

## Equipped for the Future Listen Actively Performance Continuum

### PERFORMANCE LEVEL 1

#### Listen Actively

*How adults at Level 1 Listen Actively:*

- Attend to oral information
- Clarify purpose for listening and use listening strategies appropriate to that purpose
- Monitor comprehension, adjusting strategies to overcome barriers to comprehension
- Integrate information from listening with prior knowledge to address the listening purpose

#### Level 1 Indicators

##### Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

*Adults performing at Level 1 can:*

- Understand and respond to learned words and phrases in simple questions, statements, and high frequency commands as part of short conversations, explanations, instructions, and narratives where the linguistic complexity is considerably simplified.
- Use a few simple formulas to convey understanding, and ask for repetition or clarification and one or two simple strategies for gathering missing information and/or repairing problems in communication.
- Use non-verbal and visual clues, as well as socio-cultural, linguistic, and other background knowledge to understand the basic intent of the speaker and to meet the purpose of the communication.

##### Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

*Adults performing at Level 1 can* comprehend the gist of simple conversations and explanations on familiar topics in face-to-face situations when tasks are highly structured and include supports, such as visual cues, pre-learning of new vocabulary and phrases, or collaborative listening. Text is considerably adjusted for listeners who usually require a slower rate of speech with frequent opportunities for repetition or rephrasing. For English language learners, level of ease and confidence in using English may be low, even in familiar contexts.

#### Level 1 Examples of Proficient Performance

*Adults performing at Level 1 can Listen Actively to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:*

- Listening and responding appropriately to a familiar speaker describing likes and dislikes or opinions related to familiar topics (such a co-worker describing a day off or a child describing a new teacher).
- Listening and responding to a short explanation of a task (such as a health worker explaining how to give a child medicine or a postal worker explaining how to fill out a form).
- Listening to a class discussion of a short article about a current event (with visuals and other written supports), following the main points and making a contribution.
- Following instructions with a few basic steps and sequence markers (such as instructions for using a home appliance or simple piece of work-related equipment) and asking appropriate questions to signal understanding or get clarification.
- Understanding the main points covered in a brief narrative (such as a weather forecast).

## Equipped for the Future Listen Actively Performance Continuum

### PERFORMANCE LEVEL 2

#### Listen Actively

*How adults at Level 2 Listen Actively:*

- Attend to oral information
- Clarify purpose for listening and use listening strategies appropriate to that purpose
- Monitor comprehension, adjusting strategies to overcome barriers to comprehension
- Integrate information from listening with prior knowledge to address the listening purpose

#### Level 2 Indicators

##### Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

*Adults performing at Level 2 can:*

- Understand and respond to explanations, conversations, instructions, and narratives made up of sentence length utterances and some connected discourse on familiar topics related to personal background and needs, social conventions, and everyday tasks.
- Use several strategies, including formulas for asking for repetition and clarification, and strategies for indicating understanding, for giving feedback, for gathering missing information and/or for repairing problems in comprehension, such as by rephrasing, substituting a different word, or drawing a picture.
- Apply linguistic, socio-cultural, and other background knowledge and strategies (such as expressing an opinion or collecting relevant information) to understand the intent of the speaker and what is required to respond appropriately and to meet the listening purpose.

##### Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

*Adults performing at Level 2 can listen for structured and well-defined purposes related to maintaining personal conversations, acquiring information, or completing basic transactions, either face-to-face or in a brief telephone conversation when language is somewhat simplified and frequent opportunities for repetition, rewording and clarification are provided. For English language learners, level of ease using English may be growing but varies depending on the level of familiarity with the audience and purpose and the stressfulness of the context.*

#### Level 2 Examples of Proficient Performance

*Adults performing at Level 2 can Listen Actively to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:*

- Listening for and identifying relevant information to pass along in a face-to-face conversation (such as a safety problem and to whom it should be reported).
- Participating in a conversation where a speaker gives background information about his/her experiences and the listener appropriately shares one or two experiences about the same topic.
- Listening to a recorded telephone message adjusted for English language learners (such as weather-related school closings or simple driving directions) and pass on details to another person.
- Follow a series of multi-step instructions (such as a demonstration of a more complex piece of equipment or appliance) and use several strategies to confirm and clarify understanding.
- Listening for and following the main idea in different kinds of small group presentations (such as about a school field trip or community clean-up day).

