

Unit 21

Progress and Plateaus: How Long Will It Take?

Cast:

- Missionary Li Wei
- Teacher Zhang Dong
- 4 students

Scene 21.1. Missionary Li Wei and Mr Ahmed in a tea house. Missionary Li Wei looks depressed

Missionary Li Wei, complaining to Mr. Ahmed: I am ready to give up. I seem to be unable to progress. Its like I have been on this plateau for months. I'm stuck at my current level of ability and just can't seem to break through! I've been at it for almost two years now, and I'm not making any more progress!

Mr. Ahmed: Well, that makes sense to me. When you first started to learn our language, you could really mark progress. It was easy to look back and gauge how far you'd come. But as you go on you lose that sense of progress because there are fewer 'concrete' landmarks to pass—and yet as far as the future is concerned with respect to language learner there is no end in sight! No wonder your feel discouraged. Don't settle for this plateau that you're on though! You've got to keep going!

Scene 21.2. Teacher Zhang Dong in front of class

Teacher Zhang Dong: There comes a time in language development when a gradual shift occurs: you increasingly start generating language out of your mind as opposed to reciting it from memory. In other words, you will, in time, begin to concentrating more on what you are saying, in other words, the contents of what you are trying to communicate, that on how you are saying it, or the right linguistic form in which to communicate. In other words, you will eventually start using the language more than developing it. This is a good thing, but there is a danger attached to it. When that happens, you may begin to plateau in certain areas.

In the early stages of language learning you tend to get stuck at either a basic survival or a basic working knowledge level of the language. If you must have the language for basic courtesy, marketing, travel, etc, but nothing more (e.g., because your work is in your mother tongue) then you may feel no compunction to go on in the language beyond survival.

If you need the language for a limited area of work (e.g., medical or agricultural work) but nothing more, because when you get stuck there is always someone there—an

interpreter—who can bail you out, you may restrict yourself to those areas which are necessary, but you get lost when you leave those restricted areas.

There are 5 basic factors in language learning. They are comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Of these the first three, comprehension, fluency, vocabulary will improve if you remain challenged and use the language for communicative purposes. The other two, pronunciation and grammar, tend to plateau. Just where they do so is up to you!

Just like there are 5 basic factors in language learning, you can divide your language learning plateau into 5 different levels as well. Instead of calling them plateaus, however, think of them as “stages of language learning”. Let’s have a look at them.

Stage 1: Novice, or basic survival level.

What you can understand:

- Names of common objects and food and drink items
- Words for common actions, greetings and farewell expressions
- Basic warnings and commands such as “Stop!” “Watch Out!” and “Be Careful!”
- The most basic words describing size, color or age
- Simple questions and statements that use words from the above categories.

What you can say:

- Greet and thank people politely, and say “yes” and “no”, and goodbye
- Give your name and tell where you are from
- Use memorized phrases to order a cup of coffee or food
- Count to 100
- Name concrete objects such as furniture, plants, animals, tools, machines and food items.
- Name classes of people such as men, women, boys, girls, children and babies.
- Name colours, sizes of object or age of people (i.e., “a big boat”, “an old man”)

Pronunciation is often difficult, sometimes unintelligible, and grammatical accuracy is limited to set expressions with almost no control of sentence structure. You often convey wrong information. Your vocabulary is only adequate for survival, travel and basic courtesy needs. Every utterance requires obvious effort. Comprehension requires slow repetition, a slow rate of speech. You only understand simple, short, familiar utterances

What your goals should be at this stage:

Develop a comprehension of about 1000 vocabulary items and a wide variety of grammatical patterns. Learn to show courtesy using the appropriate greetings, etc. Learn to communicate basic survival needs, and use language “power tools”

Stage 2: Intermediate, or basic working knowledge level

What you can understand:

