



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

**ADULT EDUCATION
CONTENT STANDARDS
FOR
ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER
LANGUAGES INSTRUCTION**

Writing Standards

In a highly literate society like the United States, competency in writing English is a recognized measure for academic and employment advancement. The writer William Faulkner said to the effect, “Writing is easy. Just slit your wrist and watch the blood flow onto the page.” The Adult ESOL Writing standard in this document does not represent native-English writing fluency. Instead, it represents the skills and abilities in writing that are recognized by the National Reporting System as sufficient for learners to exit a basic ESOL program. The standard is not intended to limit the scope of adult instructional programs; instead, it represents a framework for developing programs, curricula, and lesson plans to meet the needs of adult learners.

The Writing benchmarks represent the writing skills and abilities that learners need to master to move to the next highest level. The benchmarks reflect a progression from:

- more familiar to less familiar contexts
- less to more confidence, ease, and independence
- less to more control of English structure
- fewer to more complex language structures
- a greater to a smaller number of mechanical errors.

In addition, adult English language learners at higher levels will write more extensively and develop the ability to know when and how to use a range of strategies to accomplish varied writing purposes.

The Writing indicators serve as illustrative examples of the benchmarks. They illustrate the kinds of writing tasks learners need to be able to accomplish to exit a particular level. The indicators are not meant to be prescriptive of what to teach at a level. All the indicators do not need to be accomplished to satisfy a benchmark, nor do they need to be done in order. Teachers will need to select writing tasks based on their instructional context (e.g., workplace, family, correctional) and the expressed needs of their learners.

Sample writing tasks at one level may also be adapted for use at another level. For example, a thank-you note can be adapted for use with learners at a wide variety of levels. At a lower level, a thank-you note would be shorter, more personal, and written to a more familiar audience. At a higher level, a letter might be longer, more formal, and for a less familiar audience.

As learners progress through the levels, the knowledge and skills acquired in previous levels are assumed at the higher levels. Adult English language learners are expected to use appropriate technology where available.

Organization of Benchmarks

The Writing team identified four general areas for organization of the benchmarks and indicators:

• **Purposes, contexts, and audiences (benchmarks indicated with .1)**— This benchmark describes the range of contexts (e.g., familiar, unfamiliar, family, school, academic) and audiences (familiar or unfamiliar) that a writer needs to be able to address to exit a particular level.

• **Organization and development (benchmarks indicated with .2)**—The extent to which the writer must be able to organize and develop types of text.

• **Mechanics (benchmarks indicated with .3)**—The extent to which the writer must control of spelling, punctuation, and structure.

• **Planning, editing, and revising (benchmarks indicated with .4)**—The extent to which the writer needs to be able to plan, edit, and revise writing.

ESOL Writing Standard: Adult English language learners write to communicate for a range of purposes, contexts, and audiences using appropriate organization, development, structure, and mechanics.

Beginning Literacy ESL Exit Benchmarks—To exit this level, learners will be able to:

W1.1 Write basic information to communicate ideas for purposes in very familiar contexts.

W1.2 Organize and complete simple written tasks following a model.

W1.3 Write numbers, words, phrases, and simple learned sentences legibly with many spelling and other errors.

W1.4 With guidance, plan basic writing.

Low Beginning ESL Exit Benchmarks—To exit this level, learners will be able to:

W2.1 Write to communicate ideas in familiar contexts, demonstrating some awareness of audience.

W2.2 Organize and complete simple written tasks focused on one topic following a model.

W2.3 Write statements, questions, and commands with limited control of basic English language structures and use of basic mechanics with errors.

W2.4 With guidance, plan and edit writing.

High Beginning ESL Exit Benchmarks—To exit this level, learners will be able to:

W3.1 Write to communicate ideas in familiar contexts and for familiar purposes, demonstrating awareness of audience.

W3.2 Organize simple texts with connected ideas that address a particular writing task with limited development, details, and vocabulary following a model.

W3.3 Write simple texts with some control of basic English language structures and use of mechanics with some errors.

W3.4 With guidance, plan, revise, and edit writing.

Low Intermediate ESL Exit Benchmarks—To exit this level, learners will be able to:

W4.1 Write at some length to communicate ideas in familiar contexts, demonstrating some sense of purpose and engagement.

