



**ACTFL** **TEP**  
TEST OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

# Familiarization Guide

**ACTFL | PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS**

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# WHAT IS THE ACTFL TEST OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY™ (TEP)?

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## ACTFL

ACTFL is dedicated to the improvement and expansion of the teaching and learning of all languages at all levels of instruction. ACTFL is a non-profit, individual membership organization of more than 12,500 language educators and administrators from elementary through graduate education, as well as government and industry.

Since its founding in 1967, ACTFL has become synonymous with innovation, quality, and reliability in meeting the changing needs of language educators and their students. From the development of *Proficiency Guidelines*, to its leadership role in the creation of national standards, ACTFL focuses on issues that are critical to the growth of both the profession and the individual teacher.

ACTFL's work as a trusted, independent center of excellence empowers educators to prepare learners for success in a 21st century global society; helps government agencies build language capacity in the U.S. and abroad; and connects businesses with the resources and relationships they need to succeed.

## The ACTFL TEP

The ACTFL TEP is a remotely proctored, four-modes English proficiency assessment that brings together three of ACTFL's internationally recognized assessments (OPIc™, WPT™, L&Rcat™) to provide a valid and reliable measure of language proficiency in speaking, writing, listening and reading. ACTFL tests are widely used by schools, universities, corporations, and government agencies to assess language proficiency levels of students, prospective candidates, and employees.

The ACTFL TEP is remotely proctored, on the test taker's computer, from any suitable location.

Detailed descriptions of the OPIc™, WPT™, and L&Rcat™ are on page 5 of this guide.

## Rationale for the Test of English Proficiency

In order to increase accessibility and flexibility for test takers around the globe, ACTFL, in collaboration with Language Testing International (LTI), is offering corporate and educational institutions a valid and reliable, remotely proctored English language proficiency test appropriate for use in college and university admissions and high-stakes hiring decisions.

## Remote Proctoring

Remote proctoring simulates the role of an on-site proctor. The remote proctor confirms the identity of the test-taker, from a previously setup test taker profile, and safeguards the integrity of the exam and individuals' scores through the use of a webcam and with software that is temporarily installed on the test taker's computer. Remote proctoring means that test takers can take the ACTFL TEP on an internet-connected computer from any suitable location.

## Time Needed to Take the Test

The ACTFL TEP is a comprehensive assessment of proficiency. The total time needed to take all three components of the test can range from 2 – 4 hours, depending on the individual's language proficiency.

Speaking: 20-40 minutes

Writing: 20-80 minutes

Listening and Reading: 50-105 minutes

## TOEFL® Score Correspondence

To help institutions make admissions decisions based on the ACTFL Proficiency Scale, a study was conducted to provide a crosswalk between TOEFL scores and ACTFL ratings. The TEP–TOEFL crosswalk is based on a study involving 234 international students at US universities who took both the TOEFL and the ACTFL TEP components, including the OPIc, WPT, and L&Rcat (Tschirner, 2019). To request a copy of the study, please email [customercare@languageTesting.com](mailto:customercare@languageTesting.com) or make a request on the [ACTFL TEP site](#).

## Reliability and Validity

ACTFL assessments are recognized around the world as the gold standard and used by thousands of academic institutions, government agencies, and private corporations for purposes of academic placement, student assessment, program evaluation, professional certification, hiring, and promotional qualification. The reliability and validity of ACTFL assessments is well documented by many peer-reviewed, third-party studies. ACTFL certified raters are highly specialized language professionals who have completed a rigorous certification and calibration process that concludes with a rater’s demonstrated ability to consistently rate samples with a high degree of reliability.

A selection of published research on ACTFL assessments is available for review at: <https://www.languageTesting.com/lti-information/research>.

## Reporting Results

Test takers receive an official ACTFL rating for each mode (speaking, writing, listening, and reading) according to the ACTFL Rating Scale. Test results and the certificate are delivered in approximately 14 days.

## WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF THE ACTFL TEP?

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THE ACTFL TEP is a remotely proctored, four-skills English proficiency assessment that brings together three of ACTFL’s internationally recognized assessments (OPIc™, WPT™, L&Rcat™) to provide a valid and reliable measure of a person’s language proficiency in speaking, writing, listening and reading. The ACTFL TEP is on-demand, and all three assessment components are adaptive. Each one delivers a rating from Superior to Novice on the ACTFL scale.

