

RECOMMENDATION FOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICANTS TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

This document supersedes GFC Document No. 876, revised and approved January 28, 2002.

English Proficiency Requirement for Graduate Students and Graduate Teaching Assistants at the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee

Background and Rationale

English proficiency is necessary for graduate students to fully engage in academic discourse, and social and professional interactions while studying at UWM. Even in disciplines where other spoken or symbolic languages are mainly used for instruction, students who earn a graduate degree are expected to have English proficiency as an outcome of their course of study.

The last revision of the English proficiency policy was in 2002. Recent discussions with the director and staff of the ESL programs and with staff from the Center for International Education have revealed shortcomings in the current criteria for achieving proficiency for those admitted with an English deficiency, which is limited to retesting until a minimum overall TOEFL or IELTS score is attained. A better approach would be to target the specific skills in which students are deficient, and allow completion of specialized ESL courses to qualify for proficiency.

Additional standardized tests (the Cambridge English: Advanced and the Cambridge English: Proficiency) are proposed as measures of proficiency to widen the options available to applicants. These tests use the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) proficiency scales. The CEFR levels are proposed as benchmarks for admission categories.

Summary and Justification of Proposed Changes to Current Policy

- 1) Update the currently accepted TOEFL scores to include the Internet-based TOEFL (IBT).

The CBT is no longer being used, and the IBT is by far the most used version of the TOEFL.

- 2) Add the Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) and Cambridge English: Proficiency (CPE) tests to the battery of commonly accepted tests.

The Cambridge English: Advanced and the Cambridge English: Proficiency tests are aligned with many other assessments, and are becoming more popular, especially among European students.

- 3) Create a procedure for the acceptance of new assessments for the purpose of determining English proficiency for graduate school admission, and for faculty oversight of this process (Graduate Faculty Committee).

This answers an increasing demand from partner institutions to have their English programs serve as possible pathways to UWM.

- 4) Establish required minimum sub-scores in individual skill areas for purposes of customization of ESL instruction upon dual or conditional admission to the Graduate School. Recommend minimum sub-scores for full admission.

This allows ESL programs to make a more targeted diagnosis of applicant language needs, and, by tethering the sub-score to the average, makes improvement to a more acceptable level a more realistic possibility.

- 5) Create a pathway for achieving English proficiency through coursework in ESL that targets specific English language deficiencies as an alternative to retaking standardized tests and attaining the minimum required scores.

In relation to (4), this motivates students to work on improving the skill(s) in which they are deficient, because if they can demonstrate the requisite improvement, they will not be constrained to take another standardized test. Students will thus spend their energy on real language improvement, instead of spending it on finding ways to decrypt standardized tests.

- 6) Clearly delineate three possible graduate admission statuses: Full, Dual and Conditional.

This creates clear nomenclature for use by students, faculty and administration in speaking about and helping these students.

- 7) Create a realistic timeline for students with language deficiencies to remove those deficiencies and still be successful in their graduate programs, including allowing students to transition from conditional to dual and/or full admission.

This will make it possible for the Graduate School to retain and award diplomas to a larger number of successful graduate students.

- 8) Add English proficiency requirements for international students who have been offered Teaching Assistant appointments.

The current administrative policy for international students to become TAs is being included for review and approval by the Graduate Faculty Committee (GFC).

PROPOSED POLICY

All University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Graduate School applicants are required to demonstrate a suitable level of proficiency in the English language to gain admission in one of three categories*:

- I. Full admission with English proficiency
- II. Dual admission with English deficiency
- III. Conditional admission

I. Full Admission with English Proficiency

The English proficiency requirement can be fulfilled by A, B, C, D or E below.

- A. Receipt of a baccalaureate or higher degree from UWM, or another accredited institution where English is the language of instruction (as determined by the Center for International Education – CIE). Applicants whose native language is not English also must meet the following criteria:
 - A1. the applicant must have attended this institution for at least one year; and
 - A2. the applicant must have lived and worked in the U.S. continuously since receiving the degree, OR must have received the degree within the previous two years of the application date.
- B. Submission of official TOEFL** (Test of English as a Foreign Language) results with a minimum required score of 79 on the Internet-based TOEFL (IBT) and a minimum recommended sub-score of 18 in each skill).
- C. Submission of official IELTS** (International English Language Testing System) results with a minimum required score of 6.5, with a minimum recommended sub-score of 6.0 in each skill.
- D. Submission of official CAE** (Cambridge English: Advanced aka Certificate of Advanced English) or CPE** (Cambridge English: Proficiency aka Certificate of Proficiency in English) results with a minimum required level of C1 and a minimum recommended score of 170 on any given language skill test.
- E. Submission of other test scores deemed by UWM to be reliably equivalent to a C1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). Procedures for determining CEFR equivalents are outlined in Appendix A.

