



Citizenship and  
Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et  
Immigration Canada

# National Language Placement and Progression Guidelines

Citizenship and Immigration Canada



August 2013

Canada

## PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

This document is intended for language assessors, instructors and coordinators in CIC-funded language training programs, to ensure a common understanding and interpretation of assessment results based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), and to establish national guidelines for placement and progression in language classes.

## WHAT ARE THE CANADIAN LANGUAGE BENCHMARKS (CLB)?

The Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) standard is a descriptive scale of language ability in English as a Second Language (ESL)<sup>1</sup> written as 12 benchmarks or reference points along a continuum from basic to advanced. The CLB standard reflects the progression of the knowledge and skills that underlie basic, intermediate and advanced ability among adult ESL learners.

Each Canadian Language Benchmark describes:

- Characteristics of Speaking, Listening, Reading or Writing ability.
- What a person can do in each language skill.
- Specific conditions under which abilities can be demonstrated.
- Examples of possible communication tasks for community, study and work contexts.
- Indicators of task success.

## CLB-BASED LANGUAGE PLACEMENT TESTS

A CLB-based language placement test places a learner on the CLB scale of communicative competence.

During the **speaking** assessment, the assessor scores the learner's level of performance on successive tasks which gradually increase in difficulty. The assessor probes the learner until she reaches her threshold.

When scoring the **writing** assessment, the assessor evaluates each task based on a decision tree, rubric, or holistic band aligned with CLB descriptors.

When assessing **listening and reading**, the assessor takes the learner through a range of tasks designed to target specific competencies which increase in difficulty. The assessor then assigns the Benchmarks based on the cumulative scores achieved by the learner.

---

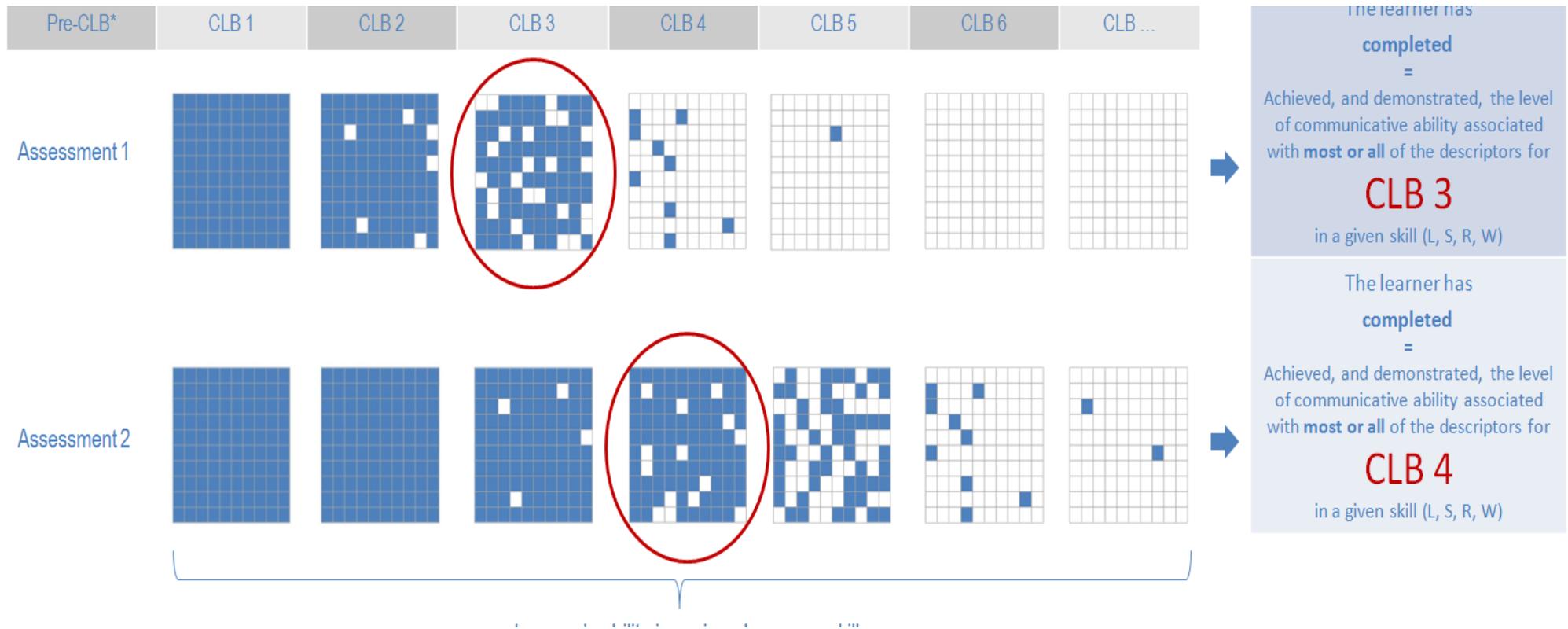
<sup>1</sup> Also termed as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or English as an Additional Language (EAL).



