Using the Newly Revised **Can-Do Statements** to Make Learning Transparent

By Jessica Haxhi and Jacque Bott Van Houten

Access the newest version of the Can-Do Statements at **actfl.org/global_statements**.

The newly revised NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements offer language educators a user-friendly tool for a variety of planning, instruction, assessment, and professional development needs. The National Council of State Supervisors of Languages (NCSSFL) originally introduced Can-Do Statements in 2002 through the groundbreaking LinguaFolio, a U.S. version of the Common European Framework of Reference, meant to make language learning transparent and empower the learner to set goals and chart progress. Subsequently, the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements helped learners and educators gain a greater understanding of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, while also serving as a way to steer lesson and unit planning toward a more performance-based outcome.

As the Can-Dos were used, educators gained insights into how to improve the document to address new areas of need (e.g., clarification for educators/learners to focus on language functions and how they progress across the sub-levels of the scale).

This newest revision of the Can-Do Statements strives to be even more accessible to learners and educators. It is enhanced by the addition of the equally new NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication. The document is organized by modes of communication, with three layers of increasing detail. Benchmarks define the general characteristics of each proficiency level. (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished). Indicators at each sub-level (Novice Low/Mid/High, Intermediate Low/Mid/High, etc.) are listed for each Benchmark. The Indicators are introduced by questions related to functions derived from the three Communication standards of the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages. The Indicators show a clear progression of each function up the proficiency scale by addressing text type, topic familiarity, and discourse type. Examples under each indicator allow both educators and learners to place themselves in the document by suggesting what new functional tasks at each sub-level might look like to fit the context of the learning situation (e.g., early language learner, immersion student, adult learner).

The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements have many applications for both language education and those learning independently. As a deconstruction of the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, they show what the ACTFL Performance Descriptors look like in action and what the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines describe as sustained performance. To support effective use of the tool, the box on the following page describes what this document "is" and "is not."

Presentational Communication

INTERMEDIATE Benchmark

I can communicate information, make presentations, and express my thoughts about familiar topics, using sentences and series of connected sentences through spoken, written, or signed language.

INTERMEDIATE Presentational Indicators

How can I present information to narrate about my life, experiences and events?		
LOW	**MID**	**HIGH**
I can present personal information about my life, activities and events, using simple sentences.	I can tell a story about my life, activities, events and other social experiences, using sentences and series of connected sentences.	I can tell stories about school and community events and personal experiences, using a few short paragraphs, often across various time frames.

Presentational Examples

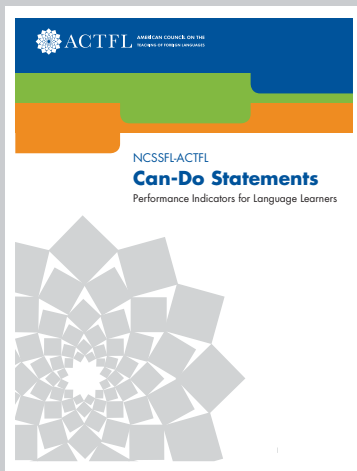| How can I present information to narrate about my life, experiences and events?		
Speaking or Signing		
I can retell a story that I've read or heard. I can narrate the steps of an experiment I conducted.	I can talk about an experience related to my hobbies or activities. I can describe plans for an upcoming work experience.	I can present a comparison between the roles of family members in my own and other cultures. I can present my hypothesis about what will happen in a science experiment and provide supporting information.
Writing		
I can write my plans for an upcoming holiday, vacation, or a typical celebration. I can write about events that took place at school, in a workplace, or in a place I have visited.	I can write a simple story about a recent trip, project or childhood memory. I can write about personal, academic, or professional goals for a college or job application.	I can write a description of an event that I participated in or witnessed for a newsletter. I can write a series of simple predictions about consequences of a particular action or practice for a community or school blog.

