

The Languages Ladder

Steps to Success

department for
children, schools and families



What is it?

The development of a national recognition scheme for languages – the Languages Ladder – is one of three overarching aims of the National Languages Strategy. The scheme is designed to endorse achievement in language skills at all levels of competence for all ages in a wide range of languages.

It is made up of six stages:

Breakthrough	Grades 1 - 3
Preliminary	Grades 4 - 6
Intermediate	Grades 7 - 9
Advanced	Grades 10 - 12
Proficiency	Grades 13 - 15
Mastery	Grades 16 & 17

Who is it for?

The scheme can be used for any language learner in schools, colleges and at work. It recognises achievement at different levels, in different skills and in different contexts. Designed to sit alongside other assessment frameworks and qualifications, rather than to replace them, it is not associated with any specific programme of study. It might therefore be appropriate in situations where existing formal assessment opportunities are not generally offered: at the end of a programme of language study in Key Stage 3, for example. The scheme is portable and supports lifelong learning.

Using the Languages Ladder flexibly across all skills

The Languages Ladder is designed to assess progress across all four skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Although assessment is organised by single skill, it is unlikely that learners will only progress in one skill area. Many will use the Ladder to assess all four skills as part of an integrated learning experience.

Others may concentrate on two skills – for example listening and speaking may be appropriate for learners wanting to carry out basic communication in a work context, or the receptive skills of listening and reading may be suitable for other learner needs.

Unlike many other assessment tools, the Languages Ladder can also reflect the reality of most people's learning, which is that they do not progress evenly across the skills. Reading may often be at a higher level than writing, for example.

Oracy skills – Listening and Speaking – are important for language learning in ways that are unique, and are likely to be especially important in the early stages of language learning. These skills will often develop in parallel and be mutually supportive. In fact in learning and real life contexts they are rarely separated. In conversation we do both simultaneously, and although the Ladder does not have a separate category for this, descriptors for both spoken interaction and spoken production are included.

Literacy skills – Reading and Writing – may sometimes depend on an existing level of oracy competence, and young learners may not reach the relatively high levels in writing that they do in oracy. Conversely, many adult learners may access a new language through their prior knowledge and existing literacy skills, and reach high levels of reading ability relatively fast.

The Ladder should not be seen as a lock-step method but as a flexible framework which allows learners to progress in ways that are appropriate to their needs and abilities.

How is it assessed?

There is a set of 'can do' statements for each skill at each grade. Although it may be used as an end-of-course assessment, the Ladder is designed to endorse the learner's achievement and to provide assessment when the learner is ready.

The 'can do' statements can support formative assessment and Assessment for Learning. The statements can be used for self, peer and teacher assessment for progression in any language.

There are two aspects of more formalised assessment in a wide range of languages:

- Teacher assessment which can lead to an Asset Languages Grade Award Certificate for any skill at any grade.
- External assessment also through Asset Languages available at each stage – Breakthrough (Entry Level), Preliminary (Level 1), Intermediate (Level 2) etc. Each skill is tested and certificated separately and there are several testing sessions in each year.

Within each stage the grades are progressive but may address different aspects of each skill.

The external end of stage test covers the competence descriptors of the three grades in the stage.

What are the benefits?

- In a changing climate of assessment it supports peer and self-assessment and Assessment for Learning;
- It is flexible enough to meet the needs of a wide range of learners;
- It could provide motivation and recognition of achievement in Key Stage 3 thus encouraging uptake in Key Stage 4;
- It can support language learning in Key Stage 4 and post-16 within a wide range of learning pathways, including vocational and work-related contexts;
- The external qualifications contribute to the Achievement and Attainment Tables;
- The range of languages and levels means that speakers and learners of lesser taught languages can have their achievement recognised;
- The scheme has the potential to raise the profile of language learning within and outside the school setting.

