

Executive summary

Background

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) 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 students with at least that score are likely to be able to do becomes clear.

ETS's goal

The TOEFL Primary® tests measure the English ability of young English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners (ages 8+) who are learning English to develop communicative competence. The TOEFL Primary tests provide a snapshot of young EFL learners' English ability in three skills areas: reading, listening and speaking.

A mapping study was conducted in 2014 to identify the minimum scores on the TOEFL Primary tests that correspond to specific levels of the CEFR. Minimum scores were identified for the Reading and Listening test (Step 1 and Step 2) and Speaking test. Revisions to some minimum scores were introduced in 2023, following the results of a multiyear vertical linking project for the TOEFL® Family of Assessments. The results of these studies allow ETS to align the reported TOEFL Primary levels with the CEFR levels.

Standard-setting study

Standard setting is the process by which a panel of informed experts makes score requirement recommendations that correspond to particular levels of knowledge, skills, proficiency, mastery or readiness that students need. 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 TOEFL Primary Reading, Listening and Speaking tests. For this study, the panel consisted of 18 educators with experience teaching English as a foreign or second language from 15 countries.

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 Primary scores for some Reading and Listening CEFR levels.

Results

TOEFL Primary score reports show levels of performance with stars (Reading and Listening test – Step 1), badges (Reading and Listening test – Step 2) or ribbons (Speaking). The tables below show the correspondence between CEFR levels and TOEFL Primary test scores.

TOEFL Primary Reading and Listening test – Step 1 scores

Level									
Scale score	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109
Reading CEFR level	Below A1	A1					A2		
Listening CEFR level	Below A1	A1				A2			

Students receiving a level of one may be at the very beginning stages of learning English. A CEFR level is not provided for a level of one .

TOEFL Primary Reading and Listening test – Step 2 scores

Level												
Scale Score	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115
Reading CEFR level	A1			A2			B1					
Listening CEFR level	A1	A2						B1				

Students receiving one may receive better information about their proficiency by taking Step 1. A CEFR level is not provided for a level of one .

TOEFL Primary Speaking test scores

Level																						
Score	1-6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
CEFR level	Below A1		A1					A2					B1					B2				

Students receiving a score of 0 may be at the very beginning stages of learning English. A CEFR level is not provided for these students.