What this tool IS	**What this tool IS NOT**
Performance indicators for learners to demonstrate consistently over time	**NOT a checklist of tasks to be demonstrated once and checked off**
Learners need to demonstrate their evidence of what they "can do" in each mode at each sub-level, with increasing consistency in numerous situations throughout the learning process.	It is not sufficient for the learner to show evidence of the indicator in just one specific situation; the examples illustrate how the learner might demonstrate each mode of communication through a wide variety of evidence of each indicator at each sub-level.
A set of indicators (illustrated by examples) that can be adapted to school, district, or postsecondary curriculum as well as independent learning goals	**NOT a prescribed curriculum**
The Can-Do Statements are meant to be adapted to individual learning contexts. They include open-ended "I can . . ." statements for learners and educators to customize in order to fit the content and context of the learning and the targeted proficiency level.	The Can-Do Statements include examples of communicative performance to adapt or modify for local curricula; they are not intended to provide ready-made lessons. The examples provided do not claim to be exhaustive or specific to a level of schooling.
A starting point for self-assessment, goal-setting, and the creation of rubrics for performance-based grading	**NOT an instrument for determining a letter or number grade**
Learners and educators use the statements for self-evaluation to become more aware of what they know and can do in the target language. By using statements aligned to the proficiency scale, educators can more easily create rubrics that enable learners to chart their progress.	Growth in acquiring a language is measured over time when tasks are integrated into performance assessments and evaluated using rubrics based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

Setting Proficiency Targets

From an educational perspective in the age of accountability, outcomes need to be measurable. From a learner perspective, end goals need to be clear, specific, and achievable in a timely manner, and in the case of language, functional in real life. Using the Can-Do Statements achieves all of these objectives. From the state, to the learning institution, to the classroom or the learner, the Can-Do Benchmarks, Indicators, and even Examples can be used to set proficiency targets. Many states already use terminology from the ACTFL Proficiency Scale in their course code descriptions, identifying learning targets of a range across sublevels or a specific level or sublevel. Can-Do

Using the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements in a fully articulated system:

States would set proficiency target expectations within their course codes for different levels and sequences of language study, to guide districts in organizing their programs and in setting policy for performance-based granting of credit.

Universities would develop entrance and exit requirements based on proficiency levels and set proficiency targets for their language courses. They would encourage learners to set learning goals, particularly in online learning situations, and grant credit for consistent demonstration. Teacher preparation courses would show educators how to use the Can-Do Statements to set learning targets, design units, plan lessons, and create assessments and rubrics for evaluating learners' performance.

Districts and schools would set proficiency targets for graduation, design curriculum and units based on Can-Do Benchmarks and Indicators and provide professional learning for educators on how to move learners up the proficiency levels. Educators would collaborate to design end-of-unit or end-of-course assessments to provide evidence of learners independently and consistently demonstrating the targeted level of proficiency.

Schools would provide time for professional learning communities (PLCs) for language educators to review and analyze evidence of learning and collaborate on assessment design. Schools would set policies to determine criteria for performance-based credit.

Educators would set daily learning targets and incorporate the Statements in lesson assessment, and rubric design to make learning transparent to students every day. Educators would assist learners to realize what learners can do with language, how to set goals, and what to do to improve.

Learners would set learning goals and regularly chart their own progress toward those goals. Through reflection they would identify what it takes to advance their language and intercultural proficiency in order to function at a higher level.

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wording from the Benchmarks and Indicators can clarify the code description even more, standardizing definitions of proficiency across program types and helping to inform those outside of language education how the focus of language learning has evolved. Using the Can-Do Indicators to set end-of-grade-level or end-of-course outcomes guides the organization of curricula and personal teaching and learning toward language usage rather than mastery of grammar. Unit and lesson design can employ indicators and use or adapt the Can-Do Examples to define their targets.

Setting Student Learning Objectives

The Indicators in the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements may also be used to guide educators in setting student learning objectives (SLOs), as required by many teacher evaluation programs within school districts. The SLOs might be based on year-end proficiency targets as defined via the Can-Do Statements. Educators can choose specific indicators from which to create SMART (Specific, Measurable Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound) goals as well. Educators may collect data from a variety of assessments throughout the year to gather evidence of student performance against the target Indicator(s). Some school districts may also allow for student self-assessment against the Can-Do Statements at various points throughout the year to be used as a measure of SLOs. The reader-friendly nature of the language of the statements allows both administrators and learners to fully-understand the SLOs as the educator presents them for evaluation purposes.

Setting Individual Learner Goals

As learning becomes more learner-directed through school initiatives, online classes, or personal apps, a structured way to show growth and motivate continued effort is essential. The Can-Do Statements provide the steps on this incremental performance path. With help from educators showing early learners how to set goals and assess what they can do with language, learners can set their own short and long-term goals. In classes, learners can personalize their lesson goals by adapting the learning tasks to create new goals to fit their interests and needs. When they are at ease with continuous demonstration of a goal, they can look to the Indicators and Examples to see what is needed to reach the next level, thus developing a clearer understanding of how to move from one proficiency sublevel to the next.

