

About the Prototype AP® Russian Language and Culture Examination

The Prototype AP: Russian test is intended for secondary school students of Russian language who wish to engage in rigorous university-level study before high school graduation. The Prototype AP Russian Language and Culture course is designed to provide students with a learning experience equivalent to that of an upper-intermediate (approximately second year) college-level Russian language course. Both traditional and heritage learners¹ are encouraged to take the Prototype AP Russian Language and Culture course, a standards-oriented, proficiency-based course designed for students at Intermediate High to Advanced Low on ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) scale.² Such a course enriches students of all backgrounds in understanding Russian culture and furthering language proficiency. At the completion of the course, students are encouraged to take the Prototype AP Russian Language and Culture Exam. The exam is designed to provide a set of measures of functional proficiency in Russian for use as a predictive assessment for continued language study beyond high school and as a placement tool by American colleges and universities for entering freshmen with prior study of Russian.³

With its focus on proficiency, the Prototype AP Russian Examination is largely independent of any specific Russian curriculum in measuring student performances. It addresses the question, “How well do students perform in the language?” Test specifications reflect *The College Board World Languages Framework* and the proficiency guidelines developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Test items are based on the tasks, skill domains, and performance indicators published in the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (W-RSLL)*.⁴ The *World-Readiness Standards and the ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners* represent some of the best current thinking among second language specialists on how well students should perform in a language (other than English), taking into

¹ *Native speakers* are individuals whose first or primary language is Russian and were educated principally in Russian in Russian speaking countries. *Heritage learners* are speakers of Russian heritage who were educated primarily in the U.S. and learned Russian at home; they differ from native speakers in that they were not educated in Russia.

² See the ACTFL proficiency scale at www.actfl.org

³ See Marshall, Camelot. “Examining the Validity of the 2010 Prototype AP® Russian Exam through a College Comparability Study,” in *The Russian Language Journal* (Volume 60, 2010).

⁴ National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (NSFLEP). (2014). *World-Readiness standards for learning languages (W-RSLL)*. Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved from: <http://www.actfl.org/publications/all/world-readiness-standards-learning-languages>.

account the student's particular stage in the learning process and the relative difficulty of the target language.

Consistent with the World-Readiness Standards for Russian, performance targets are presented at different proficiency levels in three modes of communication (presentational, interpretive, and interpersonal) and six domains (comprehensibility, comprehension, language control, vocabulary, cultural awareness, and communication strategies).

The Prototype AP Russian Examination is an Internet-distributed linear test lasting about 3 hours for administration, with a separately administered Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). This means that, except for the speaking section, each candidate takes the exam at his or her own computer terminal, in a proctored environment. Prior to the online exam administration, the OPI is administered by a certified tester at pre-scheduled time. Most OPIs in this program are administered by telephone.

The Prototype AP Russian Exam: Construct⁵

The Prototype AP Russian examination consists of four subtests, all of which are aimed at the direct assessment of functional proficiency within interpersonal, interpretive, presentational modes of communication, based on authentic speech samples.

The four sections of the exam are:

Reading Comprehension (60 minutes)

Listening Comprehension (45 minutes)

Integrated Written Communication (IWC) (70 minutes)

Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) (15-25 minutes)

Each of the exam sections contribute equally to the overall final Prototype AP grade. The Prototype AP Russian Examination targets language skills at levels of difficulty that are appropriate for American second language learners of Russian, beginning with Novice High through Intermediate High levels.

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,

⁵ The word construct is used here in the broad sense to denote the concept or characteristic that the test is designed to measure. *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999, American Educational Research Association, (p.5).

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 and address both the interpersonal and interpretive modes of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* and are in keeping with the *Fairness and Equity* guidelines as put forth by Educational Testing Services.

Also a multiple-choice section, the listening comprehension closely parallels that of the reading comprehension section. 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.⁶ 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 *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, while keeping with the *Fairness and Equity* guidelines as put forth by Educational Testing Service.

The Integrated Written Communication (IWC) section of the exam is meant to assess the students' overall language abilities across three skills. The goal is not the accumulation of facts in isolation, but rather the integration of knowledge and abilities in order to put their proficiency to use in a wider context. The writing section of the exam consists of Integrated Tasks.

The integrated tasks portion of the exam is "intermodal" and it requires students to function in more than one skill in order to work through a real-life situation. The test-takers are given two scenarios, each having two prompts (listening audio and reading passage), with each prompt requiring an extended written response. For example, a scenario might begin with an e-mail text (reading), requiring a written response, followed by a voice mail message (listening), requiring another written response, with the combination creating a contextualized situation. The information that test-takers use to compose their response(s) is provided in the listening and reading texts, and students have a choice of keyboard layout (phonetic or standard) for their Russian fonts. Students are instructed in English as to what the written task entails. Both the interpersonal and presentational modes of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* are addressed in this section of the test.

⁶ Listening tasks are often divided into three broad categories: participatory (where the hearer is actively participating (speaking) in a conversation), nonparticipatory (such as listening to a college lecture or a phone message), and overheard (where it is not known that someone else is listening).

Finally, the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) of the exam follows the general procedures as established by the American Council of Foreign Language Teachers (ACTFL) for oral proficiency interviews. A trained tester conducts the oral proficiency interview over the telephone, and the interview typically lasts fifteen minutes for non-heritage speakers and twenty minutes for heritage speakers. The oral assessment remains authentic and unique to each student, allowing the student to demonstrate his or her highest sustainable proficiency level in speaking.

Certified Testing Centers

The Prototype AP Russian—comprising reading, listening and writing—must be administered online in a certified computer lab, which may be located in a high school, university or public library. To qualify as a testing center, an institution must have enough Internet-connected computers to accommodate the number of students registered for test administration and be able to provide at least one point of contact for technical support. 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.

Scoring the Prototype AP Russian Exam

Students' scores on the writing and speaking sections are combined with the results of the computer-scored multiple-choice questions. The multiple-choice scores are converted to proficiency scores using cut-scores, which are set during a standard setting meeting. The scores on each section are combined and their appropriate weighted contribution to the final composite score is factored in. The composite scores for the Prototype AP Russian Language and Culture Exam are converted to the 5-point AP scale:

Prototype AP 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)