

To: The General Education Committee
From: Mary Docter, Chair of Modern Language Department
Date: September 9, 2025
Re: General Education SLO Assessment

In the 2024-25 academic year, the Modern Language Department assessed student learning in several lower-division language courses that form part of the General Education curriculum. Specifically, in Spring 2025 we assessed the Modern/Foreign Languages SLO as part of the college-wide general education assessment.

Student Learning Outcome & Certification Criteria:

SLO: The Modern/Foreign Language SLO states:

Students will be able to successfully manage a number of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations in a foreign language. [Conversation is restricted to a few of the predictable topics necessary for survival in the target language culture, such as basic personal information, basic objects, and a limited number of activities, preferences, and immediate needs.]

Certification Criteria include five learning objectives. The first four are based directly on the national criteria set by the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Students will be able to:

1) understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics; 2) demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between some of the practices and perspectives of the culture studied; 3) demonstrate an understanding of the nature of language by comparing the language they study and their own; 4) use the language both within and beyond the classroom setting; 5) articulate the importance of learning another language in order to engage people unlike them in terms that affirm others as persons created in God's image.

Assessment

The entire ML Department was involved in this assessment: Drs. Docter & Elías (Spanish), Professor Carter (Spanish), Professor Hofmann (German), and Professor Penkethman (French). Our 2019 GE report had assessed French and Spanish student learning at the end of the first semester; this year, we assessed language students after their second semester, while also assessing two sections of Spanish 1 for comparative data.

We again decided to assess writing competency; however, because French was taught on-line, we opted for oral proficiency in that course to reduce the possibility of cheating and with the hopes that we would get more accurate data. The following classes were assessed in Spring 2025:

- French 2
- German 2
- Spanish 2 (2 sections)
- Spanish 1 (2 sections)

Direct assessment methods were used: In the final week of the semester, students wrote (or spoke) on prompts crafted by the department in our April meeting. Students' writing (or speaking) was then evaluated by the instructor of record using a new rubric designed by the department and based on national proficiency guidelines established by ACTFL, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages ([Appendix A](#) & [Appendix B](#)). Results were then compiled in a Google sheet shared with the department ([Appendix C](#)).

Benchmarks: [According to ACTFL](#), after one semester (45 contact hours), university language students should reach the Novice-Mid level, and after one-year (or two semesters) students should place between Novice-Mid and Novice-High (though some exceptional students may reach the Intermediate-Low level).

Once again, we set our benchmark higher:

- After 1 semester, 75% of students will finish at the Novice-High level (or above)
- After 2 semesters, 75% of students will finish at the Intermediate-Low level (or above)

Level assessed	ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines	Westmont Benchmark
1 semester	Novice-Mid	Novice-High
2 semesters	Novice-Mid to Novice High	Intermediate Low

At a summer department meeting dedicated to assessment, Docter & Elías discussed the data, which are compiled below:

French 2 (6 students)

Level	Percentage	No.
Intermediate Low	0%	0
Intermediate Mid	66.67%	4
Intermediate High	33.33%	2

German 2 (12 students)

Level	Percentage	No.
Intermediate Low	16.67%	2
Intermediate Mid	41.67%	5
Intermediate High	41.67%	5

Spanish 2 (26 students)

Level	Percentage	No.
Intermediate Low	7.69%	2
Intermediate Mid	46.15%	12
Intermediate High	19.23%	5
Advanced Low	23.08%	6
Advanced Mid	3.85%	1

Spanish 1 (18 students)

Level	Percentage	No.
Novice Mid	33.33%	6
Novice High	38.89%	7
Intermediate Low	27.78%	5

Major Findings/Results:

We were very pleased with our findings. Highlights include:

- **Second semester:**
 - In French, German, and Spanish, **100% of our second semester students met our benchmark** (Intermediate-Low) and **far exceeded the national guidelines** established by ACTFL (Novice-Mid to Novice-High).
 - In fact, **90.91%** of all second-semester students placed at **Intermediate-Mid or higher** (a full level above our benchmark): 100% for French; 83.33% for German; and 92.31% for Spanish.
- **First semester:**
 - In Spanish 1, however, we fell slightly short: only **66.7% (two thirds) of our students met our benchmark** of 75% at the Novice-High (or above) level, while 33.3% (one third) did not.
 - These results were also **lower than those from 2019**, when 81.8% of our first-semester students met the benchmark.
 - That said, **100% of the first-semester students still performed at or above the national average.**

We learned several things from this assessment.