For further information on the qualifications scheme including the languages and levels available see:

www.assetlanguages.org.uk

Mastery – Grades 16-17

Reflects the skills of a postgraduate language student or a native speaker

Proficiency – Grades 13-14-15

Reflects the skills of an undergraduate studying languages

Advanced – Grades 10-11-12

The same level as AS and A Levels

Intermediate – Grades 7-8-9

The same level as the higher grades at GCSE

Preliminary – Grades 4-5-6

The same as the lower grades at GCSE

Breakthrough – Grades 1-2-3

The beginner stage

The Languages Ladder statements endorse language learning in all phases from primary through to adult.

They have been developed alongside the Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages and have been integrated into the revised National Curriculum levels. They reflect performance descriptors for GCSE/AS/A Levels and are mapped against the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Within each stage the grades are progressive but may address different aspects of each skill. To complete a stage, learners should be able to show evidence of all three grades making up that stage.



Listening

Breakthrough

Grades 1-2-3

1. I can understand a few familiar spoken words and phrases.
2. I can understand a range of familiar spoken phrases.
3. I can understand the main points from a short spoken passage made up of familiar language.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to understand a basic range of everyday expressions relating to personal details and needs. You may need to listen several times to get the information you need, depending on how fast and clearly the speaker talks. You should have some understanding of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns. You should be familiar with the sound system of the language. You should be aware of how to address people both formally and informally as appropriate.

Preliminary

Grades 4-5-6

4. I can understand the main points and some of the detail from a spoken passage made up of familiar language in simple sentences.
5. I can understand the main points and opinions in spoken passages made up of familiar material from various contexts.
6. I can understand the difference between present and past and future events in a range of spoken material.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to understand standard speech relating to a range of predictable everyday matters, providing that it is spoken clearly and directly. You should be able to recognise the difference between past, present and future events and be familiar with simple forms of the verb tenses.

Intermediate

Grades 7-8-9

7. I can understand longer passages and recognise people's points of view.
8. I can understand passages including some unfamiliar material from which I can recognise attitudes and emotions.
9. I can understand the gist of a range of authentic passages in familiar contexts.

On completing this stage:

You should now be comfortable with a range of tenses, and should be able to understand authentic passages on familiar matters. You should be able to follow much of what is said at near normal speed on familiar matters or in predictable situations. You should be able to give an oral or written summary of what you have heard.

Advanced

Grades 10-11-12

- 10.** I can understand the main points of an authentic spoken passage or conversation involving one or more speakers.
- 11.** I can understand the main points of authentic spoken passages and conversations in a range of different contexts.
- 12.** I can identify the majority of points and am able to infer the meaning of a range of authentic passages and conversations spoken at near native speed.

On completing this stage:

You should now be comfortable understanding a range of tenses and a variety of registers. You should be able to understand the majority of what you hear in the target language, including references to the culture and society of countries and communities where the language is spoken.

Proficiency

Grades 13-14-15

- 13.** I can understand extended speech of moderate length and complexity involving one or more speakers and can summarise the key points.
- 14.** I can understand extended speech of some degree of complexity and abstraction involving a number of speakers and can summarise the key points.
- 15.** I can understand extended speech in unfamiliar contexts and can summarise the key points and most of the details.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to access a range of extracts, including discussions and conversations in different styles eg. factual, journalistic, non-specialist technical. You should be able to recognise the speaker's perspective.

Mastery

Grades 16-17

- 16.** I can understand almost everything I hear, including in familiar specialised contexts, and, if required, can report back on what I have heard.
- 17.** I can understand virtually everything I hear and, if required, can report back comprehensively on what I have heard.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to access a range of extracts, discussions and conversations in different styles, engaging with subtleties of meaning and nuance in the language.

The Languages Ladder statements endorse language learning in all phases from primary through to adult.

They have been developed alongside the Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages and have been integrated into the revised National Curriculum levels. They reflect performance descriptors for GCSE/AS/A Levels and are mapped against the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Within each stage the grades are progressive but may address different aspects of each skill. In Speaking both transactional and presentational skills are addressed, some descriptors in each stage may only relate to one of these. To complete a stage, learners should be able to show evidence of all three grades making up that stage.