## Equipped for the Future Listen Actively Performance Continuum

### PERFORMANCE LEVEL 3

#### Listen Actively

*How adults at Level 3 Listen Actively:*

- Attend to oral information
- Clarify purpose for listening and use listening strategies appropriate to that purpose
- Monitor comprehension, adjusting strategies to overcome barriers to comprehension
- Integrate information from listening with prior knowledge to address the listening purpose

#### Level 3 Indicators

##### Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

*Adults performing at Level 3 can:*

- Understand and respond to conversations, explanations, instructions and short narratives of a somewhat complex nature but related to familiar tasks and situations. Tasks may include short routine telephone conversations and some simple information conveyed through electronic media, such as television or radio.
- Know when to use a range of strategies to repair gaps in understanding, comprehend information, and give feedback even when opportunities to seek clarification or repetition are somewhat limited and the context is somewhat unfamiliar.
- Apply linguistic, socio-cultural, and other background knowledge and strategies (such as by taking notes and summarizing main points to share with others, evaluating what was heard, and sharing responses of a more complex nature) to understand the main intent and details communicated by the speaker, to respond appropriately, and to meet the listening purpose.

##### Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

*Adults performing at Level 3 can listen and respond to most basic content related to personal background information, everyday transactions, and simple routine tasks but understanding the full range of details on less familiar topics may still be uneven. Only limited adjustments in the text may be made. English language learners display growing comfort using English in simple interactions and social situations but may be less at ease in more complex and/or stressful contexts.*

#### Level 3 Examples of Proficient Performance

*Adults performing at Level 3 can Listen Actively to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:*

- Listening and making relevant contributions in a small-group planning meeting (such as planning for a parent's meeting or class trip).
- Listening to a simple, authentic television news report, summarizing the issues addressed and expressing an opinion on the topic.
- Listening to a presentation to identify key information relevant to one's own situation (such as information related to enrolling in a vocational program).
- Listening and providing appropriate feedback and response as a familiar, non-threatening speaker describes a personal problem (such as a classmate describing a problem getting to class or finding the funds to buy a new car).
- Take part in a simulated job interview, responding appropriately to open-ended questions related to one's own experience and skills.

## Equipped for the Future Listen Actively Performance Continuum

### PERFORMANCE LEVEL 4

#### Listen Actively

*How adults at Level 4 Listen Actively:*

- Attend to oral information
- Clarify purpose for listening and use listening strategies appropriate to that purpose
- Monitor comprehension, adjusting strategies to overcome barriers to comprehension
- Integrate information from listening with prior knowledge to address the listening purpose

#### Level 4 Indicators

##### Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

*Adults performing at Level 4 can:*

- Understand and respond appropriately to extended explanations and narratives, detailed instructions, and complex conversations requiring adapting one's response to varied speakers and contexts when language is not adjusted for English language learners.
- Effectively use a wide range of strategies to repair gaps in understanding and give feedback, tailoring the response to the purpose of the communication, the audience, the level of formality of the situation and other socio-cultural factors.
- Apply linguistic, socio-cultural, and other background knowledge and strategies (such as comparing, integrating, and categorizing information for others) to understand fully the literal and implied intent of the speaker, to respond appropriately, and to meet the listening purpose.

##### Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

*Adults performing at Level 4 can* comprehend relatively unstructured conversations and presentations of moderate length and in somewhat complex and unfamiliar situations when language is not adjusted for non-native speakers; however they may be unable to fully follow all main ideas, details, cultural nuances and implied meanings. May have some difficulty following conversations between native speakers but displays growing ease in communicating with native speakers.

#### Level 4 Examples of Proficient Performance

*Adults performing at Level 4 can Listen Actively to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:*

- Listening to a presentation of moderate length and complexity, asking appropriate questions related to unfamiliar content or vocabulary and taking notes of key points to share with others.
- Listening and responding appropriately in a simulated conversation where a speaker is critical or displeased with the listener (such as a traffic cop, landlord or neighbor).
- Following and carrying out detailed instructions (such as multiple tasks required to prepare for an upcoming class, work-related or community event).
- Listening and contributing in a small group meeting where a difficult decision must be made.
- Listening and responding successfully to job interview questions that require adapting responses to the speaker and context, such as questions related to why one left one's previous job or how one might contribute to the organization

