# Module 4: Overview of Communication Standards and

# ACTFL Proficiency

* 1. **Start Module**

**1.1.1 Part 1: Welcome**

Welcome to the Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework Implementation Training Series! This training is brought to you by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in collaboration with the Center for Applied Linguistics. These Online Learning Modules are one component of the Implementation Training Series and are designed to support you in understanding and using the 2021 Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework.

You are in Module 4: Overview of Communication Standards and ACTFL Proficiency. This module will outline the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and how they apply to the 2021 Massachusetts World Languages Curriculum Framework, as well as introduce the Communication Standards from the Framework and how they progress across proficiency levels.

**1.1.2 How do I navigate this module?**

First, let’s talk about how to navigate this module. To navigate between the slides of this module, you can click here: on the NEXT button, to see the next slide, and here: on the PREVIOUS button, to go back to the last slide. Please note that on slides that have interactive features, such as clickable icons or tabs to learn more, you will not be able to click NEXT to see the next slide until you click on each of these features.

At the bottom of each slide, you will also see the volume button to make the audio louder or quieter; the closed-captions button to turn on closed captions and read along with the audio; a seek bar, and a replay button.

You can click on the seek bar to control which part of the screen you want to see, and you can click on the replay button to replay the entire slide.

On the left, you can see the menu. You can click on any title to navigate to the slide you want to view. The menu also has a search bar, here. If you are looking for a particular topic, you can search for it. For example, if you want to learn about the Framework, you can type the word “Framework” into the search bar, and the menu will display all slides that mention the Framework.

On the top right, you can click here on the Resources button where you can find a transcript of the full text of this module as well as a one-page summary.

**1.1.3 What are the goals of this module?**

Now let’s talk about the goals of this module. At the end of the module, you will be able to answer these questions:

* What are the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and how do they apply to the Framework?
* What are the Communication Standards in the Framework?
* How do the Communication Standards progress across proficiency levels?
  1. **Part 2: ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the Framework** 
     1. **What are the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and when were they developed?**

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are descriptions of what individuals can do with language in real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context. They describe what students can do in the skill areas of speaking, writing, listening, and reading and can be applied to signing and viewing.

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines focus on functional language ability rather than grammar and accuracy, which represents a change in approach from traditional language teaching. They can be applied regardless of where or how a language is acquired and are not tied to a particular pedagogy or curriculum.

The guidelines identify five major levels of proficiency. Each major level describes a specific range of abilities and subsumes all the lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are further divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels.

The “High” sublevel represents learners who are starting to function at the next level but cannot sustain this performance. For example, Novice High learners are able to handle a variety of tasks at the Intermediate level, but they are not able to sustain performance of all of these tasks all of the time.

Click on the dates on the timeline to learn more about how and when the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines were developed.

* 1986 – The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines were first published as an adaptation of the U.S. Government’s Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Skill Level Descriptions for the academic community. The ILR descriptions were developed to consistently and accurately measure federal employees’ language skills.
* 1999 – The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking were revised to reflect real-world assessment needs.
* 2001 – The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Writing were revised to reflect real-world assessment needs.
* 2012 – The current edition of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines was published.
* 2015 – The current edition of the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards was published. These standards provide sample progress indicators by performance range of Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced for the 5 C goal areas of Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. This Module will focus on Communication but the other standards describe how students interact with cultural competence; connect with other disciplines; make linguistic and cultural comparisons; and participate in local and global communities. These will be described in further detail in subsequent Modules.
* 2017 – The current edition of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements was published. This document includes proficiency benchmarks by range along the ACTFL proficiency continuum and performance indicators for each sublevel.
  + 1. **What can students do at each of the main ACTFL proficiency levels included in the Framework?**

Click on each level to learn more.

