
The Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments

Background of the MLPA

The University of Minnesota has long sought to ensure that its students acquire measurable second language proficiency. Through its language policies and requirements, the University of Minnesota has also sought to have an impact on language instruction in secondary institutions across the state.

The Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments include: 1) instruments created for the purpose of articulating second language programs across and within secondary and postsecondary systems, and 2) instruments appropriate for assessing the performance of students fulfilling a proficiency-based college language requirement.

The assessments were modeled on instruments and procedures used at the University of Minnesota, where:

- incoming students who wish to continue their postsecondary language study in second-year French, German, or Spanish courses must pass a battery of language proficiency tests.
- students in the College of Liberal Arts fulfill their language requirement by passing proficiency tests and an oral interview.

To address problems of articulation across secondary and postsecondary programs, the Minnesota Articulation Project (MNAP) brought together language test developers from CARLA and 50 language teaching professionals at the secondary and postsecondary levels from across the state to set standards, develop curriculum, and create assessments. For the purpose of articulation, the Intermediate-Low level of the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines was selected, and several of the instruments in this battery were developed during the course of this project.

The instruments developed to measure fulfillment of a postsecondary second language requirement target the ACTFL Guidelines' Intermediate-High (reading and

listening) and Mid (writing) levels and were developed at CARLA in collaboration with language departments at the University of Minnesota.

Purpose of the MLPA

In order to offer coordinated and continual sequences of language instruction, educators need to work toward common goals. The Intermediate-Low level MLPA are intended to determine that students have attained minimal proficiency in a second language. MNAP members selected the Intermediate-Low level as a reasonable benchmark for:

- Students completing their secondary studies and entering college
- Students completing one year of language study at the college level

Faculty at the University of Minnesota's College of Liberal Arts (CLA) set the goal for graduation at the Intermediate-High level for reading and listening, and at the Intermediate-Mid level for writing and speaking. Generally, U of M students study a second language for two years at the college level (or the equivalent thereof) in order to pass the assessments.

The MLPA were designed to be easily administered to large groups as well as to individuals. The contextualized tasks in our assessment instruments place test takers in realistic situations where they need to use the target language. Every effort was made to assess skills in the most direct manner possible while ensuring practicality of administration and scoring.

The MLPA that are currently available through CARLA include the:

- Contextualized Reading Assessment (CoRA) at the Intermediate-Low and Intermediate-High levels in computer-administered or pencil-and-paper format
- Contextualized Listening Assessment (CoLA) at the Intermediate-Low and Intermediate-High levels in computer-administered format
- Contextualized Writing Assessment (CoWA) at the Intermediate-Low and Intermediate-Mid levels in computer-administered or pencil-and-paper format
- Contextualized Speaking Assessment (CoSA) at the Intermediate-Low level for tape-mediated administration

Features of the Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments

- The MLPA include **performance-based** assessments that measure second language proficiency along a scale derived from the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.
- **Reliability** coefficients from data collected to date range from .81 to .85 for the CoRA; .89 to .92 for the CoWA; .76 to .94 for the CoSA. Interrater reliabilities for the CoWA and CoSA are consistently above .90. These figures are considered acceptable for tests of this type.
- The assessments may be administered as a **battery**, or institutions may elect to administer one or more modalities in accordance with their needs to measure learner outcomes.
- **The assessments are easy to administer.**
- **Demographic information** is solicited so that population characteristics can be considered along with test scores.
- All items and tasks have been extensively **field tested** and refined.
- Reading texts in the CoRA are **authentic and varied**.
- Training manuals provide samples for rating writing and speaking performance.
- CARLA staff can help you **interpret results and set cut scores** appropriate for your population and testing purposes.
- The passing cut score on all assessments can be **calibrated** to individual institutions' needs.

Contextualized Reading Assessment - CoRA

Assessing Reading Proficiency

The Contextualized Reading Assessment (CoRA) is a 35-item, multiple-choice test in French, German, and Spanish. It is available in a self-scoring, computer-administered format or a pencil-and-paper format. The computer-administered test generates score reports and data files, and it includes an optional background questionnaire. Information from the background questionnaire may be helpful in making placement and other programmatic decisions. Samples of reading items and output files appear below.

The number of readings within the test varies by language, but on average there are 12 texts with an average of three questions per text. Each text is contextualized for test takers so that they can form expectations about topic and text type before reading. Authentic readings on diverse topics from a variety of sources are united within a theme in which the reader is motivated to interact with L2 texts.

