

### PART III: EXPLANATION OF RATING SCALE

#### Pronunciation

The six levels of pronunciation descriptors are applicable at all levels to native and non-native speakers. That is, a “native” English speaker may demonstrate Elementary Level 2 proficiency if his or her regional dialect is so localized that it is not readily understood by those outside of that particular region. On the other hand, a person whose speech patterns clearly mark him or her as a “non-native” speaker (someone with a so-called “heavy” accent) may quite readily demonstrate Expert Level 6 proficiency, as long as he or she meets the criteria of almost always being *easy* to understand by proficient listeners.

Level	Descriptors	Additional information
<b>Expert 6</b>	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, though <b>possibly influenced</b> by the first language or regional variation, <b>almost never</b> interfere with ease of understanding.	An Expert Level 6 speaker may be a speaker of English as a first language with a widely understood dialect, or an Expert Level 6 speaker may be a very proficient second-language speaker, again with a widely used or understood accent and/or dialect. The speaker’s accent or dialect may or may not mark him or her as a second-language user, but the pronunciation patterns of Expert speakers or any difficulties, “mistakes”, almost never interfere with the ease with which he or she is understood. Always clear and understandable.
<b>Extended 5</b>	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, though <b>influenced</b> by the first language or regional variation, <b>rarely interfere</b> with ease of understanding.	The Extended Level 5 speaker demonstrates a marked accent, or localized regional variety of English, but one which rarely interferes with how easily understood his or her speech is. Always clear and understandable, although, only occasionally, a proficient listener may have to pay close attention.
<b>Operational 4</b>	<b>...only sometimes interfere...</b>	An Operational Level 4 speaker also demonstrates a marked accent, or localized regional variety of English. Occasionally, a proficient listener may have to pay close attention to understand or may have to clarify something from time to time.

Operational Level 4 is certainly not a “perfect” level of proficiency; it is the minimum level of proficiency determined to be “safe” for air traffic control communications. While it is not an Expert, fully proficient level, it is important to keep in mind that pronunciation, or form, plays the critical role in aiding comprehension between two non-native speakers of English.

## Structure

Relevant grammatical structures and sentence patterns are determined by language functions appropriate to the task. Users may refer to the communicative aeronautical language functions and to the list of controller communicative tasks in Chapter 7 of this manual for guidance.

Language teaching specialists generally categorize structural (or grammatical) errors into two classes: “global” and “local.” Global errors are those which interfere with meaning, and local errors are those which do not interfere with meaning.

<b>Level</b>	<b>Descriptors</b>	<b>Additional information</b>
<b>Expert 6</b>	Both basic and complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled.	Expert Level 6 speakers do not demonstrate consistent global structural or grammatical errors, but may exhibit fossilized local errors.
<b>Extended 5</b>	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled. Complex structures are attempted but with errors which sometimes interferes with meaning.	Extended Level 5 speakers demonstrate less control of complex grammatical structures than do Expert Level 6 speakers and may commit global errors from time to time when using complex structures.
<b>Operational 4</b>	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are used creatively and are usually well controlled. Errors may occur, particularly in unusual or unexpected circumstances, but rarely interfere with meaning.	Operational Level 4 speakers have good command of basic grammatical structures. They do not merely have a memorized set of language on which they rely, but have sufficient command of basic grammar to create new meaning as appropriate. They demonstrate errors, particularly local errors, but infrequent global errors.

## Vocabulary

A partial list of vocabulary domains related to aviation communications is found in Chapter 7 of this manual.

While memorizing phraseologies is neither an acceptable means of demonstrating language proficiency nor an effective or recommended language learning strategy, it is undeniable that *context* is a relevant factor in language proficiency. Therefore, learning or testing which focuses on, or is designed to elicit vocabulary related to, aeronautical radiotelephony communications is acceptable. An appropriate methodology is to train and test in a wide *aviation-related* context, in order to ensure that proficiency will be fully adequate in the usually narrow constraints of aeronautical radiotelephony communications.

Level	Descriptors	Additional information
<b>Expert</b> <b>6</b>	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on a wide variety of familiar and unfamiliar topics. Vocabulary is idiomatic, nuanced, and sensitive to register.	Register refers to those aspects of style, tone, and lexical choice which correspond to context and status. One of the more difficult foreign language learning tasks seems to be acquiring a cultural sensitivity to register. Another marker of strong proficiency seems to be the acquisition of, and facility with, idiomatic expressions and the ability to communicate nuanced ideas.
<b>Extended</b> <b>5</b>	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work related topics. Paraphrases consistently and successfully. Vocabulary is sometimes idiomatic.	Extended Level 5 speakers may not be sensitive to register, with a lexical range which may not be sufficient to communicate very effectively in as broad a range of topics as an Expert Level 6 speaker, but a speaker with Extended proficiency will have no trouble paraphrasing whenever necessary.

