WPT test taker can make the necessary diacritical marks in the tested language, which are not represented on a standard U.S. keyboard, several keyboard options are available within the test. For all Romanized alphabet languages (i.e French, German, Spanish, etc) have an on-screen special character palette to insert accents and symbols or the testing system will recognize the Windows ALT Codes (also known as ASCII Codes). Tests in languages that use a character-based writing system must be taken with a language-specific keyboard setup. Details on the options for these keyboard types and how to set them up for each computer's operating system are available In the **Language Support** section of the [ACTFL WPT System Check](#) and should be consulted prior to the scheduled test time.

To ensure that the test taker understands these options, a sample question is provided before the test begins. This allows the test taker to become familiar with the available keyboard options. Once the sample question is completed and the actual test is started, the test taker cannot change the selected keyboard.

## ACTFL WPT Test Format

The ACTFL WPT itself consists of four tasks that elicit written responses dealing with practical, social, and professional topics that are encountered in informal and formal contexts. Each task contains two to three writing subtasks of different types, such as describing, informing, narrating, and persuading. These subtasks are designed to elicit writing at the Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior levels, across a variety of contexts and content areas.
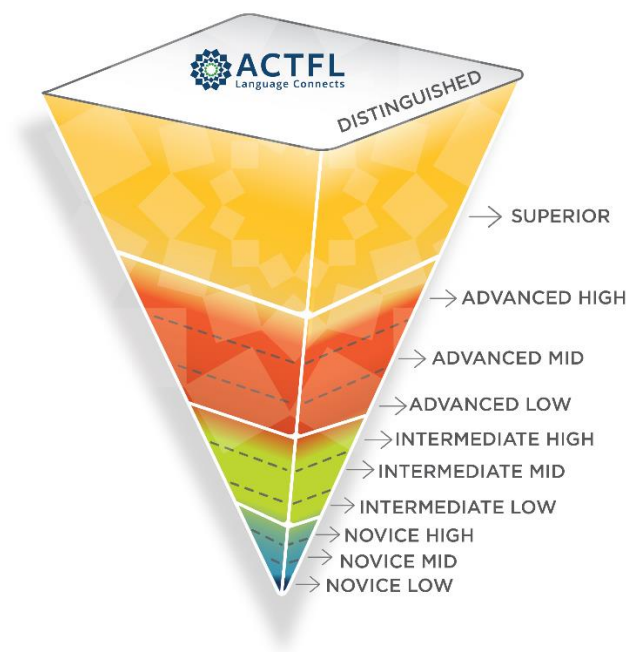
- A Novice-level task may ask the writer to supply limited information on a simple form using isolated words or phrases.

- An Intermediate-level task may ask the writer for a simple description on a familiar topic.
- An Advanced-level task may ask for paragraph-length narration of a factual nature using appropriate time frames.
- A Superior-level task may ask the writer to state and support an opinion and to hypothesize in a cohesive and structured text.

Each task describes the audience, context, and purpose for the response being elicited. There is also a box above the text entry field for each response that contains a suggested length for the response (such as several sentences or multiple paragraphs), and a time allotment in minutes to assist the test taker in budgeting their time. The system does not automatically advance to the next prompt when the suggested time allotment has passed. So, test takers should manage their time wisely to ensure they have time to respond to all prompts.

## What Does the ACTFL WPT Assess, and What Are the Assessment Criteria?

The ACTFL WPT assesses written language in terms of proficiency, that is, the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in situations the writer has not rehearsed or encountered previously, as outlined in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024—Writing*. The *Guidelines* characterize the development of language proficiency as a continuum with five major levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished; ACTFL assessments evaluate proficiency at all levels through Superior. Each level represents a range of ability (what an individual can do with language) that includes all of the prior levels.

The primary distinction between the levels is the functions and tasks (**F**) that an individual at that level can accomplish. With effort and exposure to the language over time, an individual develops the degree of accuracy (**A**) and control of context and content (**C**) and text type (**T**) that are required to accomplish increasingly complex functions and tasks. An individual's level of proficiency is thus defined by the four FACT criteria:

- **F**unctions and tasks: The types of writing activities that the individual can carry out, such as completing an information form, providing a set of written instructions, or interacting with professional colleagues in an online discussion forum.
- **A**ccuracy: The degree to which the individual can use linguistic features (including grammar and syntax, vocabulary, cohesive devices, sociocultural knowledge, and more) to convey written messages.
- **C**ontext and content: The situations or circumstances in which the individual can achieve writing goals, and the topic areas that the individual is able to address in writing.
- **T**ext type: The length and complexity of written text that the individual can produce, ranging from words and phrases to sentences, paragraphs, and multi-paragraph discourse.

