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Reference Framework
for the Oral Communication Competencies
of Second-Language Learners

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With the additional assistance of some 300 pedagogical counsellors, teachers and students in immersion programs across Canada.

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Reference Framework for the Oral Communication Competencies of Second-Language Learners

The Reference Framework for the Oral Communication Competencies of Second-Language Learners is based primarily on an extensive review of the literature on oral communication competencies in second-language learning, more particularly, learning French. It has also drawn largely from *The Common European Framework of References for Language* (CEFR), drafted by the Council of Europe. In addition, certain dimensions particular to immersion teaching and learning have been incorporated.

Finally, since our objective was to develop a user-friendly tool for teachers, students and their parents, we opted for a concise, six-level reference framework that is easy to understand and use. In this case, we decided to include a Level 0, which corresponds to a student that does not speak the second language at all. Mastery of second-language oral skills, also called *oral communication competencies*, is determined by six main parameters. They are frequently found in the literature, but they also arose from the consultations and group discussions held with teachers and pedagogical consultants from the five main Canadian regions. These parameters are:

- General communication skills
- Vocabulary
- Grammar and syntax
- Presence of the first language (L1)
- Rhythm and intonation
- Pronunciation

Finally, we should note that many of the teachers and pedagogical counsellors we met said that one of the particular features of immersion and second-language learning is that the transition from one level to the next is not always smooth. Certain psychological factors may even cause students to regress, which came as a surprise to many of the parents.

Multidimensional evaluation grid for oral communication competencies in a second language (L2)

This multidimensional evaluation grid is designed to help teachers use the Reference Framework for the Oral Communication Competencies of Second-Language Learners (www.acpi.ca/referenceframework/). First, it enables an evaluation of several dimensions of the student's oral communication skills (competencies) in the second language (L2), categorized under the six parameters of the Reference Framework (General communication skills, Vocabulary, Grammar and syntax, Presence of L1, Rhythm and intonation, and Pronunciation). Most importantly, this grid allows an identification of the student's strengths and weaknesses in oral communication. Regular use at school can also facilitate assessment of the learner's progress and prompt teachers to prioritize certain teaching/learning activities. To use the grid, the teacher should circle the level that the student achieves on each parameter. There are two ways to calculate the final score: TOTAL points, with the same value given to each parameter, or a WEIGHTED TOTAL, with some parameters given more weight in the calculation (e.g., greater emphasis is placed on general communication skills, vocabulary, etc.). The teacher may choose the most suitable calculation method.

Student's name : _____   Class : _____   Date : _____   Level achieved : _____

	General communication skills	Vocabulary	Grammar and syntax	Presence of L1	Rhythm and intonation	Pronunciation
Level 0 **Complete beginner** **(0 point per parameter)**	· The learner seems unable to express himself orally in L2. · The learner demonstrates possible understanding of questions by responding in L1.	· The learner does not use L2 words or statements, aside from a few very simple expressions (*Hello, Yes/No*).	· The learner does not use appropriate grammatical structures.	· The learner uses only L1 to communicate with peers. · The learner answers in L1 when addressed in L2.	· The learner is unable to produce any L2 output.	· The learner does not know the L2 phonetic system.
Level 1 **Beginner** **(1 point per parameter)**	· The learner sometimes asks and answers very simple questions, usually literal translations concerning day-to-day situations, as long as the speaker agrees to repeat and help the learner reformulate sentences. · The learner usually stops producing when he does not know how to express his ideas.	· The learner has a very limited vocabulary, related to day-to-day situations. · The learner generally uses stereotyped words and statements, which are either isolated or inserted into L1 sentences. · The learner cannot use simple paraphrases for unknown words. · The learner does not know the rules for use of prefixes and suffixes to express opposition, repetition, negation, etc. · The learner occasionally uses idioms. · The learner knows no or few informal words.	· The learner has a very limited use of memorized grammatical forms and syntactic structures. · The learner uses grammatical forms and syntactic structures in their written form. · The learner has difficulty using common suffixes to express plural, gender, verb tense, etc.	· The learner always uses L1 to communicate with peers. · The learner responds to questions with a single word in L2, or else answers in L1. · The learner may begin speaking in L2 and then switch to L1 once difficulties arise.	· The learner's output is characterized by many long pauses to search for words. · The learner has difficulty marking declarative, interrogative, exclamatory and imperative sentences, which limits communicative intent.	· The learner makes many pronunciation errors that hinder comprehension. · The learner has frequent difficulties with sound sequences in words and sentences.
Level 2 **Basic** **(2 points per parameter)**	· The learner can formulate short messages. · The learner can make himself understood in short conversations and in simple day-to-day situations. · The learner can ask and answer simple questions, but does not understand enough to sustain a conversation on his own. · The learner can substitute another, more accessible message for a difficult message.	· The learner produces short sentences using common expressions. · The learner has a limited vocabulary. · The learner can sometimes use simple paraphrases for unknown words. · The learner makes regular errors in the use of common prefixes and suffixes to express opposition, repetition, etc. · The learner occasionally uses certain memorized idioms. · The learner knows some informal words, but sometimes uses them inappropriately.	· The learner uses some simple connectors (*and, but, because*). · The learner makes elementary grammatical and syntactic errors. · The learner still uses grammatical and syntactic structures in their written form. · The learner regularly makes errors in the use of common suffixes to express plural, gender, verb tense, etc.	· The learner sometimes uses L2 with peers, sometimes L1. · The learner uses L1 when he cannot express his needs in L2. · The learner regularly makes literal translation and transposition errors in L2. · The learner regularly uses L1 syntax in L2 output.	· The learner pauses frequently. · The learner can correctly mark declarative, interrogative, exclamatory and imperative sentences.	· The learner makes pronunciation errors that hinder comprehension. · The learner can pronounce intelligible sound sequences, despite some errors.