<b>Operational 4</b>	Vocabulary range and accuracy are usually sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work related topics. Can often paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary in unusual or unexpected circumstances.	An Operational Level 4 speaker will very likely not have a well-developed sensitivity to register. Vocabulary is not expected to be idiomatic. A speaker with Operational proficiency will usually be able to manage communication on work-related topics, but may sometimes need clarification. When faced with a communication breakdown, an Operational Level 4 speaker can paraphrase and “negotiate meaning” so that the message is understood.
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**Fluency**

Fluency is a very interesting concept. Most have an intuitive sense of what it is, but it proves very difficult to define. In aviation, the radiotelephone is often a busy environment. The communications of air traffic controllers and pilots must not only be clear, concise, and unambiguous, but responses must be delivered efficiently and a rapid response time is expected. Therefore, for our purposes, “fluency” is intended to refer to the naturalness of speech production, the degree to which comprehension is impeded by any unnatural or unusual hesitancy, distracting starts and stops, or distracting fillers (em.... huh.... er.....). Or with inappropriate silence.

**Descriptors****Level**

<b>Expert</b> <b>6</b>	Able to speak at length with a natural, effortless flow. Varies speech flow for stylistic effect, e.g. to emphasize a point. Uses appropriate discourse markers and connectors spontaneously.
<b>Extended</b> <b>5</b>	Able to speak at length with relative ease on familiar topics, but may not vary speech flow as a stylistic device. Can make use of appropriate discourse markers or connectors.
<b>Operational</b> <b>4</b>	Produces stretches of language at an appropriate tempo. There may be occasional loss of fluency on transition from rehearsed or formulaic speech to spontaneous interaction, but this does not prevent effective communication. Can make limited use of discourse markers or connectors. Fillers are not distracting.

## Comprehension

In air traffic control communications, pilots rely on the clear and accurate information provided to them by controllers for continued safety. It is not sufficient for air traffic controllers to be able to handle *most* pilot communications; they must be ready for the unexpected. Similarly, pilots must be able to understand air traffic controller instructions, especially when these differ from what a pilot expects to hear. It is during complications in aviation that communications become most crucial, with a greater reliance upon plain language.

Level	Descriptors	Additional information
<b>Expert</b> 6	Comprehension is consistently accurate in nearly all contexts and includes comprehension of linguistic and cultural subtleties.	
<b>Extended</b> 5	Comprehension is accurate on common, concrete, and work related topics and mostly accurate when the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events. Is able to comprehend a range of speech varieties (dialect and/or accent) or registers.	
<b>Operational</b> 4	Comprehension is mostly accurate on common, concrete, and work related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. When the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events, comprehension may be slower or require clarification strategies.	As with all Operational Level 4 descriptors, Comprehension is not expected to be perfectly accurate in all instances. However, the pilot or air traffic controller will need to have strategies available which allow him or her to ultimately comprehend the unexpected or unusual communication. Unmarked or complex textual relations are occasionally misunderstood or missed. The descriptors of Operational Level 4 under <i>Interactions</i> clarifies the need for clarification strategies. Failure to understand a clearly communicated unexpected communication, even after seeking clarification, should result in the assignment of a lower proficiency level assessment.

## Interactions

Pilots and controllers should be aware that inappropriate silence may indicate a failure to understand.

Level	Descriptors	Additional information
<b>Expert</b> <b>6</b>	Interacts with ease in nearly all situations. Is sensitive to verbal and non-verbal cues, and responds to them appropriately.	
<b>Extended</b> <b>5</b>	Responses are immediate, appropriate, and informative. Manages the speaker/listener relationship effectively.	
<b>Operational</b> <b>4</b>	Responses are usually immediate, appropriate, and informative. Initiates and maintains exchanges even when dealing with an unexpected turn of events. Deals adequately with apparent misunderstandings by checking, confirming, or clarifying.	A pilot or air traffic controller who does not understand an unexpected communication must be able to communicate that fact. It is much safer to query a communication, to clarify, or even to simply acknowledge that one does not understand rather than allow silence to mistakenly represent comprehension. At the Operational Level 4, it is acceptable that comprehension is not perfect, 100 per cent of the time, when dealing with unexpected situations, but Level 4 speakers need to be skilled at checking, seeking confirmation, or clarifying a situation or communication.