** Programs are not obligated to accept students in dual and/or conditional admission status. Full admission with English proficiency is required for online programs.*

*** Test must have been taken within the previous two years of the application date. Some programs may require a higher minimum overall score on the test and/or on specific sub-scores.*

II. Dual Admission with English Deficiency

A. Qualifications for dual admission

Applicants who do not meet any of the above (I.A. through I.E.), may be recommended for dual admission in academic coursework and English as a Second Language (ESL) coursework by fulfilling one of the following:

1. Submission of official TOEFL*** (Test of English as a Foreign Language) results with a minimum score of 68 on the Internet-based TOEFL (IBT) and a minimum sub-score of 16 in each skill. A minimum sub-score of 18 is recommended for the writing test.
2. Submission of official IELTS*** (International English Language Testing System) results with a minimum score of 6.0, and a minimum sub-score of 5.5 in each skill. A minimum sub-score of 6.0 is recommended for the reading and listening tests.
3. Submission of official CAE*** (Cambridge Advanced English) results with a minimum level of B2 and a minimum score of 160 on any given language skill test.
4. Submission of other test scores deemed by UWM to be reliably equivalent to a B2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR).

**** Test must have been taken within the previous two years of the application date. Some programs may not accept students in dual admission status. Some academic courses may not be suitable for dually admitted students before they reach full proficiency. Students need to talk with their graduate advisor and/or the course instructors before enrolling in their academic courses.*

B. Subsequent Demonstration of English Proficiency to Gain Full Admission

Subsequent to dual admission, the student may demonstrate English proficiency by

- a. presenting a new official TOEFL, IELTS, CAE, or CPE score that meets the English Proficiency requirement for full admission for the program of the student, or
- b. achieving a CEFR level of C1 (or higher level if required for a specific degree program) through assessment of a portfolio that includes the following:
 1. a grade of B or better in ESL 420 and passing the impromptu writing sample, and/or
 2. a grade of B or better in ESL 435 and passing a speaking test.

The portfolio will be assessed by a normed ESL portfolio committee. Upon demonstration of proficiency, the Graduate School will remove the English deficiency, and the student will gain full admission in the semester immediately following submission of the requisite scores or achievement of a passing portfolio. If proficiency is attained through submission of qualifying official test scores before the student arrives at UWM, the student's proficiency status will be changed to allow unrestricted enrollment.

C. Enrollment Requirements and Restrictions for Dual Admission

Graduate students in dual admission status must simultaneously enroll in their academic program and in English as a Second Language (ESL), subject to the following restrictions:

1. ESL instruction will be required each semester until the English deficiency is removed. Specific ESL courses (420 and/or 435) will be assigned based on areas of need identified by test sub-scores.
2. If the English deficiency is not removed within 3 enrolled semesters, the student will be dismissed.
3. The maximum academic course load is 6 graduate credits each semester until the English deficiency is removed.

III. Conditional Admission

A. Qualifications for Conditional Admission

International applicants with **exceptional academic credentials** who do not meet the English requirements for full or dual admission may be recommended for conditional admission under either of two circumstances.

1. The applicant has not submitted official TOEFL, IELTS, CAE, or CPE test scores due to
 - a. financial hardship, or
 - b. lack of access to a testing facility.

For these applicants, it is highly recommended that programs invite the candidate to a telephone or web-based interview, ask the candidate to submit available evidence of prior English language preparation, and/or ask the applicant's references to comment on his/her language skills.

2. The applicant's TOEFL, IELTS, or CAE test scores are below the minimum for dual admission.

In either case, the program must submit a justification for recommending conditional admission, which confirms their confidence that the student will be able to satisfy academic and English proficiency requirements within the established time limits for each. If the student is being recommended for admission without official TOEFL, IELTS, CAE, or CPE test scores, the program also must justify why such scores cannot be submitted prior to offering admission.

