

Standardized Language Assessments for Settlement and Integration Pathways

This issue of *Migration Matters* explores the use of different standardized English language assessments for accessing settlement and integration pathways for newcomers in Canada. A summary of typical assessments and their uses is provided.

Introduction

To achieve their social, economic, and academic goals, newcomers to Canada may need to prove their proficiency in English for a variety of reasons:

- For entry into settlement language programs
- For entry into academic and trades programs
- For professional registration
- For Canadian citizenship

Standardized English language assessments are used to assess English language proficiency for official purposes to meet government or institutional requirements. Although a variety of standardized assessments are available to newcomers, only specific assessments may be used depending on the context.

What is a standardized language assessment?

A standardized language assessment is a language test delivered in a predetermined, consistent manner with standard scoring criteria. This increases validity of the test results as test takers are under the same testing conditions with the same scoring standards each time.¹

Entry into settlement language programs

The Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program is available for free to permanent residents or protected persons in Canada and provides language training focused on settlement and integration topics.² For entry into the LINC program in British Columbia, eligible newcomers to Canada need to take the Canadian Language Benchmark Placement Test (CLBPT). Training, licensing and administration of the CLBPT is coordinated through the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB).³ This test is only available through licensed sites with certified assessors. For a list of sites, see the [CCLB website](#).

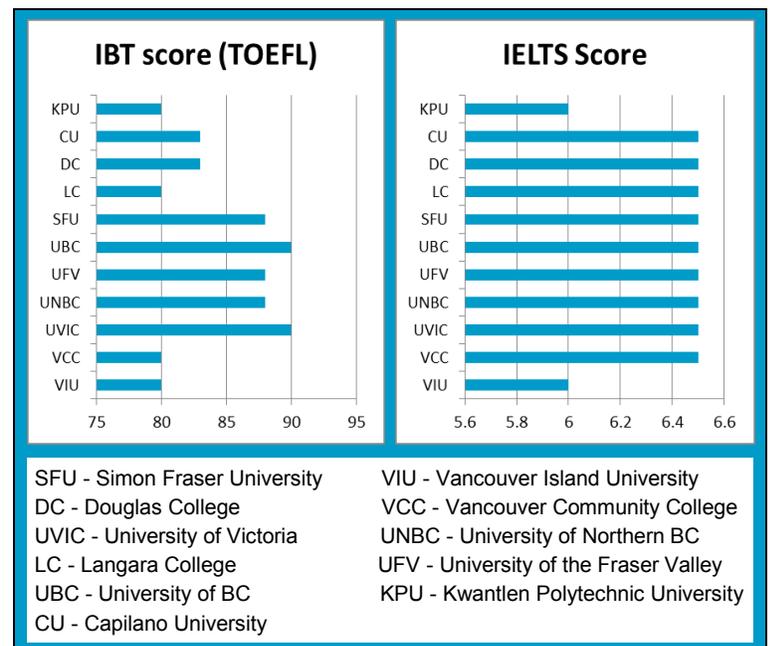
Entry into academic and trades programs

After landing in Canada, newcomers to Canada may wish to upgrade their skills or choose a different career path. To do so, entry into academic or trades programs at post-secondary institutions might be necessary. These institutions often require proof of English language

proficiency from individuals educated outside of Canada for admission. Below are the most common standardized English language assessments that are accepted by post-secondary institutions in British Columbia:

- **IELTS - Academic** (International English Language Testing System)
- **CAEL** (Canadian Academic English Language Assessment)
- **TOEFL iBT** (Test of English as a Foreign Language - internet based test)
- **MELAB** (Michigan English Language Assessment Battery)*

The level of English proficiency needed to enter an academic or trades program varies from institution to institution, and from program to program. The following graphs show the undergraduate English language proficiency requirements of eleven BC public post-secondary institutions as measured by TOEFL iBT and IELTS scores.⁴



Source: Kwantlen Polytechnic University

*Not all assessments are accepted by all post-secondary institutions. More information about accepted assessments and minimum scores for program entry is available through specific institutions & programs.

