

NATO STANDARDIZATION AGREEMENT
(STANAG)

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELS

Related Documents: None

Annex A: Table of Language Proficiency Levels

AIM

1. The aim of this agreement is to provide NATO Forces with a table describing language proficiency levels.

AGREEMENT

2. Participating nations agree to adopt the table of language proficiency levels for the purpose of :

- a. Meeting language requirements for international staff appointments.
- b. Comparing national standards through a standardised table.
- c. Recording and reporting, in international correspondence, measures of language proficiency (if necessary by conversion from national standards).

GENERAL

3. The descriptions at Annex A give detailed definitions of the proficiency levels in the commonly recognised language skills: oral proficiency (listening and speaking) and written proficiency (reading and writing).

PROFICIENCY LEVELS

4. The proficiency skills are broken down into six levels coded 0 through 5. In general terms, skills may be defined as follows:

Level 0		No practical proficiency
Level 1	-	Elementary
Level 2	-	Fair (Limited working)
Level 3	-	Good (Minimum professional)
Level 4	-	Very good (Full professional)
Level 5	-	Excellent (Native/bilingual)

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY PROFILE

5. Language proficiency will be recorded with a profile of 4 digits indicating the specific skills in the following order:

Skill A (US : L ¹)	Listening
Skill B (US : S)	Speaking
Skill C (US : R)	Reading
Skill D (US : W)	Writing

6. This number of 4 digits will be preceded by the code letters SLP (PLS in French) which is to indicate that the profile shown is the Standardised (S) Language (L) Profile (P).
(Example: SLP 3321 means level 3 in listening, level 3 in speaking, level 2 in reading and level 1 in writing).

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT

7. This STANAG will be considered implemented when a nation has issued the necessary orders/instructions to adopt the table and to put into effect the procedures detailed in this agreement.

¹ The Code letters (US: ...) is for the use of the United States.

TABLE OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELSORAL PROFICIENCY SKILL

Level	A (US:L) LISTENING	B (US:S) SPEAKING
0 -	No practical proficiency	No practical proficiency
1 -	<p><u>Elementary</u></p> <p><u>Vocabulary:</u> Adequate for routine courtesy and minimum practical needs related to travelling, obtaining food and lodging, giving simple directions, asking for assistance.</p> <p><u>Listening comprehension:</u> Adequate for very simple short sentences in face-to-face situations. May require much repetition and a slow rate of speech. Fails in situations where there is noise or other interference.</p> <p><u>Grammar and pronunciation:</u> Errors are frequent and may often cause misunderstanding.</p> <p><u>Fluency:</u> Adequate for memorised courtesy expressions and common utterances. Otherwise lacking.</p>	
2 -	<p><u>Fair (Limited Working)</u></p> <p><u>Vocabulary:</u> Adequate for simple social and routine job needs as giving instructions and discussing projects within very familiar subject-matter fields. Word-meanings often unknown, but quickly learned.</p> <p><u>Listening comprehension:</u> Dependable in face-to-face communication within well-known subject-matter fields and in common social contexts. Sometimes requires rewording or slowing of conversational speed. Incomplete in the presence of noise or other interference. Seldom adequate to follow a conversation between two native speakers.</p> <p><u>Grammar and pronunciation:</u> Meaning is accurately expressed in simple sentences. Circumlocution often needed to avoid complex grammar. Foreign-sounding pronunciation very noticeable but usually does not interfere with intelligibility.</p> <p><u>Fluency:</u> Often impaired by hesitation and groping for words.</p>	

