Encouraging Learners Through the Use of Proficiency Benchmark Portfolios

Language portfolio*: A way to document language learner proficiency progress. Can include recordings of speaking, listening files or texts that the learner can understand, writing samples, benchmark checklists, etc.

*Original idea by Patti Watts and Amanda Heunsch, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Proficiency checklists I like:
- Canadian Language Benchmarks Cando Checklists
- ACTFL Cando Statements
- Carol Orwig’s Self-Assessment Checklists for Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (2013)

Language Portfolio Details
- Put in a shared cloud folder (i.e. Dropbox)
- Organize by proficiency level (i.e. A1, CLB 1)
- Can be done as often as monthly
- Make sure they do tasks similar to the benchmarks, but can also expand
- Encourage learners to upload conversations they’ve recorded of themselves speaking with a language helper
- Learners could include a similar task for each proficiency level, but expand it as their proficiency grows (i.e. meeting a friend on the street)
- Listen together during a language assessment time, starting with lower level and moving up
- Can be used to formally or informally assess fluency and accuracy

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Canadian Language Benchmarks

LEVEL 1

Name                      Date

☐ Needs assessment        ☐ Goal setting        ☐ Self-assessment

Speaking 1
I can greet people:
☐ Hello!
☐ How are you?
☐ I’m fine, thank you.

I can ask some questions:
☐ What time is it?
☐ Pardon me?

I can give some information:
☐ M-A-R-I-A.
☐ 555-6729.
☐ I’m from India.

Listening 1
I can understand greetings:
☐ Hello! How are you?
☐ Please come in!

I can understand questions:
☐ What is your name?
☐ How do you spell it?
☐ What is your telephone number?

I can understand information:
☐ I am from Colombia.
☐ It’s ten o’clock.

Reading 1
☐ I can read the alphabet.
☐ I can read some words that I see often.
☐ I am learning the sounds of letters.
☐ I can read a short sentence with the help of a picture.

I can read:
☐ Name
☐ Address
☐ Phone Number

Writing 1
☐ I can write the alphabet.
☐ I can write numbers.
☐ I can write my name and address.
☐ I can write my telephone number.
☐ I can fill out a simple form.
☐ I can write a short list.

Notes

Name  Date

☐ Needs assessment        ☐ Goal setting        ☐ Self-assessment

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Name Date

☐ Needs assessment  ☐ Goal setting  ☐ Self-assessment  ☐ ________________

**Speaking 2**

I can answer greetings:
☐ Hello, I’m fine. How are you?
☐ Nice to meet you.

I can ask for help:
☐ Speak slowly, please.
☐ Can you help me please?

I can give information:
☐ I can talk about my family.
☐ I can describe things.
☐ I can answer questions about myself.

**Reading 2**

☐ I can read words that I see often.
☐ I can read a simple greeting card.
☐ I can read a simple form.
☐ I can read the amount of a bill.
☐ I can match a list to pictures or real things.
☐ I can read very simple, step-by-step instructions.
☐ I can read a simple text and answer questions.
☐ I understand simple maps, labels and diagrams.

**Listening 2**

I can understand more instructions:
☐ Can you show me some ID?
☐ Please write your name on the line.
☐ Go upstairs to Room B5.
☐ Could you repeat that please?

I can understand parts of conversations:
☐ I understand numbers and letters.
☐ I understand the time.
☐ I understand some of the words.

**Writing 2**

☐ I can write in a birthday card.
☐ I can copy prices at the store.
☐ I can fill out a simple application form.
☐ I can write a cheque.
☐ I can copy information from a schedule.
☐ I can write complete sentences about myself and my family.
☐ I can describe a picture.
☐ My spelling and handwriting are easy to read.

Notes

[148x727] Canadian Language Benchmarks LEVEL 2

[549x718] 2

[73x599] Speaking 2

[73x577] I can answer greetings:

[94x562] Hello, I’m fine. How are you?

[94x547] Nice to meet you.

[73x517] I can ask for help:

[94x502] Speak slowly, please.

[94x487] Can you help me please?

[73x458] I can give information:

[94x443] I can talk about my family.

[94x428] I can describe things.

