



**BUREAU FOR INTERNATIONAL
LANGUAGE CO-ORDINATION**

STANAG 6001 Level 4
Reading Proficiency Test
Familiarization Guide



BILC Working Group on Level 4 Proficiency

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to familiarize you with Level 4 proficiency in accordance with the STANAG 6001, Ed 5 (V2) language proficiency descriptors, as well as with the format of the Level 4 reading proficiency test you are about to take.

LEVEL 4 READING PROFICIENCY

The descriptor below, extracted from NATO STANAG 6001, Ed. 5 outlines what the reader *can* do at this proficiency level.¹

LEVEL 4 - EXPERT

Demonstrates strong competence in reading all styles and forms of the written language used for professional purposes, including texts from unfamiliar general and professional-specialist areas. Contexts include newspapers, magazines, and professional literature written for the well-educated reader and may contain topics from such areas as economics, culture, science, and technology, as well as from the reader's own field. Can readily follow unpredictable turns of thought on any subject matter addressed to the general reader. Shows both global and detailed understanding of texts including highly abstract concepts. Can understand almost all cultural references and can relate a specific text to other written materials within the culture. Demonstrates a firm grasp of stylistic nuances, irony, and humour. Reading speed is similar to that of a native reader. Can read reasonably legible handwriting without difficulty.

According to the descriptor, Level 4 readers understand highly sophisticated and abstract texts on unfamiliar general or professional-specialist topics that may be outside of their area of expertise. These readers can relate ideas expressed in such texts and link them to wider social, historical and cultural issues, *and thus demonstrate they can read beyond the lines*. They can also recognize the author's tone and attitudes conveyed.

The texts that belong to Level 4 range of difficulty are highly individualized, abstract, innovative and culturally dense, and may contain abstract metaphors and symbolism, and unpredictable shifts in thought, tone and register (e.g., formal versus informal). Articles from the fields of military philosophy/ethics, literary criticism, treaties,

¹ The full document can be downloaded at <http://www.natobilc.org/documents/LanguageTesting/NU-ST%206001%20NTG%20ED4.pdf>



policies, professional literature and *belles lettres*, politics, economics, philosophy etc. may represent some examples of Level 4 writings.

The test questions following such texts are aligned with the texts in their level of difficulty. With these questions, both global and detailed comprehension of ideas expressed in highly abstract texts is assessed. In addition, the examinees' understanding of references made in the text and their relationship to other written materials within that target culture may also be evaluated.

To comprehend texts of this complexity, readers need to employ what is known as higher order cognitive/thinking skills, which involve functions, such as analysis, extrapolation, synthesis, evaluation and appreciation. Reading at this level is careful, close and thorough, because surface reading, usually sufficient for processing texts of lower difficulty levels (news reports on frequently recurring events or straightforward opinions on political issues) does not suffice.

TEST FORMAT AND ADMINISTRATION

Under this test format, examinees are given the option to take the test through the spoken or written modality. It is assumed their choice will depend on their own perception as to which of the two skills, speaking or writing, they consider to be stronger of the two. It should be noted though that the main difference between the two test modalities is that testers may ask follow-up questions in the spoken test version if they feel a response does not provide sufficient evidence of comprehension, or that it has trailed off the topic. Instructions for both test versions are provided in the Examinee Test Booklet and in Annex 1 of this Guide. Before the test begins, examinees will have the opportunity to ask the test administrator for clarification of the test instructions.

The test contains 2 texts of approximately 1400-1500 words. Each text is followed by six questions. The examinees are also given a sheet of paper on which they can write their notes before they respond to the questions orally or in writing.

In this test format, some questions refer to the text as a whole, while others focus on individual paragraphs, all of which are numbered. Questions referring to specific paragraphs are followed by a number in brackets indicating that paragraph.