W4.2 With guidance, organize texts that use some development, details, and vocabulary that are appropriate to the writing task.

W4.3 Write texts with control of simple verb tenses, some control of complex structures, and consistent use of mechanics that do not distract from meaning.

W4.4 Plan, revise, and edit writing with guidance and feedback.

High Intermediate ESL Exit Benchmarks—To exit this level, learners will be able to:

W5.1 Write at length to communicate ideas for a range of purposes in less familiar contexts to an intended audience.

W5.2 With support, organize and develop writing to address a range of written tasks.

W5.3 Use a variety of English language structures and mechanics with few errors.

W5.4 With support, select and use planning, revising, and editing strategies.

Advanced ESL Exit Benchmarks- To exit this level, learners will be able to:

W6.1 Write to communicate ideas effectively and authoritatively for a wide range of purposes in less familiar and more formal contexts, tailored to the intended audience.

W6.2 Organize clear, well-developed texts.

W6.3 Use syntactic variety with few or no grammatical errors and appropriate mechanics, including basic source citations.

W6.4 Select and use appropriate strategies to plan, revise, and edit writing.

ESOL Writing Standard: Adult English language learners write to communicate for a range of purposes, contexts, and audiences using appropriate organization, development, structure, and mechanics.

Beginning Literacy ESL Exit Benchmarks—To exit this level, learners will be able to:

• **W1.1 Write basic information to communicate ideas for purposes in very familiar contexts.**

- a) Complete personal information (e.g., names, addresses, phone numbers) on **simplified** forms (e.g., sign-in sheet, registration form).
- b) Write numbers (e.g., dates, money amounts, digital clock times).

• **W1.2 Organize and complete simple written tasks following a model.**

- a) Write **simple** learned sentences (e.g., *My name is Yvonne., Today is hot., I live in Virginia.*).
- b) Organize personal information related to personal needs (e.g., envelopes, money orders, checks).

• **W1.3 Write numbers, words, phrases, and simple learned sentences legibly with many spelling and other errors.**

- a) Use periods with **simple** learned sentences.
- b) Use upper and lowercase letter conventions (e.g. *Tom* vs. *tOm*).
- c) Write numbers using conventions (e.g., 703-666-9999, \$24.92, 04/09/07).
- d) Use page conventions (i.e., left to right, top to bottom, and front to back).

• **W1.4 With guidance, plan basic writing.**

- a) Copy **simple text** (e.g., vocabulary and sentences related to tasks, phone numbers, words and numbers from grocery ads and other **realia**).
- b) Use **manipulatives** to spell words, write words and numbers, and sequence words in sentences related to relevant tasks.
- c) List (e.g., names of children).

Low Beginning ESL Exit Benchmarks-To exit this level, learners will be able to:

• **W2.1 Write to communicate ideas in familiar contexts, demonstrating some awareness of audience.**

- a) Write short descriptions (e.g., job duties, family). [Randy: Note added period here.]
- b) Request information or permission (e.g., time off from school or work).
- c) Complete personal information on **simplified** forms (e.g. job applications, health and school forms).

• **W2.2 Organize and complete simple written tasks focused on one topic following a model.**

- a) Write a series of sentences on one topic related to personal experiences and **everyday** life (e.g., family members, job duties).
- b) Organize personal information in written form (e.g. job applications, health and school forms, daily schedule).

• **W2.3 Write statements, questions, and commands with limited control of basic English language structures and use of basic mechanics with errors.**

- a) Use subject-verb order, **simple** present tense, and adjective-noun order.
- b) Use periods, question marks, and capitalization.
- c) Spell basic words (e.g., *job, family, am, is*).

