Frequently Asked Questions

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 testing director, Alan Forsyth (alan.forsyth@emory.edu). This policy covers all students, regardless of citizenship status or educational background.

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

2. What is the purpose of the test?
The test is used for making recommendations for participation in TATTO (the teaching assistantship program) and for identifying students who may benefit from language support courses their first academic year.

3. Are exemptions possible?
Due to education, living circumstances, or other background experiences, a student may qualify for an exemption. To be exempted, a student should be able to demonstrate superior level language skills, and in most cases, an informal interview is required to determine eligibility. Students should contact Alan Forsyth (alan.forsyth@emory.edu) before the assigned testing date. No exemptions will be given on the day of testing.

Please note that receiving an undergraduate or master’s degree from a university in an English-speaking country does not by itself qualify a student for an exemption.

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 making TATTO (the teaching assistantship program) recommendations and for identifying students who may benefit from language support courses their first academic year.

5. When and where is the test given?
For students entering in the fall, test dates are based on the student’s degree program, and students come to English Language Support Program (ELSP) offices on the date and at the time assigned to their degree program. For fall semester dates, please refer to the testing schedule on the English Language Support Program homepage at http://www.gs.emory.edu/resources/esl.php. Students entering spring semester should contact Alan Forsyth (alan.forsyth@emory.edu) for information.
The test is given in the ELSP offices, room 101 North Decatur Building. The street address is:
1784 North Decatur Road Atlanta, Georgia 30322

On the campus map http://map.emory.edu/, search for “Property Name” and “North Decatur Building” in the drop-down menus.

6. I will not be able to attend the assigned testing date. What should I do?

   The test is required by the Laney Graduate School, and students are expected to attend the testing date assigned to their program. However, if a student is unable to attend the session, he or she should contact Alan Forsyth (alan.forsyth@emory.edu) before the testing date to make alternative arrangements.

7. What is the format of the test?

   The test has two sections: speaking and writing.

   The speaking section is a 20- to 30-minute recorded interview on a variety of topics based on 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.

   Throughout the conversation, the interviewer is listening to how ideas are expressed and not critiquing them.   If the interviewer introduces a topic that you do not want to talk about, you should feel free to say that you 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 a designated academic topic. No minimum word count is required; however, 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.

   The writing sample is evaluated at 4 levels: novice, intermediate, advanced, or superior.

8. 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.

9. How and when will I receive the results?

   On the day of testing, students will receive a date and time to return to the English Language Support Program to receive test results and be advised of any course requirements or recommendations.
10. Are English language support courses required?

If scores on the test indicate a speaking and/or writing course requirement, these courses must be taken the first academic year. Depending on the scores attained, a student may be required or recommended to take either a speaking course sequence and/or a writing course sequence.

Speaking Assessment Score and ELSP Courses

Advanced High (3.7–3.9): Degree-seeking students scoring Advanced High are recommended to take:
- ELSP 520: Seminar in Professional Communication (Fall, 3 credits)
- ELSP 597: Laboratory in Professional Communication (Spring, 2 credits)

Advanced Low-Mid (3.0–3.6): Degree-seeking students scoring Advanced Low or Mid are required to take:
- 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 (2.0–2.9): Degree-seeking students scoring Intermediate are required to take:
- 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 first session, 2 credits)

Writing Assessment Score and ESL Courses

Advanced Low (3.0–3.2): Degree-seeking students scoring Advanced Low are recommended to take:
- ELSP 510: Fundamentals of Graduate Writing I (Fall, 3 credits)
- ELSP 511: Fundamentals of Graduate Writing II (Spring, 2 credits)

Intermediate Low-Mid-High (2.0–2.9): Degree-seeking students scoring Intermediate are required to take:
- ELSP 510: Fundamentals of Graduate Writing I (Fall, 3 credits)
- ELSP 511: Fundamentals of Graduate Writing II (Spring, 2 credits)

ELSP courses carry 2-3 hours credit, are graded S/U, and appear on transcripts. A student needing two courses in one term is expected to reduce discipline specific loads to accommodate the academic requirements of English support classes.