- Basic directions on how to get somewhere
- Greetings and other commonly occurring social routines
- Questions about your personal background, family, and why you are in the country
- Questions about your personal interests and activities, such as hobbies, sports, and subjects you know a lot about
- Short, routine telephone conversations well enough to be able to take a simple message for someone
- Bits and pieces of radio or television announcements and news reports dealing with familiar topics or events
- A description of a place or a person
- Locations and times, if making arrangements to meet somebody later
- Prices and amounts of money you need to pay in a shop, store or market
- Questions the shopkeeper might ask you about what exactly you want
- Familiar words in conversations between mother-tongue speakers. If the topic is familiar you might get the main ideas, but might not understand all they are saying.
- You can carry on short conversations on concrete topics with friendly native speakers used to dealing with foreigners if they make an effort to help you understand

What you can say:

- Introduce yourself, giving your name and basic personal information
- Give directions on how to get from one place to another
- Describe your health problem to a doctor or nurse
- Tell about your family, giving names and simple information about them, such as their occupations or what they look like
- Arrange to meet someone at a particular time, place and date in the near future
- Describe typical routine activities such as what you usually do on a weekend
- Request items, discuss prices, and handle currency in a situation involving a purchase
- Ask questions about menu items, order food, and ask for and pay a bill at a restaurant
- Describe in detail a particular place such as a school, park or store
- Talk about things you like to do, such as leisure activities, favorite hobbies or pastimes
- Talk about things you expect to do in the future, such as a planned trip or activity.

Your pronunciation is foreign but rarely unintelligible. You have gained a fair control of most basic sentence patterns, and can convey meaning accurately in simple sentences most of the time. Your vocabulary is adequate for simple social conversation and routine job needs. Your speech is still hesitant, and often forced into silence due to limited

knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. You generally understand non-technical speech directed towards you, but sometimes misinterpret or need utterances repeated or reworded. You cannot usually follow a conversation between native speakers.

What your goals should be at this stage:

Learn to understand connected discourse. Learn to negotiate meaning with native speakers. Try to get your comprehension to the level where native speakers can make themselves understood if they try hard enough. Learn to speak well enough to communicate with patient and cooperative speakers. Use language functions in normal everyday communication events and to get acquainted with people and build relationships.

Stage 3: Advanced level

What you can understand at this stage:

- An account of an event that happened in the past
- Events someone expect will happen in the future
- Descriptions of simple processes
- Brief summaries of facts about subjects
- Oral instructions on how to do something
- Advice
- The advantages and disadvantages of particular courses of action
- Descriptions of places you have never visited
- Someone comparing or contrasting two objects or places
- Familiar topics beyond your immediate situation
- Most news broadcast and factual reports on television and radio
- Information someone asks you in an interview
- Short lectures on familiar topics

What you can say:

- Describe a sequence of events that happened in the past
- Describe things that used to happen in the past, such as things you used to do when you were younger, or people and places you used to know or visit
- Compare and contrast two objects, customs or places
- Talk about your future plans and goals
- Explain a simple process you know how to do, such as making a cake or repairing a tire
- Give instructions about what you would like someone to do, explaining the steps involved in carrying out an activity, such as when telling a housekeeper how you would like her to wash the clothes.
- Give a brief, organized, factual summary of what happened in an event you attended
- Give advice to someone faced with making a decision, giving reasons for your advice
- Lodge a complaint, giving the reasons and details of why you are dissatisfied

- Express personal apologies clearly and appropriately to someone you have offended
- State the advantages and disadvantages of a situation or a decision
- Tell someone what you would do in a hypothetical situation, such as if you suddenly received a lot of money
- Answer the telephone at home or at work
- Describe your job and the organization you work for
- Direct people to the right building or office
- Handle simple job-related inquiries

Some pronunciation is sometime foreign but always intelligible. You have good control of most basic syntactic patterns, and can always convey meaning accurately in reasonably complex sentences. Your vocabulary is adequate for participation in all general conversation and for professional discussion in specialized fields. You rarely hesitate when you speak and you understand most of what is said to you. You can follow speeches, clear radio broadcasts and most conversations between native speakers, but not in great detail

Your goals at this stage:

You need enough exposure to lead to a comprehensive ability to understand native speakers in such a way that they don't need to modify their speech or make a special effort. You need to master your job-related and other specific, regular communication needs.