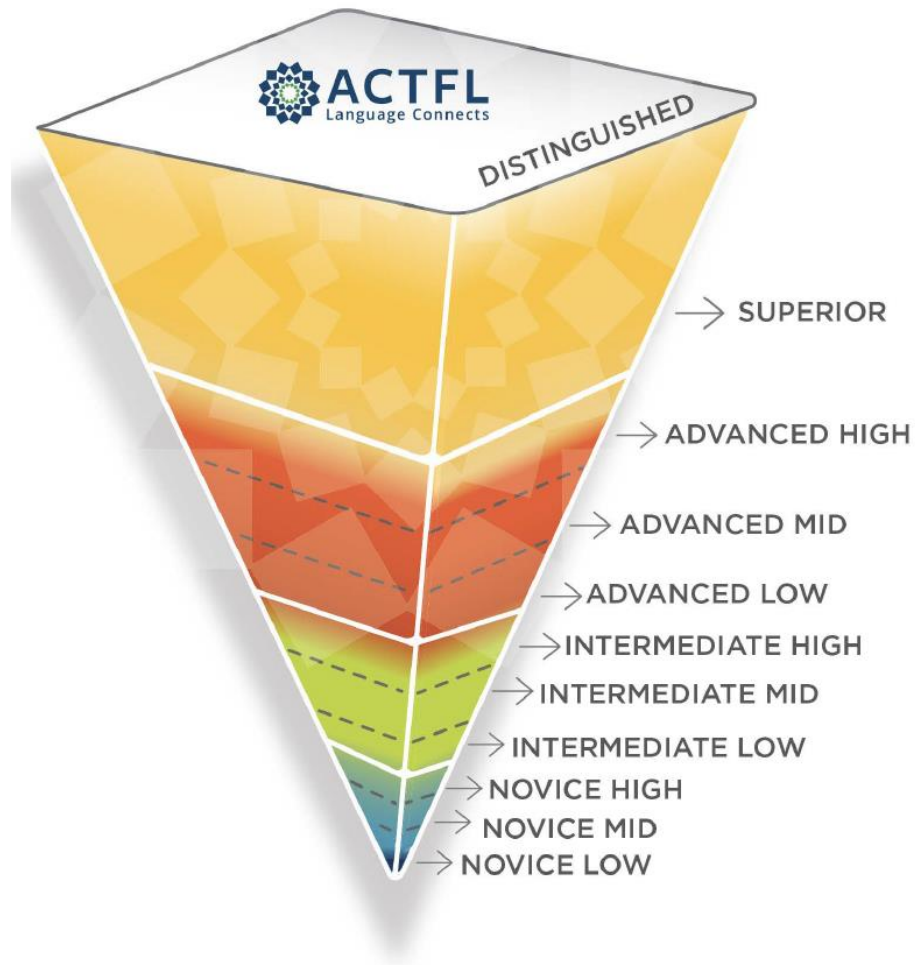
- First, we were surprised by the **low proficiency expectations for each language level reported by ACTFL** and other studies. We have always expected more of our students, which is why our benchmarks are set higher than the national guidelines.
- Second, our experience in the classroom reveals that **students are entering college with lower language abilities than in the past and doing more poorly in our classes**, which was revealed in the Spanish 1 findings. A good part of this may be due to the COVID pandemic, when language learning went on-line for most students, and many high school teachers gave high grades based on mere participation and completion of assignments, rather than mastery of the material. Because many students have more difficulty learning a language (due, perhaps, to poor high school preparation, learning disabilities, or poor study habits, among other things), ML professors have had to **reduce the material covered in our grammar courses**, as students are learning/mastering the material at a slower rate. Perhaps most concerning, however, is that we oftentimes do not have time to teach the important cultural elements in our language classes, meaning that we are oftentimes failing to meet the second point outlined in the certification criteria for our GE.

- Finally, as stated in the 2019 report, we firmly believe that one semester of language instruction does not produce students who can function as expected in the language. For example, at the Novice-Mid level, students can only “communicate with memorized words and phrases on highly predictable, everyday topics, like basic personal information.” Even achieving Novice-High or Intermediate-Low will not permit intercultural communication at a deeper level. In other words, our **one-semester GE language requirement falls short:** it does not provide enough instruction for students to engage in the target language in meaningful ways or to understand anything beyond very basic aspects of culture.
- We look forward to sharing these results and more insights regarding Modern Languages at Westmont with the entire faculty as part of a broader conversation about foreign language GE requirements as they relate to the mission of Westmont College.