References

- ¹ Centre for Public Education. (2006). [A guide to standardized testing: The nature of assessment](#).
- ² Government of Canada. (2014). [Language classes funded by the Government of Canada](#).
- ³ Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. (2016). [CLB Placement Test \(CLBPT\)](#).
- ⁴ Kwantlen Polytechnic University. (2011). [English Thresholds Project: A Review of English Entrance and Exit Thresholds](#).

Professional registration

To be able to work in British Columbia, certain professions require proof of English language proficiency, particularly in high demand healthcare fields such as pharmacy, occupational therapy, medicine, nursing, and health care aide.⁵ Below are the certifying bodies for these professions and links to their English language proficiency requirements:

Certifying Bodies with Language Proficiency Requirements

- [College of Pharmacists of British Columbia](#)
- [College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia \(CRNBC\)](#)
- [College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia \(CPSBC\)](#)
- [Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations \(ACOTRO\)](#)
- [BC Care Aide & Community Health Worker Registry](#)

Currently in BC, nursing is the only profession with an occupationally specific standardized language assessment: the Canadian English Language Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN).⁶ Although CRNBC also accepts IELTS scores, CELBAN gives internationally trained nurses an alternative assessment option that tests language within realistic health care contexts, making the assessment more relevant to the Canadian healthcare workplace.⁷

Entry into the fields of pharmacy, occupational therapy, medicine, nursing and health care aide require additional steps over and above proof of language proficiency. More information on the process and requirements for registration are available through the certifying bodies of the professions.

Other in demand professions in BC, such as engineering and accounting, may not use standardized assessments for certification, but still require certain levels of language proficiency. For example, the certifying body Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of BC evaluates English proficiency for internationally trained engineers through the essay portion of the Professional Practice Examination, and comments from the applicant's referees and interviewers.⁸ Internationally trained accountants do not need to submit English language proficiency requirements to the certifying body of Chartered Professional Accountants of BC. However, applicants may have to do further academic training to become designated, such as the CPA Professional Education Program, which recommends a minimum level of CLB 8 for success in the program.⁹

Canadian citizenship

For Canadian citizenship, proof of language proficiency is required for applicants 18-64 years of age and can be provided in either English or French. For English, there are only two approved standardized assessments for citizenship purposes: the CELPIP (Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program) General test and IELTS General test.¹⁰ Below are the minimum scores required for citizenship:

| Test | Listening | Speaking |
|------------------|---------------|---------------|
| CELPIP - General | 4 or higher | 4 or higher |
| IELTS - General | 4.5 or higher | 4.0 or higher |

More information about proof of language proficiency for Canadian citizenship can be found on the [Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada website](#).

Summary of Standardized Language Assessments for Settlement and Integration Pathways

| Test | Uses | Scoring System |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| IELTS - Academic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For entry into academic and trades programs • For professional registration | IELTS Band Scores |
| CAEL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For entry into academic programs | CAEL Band Descriptors |
| MELAB | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For entry into academic programs | MELAB Speaking and Writing Descriptors |
| TOEFL iBT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For entry into academic and trades programs | TOEFL iBT Test Scores |
| CELBAN | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For professional registration (nursing context only) | Canadian Language Benchmarks |
| IELTS - General | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Canadian citizenship | IELTS Band Scores |
| CELPIP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Canadian citizenship | Canadian Language Benchmarks |
| CLBPT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For placement into federally funded language programs | Canadian Language Benchmarks |

References

⁵ Work BC. (2016). [British Columbia 2025 Labour Market Outlook](#).

⁶ College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia. (2016). [English requirements](#).

⁷ The CELBAN Centre. (2015). [About the CELBAN test](#).

⁸ Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of BC. (2017). [Engineer First Time Applying in Canada](#).

⁹ Chartered Professional Accountants Canada. (2017). [Other international accounting professionals seeking the Canadian CPA designation](#).

¹⁰ Government of Canada. (2016). [Application for Canadian citizenship under subsection 5\(1\) – Adults 18 years of age and older](#).

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