## Equipped for the Future Listen Actively Performance Continuum

### PERFORMANCE LEVEL 5

#### Listen Actively

*How adults at Level 5 Listen Actively:*

- Attend to oral information
- Clarify purpose for listening and use listening strategies appropriate to that purpose
- Monitor comprehension, adjusting strategies to overcome barriers to comprehension
- Integrate information from listening with prior knowledge to address the listening purpose

#### Level 5 Indicators

##### Use Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies

*Adults performing at Level 5 can:*

- Understand main ideas and most details in conversations, short lectures, news reports, extended explanations and other connected discourse on a range of topics, including topics beyond everyday contexts and immediate experiences in a variety of work, personal, and basic academic contexts.
- Effectively use advanced strategies to repair gaps in understanding, to ask questions to deepen understanding and to give feedback appropriate to the situation, the audience and the purpose of the communication. Growing ability to use strategies appropriate to the socio-cultural context.
- Apply linguistic, socio-cultural, and other background knowledge and strategies (such as integrating information from more than one source; evaluating the relevance, validity, and adequacy of information; or adapting responses to the age, gender, status, and emotional state of the speaker) to understand fully the literal and implied intent of the speaker, to respond appropriately, and to meet the listening purpose.

##### Show Fluency, Independence, and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings

*Adults performing at Level 5 can function independently in most social and work situations and comprehend relatively complex and unstructured conversations or presentations requiring the integration and summary of several data sources or media with limited need for guidance and repetition and with few errors. Adults at this level may have some difficulty following the coherence or thematic organization of longer connected discourse or may have difficulty understanding when time frames and tense markers are complex. They can understand most English language communication at normal speed and often can function successfully (with some support) in adult education classrooms (such as GED classes) with native English speakers, although they may still lack full comfort and ease conversing with native speakers.*

#### Level 5 Examples of Proficient Performance

*Adults performing at Level 5 can Listen Actively to accomplish a variety of goals, such as:*

- With classmates, listening to the director of a food pantry describe his needs, watching a video on homelessness and discussing priorities for a community service activity.
- Listening for, identifying and evaluating the viewpoints and truthfulness of various types of marketing in recorded radio commercials.
- Listening to a simulated community college/GED lecture on a literary topic, taking notes to prepare a brief summary of what was heard, and discussing one's own ability to listen to college lectures.

## **Equipped for the Future**

### **Listen Actively Performance Continuum**

- Listening and providing appropriate feedback and advice in a simulated discussion with a teenager who wants to drop out of school.
- Listening to several short poems and identifying the underlying themes and implied meanings.

**Equipped for the Future  
Listen Actively Performance Continuum**

**Mapping the Listen Actively and Speak So Others Can Understand Performance Levels to NRS ESL Educational Functioning Levels**

There is very little specific information on the nature of the listening knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with each of the six NRS ESL Educational Functioning Levels. Therefore, in mapping the EFF Listen Actively and Speak So Others Can Understand Performance Levels to NRS ESL Levels, we have also considered the correspondence of the EFF levels to more detailed descriptions of adult performance levels in listening and speaking contained in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines – Listening (1986), ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines – Speaking (1999), and the MELT Student Performance Levels (SPL’s).

**EFF Listen Actively Performance Levels**

<b>EFF Performance Levels</b>	<b><i>NRS ESL [and ASE] Educational Functioning Levels</i></b>	<b><i>ACTFL</i></b>	<b><i>SPL</i></b>
Listen Performance Level 1	Low Intermediate ESL	Novice High	4-5
Listen Performance Level 2	High Intermediate ESL	Intermediate Low	5-6
Listen Performance Level 3	Low Advanced ESL	Intermediate Mid	6-7
Listen Performance Level 4	High Advanced ESL [Low Adult Secondary]	Intermediate High	7-8
Listen Performance Level 5	[High Adult Secondary]	Advanced	8-9

**EFF Speak So Others Can Understand Performance Levels**

<b>EFF Performance Levels</b>	<b><i>NRS ESL [and ASE] Educational Functioning Levels</i></b>	<b><i>ACTFL</i></b>	<b><i>SPL</i></b>
Speak Performance Level 1	Low Intermediate ESL	Novice High	4-5
Speak Performance Level 2	High Intermediate ESL	Intermediate Low	5-6
Speak Performance Level 3	Low Advanced ESL	Intermediate Mid	6-7
Speak Performance Level 4	High Advanced ESL [Low Adult Secondary]	Intermediate High	7-8
Speak Performance Level 5	[High Adult Secondary]	Advanced	8-9

