



Initial English Language Proficiency Assessments for California: Performance Level Descriptors

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Initial ELPAC Performance Level Descriptors

In conjunction with the California Department of Education (CDE), Educational Testing Service (ETS) has developed performance level descriptors (PLDs) for the Initial English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC). This document presents and defines the Initial ELPAC PLDs and briefly summarizes the process used to create those PLDs in collaboration with the CDE and California educators.

In January 2018, the California State Board of Education approved the general PLDs, which define, in general terms, performance expectations across all grades and domains (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing). These general PLDs consider stakeholder feedback and contain clarifying language pertaining to the English language development (ELD) proficiency levels as compared to the ELPAC performance levels.

Definitions

PLDs	Definition
General PLDs	General PLDs are generic descriptors of student performance expectations that provide the range expected in each performance level. These PLDs are used as input for the more specific descriptors used in setting threshold scores.
Range PLDs	Range PLDs are domain- and grade-specific descriptors that can be used by test developers to guide item writing. Range PLDs provide the range of expectations specific to each domain for each grade or grade span, are used in the standard-setting process, and are developed at the beginning of the testing program.
Reporting PLDs	Reporting PLDs are the final PLDs that are developed after standard setting. They provide guidance to stakeholders on how to interpret student performance on the ELPAC. A key difference between the reporting PLDs and the range PLDs is that the reporting PLDs reflect student test performance. As such, they reflect a student's knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Range PLD Process

California educators were selected to participate in a workshop to refine draft range PLDs based on the general PLDs and the 2012 *California English Language Development Standards: Kindergarten Through Grade 12 (2012 ELD Standards)*. Participants had experience teaching students eligible to take the ELPAC as well as knowledge of the 2012 *ELD Standards*. Panelists were recruited from across the state in order to achieve representation of educators who work with this student population. These educators contributed to the development of the grade- and domain-specific expectations measured by the ELPAC.

The goal in developing range PLDs was to provide distinctions between the levels for each grade or grade span for each domain. They aid in the interpretation of the threshold scores. In the development of Student Score Reports, both the general PLDs and the range PLDs were considered.

Reporting PLD Process

In collaboration with the California Association for Bilingual Education, Californians Together, the California State Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and the California School Board Association, ETS developed score reports that included descriptions of the PLDs in parent-friendly language. Those descriptions—the reporting PLDs—are given to score users to provide interpretations of scores and performance levels. These PLDs were developed using feedback from stakeholders at the elementary school and high school levels.

Initial English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) General PLDs

Level	Description
Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)	Students at this level have well developed oral (listening and speaking) and written (reading and writing) skills. They can use English to learn and communicate in meaningful ways that are appropriate to different tasks, purposes, and audiences in a variety of social and academic contexts. They may need occasional linguistic support to engage in familiar social and academic contexts; they may need light support to communicate on less familiar tasks and topics. This test performance level corresponds to the upper range of the “Bridging” proficiency level as described in the 2012 <i>California English Language Development Standards: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (2012 ELD Standards)</i> .
Intermediate English Learner	Students at this level have somewhat developed to moderately developed oral (listening and speaking) and written (reading and writing) skills. This level captures a broad range of English learners, from those who can use English only to meet immediate communication needs to those who can, at times, use English to learn and communicate in meaningful ways in a range of topics and content areas. They may need some degree of linguistic support to engage in familiar social and academic contexts (depending on the student, the level of support needed may be moderate, light, or minimal); they may need substantial-to-moderate support to communicate on less familiar tasks and topics. This test performance level corresponds to the entire “Expanding” proficiency level and to the lower range of the “Bridging” proficiency level as described in the 2012 <i>ELD Standards</i> .
Novice English Learner	Students at this level have minimally developed oral (listening and speaking) and written (reading and writing) English skills. They tend to rely on learned words and phrases to communicate meaning at a basic level. They need substantial-to-moderate linguistic support to communicate in familiar social and academic contexts; they need substantial linguistic support to communicate on less familiar tasks and topics. This test performance level corresponds to the “Emerging” proficiency level as described in the 2012 <i>ELD Standards</i> .

Initial ELPAC Range PLDs

Listening: Kindergarten Through Grade Two

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner level have minimally developed listening skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occasionally comprehend grade-appropriate short conversations on familiar topics by identifying main ideas and key details. Occasionally comprehend grade-appropriate read-aloud stories and oral presentations on social and academic topics by identifying a few main ideas or key details. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed listening skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually or consistently comprehend grade-appropriate short conversations on familiar topics by identifying main ideas and key details. Sometimes or usually comprehend grade-appropriate read-aloud stories and oral presentations on social and academic topics by identifying main ideas and key details. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed listening skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently comprehend grade-appropriate short conversations on familiar topics by identifying main ideas and key details. Consistently comprehend grade-appropriate read-aloud stories and oral presentations on social and academic topics by identifying main ideas and key details.