• **W2.4 With guidance, plan and edit writing.**

- a) Select words (e.g., from a picture dictionary) appropriate for a given task.
- b) Organize ideas and information appropriate to a given task, alphabetically or chronologically (e.g., timeline of daily activities, alphabetized list of family members).
- c) **Edit** end punctuation (e.g., *Is she sick.* to *Is she sick?*) and spelling of basic words (e.g. *job, am*).
- d) Identify irrelevant sentences (e.g. *My child is sick. She has a fever. I like hamburgers. Please excuse my child from school.*)

High Beginning ESL Exit Benchmarks—To exit this level, learners will be able to:

• **W3.1 Write to communicate ideas in familiar contexts and for familiar purposes, demonstrating awareness of audience.**

- a) Write for a variety of purposes:
 - 1) Inform (e.g., about self, work, family).
 - 2) Request information or permission (e.g., request time off).
 - 3) Organize daily tasks (e.g., make a shopping list and a daily schedule)
 - 4) Express likes and dislikes (e.g., favorite foods, colors, places) and feelings (e.g., angry, tired, thankful).
 - 5) Express courtesy (e.g., thank-you notes, get well cards).
- b) Write to school authority (e.g., teacher, principal), employer, coworker, and classmate briefly for one of the purposes above.

• **W3.2 Organize simple texts with connected ideas that address a particular writing task with limited development, details, and vocabulary following a model.**

- a) Write short paragraphs, notes, and messages related to familiar contexts and purposes (e.g., “My Country,” get well card, work report).
- b) Develop writing using chronological order.
- c) Use guided questions to develop details and vocabulary (e.g., who, what, when, where, why).

• **W3.3 Write simple texts with some control of basic English language structures and use of mechanics with some errors.**

- a) Use *because* **clauses** (e.g., *I like my school because I learn a lot.*) and conjunctions such as *and, or,* and *but* (e.g., *I like pizza and ice cream.*).
- b) Use **simple** past (e.g., *He came last week.*).
- c) Use place and directional prepositions (e.g., *in, on, at*) and transition words (e.g., *first, next, finally*).
- d) Use salutations (e.g., *Dear Dr. Barns, Hi Jose*) and commas for conjunctions (e.g., *We went to the museum, the park, and the restaurant.*)
- e) Spell familiar words but with occasional errors that distract from meaning.

• **W3.4 With guidance, plan, revise, and edit writing.**

- a) Plan by brainstorming vocabulary and content, and answering guided written questions.
- b) Make a few **simple** content revisions (e.g., add content included in the model).
- c) Make a few **simple** edits of **subject-verb agreement, simple** present, and past tenses (e.g., *He eat yesterday. to He ate yesterday.*); spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

Low Intermediate ESL Exit Benchmarks—To exit this level, learners will be able to:

• **W4.1 Write at some length to communicate ideas in familiar contexts, demonstrating some sense of purpose**

and engagement.

- a) Write for a variety of purposes in work, school, social, and community contexts:
 - 1) Inform and describe (e.g., about customs in native countries and personal life experiences, on a **simplified** medical history form, on a resume).
 - 2) Request and respond to information (e.g., a favor, telephone and e-mail messages).
 - 3) Complain and compliment (e.g., report a problem to the landlord, thank someone for a favor).
- b) Write to a number of audiences (e.g., employer, coworker, teacher, friends, landlord, guest speakers, school board).

• W4.2 With guidance, organize texts that use some development, details, and vocabulary that are appropriate to the writing task.

- a) Write connected paragraphs (e.g. letters, essays, e-mails).
- b) Use details for support and illustration (e.g., examples, reasons, contrasts).
- c) Sequence ideas (e.g. paragraphs organized by verb tense—past, present, future).
- d) Develop and clarify ideas with descriptive vocabulary, personalization, opinion, and explanations.
- e) Connect ideas with compound and **complex sentences**.

• W4.3 Write texts with control of simple verb tenses, some control of complex structures, and consistent use of mechanics that do not distract from meaning.

- a) Use **compound sentences** with *and, or, but,* and *so* (e.g., *He lives in Winchester, but he works in Fairfax.*) and **complex sentences** with *when, after, before, while,* and *if* (e.g., *If it snows, we will cancel the party.*).
- b) Use **simple** present, **simple** past, and future.
- c) Use mostly conventional spelling and commas.

• W4.4 Plan, revise, and edit writing with guidance and feedback.

- a) Develop a **simple** outline, brainstorm ideas for the topic, and cluster ideas to plan writing.
- b) Make some content revisions (e.g., add details, use different vocabulary, reorganize sequence).
- c) Make focused edits of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
- d) Use a **simple** checklist, peer and teacher feedback, and spell check to improve writing.