Creating Rubrics

When assessments have been created based on targets and unit objectives set using the Can-Do Statements, rubrics for those assessments flow naturally and tie the learning together, such as the one featured in the Elementary Learning Scenario on p. 25-26. Educators might choose to use their Target Indicator as the "competent" rating and then use the Indicator one proficiency sublevel higher as "exceeds" and the one lower as "near target." Educators might also use the Indicator as a guide for creating a more detailed rubric that includes common criteria such as comprehensibility, comprehension, vocabulary use, accuracy, or communication strategies, as well

as task-specific measures. During the rubric implementation process, however, educators and learners must keep in mind that one single performance at a given proficiency level does not put a learner solidly at that level. What is needed is a series of performances at that level throughout the year and across a range of tasks and topics as well as increasingly independent of the educator's support to provide evidence that the learner is demonstrating the given level.

Informing Unit and Lesson Goals and Assessment

The indicators in the Can-Do Statements may be taken as-is or modified for specificity when creating unit and lesson goals, as educators have done in the learning scenarios (see p. 24-26). This practice aids in keeping educators focused on proficiency targets while allowing for a range of real-world contexts and themes via modification of the indicators. For each unit, educators can choose one or more indicators in each mode of communication (Interpersonal, Interpretive, Presentational) and use those indicators to guide creation of unit assessments, such as in ACTFL's Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) model. The examples may also offer ideas for assessments appropriate to the proficiency level and can spark new ideas for lesson activities well beyond those provided.

Used to Guide Professional Development

The grid of the Can-Do Statements (Benchmarks and Indicators) offers a big-picture view for defining each proficiency level and talking about how to assist learners in progressing up the levels. In state, district, school, and classroom meetings, educators can use the benchmarks of the Can-Dos, as well as the sample videos and written work on the Proficiency Guidelines page on the ACTFL website (***www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012***) to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics of each proficiency level. Then, educators can use the sub-level Indicators to brainstorm ways to move students up the proficiency levels. They can also discuss how to build assessments that provide evidence that a student is reaching a particular level. For example, in order to move students from Novice to Intermediate, classroom activities and assessments must encourage and provide opportunities for students to speak at the sentence level when the situation authentically requires it and to ask questions. The specificity and comprehensiveness of the new Can-Do Statements demonstrate where these key transitions need to occur.

Teacher Education

The number of postsecondary institutions that are using Can-Dos to set their own targets is growing. The more widespread the use of Can-Do Statements becomes, the more important it is for students in teacher preparation programs to see them modeled in their own university language classes and to be informed of the strategies for implementing the Statements in their methods classes. Keeping the wide variety of learners in mind, creators of the tool took care to craft sexamples of learning activities or assessments that were relevant to adults as well as K–12 learners, so adapting statements to the university context should not be difficult.

Deeper Learning

As education slowly begins to move away from a total focus on accountability to an emphasis on the whole child through deeper learning, mastery-based learning, and learner autonomy through metacognitive awareness, language educators will find the revised NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements a helpful tool. Using it facilitates the first step in a shift toward a focus on functional language and performance. The second step involves incorporating the cultural context in which language learning always takes place. The new NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication (IC) guides educators and learners through this next key transition and offers a fuller view of how to implement and integrate the Communication and Cultures standards. The Can-Do IC Statements show what learners can do to demonstrate how much they understand about their own and others' cultural products, practices and perspectives through their learned language(s).

The Language Can-Dos deconstruct the Communication's Interpersonal, Interpretive, and Presentational standards through Benchmarks and Indicators that use the same terminology (e.g., negotiate meaning; interpret and analyze; present information, concepts . . . to explain, persuade . . .). The Intercultural Can-Dos also use wording that mirrors the Cultures Standards: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between cultural practices and perspectives and between cultural products and perspectives. Both sets of Can-Do Statements provide illustrative examples and both are organized under proficiency headings. There are differences between the tools. Every IC Can-Do example is set within a cultural context. For example, Intermediate Low: "In my own and other cultures I can compare school/learning environments and curricula to determine what is valued." Descriptions of demonstrations of proficiency are provided only for levels (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced), not sublevels (Low, Mid, or High).