Appendix A

Appendix A (p. 1)

ACTFL Inverted Pyramid



The Novice Level

At the Novice level, writers can reproduce practiced material to convey simple messages on everyday topics that they are familiar with and that affect them directly. They express themselves using words, phrases, and simple sentences, and can produce lists, notes, and limited formulaic information on simple forms and documents. In addition, they can transcribe familiar words or phrases, copy letters of the alphabet or syllables of a syllabary, or reproduce basic characters with some accuracy.

Novice Low

Writers at the Novice Low sublevel are able to copy or transcribe familiar words or phrases, form letters in an alphabetic system, and copy and produce isolated, basic strokes in languages that use syllabaries or characters. Given adequate time and familiar cues, they can reproduce from memory a very limited number of isolated words or familiar phrases. Their writing may reflect the vocabulary and syntactic patterns of other languages in ways that interfere with communication.

Novice Mid

Writers at the Novice Mid sublevel can reproduce from memory a modest number of words and phrases in context. They can supply basic biographical information, such as names, numbers, and nationality, and other limited information on simple forms and documents. Writers at the Novice Mid sublevel exhibit a high degree of accuracy when writing on well-rehearsed, familiar topics using limited formulaic language. With less familiar topics, there is a marked decrease in accuracy. Errors in spelling or in the representation of symbols may be frequent.

Novice High

Writers at the Novice High sublevel are able to meet basic practical writing needs using lists, short messages, and simple notes. They are able to express a simple message within the context in which the language was learned, relying mainly on practiced material. Their writing is focused on common elements of daily life. At the Novice High sublevel, writers are able to demonstrate an Intermediate-level ability to recombine vocabulary and structures that they have rehearsed to create simple sentences on very familiar topics, but they are not able to sustain sentence-level writing all the time. Due to limited exposure to and rehearsal of the language, writing at this sublevel may only partially communicate the intentions of the writer.

Correlations with Performance

Table 3 outlines the parameters of performance for Novice-level writing in Interpersonal and Presentational modes of communication.

Table 3. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Writing—Novice Level

Overall Description		
Communicates written information on very familiar topics using a variety of words, phrases, simple sentences, and questions that have been extensively rehearsed.		
Parameters of Performance	Interpersonal Mode	Presentational Mode
Functions	Can respond to highly predictable and formulaic questions by listing, naming, and identifying or labeling. May show emerging evidence of the ability to engage in simple written exchanges such as notes or text messages.	Can provide basic personal information on very familiar topics using highly practiced words, lists, notes, and formulaic language. May show emerging evidence of ability to express own thoughts and preferences.
Contexts and Content	Can reproduce simple practiced messages in personally relevant contexts on topics that relate to basic biographical information. May show emerging evidence of ability to create messages in highly practiced contexts related to self and immediate environment.	
Discourse Type	Can produce lists, notes, and formulaic information using words, phrases, and highly practiced sentences. Can write formulaic or highly rehearsed questions.	
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
<i>Language Control</i>	Can produce rehearsed words and phrases that are appropriate to the context. Limited control of spelling and/or writing system may interfere with ability to convey intended meaning.	
<i>Vocabulary</i>	Can produce a number of high-frequency words, highly practiced expressions, and formulaic questions and phrases.	Can produce a number of high-frequency words and formulaic expressions; can use a variety of vocabulary on familiar topics.
<i>Communication Strategies</i>	Can use some or all of the following strategies to maintain communication: • Relying on a rehearsed or formulaic format • Imitating modeled written words • Using another language • Indicating lack of understanding (writing a question mark) • Using graphic organizers and visuals to support written material	Can use some or all of the following strategies to communicate: • Relying on a formulaic or rehearsed format with multiple drafts • Using modeled words • Using graphic organizers and visuals to support written material • Using another language
<i>(Socio)Cultural Awareness</i>	Can use culturally appropriate formulaic expressions in highly practiced applications. May show awareness of the most obvious cultural conventions.	Can use basic writing conventions and some rehearsed culturally appropriate formulaic expressions.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012).

