What are CAN DO Descriptors?

The five grade level cluster CAN DO Descriptors- PreK-K, 1-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12- are examples of expectations of English language learners for each of the four language domains—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and five levels of English language proficiency—Entering, Beginning, Developing, Expanding, and Bridging. The CAN DO Descriptors are a collective representation of WIDA's five English language proficiency standards—social and instructional language, the language of language arts, the language of mathematics, the language of science, and the language of social studies. The Descriptors are a standards-based resource tool—an extension of, not a substitute for, the English language proficiency standards.

Why were grade level cluster CAN DO Descriptors created?

The original K-12 CAN DO Descriptors were expanded into grade level cluster descriptors at the request of administrators and teachers serving English language learners within the Consortium. Grade level cluster descriptors more accurately communicate the performance of English language learners within a specified age range. As a result, the Descriptors can be more closely synchronized to language and content instruction.

How were the CAN DO Descriptors developed?

WIDA, in collaboration with the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), underwent a multi-step process from November 2007 through August 2008 to maximize the involvement of educators across Consortium states. The following is a partial listing of the steps related to the development, refinement, and validation of the Descriptors: we

1. conducted a full day professional development workshop for select teachers of English language learners to draft initial sets of grade level cluster descriptors;
2. sought input from WIDA consultants and prior WIDA course participants to evaluate the descriptors and give suggestions for expanding the sets (Round 1);
3. analyzed survey data and edited grade level cluster sets to produce Draft 2;
4. devised a checklist from the draft descriptors to offer to all Consortium states
5. collected survey data on Draft 2 from educators across WIDA states (Round 2);
6. analyzed data on individual grade level cluster descriptors;
7. devised a system based on the results (percentage of acceptability) for dealing with each descriptor to produce Draft 3; and
8. vetted, edited, and produced final grade level cluster CAN DO Descriptors.

What research was involved in the validation of the CAN DO Descriptors?

What was our overall goal?

Our primary intent of this project was to validate a series of CAN DO Descriptors as a means of confirming the meaning of the WIDA English language proficiency levels and language domains. This information, used in conjunction with our analysis of data from our large-scale English language proficiency test, ACCESS for ELLs[®], and our English language proficiency standards provides a fuller understanding of the construct of academic language proficiency.

Who was involved in the project?

Initially, groups of educators, corresponding to the five grade level clusters, created draft CAN DO Descriptors as a product of a professional development workshop. For round 1 of data collection, 63 educators who had preciously participated in WIDA professional development activities and were highly familiar with the English language proficiency standards were selected to take an on-line survey. In round 2 of the validation process, a total of 835 educators, primarily teachers and ESL Coordinators from 13 WIDA states, responded to a shortened on-line survey.

How were the data collected and analyzed?

Demographic data provided insight into the characteristics of the survey takers. In round 1, using the web-based tool Survey Monkey, consultants answered yes/no questions for four criteria on each proposed CAN DO Descriptor:
- Is this descriptor clear?
- Is this descriptor appropriate for grade cluster (PreK-K, 1-2, 3-5, 6-8, or 9-12)?
- Is this descriptor appropriate for the language domain of (listening, speaking, reading, writing)?
- Is this descriptor appropriate for proficiency level (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)?

A fifth question, "If you answered no to any question, how can this descriptor be improved?" enabled the participants to modify or add descriptors, thereby, producing an expanded set.

In round 2, again using Survey Monkey, teachers and coordinators across Consortium states accepted or rejected each CAN DO Descriptor for the selected grade level cluster generated from round 1 and had an opportunity to offer comments.

What were the findings?

For Round 1, overall means were calculated for the four questions for each draft CAN DO Descriptor. Qualitative data from comments and suggestions for additional descriptors helped informed creating Draft 2 of the CAN DO Descriptors.

For Round 2, Draft 2 of the CAN DO Descriptors was validated by teachers and coordinators. Tables were produced with the percentage of acceptability for each CAN DO Descriptor by grade level cluster and language domain. The results were then color-coded: descriptors which fell below 70% acceptability were eliminated, those within the 70-74% acceptability range were edited, and those with 75% acceptability and above were generally accepted. From Draft 3, individual descriptors were tweaked for clarity, and examples were added, to produce the final five sets of grade level cluster CAN DO Descriptors.

How might the grade level cluster CAN DO Descriptors be used?

What assumptions underlie the Descriptors?

The CAN DO Descriptors do not function like Model Performance Indicators, the basic component of the English language proficiency standards' matrix. Figure 1 highlights the differences between these two.

Figure 1. The differences between CAN DO Descriptors and Model Performance Indicators.

CAN DO Descriptors	Model Performance Indicators
Are applicable across the five English language proficiency standards	Are contextualized within each English language proficiency standard
Are topic-neutral	Are topic-specific
Function independently within a given level of language proficiency	Scaffold from one level of language proficiency to the next across the strand
Do not operate within a specific framework	Are specified within a formative or summative framework

Both Model Performance Indicators and CAN DO Descriptors are concise statements. To maintain their succinctness, some basic assumptions need to be made in interpreting the CAN DO Descriptors and Model Performance Indicators.

1. Visual, graphic, or interactive supports, although not systematically included in the CAN DO Descriptors, are present through language proficiency level 4, Expanding.
2. English language learners can process or produce the *language* associated the stated Descriptor or Model Performance Indicator.
3. Linguistic complexity, vocabulary usage and language control increase incrementally as English language learners progress from one English language proficiency level to the next.
4. There is a range of performance within each level of English language proficiency, from students who are just starting to those completing a given level.

How might school leaders use the CAN DO Descriptors?

The CAN DO Descriptors are a resource, in addition to the English language proficiency standards, for schools serving English language learners. As a guide for outlining an expected range of language performance for English language learners, school leaders may use the Descriptors to:

- share with community leaders, organizations, and Boards of Education;
- explain English language proficiency data (i.e., the results from ACCESS for ELLs®, the W-APT™, or WIDA MODEL™);
- set school improvement goals;
- work with school or district committees;
- provide resource teachers within a school or district, such as Title I or literacy coaches, additional information on English language learners.

How might teachers use the CAN DO Descriptors?

As an instructional assessment tool that supplements the English language proficiency standards, language teachers may use the Descriptors to:

- share with classroom teachers as a way to describe or explain the stages of English language development using concrete examples;
- work with content teachers to show language may be integrated within a given discipline or content area;
- use to plan with tutors or mentors who work with English language learners;
- develop or co-develop lessons with differentiated language objectives;
- set language goals with their English language learners;
- explain students' progress in listening, speaking, reading and writing to parents/ family members;
- suggest language goals to be incorporated into Individual Education Programs (IEPs) for English language learners with diagnosed disabilities;
- translate English language proficiency test scores (i.e., ACCESS for ELLs®, the W-APT™, WIDA MODEL™) into instructional practice;
- observe and note levels of student performance as a precursor to using WIDA Speaking and Writing rubrics for formative assessment;
- advocate on behalf of English language learners to show what they CAN DO.

You are welcome to contact WIDA with any additional ideas you might have for using the CAN DO Descriptors using the contact information below!

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