CARLA devised a theoretical, research-based framework to guide item development for the CoRA, and this framework is discussed at length in CARLA Working Paper Series #1: Chalhoub-Deville, M., Alcaya, C., & McCollum Lozier, V. (1996). *An Operational Framework for Constructing a Computer-Adaptive Test of L2 Reading Ability: Theoretical and Practical Issues*.

Texts included in the CoRA are evaluated along several scales. The text content scale refers to the generalizability of topic interest. Organizational characteristics scales refer to linguistic complexity (simple vs. complex sentence structure, basic vs. non-basic vocabulary) and the complexity of textual development (sequential vs. non-sequential). The cultural content scale refers to the amount of specific knowledge about the target culture and its conventions in written communication that the reader must possess to fully


comprehend the text. The appropriateness of any text cannot be determined by its position along any one scale; instead, we consider the text along all scales simultaneously. For Intermediate level readers, appropriate texts commonly:

- are about topics of general interest
- are organized sequentially
- are written in basic sentence patterns
- contain a high percentage of basic vocabulary
- do not require specific knowledge about life in the target culture
- do not require specific knowledge about the target culture's ways of presenting information in writing

Sample CoRA testlets in French, German and Spanish are displayed in the pages that follow. You can try the computer-administered test on the CARLA web site at <<http://carla.acad.umn.edu>>. To view the sample, you must have the Authorware Web Player plug-in installed on your hard drive. A link to the free plug-in download site is included on the Assessment page of the CARLA website.

Sample 1. A montage of screens from a horoscope testlet.

Horoscopes are popular in France. You find some horoscopes on a French magazine's website, and you look to see what they say.



Horoscopes: Question 1 of 4

Who is worried about changes at work? Click on the answer.

<p>SCORPION: Vous êtes un peu angoissé, car il y a des restructurations dans votre travail. Ayez confiance, tout se passera bien.</p>	<p>SAGITTAIRE: Vous cherchez à être le meilleur dans votre travail, et vous aurez le soutien de vos supérieurs. Excellente période.</p>
<p>POISSONS: Vous serez revalorisé dans votre travail. Une rentrée d'argent fera beaucoup de bien à votre compte en banque.</p>	<p>VERSEAU: N'ayez pas peur de vous montrer ambitieux dans votre vie professionnelle. Et sachez limiter vos dépenses</p>

skip

Horoscopes: Question 2 of 4

Who will have money problems? Click on the answer.

<p>BALANCE: Vous maintenez vos bonnes résolutions. Vous êtes soulagé, votre situation financière s'arrange enfin.</p>	<p>CAPRICORNE: La fatigue vous gagne mais, moralement, vous êtes en pleine forme.</p>
<p>BELIER: Bon gestionnaire, vous arrivez à équilibrer vos dépenses. En effet, depuis peu, vous avez appris à vivre en fonction de vos moyens.</p>	<p>TAUREAU: Les factures attendues seront plus élevées que prévues. Il faut réduire votre train de vie quelque temps.</p>

skip

Horoscopes: Question 3 of 4

Who needs to find an outlet for excess energy? Click on the answer.

<p>GEMEAUX: Nerveux, ne vous laissez pas gagner par le doute; au contraire, il faut rester plus positif que jamais.</p>	<p>CANCER: Votre caractère énergique est admirable, mais il faut apprendre à contrôler votre émotivité et à montrer plus de calme.</p>
<p>VIERGE: Pour évacuer votre trop-plein d'énergie, multipliez les activités. Pensez surtout à une activité physique.</p>	<p>LION: Quelques bons petits plats équilibrés feraient du bien à votre santé et vous donneraient plus d'énergie. Pensez-y!</p>

skip

Horoscopes: Question 4 of 4

Who needs to get some rest? Click on the answer.

<p>LION: Si vous avez peur des changements dans votre vie, entreprenez un traitement (homéopathie, relaxation), mais pas un traitement de choc!</p>	<p>CANCER: Tendu et stressé, il faut absolument profiter de vos soirées et de vos week-ends pour vous reposer.</p>
<p>VIERGE: Evitez les gens déprimés qui pourraient vous décourager. Programmez des sorties et inscrivez-vous dans un club de gymnastique.</p>	<p>VERSEAU: N'hésitez pas à puiser dans votre vie affective le réconfort dont vous avez besoin!</p>

skip

Sample 2. Screens from a restaurant review testlet.