These assessment criteria are evaluated holistically based on the test taker's overall performance. A proficiency rating is awarded based on how evidence of all the criteria contributes to the description of a writer's global proficiency.

Table 1 summarizes the assessment criteria as they relate to the first four major proficiency levels-. With a rating range of Novice low to Superior, the ACTFL WPT assesses writing skills at the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels.

**Table 1. Assessment Criteria for Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior Levels**

| Proficiency Level | Global Tasks and Functions | Context & Content | Text Type | Accuracy |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Novice** | Can write words, lists, notes and limited formulaic information to communicate the most basic information | The most common informal settings *Most common aspects of self and daily life* | Individual words, lists, phrases, and some limited formulaic information | May be difficult to understand, even for readers accustomed to the writing of language learners |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Intermediate** | Can create with language<br>Can meet practical writing needs, such as simple messages and letters, requests for information, and notes<br>Can ask and respond to simple questions | Routine informal settings and limited tasks involving the exchange of simple information<br>*Familiar, predictable topics related to self and daily routines and activities* | Writes a loosely connected text made up mostly of discrete sentences | Uses vocabulary and basic structures to express meaning that is comprehensible to readers accustomed to the writing of language learners |
| **Advanced** | Can write routine, informal, and some formal correspondence, as well as narratives, descriptions in detail, and summaries of a factual nature<br>Can narrate and describe in all major time frames, at times uses paraphrasing and elaboration to provide clarity | Informal settings and some routine formal settings<br>*Topics of personal and general interest* | Writes a connected, cohesive text of at least a paragraph in length<br>Can extend to two or more paragraphs on familiar topics | Demonstrates good control of the most frequently used structures and generic vocabulary<br>Writing is understood without difficulty by readers not accustomed to the writing of language learners |
| **Superior** | Can write most kinds of correspondence, in-depth summaries, reports, and research papers<br>Can write in detail and explain complex matters, present and support opinions by developing cogent arguments, and compose hypotheses and conjectures | Most informal and formal settings<br>*Practical, professional, and social topics treated both concretely and abstractly* | Writes a clearly organized and articulated text that can extend from several paragraphs to multiple pages | Demonstrates no patterned errors in structures, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling<br>Errors almost never interfere with communication or distract from the message. |

# What Are the Possible Test Outcomes (Proficiency Ratings)?

An ACTFL WPT can be rated at one of the first four major levels of the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*:

- **Novice**: The individual can express basic personal information and complete a limited number of writing tasks using formulaic and rote words, lists, and phrases.
- **Intermediate**: The individual can write sentence-level text on predictable topics and complete simple written tasks such as filling out a form.
- **Advanced**: The individual can write paragraph-length text on topics of personal and public interest, narrate and describe in present, past, and future time frames, and respond in writing to a situation with a complication.

- **Superior**: The individual can use multi-paragraph discourse and abstract language to state and support opinion, hypothesize, and write in the context of a linguistically unfamiliar situation.

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, the ACTFL WPT rating can also reference one of three sublevels: Low, Mid, or High. The sublevels indicate how well the individual meets the criteria for the major level, and also how close the individual's proficiency is to sustaining the criteria for the next major level.

- **Low**: Baseline performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel have consistent ability to meet the criteria for the level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may demonstrate some hesitation in doing so, but they are able to sustain communication with regard to all of the criteria. They demonstrate little ability to carry out written communication functions that typify the next-higher major level.

- **Mid**: Solid performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel demonstrate skill in carrying out the functions of the major level in all level-relevant written communication situations. They may also exhibit partial ability to carry out communication tasks that typify the next-higher major level.

- **High**: Performance with quality and quantity at the level. Individuals at this sublevel communicate with ease and confidence when performing the functions of the level. They are capable of functioning much of the time at the next higher major level, but they are unable to sustain language at that level without evidence of difficulty.

Possible ACTFL WPT ratings are thus as follows:

- Novice Low
- Novice Mid
- Novice High

- Intermediate Low
- Intermediate Mid
- Intermediate High

- Advanced Low
- Advanced Mid
- Advanced High

- Superior

For more information on the proficiency ratings, see the documents *Overview of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024* and *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024—Writing*.

