

SECONDARY ENGLISH FOR ADULT LEARNERS

(S.E.A.L.)

DEFINITION OF THE DOMAIN
FOR PLACEMENT TESTING

DÉFINITION DU DOMAINE D'EXAMEN

FEBRUARY 1999

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FOR PLACEMENT TESTING**

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Direction de la formation générale des adultes
Service de l'évaluation des apprentissages

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INTRODUCTION

This definition of the domain for placement testing is intended as an aid for those responsible for the placement of candidates in the appropriate levels of the Secondary English for Adult Learners (S.E.A.L.) program. It describes the characteristics of the placement test developed for this use and outlines the assessment criteria to be followed in determining the appropriate placement.

The goal of the definition of the domain for placement testing is to prepare tests that are valid from one version to another and from one school board to another, taking into account the responsibilities shared by the ministère de l'Éducation and the school boards.

1. ORIENTATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

Orientations

The goal of the *Secondary English for Adult Learners Program of Study* is to help students learn to listen to, read, formulate orally and write various texts and messages that meet their communication needs.

The program is designed to encourage students to express their perceptions of the values conveyed in texts and messages.

The program is intended to help students develop language skills which are acquired progressively by means of a spiral curriculum. That is, the intermediate objectives are repeated in all courses in both comprehension and expression.

The program promotes the use of language resources to develop the students' ability to understand the meaning of the suggested texts and messages.

The program is designed so that students also use language resources to develop their skills in oral and written expression.

The program favours the integration of skills in order to reflect real-language use and to develop language skills through their mutual reinforcement.

Consequences

The placement test will be based on real-life situations that make it possible to measure the candidates' ability to read and write various meaningful texts. The test will measure only two of the four abilities.

The placement test will make it possible to measure the candidates' ability to establish links between their own values and those conveyed in texts.

The placement test will take into account the spiral nature of the program's learning content by selecting indicators from each level of the program.

The placement test will make it possible to measure the candidates' ability to use language resources to interpret and evaluate the meaning of texts and to extrapolate from these texts.

The placement test will make it possible to measure the candidates' ability to use language resources in producing written texts and in formulating responses.

The placement test will involve candidates in integrating skills where required by appropriate use within given tasks. Where possible, these reading and writing tasks will be related to a common theme.

2. CONTENT OF THE PROGRAM FOR PURPOSES OF PLACEMENT TESTING

2.1. Skills and Content

Understanding written discourse by reading a newspaper/magazine article:

- to identify the context of communication
- to construct meaning from the text
- to show familiarity with connotative meaning
- to give a personal consideration of the text

Understanding written discourse by reading a short narrative:

- to identify key components of the narrative
- to construct meaning from what is being read
- to respond in an individual way

Composing written discourse by writing a letter:

- to determine the purpose of communication
- to select details relevant to the purpose
- to engage the reader
- to make appropriate use of language

Composing written discourse by writing an essay:

- to formulate a thesis
- to develop ideas with supporting details
- to organize information
- to make appropriate use of language and style

2.2. Table of Dimensions

SKILLS / CONTENT	ELEMENTS OF DISCOURSE	COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
Understanding Written Discourse: Reading a newspaper/magazine article	• Context of communication • Construction of meaning (1)	• Familiarity with connotative meaning • Personal consideration of text (2)
Understanding Written Discourse: Reading a short narrative	• Key components of the narrative • Construction of meaning (3)	• Personal response (4)
Composing Written Discourse: Writing a letter	• Context of communication • Selection and development of ideas (5)	• Engagement of reader • Appropriate use of language (6)
Composing Written Discourse: Writing an essay	• Formulation of thesis • Development of ideas • Selection and organization of ideas (7)	• Language and style appropriate to context (8)

2.3. Observable Behaviours

Dimension 1: Elements of Discourse

In reading a newspaper or magazine article, the candidate should be able to:

- (Context of communication)
 - identify the purpose of the article;
 - identify the main point and specific details;
- (Construction of meaning)
 - use context clues to find meaning;
 - identify the method of organization.

Dimension 2: Communication Strategies

In reading a newspaper or magazine article, the candidate should be able to:

- (Familiarity with connotative meaning)
 - check facts, events, ideas by recognizing unstated assumptions, cause and effect, causal relations;
 - distinguish relevant from irrelevant information;
- (Personal consideration of text)
 - make inferences beyond given data;
 - draw conclusions.

Dimension 3: Elements of Discourse

In reading a short narrative, the candidate should be able to:

- (Key components of the narrative)
 - identify characterization and characters' motivation;
 - identify setting (time, place);
 - identify central conflict;

- (Construction of meaning)
 - understand the impact of the various components and combine with personal knowledge and experience to produce meaning;
 - draw conclusions about the total meaning.

Dimension 4: Communication Strategies

In reading a short narrative, the candidate should be able to:

- (Personal response)
 - record individual response, both intellectual and emotional.