Listening: Grades Three Through Twelve

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner level have minimally developed listening skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occasionally comprehend key details and or main ideas in short, simple conversations when those ideas and details are emphasized or reiterated. Occasionally comprehend how ideas and events are linked in short conversations. For grades 6–12, occasionally comprehend explicitly stated opinions in short conversations. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed listening skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sometimes or usually comprehend grade-appropriate discussions and parts of or entire oral presentations on familiar and some unfamiliar social and academic topics. Sometimes or usually comprehend key details and main ideas in conversations and occasionally comprehend inferences. Occasionally or sometimes comprehend how ideas, events, and reasons are linked in discussions, oral presentations, and (for grades 3–5) stories. For grades 6–12, sometimes or usually comprehend opinions; how speakers support ideas and arguments; and the language speakers use to persuade. For grades 6–12, occasionally or sometimes comprehend why specific language is used in a conversation or presentation and how similar words (with differences in shades of meaning) are used to produce different effects on the listener. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed listening skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently comprehend grade-appropriate discussions and oral presentations on both familiar and unfamiliar social and academic topics in a range of contexts. Consistently comprehend key details, main ideas, and inferences. Usually comprehend how ideas, events, and reasons are linked in discussions, oral presentations, and (for grades 3–5) stories. For grades 6–12, consistently comprehend opinions; how speakers support ideas and arguments; and the language speakers use to persuade. For grades 6–12, usually comprehend why specific language is used in a conversation or presentation and how similar words (with differences in shades of meaning) are used to produce different effects on the listener.

Speaking: Kindergarten Through Grade Two

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner level have minimally developed speaking skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce some common words and simple phrases in direct informational conversations on familiar and routine topics. • Use some learned vocabulary about social or academic topics to convey some information. • Speak using isolated words or phrases. Frequent errors in pronunciation or intonation often impede meaning. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed speaking skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to conversations and discussions on familiar topics with responses that are somewhat appropriate or appropriate. • Express somewhat to mostly clear information and ideas about social and academic topics that may be appropriate but may not be complete. • Offer an opinion that may be supported with a reason or reasons that are partly relevant and developed. • Attempt to connect ideas or sometimes connect ideas, but the connections may be unclear at times. • Use age-appropriate grammar and vocabulary that allow for communication, but limitations and errors may sometimes interfere with sustained expression of ideas. • Attempt to speak, or speak, in a sustained manner (as appropriate to the student's age), with delivery of speech ranging from slow, choppy, or hesitant to fairly smooth and sustained. Errors in pronunciation or intonation often or occasionally impede meaning. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed speaking skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to conversations and discussions on familiar topics with responses that are appropriate. • Express information and ideas clearly about social and academic topics that convey sufficient and relevant details. • Offer an opinion and support it with a reason or reasons that are relevant and developed. • Connect ideas clearly. • Use age-appropriate grammar and make word choices effectively. Minor age-appropriate errors do not interfere with communication. • Usually speak in a smooth and sustained manner (as appropriate to the student's age). Any errors in pronunciation or intonation do not impede meaning.

Speaking: Grades Three Through Twelve

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner level have minimally developed speaking skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce some common words and simple phrases in direct informational conversations on familiar and routine topics. • Attempt to: contribute to conversations and discussions, offer an opinion and support it, or provide a presentation or summary but convey little or no relevant information. • Use grammar and make word choices that are sufficient to provide basic statements about familiar and routine topics, but limitations and errors prevent sustained expression of ideas. • Speak with simple or learned phrases and sentences. Attempts at sustained speech may be mostly unintelligible and may consist of isolated words or phrases. Frequent errors in pronunciation and intonation often impede meaning. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed speaking skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to conversations and discussions on familiar topics with responses that are somewhat appropriate or appropriate. • Express somewhat to mostly clear ideas in a presentation or summary of a presentation about academic content that may be appropriate but partial or incomplete. • Offer an opinion that may be supported with a reason or reasons that are not fully developed. • Attempt to connect ideas, or sometimes connect ideas, but the connections may be unclear at times. • Use grammar and vocabulary that allow for communication, but limitations and errors may sometimes interfere with sustained expression of ideas. • Attempt to speak, or speak, in a sustained manner (as appropriate to the student's age), with delivery of speech ranging from slow, choppy, or hesitant to fairly smooth and sustained. Errors in pronunciation or intonation often or occasionally impede meaning. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed speaking skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to conversations and discussions on familiar topics with responses that are appropriate. • Express ideas clearly in a presentation or summary of a presentation about academic content that conveys sufficient and relevant details. • Offer an opinion and support it with relevant and developed reasons. • Connect ideas clearly. • Use grammar and make word choices effectively to address a variety of tasks and purposes. Minor errors do not interfere with sustained expression of ideas. • Speak fairly smoothly in a sustained manner. Pronunciation and intonation only rarely impede meaning.