B. Students Conditionally Admitted Without Test Scores

1. ESL must be notified of students who are being admitted without test scores at least 5 weeks before the start of a semester.
2. These students must complete a placement assessment during the week before classes begin that comprises
 - a. the Institutional TOEFL* or other standardized test performed by ESL.
 - b. an impromptu writing sample, and
 - c. a speaking test.The writing sample and speaking test will be conducted and scored by ESL staff. The ESL programs office has the right to refuse to conduct this assessment when there is a lack of resources to support larger numbers of students. In such cases students will be placed in ESL courses based solely on the institutional TOEFL (or other standardized test) score and sub-scores.
3. Based on the results of the placement assessment, students will either
 - a. qualify for full admission based on meeting all of the following:
 - Minimum Institutional TOEFL score of 550
 - Minimum Reading and Listening sub-scores of 53
 - Minimum Writing sub-score of 56
 - Minimum CEFR level of C1 on the writing sample and the speaking test.
 - b. qualify for dual admission status based on meeting all of the following:
 - Institutional TOEFL score between 523 and 549
 - Reading and Listening sub-scores of 51 or 52
 - Writing sub-score of 54 or 55
 - Minimum CEFR level of B2 on the writing sample and the speaking test.

* Institutional TOEFL is approved by ETS for UWM's internal diagnostic use. The exam results are comparable to regular TOEFL, but they are not considered official.

c. Enter the full-time Intensive English Program (IEP) based on any the following:

- Institutional TOEFL score below 523
- Reading and Listening subscores below 51
- Writing subscore below 54
- CEFR level below B2 on the writing sample or the speaking test.

Students who are conditionally admitted without test scores and who fail to complete the placement assessment must complete at least one semester in the full time Intensive English Program.

C. Conditionally Admitted Students with Low Test Scores

Students whose test scores are below the minimum for dual admission must enter the full time Intensive English Program of ESL for at least one semester.

D. Subsequent Demonstration of English Proficiency for Dual Admission

Subsequent to conditional admission, the student may be changed to dual admission by

1. presenting a new official TOEFL, IELTS, CAE, or CPE score that meets the English Proficiency requirement for dual admission for the program of the student, or
2. by achieving a CEFR level of B2 through portfolio assessment after completion of at least one semester in the UWM Intensive English Program

Attainment of a B2 level will be demonstrated through a portfolio that includes all of the following:

- Institutional TOEFL score of at least 523
- An impromptu writing sample
- Speaking test

The portfolio will be assessed by a normed ESL portfolio committee.

Based on submission of a qualifying official test score, or portfolio assessment after completion of IEP, the Graduate School will change the student to dual admission status for the immediately following semester.

E. Enrollment Requirements and Restrictions for Conditional Admission

Graduate students in conditional admission status are subject to the following restrictions:

1. These students must enroll in a full-time ESL program, and achieve at least a CEFR B2 level within 2 semesters or the admission offer will be rescinded.
2. Conditionally admitted students are not allowed to take academic courses.
3. These students cannot be appointed in any Graduate Assistant position.

IV. Assessment of English skills for international students appointed as Teaching Assistants

A. An assessment of spoken English is required to appoint an international student as a Teaching Assistant unless the student has submitted official scores on one of the tests as follows:

1. 23 or better on the Speaking section of the internet-Based TOEFL (iBT)
2. 7.0 or better on the Speaking section of the IELTS
3. 185 or better on the Speaking paper of the CAE or the CPE

The test must have been taken within the previous two years of the application date.

B. Those who do not meet the criteria above must take the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee International Teaching Assistant Assessment (MITAA). The student may then be hired as a TA subject to the following:

1. score of 36 to 48 – no restrictions
2. score of 30 to 35 – the student must take the International Teaching Assistants oral skills ESL course, or an equivalent course approved by GFC, concurrent with the TA appointment.
3. score of 29 or less – the student must take the International Teaching Assistants oral skills ESL course, or an equivalent course approved by GFC, before the TA appointment begins.

Students will be re-tested after completion of one semester in the International Teaching Assistants oral skills class, and will be reassessed for the TA appointment based on the MITAA score ranges in III B 1-3 above.

V. Consideration of exceptional cases

The admissions staff of the Center for International Education (CIE) has discretion to determine whether this policy applies to applicants with circumstances not considered by the parameters of this policy. In so doing, the admissions staff will work with representatives from the program to which the student applied, the English as a Second Language program (ESL) program, and the Graduate School.