Level	A (US:L) LISTENING	B (US:S) SPEAKING
3 -	<p><u>Good (Minimum Professional)</u></p> <p><u>Vocabulary:</u> Adequate for all practical and social conversations and for professional discussions in a known field.</p> <p><u>Listening comprehension:</u> Adequate to follow radio broadcasts, speech conversations between two educated native speakers in the standard language. Details and regional or dialectic forms may be missed, but general meaning is correctly interpreted.</p>	<p><u>Grammar and pronunciation:</u> Full range of basic structures well understood, and complex structures used. Mistakes sometimes occur, but meaning accurately conveyed. Pronunciation recognisably foreign but never interferes with intelligibility.</p> <p><u>Fluency:</u> Rarely impaired by hesitations. Flow of speech is maintained by circumlocution when necessary. There is no groping for words.</p>
4 -	<p><u>Very Good (Full Professional)</u></p> <p><u>Vocabulary:</u> Broad, precise, and appropriate to the subject and the occasion.</p> <p><u>Listening comprehension:</u> Adequate for all educated standard speech in any situation. Undisturbed by noise or interference in moderate amount. May occasionally have difficulty with colloquial or regional dialect variations.</p>	<p><u>Grammar and pronunciation:</u> Errors seldom occur, and do not interfere with accurate expression of meaning. Non-native speaker pronunciation does not interfere with intelligibility.</p> <p><u>Fluency:</u> Similar to native fluency in known subject fields. Easy for a native speaker to listen to.</p> <p><u>NOTE:</u> This level reflects extensive experience using the language in an environment where it is the primary means of communication.</p>
5 -	<p><u>Excellent (Native/bilingual)</u></p> <p>In all criteria of language proficiency, completely equal to a native speaker of the language. This level of proficiency is not achieved by training, and cannot normally be attained except by natives who have been educated through the secondary level in indigenous schools.</p>	

WRITTEN PROFICIENCY SKILL

Level	C (US:R) READING COMPREHENSION	D (US:W) WRITING
0 -	No practical proficiency	No practical proficiency
1 -	<p><u>Elementary</u></p> <p>Adequate for street signs, public directions, names on buildings, and elementary lesson material. In languages written by alphabet or syllabify, adequate to spell out unknown words and approximate their pronunciation in order to ask a native speaker the meaning.</p>	<p>Has sufficient control of the writing systems to meet limited practical needs. Can produce all symbols in an alphabetic or syllabic writing system. Can write numbers and dates, his own name and nationality, addresses, etc. Otherwise ability to write is limited to simple lists of common items or a few short sentences. Spelling may be erratic.</p>
2 -	<p><u>Fair (Limited working)</u></p> <p>Adequate for intermediate lesson material and simple colloquial texts such as children's books. Requires extensive use of dictionary to read short news items. Written material seldom fully understood without translation.</p>	<p>Can draft routine social correspondence and meet limited professional needs. Is familiar with the mechanics of the writing system, except in character systems where ability is limited to a small stock of high-frequency items. Makes frequent errors in spelling, style and writing conventions. Able to write simple notes and draft routine social and limited office messages. Material normally requires editing by a more highly proficient writer.</p>
3 -	<p><u>Good (Minimum professional)</u></p> <p>Adequate for standard text materials and most technical material in a known professional field; with moderate use of dictionary, adequate for most news items about social, political, economic, and military matters. Information is obtained from written material without translation.</p>	<p>Can draft official correspondence and reports in a special field. Control of structure, spelling, and vocabulary is adequate to convey his message accurately, but style may be quite foreign. All formal writing needs to be edited by an educated native.</p>

Level	C (US:R) READING COMPREHENSION	D (US:W) WRITING
4 -	<p><u>Very Good (Full professional)</u></p> <p>Adequate to read easily and with minimal use of dictionaries, styles of the language occurring in books, magazines and newspapers written for an audience educated to the level of a high school graduate. Adequate to read technical and abstract material in known professional fields.</p> <p><u>NOTE:</u> This level reflects extensive experience using the language in an environment where it is the primary means of communication.</p>	<p>Can draft all levels of prose pertinent to professional needs. Control of structure, vocabulary, and spelling is broad and precise; sense of style is nearly native. Errors are rare and do not interfere with understanding. Nevertheless, drafts or official correspondence and documents need to be edited by an educated native.</p>
5 -	<p><u>Excellent (Native/bilingual)</u></p> <p>In all criteria of language proficiency, completely equal to a native speaker of the language. This level of proficiency is not achieved by training, and cannot normally be attained except by natives who have been educated through the secondary level in indigenous schools.</p>	

Appendix 1 Interpretation of Language Proficiency Levels

INTERPRETATION OF THE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEVELS

LEVEL 0 (NO PROFICIENCY)

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

1. No practical understanding of the spoken language. Understanding is limited to occasional isolated words. No ability to comprehend communication.