- 1 The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview-Computer (OPIc) assesses functional speaking ability. It was developed as a tool to deliver and score valid and reliable oral proficiency testing on a larger scale than the “live” OPI. The OPIc uses an avatar to simulate aspects of conversation. The avatar asks questions on practical, social, and professional topics that are encountered in informal and formal contexts. The recorded spoken answers are certified ACTFL raters.
- 2 The Writing Proficiency Test (WPT) assesses functional writing ability. The WPT was developed as a tool to measure how well a person spontaneously writes in a language (without access to revisions and/or editing tools). The WPT presents four prompts for written responses dealing with practical, social, and professional topics that are encountered in informal and formal contexts. The written answers are rated by certified, ACTFL raters.
- 3 The ACTFL Listening and Reading Computerized Adaptive Test (L&Rcat) assesses how well a person understands spoken and written discourse. The L&Rcat requires the test taker to listen to and read a number of passages and texts and review associated multiple-choice questions, by selecting the most appropriate answers. The answers are computer-rated.

## WHAT ARE THE ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES?

The [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012](#) are descriptions of what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context. For each mode, these guidelines identify five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are subdivided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels.

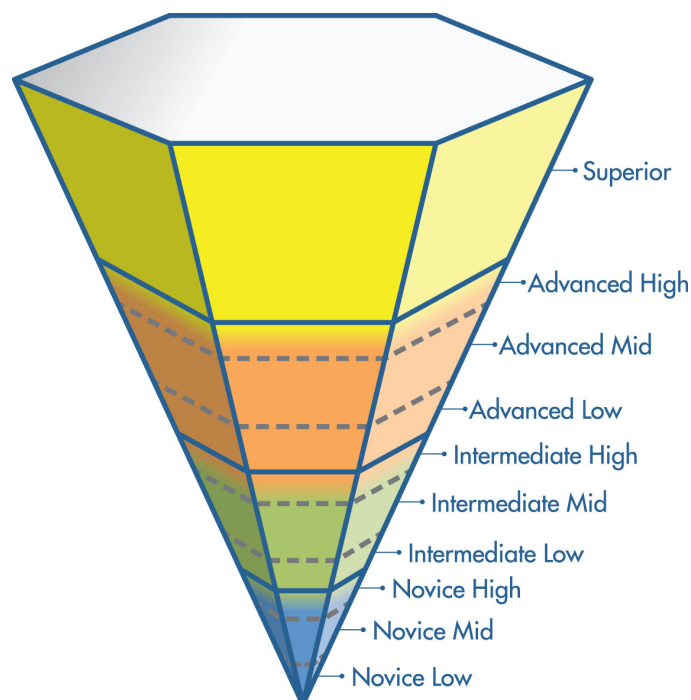
These Guidelines present the levels of proficiency as ranges and describe what an individual can do with language at each level, and cannot do at the next higher level, regardless of where, when, or how the language was acquired. Together, these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The Guidelines are not based on any specific theory, pedagogical method, or educational curriculum. They neither describe how an individual learns a language nor prescribe how an individual should learn a language, and they should not be used for such purposes. They are an instrument for the evaluation of functional language ability.

The complete Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking, Writing, Listening, and Reading for English can be found here: [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 for English](#).

### The ACTFL Rating Scale

The ACTFL Rating Scale mirrors the levels of proficiency outlined in the *Proficiency Guidelines 2012*. It includes five major levels--Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice.

The major levels are delineated according to a hierarchy of global tasks. This hierarchy is summarized in a rating scale spanning a full range of language abilities from Distinguished (a very able, well-educated language user) to Novice (those who have little or no functional ability in the language). Major borders divide the major levels of the scale (Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice). The major levels of the scale--Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice--are subdivided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels.



## HOW DOES THE TEST WORK?

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The ACTFL TEP includes three assessments the OPIc, the WPT, and the L&Rcat. Read the general descriptions below of how the components of the ACTFL TEP work. For more detailed descriptions, with screenshots and tips for preparing for and taking the test, please read the [ACTFL TEP Examinee Handbook](#).

