



26 April 2023

Secretary-General's bulletin

United Nations Language Framework and levels of language competence

The Secretary-General, for the purpose of establishing language standards in the Secretariat, including a common definition of different levels of language competence for Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish that can also be applied to other languages, in accordance with the broad mandate on multilingualism disseminated in a number of resolutions by the General Assembly¹ in particular resolution [73/346](#),² promulgates the following:

Section 1

United Nations Language Framework

1.1 The United Nations Language Framework³ is aimed at building consistency in the way in which languages are learned, assessed and certified across the Secretariat. The adoption of the Framework is intended to support a more efficient management of staff language skills in all aspects of talent management (e.g. workforce planning, recruitment, learning and career development) by providing a common language learning model for personnel, as well as by allowing common assessment criteria for a more reliable and valid assessment and certification process that enhances the equal treatment of languages and stronger recognition of staff language skills in the Secretariat.

Language model

1.2 The United Nations Language Framework adopts a language model based on an action-oriented approach, which considers communication as a social activity performed by language users to accomplish specific tasks.

¹ Resolutions [76/268](#), [73/346](#), [71/328](#), [69/324](#), [67/292](#), [65/311](#), [63/306](#), [61/266](#), [59/309](#), [56/262](#), [54/64](#), [52/23](#) and [50/11](#).

² In its resolution [73/346](#), the General Assembly welcomed the ongoing harmonization exercise that aimed to produce a United Nations Language Framework ensuring greater consistency in language learning, teaching and assessment across the entire Secretariat and across all six United Nations official languages.

³ See the measures and recommendations proposed by the Secretary-General in his report on multilingualism ([A/73/761](#)) aimed at mainstreaming multilingualism, as a core value of the Organization, into the activities of all entities of the Secretariat.



1.3 In this respect, the United Nations Language Framework considers that the learning of the official languages by personnel must be linked, from the initial stages of learning, to their use of those languages to accomplish personal, public and professional tasks.

1.4 In accordance with this postulate, the assessment and certification of language competence would need to consider the ability of personnel to use the official languages to perform personal, public and professional tasks.

United Nations levels of language competence

1.5 The United Nations Language Framework, which is equally valid for the six official languages and for any other language, comprises the following four levels:

- United Nations level I, or basic language competence
- United Nations level II, or intermediate language competence
- United Nations level III, or advanced language competence
- United Nations level IV, or expert language competence

1.6 The descriptions of each of the four levels are detailed in the annex to the present bulletin.

Section 2

Final provision

The present bulletin shall enter into force on the date of its issuance.

(Signed) António **Guterres**
Secretary-General

Annex

United Nations levels of language competence

The United Nations levels of language competence build on one another and are defined by an overall descriptor and four specific descriptors, respectively. The levels match the traditional division of reception (reading and listening) and production (speaking and writing) and refer to using the language in three areas:

- The personal domain, for interpersonal relationships and individual social practices
- The public domain, for the transactions of various kinds of citizens within a community, such as administrative tasks, that deal with public services
- The professional domain, for individuals' activities in the exercise of their occupation

United Nations level I, or basic language competence

Overall descriptor

- Use the language in a simple manner, in non-demanding everyday contexts and situations, when dealing with routine or predictable matters in the personal, public and professional domains
- Show basic linguistic competence and use a restricted range of social language conventions to meet simple communication needs
- Show limited facility in understanding whether an action or response is required and some autonomy in responding
- Usually require reference resources and models, templates or external help to prepare in advance, check understanding or repair communication

Receptive activities: reading

- Understand the main message and find specific information, often with the help of visuals or background knowledge, in straightforward, clearly written factual texts of a limited variety of various genres

Receptive activities: listening

- Understand the main message in texts delivered clearly at a slow-to-average rate in the spoken standard and in favourable conditions, often with the help of visuals and/or background knowledge
- Usually request repetition or reformulation

Spoken production and interaction

- Participate with some effort in simple, brief and routine exchanges, often requiring the help of the interlocutor
- Produce simple, previously prepared, brief spoken texts

Written production and interaction

- Write or draft short, simple texts, notes and messages and produce longer texts with the help of a variety of resources and tools
- Write and respond to simple everyday correspondence