Reading: Kindergarten

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner level have minimally developed reading skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify some letter names. • Identify some letter sounds. • Make meaning of a few simple, grade-appropriate words within a jointly read informational or literary text, with linguistic support. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed reading skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes or usually identify the main idea and key details within a jointly read, simple, grade-appropriate, informational or literary text, with linguistic support. • Sometimes or usually make meaning of simple, grade-appropriate words within a jointly read text, with linguistic support. • Show partial or full understanding that English texts are read from left to right and top to bottom. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed reading skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently identify the main idea and key details within a jointly read, simple, grade-appropriate, informational or literary text, with linguistic support. • Consistently make meaning of simple, grade-appropriate words within a jointly read text, with linguistic support.

Reading: Grades One and Two

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner level have minimally developed reading skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and make meaning of a few simple, grade-appropriate words and sentences. • Occasionally identify information in passages, including main ideas and key details. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed reading skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes or usually read and make meaning of simple, grade-appropriate words, sentences, and informational and literary passages. • Sometimes or usually identify information in passages, including (though not limited to) main ideas and key details. • For grade 1, show partial or full understanding that English texts are read from left to right and top to bottom. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed reading skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently read independently and make meaning of grade-appropriate words, sentences, and informational and literary passages. • Consistently identify information in passages, including (though not limited to) main ideas and key details.

Reading: Grades Three Through Twelve

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner Level have minimally developed reading skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehend simple academic or nonacademic words and sentences that depict concrete actions. • For grades 6–12, occasionally identify the main ideas and key details within a text. • For grades 6–12, occasionally determine the meaning of a few unknown words and phrases. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed reading skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes or usually comprehend short to multi-paragraph grade-appropriate texts, both informational and literary (on familiar social topics and some academic topics). • Sometimes or usually identify the main idea and key details within a text. • Occasionally or sometimes make inferences within a text and, at times, identify the language that supports main ideas, details, and inferences. • Sometimes determine the meaning of unknown words and phrases by using context. • Occasionally or sometimes demonstrate understanding of the organization of a text and how the writer connects ideas within a text. • Occasionally or sometimes understand the reason a writer uses specific words or phrases in a text to produce shades of meaning and effects on the audience. • For grades 6–12, occasionally or sometimes identify how writers could revise a text for specific purposes. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed reading skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently comprehend multi-paragraph, grade-appropriate academic texts, both informational and literary (on a variety of social and academic topics). • Consistently identify the main idea and key details within a text. • Usually make inferences within a text and identify the language that supports main ideas, details, and inferences. • Usually demonstrate understanding of the organization of a text and how the writer connects ideas within a text. • Usually determine the meaning of unknown words and phrases using context. • Usually understand the reason a writer uses specific words or phrases in a text to produce shades of meaning and effects on the audience. • For grades 6–12, usually identify how writers could revise a text for specific purposes.

Writing: Kindergarten

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner Level have minimally developed writing skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to participate in writing exercises collaboratively with an adult. • Attempt to write a few letters of the Latin alphabet that correspond to English letter names or phonemes, although they may be reversed or inverted. • Attempt to write a few grouped letters from left to right representing English words. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed writing skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in writing exercises of grade-appropriate literary and informational texts (letters, words, and sentences) collaboratively with an adult and sometimes independently. • Sometimes write letters of the Latin alphabet that correspond to English letter names or phonemes, although they may be reversed or inverted. • Sometimes write grouped letters from left to right representing English words; errors may be frequent or occasional. • Sometimes or usually represent the initial sound of grouped letters with a phonetically logical letter. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed writing skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in writing exercises of grade-appropriate literary and informational texts (letters, words, and sentences) collaboratively with an adult and independently. • Usually write letters of the Latin alphabet that correspond to English letter names or phonemes, although they may be reversed or inverted. • Usually write grouped letters from left to right representing English words and usually represent sounds with phonetically logical letters.