## **Equipped for the Future**

### **Listen Actively Performance Continuum**

#### **How to Read the EFF Performance Continua for *Listen Actively* and *Speak So Others Can Understand***

Each performance level of the EFF Performance Continuum for each EFF Standard is divided into four sections:

##### **Section 1: The Definition of the Standard**

Section 1 is the definition of the Standard. The definition of the standard in the components of performance is a useful tool for communicating to adult learners and their teachers the essential features of the construct for each standard. By “unmasking the construct” in this way (making it clear how the skills of listening and speaking are defined, see Gitomer & Bennett, 2002), adult learners are better able to articulate their own learning goals for improving proficiency and teachers are better able to focus learning and instructional activities that build toward the goal of increasing ability to Listen Actively and to Speak So Others Can Understand to accomplish everyday activities.

The definition of the EFF Standards Listen Actively and Speak So Others Can Understand are repeated in the same form at each level of the continuum. This repetition serves as a reminder that the integrated skill process defined by the components of performance for each of these standards is constant across all levels, from novice to expert levels of performance. Thus, the standard does not change from level to level. It remains a consistent focal point for learning and instruction. What changes from level to level is the growth and complexity of the underlying knowledge base and the resulting increases in fluency and independence in using the standard to accomplish an increasing range and variety of communication tasks. These changes are reflected in the descriptions of key knowledge, skills, and strategies at each level (Section 2); descriptions of fluent and independent performance in a range of settings at each level (Section 3); and the examples of real-world activities that can be accomplished at each level (Section 4).

##### **Section 2: Key Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies**

Section 2 of the performance continua for Listen Actively and Speak So Others Can Understand contains descriptions of some of the key knowledge, skills, and strategies that form the basis for proficient performance on the standards at each level. This listing of key knowledge, skills, and strategies is specific to each level and is the foundation for designing assessments to measure performance at that level. Beyond serving as guide for assessment development, the key knowledge, skills, and strategies described at each performance level can also be used to identify instructional objectives or can be included in the criteria used for placement of learners in instructional levels.

##### Linguistic and Textual Knowledge

The first bullet under Key Knowledge, Skills and Strategies addresses the level of linguistic knowledge (such as grammar rules and vocabulary at the sentence level), textual knowledge (such as rules for longer texts and connected discourse), and degree of familiarity with the topic

## **Equipped for the Future**

### **Listen Actively Performance Continuum**

and context. In terms of linguistic and textual knowledge, at Level 1 students are expected to respond to or to produce only words and phrases that have been learned in advance. By Level 2, students are responding to or producing some sentence length utterances and some short connected discourse. As students move through Levels 3, 4, and 5, they are able to participate in listening and speaking tasks with increasingly more complex grammar and vocabulary and involving longer and more detailed discourse. As their linguistic knowledge grows, students are increasingly able to use semantic cues, surrounding text, and other cues to understand and produce new vocabulary and idiomatic expressions and in so doing improve their ability to Listen Actively and Speak So Others Can Understand. One of the key differences between Levels 4 and 5 is the mastery of textual knowledge such as the connectedness between phrases and utterances, the thematic and organizational patterns in different kinds of texts, and discourse markers that help listeners understand and speakers convey sequence (e.g., first, next, to conclude, for instance) and tense changes (e.g., shifts from past to past perfect or future tenses). Another key difference between Levels 4 and 5 is the mastery of a wide range of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and registers and the resulting abilities to understand and use a variety of speaking styles.

While growth in the linguistic knowledge base is essential to the development of listening and speaking proficiency, the EFF performance level descriptions are not driven by a sequence of grammatical structures but by the ability to understand and convey meaning in purposeful activities. This does not imply that grammar should not be an explicit focus of teaching and learning in the EFF classroom. However, given the purposeful and communicative nature of the EFF Standards, it would be best when teaching to the standards to subsume systematic teaching and learning of grammatical structures within lessons focused on helping learners achieve their goals for communicating in English.