The IC tool includes a reflective piece with sample activities to offer educators a glimpse of how they might use the Can-Dos, integrate language and culture, and foster interculturality within their classes. These complementary Can-Do tools provide a scaffolded approach to understanding and implementing a standards- and performance-to-proficiency-based approach to teaching and learning.

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The scenarios shown here illustrate how the Can-Do Statements might be applied in real-world classrooms.

High School Scenario

Second-year language learners, like other students in their high school, are encouraged to volunteer or do service learning projects. Because many are unaware of the international population in their community or the global agencies that exist and offer opportunities for interaction or service, their teacher has suggested they explore the situation in a project-based learning (PBL) unit.

PBL starts with a problem, so through a brainstorming activity they decide to address: "How can I use the target language to interact with or serve others in my or the global community?" Each learner will share what he or she learns through a gallery-walk type of presentation, supported by visuals of the learner's choosing (e.g., multimedia, poster, etc.), so that everyone can become aware of the variety of opportunities available.

The students are trying to transition from Novice High proficiency to Intermediate Low, the course target, so the focus will be on getting them to broaden their vocabulary topic areas and communicate and ask questions in unrehearsed sentence length speech and text. They will also be striving to identify main ideas and some other pieces of information from what they read and hear.

Because PBL is a student-directed effort, the teacher uses NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Indicator Statements for broad unit goals and rubrics, and, since learners are somewhat familiar with "I Can" goals from their teacher's daily postings, the learners create their own Can-Do learning task statements. During a lesson early in the unit, the teacher models how to *adapt* the statements to fit the learners' particular needs in acquiring new vocabulary for thinking about and researching volunteer opportunities. Later, the teacher models how to *create* new Can-Do learning tasks that align to the Benchmarks and Indicators (e.g., text type, audience), but whose contexts are specific to the individual.

Teacher's Goals

Interpersonal:
- I can request and provide information on familiar topics by creating questions and simple sentences.

Presentational:
- I can present on familiar and everyday topics, using simple sentences.

Interpretive:
- I can identify the topic and related information from simple sentences in short informational texts.

Early Lesson Teacher Modeling

To prepare the learners for their topic exploration, the teacher writes a Can-Do Learning Task on the board and shares how she adapted it from the original:

> Intermediate Low Interpersonal Example – Meet Needs – Writing/Reading:
>
> I can interact online with a ~~hotel agent~~ community agency to inquire about ~~their pet policy~~ volunteer opportunities.

Because the learners will have to contact the various agencies to gain information, the teacher then has them form groups and brainstorm categorized questions about what they would need to ask about. She has the learners work in groups to write questions on sticky notes and post them on large posters under the headings of Logistics (hours of operation, location, contact information, names of directors), Purpose (audience, activities, events), and Your Involvement.

Then, the teacher has learners think about the process they will need to go through to find and present the information on volunteering at a community/global agency and asks them to look at the list of NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do statements, choosing ones they feel will be appropriate to their own work and adapting them as goals to guide the process.

Learners work individually or collaboratively to identify the resources and information they need to present information (a solution) about where and how to volunteer and analyze that solution to decide how they personally will volunteer. They share the information in the gallery walk and later reflect on the process, self-assessing their language performance on the self-created Can-Do Statements.

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Example of Learner's Can-Do Adaptations

Intermediate Low	NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Examples	*ADAPTED* Can-Do Learning Task
Interpretive Main idea Pieces of information Familiar topics	I can understand some information on job postings.	I can understand some information *about a volunteer agency from a brochure or website.*
Interpersonal Unrehearsed Simple sentences Familiar topics	I can participate in a conversation to compare classes and sports with peers at a partner school.	I can ask and respond to questions to explore *what a community/global agency does, who it serves, and how I might volunteer there.*
Presentational Simple Sentences Familiar topics	I can present a brief summary of something from a book I've read.	I can present a brief summary of *information I've read about a community/global agency and what opportunities it offers to volunteer.*
	I can state multi-step instructions for completing a process, such as preparing a recipe.	I can state multi-step instructions for *offering/applying to volunteer.*
	I can give a series of reasons why an art or music style is appealing to me.	I can give a series of reasons why *a particular volunteer opportunity is appealing to me.*
	I can give a presentation recommending something I like, such as a movie, television show, famous athlete, celebrity, or historical figure.	I can give a presentation recommending *a particular community/global agency as a service learning opportunity.*

Elementary Level Scenario: Unit Example

Background

Students in a fifth-grade class have been learning Japanese three times a week for 30 minutes since third grade. The teacher is focused on developing their proficiency through engaging and real-world use of vocabulary, phrases, and simple sentences. While many of the class activities are at the Novice Mid level, her goal this year is to move students to Novice High tasks within each unit and she plans her lessons accordingly. She uses the new NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements to guide her planning. She has chosen these Can-Do Statements as objectives for a six-week long "Let's Eat!" unit [specifics of the unit in *italics*].

