

Determining Language Proficiency

Determining language proficiency for job applications or resumes, in the United States, can be difficult because there are no universal standards of measurement.

Education.com states that “Language proficiency is a measurement of how well an individual has mastered a language. Proficiency is measured in terms of receptive and expressive language skills, syntax, vocabulary, semantics, and other areas that demonstrate language abilities. There are four domains to language proficiency: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Language proficiency is measured for an individual by each language, such that the individual may be proficient in English and not proficient in another language.”

The following information should help you to assess your language proficiency level so that you can more accurately represent it on your resume and job application. This overview of common language terms and possible definitions was compiled from numerous sources.

- **Basic Knowledge** – This is an elementary level equivalent to 101 or 102 college courses. Knowledge of vocabulary words, ability to speak simple phrases or sentences, have some difficulty understanding native speakers, elementary reading and writing skills.
- **Conversant** - An intermediate level where the speaker is able to handle a variety of uncomplicated, basic, and communicative tasks and social situations. Can talk simply about their self and family members. Can ask and answer questions and participate in simple conversations on topics beyond the most immediate needs. Reading and writing skill may or may not be at the same level.
- **Proficient** – The word, proficient, means a well advanced skill level. In terms of language, the “proficient” label can refer to someone who is very skilled in the use of a language but who uses the language less easily and at a less-advanced level than a native or fluent speaker. Caution: this term is over used and many people don’t bother to use it to define their true level of ability.
- **Fluent** - A high level of language proficiency, in this instance we are referring to proficiency of a foreign language or another learned language. At the fluent level, a speaker will have *fluid* speech as opposed to halting use. Generally, a person who is fluent in a foreign language will show mastery in the following areas:
 - Read: the ability to read and understand texts written in the language
 - Write: the ability to formulate written texts in the language
 - Comprehend: the ability to follow and understand speech in the language
 - Speak: the ability to produce speech in the language and be understood by its speakers.
- **Native Language / Native Speaker** – The language that is your primary language. This is usually learned during childhood and is considered your “mother-tongue”. A native speaker is more than fluent—he correctly and easily uses his first language, in a proper sense as well as understands and can use colloquialisms, idioms and slang.
- **Bilingual** - The dictionary definition of “bilingual” is “using or able to use two languages with equal fluency.” Unless all languages are spoken with equal strength, the term “bilingual” really doesn’t apply.