## ASSESSED COMMUNICATIVE ABILITY IN CLB TERMS

As a general rule, the benchmarks assigned to a learner at the time of placement assessment, summative in-class assessment, or high-stakes language test, mean that the learner has achieved, and demonstrated, the level of communicative ability associated with **most or all** (traditionally, 70 to 100%) of the descriptors for the benchmarks assigned in each of the four skills.

A learner who has been assigned a given benchmark is said to have **completed** that benchmark for the given language skill.



\*Pre-CLB learners, also referred to as pre-benchmark learners, have not yet achieved, or demonstrated, the level of communicative ability associated with most or all of the descriptors for CLB 1 in a given skill (L, S, R, W).

## LANGUAGE PLACEMENT AND PROGRESSION – GENERAL GUIDELINES

As a general rule, learners should be placed or progressed into a course where they **will mainly focus on acquiring the competencies associated with the CLB level following the level they have already completed.**

### National Language Placement and Progression Grid\*

For any given skill (L, S, R, W)	Placement test or summative in-class assessment result	CLB level							
		Pre-CLB	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Place or progress into course focusing on the competencies associated with	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

*\*This grid effectively replaces the National LINC Placement Grid issued in February 2007. Programs may still use the LINC brand name, but class levels should be organized in accordance with the CLB scale.*

### Placement or progression in integrated courses

Placement or progression in **integrated courses that cover all four language skills** should also be based on the general rule of CLB X +1:

Learner's assessment result	Place or progress into course level:
All benchmarks are the same (e.g. 3-3-3-3)	CLB 4
Most benchmarks are the same (e.g. 3-3-4-3)	CLB 4

### *Irregular CLB profiles – holistic evaluation of learner's needs<sup>2</sup>*

In the case of learners with irregular (or 'spiky', e.g. 7-7-2-1) CLB profiles, and where skill-specific courses are **not** available, the language assessor must make a holistic evaluation when determining where to place (or progress) a learner. Some of the factors that assessors may consider when making a placement judgement include:

- learner's prior learning
- learner's goals
- length of time in Canada
- first language proximity to English
- level of confidence
- class curricula, program organization, availability of programs that can accommodate learners with irregular CLB profiles

<sup>2</sup> Though this section is intended for language assessors, language instructors could consider also some of these factors when making a progression decision in the best interest of the learner.



In addition, when the learner can communicate with the assessor in English/French or another common language, they can discuss together the advantages and disadvantages of different placement options.

### *Attributing more weight to Listening and Speaking skills*

In some cases, where skill-specific courses are unavailable, it may be beneficial to the learner for L/S benchmarks to be given more weight during the placement or progression decision for an integrated course. Learners who struggle to speak or listen in class may become frustrated for having difficulty understanding the instructor’s directions and communicating with classmates. By ensuring that learners can understand instructions and communicate in class, it is expected that they will have greater success in that class. A more narrow range of levels in an integrated class may also be easier to manage by differentiating reading and writing tasks, rather than listening and speaking activities.

