



Competence in two languages is necessary but not sufficient for any translation task. Though the translator must be able to (1) read and comprehend the source language and (2) write comprehensibly in the target language, the translator must also be able to (3) choose the equivalent expression in the target language that both fully conveys and best matches the meaning intended in the source language (referred to as *congruity judgment*).

The prerequisite language skills for translation (reading in the source language and writing in the target language) are tested separately from translation skills themselves. Language proficiency testing serves as a screening tool and may provide a preliminary indication of the individual's potential as a translator. However, to assess translation skills, a translation test that measures the individual's ability to exercise congruity judgment and apply a translation methodology successfully must be used.

Various non-linguistic factors have an impact on performance, such as the time allotted to deliver the product. Familiarity with the subject matter and the socio-cultural aspects of either or both source and target languages may also affect performance. Given previous knowledge of these factors or appropriate training, an individual with limited skills may be able in certain instances to produce renditions of various texts that might be useful for specific purposes. On the other hand, an otherwise skilled translator who

lacks subject matter knowledge or who is unfamiliar with certain socio-cultural aspects may provide an unreliable translation of some points if he or she has no access to relevant resources.

Moreover, analytical and research skills as well as adeptness in using translation tools and resources (such as monolingual dictionaries and glossaries, on-line aids, and consultation with experts) allow the individual to proceed methodically and verify the appropriateness of the equivalents chosen. Such specialized skills must be acquired through training and practice.

The complexity of the translation task increases with the complexity of the text to be translated. Accordingly, the individual's performance range will depend on the degree to which competence in all the necessary skills combine in order to produce a rendition that is useful to a reader not familiar with the source language. Hence, the need for product review and oversight diminishes as the performance level rises. Nonetheless, any translation of potential importance should, to the extent possible, be subject to review for accuracy by another qualified individual.

In summary, an individual's translation performance level depends on (1) command of two languages, (2) ability to exercise congruity judgment and apply a translation methodology, (3) familiarity with the cultural context of both languages, (4) knowledge of terminology in specialized fields, and (5) ability to finalize the product within time constraints and according to specifications.

Individuals should be assigned to tasks within their performance range. To facilitate this correspondence, the Skill Level Descriptions for Translation are divided into three bands: Minimal Performance (levels 0+ to 1+), Limited Performance (levels 2 and 2+), and Professional Performance (levels 3 to 5).

Examples of tasks and texts appropriate for each level are provided. Each level implies control of all functions at the lower levels. The "plus level"

designation is used to describe performance which substantially exceeds the next lower skill level but for any reason does not fully meet the criteria for the next higher level.

The **Minimal Performance Levels** (0+ to 1+) are characterized by weaknesses in all of the requisite skills. Translation is not possible at these levels.

The **Limited Performance Levels** (2 to 2+) are characterized by weaknesses in one or more of the requisite skills. Renditions prepared by individuals at these levels should not be considered professional translations, and should be subject to rigorous quality control with feedback as a means of development toward professional status.

It is at the **Professional Performance Level 3** that all necessary skills begin to align and enable production of a reasonably accurate and reliable translation.

At **Professional Performance Level 4** (and above) an individual's competence and expertise combine to produce an accurate and reliable translation of a variety of texts ranging from simple to complex.


It must be noted that language tasks often associated with translation, such as gisting and summarizing a text, are not included in this document, since such tasks require skills distinct from translation skills.

Level 5 (Professional Performance) :

Can successfully translate virtually all texts, including those where lack of linguistic and cultural parallelism between the source language and the target language requires precise congruity judgments and the ability to apply a translation methodology. Expression is flawless. At this level, the translator consistently excels in a number of specialties, and is generally regarded as one of the arbiters of translating very high level language by

persons competent in dealing with such material. Nonetheless, the resulting product may be subject to quality control.

Level 4+ (Professional Performance Plus) :

Can successfully apply a translation methodology to translate texts that contain highly original and special purpose language (such as that contained in religious sermons, literary prose, and poetry). At this level, a successful performance requires not only conveying content and register but also capturing to the greatest extent all nuances intended in the source document. Expression is virtually flawless. Can produce fully accurate translations in a number of subject fields. When the need arises to perform in areas outside of specialization, a translator at this level is able to reach a successful level of performance given the time necessary for acquiring the relevant knowledge of the subject matter. The resulting product is a professional translation which may be subject to quality control. 


