

Dr Popkins' Overview Guide to Foreign Language Proficiency Exams for Adult Language Learners

This guide is intended to be helpful as a quick, initial overview to the major exams in the languages listed below. I have put effort into creating it, however you should check the details relating to the exams that interest you from relevant authoritative sources. While I have tried to include the main exams for each of the language, details change and you should always do your own research.

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English ...

- 1. IELTS (International English Language Testing System)**
 - **Levels:** Covers a wide range of proficiency, scored from 1 to 9; comparable to CEFR levels A1-C2.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Widely accepted for university admissions and immigration globally.
 2. Offers academic and general training modules to suit different purposes.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Some may find IELTS expensive, compared to some alternatives.
 2. Test score validity is limited to two years.
- 2. TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)**
 - **Levels:** Covers A2-C2; scored out of 120.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Commonly required for US universities and professional settings.

- 2. Internet-based test offers flexibility for global test-takers.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 - 1. Heavy focus on academic English might not suit all learners.
 - 2. Can be challenging for non-academic English users.
 - 3. **Cambridge English Exams (e.g., CAE, CPE)**
 - **Levels:** Wide range from A1-C2; includes PET (B1), FCE (B2), CAE (C1), CPE (C2).
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 - 1. Certificates have lifelong validity.
 - 2. Highly respected for academic and professional purposes.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 - 1. Time-intensive preparation for advanced levels.
 - 2. Limited availability in some regions.
 - 4. **PTE Academic (Pearson Test of English)**
 - **Levels:** Covers A1-C2; scored out of 90.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 - 1. Fast results (usually within 48 hours).
 - 2. Accepted for immigration and academic purposes.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 - 1. Less widely accepted than IELTS or TOEFL.
 - 2. Heavily computerized, which may not suit all learners.
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German ...

- 1. **TestDaF (Test Deutsch als Fremdsprache)**
 - **Levels:** Covers B2-C1.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 - 1. Required for most German university admissions.
 - 2. Provides detailed evaluation across four skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking).
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 - 1. Limited to academic contexts.
 - 2. Requires extensive preparation, especially at higher levels.
- 2. **Goethe-Zertifikat**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2 (separate exams for each level).
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 - 1. Highly respected and internationally recognized.
 - 2. Moving to a modular system (more flexible).
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 - 1. Can be costly for higher-level exams.
 - 2. Limited test dates and locations in some countries (often at local Goethe Institut).

3. telc Deutsch

- **Levels:** A1-C2, including specialized exams (e.g., German for healthcare professionals).
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Practical, real-world focus in tasks.
 2. Offers specific exams tailored to professional needs. Well-known and popular within Germany.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Less recognized outside Germany than Goethe-Zertifikat.
 2. Availability may be an issue outside Europe.

4. DSH (Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang)

- **Levels:** Advanced levels (C1+), focused on academic German.
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Mandatory for admission to many German universities.
 2. Prepares learners well for academic study in German.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Only offered in Germany.
 2. Results are often specific to the university administering the test.

French ...

1. DELF/DALF

- **Levels:** DELF (A1-B2), DALF (C1-C2).
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Official French government certification, internationally recognized.
 2. Focused on practical and academic proficiency.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Separate exams required for each level, which can be costly.
 2. Limited test sessions in some regions.

2. TEF (Test d'Évaluation de Français)

- **Levels:** A1-C2.
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Useful for immigration to Canada and France.
 2. Flexible, as it's offered regularly throughout the year.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Does not provide a lifetime certificate.
 2. Limited focus on academic French.

3. TCF (Test de Connaissance du Français)

- **Levels:** A1-C2.
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Accepted for visas, citizenship, and academic purposes.
 2. Adaptive format available for quicker assessments.

- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Results are valid for only two years.
 2. Less tailored for professional contexts.
 - 4. **DFP (Diplôme de Français Professionnel)**
 - **Levels:** B1-C1, CEFR-aligned; offered in different domains such as business, tourism, and healthcare.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Tailored to specific professional sectors, making it highly practical for career advancement.
 2. Issued by the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry, ensuring credibility and global recognition.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Not suitable for general or academic French proficiency.
 2. Availability of test centers and preparation materials may be limited outside of Francophone regions.
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Italian

1. **CILS (Certificazione di Italiano come Lingua Straniera)**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Official certification from the University of Siena, recognized globally.
 2. Includes specialized exams (e.g., for citizenship at B1).
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Test dates are limited and fixed throughout the year.
 2. Preparation materials are less widely available compared to other tests.
2. **CELI (Certificato di Conoscenza della Lingua Italiana)**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Administered by the University for Foreigners of Perugia, a respected institution.
 2. Flexible options for general, academic, or professional contexts.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Can be challenging to find test centers outside Italy.
 2. Less popular than CILS, so not as widely recognized.
3. **PLIDA (Progetto Lingua Italiana Dante Alighieri)**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Highly respected, particularly in Italy.
 2. Suitable for immigration and citizenship (B1 level).
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Limited availability in some regions.