The Intermediate Level

Writers at the Intermediate level have the ability to meet practical writing needs, such as simple messages and letters, requests for information, and notes. In addition, they can ask and respond to simple questions in writing. These writers can create with the language and communicate simple facts and ideas in a series of loosely connected sentences on topics of personal interest and social needs. They write primarily in present time. At this level, writers use basic vocabulary and structures to express meaning.

Intermediate Low

Writers at the Intermediate Low sublevel are able to meet some limited practical writing needs. They can create statements and formulate questions based on familiar material. Most writing consists of short, simple sentences that recombine learned vocabulary and structures using basic word order, present tense, and conversational style. Topics are tied to highly predictable content areas and personal information. Vocabulary is adequate to express elementary needs. There may be basic errors in grammar, word choice, punctuation, spelling, and the formation and use of non-alphabetic symbols.

Intermediate Mid

Writers at the Intermediate Mid sublevel are able to meet a number of practical writing needs. They can write short, simple communications, compositions, and requests for information in loosely connected texts about personal preferences, daily routines, common events, and other personal topics. Their writing demonstrates control of basic sentence structures and verb forms. It is usually framed in present time but may contain references to other time frames. The writing style at this sublevel resembles oral discourse; it consists of discrete sentences that are loosely strung together with little evidence of deliberate organization.

Intermediate High

Writers at the Intermediate High sublevel are able to meet all practical writing needs of the Intermediate level, including routine transactional tasks and social situations that require an exchange of basic information related to work, school, recreation, individual interests, and areas of competence. The breadth of their vocabulary and language control is sufficient to ensure successful communication. Additionally, these writers can demonstrate an Advanced-level ability to write paragraph-length compositions and simple summaries related to work and/or school experiences but cannot do this all of the time. They can narrate and describe in different time frames when writing about everyday events and situations, but their writing exhibits some challenges in structure or vocabulary use when they do so.

Correlations with Performance

Table 4 outlines the parameters of performance for Intermediate-level writing in Interpersonal and Presentational modes of communication.

Table 4. Modes of Communication and Parameters of Performance in Writing—Intermediate Level

Overall Description		
Communicates information and expresses own thoughts about familiar topics using sentences and series of sentences. Handles brief written social interactions in everyday situations by asking and answering a variety of questions. Can communicate about self, others, and everyday life.		
Parameters of Performance	Interpersonal Mode	Presentational Mode
Functions	Can manage transactional and survival situations and express personal information and preferences in writing. Consistently able to initiate, maintain, and end written interactions to satisfy basic needs and handle simple transactions. May show emerging evidence of ability to communicate on general interest and school- or work-related topics.	Can express own thoughts and provide information and personal preferences on familiar topics by creating with language, primarily in present time. May show emerging evidence of ability to tell or retell a story and provide additional description.
Contexts and Content	Can create written messages in contexts and on topics relevant to self, others, and the immediate environment.	
Discourse Type	Can produce discrete sentences and sentence strings. Can use some connectors to show sentence relationships.	Can write in sentences and sentence strings. Can demonstrate some ability to use sentence connectors to create longer discourse when using rehearsed language.
Comprehension and Comprehensibility		
Language Control	Can produce straightforward language that relies mainly on simple, familiar structures. Can ask and answer a variety of questions. Control of language structures, spelling, and writing system is sufficient to ensure clarity in most situations.	Can use straightforward language that relies mainly on simple, familiar structures. Control of language structures, spelling, and writing system is sufficient to ensure clarity in most situations.
Vocabulary	Can produce high-frequency vocabulary on a variety of everyday topics, topics of personal interest, and topics that are familiar or have been studied.	
Communication Strategies	Can ask questions to initiate and sustain two-way written exchanges. Can use some of the following strategies some of the time to maintain communication: • Asking questions • Asking for clarification • Self-correcting or restating when not understood • Using known language to compensate for unknown vocabulary (circumlocution)	Can use some or all of the following strategies to communicate and maintain audience interest: • Simplifying • Using graphics or images • Using known language to compensate for unknown vocabulary (circumlocution) • Self-correcting or restating • Using reference resources
(Socio)Cultural Awareness	Can use some socioculturally appropriate vocabulary and expressions when participating in everyday interactions. Recognizes that differences exist in cultural behaviors and perspectives and can conform in familiar situations.	Can use some socioculturally appropriate vocabulary and expressions. Can demonstrate some knowledge of cultural differences related to written communication.