### Strategic Knowledge for Clarifying Meaning, Conveying Understanding, and Repairing Problems in Communication

The second bulleted category under Knowledge, Skills, and Strategies has to do with the strategic knowledge required to integrate and apply listening and speaking skills. By strategies we mean any behavior, thought, or action that allows an adult to apply their knowledge and skills more effectively and appropriately to accomplish a communication task. At Level 1, the communication-related strategies students are able to access are primarily formulaic in nature, consisting of learned phrases they can use to relay basic information, accomplish simple speaking tasks (such as greetings or asking about the cost of an item at the store), or improve listening and speaking performance (such as: “Say that again please.” or “I don’t understand.” “Do you know what I mean?”). By Level 2, students have gained more flexibility in combining and recombining learned statements and questions appropriate to the context. Their increasing linguistic knowledge may allow them to use a larger variety of strategies beyond simply relying on learned phrases such as rephrasing--saying “the place where you go to work” for “office” or substituting a different word—“job” for “employment” or selectively identifying key information to convey or listen for. By Level 3 and above, as a student’s repertoire of strategies for repairing problems in communication grows they are able make more decisions about when and under what conditions to use certain strategies. Such decisions may take into account the purpose of

## **Equipped for the Future**

### **Listen Actively Performance Continuum**

the communication, the audience, the level of formality of the situation, and a variety of other socio-cultural factors such as the age and gender of the speaker or listener.

Although students at Levels 1, 2 and 3 are often able to give appropriate feedback in conversations, by Level 4 and above students are increasingly able to tailor their feedback. For example, a Level 4 Listen Actively sample task requires students to listen and respond in a small group meeting where a difficult decision must be made. In this case, a student might possess the linguistic ability to acknowledge the speakers' concerns before responding such as by saying, "I know what you mean about this problem but we need to..." By Level 5, students in most communication situations should be able to craft questions and responses that can be understood and are considered appropriate by native English speakers.

Strategies supporting listening and speaking proficiency may also be non-linguistic. Adults may use gestures, eye contact, and body language to understand or convey meaning. They may also engage in self-talk or silent "rehearsals" of what they will say in order to overcome anxiety. They may use social strategies to ask for assistance from a teacher or friend, or pool information with peers. They may also use writing to aid listening comprehension or prepare to speak by taking notes, creating graphic organizers, drawing pictures, or creating bilingual vocabulary lists to aid comprehension and production. Non-linguistic strategies such as these and others can be found in the performance level descriptors for Listen Actively and Speak So Others Can Understand.

### Meeting the Purpose for Communication

The knowledge and strategies required to understand the basic intent of the speaker, to relay information effectively in speaking, and to do what is required to meet the purpose of the communication are addressed under the third bullet. The ability to draw upon background knowledge and to apply it to aid communication is included here. Although all the various functions of communication (such as informing, persuading, establishing social interaction, or solving a problem, etc.) may be present at any level, at higher levels students are expected to be able to accomplish increasingly challenging and complex communications. For example, at Listen Actively Level 1 a student might only be expected to ask simple clarification questions in response to a very short persuasive narrative while at Listen Actively Level 3, a student might also be expected to have sufficient and detailed comprehension to take notes and to be ready to summarize the main points so that they can be shared with others. Similarly, at Speak Levels 1 and 2, a student might be expected to provide very basic, and short response to an interview question, while at Speak Level 4, students are expected to be able to provide a more elaborate and longer response to even a simple interview question.

## **Equipped for the Future**

### **Listen Actively Performance Continuum**

#### **Section 3: Fluency, Independence and Ability to Perform in a Range of Settings**

Section 3 is the description of fluency, independence, and ability to perform in a range of settings expected for proficient performance on the standard at each level. Like the descriptions of key knowledge, skills, and strategies in Section 2, the descriptions in Section 3 are specific to each level and are intended to serve as a basis for guiding assessment, learning, and instruction that is appropriate to that level.

For Listen Actively, a key feature of this section is description of how much the listening text has been adjusted to make understanding simpler and to increase opportunities for repetition and clarification. At Level 1, the linguistic and textual complexity, the vocabulary and the rate of speech of the texts is considerably simplified and slowed down. It is assumed that the speaker may need to pause often to repeat or rephrase language to aid comprehension. In Levels 2 and 3, text is still simplified with frequent opportunities for clarification and repairing communication are provided, but the level of complexity of text and speed of delivery gradually increases. At the lower levels, more scaffolding in the form of visual aids, pre-listening exercises, written materials and other supports are also provided.