	General communication skills	Vocabulary	Grammar and syntax	Presence of L1	Rhythm and intonation	Pronunciation
Level 3 Intermediate (3 points per parameter)	· The learner can formulate complete sentences on topics such as family, recreation, etc. · The learner can make himself understood in many oral situations. · The learner can ask someone else for help finding a word.	· The learner has a varied vocabulary, although sometimes imprecise. · The learner effectively uses paraphrases for unknown words. · The learner has mastered the use of common prefixes and suffixes to express opposition, repetition, negation, etc. · The learner has a repertoire of various idioms. · The learner knows the most common informal words and uses them appropriately.	· The learner draws on a repertoire of frequent common structures for use in predictable situations. · The learner relates and combines short elements. · The learner uses certain oral markers such as truncated negatives, ellipsis, substitution of the interrogative for the declarative, etc. · The learner has mastered the use of common suffixes to express plural, gender, verb tense, etc.	· The learner can communicate with peers in L2. · The learner occasionally uses L1 to talk about less familiar subjects. · The learner uses compensation strategies (e.g., paraphrases), often in L2.	· The learner pauses during long free-production sequences. · The learner clearly marks declarative, interrogative, exclamatory and imperative sentences.	· The learner makes pronunciation errors that do not hinder comprehension of the message. · The learner's diction is intelligible.
Level 4 Advanced (4 points per parameter)	· The learner can start, sustain, close and extend a conversation, while indicating good comprehension, etc. · The learner can formulate complete sentences that clearly describe something, express an opinion, or develop an argument. · The learner can spontaneously and coherently make himself understood in most oral communication situations. · The learner's contributions are suitable for the communication situation.	· The learner generally has a varied and accurate vocabulary. · The learner effectively uses paraphrases for unknown words. · The learner has mastered a large number of prefixes and suffixes to express opposition, repetition, negation, etc. · The learner uses a large number of prefixes and suffixes to correctly build new words. · The learner frequently and correctly uses a variety of idioms. · The learner has a large repertoire of informal words and uses them to adjust to the formality of the situation.	· The learner makes infrequent grammatical and syntactic errors, and usually self-corrects. · The learner can use a large number of oral markers, and knows the usage contexts and levels. · The learner uses connectors to structure output. · The learner uses a large number of suffixes to correctly build new grammatical structures.	· The learner can communicate with peers in L2 alone. · The learner uses some L1 words during spontaneous production on difficult concepts, or in spontaneous or unpredictable situations. · The learner uses compensation strategies (e.g., paraphrases), very often in L2.	· The learner pauses rarely, and generally briefly. · The learner usually produces a regular output. · Fluency is hampered only by difficult subjects. · The learner sometimes uses tonal register to express attitudes, states and feelings such as enthusiasm, disappointment, disapproval, etc.	· The learner rarely makes pronunciation errors that, however, do not hinder comprehension. · The learner's diction is clear.
Level 5 Expert (5 points per parameter)	· The learner can formulate complete, complex sentences and rephrase ideas in different terms. · The learner can make himself understood in all oral communication situations appropriate for his age group, with practically no limitations on self-expression.	· The learner has a very varied, rich and accurate vocabulary. · The learner correctly uses all L2 prefixes and suffixes to express opposition, repetition, negation, etc. · The learner uses a very large number of prefixes and suffixes to correctly build new words. · The learner spontaneously and appropriately uses idioms. · The learner has a large repertoire of informal words and uses them appropriately to adjust his tonal register and effectively express intent in a given communication situation.	· The learner uses a variety of linking words and connectors. · The learner rarely makes grammatical or syntactic errors, with practically systematic self-correction. · The learner readily and appropriately uses all oral markers. · The learner uses a large number of suffixes to correctly build new grammatical structures.	· The learner does not need to resort to L1 to communicate in all kinds of situations. · The learner can communicate with peers in L2 only. · The learner uses compensation strategies (e.g., paraphrases) in L2 only.	· The learner speaks fluently and rhythmically. · The learner effectively uses tonal register to express attitudes, states and feelings such as enthusiasm, disappointment, disapproval, etc.	· The learner makes barely noticeable pronunciation errors. · The learner's diction is clear and neutral.
Total						
Weighted total	(___) X 8 = _____	(___) X 5 = _____	(___) X 3 = _____	(___) X 2 = _____	(___) X 1 = _____	(___) X 1 = _____
CALCULATION OF TOTAL / CALCULATION OF WEIGHTED TOTAL	Level 0 (0 – 3) Level 0 (0 – 14)	Level 1 (4 – 7) Level 1 (15 – 29)	Level 2 (8 – 13) Level 2 (30 – 49)	Level 3 (14 – 19) Level 3 (50 – 69)	Level 4 (20 – 25) Level 4 (70 – 84)	Level 5 (26 – 30) Level 5 (85 – 100)

