The National Examinations in World Languages (NEWL™)

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About the National Examinations in World Languages (NEWL): ARABIC

The NEWL: Arabic test is a proctored online assessment requiring approximately three hours for administration, including a scheduled 15 minute break. The exam consists of four subtests, all of which assess functional proficiency or performance in Arabic within interpersonal, interpretive, presentational modes of communication, based on authentic text and speech samples. The NEWL: Arabic is designed to provide a set of measures of functional proficiency in Arabic for use as a predictive assessment for continued language study beyond high school. This test reflects best practices in the field of language assessment and is innovative in its construct and design.

The NEWL: Arabic is modeled after the Prototype AP® Russian Examination, the only high school-to-college articulation examination available in the Russian field. That exam has been overseen by the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR), a subsidiary of the American Councils for International Education, and has been offered each spring at the time of other AP test administrations since 2004.

The principal performance metrics for the NEWL: Arabic are *language proficiency* and *performance*. The assessment does not directly target learning achievement or the accumulation of specific grammatical, literary, or historical knowledge. Test specifications reflect the most recent draft of the "World Languages Framework" (College Board, 2006), and the proficiency guidelines developed by American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Test items are based on the tasks, skill domains, and performance indicators published by the National Standards in Foreign Education Project (2015). These *Standards* and the ACTFL *Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners* represent some of the best current thinking among second language specialists about how well students should perform in a foreign language, taking into account the student's particular stage in the learning process and the relative difficulty of the target language.

The four sections of the exam are:

Reading Comprehension (60 minutes)
Listening Comprehension (45 minutes)
Presentational Writing (30 minutes)
Interpersonal Listening/Speaking (30 minutes)

Each of the exam sections contribute equally to the overall final grade. The National Examinations in World Languages targets language skills at levels of difficulty that are appropriate for high school language test-takers beginning with Novice High through Intermediate High.

The *reading comprehension* section consists of short, authentic texts followed by one to three multiple-choice questions in English. Text types are varied and include a formatted layout, such as announcements, schedules, and brochures, as well as paragraph length. The topics range from personal information, basic needs, social conventions, and routine tasks, to formal announcements, pamphlets, etc., and to more advanced topics with lengthier prose text. Topics are those that will be of interest to high school students taking the exam, address both the interpersonal and interpretive modes of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Language* (NSFLEP, 2015), and are in keeping with the Fairness and Equity guidelines as put forth by Educational Testing Services (2009).

Also in multiple-choice format, the *listening comprehension* section closely parallels that of reading comprehension. Authentic spoken stimulus passages may include oral texts, conversations, announcements, radio clips or reports. In listening comprehension, the test-taker functions in several different roles, depending on the audio stimulus. For example, the test-taker may function as an over-hearer of a conversation or monologue, or may function as the addressee, if the audio is addressed to the test-taker. Again, topics range from personal information, basic needs, social conventions, and routine tasks to formal announcements and reports over the media, to more advanced topics with extended discourse, such as interviews, short lectures, and news items. Similar to reading, topics will be of interest to the high school test-taker, and topics address the interpersonal and interpretive modes of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Language* (NSFLEP, 2015).

The *Presentation Writing (PW)* section is administered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language Teachers/Language Testing International (ACTFL/LTI). The writing assessment consists of several targeted short notes and emails to peers and teachers. Test-takers are assessed in terms of how they present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and adapting to various audiences of listeners, readers, or viewers. The presentational mode of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Language* (NSFLEP, 2015) is addressed in this section of the test.

Finally, the *Interpersonal Listening/Speaking (ILS)* section is also administered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language Teachers/Language Testing International (ACTFL/LTI). The Arabic speaking assessment has different versions for female and male test-takers. The test-takers

are evaluated in how well they can express information, reactions, feelings and opinions in spoken conversations. The ILS tasks are designed to provide multiple opportunities within the same content area to demonstrate ability at the floor level (what the test-taker can do consistently at that level) as well as multiple opportunities to demonstrate performance at the ceiling level (what the test-taker cannot do at the next higher level). For example, all Intermediate Interpersonal Listening/Speaking tasks ask the test-taker to speak in language using sentence-level discourse on everyday topics in predictable contexts.

