

## ATESL Best Practices Checklist for Canadian Language Benchmarks and Portfolio Based Language Assessment

Where implemented, the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) provide a common frame of reference for all stakeholders (learners, instructors, administrators, funders, etc.) and inform all aspects of EAL programming. Curriculum development, materials development, instruction, and assessment are referenced to and informed by the Canadian Language Benchmarks.<sup>1</sup>

Where implemented, Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA) encourages learners to take responsibility for and ownership of their own learning. It ensures learners and instructors have multiple opportunities to monitor and reflect on progress, set learning goals, provide/receive action-oriented feedback, and use performance to make plans for learning.

### Use the ATESL Best Practices Checklists:

#### *For Individuals*

- To learn about an unfamiliar area or new responsibility
- To reflect on your own practice
  - What am I doing well?
  - What am I doing that could be improved?
  - What am I not doing that I could or should be doing?

#### *For Professional development and teacher training*

- To identify goals to aspire to and specific steps to take to meet those goals
- To focus discussion after class observations
- To focus team meeting discussions
- To develop workshops/presentations

#### *For Programs*

- To identify strengths that distinguish your program (e.g., to justify the worth/value of the program to the broader institution, to funders, to learners, to community stakeholders)
- To identify gaps in a program or practice (e.g., to identify constraints to address, to identify initial and ongoing actions, to determine a focus for professional development, to justify requests for funding)

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<sup>1</sup> Note: This theme does not stand alone. Each of the Best Practices in this theme must be paired with relevant Best Practices in the Staff (i.e., professional development), Curriculum, Instruction, Learner Assessment, and Resources themes.

**32. Instructors and other staff (administrators, curriculum developers, material developers, and assessors) access and receive formal, ongoing professional development regarding the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA), and their applications.**

- Instructors and other staff are trained in the knowledge and use of the CLB for the following:
  - Curriculum development
  - Course development
  - Instruction
  - Placement, formative, and summative assessment (e.g., workshops where instructors are trained to design PBLA assessments and evaluate and recommend CLB-levels)
  - Other
- Where PBLA is implemented, instructors receive information, training, support, and orientation related to PBLA, including the following:
  - The expectations of PBLA as implemented in their program
  - PBLA resources that they are expected to use (assessment tasks, assessment templates, binders, record-keeping tools, needs assessment and goal setting tools, etc.)
  - Technology and processes related to e-portfolios and record-keeping (if relevant)
- Professional development related to the CLB and PBLA encourages the following:
  - Ongoing commitment of participants
  - Opportunities to reflect on practice and challenge biases/assumptions
  - Opportunities to apply what is learned
  - Opportunities to report back on, receive feedback on, and further refine what is learned
  - Opportunities for mentorship and collaboration
- The program maintains connections with the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB), for instance, by accessing CCLB-designed workshops and training materials, and keeping current with new CCLB and PBLA resources.
- The program develops links with CLB assessment centres (e.g., CLARC in Calgary, LARCC in Edmonton) through arranging for instructor workshops and/or instructor and learner visits to the site.
- Participation in CLB/PBLA training (online or face-to-face) is recognized, facilitated, and supported by the program (e.g., certificate of attendance, upgrading of credentials).
- The program ensures instructors have access to CLB/PBLA resources for professional development.

**33. Learners are familiar with the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA), and are able to use them to clarify their present proficiency levels, to identify learning goals and objectives, and to chart a course for learning.**

- CLB descriptors are expressed in language that learners can understand (in plain language; clarified by visuals and/or first language support where necessary). They are used to describe the following:
  - The learner’s current proficiency level
  - The progress the learner needs to make to progress to the next level (i.e., the goals, objectives, and criteria for success)
  - Criteria for assessment in peer-/self-assessments as well as skill-using tasks and PBLA tasks
  - Results of assessment: placement, ongoing, exit, and PBLA
- Learners know what their present CLB proficiency level is in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and they understand what that means in terms of what they “can do.”
- Learners know what CLB proficiency level they need in order to attain their short- and long-term goals. They know how to demonstrate that proficiency level, for example:
  - Success on a sufficient and pre-determined number of PBLA tasks
  - A minimum course grade, based on CLB-aligned scores and final exam
  - A CLB score from an in-house placement test or a recognized testing centre to gain entrance into a bridging program
- CLB-referenced resources for learners are available and in use.
- Where PBLA is implemented, learners are aware of the purposes, processes, and benefits of PBLA assessment.
- Formative feedback on skill-using tasks, and feedback from self-/peer-assessment activities provide continual feedback to learners about their progress towards CLB-referenced goals.
- Evaluative and action-oriented feedback on summative assessment (PBLA) tasks provide ongoing feedback to learners about their progress towards CLB-referenced goals.