Writing: Grade One

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner level have minimally developed writing skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to participate in writing exercises collaboratively with an adult. • Write a few letters of the Latin alphabet that correspond to English letter names or phonemes, although they may be reversed or inverted. • Write a few grouped letters from left to right representing English words. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed writing skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in writing exercises of grade-appropriate literary and informational texts (words, short phrases, and sentences) collaboratively with an adult and sometimes independently. • Sometimes or usually write letters of the Latin alphabet that correspond to English letter names or phonemes, although they may sometimes be reversed or inverted. • Sometimes or usually write grouped letters from left to right representing English words. The initial sound may be represented phonetically (e.g., “cat” may be spelled as “kat”). • Sometimes or usually leave spaces between words, demonstrating an understanding of how groups of letters represent whole words or syllables. • Attempt to independently write part of a sentence on academic and/or literary topics. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed writing skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in writing exercises of grade-appropriate literary and informational texts (words, short phrases, and sentences) collaboratively with an adult and independently. • Consistently write letters of the Latin alphabet that correspond to English letter names or phonemes, although they may occasionally be reversed or inverted. • Consistently write grouped letters from left to right representing English words. The initial sound and one other sound in the word are each represented phonetically (e.g., “cat” may be spelled as “kat”). • Consistently leave spaces between words, demonstrating an understanding of how groups of letters represent whole words or syllables. • Usually independently write a sentence on academic and/or literary topics.

Writing: Grade Two

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner Level have minimally developed writing skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to participate in writing exercises with an adult. • Write a few letters of the Latin alphabet that correspond to English letter names or phonemes. • Write a few grouped letters from left to right representing English words. The initial sound or one other sound in the word is represented with a phonetically logical letter. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed writing skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in writing exercises of grade-appropriate literary and informational texts (words, short phrases, and sentences) collaboratively with an adult. • Sometimes or usually write letters of the Latin alphabet that correspond to English letter names or phonemes. • Sometimes or usually write grouped letters from left to right representing English words. The initial sound and or one other sound in a word is represented with a phonetically logical letter. • Sometimes or usually, independently write part of a sentence, a sentence, or multiple sentences on academic and/or literary topics. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed writing skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in writing exercises of grade-appropriate literary and informational texts (words, short phrases, and sentences) collaboratively with an adult. • Consistently write letters of the Latin alphabet that correspond to English letter names or phonemes. • Consistently write grouped letters from left to right that phonetically represent English words. • Consistently independently write sentences on academic and/or literary topics.

Writing: Grades Three Through Twelve

Novice English Learner	Intermediate English Learner	Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)
<p>Students at the Novice English Learner level have minimally developed writing skills. They may be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write basic words, short phrases, or sentences within structured contexts on familiar and routine topics with moderate support provided by the text. • Convey minimal relevant information or details. • Write with frequent errors in grammar and word choice that consistently impede meaning. 	<p>Students at the Intermediate English Learner level have somewhat developed to moderately developed writing skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write sentences with moderate support when collaborating with others or write extended text to meet some academic needs. • Attempt to write, or write, texts of the following types: informational, short responses to literary texts; narrative summaries of experiences; and/or opinions with support. The writing may convey limited relevant information or may be relevant but not sufficient. • Produce text that includes some appropriate connecting and transitional words. • Convey some relevant information and a few details or convey information and some details to meet most academic needs. • Organize ideas with some degree of clarity. • Write with frequent errors or some errors in grammar and word choice that often or sometimes impede meaning. 	<p>Students at the IFEP level have well developed writing skills. They can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write extended text with elaboration as needed to meet most academic needs successfully and independently. • Write sufficient and relevant texts of the following types: informational, short responses to literary texts; narrative summaries of experiences; and opinions with support. • Produce cohesive and coherent text that includes a variety of appropriate connecting and transitional words. • Organize ideas clearly. • Convey information and sufficient details to effectively meet academic needs. • Write with only minor errors in grammar or word choice that rarely impede meaning.

Initial ELPAC Reporting PLDs

Level	Description
Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)	Students at this level have well developed oral and written English skills. They can use English to learn and communicate in meaningful ways. They may occasionally need help using English.
Intermediate English Learner	Students at this level have somewhat to moderately developed oral and written English skills. They may sometimes be able to use English to learn and communicate in meaningful ways. They may need some help to communicate about familiar topics in English and more help on less familiar topics.
Novice English Learner	Students as this level have minimally developed oral and written English skills. They may be able to use known words and phrases to communicate meaning at a basic level. They may need substantial help using English.