

Frequently Asked Questions

Laney Graduate School Language Testing Requirements

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1. Who is required to take the English language proficiency test?

All new degree-seeking graduate students whose first language is not English must take the test or receive an exemption from the English Language Support Program director, Mackenzie Bristow (mackenzie.bristow@emory.edu). This requirement includes international students as well as permanent residents and U.S. citizens, and it includes students with degrees from U.S. institutions.

For exchange and other non-degree seeking graduate students, testing and classes are optional. These students should contact Mackenzie Bristow for more information and to determine eligibility.

2. What is the purpose of the test?

In line with Laney's commitment to student success, the test is used for identifying students who may benefit from language support courses their first academic year and, for PhD students, making recommendations for teaching assistantships.

3. Are exemptions possible?

Due to an extensive educational background in an English-speaking environment, students may qualify for an exemption. To be exempted, students should be able to demonstrate exceptional English language skills through their educational background, and in most cases an informal interview is required. To inquire about an exemption, students must contact Mackenzie Bristow (mackenzie.bristow@emory.edu) before June 12th. No exemptions will be made after this date; in other words, if you have not proven exceptional English language skills and been exempted prior to June 12, you will need to be tested.

Important: Receiving a master's degree from a university in an English-speaking country does not *by itself* qualify a student for an exemption. A student needs to demonstrate extensive education in an English-speaking environment. In other words, the educational experience should be more than two or three years of study.

4. I provided a TOEFL score (or another language proficiency test) to my program. Is that enough?

No. Students must still take the Laney Graduate School English Language Test. This test is not used for admission decisions but instead for identifying students who may benefit from language support courses their first academic year and, for PhD students, making recommendations for teaching assistantships.

5. When and where is the test given?

Due to the impacts of COVID-19, Fall 2020 ELSP language assessments will be conducted remotely rather than in our ELSP offices. Testing will be conducted over a 2-to-3 week period in August before the semester begins; the ELSP will email you with more details regarding your individual appointment time. Students entering spring semester should contact the ELSP director, Mackenzie Bristow, at (mackenzie.bristow@emory.edu) for information.

6. What is the format of the test?

The language test has two sections: speaking and writing.

The speaking section is a 20- to 30-minute recorded interview on a variety of topics regarding the student's interests, routine, experiences, and opinions. The interviewer will ask questions of varying complexity to obtain language samples. Students should listen carefully to the questions and provide detailed responses to demonstrate language proficiency. Limiting responses to improve accuracy will not improve the score. In the interview, students may be asked to give their opinion, and the interviewer may seem to disagree or challenge the opinion. The interviewer is not critiquing the opinion but instead is listening to how ideas are expressed about a topic with opposing sides. **In addition, if a topic is introduced that a student does not want to discuss, the student should feel free to say that he or she would rather discuss something else.**

The speech sample is evaluated at 4 levels: *Novice*, *Intermediate*, *Advanced*, or *Superior* (based on the Oral Proficiency Interview by ACTFL/American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages).

The writing section is a 1-hour essay on an academic topic that will be given. Below is a sample question (this question will not be the topic given during your exam session):

Sample: The value of research and knowledge is sometimes measured by its commercial and practical application. Some scholars believe that graduate education should focus on basic research whether it has a commercial application or not. Do you agree or disagree with this belief? Be sure to include your reasons.

No minimum word count is required, but the average essay is 3 to 6 paragraphs, or 300-600 words. In the essay, students should try to fully support their claim (ideas), follow academic essay organization, and use formal, academic vocabulary. They should also allow time near the end of the writing test to edit for accurate grammar and word choice. Students may use the Spelling & Grammar Check function in Microsoft Word. However, these tools may not improve a score because the essay will be evaluated with a primary focus on organization, development, content, and word choice. Students are encouraged to spend the allotted time on these areas.

7. How can I prepare for the test?

The best preparation for a language proficiency test is to keep language skills strong by reading, writing, hearing, and speaking in the language on a regular basis. In addition, students should understand the format of the test (see #6 above).

8. How and when will I receive the results?

Before the beginning of classes, students and programs will receive an email from the English Language Support Program with test scores and any required or recommended classes.

9. Are English language support courses required?

In some cases, yes. If your score indicates a speaking and/or writing course requirement (see below for details), these courses must be taken the first academic year. Courses carry 2-3 hours credit, are graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory, and appear on transcripts. Please note that master's and PhD students have slightly different speaking course requirements.

All students (PhD and Master's): Writing scores and ELSP courses

- Superior: No requirement; writing center or tutorial assistance, as needed
- Advanced High: No requirement; program may need to monitor student's writing
- Advanced Mid: No requirement; program should monitor the student's writing
- Advanced Low: Degree-seeking students are recommended to take the sequence
 - ELSP 510: Fundamentals of Graduate Writing I (fall, 3 credits)
 - ELSP 511: Fundamentals of Graduate Writing II (spring, 2 credits)
- Intermediate Low-Mid-High: Degree-seeking students are required to take the sequence
 - ELSP 510: Fundamentals of Graduate Writing I (fall, 3 credits)
 - ELSP 511: Fundamentals of Graduate Writing II (spring, 2 credits)

PhD students: Speaking scores and ELSP courses

- Superior: No requirement
- Advanced High: No requirement; degree-seeking students are recommended to take the sequence
 - ELSP 520: Seminar in Professional Communication (fall, 3 credits)
 - ELSP 530: Laboratory in Professional Communication (spring, 2 credits)
- Advanced Low-Mid: Degree-seeking students are required to take the sequence
 - ELSP 517: Communication Skills for Advanced Speakers I (fall, 3 credits)
 - ELSP 518: Communication Skills for Advanced Speakers II (spring, 2 credits)
- Intermediate Low-Mid-High: Degree-seeking students are required to take the sequence
 - ELSP 505: Communication Skills for Intermediate Speakers I (fall, 3 credits)
 - ELSP 515: Communication Skills for Intermediate Speakers II (spring, 3 credits)
 - ELSP 516: Communication Skills for Intermediate Speakers III (summer, 2 credits)

Master's students: Speaking scores and ELSP courses

- Superior: No requirement
- Advanced High: No requirement; degree-seeking students are recommended to take the sequence
 - ELSP 520: Seminar in Professional Communication (fall, 3 credits)
 - ELSP 530: Laboratory in Professional Communication (spring, 2 credits)
- Advanced Low-Mid: Degree-seeking students are required to take the sequence
 - ELSP 517: Communication Skills for Advanced Speakers I (fall, 3 credits)
 - ELSP 518: Communication Skills for Advanced Speakers II (spring, 2 credits)
- Intermediate Low-Mid-High: Degree-seeking students are required to take the sequence
 - ELSP 505: Communication Skills for Intermediate Speakers I (fall, 3 credits)
 - ELSP 515: Communication Skills for Intermediate Speakers II (spring, 3 credits)
- Intermediate Low-Mid-High: Degree-seeking students are recommended to take the course
 - ELSP 516: Communication Skills for Intermediate Speakers III (summer, 2 credits)