

The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Scale

(Language Proficiency Assessment)

Description

The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale is a set of descriptions of abilities to communicate in a language. It was originally developed by the United States Foreign Service Institute, and is still widely known as the FSI scale. It consists of descriptions of five levels of language proficiency.

Levels

Click on the level for which you would like to see the definition (**also printed out below this section**):

- [Elementary proficiency \(S-1\)](#)
- [Limited Working proficiency \(S-2\)](#)
- [Professional Working proficiency \(S-3\)](#)
- [Full Professional proficiency \(S-4\)](#)
- [Native or Bilingual proficiency \(S-5\)](#)

What is elementary proficiency? (S-1)

Definition

Elementary proficiency is the first level of five in the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale of language proficiency, formerly called the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) scale. This level is sometimes referred to as S-1 or Level 1. A person at this level is described as follows:

- able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements
- can ask and answer questions on very familiar topics; within the scope of very limited language experience
- can understand simple questions and statements, allowing for slowed speech, repetition or paraphrase
- has a speaking vocabulary which is inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs; makes frequent errors in pronunciation and grammar, but can be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak the language
- while topics which are “very familiar” and elementary needs vary considerably from individual to individual, any person at the S-1 level should be able to order a simple meal, ask for shelter or lodging, ask and give simple directions, make purchases, and tell time.

What is limited working proficiency? (S-2)

Definition

Limited working proficiency is the second level of five in the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale of language proficiency, formerly called the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) scale. This level is sometimes referred to as S-2 or level 2. A person at this level is described as follows:

- able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements
- can handle with confidence, but not with facility, most social situations including introductions and casual conversations about current events, as well as work, family, and autobiographical information
- can handle limited work requirements, needing help in handling any complications or difficulties; can get the gist of most conversations on non-technical subjects (i.e. topics which require no specialized knowledge), and has a speaking vocabulary sufficient to respond simply with some circumlocutions
- has an accent which, though often quite faulty, is intelligible
- can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately but does not have thorough or confident control of the grammar.

What is professional working proficiency ? (S-3)

Definition

Professional working proficiency is the fourth level of five in the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale of language proficiency, formerly called the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) scale. This level is sometimes referred to as S-3 or Level 3. A person at this level is described as follows:

- able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics
- can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease
- has comprehension which is quite complete for a normal rate of speech
- has a general vocabulary which is broad enough that he or she rarely has to grope for a word
- has an accent which may be obviously foreign; has a good control of grammar; and whose errors virtually never interfere with understanding and rarely disturb the native speaker.

What is full professional proficiency? (S-4)

Definition

Full professional proficiency is the fourth level of five in the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale of language proficiency, formerly called the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) scale. This level is sometimes referred to as S-4 or level 4. A person at this level is described as follows:

- able to use the language fluently and accurately on all levels normally pertinent to professional needs
- can understand and participate in any conversations within the range of own personal and professional experience with a high degree of fluency and precision of vocabulary
- would rarely be taken for a native speaker, but can respond appropriately even in unfamiliar situations
- makes only quite rare and unpatterned errors of pronunciation and grammar
- can handle informal interpreting from and into the language.

What is native or bilingual proficiency? (S-5)

Definition

Native or bilingual proficiency is the fifth level of five in the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale of language proficiency, formerly called the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) scale. This level is sometimes referred to as S-5 or level 5. A person at this level is described as follows:

- has a speaking proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker
- has complete fluency in the language, such that speech on all levels is fully accepted by educated native speakers in all of its features, including breadth of vocabulary and idiom, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references.