* At the Superior level, students can support opinions, hypothesize, discuss abstract topics, and handle a linguistically unfamiliar situation.
* At the Advanced level, students can narrate and describe in past, present, and future time, and handle a complicated situation or transaction, such as reporting an accident, losing a reservation, or returning a broken item.
  + Note that the Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy may be awarded to students who reach a level of Intermediate High proficiency. This is the level at which students can participate actively to meet the demands of multilingual academic, social, and work situations.
  + The Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy *with Distinction* is awarded to students who reach a level of Advanced Low proficiency.
* At the Intermediate level, students can create with language, ask and answer simple questions on familiar topics, initiate, maintain, and close conversations, and handle a simple situation or transaction.
  + Note that the Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy may be awarded to students who reach a level of Intermediate High proficiency. At the Intermediate High level, students can also demonstrate Advanced functions, but with inconsistency.
* At the Novice level, students can use short, memorized phrases and words to communicate minimally.
  + 1. **How do the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines work together with the Framework?**

Click on each picture to learn more.

* The vision from the Massachusetts Framework states that “All Massachusetts students will acquire a high level of linguistic and cultural proficiency in at least one world language.” The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recommends and supports that all schools and districts identify and work toward the level of Intermediate High as the minimum programmatic outcome for all students. At the Intermediate High level, students start to see significant and tangible benefits from their language skills that can be applied to college and career endeavors.
* The levels of the standards in the Massachusetts Framework correspond to the proficiency levels in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, from Novice Low through Superior.
  1. **Part 3: Overview of Communication Standards**
     1. **What are the Communication Standards?**

The Communication Standards are related to *how* students use language.

The different modes of communication comprise the Communication Practices in Domain 1 of the Framework. The four modes are Interpretive, Interpersonal, Presentational, and Intercultural.

These modes include the skills of reading, writing, listening, viewing, speaking, and signing, which are organized into modes based on the tasks students accomplish with language.

* + 1. **Why are the Communication Standards important for world language education?**

The Communication Standards are important for many reasons. Click on each of the long boxes to learn more. After you’ve clicked on each of these boxes, click the Proficiency box at the bottom of the slide to learn about how proficiency in the Communication Standards supports proficiency in other Domains.

* The Communication Standards support meaningful, authentic, and affirming interactions in the target language.
* The Communication Standards enable students to access information and engage in collaboration.
* The Communication Standards facilitate interaction in a global community.
* The Communication Standards provide an avenue for students to become critical thinkers, good problem solvers, and informed, engaged global citizens.
* Proficiency in the Communication Standards enables students to use the language to gain knowledge. This knowledge corresponds to the second Domain in the Framework, Linguistic Cultures.
* Proficiency in Communication also corresponds to Domain 3, Lifelong Learning, as students apply what they have learned to their personal, social, academic, and professional/occupational contexts.

In short, the Communication Standards are how students express the Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities standards.

* + 1. **What do the Communication Standards look like?**

The Communication Standards are divided by mode and color-coded by the five different linguistic components that describe how students achieve the communicative function. In a given Context (shown in teal), producing or relying upon the Text Type (shown in purple) and supported by Supports (shown in yellow) in such a way that Comprehensibility (shown in brown) is achieved, students can perform the Functions (shown in black). These linguistic components will be described in greater detail later in this Module.

* + 1. **What skills are involved in the four modes of Communication?**

Click on each box to learn more.

* Interpretive Reading, Viewing, and Listening are involved in Interpretive Communication. Students apply these skills as they engage with and demonstrate understanding of texts, which may include books, poems, songs, dramatic performances, posts on social media, photographs, paintings, dances, or any other cultural artifact that transmits meaning.
* Interpersonal Speaking, Signing, and Writing are involved in Interpersonal Communication. Students can apply these skills in person or via technology, such as speaking over the phone or signing via a video chat, in order to exchange information with interlocutors (i.e., persons involved in a conversation, dialogue, or discussion).
* Presentational Speaking, Writing, and Signing are involved in Presentational Communication. Students apply these skills to plan prepared communications for an audience.
* Intercultural Communication uses all the skills from the Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational modes. Students apply these skills to interact appropriately with others in and from another culture.
  + 1. **How are the Communication Standards taught?**

The Communication Standards are taught using Core Practices. With the backward design model, educators design learning activities that align with their unit goals or objectives and incorporate students’ interests and desires to communicate. Use of the target language is key to facilitate language learning, and this must be scaffolded using supports so that the language is comprehensible. Remember: you and your students should be using the target language 90% of the time or more, as this is how students acquire communicative proficiency.