At Listen Actively Levels 4 and 5, the content and speed of delivery of text is not adjusted. Depending on their level of confidence, many non-native English speakers at these levels can function successfully in classes with a mixed ABE and ESL students. One of the key differences between Levels 4 and 5 is the degree of misunderstanding and number of opportunities to repair communication that can be expected to be required. Students at Level 4 may listen to similar kinds of texts as those provided in Level 5, however Level 5 students will be expected to understand more main ideas, details and nuances conveyed by the listening text with fewer opportunities to repair understanding.

For Speak So Others Can Understand, a key feature of this section is description of the degree to which the speaker is able to be creative and flexible in their use of vocabulary, sentence structure, style, and register. At Levels 1 and 2, speech production consists almost entirely of learned words and formulaic language (standard greetings, simple questions, politeness formulas, etc.). By Level 5, the speaker is expected to be able to shift speaking styles and be effective in communication in previously unknown and/or unpredictable contexts and situations.

For both Listening and Speaking the level of comfort and familiarity associated with the communication context, participants, and situation decreases moving up the performance levels. At the lower levels, fluency and independence are expected only in relatively comfortable and familiar situations. At the higher levels, the degree of risk and ability to communicate in stressful situations increases. At levels 4 and 5, fluency and independence are expected even in situations that may be uncomfortable (such as receiving and responding to a poor performance review from a supervisor) or threatening (such as talking your way out of fight).

## **Equipped for the Future**

### **Listen Actively Performance Continuum**

#### **Section 4: Examples of Applications of the Standards**

**Section 4** of the performance level descriptions provides a short list of examples of the purposeful applications of the standard (activities) that can be accomplished by an adult who is proficient at each level. This list of examples is illustrative and not exhaustive. Like Sections 2 and 3, the descriptions of activities in Section 4 are specific to each performance level. These examples of things that adults can accomplish in the real world at each level of performance on the continuum are useful to adult learners and to their teachers as ways of making concrete the purpose and need for attaining increasing proficiency in performance on the standard. By making it clear what can be accomplished at each level, the descriptions of activities in Section 3 also provide motivation for higher levels of learning. The listing of real-world accomplishments also provides guidance for selecting and designing the content for instructional materials and assessments.

At Levels 1 to 3 students are expected to listen and speak in the context of mostly routine tasks that are encountered in everyday life. Level 1 tasks include many supports, such as listening to a local weather forecast with visuals and following instructions for the use of a piece of equipment where the steps are demonstrated as well as described. By Level 3, while the general topics may be familiar, students are expected to be able to understand and respond to some unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts such as, for example, when they listen to a presentation about a vocational education program. At Levels 4 and 5, students are expected to be able to respond to increasingly less familiar listening tasks such as short lectures that simulate simple examples of those they might encounter at the community college, authentic new reports, and conversations where the topic discussed is somewhat unfamiliar. Most listening and speaking at the lower levels consists of face-to-face interactions although at Level 2 students are able to manage short, predictable phone conversations and by Level 3 they are also able to listen and comprehend or convey simple authentic texts conveyed in situations where there are no visual cues, such as by telephone and radio.

Across each level many of the genres for listening and speaking are the same. At all levels students are asked to understand and respond to face-to-face conversations, instructions, explanations, narratives, and small group discussions. However the degree of complexity and familiarity with the rules of each of these listening/speaking-related genres increases as students move along the continuum. Within one-to-one conversations, for example, as students move from one level to another they are expected to participate in increasingly complex and potentially difficult situations, such as, by Level 5, communicating with an angry teenager who wants to drop out of school. The length and complexity of text/discourse also increases as we move along the continuum. By Levels 4 and 5, students are expected to be able to effectively participate in communications that may involve, for example, lecture-length, multi-part narratives. Some genres of listening or speaking (such as expressive genres: listening to fiction/ story-telling, reciting/listening to poetry, or singing/listening to music lyrics) may not appear in the examples at every level, but students at all levels can be expected to be able to communicate within these genres and other examples at other levels can be added.