## What Is an Official ACTFL WPT Rating?

Official ACTFL WPT ratings are assigned to ACTFL WPTs that are conducted under the supervision of a proctor and rated by ACTFL-certified WPT raters who are contracted by LTI, the exclusive licensee of ACTFL assessments. Each official ACTFL WPT is anonymously rated by two ACTFL-certified WPT raters, meaning the second rater is not aware of the rating assigned by the first rater. The two ratings must agree exactly in both the major level and sublevel to be considered final. If not, the test is assigned to a third rater for anonymous arbitration. Results are stored in LTI's Test Management System and are made available, along with the ACTFL Certificate of Writing Proficiency, to authorized users through the LTI Client Site.

Individual candidates testing directly through LTI (rather than through an organization) can access their results and certificate by logging into their account on languagetesting.com.

## Who Are the ACTFL WPT Raters?

ACTFL-certified WPT raters are highly specialized language professionals who have completed a rigorous certification and calibration process that concludes with a rater's demonstrated ability to consistently rate samples with a high degree of reliability. ACTFL-certified WPT raters uphold the highest professional and ethical standards in test administration, rating, and confidentiality, adhering to the rating protocol under ACTFL's supervision. They are required to follow all ACTFL WPT procedures and guidelines, and they agree to abide by the exclusivity of the ACTFL WPT as ACTFL property.

As a prerequisite to becoming certified, rater candidates must first demonstrate a minimum proficiency of Superior in the language in which they will rate.

## What Accommodations Are Available?

Several types of testing accommodations are available for candidates with a documented need. These may include extended testing time, extended breaks, screen magnification, human reader, oral interpreter for directions, testing environment adjustments, and blank scratch paper. Accommodations can be requested from LTI. LTI's accommodation team works with candidates and the organizations they test through to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations. For more information on accommodation support and how to request an accommodation, please visit https://www.languagetesting.com/academic-test-accommodations.

## Where Can I Find Tips for Test Takers?

ACTFL provides an ACTFL WPT Demo Test at https://wptdemo.actfltesting.org/.

## How Is the ACTFL WPT Currently Being Used?

Official ACTFL WPT ratings provide a common metric for describing functional writing ability in a language. For this reason, ACTFL WPT ratings are used for a variety of purposes in academic, commercial, and government communities.

- In academic contexts, the ACTFL WPT is used for purposes of admission into programs, placement

within a language sequence, formative and summative assessment, and determination of the fulfillment of exit or graduation requirements. Establishing proficiency outcomes in terms of the descriptors contained in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024–Writing* provides a framework for design and development of the writing component of curricula for language courses and course sequences. Proficiency testing of students is also used as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of language programs.

- The ACTFL WPT is available for the Seal of Biliteracy for high school students in grades 11 and 12.
- Teacher Certification Boards in some states require evidence of written language competency as demonstrated through an official ACTFL WPT. In some cases, a WPT rating can be used to show that an individual meets a designated language proficiency requirement.
- In commercial and government contexts, the ACTFL WPT ratings are used as a means of certification, qualification, hiring, and promotion in multilingual positions.

## How Is the ACTFL WPT Proctored?

The ACTFL WPT must be administered in a secure, proctored environment. Proctoring options are communicated at the time of order from LTI's website (for individual candidates not testing through an organization) or as part of the account setup for organizations looking to test their learners or candidates.

## How Can I Schedule an ACTFL WPT?

To schedule individual or group ACTFL Writing Proficiency Tests, contact LTI.

www.languagetesting.com

testing@languagetesting.com

1-800-486-8444

# About ACTFL Assessments

ACTFL is proud to offer a variety of assessments to support language educators and learners in higher education and beyond. From placement to graduation and certification, ACTFL has an assessment for each step of the postsecondary journey with options available for institutions and individuals. ACTFL assessments measure language ability based on skill level for the most accurate results possible.

ACTFL proficiency tests are used worldwide by academic institutions, government agencies, and private corporations for purposes such as academic placement, student assessment, program evaluation, professional certification, hiring, and promotional qualification.

- Placement: A non-proctored proficiency-based framework in a computer adaptive solution designed to assist in the placement of incoming post-secondary learners

- Documentation: Measure and evaluate program effectiveness or student progress and benchmarks to achieving badges, credits, or certification
- Teacher Certification: ACTFL language proficiency assessments are accepted by most states for some component of their teacher certification process. You should review your state or program's certification requirements so that you can be sure which assessment(s) are required.

For more information on ACTFL assessments, visit

**https://www.actfl.org/assessments**

For information on Proficiency and Assessment workshops, visit
**https://www.actfl.org/professional-learning/individual-workshops**

For information on ACTFL tester and rater training, visit
**https://www.actfl.org/assessments/tester-rater-certifications**

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