Geneva Resto.Guide
<http://anthropologie.unige.ch/Resto.Guide/>



Restaurant du Vieux-Moulin

Route d'Annecy, 89, 1256 Troinex
Téléphone: (022) 342 29 56

Spécialité: *Viande grillée*

Appréciation personnelle: *Comme ci, comme ça*

Qualité du service: *Bon*

Atmosphère générale: *Sympa*

Gamme de prix: *75 à 100 Frs.*

Le cadre est sympathique et appréciable.

Par contre, les plats sont quelconques et la carte très (trop) courte. Vous n'avez le choix qu'entre 4 plats de viande très communs (côte de bœuf, d'agneau, de porc et médaillons de veau grillés) et un saumon à l'aneth à des prix allant de 30 à 40 francs le plat.

Les vins sont chers et la carte n'indique pas la possibilité de commander du vin au verre, qui coûte beaucoup moins cher que les bouteilles proposées (premier prix: un Côte de Provence à 48 francs!).

En résumé, le patron devrait profiter davantage de ce site très sympathique et offrir un peu plus de choix et de fantaisies à ses clients, sans cela... (le restaurant était à trois-quart vide un vendredi soir).

Restaurant: Question 1 of 2

What is one of this restaurant's strong points?

- a The menu
- b The chef
- c The ambiance
- d The wine list
- skip

Restaurant: Question 2 of 2

What is one of this restaurant's shortcomings?

- a It is hard to find.
- b The menu is limited.
- c The portions are too small.
- d The waiters are rude.
- skip

Sample 3. Screens from a postcard testlet.

A friend shows you a postcard she received from her mother who was in Germany visiting her family.



Liebe Familie,
Hier sind wir drei bei wunderbarem blauen Himmel angekommen. Die Bustour war eine tolle Idee. Das Autofahren wird ständig stressiger und Cosima will nicht so leicht still sitzen. Bei Onkel Ferdinand in Calw war es ganz schön. Es geht ihm besser und die neue Wohnung gefällt ihm gut. Sie liegt direkt im Stadtzentrum. Schade-die Zeit vergeht so schnell. Morgen unternehmen wir eine kleine Radtour, um die herrliche Gegend kennenlernen. Hier ist die Zeit fast stillgestanden. Cosima möchte Kühe sehen und Schafe füttern. Bis bald,
Bussi,
von eurer Mutti. Auch liebe Grüße von Tante Gabi und Cosima



Ansichtskarte: Question 1 of 2

Where does Onkel Ferdinand live?

- a On a farm
- b In the suburbs
- c In the mountains
- d Downtown
- skip

Ansichtskarte: Question 2 of 2

What will Mutti, Tante Gabi and Cosima do tomorrow?

- a Take a bike ride.
- b Visit Onkel Ferdinand.
- c Take a bus tour
- d Go to the city.
- skip

Sample 4. Screens from a headlines testlet.



You have an assignment in your German class to find information on specific topics. You begin by eliminating some of the headlines that you find in online publications.

Titel: Question 1 of 4

Click on the headline that DOES NOT relate to WEATHER.

Milde Temperaturen locken Touristen ans Meer

Starke Gewitter im Süden-Mann von Blitz verletzt

Sommerferien im Ausland oft teuer

Anhängendes Tief-weiterhin wolkig

skip

Titel: Question 2 of 4

Click on the headline that DOES NOT relate to SPORTS.

In letzter Sekunde-Tor für Heidelberger Team

13jährige im National-Handballpokal

Maher an dritter Stelle mit 280 km pro Stunde

Solinger Hausfrau verliert Haus im Casino

skip

Titel: Question 3 of 4

Click on the headline that DOES NOT relate to POLITICS.

100.000 Besucher im Stadtmuseum

Grüne versprechen mehr Arbeitsplätze

EU debattiert Rindfleisch Exporte

Neustadt wählt Bürgermeister

skip

Titel: Question 4 of 4

Click on the headline that DOES NOT relate to EDUCATION.

Laut Umfrage: Mathe ist Lieblingsfach

Kinder essen oft ungesund

Nicht nur für Schule, sondern für's Leben lernen

Technologische Krise: 500.000 Computers fehlen den Schulen

skip

As you scan some Spanish want-ads online, you bookmark a few of them for friends.

Clasificados: Question 1 of 2



Your friend Marisol has always dreamed of driving a limo. Click on the ad that she should check out.