## **Introduction to the Performance Continua for Listen Actively and Speak So Others Can Understand**

Listening and speaking are interactive, communication skills. For all practical purposes, it is not possible to completely separate them. For example, responding to what is heard and asking for clarification are integral to real world, purposeful applications of both the Listen Actively and the Speak So Others Can Understand standards. For this reason, while the EFF Standard Listen Actively and the Standard Speak So Others Can Understand each have their own set of five performance levels, this introduction will provide background information on both continua, considered together. The separate descriptions of levels of performance are useful for the purposes of guiding assessment, teaching, and learning. As you read the performance continuum for each standard, however, you also see that the performance levels descriptors make frequent reference to the other.

### Background to the EFF Listen and Speak Performance Continua

The empirical basis for the performance level descriptions for the Listen Actively and Speak So Others Can Understand Performance Continua was data on adult learner performance collected by EFF field researchers who developed and piloted activities and performance tasks based on these EFF standards in their ABE, GED, and ESL classes. Initial performance level descriptions for these EFF standards were reviewed and amended by two panels of content experts (one for Listen Actively and one for Speak So Others Can Understand). In addition, we conducted a review of research and considered the correspondence of the EFF Listen and Speak performance levels to other descriptions of adult performance levels in listening and speaking. Of particular importance was the review of guidelines developed by the American Council of Foreign Language Teachers (ACTFL) (<http://actfl.org>) and the Student Performance levels (SPL's) developed by the Mainstream English Language Training (MELT) project and used in the BEST and BEST Plus language assessments (<http://www.cal.org>). We also reviewed and took guidance from the *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000* (<http://www.language.ca>) and the *Adult Literacy Core Curriculum* and the *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum* developed by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit in the United Kingdom (<http://www.basic-skills.co.uk>). In all of these background resources, the development of listening and speaking proficiency is demonstrated through progressively more effective, accurate, fluent, and independent language use in increasingly demanding communicative contexts. It may be helpful to consult these resources for more detailed proficiency level descriptions, sample tasks, and curriculum guidelines.

The EFF approach to defining performance levels for Listen Actively and Speak So Others Can Understand is also informed by a communicative approach to second language teaching and testing. This communicative approach has its roots in theoretical work in philosophy, linguistics, and sociolinguistics that have focused on the functional and interactive aspects of language use – speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), ethnomethodological and ethnographic approaches to conversational and discourse analysis (Sacks, 1995; Gumperz, 1982); and functional linguistics (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). As elaborated in models of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman & Palmer, 1996), the abilities

## Equipped for the Future

### Listen Actively Performance Continuum

underlying communication activities (accomplishment of listening and speaking tasks) are understood to include: linguistic competence, textual competence, functional competence, socio-cultural competence, and strategic competence. Graznya Pawlikowska-Smith (2002) provides a good, succinct explanation of these forms of competence in language use in her description of the concept of communicative proficiency that guided development of the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000:

1. Linguistic competence is the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary at a sentence level. It enables the building and recognition of well-formed, grammatically accurate utterances, according to the rules of syntax, semantics, morphology, and phonology/graphology.
2. Textual competence is the knowledge and application of cohesion and coherence rules and devices in building larger texts/discourses. It enables the connection of utterances and sentences into cohesive, logical, and functionally coherent texts and/or discourse.
3. Functional competence is competence to convey and interpret communicative intent (or function) behind a sentence, utterance, or text. It encompasses macro-functions of language use (e.g., transmission of information, social interaction and getting things done/ persuading others, learning and thinking, creation and enjoyment) and micro-functions, or speech acts (e.g., requests, threats, warnings, pleas, etc.) and the conventions of use.
4. Socio-cultural competence focuses on appropriateness in understanding and producing utterances. These include rules of politeness; sensitivity to register, dialect, or variety; norms of stylistic appropriateness; sensitivity to “naturalness”; knowledge of idioms and figurative language; knowledge of culture, customs, and institutions; knowledge of cultural references; and uses of language through interactional skills to establish and maintain social relationships.
5. Strategic competence manages the integration and application of all of language competence components to the specific context and situation of language use. It involves planning and assessing communication; avoiding potential or repairing actual difficulties in communication, coping with communication breakdown, and using affective devices. Most of all, it functions to ensure effectiveness of communications “transactions.”

