



The New ILR Skill- Level Descriptions for Intercultural Communication

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Agenda

- Introductions and background to the Descriptions
- Process of development, review and approval
- Purposes of the Descriptions
- Limits to the Descriptions
- Examples from the Descriptions across levels
- A few “hot-button” topics from the development
- Questions and open discussion



Brief Historical Highpoints

- 1955-84 Original FSI-ILR Descriptions were “performance-based” and focused on the ability to function successfully in another culture
- 1974 ILR Committee attempted to develop separate *Cultural Proficiency* scale, never adopted
- 1984 Importance of cultural understanding is stressed in ILR Skill Level Descriptions for all language skill modalities
- 1984-5 ACTFL Committee worked on draft of generic Cultural Proficiency descriptions, never adopted
- 1993-6 *National Standards for Foreign Language Learning* developed & published in 1996
- 2003 > Defense Department leadership recognizes critical importance of cultural understanding and culturally appropriate behavior; Defense researchers develop concepts of “cross-cultural competence” and “regional expertise”



Purposes

These Skill Level Descriptions are intended to serve primarily as guidelines for use in **government settings**. They may provide a **basis for curriculum development, instruction and assessment**. Intercultural communication is a complex activity that combines several abilities.



Definitions

For the purposes of this document, [Intercultural Communication] refers to the **content and form of communication, both verbal and nonverbal, among people of different cultures. Competence in intercultural communication is the ability to take part effectively in a given social context by understanding what is being communicated and by employing appropriate language and behavior to convey an intended message.**



Definitions - 2

A given level of competence in Intercultural Communication requires a corresponding level in language proficiency. But **language proficiency and cultural knowledge, skills and abilities do not always align. Any such differences may impact the effectiveness of intercultural communication.** Moreover, having different levels of ability in the various language skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing) may also hinder performance in intercultural communication. Finally, it must be noted that any successful communication, but particularly intercultural communication, is generally dependent on interpersonal skills, disposition, tolerance for ambiguity, and social flexibility.



Caveat

The Skill Level Descriptions for Intercultural Communication ... are generic, as with all other ILR Descriptions. **Culture-specific models should be developed for assessment and instructional purposes.** The Descriptions characterize competence in Intercultural Communication for the six base levels and the 0+ level of the ILR scale.



The Levels

Level 0: (No Competence)

Level 0+: (Memorized Competence)

Level 1: (Elementary Competence)

Level 2: (Limited Working Competence)

Level 3: (Professional Competence)

Level 4: (Advanced Professional Competence)

Level 5: (Superior Professional Competence)



Range of Contexts

Level 0: No Competence

Level 0+: ... *a few routine interactions serving basic survival needs*. Can use appropriate posture and behavior when acknowledging and delivering short polite exchanges, such as greetings, farewells, and expressions of thanks and apology, but can rarely cope with deviations from the routine.

Level 1: Able to *participate in some everyday interactions* ...

Level 2: Able to *participate acceptably in many everyday social and work-related interactions.... Normally functions as expected in predictable and commonly encountered situations, including public events and large gatherings*

Level 3: Able to *participate successfully in most social, practical, and professional interactions, including those that may require a range of formal and informal language and behavior.*

Level 4: Able to *participate successfully in virtually all social, professional, and official interactions, including those where leadership is required*. Controls the full range of formal and informal styles of language and behavior.

Level 5: *The individual has mastered and controls virtually all forms of intercultural communication. Can deal skillfully with a very extensive range of circumstances, including high-stress situations.*



Awareness of Cultural Differences

Level 0: Shows *little or no awareness* that differences exist

Level 0+: Shows *awareness of obvious differences* between the culture and the individual's own.... *May often miss cues* indicating miscommunication and is almost always unable to repair misunderstandings when they occur.

Level 1: *Recognizes that differences exist between behaviors, norms and values* of the individual's own culture and those of the other culture, but *shows little understanding of the significance* or nature of these differences.

Level 2: Shows *conscious awareness of significant differences* between the individual's own culture and the other culture.... *May sometimes misinterpret cultural cues* or behave inappropriately for the culture, but is *usually able to recognize and repair* misunderstandings.

Level 3: *Rarely misreads cultural cues, and can almost always repair misinterpretations.*

Level 4: *...almost always correctly interprets visual cues, cultural allusions, nuance, tone, and subtle manifestations of underlying values.*

Level 5: *Able to analyze, debate, and synthesize the most creative expressions of language and aesthetics, as well as the concepts, values and standards that constitute the fundamental underpinnings of the culture.*



Tasks & Functions

Level 0+: Greetings, farewells, and expressions of thanks and apology

Level 1: Typically *experiences difficulties with less predictable and spontaneous interactions*, such as open-ended conversations or bargaining... *normally observes basic courtesy requirements* in encounters with individuals of different gender, age, or status.