NOTE: This test includes authentic texts originally intended for a variety of English language readers. Some topics and opinions may appear to be controversial. Examinees should bear in mind that these are the topics chosen and opinions voiced by the authors of the texts. These do not represent the point of view of the test developers, test administrators, or user organizations.

Sample Text

Excerpt from "Politics among Nations" by Hans J. Morgenthau

[Para 1] When one reflects upon the development of American thinking on foreign policy, one is struck by the persistence of mistaken attitudes that have survived- under whatever guises - both intellectual argument and political experience.

[Para 2] Once that wonder, in true Aristotelian fashion, has been transformed into the quest for rational understanding, the quest yields a conclusion both comforting and disturbing: we are here in the presence of intellectual defects shared by all of us in different ways and degrees. Together they provide the outline of a kind of pathology of international politics. When the human mind approaches reality with the purpose of taking action, of which the political encounter is one of the outstanding instances, it is often led astray by any of four common mental phenomena: residues of formerly adequate modes of thought and action now rendered obsolete by a new social reality; demonological interpretations of reality which substitute a fictitious reality - peopled by evil persons rather than seemingly intractable issues - for the actual one; refusal to come to terms with a threatening state of affairs by denying it through illusory verbalization; reliance upon the infinite malleability of a seemingly obstreperous reality.

[Para 3] Man responds to social situations with repetitive patterns. The same situation, recognized in its identity with previous situations, evokes the same response. The mind, as it were, holds in readiness a number of patterns appropriate for different situations; it then requires only the identification of a particular case to apply to it the preformed pattern appropriate to it. Thus the human mind follows the principle of economy of effort, obviating an examination de novo of each individual situation and the pattern of thought and action appropriate to it. Yet when matters are subject to dynamic change, traditional patterns are no longer appropriate; they must be replaced by newness reflecting such change. Otherwise a gap will open



between traditional patterns and new realities, and thought and action will be misguided.

Sample Test Question (Whole Text): In the realm of international politics, what intellectual failings and attitudes do the Americans exhibit, and what are their origins?

Sample Response: When it comes to foreign policy and international politics the Americans tend to rely on obsolete views and allow their action to be guided by the principles that are no longer applicable to the newly arisen circumstances. Instead of adapting their views to the new realities and examining every new political situation with a fresh view, they misinterpret it by viewing it through the prism of either illusory perception or substituting that reality.

Rating

Raters are aware that the examinees may formulate their responses in many different ways. A response will be considered successful if it conveys the same idea as the one contained in the sample response. Also, to be successful, a response needs to be sufficiently elaborate and nuanced to convey the complexity of the ideas expressed in the text.



PREPARATION FOR THE TEST

This is not the type of test for which examinees can prepare directly. Success on the test will depend on how generally well-read the examinee is across a variety of topical areas dealing with abstract ideas and concepts. Possible topics might include social studies, science, military philosophy and ethics. Sources might be literary fiction, higher level editorials, and essays in publications intended for well-educated native readers.

Examinees should expect to discuss high level texts, interpreting the author's meaning by reading 'between' and 'beyond' the lines. Understanding meaning "between the lines" is the ability to comprehend information that is not explicitly expressed by the author but which can be derived or assumed on the basis of the text. Understanding meaning "beyond the lines" is the ability to make judgements or express opinion about a text, evaluate the significance of the author's message, credibility, intent, and purpose, extrapolate beyond the text and place it in a socio-cultural and historical context. Full comprehension at Level 4 goes beyond literal understanding of explicitly stated information; it involves the interpretation and critical evaluation of the text and the speaker or writer, who may have a unique attitude toward the subject of their discussion. In other words, the comprehension tasks that characterize Level 4 are inferential and evaluative by nature. For that reason, careful and attentive reading of the texts is required to facilitate their processing and understanding. In addition, examinees need to have strong speaking or writing skills in order to be able to elaborate on the responses to complex and abstract questions.

As test confidentiality is important, examinees should not discuss with or divulge test content with other potential test takers or anyone else.