Stage 4: Superior

What you can understand:

- Unspoken emotional nuances in most communication situations
- A detailed description of a complex object or procedure
- A discussion of an abstract professional topic
- Hypotheses about what might happen in a certain situation
- Debates on both sides of an issue
- Personal points of view on a controversial subject
- Reasons someone gives for acting in a certain way
- Unspoken messages, when people hedge, evade an answer, or try to get out of a commitment
- Speeches and academic lectures
- The dialogue in films
- Media coverage

What you can say:

- Persuade people to do something they do not want to do or stop doing something you do not like
- Describe a complex object, such a car, bicycle or computer in detail, using the correct vocabulary

- Present arguments on both sides of a familiar issue or topic and evaluate the merits of the arguments
- Discuss a professional topic at length
- Explain in detail a non-routine, complex process, such as how to do grammatical analysis or how to perform an operation
- Present a talk at a professional meeting
- Tell someone in detail the possible consequences of a certain situation, for example, if the price of coffee were to rise suddenly
- Express what you think might happen if something unexpectedly occurs
- Propose a course of action and defend your proposal in such a way that people might be persuaded to accept your idea
- State a personal point of view on a subject, including controversial issues, explaining why you hold your beliefs
- Handle formal business situations
- Talk to dignitaries or influential people
- Discuss issues in the news

You only make the occasional error, your vocabulary is professional, broad, precise and appropriate to the occasion. Your speech on all professional matters is apparently effortless; you are easy to listen to. You can understand all educated speech in any moderately clear context, though you may occasionally be baffled by colloquialisms and regionalisms.

Goals:

No formal language lessons. Focus on building your vocabulary.

Stage 5: Distinguished

What you can understand:

- Fine points of the issues debated at meetings of local government agencies, such as city councils or town councils
- Plots of dramatic presentations and the artistic merits of the script and the presentation
- Dialogues in films, including slang
- Editorials on the radio or television
- Different points of view expressed at symposia
- Points of view in academic debates
- Public policy statements
- Literary readings
- Most jokes and puns
- General conversations you overhear between mother-tongue speakers

What you can say:

- Do informal interpreting
- Take part in mediating or negotiating between parties

- Discuss in detail highly abstract or unfamiliar topics
- Tailor the style and content of your presentation on the spur of the moment to an audience different from the one you had expected

You sound like an native speaker. Your vocabulary and control of grammar is equal to an educated native speaker. Your speech is as fluent and effortless, and your comprehension equal to a native speaker.

Student #2: How can you tell if you are stuck on a particular plateau?

Teacher Zhang Dong: Good question. Being stuck on a plateau, or on a particular learning level, may be characterized more by what you are not doing any more than by what you are doing. If, for example, you quit doing pronunciation or grammar work, you can be sure to stay stuck at whatever level you are at. Or if you fail to do put yourself in potentially non-comprehending situations, your comprehension will plateau at that level. You may even go backwards!

There are a number of other symptoms as well. Sometimes people suffer from premature satisfaction. They feel that they've done their bit. Language school is over, and they leave with a feeling that "That was hard; I'm sure glad I don't have to go through that again!". They have no further drive to develop their language further, even though they don't really know much about the people's customs, values, and way of life. They are content to simply get by at the level they are in. They are into their routine and functioning fairly well in it. They have stopped doing academic work, they are not working specifically on pronunciation any more, they stay within a limited number of grammatical options, the ones they control well. They take two or three sentences to say what they might have said in one sentence if only they knew the proper grammatical forms; but they don't mind: they managed to communicate and that is good enough for them. They remain in their comfort zone. They are not branching out. They talk to the same type of people about the same kinds of subjects and they don't get beyond that. They are in a rut. They intentionally stay away from new situations. They may not be making mistakes in what they are saying, but they are not learning any more either.

The antidote this for premature satisfaction is a healthy discontent! You need to nurture your curiosity and explore new areas of language and culture! You need to keep working systematically on pronunciation and grammar. Try to make it related to specific communicative needs. Do specific composition (e.g., correspondence) and get it corrected by your helper. If your new language has a writing system that is different from yours, keep working at reading and writing. The cure is to get into new niches, to make another 1000 mistakes. Start reading the newspaper or a novel, start listening to the radio and/or start watching the news on television!