SPEAKING

2. Unable to function in the spoken language Oral production is limited to occasional isolated words such as greetings or basic courtesy formulae. Has no communicative ability.

READING COMPREHENSION

3. No practical ability to read the language. Consistently misunderstands or cannot comprehend the written language at all.

WRITING

4. No functional writing ability.

LEVEL 1 (ELEMENTARY)

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

5. Can understand common familiar phrases and short simple sentences about everyday needs related to personal and survival areas such as minimum courtesy, travel, and workplace requirements when the communication situation is clear and supported by context. Can understand concrete utterances, simple questions and answers, and very simple conversations. Topics include basic needs such as meals, lodging, transportation, time, simple directions and instructions. Even native speakers used to speaking with non-natives must speak slowly and repeat or reword frequently. There are many misunderstandings of both the main idea and supporting facts. Can only understand spoken language from the media or among native speakers if content is completely unambiguous and predictable.

SPEAKING

6. Able to maintain simple face-to-face communication in typical everyday situations. Can create with the language by combining and recombining familiar, learned elements of speech. Can begin, maintain, and close short conversations by asking and answering short simple questions. Can typically satisfy simple, predictable, personal and accommodation needs; meet minimum courtesy, introduction, and identification requirements; exchange greetings; elicit and provide predictable, skeletal biographical information; communicate about simple routine tasks in the workplace; ask for goods, services, and assistance; request information and clarification; express satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and confirmation. Topics include basic needs such as ordering meals, obtaining lodging and transportation, shopping. Native speakers used to speaking with non-natives must often strain, request repetition, and use real-world knowledge to understand this speaker. Seldom speaks with natural fluency, and cannot produce continuous discourse, except with rehearsed material. Nonetheless, can speak at the sentence level and may produce strings of two or more simple, short sentences joined by common linking words. Frequent errors in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar often distort meaning. Time concepts are vague. May often use only one tense or tend to avoid certain structures. Speech is often characterised by hesitations, erratic word order, frequent pauses, straining and groping for words (except for routine expressions), ineffective reformulation, and self-corrections.

READING COMPREHENSION

7. Can read very simple connected written material, such as unambiguous texts that are directly related to everyday survival or workplace situations. Texts may include short notes; announcements; highly predictable descriptions of people, places, or things; brief explanations of geography, government, and currency systems simplified for non-natives; short sets of instructions and directions (application forms, maps, menus, directories, brochures, and simple schedules). Understands the basic meaning of simple texts containing high frequency structural patterns and vocabulary, including shared international terms and cognates (when applicable). Can find some specific details through careful or selective reading. Can often guess the meaning of unfamiliar words

from simple context. May be able to identify major topics in some higher level texts. However, may misunderstand even some simple texts.

WRITING

8. Can write to meet immediate personal needs. Examples include lists, short notes, post cards, short personal letters, phone messages, and invitations as well as filling out forms and applications. Writing tends to be a loose collection of sentences (or fragments) on a given topic, with little evidence of conscious organization. Can convey basic intention by writing short, simple sentences, often joined by common linking words. However, errors in spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation are frequent. Can be understood by native readers used to non-natives' attempts to write.