Compañía de prestigio solicita:
Agente de ventas para todo tipo de automóviles
789-3365
Pregunte por José

¡Barato!
Pinta tu carro o camioneta a precio bajo.
Llame hoy, al teléfono
680-2277

Solicito Choferes
Hombre o mujer,
licencia con record limpio
¡¡Llame ya!!
Tel. 761-4666

Aseguranzas de auto y de vida
Llámenos hoy, ¡no tarde más!
Teléfono:
952-8582

skip

Clasificados: Question 2 of 2



Bret wants to take some computer courses. Click on the ad that would most interest him.

Instituto de Computación
busca a instructores de las aplicaciones comerciales de más demanda.
Interesados llamen al
550-8861.

Ventas: computadoras
Quadra 650 y Compaq Desktop en excelentes condiciones. Más detalles al tel.
526-2960.

Es Usted: **técnico, programador, consultante, etc...**
Anúnciese en este periódico. Haga de sus habilidades un negocio.
988-6245

¡Visite nuestro centro hoy mismo!
Registración para el verano empieza ya. Se ofrecen seminarios en computación a todos niveles.
Tel. 953-5692

skip

Sample 6. Screens from a news article testlet.

This article about a young man who cannot graduate with his class appears on the *El periódico* website.



Prohiben a estudiante panameño de 17 años graduarse porque se casó

PANAMA, DIC 13 (AFP) - Un colegio secundario de orientación evangélica prohibió a un estudiante de 17 años que reciba su diploma de graduación con sus compañeros, por haberse casado con su novia de 16 años a quien había embarazado, informó la familia a medios locales.

"Por contraer matrimonio le están aplicando una sanción" al joven Daniel Vega, dijo su padre, Luciano Vega, y acusó al colegio, el Instituto Panamericano (IPA), de violar el Código de la Familia y el Menor de Panamá.

Medios de prensa y radio pidieron este viernes al colegio que reconsidere la decisión, porque viola los derechos del estudiante "castigado por ser responsable".

El director del IPA, Rogelio Smith, se justificó, diciendo que si el estudiante Vega "no se hubiese casado, sería un menor dependiente", pero al contraer matrimonio se convirtió en "un menor emancipado", lo que impide que participe en los actos y baile de graduación.

Según el Código, aprobado hace un año, no se puede impedir a un menor recibir educación por razones de embarazo o conflictos personales.

Matrimonio: Question 1 of 2

What position does the news media take on this incident?

- a They refuse to take a position on this matter.
- b They believe that the school's action is wrong.
- c They have called Daniel Vega irresponsible.
- d They support the school's decision.

skip

Matrimonio: Question 2 of 2

Why can't Daniel Vega attend graduation ceremonies?

- a Because he got married to avoid criminal prosecution
- b Because his marriage violates Panamanian family law
- c Because his parents did not approve of his marriage
- d Because his status as a dependent child changed

skip

Sample 7. Sample Intermediate-High French testlet

You come across an article about elephants in South Africa.

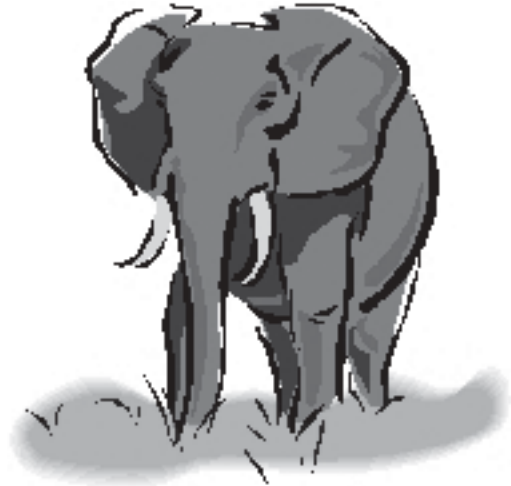
Des éléphants délinquants

Comme les enfants, les jeunes éléphants ont besoin de discipline s'ils veulent devenir des membres raisonnables de la société, fait remarquer *New Scientist*.

Les zoologistes racontent que dans la réserve naturelle de Pilanesberg, en Afrique du Sud, des éléphants mâles orphelins sont devenus délinquants parce qu'ils n'avaient jamais été pris en main par leurs aînés. Ces éléphants solitaires ont attaqué des humains, tué à coups de défenses 19 rhinocéros blancs en trois ans et même tenté de s'accoupler avec ce genre de mammifère.