**34. Language outcomes are referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), providing a standard frame of reference for all users and facilitating movement within the program, from program to program, and from program to workplace, within Alberta and Canada.**

- The CLB are referenced in descriptions of course prerequisites, course expectations, and course goals.
- The CLB inform the learner’s initial placement in the program.
- Assessment tasks (skill-using and PBLA tasks) referenced to the CLB are used to document ongoing progress throughout a course.
- The CLB (and, where relevant, performance on PBLA tasks) are used as a guide in determining the learner’s movement to more advanced levels.
- The CLB (and, where relevant, performance on PBLA tasks) are used as a guide in determining the learner’s level of achievement when leaving the program.
- Learner progress, referenced to the CLB, is tracked, recorded, and reported to relevant stakeholders.



**35 (a). Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) inform curriculum development, materials development, and course/lesson planning.**

- Peer-reviewed research on the CLB informs program expectations regarding length of time required for progress.
- Learners' communication needs/goals are linked to CLB competencies and are articulated as learning objectives.
- Goals, objectives, and outcomes are identified in the curriculum and are informed by the following:
  - Needs assessments and language needs of learners
  - Learning goals related to the theme/content/topics/context of the class
  - Task types, Competency Areas, Competency Statements, Profiles of Ability, Features of Communication, and Indicators of Ability relevant to a particular CLB level
  - Knowledge and Strategies relevant to a CLB stage
- Tasks, texts, and learning activities, linked to the learning goals and objectives, are identified in the curriculum, and are informed by the following:
  - The specific present and future real-life needs and interests of the learners (e.g., in determining which themes/tasks to cover)
  - The Sample Tasks, Competency Areas, Competency Statements, Profiles of Ability, Features of Communication, and Indicators of Ability relevant to a particular CLB level
  - The language, skills, and content that are needed to accomplish those tasks
- Assessment (PBLA) tasks reflect real-life tasks and are linked to class outcomes and class activities (e.g., skill-building/using activities).

**35 (b). Instructors are aware of and have access to recommended CLB-referenced teaching/learning resources and PBLA resources, relevant to their learners and sufficient to support the curriculum.**

- Key Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) resources are available and in use.
- Teaching/learning resources, referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks, are recommended for specific classes, easily accessible, and in use.
- PBLA tools, along with other resources for assessment referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks, are used for placement, formative, and summative assessment.

**36. Where Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA) is implemented, instructors and learners are familiar with Portfolio Based Language Assessment (PBLA), have access to PBLA resources, are allotted time for portfolio management and ongoing reflection, and use portfolios to reflect, set goals, make plans, and make decisions.**

- The purposes, processes, and benefits of PBLA assessment are communicated to learners (see *My PBLA Resources* on the CCLB website).
- Supplies or technology are available to facilitate paper-based portfolios (e.g., binders, dividers) or e-portfolios (e.g., Google Sites or Avenue,).
- Regularly scheduled class time is set aside for managing portfolios, whether in paper-based binders or e-portfolios.
- Learners are supported to learn the organizational and digital skills needed to manage their portfolios.
- Important artefacts are included and documented in learner portfolios, including the following:
  - Inventory
  - Autobiography (optional)
  - Needs assessment and goal setting artefacts
  - Skill-using tasks, i.e., tasks where learners practice real-life skills; receive self, peer or instructor non-evaluative action-oriented feedback; and reflect on their performance
  - Assessment tasks, i.e., authentic tasks where learners demonstrate what they can do, receive an evaluative mark and action-oriented feedback from the instructor, and reflect on their performance
  - Self- and peer-assessments
  - Instructor assessments and action-oriented feedback
  - Ongoing learner reflections
- In regularly scheduled learner conferences, instructors and learners review portfolio artefacts and discuss learner progress, goals, and plans for learning.
- Instructors aim for a sufficient number<sup>2</sup> of skill-using and assessment tasks per skill when making decisions about a learner’s CLB level.
- Learners retain ownership of their portfolios.
- Portfolios are used for making decisions about learner progress within the program.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the *PBLA Practice Guidelines* (CCLB, 2019), instructors should aim for 8–10 skill-using or assessment artefacts per skill when making decisions about level. However, this may not always be possible depending on the length/hours of the course, their learners’ literacy and language levels, and task complexity (e.g., longer essays at the higher CLB levels). The PBLA Practice Guidelines FAQ states that “each provider determines the expected pace of teaching and assessment for their program by deciding the timeframe for classes to produce a particular number of artifacts” (2019–2020, <https://pblapg.language.ca/frequently-asked-questions/>) Thus, programs and instructors should make informed professional decisions when determining the number of required artefacts.