Another indication that you may be stuck at a particular level is when you suffer from perpetual fatigue. You have this constant feeling of being tired or worn out. A lot of things can contribute to this: the climate, the bugs, the culture, the family, the multitude of things you are coping with in the new setting, possibly an undisciplined lifestyle, etc.

You have only enough energy for the absolute essentials, and language doesn't happen to be one of them right now! The solution is to pace yourself properly, to lead a disciplined lifestyle and to take proper rest, diet and exercise.

The critical factor in going on in the language are a combination of internal commitment, knowing what to do and how to do it, and external accountability. Implement these and take everything mentioned in this course seriously and you will not get stuck indefinitely on a plateau!

Student #3: Teacher, how long does it take the average missionary to learn a language?

Teacher Zhang Dong: In 1792 the famous missionary William Carey wrote that *“missionaries must have patience, and mingle with the people, till they have learned so much of their language as to be able to communicate their ideas to them in it. It is well known to require no very extraordinary talents to learn, in the space of a year, or two at most, the language of any people upon earth, so much of it at least, as to be able to convey any sentiments we will to their understanding.”*

Is that really true? Well, that is hard to say. The answer depends on a number of factors: How close is the target language related to your first language? How complex is the language? How many hours per week can you devote exclusively to language learning? What are the number and quality of language learning resources available to you? How motivated are you? Do you have some aptitude for language learning? What are your language learning goals?

Student #4: Should we all strive towards “distinguished” level?

Teacher Zhang Dong: In an ideal world, yes. However, people's language needs do differ. You might want to make a detailed list of the situations and activities where you will use the language. You might be in a situation in which you will need to use more than one language. In that case, you will need to go through each step for each language. List the basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading or writing) that you need to develop to handle situations and activities you foresee yourself doing. In most cases you want to develop all four skills, but in special circumstances you might concentrate only on reading or listening comprehension. If you only need to read articles or books in your new language, then you can concentrate only on the written form. If you are going to live in a place where your new language is spoken, you will need listening and speaking skills in order to communicate. If the language is written and the population is literate, reading and writing skills may also be important. In short, you need to decide on a proficiency goal for each basic skill you need to develop and use a checklist to keep you on track. Here, let me give you a checklist that you can go through on a regular basis to measure how you are doing. (Teacher hands out the check lists—see below)

Scene 21.3 Things learned in this lesson

- When you first start learning a foreign language you really sense progress. As you go on you lose that sense of progress.
- Eventually a gradual shift occurs in your language development: you increasingly start generating language out of your mind, rather than reciting it from memory. You begin concentrating on what you are going to say, rather than on how you are going to say it.
- Comprehension, fluency and vocabulary can only improve if you stay engaged in the language learning process. Pronunciation and grammar plateau easily if you are not careful.
- Being stuck on a plateau is often characterized by what you are NOT doing. You've quit doing some vital part of language learning.
- People remain on a plateau because they suffer from premature satisfaction or are tired. You must nurture your curiosity and pace your life properly.
- Use the enclosed self-assessment check lists to track your progress.

Self-assessment checklist for listening

Here's how to use this checklist. You may want to make a photocopy of it so that more than one person can use it. You might also want to use pencil, so that you can erase your answers and use the checklist again.

1. Read each statement, and for each one circle the number which you feel best expresses how well you think you do *when actually using the target language in specific, real-life situations*.
2. If you feel that a statement describes something you would never want to do in the language, disregard it.
3. Go back and look at your answers for each level. For example, look at the Intermediate Level tasks. If you have marked yourself as at least *adequate* for nearly all of the items then you can assume that you have achieved that level of proficiency. If you have marked yourself as adequate for about half of the items, you may be in the upper range of the next lowest level.
4. Record your assessment of your level on the proficiency summary worksheet. (You may also want to photocopy that sheet and keep the original as a master copy.)