Deux personnes ont trouvé la mort: parmi elles, un chasseur professionnel envoyé pour abattre un éléphant qui avait chargé un groupe de touristes. Dans chaque cas, l'animal délinquant faisait partie d'une troupe de jeunes mâles qui avaient été déplacés du Parc national Kruger vers la réserve, après que le reste du troupeau avait été supprimé pour limiter la population des éléphants.

Quoique plusieurs facteurs aient contribué à rendre ces pachydermes nerveux, les zoologistes pensent que le manque de discipline et d'éducation de la part des animaux plus âgés, données importantes dans la vie familiale des éléphants, est en partie au moins la cause de leur comportement lunatique. Dorénavant, seules des familles entières seront déplacées; ainsi, conclut l'article, les jeunes mâles continueront à recevoir la discipline parentale stricte dont ils ont besoin.



<http://www.webecois.com>

1. What did zoologists observe about orphaned male elephants?
 - a. They have a high mortality rate.
 - b. They exhibit aggressive behavior.
 - c. They join other elephant herds.
 - d. They are afraid of other mammals.

2. Why were some young elephants moved from Kruger National Park?
 - a. The food supply was exhausted.
 - b. Their herds were killed.
 - c. Tourists invaded the park.
 - d. Hunters threatened the elephants.

3. What did zoologists learn about elephant herds?
 - a. Herds expel young male elephants.
 - b. Herds must compete for territory.
 - c. Herds shun members that do not conform.
 - d. Herds teach the young how to behave.

Sample 8. Sample Intermediate-High German testlet

You find the following article about a robbery on the Autobahn.

Spektakulärer Überfall auf Geldtransporter

Auf der Autobahn 5 bei Heidelberg haben vier schwerbewaffnete Männer bei schlechtem Wetter mehrere hunderttausend Mark gestohlen. Die Gangster hatten einen VW-Bus auf der A 5 Basel-Frankfurt quer in die Ausfahrt Ladenburg gestellt und so den Geldtransporter gestoppt. Die Räuber waren mit einer Maschinenpistole und einem Revolver bewaffnet. Sie zwangen die Geldboten zum Aussteigen, fesselten sie mit Handschellen und nahmen vier Aluminiumkoffer.

Anschließend stiegen sie in den VW-Bus und fuhren im dichten Nebel weg. Die sofort eingeleitete bundesweite Fahndung der Polizei blieb bislang erfolglos.

Der Geldtransporter hatte die Tageseinnahmen mehrerer Mannheimer Geschäfte abgeholt. Die Polizei prüft nun, ob es Verbindungen zu einem ähnlichen Coup in Hessen gibt. Im November hatten Räuber in Rodenbach bei Hanau eine hohe Summe erbeutet. Bei diesem Überfall war auch ein Kleinbus benutzt worden, und auch dann war das Wetter dicht mit Feuchtigkeit.

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Veränderungen von CARLA

1. How did the robbers stop the armored truck on the A5 Autobahn?
 - a. The robbers hit the truck.
 - b. The robbers faked a flat tire.
 - c. The robbers blocked the road.
 - d. The robbers impersonated policemen.

2. What helped the robbers escape?
 - a. The weather was bad.
 - b. It was during the night.
 - c. They crossed the border.
 - d. They used a stolen car.

3. What possibility are police investigating?
 - a. There is a police accomplice
 - b. There is a connection to a previous robbery
 - c. The robbery is connected to illegal weapons sales
 - d. The security guards are involved in the robbery

Sample 9. Sample Intermediate-High Spanish testlet

You find a Guatemalan site containing interviews of people who are 100 or more years old. This is an excerpt of an interview with María Arango.

Cien años no es nada

- **¿Qué pasó para su cumpleaños, para la Revolución de Octubre del 44?**

“Yo pasé muchas penas pero no tanto como para la caída de Cabrera ¿A oído usted mencionar a Cabrera?”.

- **Sí**

“Bueno, él no quería dejar la presidencia hasta que se levantó el pueblo, entonces hubieron balas por todos lados, fue en 1920; resulta que yo trabajaba en la perfumería Sierra y me subí al techo, para ver si veía a Manuel (Amaya, quien sería después su esposo), pero en eso una bala me quemó aquí, todavía tengo aquí la seña (me muestra la cicatriz en su antebrazo derecho), la bala regresó, se me enrolló en el cuerpo pero no me entró por ningún lado”.