Appendix A
UWM Procedure for Determining CEFR Equivalency

The English proficiency policy for the Graduate School includes a provision to allow submission of “a test score deemed by UWM to be reliably equivalent to a C1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR)”. The following procedure will be established to determine if a test score or other language assessment is an acceptable replacement for TOEFL, IELTS or CAE (per proficiency policy above). Faculty oversight will be provided by GFC.

- A. The process for determining the validity of a language assessment will be initiated by **the institution administering the assessment, or by a UWM graduate program director or other graduate faculty member, in cooperation with graduate school administration**. When requesting approval from UWM, the administering institution will submit the following to UWM ESL program’s director who will copy appropriate staff from the Center for International Education and the Graduate School:
1. Documentation outlining the assessment procedures at the institution, including but not limited to sample assessment items, systems for evaluation and calculations of the statistical validity and reliability of the assessment.
 2. Procedures for the security of administering the assessment.
 3. In the case of a global appreciation of a student’s ability to perform, based on long term and multiple assessments over a period of time, documentation of the institutional student learning outcomes and the methods of assessment used to determine student attainment of those outcomes, and documentation of institutional accreditations.
- B. If UWM officials do not feel the above evidence is adequate for making a determination, further steps may be initiated, including:
1. Teleconferencing between UWM’s ESL experts and the institution’s experts to discuss instructional and assessment practices, and review the qualifications of instructors and administrators.
 2. Correlation studies of the institution’s assessments and other language assessments already accepted at UWM.

Appendix B
References

The working group reviewed the following information sources during their discussions

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

Introduction

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/CEFR_EN.asp#TopOfPage

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE1_EN.asp

Overview of CEFR levels and competencies

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key%20reference/Overview%20CEFRscales_EN.pdf)

[reg/Source/Key reference/Overview CEFRscales EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key%20reference/Overview%20CEFRscales_EN.pdf)

Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) test

Test components

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/advanced/whats-in-the-exam/>

Higher education institutions and Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE)

[http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/advanced/why-choose-the-](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/advanced/why-choose-the-exam/institutions/)

[exam/institutions/](http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/advanced/why-choose-the-exam/institutions/)

Understanding score results

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/advanced/results/>

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/cambridge-english-scale/institutions/>

Cambridge English: Proficiency (CPE) test

Test components

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/proficiency/whats-in-the-exam/>

Understanding score results

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/proficiency/results/>

International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

Guide for Organisations

http://www.ielts.org/PDF/Guide_Edu-%20Inst_Gov_2013.pdf

Score processing and reporting

http://www.ielts.org/researchers/score_processing_and_reporting.aspx

Understanding score results

<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams/ielts/results/>

<http://www.ielts.org/PDF/Writing%20Band%20descriptors%20Task%201.pdf>

<http://www.ielts.org/pdf/Writing%20Band%20descriptors%20Task%202.pdf>

http://www.ielts.org/pdf/Speaking%20Band%20descriptors_2014.pdf

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

Understanding score results

<http://www.ets.org/toefl/institutions/scores/interpret/>

Scoring rubrics

http://www.ets.org/s/toefl/pdf/toefl_speaking_rubrics.pdf

http://www.ets.org/s/toefl/pdf/toefl_writing_rubrics.pdf

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Working group on English proficiency 2013-15

Sukanya Banerjee, GFC representative, and Associate Professor, Department of English

Rosemarie Feiza-Lenz, Senior Lecturer, UWM English as a Second Language Programs

Erin Fox, Assistant Dean for Graduate Education, Graduate School

Joyce Hamm, Student Status Examiner Senior, Graduate Education, Graduate School

Kathleen Koch, Director, Strategic Initiatives in Research, Educations, and Scholarship,
Graduate School and Office of Research

Larry Kuiper, Director, UWM English as a Second Language Programs, 2013-14, and
Associate Professor, Department of French, Italian & Comparative Literature

Michael Liston, Associate Dean, Graduate School, and Professor, Department of Philosophy

Heidi Matera, Interim Director, UWM English as a Second Language Programs, 2014-

Peter Paik, APCC representative, and Associate Professor, Department of French, Italian &
Comparative Literature

Gabriel Rei-Doval, GFC representative, and Associate Professor, Department of Spanish and
Portuguese

Jennifer Singer, Assistant Director for International Admissions, Center for International
Education

Mark Sondrol, Senior Lecturer and MITAA & Spoken English Coordinator, UWM English
as a Second Language Programs

Kristene Surerus, GFC chair, and Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry

Jon Welstead, GFC representative, and Professor, Department of Music

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