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Level 0
Complete beginner

The learner does not seem to be able to express himself in the second language. He uses his first language (e.g., English or other language – L1) to communicate with peers. When asked a question in the second language, he answers in his first language, apart from a few elementary words like *Yes, No, Hello*, etc. He does not use grammatical structures, nor does he seem to know the L2 phonetic system, and he cannot produce any output in the second language. However, he may be able to answer in his first language to show he has managed to understand the question.

Level 1
Beginner

The learner uses few age-appropriate words or statements in the second language. They are generally clichés and are either isolated or inserted into sentences in his first language. The learner does not know the usage rules for grammatical suffixes to express plural, gender, verb tense, etc., or the lexical prefixes and suffixes to express opposition, repetition, negation, etc. Consequently, his vocabulary is very limited and concerns mainly day-to-day situations. However, the learner can occasionally use a few memorized fixed expressions (i.e. idioms). His output is characterized by many long pauses to look for words, to pronounce less familiar words, and to make up for evident communication deficiencies. He has difficulty marking sentences as affirmative, interrogative, exclamatory or imperative, which limits effective communication. Usually he also has trouble combining sequences of sounds intelligibly in words and sentences. He makes many pronunciation errors and has a very limited grasp of grammatical forms and syntactic structures, which he uses in their written form. The learner that has progressed to Level 1 can sometimes ask and answer very simple questions, usually using calques (literal translations from his first language), on topics relating to his day-to-day life, as long as the speaker is willing to repeat and help him reformulate his sentences. However, because he apparently cannot use paraphrases for words that he does not know, he tends to stop producing or else continues in his first language (English or other) when he is at a loss to express his ideas. He frequently resorts to his first language, especially when communicating with peers. Generally, he replies to questions with either a one-word answer in the second language or else answers in his first language.