2. Less emphasis on professional Italian compared to other exams.
 4. **AIL (Accademia Italiana di Lingua)**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2, with different exams like DELI (A2), DILI (B1-B2), and DALI (C1-C2).
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Practical test structure focusing on real-life situations.
 2. Suitable for beginners as well as advanced learners.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Not as internationally recognized as CILS or CELI.
 2. Test centres only in Italy and Switzerland.
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Spanish ...

1. **DELE (Diplomas de Español como Lengua Extranjera)**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Globally recognized and administered by the Instituto Cervantes.
 2. Lifetime validity.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Fixed test dates can limit flexibility.
 2. Can be challenging to prepare for the speaking section without a tutor.
2. **SIELE (Servicio Internacional de Evaluación de la Lengua Española)**
 - **Levels:** A1-C1, scored on a single scale.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Fully digital, offering flexible scheduling.
 2. Results are available quickly.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Certification validity limited to two years.
 2. Does not offer a C2-level certification.
3. **esPro (Spanish Proficiency Test)**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2, CEFR-aligned; focuses on professional contexts.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Specifically designed for evaluating Spanish proficiency in workplace scenarios.
 2. Flexible format with modular options for assessing listening, reading, and speaking/writing separately.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Less widely recognized than DELE or SIELE for general or academic purposes.
 2. Limited test center availability in some regions, as it is less common than other Spanish tests.

Portuguese ...

1. **CAPLE (Centro de Avaliação de Português Língua Estrangeira)**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Aligned with CEFR; covers all proficiency levels.
 2. Globally respected, especially for European Portuguese.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Limited test dates annually.
 2. Focus on European Portuguese. Learners of Brazilian Portuguese may prefer the CELPE-Bras exams (below).
2. **CELPE-Bras (Certificado de Proficiência em Língua Portuguesa para Estrangeiros)**
 - **Levels:** Intermediate to Advanced (approximately B1-C1). DIPLE (**Diploma Intermediário de Português Língua Estrangeira**) is the intermediate level exam, DAPLE (**Diploma Avançado de Português Língua Estrangeira**) is the advanced level.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Official Brazilian certification for academic and immigration purposes.
 2. Emphasizes communicative proficiency.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Limited to intermediate and advanced levels (no A-level certification).
 2. Focus on Brazilian Portuguese, learners of European Portuguese may prefer the CAPLE exams (above).
3. **PLE (Português como Língua Estrangeira) Certification by Universidade de Lisboa**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2, CEFR-aligned.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Offered by one of the most prestigious universities in Portugal, ensuring credibility.
 2. Comprehensive coverage of all language skills across all proficiency levels.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Limited recognition compared to CAPLE or CELPE-Bras.
 2. Availability may be restricted to Lisbon or affiliated institutions.
4. **PFL (Portuguese as a Foreign Language) Certification**
 - **Levels:** Beginner to Advanced (approximately A1-C1, depending on the institution offering it).
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Flexible certification often tailored to academic or specific learner needs.
 2. Can be a stepping stone to more formal certifications like CAPLE.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Less standardized, as different institutions may issue PFL certificates.

2. Recognition and portability may vary compared to CAPLE or CELPE-Bras.
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Basque ...

1. EGA (Euskararen Gaitasun Agiria)

- **Levels:** Equivalent to C1.
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Traditionally respected certification for advanced Basque proficiency.
 2. Often required for public sector jobs in the Basque Country.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Being phased out in favor of newer, CEFR-aligned exams (see HABA, below).
 2. Focused primarily on formal and professional Basque, which may not suit casual learners.

2. HABA Exams

- **Levels:** A1-C2, CEFR-aligned.
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Supported by the Basque government, ensuring broad recognition.
 2. Regularly offered, with resources designed for learners of all levels.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Primarily geared toward residents of the Basque Country.
 2. Availability of test centers is limited outside the Basque Country.

3. Euskara Tituluak by IVAP

- **Levels:** B1-C2.
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Tailored for professionals needing Basque in public administration.
 2. Officially recognized for career advancement in the Basque Country.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Focused on professional language, not general or conversational use.
 2. Limited relevance outside the Basque Country.

4. Euskara Munduan

- **Levels:** Flexible, CEFR-aligned (A1-C2).
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Accessible to international learners through Basque language organizations.
 2. Offers a supportive framework for beginners and intermediate learners.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Less established compared to EGA or HABA exams.
 2. Availability of test centers may vary internationally.
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Welsh

1. **WJEC Welsh for Adults Exams / CBAC Cymraeg i Oedolion**
 - **Levels:** A1-B2, CEFR-aligned.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Comprehensive coverage of skills, good free preparation materials available.
 2. Widely respected in Wales, with government support.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. No C-level (advanced) exams.
 2. No testing availability outside Wales.
 2. **Welsh Language Skills Certificate / Tystysgrif Sgiliau Iaith Gymraeg (Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol)**
 - **Levels:** Intermediate to Advanced (B2+).
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Respected for professional use in the workplace.
 2. Focused on practical applications of Welsh.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. No suited to casual learners.
 2. Usually only available for matriculated students of relevant HE institutions or employees in various places of work.
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Russian ...