GOOD LUCK!

ANNEX I



Written Test Modality

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE EXAMINEE

This is a test of Level 4 proficiency in the reading skill IAW NATO STANAG 6001. In taking the test, you will read two texts of similar lengths but on different topics, and respond in writing to the questions asked.

1. The test consists of 2 texts followed by 6 questions each. At each question, it is indicated in brackets whether that question refers to the whole text or a particular paragraph. You can use this information to help focus your attention on the parts of the text addressed by the question.
2. While reading the texts, you can take notes on a separate sheet before you respond to the questions by writing in the test booklet. Turn in these notes to the Tester/Test Control Officer at the end of the test.
3. Because the texts deal with complex ideas, in order to help the tester(s)/rater(s) evaluate your comprehension, please try to be as **complete, concise and coherent** as you can. Please note the following:
 - a. your writing skill/style or techniques will not be part of the official evaluation;
 - b. those rating your responses will regard your production as a first draft. Within the time limits of this test, do the best job you can both to write clearly and to fully cover the subject.
 - c. **IMPORTANT: This test aims to assess your comprehension of the arguments, views and opinions expressed by the author. Therefore, your responses should reflect the ideas outlined in the texts and not your personal opinions.**
4. This test includes authentic texts originally intended for English language readers. Some topics and opinions may appear to be controversial. Examinees should bear in mind that these are the topics chosen and opinions voiced by the authors of the texts. These do *not* represent the point of view of the test developers, test administrators, or user organizations.
5. The use of online or any other type of dictionary or aid is **NOT PERMITTED**.
6. You have **2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes)** to complete the test; however, if you finish earlier, please let the tester(s)/Test Control Officer know.
7. Finally, be kind enough to fill out a questionnaire that you will find at the end of this booklet. Your feedback will assist us in adjusting our test administration procedures.

Good luck!



Spoken Test Modality

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE EXAMINEE

This is a test of Level 4 proficiency in the reading skill IAW NATO STANAG 6001. In taking the test, you will read two texts of similar lengths but on different topics, and respond orally to the questions asked.

1. The test consists of 2 texts followed by 6 questions each. At each question, it is indicated in brackets whether that question refers to the whole text or a particular paragraph. You can use this information to help focus your attention on the parts of the text addressed by the question.
2. You will have **30 minutes** to read **each** text. After 30 minutes, or earlier if you are ready, you will be asked to respond orally to questions on Text 1, before moving on to Text 2. While reading the texts, you can take notes on a separate sheet. You may write out your responses fully or partially; however you must give your oral responses spontaneously, and not by reading them off the note pad. You will be asked to turn in these notes to the Tester/Test Control Officer at the end of the test.
3. Besides the written questions shown in the Test Booklet, the tester(s) may ask you follow-up questions to further explore the topic, or gain additional evidence of your comprehension. The time period for this part of the test may vary from one candidate to the next;
4. Because the texts deal with complex ideas, in order to help the tester(s)/rater(s) evaluate your comprehension, please try to be as **complete, concise and coherent** as you can in your responses. Please note the following:
 - a. you may refer back to the texts to refresh your memory before giving your responses;
 - b. your speaking skill/style will not be part of the **official** evaluation;
 - c. **IMPORTANT: This test aims to assess your comprehension of the arguments, views and opinions expressed by the author. Therefore, your responses should reflect the ideas outlined in the texts and not your personal opinions.**
5. This test includes authentic texts originally intended for English language readers. Some topics and opinions may appear to be controversial. Examinees should bear in mind that these are the topics chosen and opinions voiced by the authors of the texts. These do *not* represent the point of view of the test developers, test administrators, or user organizations.
6. The use of online or any other type of dictionary or aid is **NOT PERMITTED**.
7. Finally, be kind enough to fill out a questionnaire that you will find at the end of this booklet. Your feedback will assist us in adjusting our test trialing procedures.

Good luck!