Test takers can review technical requirements for each test, perform a System Check on their computer,\* and also take free, short demo versions of the test on the LTI test websites:

OPIc: <https://opicdemo.actfltesting.org>

WPT: <https://wptdemo.actfltesting.org>

L&Rcat: <https://lrcatdemo.actfltesting.org>

\*The System Check will run at the start of each part of the ACTFL TEP. It's helpful to run a check ahead of time using the demos above. If everything works well, use the same computer, webcam, and headset on the day of the test.

### Taking the ACTFL OPIc and ACTFL WPT

Before beginning the OPIc and WPT, test takers complete a Survey and a Self-Assessment to generate a test that is unique to the test taker. They also receive a complete explanation of OPIc and WPT test procedures and instructions, including a sample test question. These instructions are delivered in English.

#### Survey: Selecting Topics

The Survey is a questionnaire which elicits information about the test taker's work, school, home, personal activities and interests. The test taker completes the survey and the answers determine the pool of topics from which the computer will randomly select questions. The variety of topics, the types of questions, and the range of possible combinations the computer can generate allow for unique tests. Even if two test takers selected the same combination of Survey responses, the resulting test would not include identical tasks.

#### Self-Assessment: Defining the Level of the OPIc and WPT

The Self-Assessments provide five different statements describing how well a person can speak and six different statements describing how well a person can write in English. Test takers select the statement that they feel most accurately describes their language ability. Please note that for speaking, they must select Statement 3 or 4 if they need a rating up to Advanced Mid. They must select Statement 5 if they need a rating up to Superior. For writing, test takers must select Statement 3 or 4 if they need a rating up to Advanced Mid. They must select Statement 5 or 6 if they need a rating up to Superior.

For the OPIc, samples of speech accompany each descriptor, so test takers can also listen to samples to help select the most appropriate description.

The choices made by the test taker in response to the Survey and the Self-Assessment ensure that each test taker receives a customized and unique test.

### **OPIc Test Administration**

The OPIc provides detailed test instructions on how to listen to the questions and record answers. In order to ensure that the test taker understands these instructions, a sample question is provided for the test taker to practice with the functionality of the OPIc. The test taker has the opportunity to review the instructions and sample question again before beginning the test. The test taker then begins the OPIc test.

### **Ava – the OPIc “Tester”**

Ava is an avatar figure that personifies the OPIc tester. Test takers listen to the avatar’s questions and respond. Having the picture of Ava on the screen helps to engage the test takers in conversation and mimics a one-on-one conversation with a first language speakers of the target language.

The first part of every OPIc test is: *Let’s start the interview now. Tell me something about yourself.*

This functions as a warm-up and an opportunity for the speaker to begin using the language.

### **WPT Test Administration & US Keyboard**

The WPT provides detailed test instructions on how to navigate the test.

The keyboard provided, and the only one needed, is the standard US keyboard. A warm-up grid is provided in advance of the test to allow test takers to become familiar with it.

## **Taking the L&Rcat**

The L&Rcat provides detailed test instructions on how to navigate the test.

**Sample Test:** The test taker will be given directions to the test and the option to view a sample test item called a “Sample Test” to become familiar with the layout of a test page and the progression of a test item. If test takers are already familiar with ACTFL Listening Tests, they can click on “Start Test” to begin the Listening Test. Once started, the test will end as soon as the test taker has answered a sufficient number of questions for the program to determine the listening proficiency rating. The maximum duration for Listening is 45 minutes. The procedure is the same for the Reading section of the L&Rcat. The maximum duration for Reading is 50 minutes.

**Format:** Each full test (with both the Listening and Reading sections, combined) may contain up to twenty (20) total passages or texts, with a maximum of ten (10) passages or texts for the test taker to listen to, or read, respectively. Each listening passage or reading text has three (3) multiple-choice questions.

**Timing:** There is a maximum amount of time allotted to answer the questions associated with a passage or text. The time depends on the difficulty/length of the passage or text. A count-down clock on the page tells test takers how much time they have before the program automatically advances the test to the next task.

## HOW IS THE TEST RATED?

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Each part of the ACTFL TEP is rated separately. Test takers are provided with their rating (Superior to Novice) for each part. It is important to remember that for most test takers, proficiency levels will not be the same across all language skills.

