

For Practitioners



Canadian
Language
Benchmarks for
living and working



in Canada



Helping adult newcomers set language learning goals for living and working in Canada.



Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks

For use in lower CLB level programs.
e-version ISBN 978-1-897100-51-6

For Practitioners

Helping adult newcomers set language learning goals for living and working in Canada.

Canadian Language Benchmarks:

- A descriptive scale of communicative proficiency in ESL expressed as 12 benchmarks or reference points.
- A framework of reference for learning, teaching, programming and assessing adult ESL in Canada.

Benchmark:

- A reference point, a statement describing what a person can do.

Competencies:

- Descriptions of what the learner can accomplish at a given moment or at the end of the course of study. They are statements of intended outcome of learning, applicable to a variety of specific contexts.

Task:

- A practical application and demonstration of language abilities.

“The Canadian Language Benchmarks help instructors, curriculum developers and assessors to understand language as much more than its parts. This deepened understanding of communication enhances the programs we deliver to immigrants, and brings them closer to success.” —Andrea Strachan, ardocs corporation

Why a national standard?

Before the CLB was developed, a group of learners talking together might describe their language proficiency like this:

Learner 1: “I’m at a level 3.”

Learner 2: “I’m a lower intermediate.”

Learner 3: “I’m an advanced beginner.”

“The lack of consistent definitions and criteria across Canada was one of the issues long raised by newcomers in adult ESL programs. They were concerned that differences in language assessment criteria and in the decisions that followed from those assessments meant that some immigrants were being denied opportunities available to others – not as a result of design or plan, but through an absence of design or plan.”

—The National LINC Benchmarks Project: Report on the Consultations, 1993

In this introduction to the CLB you will find:

- a brief overview of the CLB – what it is and what it isn’t,
- practical tips and suggestions to help learners understand their CLB levels and the levels they need to achieve their goals, and
- CLB resources available to support teaching and learning.

Introducing the Canadian Language Benchmarks

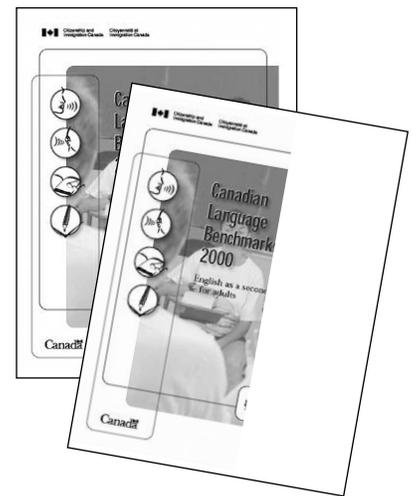
What the CLB is (and what it isn’t)

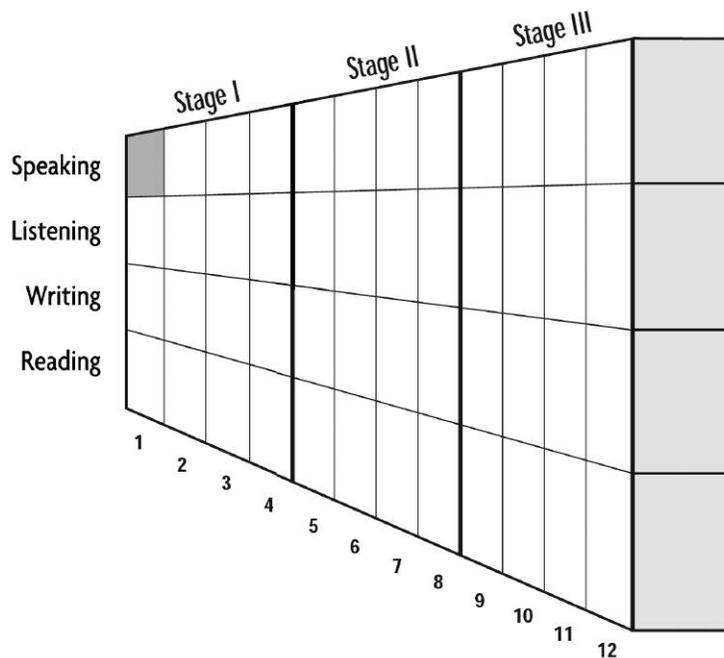
“The Canadian Language Benchmarks is a set of descriptors of what people can do with English at various levels of competency. It is not a test, a curriculum, or a syllabus.”—Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: A Guide to Implementation, page 1.