Level 2: Can typically ... *adhere to basic social norms ...*, such as in *accepting and refusing invitations, offering and receiving gifts, and requesting assistance*. Can appropriately *issue straightforward directions and instructions, give or receive orders, whether in person, on the telephone or in writing*, and may be able to address some job-related problems.

Level 3: Can usually *discuss a variety of issues and subject matter that refer to the culture, such history, politics, literature, and the arts....* In professional contexts, the individual can interact appropriately during meetings and provide detailed explanations or reports both in person and in writing.

Level 4: Can employ sophisticated communicative strategies to command, argue, persuade, negotiate, counsel, and show empathy. Can take part successfully in public discourse, such as presentations, conferences, speeches, and media interviews.

Level 5: Able to analyze, debate, and synthesize the aesthetic qualities and ideas expressed in the arts, as well as the concepts, values, and standards that constitute the fundamental underpinnings of the culture.



Culturally Appropriate Behavior

Level 0: *Unable to adjust* when faced with cultural differences

Level 0+: *Able to use rehearsed behavior and memorized utterances* to engage in a few routine interactions serving basic survival needs.

Level 1: Usually *responds appropriately to the most commonly used cultural cues* but may exhibit confusion when faced with unfamiliar ones and *can rarely cope if misunderstandings arise*. Can *generally conform to culturally prescribed practices during interactions*, such as those regarding posture, eye contact, and distance from others, and observe rules governing personal appearance and attire.

Level 2: Able to *participate acceptably in many everyday social and work-related interactions*. Shows conscious awareness of significant differences between the individual's own culture and the other culture and *attempts to adjust behavior accordingly, although not always successfully*.

Level 3: Able to *participate successfully in most social, practical, and professional interactions*, including those that may require a range of formal and informal language and behavior.

Level 4: Able to *participate successfully in virtually all social, professional, and official interactions*, including those where leadership is required. Controls the full range of formal and informal styles of language and behavior.



Dealing with Taboos

Level 0: [No reference]

Level 0+: ...avoids some of the most critical and noticeable taboos, **although not consistently**

Level 1: Avoids well-known taboo topics and behavior.

Level 2: Can typically avoid taboos ...

Level 3: Controls nonverbal responses ... and **handles unfamiliar situations appropriately, including those involving taboos or emotionally-charged subjects.**

Level 4: Can effectively employ, both in person and in writing, a **wide variety of sophisticated communicative strategies to command, argue, persuade, dissuade, negotiate, counsel, and show empathy...** Can use intercultural communicative skills to facilitate information exchanges in a variety of situations. Makes frequent and appropriate use of cultural references, literary allusions, quotations from literature and other significant documents, and can discuss in depth the culture's traditions, beliefs, history, national policies, and public issues.



Literacy

Level 0+: [No reference.]

Level 1: Exhibits emerging ability to participate in some **social media** activities.

Level 2: Able to participate in **various social media activities**. In a work environment, can appropriately issue straightforward directions and instructions, give or receive orders, whether in person, on the telephone, **or in writing**.

Level 3: Can **interpret reading materials and recognize subtleties, implications, and tone**. Able **to communicate via social media**. In professional contexts, the individual can interact appropriately during meetings and provide detailed explanations or reports both in person and in writing.

Level 4: Can effectively **employ, both in person and in writing, a wide variety of sophisticated communicative strategies** to command, argue, persuade, dissuade, negotiate, counsel, and show empathy... Makes frequent and appropriate use of cultural references, **literary allusions, quotations from literature and other significant documents**...

Level 5: Able to analyze, debate, and synthesize the **most creative expressions of language and aesthetics**.



Some Issues

- Is this a “proficiency” scale?
- Why aren’t there plus levels?
- Does a factor need to be directly observable?
- How do the Standards’ reference to *products*, *practices* and *perspectives* fit in with the guidelines?
- What about knowledge **about** the culture?
- Why is *social media* part of the Intercultural Communication guidelines?
- What is the role of language proficiency in Intercultural Communication Competence?



Interagency Language Roundtable Skill- Level Descriptions for Intercultural Communication

http://www.govtilr.org/Skills/Intercultural_PostingDraft.pdf



- *Questions?*
- *Suggestions?*
- *Criticisms?*

We'd appreciate your feedback.