Table adapted from ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (2012)

Appendix B

Appendix B: ML Dept Rubric for 1st Semester

Functions	Novice Mid	Novice High	Intermediate Low	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High
Content & Context	- Can reproduce from memory a modest number of words and phrases in context. - Can supply basic biographical information (names, numbers, nationality)	- Can express oneself by relying mainly on practiced material. - Writing focuses on elements of common elements of daily life and personal information	- Can write on highly predictable content areas and personal information. - Vocabulary is adequate to express elementary needs.	Can write about personal preferences, daily routines, common events, or other personal topics.	- Can write on topics related to work, school, recreation individual interests, and areas of competence. - Topics relevant to self, others, and the immediate environment.
Discourse Type	Can reproduce formulaic or highly rehearsed lists or phrases.	- Can meet limited basic practical writing needs using lists, short messages, and simple notes. - Can recombine learned vocabulary and structures to create simple sentences on very familiar topics, but unable to sustain sentence-level writing all the time.	- Can produce discrete sentences and formulate questions based on familiar material. - Most writing consists of short, simple sentences that recombine learned vocabulary and structures using basic word order, present tense, and conversational style.	- Can write short, simple communications, compositions, and requests for information in loosely connected texts. - There is little evidence of deliberate organization; rather, writing consists of a collection of discrete sentences loosely strung together, resembling oral discourse	- Can write paragraph-length compositions and simple summaries (but cannot do this all the time). - Can narrate and describe in different time frames (e.g., preterite and/or imperfect) with writing about everyday events and situations.
Accuracy	- Exhibits high degree of accuracy when writing about well-rehearsed, familiar topics using limited formulaic language. - With less familiar topics, there is a marked decrease in accuracy - Frequent errors in spelling and symbols.	- Exhibits high degree of accuracy when writing on well-practiced, familiar topics using limited formulaic language. - With less familiar topics, there is a marked decrease in accuracy. - Errors in spelling and grammar are common.	There may be basic errors in grammar, word choice, punctuation, spelling, and in the formation and use of nonalphabetic symbols.	- Writing demonstrates control of basic sentence structures and verb forms. - Usually framed in present tense, but may contain references to other time frames.	- Can write in the present tense with accuracy. - When narrating or describing in different time frames, their writing exhibits some challenges in structures or vocabulary. - Some ability to use sentence connectors to create longer discourse when using rehearsed lang.
Comprehensibility	- The writing only partially communicates the intentions of the writer, due to inadequate vocabulary and grammar - Difficult to understand even by those accustomed to non-native writers.	- Writing may only partially communicate intentions of the writer. - Gaps in comprehension may occur	- Writing is understood by natives used to the writing of non-natives, although additional effort may be required. - When attempting to write at the Advanced level, writing deteriorates significantly and the message may be left incomplete.	- Writers can be understood readily by natives used to the writing of non-natives. - When attempting to write at the Advanced level, the quality and/or quantity declines and the message may be unclear.	Although some errors occur, the breath of their vocabulary and language control is sufficient to ensure successful communication on basic topics in most, but not all, situations.

