

Frequently Asked Questions About the DELF in Canada



What is the DELF-DALF?

DELF : Diplôme d'études en langue française

DALF : Diplôme approfondi de langue française

Official diplomas awarded by National Ministry of Education of France and recognized around the world, the DELF and DALF are valid for life. More than 300,000 diplomas are awarded each year, including over 2000 in Canada in 2009. The DELF and DALF are recognized in 165 countries and offered by 965 authorized centres throughout the world, including 19 in Canada.

As an evaluation of second-language proficiency, the DELF and DALF officially certify the ability of students to use French in real-life situations based on the six competence levels identified within the *Common Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), a document produced by the Council of Europe after twelve years of research. The CEFR is a series of descriptions of abilities which can be applied to any language and can be used to set clear targets for achievements within language learning. It has now become accepted as a way of benchmarking language ability all over the world. Based on this framework, six separate DELF-DALF exams exist, including adaptations for all ages and all segments of the population, and six separate diplomas. At each level, four skills are assessed: listening, reading, writing and speaking.

The six levels are:

A Basic User

A1 Beginner

A2 Elementary

B Independent User

B1 Pre-intermediate

B2 Intermediate

C Proficient User

C1 Proficiency

C2 Mastery

The DELF corresponds to levels A1 to B2 and the DALF corresponds to levels C1 and C2. The topics within the assessments include a variety of situations which are representative of the linguistic and cultural diversity in the world. It is not required to take all of the exams or to take them sequentially. Enrollment at each level is determined according to the confidence level of the candidate.

DELF and DALF assessments are offered only at accredited centres, which follow specified procedures to ensure examination security. The examiners/markers are trained by authorized instructors and evaluated to ensure uniform standards of assessment throughout the world.

Why take a DELF exam?

Today French is an official language in almost 50 countries, including Canada. It is spoken by more than 200 million people on five continents. It is also an official language of the United Nations, the Red Cross, and many other international organizations.

International recognition of French proficiency:

- Life-long certification, whether obtained in the candidate's country or another country.
- Based on the same international standard used in 164 countries (CEFR).
- Facilitates interprovincial dialogue across Canada.

A testimonial to one's success in learning French:

- Recognition of the candidate's accomplishments to date on the path to French proficiency.
- Represents an official document, recognized internationally, that enriches the candidate's school or professional portfolio.

Advantages for postsecondary education:

- Recognized internationally by francophone postsecondary institutions, including a growing number in Canada.
- Acceptance into a university in France (B2 or higher level).

Enhances one's resume:

- A description in meaningful terms what the candidate is capable of doing in French.
- Helps to open doors to a wide range of career and recreational opportunities throughout Canada and around the world.
- An aid for professional advancement.

Does the French context (cultural references, higher level of language, rapid flow, European accent, choice of themes such as vacation, trains, euros) disadvantage our students?

Initially, it may seem that this would be the case. However, for several years we have been observing that our students are managing very well. For the most part, the context enables them to accomplish the tasks without any bias. The CIEP (Centre international d'études pédagogiques), an organisation appointed by the National Ministry of Education of France to create the exam, works hard to develop texts and activities that have an international scope and that can be adapted to all French-speaking countries. When we prepare students for the exam, it is an extraordinary opportunity for them to learn more about the diverse cultures of the French-speaking world.

Is there a danger of creating confusion among our teachers with regards to a different teaching method?

The CEFR is a flexible tool that enables teachers to create targeted action-based activities that contribute to a strong development of linguistic skills among our learners.

Is there a time limit to accomplish the tasks during the DELF exams? Will this create a stressful situation for our students?

The DELF exams take place nationally. Respecting time zones, a common start and end time are set up across the country. The duration of the exam is appropriate to the skill level of learner. As well, like all good evaluation tools, it is possible to make adjustments. Provisions can be made for learners who have a diagnosed learning disability.

Are there trick questions on the DELF exam?

More and more in education, this practice tends to be condemned. DELF exams are made to be respectful of learners and aim to determine their true skill level. So, no tricks!

Does the exam require knowledge that is not familiar to our students?

The CIEP uses authentic texts of general interest that correspond to the general knowledge of learners all over the world. The objective of the exam does not consist of validating knowledge, but rather aims at validating specific linguistic skills.

Is the DELF primarily an exam of memorization?

Not at all. The exam targets comprehension of both oral and written texts. All texts used during the exams are authentic and drawn from real life situations.

Are participants allowed to have time to prepare for the listening, the reading and the writing components of the exam?

Fundamentally, students must demonstrate their skills. During the exam, the point is to see the learner in action rather than in the preparation or planning stage. Criteria such as the extensiveness of the vocabulary and spontaneity are important and correspond to levels of competence according to the CEFR rubrics.

Depending on the level, there is also the opportunity to listen twice to oral documents. During the interactive oral exam, the student will have time to prepare, just as he or she would for a job interview. In addition, the allotted time per competency allows ample opportunity for preliminary work as well as review.

Is the student permitted to have tools (such as a dictionary, a grammar book, the *Bescherelle*) for the written portion of the exam?

When preparing students in class prior to the exam, it is certainly important to allow students to use all tools available so that they can have as many opportunities for feedback as possible. However, during the DELF exams, students must demonstrate specific skills. For example, one of the written requirements for level B2 is a 250 word essay that demonstrates concise thinking, by the candidate, without tools. Dictionaries are allowed at the DALF level: C1 and C2.

What is the passing mark?

The total required passing mark for the diploma is 50%. It is important to understand that students must demonstrate a minimum level of success in all four competencies. If one of the competencies is problematic (a mark below 5/25), then a candidate would not receive his or her diploma. To properly understand the progression between the levels, it is important to consider each level as a developmental zone. If someone obtains 55% in B1, he or she will most likely take three more years to obtain a B2. However, if someone receives 90% in B1, he or she will probably pass a B2 more rapidly. If a participant does not attend part of an exam, he or she does not pass.

Are there links between the DELF and DALF exams and our curriculum?

Already several provinces have harmonized their curriculum and program of studies with the CEFR descriptors. In other provinces, Ministries of Education are giving latitude to school boards in terms of use of the CEFR and the DELF.

- *British Columbia* is proposing a very detailed approach for all second languages based on the framework levels.
- *All four Atlantic provinces* are currently reviewing their programs in order to create a logical alignment with the framework principles.
- *In Ontario*, new frameworks are being revised, and according to first drafts, there will be a marked effort to align directly with the framework
- *In Alberta*, important initiatives are in place and have enabled the province to be a pioneer with the framework. Such successes have taken place in Edmonton, Calgary and Grande-Prairie.

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