Speaking

Breakthrough

Grades 1-2-3

1. I can say and repeat single words and short simple phrases.
2. I can answer simple questions and give basic information.
3. I can ask and answer simple questions and talk about my interests.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to use a basic range of everyday expressions relating to personal details and needs. Your pronunciation may not always be completely accurate but your meaning will be clear. You should be able to understand and use a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns. You should be familiar with the sound system of the language. You should be aware of how to address people both formally and informally as appropriate.

Preliminary

Grades 4-5-6

4. I can take part in a simple conversation and I can express my opinions.
5. I can give a short prepared talk, on a topic of my choice, including expressing my opinions.
6. I can give a short prepared talk, expressing opinions and answering simple questions about it, using a variety of structures.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to use and adapt learnt language relating to a range of predictable everyday matters. Your pronunciation should be clearly understandable and you should be able to maintain a simple conversation using strategies such as asking for clarification or repetition. You should be able to recognise the difference between past, present and future events and be familiar with simple forms of the verb tenses.

Intermediate

Grades 7-8-9

7. I can answer unprepared questions in a conversation or following a presentation.
8. I can narrate events, tell a story or relate the plot of a book or film and give my opinions about it.
9. I can take part in a discussion, giving and justifying my opinions and ideas.

On completing this stage:

You should now be comfortable with a range of tenses, and should be able to use language relating to a range of familiar matters. You should be using and adapting language for new purposes. Your pronunciation and intonation should be generally accurate. You should be able to maintain a conversation on familiar matters or in predictable situations using a range of language and structures.

Advanced

Grades 10-11-12

- 10.** I can give a presentation on a chosen theme and respond readily to questions.
- 11.** I can give a presentation on a chosen theme and argue my viewpoints with some degree of success.
- 12.** I can participate in discussions relating to a variety of situations and topics, taking the initiative where appropriate.

On completing this stage:

You should now be comfortable using a range of tenses and a variety of registers. You should be able to communicate confidently using a wide ranging vocabulary. Your pronunciation and intonation will be generally accurate. You should be able to make references to the culture and society of countries and communities where the language is spoken.

Proficiency

Grades 13-14-15

- 13.** I can sustain a conversation and can find ways of expressing myself with relative ease.
- 14.** I can play a pro-active role in discussions on a range of topics in an appropriate register and can make myself understood with relative ease.
- 15.** I can take a leading role in discussions speaking coherently in a wide variety of situations.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to communicate confidently and express yourself with relative ease with appropriate interventions. Your pronunciation and intonation will be accurate – any inaccuracies will not impede communication. You should be able to present a point of view effectively, using a range of language appropriate to the situation.

Mastery

Grades 16-17

- 16.** I can communicate with ease in both formal and informal situations, using a wide range and variety of language appropriately.
- 17.** I can communicate effortlessly and confidently in most situations, showing a command of language which enables me to express finer shades of meaning.

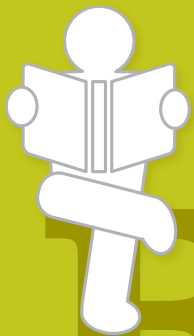
On completing this stage:

You should be able to communicate effortlessly and confidently and express yourself with ease, using appropriate interventions and backtracking when necessary. Your pronunciation and intonation will be accurate. You should be able to present information and arguments skilfully, using a sophisticated range of stylistic resources.

The Languages Ladder statements endorse language learning in all phases from primary through to adult.

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Reading

Breakthrough

Grades 1-2-3

1. I can recognise and read out a few familiar words and phrases.
2. I can understand and read out familiar written phrases.
3. I can understand the main points from a short written text in clear printed script.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to understand a basic range of everyday expressions relating to personal details and needs. You should have some understanding of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns. You should be familiar with the writing system of the language. You should be aware of how to address people both formally and informally as appropriate.