Appendix B: ML Dept Rubric for 2nd Semester

<i>Functions</i>	Intermediate Low	Intermediate Mid	Intermediate High	Advanced Low	Advanced Mid
<i>Content & Context</i>	• Can write on highly predictable content areas and personal information. • Vocabulary is adequate to express elementary needs.	• Can write about personal preferences, daily routines, common events, or other personal topics.	• Can write on topics related to work, school, recreation, individual interests, and areas of competence. • Topics relevant to self, others, and the immediate environment.	• Can narrate and describe in major time frames • Can compose simple summaries on familiar topics. • Can write on topics such as personal and general interest (e.g., community & national events).	• Can narrate and describe with detail in all major time frames • Can write straightforward summaries on topics of general interest. • May show emerging evidence of ability to write about issues beyond the concrete
<i>Discourse Type</i>	• Can produce discrete sentences and formulate questions based on familiar material. • Most writing consists of short, simple sentences that recombine learned vocabulary and structures using basic word order, present tense, and conversational style.	• Can write short, simple communications, compositions, and requests for information in loosely connected texts. • There is little evidence of deliberate organization; rather, writing consists of a collection of discrete sentences loosely strung together, resembling oral discourse	• Can write paragraph-length compositions and simple summaries (but cannot do this all the time). • Can narrate and describe in different time frames (e.g., preterite and/or imperfect) with writing about everyday events and situations.	• Can combine and link sentences into texts of paragraph length and structure • Can demonstrate the ability to use a limited number of cohesive devices • May resort to redundancy and repetition	• Can write texts of several paragraphs in length • Can use a variety of cohesive devices • Can use a range of vocabulary • Thoughts are usually expressed clearly and supported by some elaboration
<i>Accuracy</i>	• There may be basic errors in grammar, word choice, punctuation, spelling, and in the formation and use of nonalphabetic symbols.	• Writing demonstrates control of basic sentence structures and verb forms. • Usually framed in present tense, but may contain references to other time frames.	• Can write in the present tense with accuracy. • When narrating or describing in different time frames, their writing exhibits some challenges in structures or vocab. • Some ability to use sentence connectors to create longer discourse when using rehearsed lang.	• Can narrate and describe in major time frames (present, past, & future) with some control of aspect • Less accurate when writing on less familiar topics that have not been studied and/or using different tenses and moods.	• Can narrate and describe with detail in all major time frames (present, past, & future) with good control of aspect • Exhibits good control of frequently used syntactic structures and a range of general vocabulary
<i>Comprehensibility</i>	• Writing is understood by natives used to the writing of non-natives, although additional effort may be required. • When attempting to write at the Advanced level, writing deteriorates significantly and the message may be left incomplete.	• Writers can be understood readily by natives used to the writing of non-natives. • When attempting to write at the Advanced level, the quality and/or quantity declines and the message may be unclear.	• Although some errors occur, the breath of their vocabulary and language control is sufficient to ensure successful communication on basic topics in most, but not all, situations.	• Writers can be understood readily by natives used to the writing of non-natives. • However, they rely on patterns of oral discourse and writing style(s) of other languages they know.	• Writers are readily understood by natives • Writers may combine organizational features from different languages, and their writing may at times resemble oral discourse.

Appendix C

Appendix C: Student Data

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
1	French 2	Novice Mid	Novice High	Intermed Low	Intermed Mid	Intermed High	Advanced Low	Advanced Mid	Notes
2	Student 1					X			
3	Student 2				X				
4	Student 3				X				
5	Student 4				X				
6	Student 5				X				
7	Student 6					X			

1	German 2	Novice Mid	Novice High	Intermed Low	Intermed Mid	Intermed High	Advanced Low	Advanced Mid	Notes
2	Student 1					X			
3	Student 2					X			
4	Student 3			X					Student 3 did not take German 1 an
5	Student 4					X			
6	Student 5					X			
7	Student 6			X					
8	Student 7				X				
9	Student 8				X				
10	Student 9				X				
11	Student 10				X				
12	Student 11				X				
13	Student 12					X			
..									

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
1	Spanish 2	Novice Mid	Novice High	Intermed Low	Intermed Mid	Intermed High	Advanced Low	Advanced Mid	Notes
2	Student 1						X		
3	Student 2							X	
4	Student 3						X		
5	Student 4				X				
6	Student 5				X				
7	Student 6					X			
8	Student 7						X		
9	Student 8				X				
10	Student 9				X				
11	Student 10					X			
12	Student 11						X		
13	Student 12						X		
14	Student 13				X				
15	Student 14				X				
16	Student 15				X				
17	Student 16				X				
18	Student 17			X					
19	Student 18					X			
20	Student 19						X		
21	Student 20				X				
22	Student 21					X			
23	Student 22				X				
24	Student 23				X				
25	Student 24			X					
26	Student 25					X			
27	Student 26				X				
..									

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
1	Spanish 1	Novice Mid	Novice High	Intermed Low	Intermed Mid	Intermed High	Advanced Low	Advanced Mid	Notes
2	Student 1	X							
3	Student 2			X					
4	Student 3		X						
5	Student 4			X					
6	Student 5		X						
7	Student 6	X							
8	Student 7	X							
9	Student 8		X						
10	Student 9			X					
11	Student 10			X					
12	Student 11	X							
13	Student 12	X							
14	Student 13		X						
15	Student 14		X						
16	Student 15	X							
17	Student 16		X						
18	Student 17			X					
19	Student 18		X						