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Level 2
Basic

The learner can formulate short messages that are appropriate for his age group. He can produce short sentences constructed of memorized expressions, some word combinations and common expressions. Occasionally, he can also use simple connectors (e.g., *and, but, because*), correctly mark sentence types, intelligibly pronounce sequences of sounds and use a few idioms. Despite a limited vocabulary, he manages to make himself understood in short conversations and simple day-to-day situations, while sometimes using paraphrases or substituting a more familiar message for another. However, effective communication is still hindered by poor use of grammatical suffixes and lexical prefixes and suffixes, frequent pauses, and regular pronunciation errors.

The learner focuses much more on communicating his own ideas than on the form of the message or the listener's understanding. He might ask and answer simple questions, but does not understand enough to be able to sustain a conversation on his own. He sometimes uses the second language and sometimes his first language to communicate with peers. Moreover, he regularly makes errors of literal (word-for-word) translation and transposition (e.g., applying L1 rules to L2). In addition, his sentence structures contain elementary errors, often carrying over structures from the first language, or else he uses the written form. The learner knows a few informal words, but sometimes uses them in inappropriate contexts.

Level 3
Intermediate

The learner can formulate complete, age-appropriate sentences on subjects such as family, recreation, etc. He can make himself understood in a number of oral situations, particularly by asking for help from others to find a word that he does not know, and by the effective use of paraphrases, different sentence types and diction. The most common grammatical suffixes and lexical prefixes and suffixes are used correctly, and the vocabulary is varied, albeit sometimes imprecise. Pauses are not as frequent, and they appear more in long, free-production sentences. Pronunciation errors may persist, but do not hinder comprehension. The learner draws on a repertoire of frequent, common structures for use in predictable situations, as well as a variety of idioms. He can use some oral markers: negative truncation (e.g., *won't* in place of *will not*), ellipsis (deliberate omission, or gapping), substitution of the interrogative for the declarative, etc., as well as common informal words in appropriate contexts. He can relate and combine a series of short, simple and separate elements. He can vary the expression of his thoughts in order to give feedback and contribute to a conversation. He can also start, sustain and close a simple conversation on a familiar subject, and demonstrate that he understands. Use of the first language is less prevalent. The learner can communicate with his peers in the second language, although he sometimes reverts to his first language.

Level 4
Advanced

The learner can formulate complete, age-appropriate sentences in order to clearly describe something, express an opinion, or develop an argument. He can make himself understood in most oral communication situations, notably through a very effective use of paraphrases and idioms, and sometimes through tonal register to express attitudes, states and feelings such as enthusiasm, disappointment, disapproval, etc. In addition, he can draw on a large number of grammatical suffixes and lexical prefixes and suffixes to correctly build new sentences. His vocabulary is generally varied and accurate. Communication is spontaneous, smooth, coherent and structured with connectors. Pauses are very rare, and generally short. Output is regular, and speech fluency is hampered only when tackling a difficult subject. Diction is clear, and pronunciation errors are rare and do not hinder comprehension of the message. Grammatical and syntactic errors are less frequent, and usually self-corrected by the learner. His contributions are adapted to the communication situation. They fit well into the conversation and are relevant. The learner can start, sustain, close and extend a conversation, while demonstrating good comprehension by picking up on the remarks of others, etc. He very rarely resorts to his first language. The learner can communicate with his peers entirely in the second language. He can use a large number of informal words and oral markers, and knows the appropriate usage contexts and levels.

Level 5
Expert

The learner can formulate complete, age-appropriate complex sentences and rephrase his thoughts in different terms. He can make himself understood in all age-appropriate oral communication situations, with practically unlimited self-expression. His vocabulary is varied and accurate, supported by the spontaneous and common use of idioms. He spontaneously uses all the grammatical suffixes and lexical prefixes and suffixes to produce correctly constructed new sentences. Pronunciation errors are barely noticeable, and his diction is clear and neutral. Speech is very fluent and rhythmic, with effective comprehension and production of tonal register, linking words and connectors, as well as non-verbal signals. Grammatical and syntactic errors are very rare, and self-correction is practically systematic, even when he is not paying attention. His contributions and conversations are sustained, spontaneous and unforced. The learner does not need to resort to his first language to communicate in any situations that may arise. He can communicate with his peers in the second language alone. He readily uses all the oral markers and informal words to adjust the formality of his discourse and effectively communicate intent.