Level 4 (Professional Performance) :

Can successfully apply a translation methodology to translate a wide variety of complex texts that contain difficult, abstract, idiomatic, highly technical, and colloquial writing. Able to capture subtleties, nuances, and tone and register (such as official, formal, and informal writing). Such texts range from commentary reflecting a specific culture to analysis and argumentation. Linguistic knowledge and familiarity with source language norms enable an individual at this level to translate handwritten documents and other texts that represent spontaneous expression characteristic of the source language. Expression reflects correct usage and consistent control of target language conventions. Can translate materials outside the individual's specialties, but may not reach the absolute subject matter accuracy of the specialist in the given field. The resulting product is a professional translation which may be subject to quality control.

Level 3+ (Professional Performance) :

Can generally translate a variety of texts, such as many scientific or financial reports, some legal documents and some colloquial writings. Can convey the meaning of many socio-cultural elements embedded in a text as well as most nuances and relatively infrequent lexical and syntactic items of the source language. Expression reflects target language norms and usage. May be able to operate in fields outside areas of specialty. The resulting product is a draft translation, subject to quality control.

Level 3 (Professional Performance) :

Can translate texts that contain not only facts but also abstract language, showing an emerging ability to capture their intended implications and many nuances. Such texts usually contain situations and events which are subject to value judgments of a personal or institutional kind, as in some newspaper editorials, propaganda tracts, and evaluations of projects. Linguistic knowledge of both the terminology and the means of expression specific to a subject field is strong enough to allow the translator to operate successfully within that field. Word choice and expression generally adhere to target language norms and rarely obscure meaning. The resulting product is a draft translation, subject to quality control. 

Level 2+ (Limited Performance):

Can render straightforward texts dealing with everyday matters that include statements of fact as well as some judgments, opinion, or other elements which entail more than direct exposition, but do not contain figurative language, complicated concepts, complex sentence structures, or instances of syntactic or semantic skewing. In these types of texts, the individual can read source language materials and render them accurately into the target language, conveying the key points and/or main ideas, supporting facts, most of the details, and some nuances. Can usually operate in more than one narrowly defined subject field, using both linguistic knowledge of the languages involved and familiarity with the subject matter. A tendency to

adhere to source language structures may result in target language expressions that may appear to be correct but are awkward or perhaps unidiomatic. Such expressions may sometimes obscure meaning. The resulting product is not a professional translation and must be subject to quality control.

Level 2 (Limited Performance) :

Able to render into the target language some straightforward, factual texts in the standard variety of the source language. Can typically render accurately uncomplicated prose (such as that used in short identification documents, simple letters, instructions, and some narrative reports) that does not contain figurative language, complex sentence structures, embedding, or instances of syntactic or semantic skewing. Can normally rely on knowledge of the subject matter to operate within one given subject field, consisting of a narrow body of material that is routine, repetitive, and often predictable. Expression in the target language may be faulty, frequently reflecting the structure and word order of the source language. To the extent that faulty expression may obscure or distort meaning, accuracy will suffer. The resulting product is not a professional translation and must be submitted to quality control.

Level 1+ (Minimal Performance) :

Able to scan source language texts for specific categories, topics, key points and/or main ideas, generally rendering an accurate report on these but often missing supporting facts and details. Can to some extent render factual materials, such as records or database entries, often relying on real-world knowledge or familiarity with the subject matter. Oversight and review of the product are necessary.

Level 1 (Minimal Performance):

Able to make word by word transfers, not always with accuracy. May be able

to identify documents by their label or headings and scan graphic materials, such as charts and diagrams, for items of specific interest. Constant oversight and review of the product are necessary.

Level 0+ (Minimal Performance)

Able to transfer very little information from one language into another, usually representing isolated words and/or phrases. Accuracy is haphazard. Constant oversight is required.

Level 0 (Performance)

Has no practical ability to transfer information from one language into another. 🔄