### The OPIc and the WPT

Once the OPIc and WPT tests are complete, the language samples are uploaded and saved automatically on a secure Internet site. At least two ACTFL-certified OPIc and WPT raters evaluate the sample and select the best match between the sample and the assessment criteria of the rating scale. A rating at any major level is arrived at by the sustained performance across ALL the criteria of the level. An appropriate sublevel can then be determined, and the rating is assigned.

It's important to note that the OPIc and WPT raters are ACTFL certified, highly specialized language professionals who have completed a rigorous certification and calibration process that concludes with a demonstrated ability to consistently rate samples with a high degree of reliability. ACTFL certified raters uphold the highest professional and ethical standards in test administration and rating.

### L&Rcat

The L&Rcat is computer scored, and an ACTFL rating is assigned immediately based on a system that compares the difficulty levels of all questions that test takers have answered correctly and incorrectly.

## WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA?

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### OPIc and WPT Criteria

The OPIc and WPT are integrative tests, i.e., they address a number of abilities simultaneously and look at them from a global perspective rather than from the point of view of the presence or absence of any given linguistic feature. Linguistic components are viewed from the wider perspective of their contribution to overall performance. To best understand the full criteria, refer to the complete *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines-Speaking* and *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines-Writing*. The complete Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking, Writing, Listening, and Reading for English, along with samples for each level, can be found here: [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 for English](#).

Very generally, speaking and writing proficiency is evaluated as follows.

In evaluating a speech sample, the following criteria are considered:

- the functions and global tasks the speaker is able to sustain
- the social contexts and specific content areas within which the speaker performs the tasks
- the accuracy or precision with which these tasks are accomplished and understood
- the type of oral text or discourse the speaker is capable of producing

In evaluating a writing sample, the following criteria are considered:

- the functions or global tasks the writer performs
- the social contexts and specific content areas within which the writer performs the tasks
- the accuracy of the writing
- the length and organization of the written discourse the writer produces

### **L&Rcat Criteria**

Listening and Reading are interpretative modes. To best understand the criteria, refer to the complete *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines-Listening* and *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines-Reading*. The complete Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking, Writing, Listening, and Reading for English, along with samples for each level, can be found here: [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 for English](#).

Very generally, listening and reading proficiency is assessed as follows.

In assessing listening, the following criteria are considered:

- the amount of information the listener can retrieve from what they hear
- the comprehension, inferences and connections that can be made by listening to spoken language produced by one or multiple speakers
- the different tasks that listeners can understand from varying length and type of oral passages under a variety of circumstances.

In assessing reading, the following criteria are considered:

- the amount of information a reader can retrieve from a text
- the comprehension, inferences and connections that can be made within and across texts
- the different tasks that readers can understand from different texts and under different circumstances.

## **HOW DOES A TEST TAKER PREPARE FOR THE ACTFL TEP?**

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The best approach for doing well on the ACTFL TEP is PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! The ACTFL TEP assesses what a person can do with language at the time of the test. Only language development over time will influence a rating. Last-minute language learning, grammar review or vocabulary practice will most likely not improve final results. Knowing more about the language will not affect ratings unless it is reflected in what a person can do. A prospective test taker should practice communicating naturally in the language, focusing on the message rather than just the language forms. As with any test, being well-rested and alert, and maintaining a positive attitude throughout the test, are beneficial.

As stated previously, it is also important to be familiar with the [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 for English](#) and with the format for each assessment in the ACTFL TEP.

## Specific ways for test takers to prepare for each part of the ACTFL TEP

### OPIc

- Practice speaking at length about familiar topics, current events, past memories, future plans, etc.
- Speak every day. If possible, have someone who is familiar with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines provide feedback.
- Take a conversation course or find a conversation partner, in person or online.
- Read. Reading not only builds vocabulary, but also provides speaking models.

### WPT

- Practice writing longer descriptions and narratives about familiar topics, current events, past memories, future plans, etc.
- Write every day. If possible, have someone who is familiar with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines review the writing and provide feedback.
- Practice keyboarding so that you are comfortably able to respond to WPT prompts in the time allotted.
- Take a composition course.
- Read. Reading not only builds vocabulary, but also provides writing models.