[94x413] I can answer questions about myself.

[73x357] Reading 2

[73x335] I can read words that I see often.

[94x335] I can read a simple greeting card.

[94x320] I can read a simple form.

[94x315] I can read the amount of a bill.

[94x310] I can match a list to pictures or real things.

[94x305] I can read very simple, step-by-step instructions.

[94x290] I can read a simple text and answer questions.

[94x275] I understand simple maps, labels and diagrams.

[336x579] Listening 2

[336x557] When someone is speaking, I can understand the main points, details, purpose, and attitude. I can recognize different levels of formality.

[336x497] I can understand some technical conversations, especially about my line of work.

[336x452] I can understand abstract and complex ideas on a familiar topic.

[336x422] I recognize other people’s moods, attitudes and feelings.

[336x392] I can understand many local idioms and expressions and can follow detailed stories of general interest.

[336x347] I can follow detailed and extended instructions if they are clear and coherent.

[336x302] I can usually understand phone messages, even on unfamiliar, non-routine subjects.

[89x636] Needs assessment

[188x636] Goal setting

[279x636] Self-assessment

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**Level 3**

**Speaking 3**
- I can say a few simple sentences about familiar, everyday topics: my work, family, daily activities, health, the weather, etc.
- I can answer simple questions with single words or short sentences.
- I can ask for help or permission.
- I can ask short, routine questions.
- I use words like ‘yesterday’ and ‘today’, but I don’t always use the correct verb tenses.
- I know a few words about health and feelings.
- I can give basic information about familiar subjects, such as family, weather or daily activities.
- I can connect parts of sentences, for example, with ‘and’ and ‘but’.

**Listening 3**
- I know when a greeting is formal or informal.
- I can understand short sentences when you speak slowly.
- I can understand questions about myself.
- I can understand instructions including place and measurements.
- I can follow directions in the street.
- I can get the most important words in a story.
- I understand when a person asks me for something.
- I have trouble understanding people on the phone.

**Reading 3**
- I can read and understand a short story or simple news item.
- I can follow simple instructions with 1 – 5 steps when there are pictures to help me understand.
- I can read about the weather.
- I can understand a store flyer and make a list of key points.
- I can read words I know in a new context.
- I can sound out words in English.
- I can read some new words.

**Writing 3**
- I can write a short note or message.
- I can write short, simple sentences about my family or a familiar place.
- I can fill in a short, simple form.
- I can write an invitation.
- I can write a greeting.
- I can copy information from lists or schedules.
- I can describe my daily routine.
Canadian Language Benchmarks  LEVEL 4

Name
Date

☐ Needs assessment  ☐ Goal setting  ☐ Self-assessment  ☐ ________________________________

Speaking 4
☐ I can introduce two people to each other.
☐ I can participate in conversations that are about what I need and what I have done.
☐ I can ask and answer many simple questions.
☐ I can use short sentences to buy something or talk to the doctor.
☐ I can give someone simple directions.
☐ I can use the past tense with many common verbs.
☐ I have enough vocabulary for everyday conversation.
☐ I use some connecting words between my sentences, like ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘first’, ‘next’, and ‘because’.
☐ I can use the phone for a very short conversation.
☐ People usually understand me, but sometimes I have to repeat.

Listening 4
☐ I can understand a conversation on a familiar, everyday topic when you speak slowly.
☐ I know what you are talking about because I understand some words and phrases.
☐ I can understand many simple questions.
☐ I can follow simple oral instructions.
☐ I can use connecting words like ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘first’, ‘next’ and ‘because’.
☐ I can follow instructions to find something on a map or picture.
☐ I can understand a short phone message if I know what the topic is.
☐ I ask people to repeat when I don't understand.

Writing 4
☐ I can write a paragraph about a personal experience.
☐ I can write a paragraph about my future plans.
☐ I can write a short note, message or letter.
☐ I can fill out a simple application form of up to 20 items.
☐ When I write, I can use whole sentences.
☐ I can copy information from dictionaries, catalogues or manuals.
☐ I can take slow, simple dictation with several repetitions.
☐ I can spell and punctuate my sentences.
☐ It is easy to read my printing or handwriting.
☐ I can use whole sentences with few errors.