Novice level

When someone is speaking the language:

1. I can understand the names of common objects

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
2. I can understand the names of common food and drink items

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
3. I can understand the words for common actions

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
4. I can understand common greetings and farewell expressions

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
5. I can understand basic warnings and commands, such as *STOP!*, *Watch out!*, *Be careful!*

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
6. I can understand the most basic words describing the size, color, or age of a person or object

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
7. I can understand simple questions and statements that use words from the above categories

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Listening tasks—Intermediate level

1. I can follow someone giving me basic directions on how to get somewhere
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
2. I can understand greetings and other very commonly occurring social routines
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
3. I can understand questions about my personal background, family, and why I'm here in the country
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
4. I can understand questions about my personal interests and activities, such as hobbies, sports, and subjects I know a lot about
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
5. I can understand short, routine telephone conversations well enough to be able to take a simple message for someone
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
6. I can understand bits and pieces of radio or TV announcements and news reports dealing with familiar topics or events I already know about
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
7. I can understand the description of a place or a person
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
8. If making arrangements to meet somebody later, I can understand where and when to meet
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
9. In a shop, store, or market, I can understand the price, the amount of money I need to pay and questions the shopkeeper might ask me about exactly what I want
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
10. I can pick out familiar words in conversations between native speakers, and if the topic is familiar, get the main ideas (although I might not be able to understand all they are saying)
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
11. I can usually understand enough to carry on short conversations on concrete topics with friendly native speakers used to dealing with foreigners, if they make an effort to help me to understand
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |

Listening tasks—Advanced level

1. I can understand someone talking about an event that happened in the past

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
2. I can understand someone talking about what they expect will happen in the future

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
3. I can understand someone describing a simple process

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
4. I can understand a brief summary of facts about a subject

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
5. I can understand oral instructions on how to do something

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
6. I can understand someone giving me advice

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
7. I can understand someone explaining the advantages and disadvantages of a course of action

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
8. I can understand someone describing a place I've never been to

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
9. I can understand someone comparing or contrasting two objects or places

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
10. I can understand things beyond my immediate situation on familiar topics

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
11. I can understand most news broadcasts and factual reports on TV and radio

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
12. I can understand what someone is asking me in an interview

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well
13. I can understand short lectures on familiar topics

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Listening tasks—Superior level

1. I can understand the unspoken, emotional nuances of speakers in most communication situations

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can understand someone describing a complex object or procedure in detail

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can understand someone discussing an abstract, professional topic

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can understand people hypothesizing about what might happen in a certain situation

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can understand people debating an issue well enough to vote, if I had to

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

6. I can understand someone stating a personal point of view on a controversial subject

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

7. I can understand the reasons someone gives for deciding to act in a certain way

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

8. I can usually understand unspoken messages, as when people are hedging, evading an answer, or trying to get out of a commitment, but don't say so in so many words

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

9. I can understand speeches or academic lectures

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

10. I can understand the dialogue in films

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Listening tasks—Distinguished level

1. I can attend meetings of local government agencies, such as city or town councils, and understand the fine points of the issues being debated

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can attend dramatic presentations and not only follow the plot, but also appreciate the artistic merits of the script and the presentation

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can follow all the dialogue in a film, including slang

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can understand editorials on the radio or TV

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can attend symposia and understand the different points of view expressed

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

6. I can understand the different points of view in academic debates

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

7. I can understand Public Policy statements

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

8. I can understand most jokes and puns

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

9. I can understand any conversation I overhear between native speakers as long as it is not about a technical topic outside my experience or about some experience particular to the speakers

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Self-assessment checklist for reading

Here's how to use this checklist. You may want to make a photocopy of it so that more than one person can use it. You might also want to use pencil, so that you can erase your answers and use the checklist again.

5. Read each statement, and for each one circle the number which you feel best expresses how well you think you do *when actually using the target language in specific, real-life situations*.
6. If you feel that a statement describes something you would never want to do in the language, disregard it.
7. Go back and look at your answers for each level. For example, look at the Intermediate Level tasks. If you have marked yourself as at least *adequate* for nearly all of the items then you can assume that you have achieved that level of proficiency. If you have marked yourself as adequate for about half of the items, you may be in the upper range of the next lowest level.
8. Record your assessment of your level on the proficiency summary worksheet. (You may also want to photocopy that sheet and keep the original as a master copy.)