Preliminary

Grades 4-5-6

4. I can understand the main points and some of the detail from short written texts in familiar contexts.
5. I can understand the main points and opinions in written texts from various contexts.
6. I can understand the difference between present, past and future events in a range of texts.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to understand standard language relating to a range of predictable everyday matters. You should be able to read clear handwritten text. You should be able to recognise the difference between past, present and future events and be familiar with simple forms of the verb tenses.

Intermediate

Grades 7-8-9

- 7. I can understand longer texts and recognise people's points of view.
- 8. I can understand texts including some unfamiliar material from which I can recognise attitudes and emotions.
- 9. I can understand a wide range of authentic texts in familiar contexts.

On completing this stage:

You should now be comfortable with a range of tenses, and should be able to understand authentic texts on familiar matters. You should be able to follow much of what you read on familiar matters or in predictable situations. You should be able to give an oral or written summary or translation of what you have read.

Advanced

Grades 10-11-12

- 10.** I can understand authentic written texts of moderate length and complexity. I can produce a summary covering the majority of points.
- 11.** I can understand authentic texts of some degree of complexity and abstraction in a range of different contexts. I can produce a summary covering most essential points.
- 12.** I can understand and am able to infer the meaning of a range of more complex texts. I can produce a detailed report covering all essential points.

On completing this stage:

You should now be comfortable understanding a range of tenses and a variety of registers. You should be able to understand the majority of what you hear in the target language, including references to the culture and society of countries and communities where the language is spoken.

Proficiency

Grades 13-14-15

- 13.** I can understand a range of texts, of moderate length and complexity, including specialised texts written for a non-specialist audience, and note the key points.
- 14.** I can understand a range of texts of some degree of complexity and abstraction including specialised texts written for a non-specialist audience, and note the key points.
- 15.** I can understand texts outside my field of expertise and note the key points and most of the details.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to access a range of texts in different styles eg factual, literary, journalistic, technical, written for a non-specialist audience etc. You should be able to recognise the writer's perspective.

Mastery

Grades 16-17

- 16.** I can understand and interpret almost everything I read, including texts in familiar specialised contexts, and, if required, report back on what I have read.
- 17.** I can understand and interpret virtually everything I read and, if required, translate or report back comprehensively on what I have read.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to access a range of texts in different styles, engaging with subtleties of meaning and nuance in the language. You should be able to demonstrate a sophisticated level of dictionary use – both mono and bilingual – and appropriate use of reference materials to fill in any gaps in knowledge or understanding.

The Languages Ladder statements endorse language learning in all phases from primary through to adult.

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Writing

Breakthrough

Grades 1-2-3

1. I can write or copy simple words or symbols correctly.
2. I can write one or two short sentences to a model and fill in the words on a simple form.
3. I can write a few short sentences with support, using expressions which I have already learnt.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to use a basic range of everyday expressions relating to personal details and needs. Your spelling may not always be completely accurate but your meaning will be clear. You should be able to understand and use a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns. You should be familiar with the writing system of the language. You should be aware of how to address people both formally and informally as appropriate.

Preliminary

Grades 4-5-6

4. I can write a short text on a familiar topic, adapting language which I have already learnt.
5. I can write a short text on a range of familiar topics, using simple sentences.
6. I can write a text, giving and seeking information and opinions, using a variety of structures.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to use and adapt learnt language relating to a range of predictable everyday matters. You should be able to write simple texts using descriptive language, with spelling that is generally accurate. You should be able to recognise the difference between past, present and future events and be familiar with simple forms of the verb tenses.

Intermediate

Grades 7-8-9

- 7. I can write a text eg a report, article or story, conveying opinions and points of view.
- 8. I can produce formal and informal texts in an appropriate style on familiar topics.
- 9. I can communicate ideas accurately and in an appropriate style over a range of familiar topics.

On completing this stage

You should now be comfortable with a range of tenses, and should be able to use language relating to a range of familiar matters. You should be using and adapting language for new purposes. Your spelling should be generally accurate. You should be able to write on familiar matters or in predictable situations using a range of language and structures.

