

Understanding English Language Levels

People have different abilities in English. Some people grow up speaking English with their parents and go on to study at an English university. We call them educated native speakers. For other people, English is a completely foreign language that they do not understand at all. We call them absolute beginners. Everyone else falls between these two extremes.

Europe recognizes three general categories of English proficiency: A, B, and C. We often refer to these three levels of English ability as beginner (A0, A1, A2), intermediate (B1, B2), and advanced (C1, C2), and we distinguish between low and high ability. These distinctions produce 7 levels in all. Which of these levels describes you at the moment? Which of these describes your goal for yourself?

A0 Absolute beginners

- No ability in English.
- Learners at this level need to learn ABCs, and basic phrases. Not offered by colleges in Quebec.

A1 Low Beginners (604-000)

- Very basic English ability to interact using simple words and common phrases.
- Learners at this level can introduce themselves and ask basic questions about name, address, and about what someone knows or has.
- Colleges in Quebec offer a non-credit course for students at this level if they didn't pass high school English in the French system.

A2 High Beginners (604-100)

- Basic English ability to interact using frequently used expressions with immediate relevance
- Despite errors, false starts and hesitation, learners at this level can exchange basic personal information, ask about family, prices and locations of things.
- Colleges in Quebec offer a credit course for students at this level for students who have a lot of difficulty or anxiety communicating in English.

B1 Low Intermediates (604-101)

- Some fluency in common situations with many errors
- Learners at this level can communicate in most situations while traveling and can write and speak about topics of personal interest. Despite errors and hesitation, they can describe events in the past, their hopes and ambitions, and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
- Most students in Quebec graduate high school at this level.

B2 High Intermediates (604-102)

- Fluency with some errors in most situations
- Learners at this level can communicate complex ideas about concrete and abstract topics without much difficulty. At this level, learners can have few errors with their verbs forms but can self-correct.

C1 Low advanced (604-103)

- Spontaneous fluency with nuance
- Learners at this level can understand implicit meaning in long, demanding texts, and can produce well-structured, detailed texts on complex subjects. Despite punctuation errors, grammar is error-free.

C2 High advanced

- Complete mastery of English
- Learners at this level can summarize arguments and stories fluently and precisely, differentiating fine shades of meaning.