### L&Rcat

- Listen to and read newspapers, magazines, and journals on a wide range of topics.
- Listen to a variety of spoken English discourse such as daily interactions and dialogues, reports, presentations, discussions, and broadcasts.
- Read different types of texts, such as informal notes, emails, letters, announcements, short reports, articles, and commentaries.
- Dedicate time to listening and reading for greater comprehension of spoken language and texts, to understand all the facts, to interpret the connections between different parts of a conversation or text, and to make inferences based on the information, organization, style, and other rhetorical devices that are employed by speakers and writers.

## WHAT ARE SOME TIPS FOR TAKING THE ACTFL TEP?

### Take Care of the Logistics

- Once you schedule your test, instructions will be sent to you by email. Please follow them closely. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact LTI immediately at [customercare@languagetesting.com](mailto:customercare@languagetesting.com).
- Make sure that the area where you are taking the ACTFL TEP is quiet.
- Make sure that your device meets all the technical requirements. Please check your settings in advance using the links to the System Check provided by email.
- During the test, you are not permitted to review documents or dictionaries, or ask for help. Rely exclusively on what you can do in the language on your own. If the remote proctor or the software detects that you are receiving assistance, the test will not receive a rating.

## OPIc Tips

- Respond to the questions in the Survey and the Self-Assessment as accurately as you can. The prompts in the test are generated based on your answers, so make sure that you provide the best answers you can to generate a test that is unique to you and your level of ability. Please note that for Speaking, you must select Statement 3 or 4 if you need a rating up to Advanced Mid. You must select Statement 5 if you need a rating up to Superior.
- During the OPIc, enjoy the conversation and speak as much as you can about each topic.
- Warm up by speaking the language before the assessment begins, so you do not waste the first few minutes getting used to speaking the language. Doing so will prepare you to communicate in the language at your best.
- Listen carefully to the prompts and respond accordingly. If your answer is incomplete or does not respond fully to the request, you will not have another opportunity to answer. Make sure you provide a response to the question that is being asked.
- Speak only in English and avoid using slang or words from other languages. Demonstrate, to the best of your ability, that you can function in a monolingual environment. If you do not know a word or expression, explain or paraphrase in order to convey your message as clearly as possible. Use other words, explain, or give examples to get the message across and maintain the conversation in English.
- Do not prepare for the OPIc by memorizing responses. Do not try to lead the conversation into topics you have practiced in advance. The raters are highly experienced at recognizing rehearsed/memorized material, which may negatively impact your rating. Keep in mind, memorized language is typically a characteristic of the Novice level. Raters may rate your speech accordingly. Creating authentic answers to the questions will provide better at-level responses.
- When prompted to ask questions, make sure you formulate your questions appropriately for the target language about the proposed topic.
- If you are asked to tell a story about an experience that took place in the past, make sure you tell the story in detail using appropriate time frames and structures. If you are asked to speak about a future plan, you should also make sure you use the appropriate forms and structures for that time frame too. Sustained control of the major time frames is required for the Advanced level. While a lack of control of aspect (i.e., present perfect vs. past perfect) does not prevent you from sustaining functional ability at the Advanced level, lack of control over the time frames may result in breakdown to a lower level of proficiency.
- Do not exclusively focus on verb formations (or any other grammar point). The Advanced level requires control over the use of connectors, time indicators, and other language elements that may contribute to the development of the narration in paragraph-length discourse.
- Short answers can work against you, because they do not show the breadth and depth of your speaking ability. Provide as many details as you can.
- If you are asked to state and support your opinion, make sure you support your point of view with well-organized arguments. Try to maintain the abstract treatment of the topic: a description of facts about what happened is an Advanced-level explanation, whereas a consideration of the issues involved in the problem provides a Superior-level treatment of the topic.
- If you are asked to speculate about some possible conditions and/or outcomes, make sure you use the appropriate hypothetical structures for that language. Maintain the hypothetical treatment throughout your response. Consider the topic from an abstract perspective.