LEVEL 2 (LIMITED WORKING)

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

9. Sufficient comprehension to understand conversations on everyday social and routine job-related topics. Can reliably understand face-to-face speech in a standard dialect, delivered at a normal rate with some repetition and rewording, by a native speaker not used to speaking with non-natives. Can understand a wide variety of concrete topics, such as personal and family news, public matters of personal and general interest, and routine work matters presented through descriptions of persons, places, and things; and narration about current, past, and future events. Shows ability to follow essential points of discussion or speech on topics in his/her special professional field. May not recognise different stylistic levels, but recognises cohesive devices and organising signals for more complex speech. Can follow discourse at the paragraph level even when there is considerable factual detail. Only occasionally understands words and phrases of statements made in unfavorable conditions (for example, through loudspeakers outdoors or in a highly emotional situation). Can usually only comprehend the general meaning of spoken language from the media or among native speakers in situations requiring understanding of specialised or sophisticated language. Understands factual content. Able to understand facts but not subtleties of language surrounding the facts.

SPEAKING

10. Able to communicate in everyday social and routine workplace situations. In these situations the speaker can describe people, places, and things; narrate current, past, and future activities in complete, but simple paragraphs; state facts; compare and contrast; give straightforward instructions and directions; ask and answer predictable questions. Can confidently handle most normal, casual conversations on concrete topics such as job procedures, family, personal background and interests, travel, current events. Can often elaborate in common daily communicative situations, such as personal and accommodation-related interactions; for example, can give complicated, detailed, and extensive directions and make non-routine changes in travel and other arrangements. Can interact with native speakers not used to speaking with non-natives, although natives may have to adjust to some limitations. Can combine and link sentences into paragraph-length discourse. Simple structures and basic grammatical relations are typically controlled, while more complex structures are used inaccurately or avoided. Vocabulary use is appropriate for high-frequency utterances but unusual or imprecise at other times. Errors in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar may sometimes distort meaning. However, the individual generally speaks in a way that is appropriate to the situation, although command of the spoken language is not always firm.

READING COMPREHENSION

11. Sufficient comprehension to read simple authentic written material on familiar subjects. Can read straightforward, concrete, factual texts, which may include descriptions of persons, places, and things; and narration about current, past, and future events. Contexts include news items describing frequently recurring events, simple

biographical information, social notices, routine business letters, and simple technical material intended for the general reader. Can read uncomplicated but authentic prose on familiar subjects that are normally presented in a predictable sequence that aids the reader in understanding. Can locate and understand the main ideas and details in material written for the general reader and can answer factual questions about such texts. Cannot draw inferences directly from the text or understand the subtleties of language surrounding factual material. Can readily understand prose that is predominately constructed in high frequency sentence patterns. While active vocabulary may not be broad, the reader can use contextual and real-world cues to understand texts. May be slow in performing this task, and may misunderstand some information. May be able to summarise, sort, and locate specific information in higher level texts concerning his/her special professional field, but not consistently or reliably.

WRITING

12. Can write simple personal and routine workplace correspondence and related documents, such as memoranda, brief reports, and private letters, on everyday topics. Can state facts; give instructions; describe people, places, and things; can narrate current, past, and future activities in complete, but simple paragraphs. Can combine and link sentences into connected prose; paragraphs contrast with and connect to other paragraphs in reports and correspondence. Ideas may be roughly organised according to major points or straightforward sequencing of events. However, relationship of ideas may not always be clear, and transitions may be awkward. Prose can be understood by a native not used to reading material written by non-natives. Simple, high frequency grammatical structures are typically controlled, while more complex structures are used inaccurately or avoided. Vocabulary use is appropriate for high frequency topics, with some circumlocutions. Errors in grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation may sometimes distort meaning. However, the individual writes in a way that is generally appropriate for the occasion, although command of the written language is not always firm.

LEVEL 3 (MINIMUM PROFESSIONAL)

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

13. Able to understand most formal and informal speech on practical, social, and professional topics, including particular interests and special fields of competence. Demonstrates, through spoken interaction, the ability to effectively understand face-to-face speech delivered with normal speed and clarity in a standard dialect. Demonstrates clear understanding of language used at interactive meetings, briefings, and other forms of extended discourse, including unfamiliar subjects and situations. Can follow accurately the essentials of conversations among educated native speakers, lectures on general subjects and special fields of competence, reasonably clear telephone calls, and media broadcasts. Can readily understand language that includes such functions as hypothesising, supporting opinion, stating and defending policy, argumentation, objections, and various types of elaboration. Demonstrates understanding of abstract concepts in discussion of complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, technology) as well as his/her professional field. Understands both explicit and implicit information in a spoken text. Can generally distinguish between different stylistic levels and often recognises humor, emotional overtones, and subtleties of speech. Rarely has to request repetition, paraphrase, or explanation. However, may not understand native speakers if they speak very rapidly or use slang, regionalisms, or dialect.