Advanced

Grades 10-11-12

- 10.** I can structure my writing to produce a coherent text, in an appropriate register, for a specific purpose eg a letter to an employer or an account of a visit.
- 11.** I can write coherent text, in an appropriate register, for different purposes, including communicating information, ideas and opinions eg a review, an article or a report.
- 12.** I can write extended text using a wide range of language in a variety of registers covering more specialised contexts eg work-related or in a specialised area of study.

On completing this stage:

You should now be comfortable using a range of tenses and a variety of registers. You should be able to write confidently using a wide ranging vocabulary and more complex structures. Your spelling will be generally accurate. You should be able to make references to the culture and society of countries and communities where the language is spoken.

Proficiency

Grades 13-14-15

- 13.** I can produce extended texts or reports on a range of topics in an appropriate register, using a range of appropriate concrete and abstract vocabulary.
- 14.** I can produce extended texts or reports on a range of topics in a variety of registers, using a wide range of language forms.
- 15.** I can produce well-structured text of some length which clearly expresses an argument or specific viewpoint, using a wide range and variety of language.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to write confidently and express yourself with relative ease. Your writing will be accurate – any inaccuracies will not impede communication – and in the appropriate register. You should be able to present a point of view effectively, using a range of language appropriate to the situation.

Mastery


Grades 16-17

- 16.** I can communicate with ease, producing texts for a range of purposes, using a sophisticated range and variety of structures.
- 17.** I can communicate fluently and effortlessly in writing in most situations, showing a command of language which enables me to express finer shades of meaning. I can create or translate texts accurately showing an appropriate sensitivity to style and register.

On completing this stage:

You should be able to write confidently and express yourself with ease creating more complex and, where appropriate, specialist texts. Your writing will be accurate and in the appropriate register. You should be able to demonstrate a sophisticated level of dictionary use – both mono and bilingual – and appropriate use of reference materials to fill in any gaps in knowledge or understanding. You should be able to deploy information and arguments skilfully, using an extensive range of stylistic resources.

Grade 5	I can understand the main points and opinions in spoken passages made up of familiar material from various contexts	I can give a short prepared talk, on a topic of my choice, including expressing my opinions	I can understand the main points and opinions in written texts from various contexts	I can write a short text on a familiar topic, using simple sentences
Grade 4	I can understand the main points and some of the detail from a spoken passage made up of familiar language in simple sentences	I can take part in a simple conversation and I can express my opinions	I can understand the main points and some of the detail from short written texts in familiar contexts	I can write a short text on a familiar topic, using language which I have already learnt
Grade 3	I can understand the main points from a short spoken passage made up of familiar language	I can take and answer simple questions and talk about my interests	I can understand the main points from a short written text in clear printed script	I can write a few short sentences with support, using expressions which I have already learnt
Grade 2	I can understand a range of familiar spoken phrases	I can answer simple questions and give basic information	I can understand and read out familiar written phrases	I can write one or two short sentences to a model and fill in the words on a simple form
Grade 1	I can understand a few familiar spoken words and phrases	I can say and repeat single words and short simple phrases	I can recognise and read out a few familiar words and phrases	I can write or copy simple words or symbols correctly
	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing

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Climbing the Languages Ladder