Notes

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LEVEL 5

Speaking 5

☐ I can join in conversations on familiar topics.
☐ I am beginning to use longer sentences, but sometimes I hesitate or pause.
☐ I know a lot of common, everyday vocabulary and some idioms.
☐ I use connecting words between my sentences, like ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘first’, ‘next’, and ‘because’.
☐ I can use the phone for a simple conversation, but I still find it difficult.
☐ I feel comfortable using English with people I know in social settings.
☐ I can use formal and casual language.
☐ I ask for clarification when I don’t understand.

Listening 5

☐ I can understand conversations if people speak slowly.
☐ I can follow simple, repetitive and predictable speech.
☐ I can catch many words and phrases in informal conversations at a normal speed in audio recordings and on the radio. I can follow the general idea if the subject is personally relevant.
☐ I can understand a range of common vocabulary and a few idioms.
☐ I often have to ask people to repeat, especially when they speak quickly.
☐ I can identify the situation, emotional state and relationship of speakers.
☐ I can understand a simple, predictable phone message.
☐ I catch some inferred meanings in advice, offers, compliments and suggestions.
Reading 5

- I can understand the main ideas, some details and some inferred meaning of a text 2 – 3 paragraphs long. The topics are familiar and personally relevant.
- I can read information that I receive regularly, such as a gas bill, or some items in a newspaper.
- Usually, I have to read something more than once to understand it.
- Sometimes, by looking at a whole sentence, I can understand what a new word means. However, most of the time, I use my dictionary for new words.
- I can follow instructions with 7 - 10 steps. Sometimes I need the help of pictures.
- I understand facts and some inferred meaning in everyday texts, such as memos and e-mails.
- I can locate specific details in extensive directories, charts and schedules. I can use tables of contents, indexes and glossaries.
- I can see the connection between paragraphs. I can predict what will come next.
- My vocabulary is mostly concrete, but I know some abstract, conceptual and technical words.

Writing 5

- I can write a paragraph about an idea or an opinion and give details.
- I can write a short letter, note, or e-mail using appropriate language.
- I can fill out an application form with 20 – 30 items.
- I can take a phone message with 5 – 7 details.
- I can write a paragraph with a main idea and supporting details.
- I can write sentences with good control of simple structures, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary.
- I can write a paragraph describing an event or an incident.
- I choose language and content that are appropriate and relevant to the occasion.
Canadian Language Benchmarks

LEVEL 6

Speaking 6

☐ I can participate in small group discussions where I express my opinion and ask for clarification. I can provide accurate and detailed information.
☐ I can interrupt politely when it’s necessary.
☐ I can keep a conversation going and can hold my own when speaking to a group.
☐ I use a range of vocabulary, including idioms, phrasal verbs, and common expressions.
☐ I can explain a process or sequence of events.
☐ I can use a variety of complex sentences. I sound fluent when I speak, and I speak at almost normal speed.
☐ Although I make mistakes, people don’t usually have trouble understanding my grammar and pronunciation.
☐ I know how to express and respond to regrets and excuses in a variety of situations. I can make, cancel, or rearrange an appointment. I can give my reasons or apologies.
☐ I use eye contact, tone of voice and volume familiar to Canadians.
☐ I am comfortable talking on the phone in familiar situations, but I sometimes find it hard to talk to strangers.
☐ I can change my style of speaking for different situations and people.

Listening 6

☐ I can follow a conversation about a familiar topic at a pace slightly slower than normal.
☐ I can listen to a short instructional talk and remember 7 – 10 points.
☐ I can pick out the main ideas, key details and inferred meaning from listening texts of up to 10 minutes.
☐ I can understand some idioms.
☐ I can understand the mood and attitude of the people I am listening to.
☐ I can understand short sets of instructions or directions and follow the sequence of the steps even if they are not in step-by-step form.
☐ I still often ask people to repeat what they have said.
☐ I can understand a short, predictable phone message.

Notes

Name

Date

☐ Needs assessment  ☐ Goal setting  ☐ Self-assessment  ☐ ___________________________

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