SPEAKING

14. Able to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics. Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with considerable ease. Can use the language to perform such common professional tasks as answering objections, clarifying points, justifying decisions, responding to challenges, supporting opinion, stating and defending policy. Can demonstrate language competence when conducting meetings, delivering briefings or other extended and elaborate monologues, hypothesising, and dealing with unfamiliar subjects and situations. Can reliably elicit information and informed opinion from native speakers. Can convey abstract concepts in discussions of such topics as economics, culture, science, technology, philosophy as well as his/her professional field. Produces extended discourse and conveys meaning correctly and effectively. Use of structural devices is flexible and elaborate. Speaks readily and in a way that is appropriate to the situation. Without searching for words or phrases, can use the language clearly and relatively naturally to elaborate on concepts freely and make ideas easily understandable to native speakers. May not fully understand some cultural references, proverbs, and allusions, as well as implications of nuances and idioms, but can easily repair the conversation. Pronunciation may be obviously foreign. Errors may occur in low frequency or highly complex structures characteristic of a formal style of speech. However, occasional errors in pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary are not serious enough to distort meaning, and rarely disturb the native speaker.

READING COMPREHENSION

15. Able to read with almost complete comprehension a variety of authentic written material on general and professional subjects, including unfamiliar subject matter. Demonstrates the ability to learn through reading. Comprehension is not dependent on subject matter. Contexts include news, informational and editorial items in major periodicals intended for educated native readers, personal and professional correspondence, reports, and material in special fields of competence. Can readily understand such language functions as hypothesising, supporting opinion, argumentation, clarification, and various forms of elaboration. Demonstrates understanding of abstract concepts in texts on complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, technology), as well as his/her professional field. Almost always able to interpret material correctly, to relate ideas, and to “read between the lines,” or understand implicit information. Can generally distinguish between different stylistic levels and often recognises humor, emotional overtones, and subtleties of written language. Misreading is rare. Can get the gist of higher level, sophisticated texts, but may be unable to detect all nuances. Cannot always thoroughly comprehend texts that have an unusually complex structure, low frequency idioms, or a high degree of cultural knowledge embedded in the language. Reading speed may be somewhat slower than that of a native reader.

WRITING

16. Can write effective formal and informal correspondence and documents on practical, social, and professional topics. Can write about special fields of competence with considerable ease. Can use the written language for essay-length argumentation, analysis, hypothesis, and extensive explanation, narration, and description. Can convey abstract concepts when writing about complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, and technology) as well as his/her professional field. Although techniques used to organise extended texts may seem somewhat foreign to native readers, the correct meaning is conveyed. The relationship and development of ideas are clear, and major points are coherently ordered to fit the purpose of the text. Transitions are usually successful. Control of structure, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation is adequate to convey the message accurately. Errors are occasional, do not interfere with comprehension, and rarely disturb the native reader. While writing style may be non-native, it is appropriate for the occasion. When it is necessary for a document to meet full native expectations, some editing will be required.

LEVEL 4 (FULL PROFESSIONAL)

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

17. Understands all forms and styles of speech used for professional purposes, including language used in representation of official policies or points of view, in lectures, and in negotiations. Understands highly sophisticated language including most matters of interest to well-educated native speakers even on unfamiliar general or professional-specialist topics. Understands language specifically tailored for various types of audiences, including that intended for persuasion, representation, and counseling. Can easily adjust to shifts of subject matter and tone. Can readily follow unpredictable turns of thought in both formal and informal speech on any subject matter directed to the general listener. Understands utterances from a wide spectrum of complex language and readily recognises nuances of meaning and stylistic levels as well as irony and humor. Demonstrates understanding of highly abstract concepts in discussions of complex topics (which may include economics, culture, science, and technology) as well as his/her professional field. Readily understands utterances made in the media and in conversations among native speakers both globally and in detail; generally comprehends regionalisms and dialects.