Poster grades 1-5

The Languages Ladder

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Grade 10	I can understand the main points of an authentic spoken passage or conversation involving one or more speakers	I can give a presentation on a chosen theme and respond readily to questions	I can understand authentic written texts of moderate length and complexity I can produce a summary covering the majority of points	I can structure my writing to produce a coherent text, in an appropriate register for a specific purpose I can write as an employer or an account of a visit
Intermediate				
Grade 9	I can understand the gist of a range of authentic passages in familiar contexts	I can take part in a discussion, giving and justifying my opinions and ideas	I can understand a wide range of authentic texts in familiar contexts	I can communicate ideas accurately and in an appropriate style over a range of familiar topics
Grade 8	I can understand passages including some unfamiliar material from which I can recognise attitudes and emotions	I can narrate events, tell a story or relate the plot of a book or film and give my opinions about it	I can understand texts including some unfamiliar material from which I can recognise attitudes and emotions	I can produce formal and informal texts in an appropriate style on familiar topics
Grade 7	I can understand longer passages and recognise people's points of view	I can answer structured questions in a conversation or following a presentation	I can understand longer texts and recognise people's points of view	I can write a text, say a report, article or story, conveying opinions and points of view
Preliminary				
Grade 6	I can understand the difference between present and past and future events in a range of spoken material	I can give a short prepared talk, expressing opinions and answering simple questions about it, using a variety of structures	I can understand the difference between present, past and future events in a range of texts	I can write a text, giving and seeking information and opinions, using a variety of structures

Climbing the Languages Ladder

Poster grades 6-10

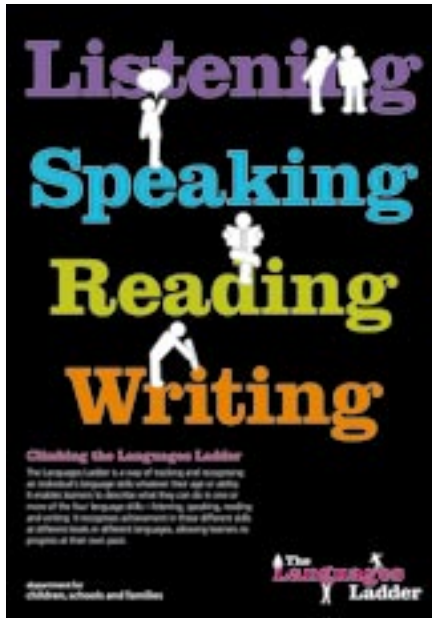
Mastery			
Grade 17	I can understand virtually everything I hear and, if required, can report back comprehensively on what I have heard.	I can communicate effectively and confidently in most situations, showing a command of language which enables me to be understood on what I have read.	I can understand and respond orally to everything I read and, if required, report back on what I have read.
Grade 16	I can understand almost everything I hear including in formal situations, reports, and, if required, can report back on what I have heard.	I can communicate with ease in both formal and informal situations, using a wide range and variety of language appropriately.	I can understand and respond orally to everything I read, including texts in formal, specialised contexts, and, if required, report back on what I have read.
Proficiency			
Grade 15	I can understand extended aspects of unfamiliar contexts and can summarise the key points and most of the details.	I can take a leading role in discussions showing confidence in a wide variety of situations.	I can understand texts, including my field of expertise and texts that are long and those of the details.
Grade 14	I can understand extended aspects of some degree of complexity and abstractness readily and can summarise the key points.	I can play a part-actor role in discussions on a range of topics to an appropriate degree and can make myself understood with relative ease.	I can understand a range of texts of some degree of complexity and abstractness including specialised texts written for a non-specialist audience, and note the key points.
Grade 13	I can understand extended aspects of moderate length and complexity readily and can summarise the key points.	I can initiate a conversation and can find ways of resolving myself with others well.	I can understand a range of texts of moderate length and complexity including specialised texts written for a non-specialist audience, and note the key points.
Advanced			
Grade 12	I can identify the reciprocity of genre and am able to infer the meaning of a range of abstract, implicit and connotative aspects of their native speech.	I can participate in discussions taking on a variety of positions and topics, taking on the initiative where appropriate.	I can understand and analyse the structure of a range of more complex texts, including a detailed report covering all essential points.
Grade 11	I can understand the main points of different spoken passages and communicate in a range of different contexts.	I can give a presentation on a chosen theme and analyse its relationship with other areas of fashion.	I can understand and analyse the structure of a range of different contexts, I can present a summary covering most essential points.
	Listening	Speaking	Reading Writing

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The Languages Ladder

Climbing the Languages Ladder

Poster grades 11-17



Climbing the Languages Ladder

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