Teaching Standards

Detailed standards for teaching Arabic for proficiency have been worked out by members of the Arabic teaching field with assistance from government and professional associations. American Councils' senior language experts in Arabic, including Professor Alaa El-Gibali and Dr. Jerry Lampe have led extensive professional development programs in proficiency and standard-based testing for teachers in Egypt and Morocco in recent years. The Arabic-specific guidelines have been published by ACTFL in Arabic and are available here: http://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012/arabic

The website describes the levels of language proficiency in the reading, listening, speaking and writing modes and provides examples in the different target levels.

A fruitful discussion concerning practical pedagogy issues of these guidelines is published as the "Arabic Consensus Project" at, the result of several years of consultation and consensus building within the Arabic field, including suggested guidelines on the use and functioning of Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic forms within the academic testing environment: http://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012/arabic/arabic-consensus-project

Certified Testing Centers

The NEWL exam—comprising reading, listening, writing and speaking—must be administered online in a certified computer lab in a high school, university or public library. To qualify as a testing center, an institution must be able to provide at least one point of contact for technical support and have enough Internet-connected computers to accommodate the number of students registered for test administration. Each computer must meet the following basic requirements:

> **Operating System:** Windows or Mac OSX
> **Bandwidth:** 3-4 hours of reliable throughput for each examinee at 1 Mbps.
> **Web Browser:** Internet Explorer, Chrome, Firefox, or Safari
> **Flash Plugin**: Version 11+

AC will work directly with prospective centers to ensure that basic technical requirements are met and guide the technical point of contact through the lab certification process in the week preceding the exam.

Support for Arabic Writing

In the written portion of the exam, students will be asked to type several short notes and emails in Arabic. The instructions for the writing test are spoken, so the system's headphones must be working. The online testing system supports the standard Arabic keyboard layouts on both Mac and Windows systems.
For more information about supported keyboards, visit the following link: http://aappl.actfltesting.org/AAPPLSystemCheck/index.htm

Support for Arabic Speaking

In the spoken portion of the NEWL exam, test-takers are asked to present verbal narratives of their own which are instantly encoded in a digital file. For this task to proceed successfully, each workstation's microphone and speakers must obviously be connected and activated.

Technical Support

AC will provide support to lab technicians during the lab certification process to ensure that all input methods are available to students when they are asked to type as well as real-time chat support for proctors throughout the test administration.

Language Proficiency Standards

Following the administration, a standard setting will be held in order to determine the cut scores, which will map the scores of the multiple-choice reading and listening sections to the ACTFL proficiency scale. For the standard setting meeting, a group of panelists, comprising a variety of language experts including high school teachers, college or university professors and ACTFL Certified Testers, will convene to establish performance standards. Because of time requirements for the standard setting, exam results will be available in the second week of July.

Scoring the National Examinations in World Languages

Students' scores on the writing and speaking sections are combined with the results of the computer-scored multiple-choice questions. The composite scores for the National Exam in World Languages are then converted to a 5-point scale, comparable to the College Board's AP® grade.

NEWL 5-point grade	Suggested Semester Placement
5	5th (first semester of third-year)
4	4th (second semester second-year)
3	3rd (first semester of second-year)
2	2nd (second semester of first-year)
1	1st (first semester of first-year)

Score reports show a grade on the 1-5 scale with a grade level of 5 reflecting the highest proficiency. In addition, the report presents sub-scores of proficiency levels for each of the skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. These sub-scores contribute to a student profile of proficiency level(s) reached within each skill. The table above offers colleges, universities, and Department faculty suggestions for placement and/or credit, based on the final grade on the National Exam in World Languages. However, each college or university develops and maintains its own policies for credit and/or placement, based on a student's result on the National Exam in World Languages.

References

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The Arabic-specific guidelines:
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