Authentic resources, which are created *by* native speakers or signers *for* native speakers or signers, offer both target language input and cultural perspectives that are necessary for Interpretive and Intercultural Communication. Students also need opportunities to practice their Interpersonal Communication skills, which are essential to overall language learning and the development of intercultural competence. Grammar should be taught as a concept and used in context, rather than being taught explicitly as the main focus of instruction. Finally, targeted and actionable feedback should be provided to further develop and advance students’ abilities in the language. Click on each box to learn more about [ACTFL Core Practices](https://www.actfl.org/resources/guiding-principles-language-learning) and related professional development opportunities through the [Massachusetts Foreign Language Association](https://mafla.org/pdonline/).

* + 1. **How are the Communication Standards assessed?**

When planning for summative assessment, it is important to design performance tasks that allow students to demonstrate how well they have met the unit goals/objectives, and you may find it helpful to use ACTFL’s [Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA)](https://carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/CreateUnit/p_2.html) model to support you in designing a connected and articulated series of tasks. This model calls for three tasks assessing the Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational modes of communication. All three tasks are connected by a central theme, and each task informs the next. Click on each box to view the [Assessment Quick Reference Guide](https://www.doe.mass.edu/worldlanguages/framework/default.html) and to learn more about creating Integrated Performance Assessments along with examples compiled by CARLA, the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition.

**1.3.7. Deeper Learning: Mastery, Identity, and Creativity**

Massachusetts’ vision for Deeper Learning calls for educators to build learning experiences with a clear Purpose, Problem, Product, and Criticality so that students demonstrate Mastery, Identity, and Creativity. [Deeper Learning](https://www.doe.mass.edu/kaleidoscope/overview.html) encompasses the Framework’s priorities for Social Justice and reflects Massachusetts’ goals of having all students explore identity, diversity, justice, and action, combined with mastery.

Click on each of the bold words to learn more, and then click on the box at the bottom of the slide to consider ways in which assessments and activities for the communicative modes ask students to demonstrate Mastery, Identity, and Creativity.

* Purpose: Students engage in a task that is part of a coherent, standards-aligned curriculum. The task is accessible to all students and engages students in the work of the field or discipline.
* Problem: Students solve a problem or explain a phenomenon, and craft logical and reasonable conclusions supported by evidence. This requires students to examine resources that provide diverse perspectives within real-world and socially relevant contexts.
* Product: Students create and answer questions, generate hypotheses, gather materials, collaborate with one another and discover opportunities to apply learning in a meaningful product; and share their ideas and solutions with those directly and/or indirectly impacted by the problem.
* Criticality: Educators and students not only engage with resources from diverse perspectives but also analyze who is centered, who is excluded, what social narratives are preserved, and the purpose for preserving those narratives. This attention to criticality drives educators and students to deepen thinking skills to better understand the connections between content and societal contexts.
* Mastery is evident when all students develop the knowledge or skills outlined in the standards and practices, with the ability to transfer that knowledge across situations.
* Identity is evident when all students become more invested in the discipline by thinking of themselves as active agents who do that kind of work. To support a shift in thinking from "I'm learning about biology" to "I am a biologist", educators affirm students' cultural and racial heritage and leverage their funds of knowledge, experiences, and interests.
* Creativity is evident when all students shift from receiving knowledge of a discipline to acting or making something within the discipline. Students engage with tasks that have multiple paths to multiple potential standards-aligned solutions.

**1.3.8. Discussion/Reflection**

The following questions are designed to help you discuss or reflect on what you have learned so far in this module. If you are completing this module in a group, you may find it helpful to talk about these questions with your colleagues and take this opportunity to share your insights and experiences. If you are completing this module on your own, you can independently reflect on these questions and consider ways in which they apply to your own teaching context and experiences.

The questions for discussion and reflection are:

* + How have you used the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines in your school or classroom?
  + What is your experience with teaching the different modes of communication?
  + Which Communication Standards do you find most challenging to teach or assess?
  1. **Part 4: Progression of Communication Standards** 
     1. **How do the Communication Standards progress across proficiency levels?**

Students develop and/or advance their communication skills at each level of proficiency in terms of Functions, which are the most direct expression of the Content Standards. Students’ proficiency also progresses across the other four linguistic components of Context, Text Type, Comprehensibility, and Supports. It is important to note that the linguistic components are not equal in importance when determining students’ proficiency levels; when determining a proficiency level, look first to the Function, then to the Context, Text Type, Comprehensibility, and Supports. We will discuss the Standards for each Communication Practice in detail in subsequent Modules.