SPEAKING

18. Uses the language with great precision, accuracy, and fluency for all professional purposes including the representation of an official policy or point of view. Can perform highly sophisticated language tasks, involving most matters of interest to well-educated native speakers, even in unfamiliar general or professional-specialist situations. Can readily tailor his/her use of the language to communicate effectively with all types of audiences. Demonstrates the language skills needed to counsel or persuade others. Can set the tone of both professional and non-professional verbal exchanges with a wide variety of native speakers. Can easily shift subject matter and tone and adjust to such shifts initiated by other speakers. Communicates very effectively with native speakers in situations such as conferences, negotiations, lectures, presentations, briefings, and debates on matters of disagreement. Can elaborate on abstract concepts and advocate a position at length in these circumstances. Topics may come from such areas as economics, culture, science, and technology, as well as from his/her professional field. Organises discourse well, conveys meaning effectively, and uses stylistically appropriate discourse features. Can express nuances and make culturally appropriate references. Speaks effortlessly and smoothly, with a firm grasp of various levels of style, but would seldom be perceived as a native speaker. Nevertheless, any shortcomings, such as non-native pronunciation, do not interfere with intelligibility.

READING

19. Demonstrates strong competence in reading all styles and forms of the written language used for professional purposes, including texts from unfamiliar general and professional-specialist areas. Contexts include newspapers, magazines, and professional literature written for the well-educated reader and may contain topics from such areas as economics, culture, science, and technology, as well as from the reader's own field. Can readily follow unpredictable turns of thought on any subject matter

addressed to the general reader. Shows both global and detailed understanding of texts including highly abstract concepts. Can understand almost all cultural references and can relate a specific text to other written materials within the culture. Demonstrates a firm grasp of stylistic nuances, irony, and humor. Reading speed is similar to that of a native reader. Can read reasonably legible handwriting without difficulty.

WRITING

20. Can write the language precisely and accurately for all professional purposes including the representation of an official policy or point of view. Can prepare highly effective written communication in a variety of prose styles, even in unfamiliar general or professional-specialist areas. Demonstrates strong competence in formulating private letters, job-related texts, reports, position papers, and the final draft of a variety of other papers. Shows the ability to use the written language to persuade others and to elaborate on abstract concepts. Topics may come from such areas as economics, culture, science, and technology as well as from the writer's own professional field. Organises extended texts well, conveys meaning effectively, and uses stylistically appropriate prose. Shows a firm grasp of various levels of style and can express nuances and shades of meaning.

LEVEL 5 (NATIVE/BILINGUAL)

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

21. Comprehension equivalent to that of the well-educated native listener. Able to fully understand all forms and styles of speech intelligible to the well-educated native listener, including a number of regional dialects, highly colloquial speech, and language distorted by marked interference from other noise.

SPEAKING

22. Speaking proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of a highly articulate well-educated native speaker and reflects the cultural standards of the country or areas where the language is natively spoken. The speaker uses the language with great flexibility so that all speech, including vocabulary, idioms, colloquialisms, and cultural references, is accepted as native by well-educated native listeners. Pronunciation is consistent with that of well-educated native speakers of a standard dialect.

READING COMPREHENSION

23. Reading proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of the well-educated native reader. Able to fully comprehend all forms and styles of the written language understood by the well-educated native reader. Demonstrates the same facility as the well-educated, non-specialist native when reading general legal documents, technical writing, and literature, including both experimental prose and classical texts. Can read a wide variety of handwritten documents.

WRITING

24. Writing proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of a well-educated native writer. Uses the organisational principles and stylistic devices that reflect the cultural norms of natives when writing formal and informal correspondence, official documents, articles for publication, and material related to a professional specialty. Writing is clear and informative