The CLB describes a learner’s ability to use the English language to accomplish a set of tasks.

Each CLB level describes the competencies the learner should demonstrate at that benchmark.

Real life tasks are provided as examples of what can be accomplished by learners at each CLB level.





The CLB covers four language skills at 12 benchmark levels. The twelve CLB levels are divided into 3 stages.

Speaking CLB 1-12

Listening CLB 1-12

Reading CLB 1-12

Writing CLB 1-12

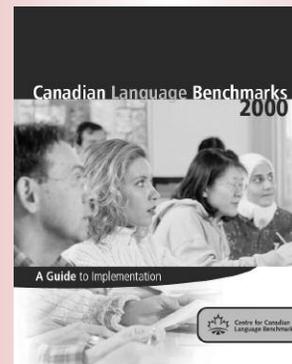
Basic Proficiency (Stage I - CLB Levels 1-4) is the range of abilities needed to communicate in common and predictable settings to meet basic needs and to carry out everyday activities. A curriculum aligned to the Benchmarks and targeting the language proficiencies of Stage I learners would focus on topics of immediate personal relevance.

Intermediate Proficiency (Stage II - CLB Levels 5-8) represents the range of abilities which enable a learner to participate more fully in social, educational, and work-related settings. The contexts in which English is used are less familiar and predictable and the proficiencies demonstrated by learners enable them to function more independently. Competencies acquired in this stage may enable a learner to move beyond the ESL classroom into new opportunities. Many learners, at the end of Stage II, are ready for post-secondary academic programs.

Advanced Proficiency (Stage III - CLB Levels 9-12) is the range of abilities which enable a learner to communicate effectively, appropriately, accurately and fluently in most settings. Learners at Stage III demonstrate a sense of audience and communicate using language features such as appropriate style, register and formality.

Each language skill is further broken down into descriptions of different types of competencies within the skill. Each CLB level, for reading, writing, listening and speaking, includes examples of the kinds of real life tasks that an ESL learner should be able to perform under specified conditions in four specific competency areas:

- **social interaction** - using speech or writing in interpersonal situations,
- **giving and receiving instructions**,
- **suasion** (getting things done), and
- **information** - exchanging, presenting, talking about information.



A Guide to Implementation

A companion document to the CLB 2000, the Guide gives both experienced and novice adult ESL teachers the theory and practical application that they need to implement the Canadian Language Benchmarks into their specific teaching situation.

The CLB describes what learners can do with language.

For example, an absolute beginner may be at CLB 1 or at pre CLB 1 in some skill areas.

The CLB describes what adult second language learners can do, using English, at twelve levels of proficiency, or benchmarks.

The CLB provides a common language to discuss language learning and progress.



Victor has a CLB 7 in speaking and listening but only a CLB 5 in writing. He wants to get a job as a hotel front desk agent and he needs to be able to fill out moderately complex forms and prepare reports. He needs a CLB 8 in writing.

Jenny just immigrated to Canada with her family. All her English skills are at a CLB 2, but she wants to develop her speaking and listening skills so she can understand and reply to her neighbours and children's friends in her new community. CLB 4 would enable her to carry out everyday activities in English.



Tony is comfortable speaking English at a CLB 6, but his written English is CLB 4. He has a job as a security guard where he needs to improve his writing skills to fill in report forms at CLB 6.