- **¿Cómo conoció a su esposo?**

“Pues en 1916 lo fui conociendo. Mi mamá los domingos me decía vamos miya, vamos al parque y allí había bandas o una orquesta, íbamos a oír marimba y todo muy en orden los niños jugaban, no había pena de que se fueran a robar a un niño... Había unas bancas en alto que ponían para que la gente pudiera apreciar lo que había. Pues yo estaba subida arriba, yo vi a Manuel, Manuel me vio a mí, pero fue una mirada que ya no nos pudimos dejar.. Esperó que bajáramos y nos siguió y vio donde vivíamos. Pero nos acercamos ya como para un noviazgo desde 1918 y nos casamos en 1921”.

- **¿Qué recuerda de cuando era niña?**

“Creo que no hubo alegría, me acuerdo mucho que mi mamá era un poco... bastante delicada, se enojaba muy seguido con su esposo, entonces yo de chiquita salía corriendo al patio a pedirle a Dios que mi mamá no se fuera a ir. Porque por cualquier cosa me decía nos vamos, miya, pero el señor era muy bueno”.



<http://www.prensalibre.com.gt/especiales/cien/009.htm>

1. What happened to María Arango in 1920?
 - a. She was hit by a stray bullet.
 - b. She was burned in a fire.
 - c. She was crushed in the crowd.
 - d. She fell from a roof.

2. What happened the day María saw her future husband, Manuel?
 - a. Manuel played with a band in the park.
 - b. Manuel climbed up the bleachers to get María's attention.
 - c. Manuel followed María and her mother home.
 - d. Manuel predicted María would be his wife.

3. What does María remember about her childhood?
 - a. There was much happiness in her family.
 - b. She and her mother prayed together on the patio.
 - c. Her mother's health was delicate.
 - d. She feared her mother might leave her husband.

Sample output files. The computer-administered CoRA and optional background questionnaire generate four text files with information for test administrators. Examples of the output files are shown below. The data files can be copied to a spreadsheet or analysis program if you wish to perform analyses at your site.

The **score report** contains test taker ID information and scores:

LANGUAGE	LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	MI	ID NUMBER	TOTAL	ADDT'L INFO
FRENCH	Nightengale	Lisa	M	468-36-2204	8	April 24, 1999
FRENCH	Tibary	Ahmed		222-00-3434	13	April 24, '99
FRENCH	Steineman	Gita	V	777-88-9999	14	4/24/99
FRENCH	Jefferson	Keeshon	R	493-27-4413	35	4/24/99

For students who respond to the optional **background questionnaire**, a report is created with information that may be useful in making placement decisions:

Demographic Data for Nightengale, Lisa M

SCORE:	8
ID NUM.:	468-36-2204
SCHOOL:	Land o'Lakes High School
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:	April 24, 1999
LANGUAGE:	French
AGE:	19-21 years
GENDER:	Female
RACE/ETHNICITY:	White
ENGLISH NATIVE LANGUAGE?	Yes
FRENCH SPOKEN AT HOME?	No
TIME IN FRENCH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY?	Less than 1 month
FATHER'S EDUCATION:	College BA/BS
MOTHER'S EDUCATION:	Technical/2 year college
TIME SINCE LAST FRENCH CLASS:	1 year
FRENCH LEVELS STUDIED:	3 levels
FRENCH GRADES:	A's and B's
ENGLISH GRADES:	Mostly A's
LIKELY TO TAKE FRENCH CLASSES?	Undecided
LIKELY TO MAJOR IN FRENCH?	Unlikely
LAST YR. OF HS COMPLETED:	Grade 12
HIGH SCHOOL GPA:	3.00-3.49
LEVELS OF FRENCH TAKEN IN COLLEGE:	
COLLEGE GPA:	

The **data_1.txt** file contains test takers' ID information, answers to questions, and score:

French	Nightengale	Lisa M	468-36-2204	April 24, 1999	a c d a [...]	c a c d	8
French	Tibary	Ahmed	222-00-3434	April 24, '99	b b d d [...]	d c b a	13
French	Steineman	Gita V	777-88-9999	4/24/99	b b c a [...]	b b c a	14
French	Jefferson	Keeshon R	493-27-4413	4/24/99	b b d d [...]	a a c a	35

The **data_2.txt** file indicates right and wrong responses (1/0 for SPSS analysis):