Dimension 5: Elements of Discourse

In writing a letter, the candidate should be able to:

- (Context of communication)
 - establish a purpose for writing;
 - establish a clear statement of point of view;
- (Selection and development of ideas)
 - choose content of interest to self and reader;
 - construct ideas coherently;
 - organize the content effectively.

Dimension 6: Communication Strategies

In writing a letter, the candidate should be able to:

- (Engagement of reader)
 - use diction and style that are clear, appropriate and accessible to the audience;
- (Appropriate use of language)
 - conform with the conventions of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Dimension 7: Elements of Discourse

In writing an essay, the candidate should be able to:

- (Formulation of thesis)
 - formulate a thesis, making a clear and concise statement of the point of view presented;
 - establish the thesis by presenting logical arguments;
- (Development of ideas)
 - provide the audience with clear and sufficient information about the subject;
- (Selection and organization of ideas)
 - organize the information coherently;
 - choose an organizational pattern that best presents the subject.

Dimension 8: Communication Strategies

In writing an essay, the candidate should be able to:

- (Language and style appropriate to context)
 - use diction and style appropriate to the audience;
 - conform with the conventions of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

3. JUSTIFICATION OF CHOICES

Two abilities have been chosen for the placement test: understanding written discourse (reading) and composing written discourse (writing). It is assumed that candidates' mastery of the understanding or composing of oral discourse is sufficient to enable them to participate in a course to which they have been assigned by a written placement test. In special cases, if the written placement test is insufficient for placement purposes, an oral interview may be used to complement it.

In order to give candidates the opportunity to develop their ideas within the limited time of the placement test, it is recommended that there be a thematic linking of the different parts of the test.

4. DESCRIPTION OF THE TEST

4.1. Content

The placement test is comprised of two parts, both of which are to be completed during the same testing session:

Part I – Reading: Candidates will be asked to read two texts and respond to five questions on **each** of them.

Text A will be a newspaper or magazine article intended to elicit responses for basic comprehension: target levels I to III.

Text B will be a short narrative intended to elicit responses for a more advanced level of understanding: target levels IV and V.

Part II – Writing: Candidates will be asked to complete a short piece of writing (one to one and a half pages in length) on their choice of **one** of the topics given. The topics should be related to the two texts given in Part I, but should allow the writer to expand his/her own ideas based on personal experience or observation, using a suggested form (i.e., a letter or an essay). The suggested form should be given in order to help guide the writer to choose a relevant context for writing. A rough draft will be encouraged, but will remain optional.

4.2. Time

The suggested time for the placement test is **two hours**.

4.3. Specific Conditions

- An English dictionary and/or thesaurus should be made available for use at any time throughout the test.
- No outside material may be brought to the testing room and no test material may be taken from the room.

5. INDICATORS OF OBSERVABLE OUTCOMES

5.1. Reading

The questions in the reading segment of the placement test will be developed and scored according to a hierarchy of comprehension:

- basic interpretation
- evaluation/judgment
- extension/exploration

Each question will have a target level indicating the level of expected outcome. However, provision should be made for responses that surpass the expected outcome (i.e., achieve a higher level) and for responses that do not reach the expected outcome (i.e., achieve a lower level).

The chart below provides an overview of the target levels for each question related to texts A and B. Overlapping levels of reading accomplishment are identified and each level represents the degree to which candidates' experience and language base allows them to respond to a range of questions based on texts of varying complexity.

Based on responses, candidates will be placed at the reading level at which they demonstrate **consistent success**.

The range of questions and their related target levels are as follows:

Text A

question 1 = level I
question 2 = level III
question 3 = level II
question 4 = level III
question 5 = level III

Text B

question 1 = level III
question 2 = level IV
question 3 = level III
question 4 = level IV
question 5 = level IV

Target Level

Text A	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV	Level V
Basic Interpretation	question 1 ●—————	—————●	question 2 —————●		
Evaluation/Judgment	—————● —————●	question 3 —————●	question 4 —————●		
Extension/Exploration		—————●	question 5 —————●	—————●	

Target Level

Text B	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV	Level V
Basic Interpretation		—————●	question 1 —————●	question 2 —————●	—————●
Evaluation/Judgment		—————●	question 3 —————●	question 4 —————●	—————●
Extension/Exploration			—————●	question 5 —————●	—————●

5.2. Writing

As indicated below, descriptions of performance are given at the various placement levels. The teacher should use the general criteria as the basis of his/her first perusal of a candidate's work. If further analysis is necessary to determine placement, the teacher can then refer to the specific elements of writing at each placement level.