**1.4.2. How do Functions progress across proficiency levels in the Framework?**

Functions are assets-based skills that correspond with the main proficiency levels included in the Framework. They are the simplest expression of the standard describing what students can do with the language. They emerge and evolve slowly, often not changing from sub-level to sub-level. Within the Framework, bolded text indicates a new Function or a more rigorous feature of a previously acquired Function. We will discuss the Functions within each Communication Standard in detail in subsequent Modules.

**1.4.3. How does Context progress across proficiency levels in the Framework?**

Context refers to the topics and settings in which students can use the language to accomplish a Function. As a student’s proficiency level increases, they can express themselves on a wider variety of topics and in a wider range of settings. Click on each circle to learn more about the Contexts described in the Communication Domain for each proficiency level.

* Novice Low: Topics of high familiarity and immediate interest to students in settings that students would find familiar and highly predictable
* Novice Mid: Topics of high familiarity and interest to students in settings that students would find familiar and highly predictable
* Novice High: Topics that relate personally to students in a variety of settings
* Intermediate Low: Topics that relate to students and their immediate environment in a variety of settings
* Intermediate Mid: A wide variety of topics that relate to students and their environment in a variety of settings
* Intermediate High: A variety of concrete topics of personal, general, or public interest, in a wide variety of settings
* Advanced Low: A variety of concrete topics of personal, general, social, or academic interest, in a wide variety of settings
* Advanced Mid: A wide variety of complex, concrete topics of personal, general, social, academic, or professional significance, in a wide variety of settings
* Advanced High & Superior: A wide variety of complex, hypothetical, and abstract topics, in a variety of general and specialized settings

Contexts are described in the Framework on page 21. A summary of Contexts used throughout the Content Standards can be found on Pages 1 and 2 of the [Linguistic Components Summary](https://www.doe.mass.edu/worldlanguages/framework/linguistic-components.pdf).

**1.4.4. How does Text Type progress across proficiency levels in the Framework?**

Text type refers to the length and complexity of the language students produce or understand to accomplish a Function. As a student’s proficiency level increases, they can both understand a wider variety of texts and express themselves using a wider range of linguistic structures. Click on each circle to learn more about the Text Types described in the Communication Domain for each proficiency level.

* Novice Low: Practiced or memorized words or phrases
* Novice Mid: Practiced or memorized words, phrases, and some sentences
* Novice High: Mostly simple sentences
* Intermediate Low: Unconnected simple sentences
* Intermediate Mid: Series of connected sentences (simple and complex)
* Intermediate High: Mostly short paragraphs
* Advanced Low: Cohesive, organized paragraphs
* Advanced Mid: Series of connected paragraphs
* Advanced High: Extended discourse composed of purposefully organized and connected paragraphs
* Superior: Precise, sophisticated, and academic language in richly organized, extended, and cohesive discourse

The Framework describes Text Types on page 22. A summary of Text Types used throughout the Content Standards can be found on Page 3 of the [Linguistic Components Summary](https://www.doe.mass.edu/worldlanguages/framework/linguistic-components.pdf).

**1.4.5. How does Comprehensibility progress across proficiency levels in the Framework?**

Comprehensibility refers to the degree of success a student experiences in communicating a message. As a student’s proficiency level increases, so does their comprehensibility, and they can be understood more easily by speakers or signers with less familiarity with language learners. Above the level of Advanced Mid, all speakers or signers of the language easily understand.

Comprehensibility is the context of mechanics (i.e., grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and sign production); while these mechanics alone do not make someone proficient, they determine whether the speaker/signer/writer is easily understood or not, and by whom. Grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and sign production are not skills to be measured in and of themselves, but rather are in service of the larger skill – the Function – and their accuracy should therefore be measured based on how they affect the comprehensibility of the overall message in authentic communications.

Click on each circle to learn more about the Comprehensibility described in the Communication Domain for each proficiency level.