French	Nightengale	Lisa	M	468-36-2204	April 24, 1999	0 0 1 0 [...]	0 1 1 0 8
French	Tibary	Ahmed		222-00-3434	April 24, '99	1 1 1 1 [...]	0 0 0 1 13
French	Steineman	Gita	V	777-88-9999	4/24/99	1 1 0 0 [...]	0 0 1 1 14
French	Jefferson	Keeshon	R	493-27-4413	4/24/99	1 1 1 1 [...]	1 1 1 1 35

Contextualized Listening Assessment - CoLA

Assessing Listening Proficiency

The Contextualized Listening Assessments (CoLA) have been developed for the Intermediate-Low and Intermediate-High level. The CoLA are 35-item assessments in which test-takers listen to mini-dialogues organized around a story line and respond to multiple-choice questions. The characters in the story engage in a variety of real-life interactions appropriate for assessing proficiency at the Intermediate level. Each situation is contextualized through the use of photographs and advance organizers. It is available in French, German, and Spanish in a computer-administered format. An Intermediate-High level CoLA for Italian is in development.

A number of features have been incorporated to reduce test anxiety. Test takers control when the recorded segments are played by clicking on an icon; in this way they have time to employ test taking strategies, such as activating schema in anticipation of what they will hear, reading the question before listening, etc.. They also have the choice of listening to each segment once or twice. During our pilot testing of the CoLA, we found that test takers wanted, and usually took advantage of, the opportunity to listen to the segment a second time. They indicated frustration, however, if they were required to listen to a segment a second time when they felt they had already understood it.



Sample screen from French CoLA

Contextualized Writing Assessment - CoWA

Assessing Writing Proficiency

The Contextualized Writing Assessment (CoWA) is a test of written proficiency at the Intermediate-Low and Mid levels of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The CoWA model is thus an efficient choice in situations where it is necessary to establish that the writer's performance meets a minimal criterion, such as for fulfilling a graduation requirement or as a criterion for placement in postsecondary intermediate level course sequences. It is available in computer-administered and pencil-and-paper formats.

Features of the CoWA include:

- All tasks in the CoWA are organized around a theme. Each task is preceded by a context description which relates the task to the overall theme. The contextualized tasks engage the test taker in a logical sequence of events with realistic writing tasks to accomplish in the target language.
- All tasks in the CoWA target language functions, topics, and discourse within situations appropriate to the Intermediate level. Together the tasks represent the domain of Intermediate performance.
- All tasks in the CoWA are preceded by an optional brainstorming, warm-up activity. Test takers are thus provided an opportunity to organize and focus their responses.

How to take the CoWA

There are pencil-and-paper and computer-administered versions of the CoWA available. After reading the instructions and overall theme for the assessment, test takers work through the segments of the CoWA at a comfortable pace. As an optional warm-up exercise, test takers are invited to jot down their thoughts in English or the target language before they begin writing each task. Possible topics to include in the response are included in the instructions to each task, but respondents are not limited to these suggestions. Test takers respond to five tasks with a minimum of seven sentences for each one.

A sample Intermediate-Low CoWA task, as it appears in the test booklet of the pencil-and-paper version, is included below. French, German and Spanish tasks are identical except for changes in names and places to fit the target culture.

All segments in the CoWA are organized around a theme. The theme for the sample below is *Keeping a Journal*:

Your teacher has given you a chance to earn extra credit in your French/German/Spanish class by keeping a journal in French/German/Spanish. You decide to take advantage of the offer. After looking at the assignment, you decide to start right away.

For each segment, a description of the situation contextualizes the writing task.

Segment 1: A great day

Situation: Your teacher tells you to think about what a really great day is like for you, and to write about it in your journal.

Warm-up: Think about your idea of a great day, then take a minute to fill in the following chart in French/German/Spanish or in English.

- Your surroundings (location, sights, sounds, smells, etc.):
- What you do:
- Whom you are with, if anyone:

Task: Describe, in French/German/Spanish, your idea of a great day. You might want to include: 1) a description of your surroundings; 2) what you do; 3) whom you are with, if anyone; 4) how you feel.

Describe your great day in seven to ten sentences in French/German/Spanish.

An Intermediate-Mid level Spanish task appears below. The assessment is organized around the theme of an opportunity to study and work abroad.

Because a good way to learn a language is to live in a country where the language is spoken, the Spanish Department at your school has started a new intersession program in which students spend the month of January at a partner institution in Costa Rica. Students can work at a variety of student jobs and take classes as well. You decide to apply.