## WPT Tips

- Respond to the questions in the Background Survey and the Self-Assessment as accurately as you can. The prompts in the test are generated based on your answers, so make sure that you provide the best answers you can to generate a test that is unique to you and your level of ability. Please note that for writing, you must select Statement 3 or 4 if you need a rating up to Advanced Mid. You must select Statement 5 or 6 if you need a rating up to Superior.
- Make sure that you understand the technology involved in answering your test. Before you finish the test, review your answers to check correct spelling, punctuation, accentuation, or any other feature required in writing in the language. Be as accurate as you can.
- Read the prompts carefully and address all the requirements in the questions fully. Keep in mind that each component of the questions addresses a variety of linguistic functions. Respond accordingly. Your answers should demonstrate your ability to perform these functions fully. If your answer is incomplete or does not respond fully to the request, your final rating may be affected. Review each question before you move to the next task and make sure that you have responded to the prompt completely.
- Write only in English and avoid using slang or words from other languages. Express your ideas as clearly as possible, and, as much as you can, demonstrate that you can function in a monolingual environment without the support of your reader. If you do not know a word or expression, explain or paraphrase what you want to say in order to convey your message. Use other words, explain, or give examples to get the message across.
- Do not prepare for the WPT by memorizing responses. Do not try to incorporate materials you have practiced in advance. The tester is highly experienced at recognizing memorized material. Memorized responses prepared in advance can count against you, whereas creating real answers to the questions will provide better at-level responses. Focus on providing legitimate answers to the questions.
- If you are asked to write a story about an experience that took place in the past, make sure you tell the story in detail using appropriate time frames and structures. If you are asked to write about a future plan, you should also make sure you use the appropriate forms and structures for that time frame. Sustained control of the time frame is required for the Advanced level. While lack of control of aspect (i.e., present perfect vs. past perfect) does not prevent you from sustaining functional ability at the Advanced level, a lack of control over the time frame may result in breakdown to the level below.
- Do not focus on verb formations (or any other grammar point) exclusively. The Advanced level requires control over the use of connectors, time expressions, and other language elements that may contribute to the development of the narration in paragraph-length discourse.
- Short answers can work against you because they do not show the breadth and depth of your writing ability. Provide details in as well-organized discourse as you can.
- If you are asked to state and support your opinion, make sure to support your point of view with well-organized arguments. Try to maintain the abstract treatment of the topic: a description of facts about what happened is an Advanced-level explanation, while a consideration of the issues involved in the problem provide a Superior-level treatment of the topic.
- If you are asked to speculate about some possible conditions and/or outcomes, make sure you use the appropriate hypothetical structures for the language. Maintain the hypothetical treatment of a topic throughout your response. Consider each topic from an abstract perspective and consider ideas instead of facts.

## L&Rcat Tips

- It is to your advantage that you prepare by listening and reading materials in the language before the assessment begins, so you do not waste the first few minutes connecting with the language.
- Read the questions first, then proceed to the passage. Read the questions carefully making sure that you understand the purpose of the question. Then, listen to the passage or read the text with that purpose in mind to help you identify the correct answers to the questions.
- Pay attention to time. During the L&Rcat, a counter will show when the recording begins. Be ready to listen before the recording starts so you understand the passage from the very beginning.
- The Listening section provides you with space to take notes. Take advantage of this virtual notepad, since you do not know what the possible choices for the multiple-choice questions will be until after you have finished listening to the passage. Your notes will remain available while you are answering the multiple-choice questions. Your notes will not affect scoring and will not be saved.
- Try to stay focused on understanding the passage. Do not get distracted taking notes.
- The Reading section questions and multiple-choice answers are available to you while the Reading passage is on screen. This means that you can go back to the passage to clarify any information or better select your response.
- Select your answers carefully. All the choices will look like possible correct answers, but only one is correct. All choices are equally attractive, and they will not repeat the content of the passage in the same words. You will be able to select the correct answer based only on your comprehension of the passage. If you are not sure of an answer, you should still attempt a response.

## THE ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES

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The [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012](#) may be used for non-profit, educational purposes only, provided that they are reproduced in their entirety, with no alterations, and with credit to ACTFL.

Click here to access the complete [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 for English](#) and to view samples at each proficiency level.

## INTERESTED IN SCHEDULING THE ACTFL TEP?

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You can visit the ACTFL TEP website for more information or to register for the test or you can email [customercare@languagetesting.com](mailto:customercare@languagetesting.com).