-- Graznya Pawlikowska-Smith (2002), *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: Theoretical framework*, p. 7.

The EFF Listen and Speak standards reflect the performance of both native and non-native speakers of English along the same continuum of performance. Of the performance levels currently described for these standards (Levels 1-5), we expect that the first three will apply primarily (though not exclusively) to English language learners, beginning with learners who might be described as at a “low intermediate” level. Higher performance level descriptions (Levels 4 and 5) may be equally applicable with native as well as non-native speakers. While these higher performance level descriptions take into the account the language development needs of English language learners, students at these levels of performance are not just “learning to listen and speak” but are also “listening and speaking to learn.” Our current data does not

## **Equipped for the Future**

### **Listen Actively Performance Continuum**

support definitions of performance levels below or above the five levels we have described. In the future, research to support the description of higher performance levels or of “pre-Level 1” performance levels for more beginning level English language learners may be developed. In the interim, guidance on features of listening and speaking proficiency (and guidance for assessment, teaching, and learning) at levels below EFF Performance Level 1 and above EFF Performance Level 5 may be found in the ACTFL, MELT/SPL, Canadian Benchmarks, and English Core Curricula cited in the above paragraph.

A mapping of the five EFF Listen and Speak Performance Levels to National Reporting System Educational Functioning Levels and to ACTFL and SPL levels can found on page 7.

## Equipped for the Future Listen Actively Performance Continuum

### References

- Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (2001). *Adult Literacy Core Curriculum*. London: The Basic Skills Agency. (<http://www.basic-skills.co.uk>).
- Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (2001). *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum*. London: The Basic Skills Agency. (<http://www.basic-skills.co.uk>).
- American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (1986). *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines – Listening*. Hastings-on-Hudson, NY: ACTFL Materials Center. (<http://actfl.org>)
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bachman, L. & Palmer, A. (1996). *Language testing in practice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Breiner-Sanders, K. E., Lowe, P., Miles, J., & Swender, E. (2000). ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines – Speaking (Revised 1999). *Foreign Language Annals* 33 (1), 13-18.
- Brown, G., Anderson, A., Shilcock, R., & Yule, G. (1984). *Teaching talk: Strategies for production and assessment*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, F. A., Eignor, D., Jones, S., McNamara, T., & Soumi, B. K. (2002). *TOEFL 2000 Speaking Framework: A Working Paper*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Canale, M. & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1-47.
- Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. (2000). *English as a Second Language for Adults. Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000*. Ottawa, Ontario. (<http://www.language.ca>)
- Devine, T. (1978). Listening: What do we know after fifty years of research and theorizing? *Journal of Reading*, 21, 296-304.
- Douglas, D. (1997). *Testing speaking ability in academic contexts: Theoretical considerations* (TOEFL Monograph Series Report No. 8). Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.
- Dunkel, P. (1991). Listening in the native and second/foreign language: Toward an integration of research and practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25, 431-457.
- Gitomer, D. H. & Bennett, R. E. (2002). Unmasking constructs through new technology, measurement theory, and cognitive sciences. In National Academy of Sciences (Ed.),

## **Equipped for the Future Listen Actively Performance Continuum**

*Technology and Assessment Thinking Ahead: Proceedings from a Workshop*, pp. 1-11.  
Washington, DC: National Academy Press.  
(<http://www.nap.edu/openbook/0309083206/html/1.html>)

Grognet, A.G. (1997). *Performance-based curricula and outcomes: The Mainstream English Language Project (MELT) updated for the 1990's and beyond*. Denver, CO: The Spring Institute.  
(<http://www.cal.org>)

Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Halliday, M.A.K. & Hasan, R. (1985). *Language, context, and text: aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Hymes, D. (1972). Models of interaction of language and social life. In J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (Eds.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Joos, M. (1967). *The five clocks*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Lynch, T. (1998) Theoretical perspectives on listening. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18, 3-19.

Mendelsohn, D. & Rubin, J. (Eds.). *A guide for the teaching of second language listening*. Carlsbad, CA: Dominie Press.

Pawlikowska-Smith, G. (2002). *Canadian Language Benchmark 2000: Theoretical Framework*. Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. Ottawa, Ontario. (<http://www.language.ca>)

Sacks, H. (1995). *Lectures on conversation*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: a lecture in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.