Situation: Professor Villar from the Spanish Department gives you the name of Amalia Solano Pérez, the student liaison at the partner school. Amalia will help screen the applicants for the program. You e-mail Amalia because you're curious about this opportunity and about the kinds of jobs that are available to students. Since this is your first contact with Amalia, you explain why you are writing and tell her a little about yourself and your qualifications to study and work in Costa Rica.

Task: In an e-mail message, introduce yourself to Amalia, tell her why you are writing and why you are a good candidate for the program. In your e-mail you might include:

- where you got Amalia's name
- why you are contacting her
- a request for information about jobs
- your qualifications for studying and working in Costa Rica (for example, your education, your talents, your previous work experience)
- anything else you want Amalia to know about you in this first contact.

Introduce yourself to Amalia, tell her why you are writing and why you are a good candidate for the program. Write at least eight sentences in Spanish.

Contextualized Speaking Assessment - CoSA

Assessing Oral Proficiency

The Contextualized Speaking Assessment (CoSA) is a test of oral proficiency at the Intermediate-Low level of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. It is modeled on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI), developed and disseminated by the Center for Applied Linguistics.

The CoSA is a tape-mediated instrument requiring students to listen to a master cassette while recording their responses on a second cassette. Individuals taking the test need only a quiet area and two tape recorders. The test can also be administered to large groups in a language lab or large room, such as an auditorium, library, or cafeteria. In the language lab, the master cassette is played on the console and student responses are recorded at individual stations. In settings where a language lab is not available, test takers are provided individual recorders and are spread out in a large space where they will not disturb each other during the test. The master cassette is then played over a public address system or a large tape player.

The CoSA has several important differences from the OPI and the SOPI:

- The CoSA certifies proficiency at one level of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The CoSA model is thus the most efficient choice in situations where it is necessary to establish that the speaker's performance meets a minimal criterion, such as for fulfilling a graduation requirement or as a criterion for placement in postsecondary intermediate level course sequences.
- The CoSA requires little time to administer—about 20 minutes. The Intermediate-Low CoSA consists of five scored tasks, a warm-up and a wind-down.
- In the CoSA, all scored tasks target language functions, topics, and discourse within situations appropriate to the Intermediate level.

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- All tasks in the CoSA are organized around a theme. Each task is preceded by a description of the context which relates the task to the overall theme. The contextualized tasks engage the test taker in a logical sequence of events with a limited number of interlocutors.

How to take the CoSA

While listening to the master cassette, test takers follow along in the test booklet. After listening to the instructions, a sample response, and a description of the overall theme for the test, the test takers are presented with situations and topics for their responses. All instructions are provided in English.

In each segment, after listening to a description of the situation and the task, test takers are allowed 15 seconds “thinking time” to plan what they will say. They then hear a prompt in the target language. The prompt is not printed in the test booklet. Following the prompt, test takers are given 60 seconds in which to provide a response. A tone sounds after 55 seconds to alert test takers that their time is almost up. A second tone sounds five seconds later when time is up.

A sample CoSA task, as it appears in the test booklet, is included below. French, German and Spanish tasks are identical except for changes in names and places to fit the target culture.

All segments in the CoSA are organized around a theme. The theme for the sample below is *The New Exchange Student*:

It's the first week of school, and when you walk into class, you see the new exchange student sitting by herself. You introduce yourself to Christine/Kristina/Cristina, who says that she is from Brussels/Frankfurt/Lima, and that she has just arrived in the United States. You have been studying French/German/Spanish, and you'd like to make her feel welcome.

Test takers first read the context for the task:

Segment 1

Christine/Kristina/Cristina wonders about you: where you're from, how old you are, what you're studying, and so on. Wait until you hear Christine/Kristina/Cristina speak, then tell her about yourself.

Thinking time: 15 seconds
Speaking time: 60 seconds

15 second pause for student to think about what to say, then student hears, but does not see, a prompt:

French "Parle-moi un peu de toi."

German "Kannst du mir etwas über dich erzählen?"

Spanish "Y tú, cuéntame de ti."

Student then has 60 seconds in which to respond.

Order Form

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By default, the COLA, CoRA, and CoWA generate a score report and data file. The CORA also generates a student background report. MLPA CD-ROMs contain instructions for collecting this data at your site. You may wish to consult with your technical support staff and consider your needs for test security. If you have questions, contact CARLA at (612) 626-8600 or by mail at MLPA@umn.edu.