High Intermediate ESL Exit Benchmarks—To exit this level, learners will be able to:

• W5.1 Write at length to communicate ideas for a range of purposes in less familiar contexts to an intended audience.

- a) Write for a variety of purposes:
 - 1) Inform, describe, and persuade (e.g., compare and contrast customs, personal life and community experiences; job applications, **simple** cover letter, resume; job, education, and life goals).
 - 2) Summarize and evaluate (e.g. articles, books, films).
 - 3) Express self (e.g., poetry, journals).
 - 4) For functional purposes, with a directed model (e.g., e-mail, memo, business letter).
- b) Write in varied contexts (e.g., work, family, school, social, community, civic) with growing independence and emerging personal style.
- c) Tailor writing to a specific audience with support (e.g., a child’s teacher, thank-you letters, personal or business letters to an employer or local government officials).

• W5.2 With support, organize and develop writing to address a range of written tasks.

- a) Write well-developed and sequenced paragraphs with introductory and concluding sentences.
- b) Connect sentences and ideas with transitions (e.g., *first, next, then, as a result, in addition*) and connectors (e.g., *and, but, if, because*).

c) Develop clarity and style through vocabulary choice and self-expression (e.g., poetry, journaling).

• **W5.3 Use a variety of English language structures and mechanics with few errors.**

- a) Use a variety of syntactic structures and verb tenses, including passive voice (e.g., *I was asked to submit a report.*) and present tenses (e.g., *I have been here for 10 years.*).
- b) Use punctuation for a variety of syntactic structures (e.g., compound and **complex sentences**, transition phrases).

• **W5.4 With support, select and use planning, revising, and editing strategies.**

- a) Develop an outline, brainstorm ideas, and connect ideas with transition words and phrases (e.g. *however, therefore, on the other hand*).
- b) **Revise** with teacher guidance at the word, sentence, and basic paragraph levels (e.g., main idea and topic sentences are supported; paragraphs and sentences are connected.).
- c) Independently use a multi-item editing checklist (e.g., verb tenses, **subject-verb agreement**, singular and plural nouns, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling using computer spell check, a dictionary, or a bilingual dictionary).

Advanced ESL Exit Benchmarks- To exit this level, learners will be able to:

• **W6.1 Write to communicate ideas effectively and authoritatively for a wide range of purposes in less familiar and more formal contexts, tailored to the intended audience.**

- a) Write for a variety of purposes:
 - 1) Inform, describe, and persuade (e.g., formal resume and cover letter, personal statements for college and job applications, opinion letter).
 - 2) Compare and contrast (e.g., research about current events or a debate)
 - 3) Summarize and evaluate (e.g., current events; police, accident, or insurance report)
 - 4) Express self (e.g., autobiography, creative writing) [Randy: I changed number “5” here to number “4”]
- b) Write in multiple contexts (e.g., work, civic, and academic—higher education, GED, vocational education).
- c) Engage multiple audiences (e.g., elected officials, civic authorities, health care providers, academic authorities, employers).

• **W6.2 Organize clear, well-developed texts.**

- a) Write multi-paragraph texts with clear introduction, sequential and logical development of ideas, and appropriate conclusion.
- b) Develop a resume according to current conventions.
- c) Use a wide range of word choices including synonyms, antonyms, and idiomatic/**slang** expressions appropriate to the text.

• **W6.3 Use syntactic variety with few or no grammatical errors and appropriate mechanics, including basic source citations.**

- a) Use syntactic structures and verb tenses as appropriate to the text and task.
- b) Use basic source citations (e.g. MLA).

W6.4 Select and use appropriate strategies to plan, revise, and edit writing.

- a) Use **process writing steps**—plan, draft, review, **revise**, and **edit**.
- b) Use multiple planning strategies (e.g., research, idea webs, outlining, brainstorming).
- c) **Revise** writing to enhance meaning, clarity, and consistency using peer and teacher feedback.
- d) With guidance, review peer texts and provide feedback.
- e) Use a variety of tools (e.g., English-English dictionaries, thesaurus, grammar guides, multi-item editing checklists) to **edit** writing.