

Mapping the TOEFL® Primary™ Tests onto the Common European Framework of Reference

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.

Teachers, schools, and parents may use the TOEFL Primary test to obtain accurate and meaningful information about students' current English ability, including determining what students have accomplished, identifying areas for improvement, and monitoring students' progress. Some schools may use TOEFL Primary scores to place students in the appropriate level of instruction.

The purpose of this mapping study was 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. The results of the mapping study allow ETS to align the reported TOEFL Primary levels with the CEFR levels.

Standard-Setting Methodology

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. Following the standard-setting process, this study aligned the CEFR levels with the TOEFL Primary Reading, Listening, and Speaking levels. For this study, the panel consisted of 18 educators with experience teaching English as a foreign or second language from 15 countries.

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.

Interpreting Results

Users of the *TOEFL Primary* tests can interpret the recommended CEFR levels by referring to the global descriptors and other tables in the CEFR, which can be found at www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (see page 24), as well as the age-appropriate modified CEFR descriptors in the Research Memorandum of the mapping study (<http://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RM-14-05.pdf>). The results incorporate the recommendations of informed experts using a recognized standard-setting approach. However, they should be considered guidelines only, as ETS does not recommend the use of rigid cut scores.