<b>Learner’s assessment result</b>	<b>Place or progress in integrated course level:</b>
Half of the benchmarks are the same, L/S are lower (e.g. 3-3-4-4)	CLB 4
Half of the benchmarks are the same, L/S are higher (e.g. 4-4-3-3)	CLB 5
Benchmarks vary by 2 or more levels (‘spiky’ profile, e.g. 4-5-2-1)	Base on holistic evaluation

### **Placement or progression in skill-specific courses**

If a learner has an irregular (or ‘spiky’, e.g. 7-6-2-1) CLB profile, a **course organized by skill** (L/S, or R/W) may respond to her needs. If a learner has completed CLB X for L/S, she should be placed or progressed into a L/S course at **CLB X + 1**. If a learner has completed CLB Y in R/W, she should be placed or progressed into a R/W course at **CLB Y + 1**.

If the learner’s L and S benchmarks vary by one level only, or her R and W benchmarks vary by one level only, she should be placed or progressed based on the productive skill benchmark (speaking or writing), plus one level.

Lastly, if the learner’s L and S, or her R and W benchmarks, vary by 2 or more levels, the assessor (or instructor) must make a holistic evaluation when determining where to place or progress the learner.

<b>Learner’s assessment result</b>	<b>Place or progress in skill-specific course level:</b>
L/S <b>OR</b> R/W benchmarks are the same (e.g. 7 - 7 - 2 - 2)	CLB 8 for L/S course CLB 3 for R/W course
L/S <b>OR</b> R/W benchmarks vary by one benchmark (e.g. 7 - 6 - 2 - 1)	CLB 7 (S benchmark + 1) for L/S course CLB 2 (W benchmark + 1) for R/W course
Benchmarks vary by 2 or more levels (e.g. 1-4)	Base on holistic evaluation, and place in skill-specific or integrated course, as deemed appropriate



Finally, placement or progression decisions should always be made in the best interest of the learner; to progress optimally, learners should feel sufficiently challenged, without feeling overwhelmed.

## **IDENTIFYING AND PLACING ESL OR FSL LITERACY LEARNERS**

ESL or FSL Literacy learners have little or no literacy skills in any language, usually because of limited or interrupted formal education. They may:

- be speakers of languages with no written code
- have little or no education in their home countries (one to two years)
- have gone to school for up to eight years, with many interruptions

### **Categories of ESL or FSL Literacy learners**

*Pre-, Non- or Semi-Literate Learners:* Similar to native speaking literacy learners, these learners have limited numeracy skills and will not read and write well in their first language, in addition to now attempting to learn English or French as an additional language. They will struggle in regular ESL or FSL classes with literate classmates who can draw on a repertoire of skills and concepts learned in a traditional classroom setting. However, they may have developed other sets of skills and concepts over time that have helped them compensate for their limited literacy skills. This group thus requires specialized approaches and materials to support and enhance their learning process.

*Non-Roman Alphabet ESL Literacy Learner:* These ESL literacy learners who are literate in a non-Roman alphabet language bring much meta-cognitive strength to new learning experiences and will transition quickly into regular ESL classes, once they are familiar with the English writing system. For this group especially, the assessor's notes should include the recommendation to frequently review the literacy placement to ensure that it is still appropriate.

For placement purposes, ESL Literacy learners benefit from being grouped together. This enables instruction to be carried out using strategies and resources that build meta-cognitive as well as language concepts and skills.

### **Inputting data for ESL Literacy learners in data management systems**

ESL Literacy learners should be clearly identified as requiring Literacy supports. Assessors should also provide details of the learner's previous education and whether she is literate in her first language. It is important for language instructors to know that there are literacy gaps in a learner's history, and it is important for CIC to be able to accurately measure and respond to the needs of the ESL Literacy learner population.