The CLB is used in federally and provincially funded language training programs across Canada.

Can learners have different CLB levels for different skills?

Learners often have different Benchmark levels in different skill areas, for example a CLB 4 in Listening and CLB 3 in Speaking. Receptive skills (Listening and Reading) are often higher than Productive skills (Speaking and Writing). Learners are usually placed in a class which best matches their skill strengths, weaknesses and goals.

Why “Benchmarks”?

Canadian Language Benchmarks provide a common language for ESL teachers, tutors and learners to discuss language learning and progress.

It helps demystify and empower learners, so that they can:

- understand where they fit within the continuum of language competency
- understand their own progress
- identify language gaps and needs
- set their own goals

- understand why they are working on activities set out by the

It provides ESL teachers and tutors with a common language to discuss language proficiency. It allows them to see the continuum of language competency and where their learners fit. It also encourages meaningful and relevant language curriculum development and language instruction.

How are learners assessed and placed into ESL programs according to CLB levels?

Learners can be assessed at any CLB Assessment Centre. Service providers are listed on the CCLB website at www.language.ca under “Assessment”.

Learners will receive an Assessment Report that gives them a CLB score in each of the four skill areas: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

How do I introduce the CLB to learners?

Adult ESL learners are the primary intended beneficiaries of the CLB. They will become aware of the CLB mostly through their ESL teachers, tutors and assessors.

There are a number of resources you can use to help learners understand and use the CLB.

There is an **informational booklet for learners** about the Canadian Language Benchmarks called: **“Setting language learning goals for living and working in Canada.”** This booklet provides examples of learners at different CLB levels and what they can do at that level. It also explains the CLB levels those learners need to achieve to meet their goals.

Lesson Plans about the CLB to help you introduce your learners to the Benchmarks. There are 3 lessons to choose from, depending on the CLB level of the learners in your class: CLB 3-4, CLB 5-6 and CLB 9-10.

Brochures about the CLB written at a CLB 3-4, can be given to learners to read on their own, or as part of a class activity. The brochure is available in 7 languages in addition to English, for learners with limited English reading proficiency.

CLB Posters for the classroom for CLB 1–10 include simple and clearly written descriptors suitable for learners at each level. They are not nearly as detailed as the CLB 2000, and describe the general abilities of the learner to perform in English.

The CLB Posters are an effective tool to engage the whole class in:

- discussing tasks
- identifying progression through the levels
- keeping functions of a lesson in mind

ESL teachers have found that when the CLB Posters are in the classroom, learners refer to them often as clear descriptors of what they have practised and will practise in the classroom. Learners become excited about their progress and responsible for their learning. Often there is classroom discussion about

what the learners are practising, and how assignments relate to the Benchmarks. Learners identify which tasks they have used in their “real lives” outside the classroom, reinforcing their relevance.

Mini-Versions of the CLB Posters for CLB 1–10 are also available for easy insertion into a binder or notebook.

CLB “Can Do” Checklists are based on the descriptors used in the CLB Posters. These photocopyable forms were designed for goal-setting and as a self-evaluation tool for tracking progress. It is helpful to use in learner conferencing or when conducting portfolio reviews where learner samples of work are reviewed and discussed.

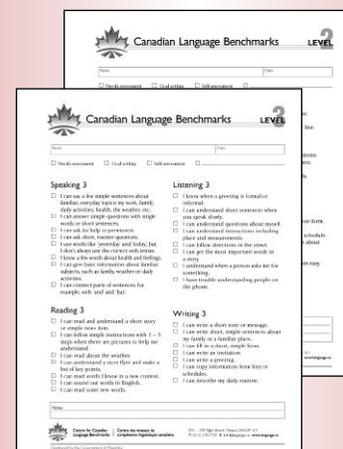
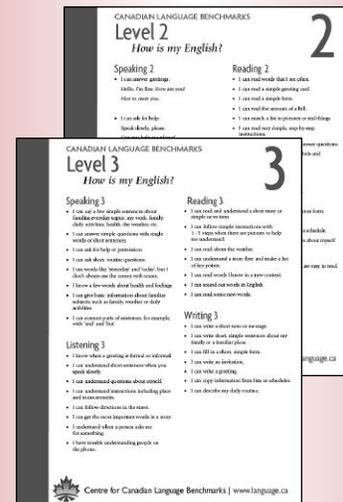
Key features:

- a checkbox for each item for learners to indicate what they can do or need to learn
- a notes section for learners to write a goal statement or give examples of what they would like to learn

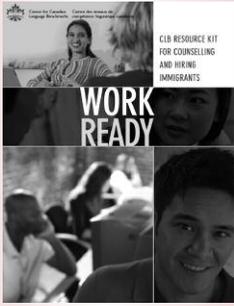
It is important to provide a range of at least 3 CLB levels so learners can get a sense of their own progress. It will also help them understand how they can have skills at different benchmark levels. Learners can keep an individual “Can Do” checklist in their notebooks as a motivator and reference.

Caution – learners may have the impression that doing the task once allows them to check it off. They should be able to repeat the task at different times and in different situations. ESL teachers will need to consult the *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000* to accurately describe the performance conditions at each level.

All of these resources, with the exception of the full size CLB Posters, can be freely downloaded as PDF files and photocopied at www.language.ca under “For ESL Professionals”. Learners can also access these resources under “For Learners”.



Also available in Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Urdu, Russian and Spanish.



elearning.language.ca

Benchmarks for Internationally-educated nurses:



www.CELBAN.org



www.itsessential.ca

How can I help learners understand their CLB levels as they progress?

The tasks described in one level of the Benchmarks are often repeated in higher levels as they increase in complexity. The Can Do lists reflect the progression of tasks and highlight what learners need to learn to help them in the next level.



"I am CLB 5 in Writing, and I need to be CLB 8 to work as a hotel front desk agent. I need to be able to fill in different forms and prepare reports."

Writing CLB 5 describes: *"I can write a paragraph describing an event or an incident."*

In CLB 6 it is: *"I can write a structured paragraph in which I give an accurate description, comparison or sequence of events."*

By CLB 8, writing skills include: *"I can write an incident report or memo. I can extract key information and relevant detail from a page-long text or 10-15 minute oral presentation, and write an outline or a one-paragraph summary. I reduce information to the main points with no major omissions."*

Keeping the Benchmarks as a reference for your overall teaching goals and your individual lesson preparation encourages meaningful outcomes for learners and guidance for your objectives. You can involve learners in the discussion of their learning with lessons about the Benchmarks, needs assessments, task-based lessons and the Can Do checklists, keeping learners motivated and responsive. As a lesson or unit incorporates the Benchmark skills, note it for reference. As you inevitably repeat certain functions, you can point out to learners the review of skills in different contexts. This record keeping can also challenge you to explore and expand on tasks that you may have been overlooking. The checklists can also be helpful for you to identify gaps that could be filled in future lessons.

"What resources are available to help me use the CLB for teaching?"

Visit www.language.ca and go to "For ESL Professionals" and "Publications" to find out about other CLB materials and resources for:

- program and lesson planning
- classroom assessment
- literacy benchmarks

Visit the CCLB website at www.language.ca to:

- download free resources, including theme-based lesson plans
- order publications
- keep current about new research and development projects

Visit other CCLB websites to find out about:

- CLB levels needed to work as a nurse in Canada – www.CELBAN.org
- CLB and Essential Skills for the Workplace – www.itsessential.ca
- Occupational Language Analyses (OLAs) www.itsessential.ca
- Work Ready Resource Kit - elearning.language.ca
- Online CLB Professional Development Modules for ESL Professionals elearning.language.ca

Join the CCLB email list to get monthly news and information. Just send us an email to info@language.ca with your contact information.