1. **TORFL (Test of Russian as a Foreign Language) / TRKI**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2, CEFR-aligned.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Official state testing system and certification, recognized internationally and in Russian official / academic contexts. Required for university admission in Russia.
 2. Comprehensive assessment of all four language skills, plus separate grammar/vocab section.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Relatively traditions, can be difficult to get information about the requirements and to access preparation materials.
 2. Limited test centers in some foreign countries .
2. **Pushkin Institute Certification**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Offered by the prestigious Pushkin State Russian Language Institute. Strong focuses on cultural competency alongside language skills.
 2. Respected within Russia and neighboring countries.

- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Less commonly accepted internationally compared to TORFL.
 2. Test centres mainly in Russia / limited number of partner institutions.
 - 3. **Moscow State University Exams**
 - **Levels:** B1-C2.
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Prestigious certification tied to a top Russian institution.
 2. Designed for advanced learners, strong focus on academic writing and presentation skills. Required for certain MSU programmes and partner universities.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Very limited availability (mainly at MSU and partner institutions).
 2. Focus on more academic Russian may not suite general or business learners.
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Mandarin Chinese

1. **HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi)**
 - **Levels:** HSK 1-6 (A1-C2). Band 1-9 (new system being implemented).
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Most widely recognized Mandarin proficiency exam globally, accepted for university admission and employment..
 2. Structured progression, with separate writing tests for higher levels. Extensive preparation materials available.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Limited focus on speaking at lower levels. Speaking tests separate (HSKK, speaking test at three levels).
2. **TOCFL (Test of Chinese as a Foreign Language)**
 - **Levels:** A1-C2. (Novice, Basic, Intermediate, Advanced).
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Official Taiwanese tests. Tailored for learners of Taiwanese Mandarin (tests both traditional and simplified characters). Recognized for academic and immigration purposes in Taiwan.
 2. Includes speaking component in the main test (compare HSK, above).
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Less internationally recognized than HSK.
 2. Focus on traditional characters may not suit learners of simplified script.
3. **BCT (Business Chinese Test)**
 - **Levels:** IBCT Level 1-5 (approximately B1-C2).
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Focused on business and professional contexts, includes speaking component (as well as listening, reading, writing)..

- 2. Practical focus on workplace communication.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 - 1. Limited suitability for general learners.
 - 2. Not as widely offered as HSK.
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Japanese

1. JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Test)

- **Levels:** N1: C1-C2 (advanced); N2: B2-C1 (upper intermediate); N3: B1-B2 (intermediate); N4: A2-B1 (lower intermediate); N5: A1-A2 (beginner).
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 - 1. Most widely recognized Japanese proficiency test globally.
 - 2. Clear level progression for learners.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 - 1. No speaking or writing sections.
 - 2. Fixed test dates can limit flexibility (but more flexible online testing being rolled out).

2. BJT (Business Japanese Proficiency Test)

- **Levels:** Intermediate to Advanced (B1-C2).
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 - 1. Focus on professional and business language use.
 - 2. Useful for career opportunities in Japanese-speaking companies.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 - 1. Less emphasis on general Japanese.
 - 2. Limited test availability outside Japan.

3. J.TEST (Practical Japanese Proficiency Test)

- **Levels:** A-D, ranging from beginner to advanced (approximately A1-C2).
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 - 1. Offers more frequent testing dates than JLPT.
 - 2. Includes practical listening and speaking scenarios.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 - 1. Less globally recognized than JLPT.
 - 2. Preparation resources may be harder to find.

4. NAT-TEST

- **Levels:** N5-N1 (aligned with JLPT levels).
 - **Reasons to Choose:**
 - 1. More frequent test dates than JLPT.
 - 2. Test content mirrors JLPT, making it a good practice option.
 - **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 - 1. Results may not be as widely accepted as JLPT.
 - 2. Does not include speaking or writing components.
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Turkish

1. TÖMER Türkçe Yeterlik Sınavı (TYS)

- **Levels:** A1-C2, CEFR-aligned.
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Offered by Ankara University's TÖMER, the most prestigious Turkish language institution.
 2. Recognized for academic, professional, and personal language certification.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Limited test centers outside Turkey.
 2. Speaking component can be challenging for beginners.

2. Yunus Emre Institute Turkish Proficiency Exam (TPE)

- **Levels:** A1-C2, CEFR-aligned.
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Globally respected certification suitable for all levels.
 2. Comprehensive testing of all four skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking).
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Availability may be limited in some regions.
 2. Slightly less established than TÖMER for academic purposes.

3. YDS (Yabancı Dil Sınavı) and e-YDS (computer-based version)

- **Levels:** Intermediate to Advanced (B2-C2).
- **Reasons to Choose:**
 1. Required for specific academic and professional positions in Turkey.
 2. Only tests reading and grammar.
- **Reasons Not to Choose:**
 1. Does not assess speaking or writing skills.
 2. Primarily aimed at academic audiences in Turkey.