United Nations level II, or intermediate language competence

Overall descriptor

- Use the language with moderate fluency and accuracy in everyday contexts and situations when dealing with ordinary or general matters in the personal, public and professional domains
- Show an appropriate command of a moderate range of linguistic and pragmatic competences and of social language conventions to meet ordinary general communication needs
- Understand whether any action or response is required and show adequate autonomy in responding
- Often require reference resources and models or external help to prepare in advance, check understanding and improve or support communication

Receptive activities: reading

- Understand the general meaning and identify the main conclusions and the most relevant details in straightforward, clearly written, factual texts of various genres

Receptive activities: listening

- Understand the general meaning and identify the main conclusions in texts delivered clearly at an average rate in the spoken standard
- May often require reformulation or repetition of a word or a phrase

Spoken production and interaction

- Take part with ease in routine interactions, making statements and expressing personal opinions
- Produce, with or without previous preparation, short-to-medium-length spoken texts
- Relay the key points contained in an oral or written communication

Written production and interaction

- Write or draft short texts of various genres on concrete matters
- In written exchanges, respond appropriately using writing conventions
- Relay the key points contained in an oral or written communication

United Nations level III, or advanced language competence

Overall descriptor

- Use the language efficiently, with a high degree of fluency and accuracy, in a variety of contexts and situations when dealing with a wide variety of general matters in the personal, public and professional domains
- Show a good command of a range of linguistic and pragmatic competences and of social language conventions to meet most communication needs
- Respond autonomously and sufficiently to most required actions
- Use reference resources to confirm and refine interpretation and to improve communication

Receptive activities: reading

- Understand most written texts of various genres and lengths, identifying essential information, the most relevant details and the tone and viewpoints expressed – both implicit and explicit
- Understand most commonly used idiomatic and figurative language and explicit sociocultural references

Receptive activities: listening

- Understand the general meaning and identify essential information, the most relevant details and the attitudes and viewpoints expressed – both implicit and explicit – in texts delivered clearly at an average-to-fast rate in standard varieties and in moderately demanding contexts or noisy backgrounds
- May occasionally require repetition of a word or a phrase

Spoken production and interaction

- Take part naturally in a variety of interactions, arguing opinions and showing the ability to respond to various viewpoints
- Produce clear and well-structured spoken texts of various lengths with appropriate detail
- Relay and efficiently summarize the main information contained in an oral or written communication

Written production and interaction

- Write clear and well-organized texts in various genres
- In written exchanges, respond in a way that demonstrates the ability to competently match register and style to the communicative situation
- Relay and efficiently summarize the main information contained in an oral or written communication

United Nations level IV, or expert language competence*Overall descriptor*

- Use the language efficiently and flexibly, consistently maintaining a high degree of fluency, accuracy and precision. Function in a large variety of demanding contexts and situations, including adverse and unpredictable ones, when dealing with a wide range of matters, including highly specific or sensitive ones, in the personal, public and professional domains
- Show an excellent command of a wide range of linguistic and pragmatic competences and of social language conventions to meet any communication need
- Respond to and follow up on any required action appropriately and without hesitation
- Use reference resources to enhance communication with sophisticated precision

Receptive activities: reading

- Thoroughly understand linguistically and/or conceptually complex written texts of various genres and lengths, capturing implicit meanings and subtleties, concrete or abstract, including in unfamiliar contexts
- Understand a wide range of idiomatic and figurative language and sociocultural references

Receptive activities: listening

- Understand without any notable effort, capturing implicit meanings and subtleties, linguistically and/or conceptually complex texts delivered at an average-to-fast rate in a range of varieties, including unfavourable situations
- Understand a wide range of idiomatic and figurative language and sociocultural references

Spoken production and interaction

- Take part fluently in a variety of demanding situations, arguing opinions skilfully, building on various contributions and demonstrating the ability to take the lead and to intervene diplomatically
- Produce a wide range of spoken texts of various purposes
- Relay and synthesize information contained in texts of varied typology and complexity in oral or written communication

Written production and interaction

- Write reasonably complex and/or long texts in various genres
- In demanding written exchanges, respond effectively, confidently matching register and style to the communicative situation
- Relay and synthesize information contained in texts of varied typology and complexity in oral or written communication
- Proofread or edit one's own texts or texts produced by others