Evaluation Grid

General criteria for each level					
Level I	The writer demonstrates only an elementary grasp of the fundamental elements of writing (i.e., ideas/content, organization, language and usage). Integration of these elements is haphazard, often not clearly focused. The writing conveys simplistic meaning, sometimes partial and/or fragmented.				
Level II	The writer demonstrates an uneven grasp of the elements of writing (i.e., ideas/content, organization, language and usage). Integration of the elements tends to be inconsistent. The writing conveys simplistic, often trite, meaning.				
Level III	The writer demonstrates a basic grasp of the elements of writing (i.e., ideas/content, organization, language and usage). Integration of some elements is apparent, but development may be sketchy and/or inconsistently maintained.				
Level IV	The writer demonstrates a control of the elements of writing (i.e., ideas/content, organization, language and usage). The writing is generally integrated; development is usually maintained. The writing conveys a clear perspective.				
Level V	The writer demonstrates an effective control of the elements of writing (i.e., ideas/content, organization, language and usage). The writing is integrated, clearly developed, and comes together as a whole. The writing is focused and conveys a thoughtful perspective.				

Specific elements of writing	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV	Level V
Writer's voice/stance	Ambiguous, inappropriate and unclear	Often unclear and inconsistent, but discernible	Present, but inconsistent or uneven	Appropriate; shows consistent interest in the subject	Interesting, clear and individual
Writer's engagement/reader's interest	Superficial interest in the subject or awareness of the reader	Little interest in both the task and awareness of the reader	Engagement with the subject shown, but inconsistent awareness of the reader	Conveys interest in the subject and in communicating with the reader	Shows engagement with the subject and maintains the reader's interest
Ideas, content and development	Controlling idea is vague	Controlling idea is discerned; limited development; few details, often imprecise	Controlling idea may be unclear or overgeneralized; few or repetitive details not clearly relevant and inconsistently related to ideas	Controlling idea and its development are clear and appropriate, although perhaps overgeneralized; details are relevant and help clarify the ideas	Controlling idea and its development are thoughtful and straightforward; details are relevant, they clarify and complete the ideas
Order and arrangement	Haphazard order and arrangement of events, ideas and details; lack of focus and coherence; opening often does little more than repeat the task; closure is missing or unconnected	Weak order and arrangement of events, ideas and details; opening is mildly engaging; closure is too weak to unify the piece	Inconsistent order and arrangement of events, ideas and details; focus and coherence are inconsistent; closure is often ineffective	Good order and arrangement of events, ideas and details; focus and coherence are generally maintained	Clear order and arrangement of events, ideas and details; opening is clear and direct; focus and coherence are maintained throughout; closure assists unity
Language and mechanics/grammar	Words and expressions may be misused; many sentences are unclear; errors in grammar make communication difficult	Word choice is limited; poor control of syntax and frequent errors in language interfere with communication	Words and expressions are general and may be imprecise or redundant; sentences with uncomplicated structures are clear, but more complicated structures obscure communication; adequate grasp of conventional syntax and rules of language	Words and expressions are clear; sentences are generally clear; attempts to use complex syntax may be present but not always effective; general control of the rules of language	Choice of words or expressions indicates an effective control of vocabulary; sentences are clear and purposeful; a solid control of style, syntax and the rules of language is evident and effective; errors are minimal

5.3. PLACEMENT CHECKLIST

The level attained by a candidate should be recorded on the placement checklist found on the next page.

Whichever level a candidate attains on the placement test should be his/her placement level in the S.E.A.L. program (i.e., a test score in the Level III range admits the candidate to S.E.A.L. Level III — ENG-3061-3).

It is not necessary to assign marks to each question of the Reading segment; rather a check mark is placed on the form at the level attained for each question, in accordance with the criteria provided, and assessment is made for the overall placement level. For convenience, areas NOT applicable to each question are blocked out. Responses below the designated levels fall into the pre-secondary category.

If achievement in the Writing segment differs significantly from the achievement of a candidate in the Reading segment, the teacher will need to review the candidate's entire test. It may be possible to consult with another teacher. When marks on different segments vary considerably, it is best to set results at the lower level.

Placement Checklist

The chart below can be used as a checklist for evaluation. It is not necessary to assign marks to each question of the Reading segment. Simply place a check mark on this form at the level attained for each question, in accordance with the criteria provided, and assess the overall placement level. For convenience, areas NOT applicable to each question are blocked out. Responses below the designated levels fall into the pre-secondary category.

Text B of the Reading segment should be evaluated first. If a candidate attains Level V, Level IV or a clear Level III on Text B, a review of answers to Text A may not be necessary until, possibly, after evaluation of the Writing segment of the test. If a candidate's reading is below that of Level III, or if it is not clear that Level III is appropriate, then the teacher should evaluate Text A in addition to the Writing segment.

For the Writing segment, the teacher should use the general criteria provided on the evaluation grid as the basis of his/her first perusal of a candidate's work. If further analysis is necessary to determine placement, the teacher can then refer to the specific elements of writing at each placement level.

Candidate's Name: _____							
Date: _____							
		Pre-Secondary	PLACEMENT LEVEL				
			I	II	III	IV	V
READING							
Text A	question	1					
		2					
		3					
		4					
		5					
Text B	question	1					
		2					
		3					
		4					
		5					
WRITING							
General Criteria							
Specific Elements of Writing							
PLACEMENT							
COMMENTS							

