

Mapping the TOEFL Junior® Standard and Speaking tests onto the Common European Framework of Reference

Executive summary

Background

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment provides a common basis for describing the skills needed to reach different levels of language proficiency and is used by language instructors, educators, curriculum designers and agencies working in the field of language development.

The CEFR describes language proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening on a six-level scale:

- **A1–A2 (Basic user)**
- **B1–B2 (Independent user)**
- **C1–C2 (Proficient user)**

The CEFR provides a descriptive context that may be used to interpret the meaning and practical significance of scores on language tests. If a test score corresponds to one of the levels of the CEFR, what that score means and what candidates with at least that score are likely to be able to do becomes clear.

ETS's goal

The TOEFL Junior® tests are designed specifically for students ages 11 to 15. The tests are an objective and reliable measure of students' English communication skills. The TOEFL Junior Standard test is delivered on paper or digitally, while the TOEFL Junior Speaking test is delivered digitally only.

The TOEFL Junior Standard test measures students' listening and reading comprehension skills as well as their knowledge of English-language form and meaning. The test covers both academic and social contexts. The TOEFL Junior Speaking test measures students' ability to communicate successfully in English by integrating language skills such as listening, reading and speaking.

A mapping study was conducted in 2010 to identify the minimum scores on the TOEFL Junior Standard test that correspond to each level of the CEFR. Minimum scores were identified separately for the Listening Comprehension, Language Form and Meaning, and Reading Comprehension sections.

A second mapping study was conducted in 2012 to identify the minimum scores on a previous version of the digital test that correspond to each level of the CEFR. Further research was also conducted employing equipercentile equating of the Reading and Listening sections of that previous version of the digital test to their corresponding TOEFL Junior Standard scores. These additional studies allow ETS to align the reported test scores and the CEFR cut scores for both the TOEFL Junior Standard and the TOEFL Junior Speaking tests.

Revisions to some minimum scores were introduced in 2023, following the results of a multi-year vertical linking project for the TOEFL® Family of Assessments. The results of these studies allow ETS to align the scores of the TOEFL Junior Standard and TOEFL Junior Speaking tests to the CEFR levels.

Standard-setting study

Standard setting is the process by which a panel of informed experts makes score requirement recommendations that correspond with the level of knowledge, skills, proficiency, mastery or readiness candidates need in order to be placed in a certain category. The end result of standard setting is one or more recommended minimum score requirements or cut scores. The minimum scores for each CEFR level are presented as lower limits of the level for the Listening Comprehension, Language Form and Meaning, and Reading Comprehension sections of the TOEFL Junior Standard test and for the TOEFL Junior Speaking test.

For the TOEFL Junior Standard test study, the panel consisted of 14 middle school and high school teachers of English as a foreign or second language from nine countries. For the TOEFL Junior Speaking test study, the panel consisted of 18 middle school and high school teachers of English as a foreign or second language from 15 countries.

Scale aligning

In addition to the standard-setting study, a scale-aligning study was conducted that was aimed

at determining what TOEFL Junior Standard Reading and Listening scores were comparable to the Reading and Listening scores of the previous version of the digital test. Approximately 1,000 examinees were recruited to take both tests. The equipercentile method was used to link the Reading and Listening scores between the two tests. Specifically, this method determines which scores on the TOEFL Junior Standard test have the same percentile rank as the previous version of the digital test; the aligned scores on the two tests will pass the same proportion of examinees that may take either test.

Vertical linking project

The purpose of the vertical linking project was to support decisions about readiness to take each TOEFL test by empirically linking the different score scales. Based on the results of this project, a visual tool called TOEFL Steps was created to help score users decide when language learners at different ages and proficiency levels are ready to take a test in the TOEFL Family. The results of the vertical linking project led to revisions to some minimum TOEFL Junior Standard scores for some Reading and Listening CEFR levels.

Results

The table below presents the scores for each section of the TOEFL Junior Standard test and the TOEFL Junior Speaking test that correspond to specific CEFR levels:

Sections	CEFR below A2	CEFR level A2	CEFR level B1	CEFR level B2
Listening Comprehension	Under 210	210–240	245–285	290–300
Language Form and Meaning	Under 210	210–245	250–275	280–300
Reading Comprehension	Under 210	210–240	245–285	290–300
Speaking	Under 8	8–10	11–13	14–16