Novice level

1. I can read the letters in an alphabet or syllabic writing system and a few characters in a system that uses characters objects

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can read the items on most menus objects

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can read railroad or bus timetables objects

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can read maps objects

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can read road signs objects

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

6. I can read signs above shops

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Intermediate level tasks

1. I can read simple, connected texts about predictable subjects

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can read public service messages or instructions

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can read short, straightforward descriptions of persons, places and things written for a wide audience, such as encyclopedia entries

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can read newspaper headlines

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can read basic written directions on how to get somewhere

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

6. I can read descriptions of what a place or a person looks like

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Advanced level tasks

1. I can read short stories

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can read news articles in a newspaper or magazine

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can read encyclopedia entries

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can read short biographies

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can read personal letters

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

6. I can read routine business letters

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

7. I can read simple technical information for the general reader

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Superior level tasks

1. I can read expository prose on a wide range of subjects, including some unfamiliar to me

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can read newspaper editorials
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
3. I can read any kind of personal or business correspondence
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
4. I can read technical reports
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
5. I can read political commentaries
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
6. I can read official documents
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
7. I can read academic texts
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
8. I can read professional papers
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
9. I can read biographies
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |

Distinguished level tasks

1. I can read sophisticated editorials
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
2. I can read specialized journal articles in my field
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
3. I can read novels and appreciate the style as well as understand the content
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
4. I can read plays
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
5. I can read poems and appreciate the imagery of the language
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |

Self-assessment checklist for speaking

Here's how to use this checklist. You may want to make a photocopy of it so that more than one person can use it. You might also want to use pencil, so that you can erase your answers and use the checklist again.

9. Read each statement, and for each one circle the number which you feel best expresses how well you think you do *when actually using the target language in specific, real-life situations*.
10. If you feel that a statement describes something you would never want to do in the language, disregard it.
11. Go back and look at your answers for each level. For example, look at the Intermediate Level tasks. If you have marked yourself as at least *adequate* for nearly all of the items then you can assume that you have achieved that level of proficiency. If you have marked yourself as adequate for about half of the items, you may be in the upper range of the next lowest level.
12. Record your assessment of your level on the proficiency summary worksheet. (You may also want to photocopy that sheet and keep the original as a master copy.)

Novice level

1. I can greet people politely when I see them

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can thank people for doing something for me

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can order a cup of coffee, or food in a restaurant

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can count to 100

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can say good-bye politely

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

6. I can tell someone my name and where I am from

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

7. I can name 10 or more concrete objects in each of the following areas: furniture, plants, animals, tools, machines, food items

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

8. I know the names for various classes of people, such as men, women, boys, girls, babies

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

9. I know the words for the major color distinctions in the target language

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

10. I can describe the size or age of objects and people, such as a big boat, or a small child

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Speaking tasks—Intermediate level

1. I can introduce myself, giving my name and basic personal information such as would be given at a first meeting

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can give someone directions on how to get from one place to another

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can describe to a doctor or nurse the symptoms of health problems I have

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can tell about my family, giving their names and simple information about them, such as their occupations or what they look like

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can arrange to meet someone at a particular time and place and date in the near future

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

6. I can describe what I usually do on the weekend

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

7. I can request items, discuss prices and handle currency in a situation involving a purchase

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

8. I can ask questions about menu items, order food, and ask for and settle a bill at a restaurant

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

9. I can describe in detail a particular place, such as a school, park, or store

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

10. I can talk about things I like to do, such as leisure activities, favorite hobbies or pastimes

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

11. I can talk about things I expect to do in the future, such as a planned trip or activity	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Speaking tasks—Advanced level

1. I can describe a sequence of events that happened in the past -- for example, last week	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can describe things that used to happen in the past, such as things I used to do when I was younger, or people and places I used to know or visit	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can compare and contrast two objects, customs or places	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can tell someone about my future plans or goals	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can explain a simple process I know how to do, such as making a cake or repairing a tire	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

6. I can give clear instructions about what I would like someone to do, explaining the steps involved in carrying out an activity, as in telling a housekeeper how I would like her wash the clothes	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

7. I can give a brief, organized, factual summary of what happened in an event at which was present	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

8. I can give advice to someone faced with making a decision, giving reasons for my advice	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

9. I can lodge a complaint, giving the reasons and details of why I am dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

10. I can express personal apologies clearly and appropriately to someone I have offended	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