* Novice Low: Speakers/signers of the language who are accustomed to engaging with language learners sometimes understand
* Novice Mid: Speakers/signers of the language who are accustomed to engaging with language learners often understand
* Novice High: Speakers/signers of the language who are accustomed to engaging with language learners usually understand
* Intermediate Low: Speakers/signers of the language who are accustomed to engaging with language learners understand
* Intermediate Mid: Speakers/signers of the language who are accustomed to engaging with language learners easily understand
* Intermediate High: Speakers/signers of the language usually understand
* Advanced Low: Speakers/signers of the language understand
* Advanced Mid, Advanced High, and Superior: Speakers/signers of the language easily understand

The Framework describes Comprehensibility on page 22, and a summary of Comprehensibility descriptors used throughout the Content Standards can be found on Page 5 of the [Linguistic Components Summary](https://www.doe.mass.edu/worldlanguages/framework/linguistic-components.pdf).

**1.4.6. How do Supports progress across proficiency levels in the Framework?**

Supports refer to what students may need to accomplish the Function. As students’ proficiency level increases, their needs for support decrease. Students at the Novice Low and Novice Mid levels need repetition, gestures, and visual aids. Students at the Novice High through Intermediate Mid level need repetition, clarification, circumlocution, and plain language, and Intermediate High students may also rely on clarification and circumlocution.

As students progress in their proficiency, their need for linguistic supports diminishes, which is why the Framework does not list supports at the Advanced level and beyond. This description of Supports can be found on Page 4 of the [Linguistic Components Summary](https://www.doe.mass.edu/worldlanguages/framework/linguistic-components.pdf).

**1.4.7. Discussion/Reflection**

The following questions are designed to help you discuss or reflect on what you have learned so far in this module. If you are completing this module in a group, you may find it helpful to talk about these questions with your colleagues and take this opportunity to share your insights and experiences. If you are completing this module on your own, you can independently reflect on these questions and consider ways in which they apply to your own teaching context and experiences.

The questions for discussion and reflection are:

* + When determining a student’s proficiency level, which linguistic component do you usually notice first – Function, Context, Text Type, or Comprehensibility? Which do you find most helpful?
  + What is the relationship between mechanical accuracy (i.e., grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and sign production) and Comprehensibility?
  + In what ways does your current curriculum support students to progress through the proficiency levels? Where might there be a need to make adjustments to that curriculum?
  1. **Part 4: Conclusion**
     1. **What did we learn in this module?**

We have now come to the end of Module 4. Let’s summarize the topics this module covered. In Module 4, we learned what the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are and how they apply to the Framework, what the Communication Standards in the Framework are, and how the Communication Standards progress across proficiency levels.

You can check the Resources section for a one-page summary of the topics covered in this module.

* + 1. **Check for Learning**

Complete the following check for learning to see what you have learned in this module. After answering each question, click submit to check your answer against the expected response. You will have two opportunities to answer the questions correctly, and if you do not answer correctly, you will see the correct response before being prompted to move on to the next questions.

* + - 1. **Question 1**

What are the modes of Communication? Select all that apply.

* + - 1. **Question 2**

A student appears to have mastered all Novice criteria and has begun to perform at the Intermediate level. However, you notice that when pressed, this student cannot sustain Intermediate functions. What is the highest level of proficiency that this student has most likely acquired?

* + - 1. **Question 3**

What Supports are necessary for Advanced-level students? Select all that apply.

* + - 1. **Question 4**

Select the correct Text Type for each proficiency level.

* + - 1. **Question 5**

Which linguistic component is the primary indicator of proficiency level?

* + - 1. **Question 6**

Why is Intermediate High the minimum criteria for the State Seal of Biliteracy?

* + - 1. **Question 7**

What attitude does the Framework take toward the teaching of mechanics (i.e., grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and/or sign production)?

* + - 1. **Question 8**

What is the relationship between the Communication standards and the other Domains (other 4 Cs) in the Framework?

* + - 1. **Question 9**

Which of the following statements does NOT accurately describe the relationship between proficiency and equity that the Framework advances?

* + 1. **What’s next?**

We hope you will also join us for the next module, Module 5: Interpersonal Communication Standards.

* + 1. **Thank you!**

Thank you for completing this module and showing your commitment to providing high-quality world language education by learning more about the 2021 Massachusetts World Languages Framework!