Interpersonal:
- I can interact with others to meet my basic needs related to routine everyday activities, using simple sentences and questions most of the time: *ordering food, asking prices, asking "do you have _____?"*

- I can express, ask about, and react to preferences, opinions, or feelings on familiar topics, using simple sentences most of the time and asking questions to keep the conversation on topic: *likes/dislikes of foods*.

Interpretive:
- I can identify the topic and some isolated facts from simple sentences in informational texts: *fast food chain commercials, restaurant menus*.

Presentational:
- I can express my preferences on familiar and everyday topics of interest, using simple sentences most of the time: *my likes/dislikes of foods and restaurants*.
- I can present on familiar and everyday topics, using simple sentences most of the time: *my favorite restaurant and the foods they have there*.

Unit Sequence

The unit begins with a variety of activities introducing Japanese foods with visuals and discussing likes and dislikes. Students learn to recognize Japanese written words for the foods through matching and copying activities and games. They watch a variety of restaurant commercials and name the foods they see. They simulate purchases with Japanese money and talk about what various foods cost while finding them on authentic menus.

As an Interpretive assessment, the teacher shows students a new authentic menu and restaurant commercial. Students answer questions in English about the type of restaurant each might be, prices, and foods are served there. The teacher uses their results to inform further review and extension activities.

For Interpersonal assessments, students work in pairs to complete an information gap about likes/dislikes of foods and restaurants while the teacher walks around and scores by rubric. Later in the unit, students take turns coming up to the teacher's "restaurant" to order foods, respond to her follow-up questions about their "meal," and pay appropriately, as she scores. The rubric for that task is presented in the box below.

Novice High is set as the target for learners' language performance. The teacher has provided learners with numerous opportunities to practice the type of interaction needed to produce Novice High language in an Interpersonal interaction. The teacher designed the task to provide learners the opportunity to demonstrate Novice

High language . Weak or minimal evidence of Novice High language is labeled "Near Target" and "Emerging" and characteristics that exceed the target, with some evidence of Intermediate level language, are labeled "Above Target." Note that weaker or stronger performance is not sufficient evidence to say that learners are at the Novice Low, Novice Mid, or Intermediate Low level; they are simply below or above the targeted level of Novice High. Consistent and independent demonstration of Novice High language is the target.

As a Presentational assessment, each student is asked to convince the class to come to a new Japanese restaurant. The students must name the foods at their restaurant (*It has _____*), talk about which ones they like the best (I love the tempura!), talk about some of the prices (*It costs _____*), and say at least one learned extra expression about the restaurant (*It's the most delicious!*). Some students choose to do this with a poster, others create fake Japanese foods from clay, while others record videos at home to show to the class. Students peer score as they watch one another's presentations and give feedback about both language performance and impact of the presentation.

As a unit wrap-up, the teacher passes out the ACTFL Can-Do Statements related to the unit and has students self-assess using the choices of *Yes I Can Do This*, *Can Do With Help*, or *Not Yet*. The teacher gathers this data with her own observations of student work to inform instruction in the next unit.

Rubric—Interpersonal Assessment

	4 - Above Target	3 - Target (Novice High Performance)	2 - Near Target	1 - Emerging
What type of language do I use to accomplish this task?	I consistently use simple sentences, when appropriate, and a variety of vocabulary, to order and discuss my meal.	I use simple sentences when appropriate, with sufficient and appropriate vocabulary most of the time to order and discuss my meal.	I use a mixture of practiced or memorized words and phrases, to order my meal.	I can use a few practiced or memorized words and phrases, to identify some of my meal.
How well do I interact in the conversation?	I consistently interact with my conversation partner to accomplish the task.	I interact enough with my conversation partner to accomplish the task.	I express basic needs.	I express some basic needs.

The teacher is focused on developing learners' proficiency through engaging and real-world use of vocabulary, phrases, and simple sentences.