11. I can state the advantages and disadvantages of a situation, (such as living in a big city) or a decision (such as whether to stay in school)	1	2	3	4	5	6
	not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

12. I can tell someone what I would do in a hypothetical situation; for example if I suddenly came into a lot of money

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

13. I can answer the telephone at home or at work

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

14. I can describe my job and the organization I work for

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

15. I can direct people to the right building or office

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

16. I can handle simple job-related inquiries

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Speaking tasks—Superior level

1. I can persuade someone to do something he doesn't want to do or to stop doing something I don't like

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can describe a complex object, such as a car or bicycle or computer, in detail, using the correct vocabulary

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can present arguments on both sides of a familiar issue or topic and tell someone the merits of the arguments

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can discuss a professional topic at length and in detail

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can explain in detail a non-routine, complex process I know how to do, (such as how to do grammatical analysis or repair a car)

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

6. I can present a talk at a professional meeting

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

7. I can tell someone in detail what I think would be the possible consequences of a certain situation — for example, what I think would happen if the price of coffee were to rise suddenly

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

8. I can express what I think might happen if something unexpected occurs
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
9. If there are at least two possible choices of action in a situation, I can propose a course of action and defend my proposal in such a way that people are persuaded to accept my idea
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
10. I can state a personal point of view on a subject, including controversial issues, explaining why I hold my beliefs
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
11. I can handle formal business negotiations
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
12. I can talk to dignitaries or influential people
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
13. I can discuss most issues in the news
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |

Speaking tasks—Distinguished level

1. I can do informal interpreting between my mother tongue and the target language
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
2. I can take part in mediating or negotiating between two disputing parties
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
3. I can discuss in-depth, highly abstract or unfamiliar topics
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
4. I can usually tailor the style and content of my presentation on the spur of the moment, to an audience different from the one I had expected
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |

Self-assessment Checklist for Writing

Here's how to use this checklist. You may want to make a photocopy of it so that more than one person can use it. You might also want to use pencil, so that you can erase your answers and use the checklist again.

13. Read each statement, and for each one circle the number which you feel best expresses how well you think you do *when actually using the target language in specific, real-life situations*.
14. If you feel that a statement describes something you would never want to do in the language, disregard it.
15. Go back and look at your answers for each level. For example, look at the Intermediate Level tasks. If you have marked yourself as at least *adequate* for nearly all of the items then you can assume that you have achieved that level of proficiency. If you have marked yourself as adequate for about half of the items, you may be in the upper range of the next lowest level.
16. Record your assessment of your level on the proficiency summary worksheet. (You may also want to photocopy that sheet and keep the original as a master copy.)

Novice level

1. I can fill out hotel registration forms

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can fill out travel documents

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can write words or sentences I know how to say

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can write dates and numbers

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Intermediate level tasks

1. I can write short, simple personal letters about my personal preferences, daily routine or everyday events

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can write down telephone messages

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can write postcards

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can write short synopses of something I have read
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
5. I can take class or lecture notes on familiar topics
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
6. I can write simple descriptions of things, people or places
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
7. I can write simple paraphrases of something I hear
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
8. I can write short essays about my life, work, or experience
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |

Advanced level tasks

1. I can write routine social correspondence
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
2. I can write a discourse of at least several paragraphs in length on familiar topics
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
3. I can write a detailed summary and résumé
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
4. I can write stories or anecdotes about things that have happened to me
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
5. I can write straightforward, informal business letters
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
6. I can write concrete facts about my special interests or fields of competence
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
7. I can take lecture notes
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |
8. I can write cohesive summaries and résumés of things I have read or heard
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|------------|------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| not at all | barely | somewhat | adequately | well | extremely well |

9. I can write descriptions of persons, places, activities

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Superior level tasks

1. I can write any type of social and business correspondence

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can write memos

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can write short research papers

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can write statements of my position in areas of special interest or in my professional field

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can write an essay

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

Distinguished level tasks

1. I can write letters to the editor

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

2. I can write articles for professional journals

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

3. I can write a short story

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

4. I can write poetry or lyrics to a song

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well

5. I can write a play

1	2	3	4	5	6
not at all	barely	somewhat	adequately	well	extremely well