

## Language Fluency Requirements for Licensure as a Pharmacist in Canada

### Introduction

The fourth of six Competencies in the "Professional Competencies for Canadian Pharmacists at Entry-to-Practice" relates to the pharmacist's ability to communicate. This Competency Unit states that:

*"Pharmacists educate and communicate with groups and individuals to support optimal patient care and promote health"*

Element #4.5 of this Competency Unit requires pharmacists to:

*"Demonstrate comprehension and fluency in written and verbal English or French"*

Although language fluency per se does not guarantee that effective communication will take place, it is the foundation for reading, speaking, listening/comprehension, and writing skills - all components of communication. For pharmacists and other health care professionals in particular, a relatively high level of communication ability is critical to ensure safe and effective patient care. Accordingly, high standards are justified.

The primary intent of this Report is to provide a model for pharmacy regulators across Canada in the licensure of pharmacists. It must be noted that all provinces have regulations set by the provincial governments regarding language requirements for professions. Pharmacists must meet these respective requirements in order to practise in the province for which they are licensed.

### Background

The framework for the model fluency standards presented in this Report was established in early 1998 by NAPRA's former National Licensing Standards Committee (NLSC). The NLSC was comprised of individuals appointed by pharmacy regulatory authorities, the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists, the Association of Faculties of Pharmacy of Canada, the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada, the Association of Deans of Pharmacy of Canada, the Canadian Council for Accreditation of Pharmacy Programs, and the Canadian Pharmacists Association.

Representatives from all provincial pharmacy regulatory authorities and from pharmacy academia formed a small working group, and through a series of meetings in 1998 and 1999 further developed the model language fluency standards for licensure. Participating in the development of this Report were:

Neila Auld, *Registrar*, Prince Edward Island Pharmacy Board  
Jim Dunsdon, *Registrar*, Ontario College of Pharmacists  
Greg Eberhart, *Registrar*, Alberta Pharmaceutical Association  
Ray Joubert, *Registrar*, Saskatchewan Pharmaceutical Association  
Linda Lytle, *Registrar*, College of Pharmacists of British Columbia  
Don Rowe, *Secretary-Registrar*, Newfoundland Pharmaceutical Association  
Dr. Regis Vaillancourt, *l'Ordre des pharmaciens du Quebec*  
Dr. Bruce Schnell, *Executive Director*, Canadian Council for Accreditation of Pharmacy Programs  
Bill Veniot, *Registrar*, New Brunswick Pharmaceutical Society  
Susan Wedlake, *Registrar*, Nova Scotia Pharmaceutical Society

Stew Wilcox, *Registrar*, Manitoba Pharmaceutical Association  
Barbara Wells, *NAPRA Executive Director* (Committee resource)

The minimum scores and equivalencies for fluency tests proposed are based on recommendations made by Drs. Alister Cumming and Barbara Burnaby of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, as well as current practices across Canada and the results of a standard-setting process undertaken by the National Advisory Committee on Licensing on March 13 1999.

This project was funded in part by Human Resources Development Canada because of its relevance to the development of a Mutual Recognition Agreement for Pharmacists, as required by the Labour Mobility Section of the Agreement on Internal Trade.

### Principles

1. The language fluency standards are to be applied on entry to practical training, (unless the candidate has received a university degree from a Canadian or American program accredited by the Canadian Council for Accreditation of Pharmacy Programs).  
-Application at this time (rather than at the point of licensure) supports public protection and enables the candidate to derive the expected educational benefits from the program, while at the same time allows for language fluency to improve through the program's emphasis on communication, prior to licensure.
2. Prior language fluency test results should be accepted by the provincial regulatory authority as valid if completed within 2 years prior to commencement of practical training.
3. NAPRA will facilitate ongoing, longitudinal studies on the recommended language fluency tests and scores, and how unsuccessful attempts at specific tests are ultimately resolved. Data such as this on the tests and scores will be valuable to ensure that the standards continue to meet the needs of the provincial regulatory authorities in protecting the public.
4. These fluency standards will be reviewed by NAPRA on a national basis at least every two years, to maintain their currency.

### English Fluency Requirements

All students/candidates who have received an accredited Canadian or American university degree in Pharmacy will not be required to undergo further testing unless a 'trigger' suggests that a test for English language fluency is necessary.

### Trigger #1 for fluency testing

A pharmacist, who has been recognized by a Provincial or Territorial Regulatory Authority as a preceptor, identifies a candidate who has demonstrated less than adequate language fluency. This perceived inadequacy must be confirmed through an appropriate process approved by the Provincial or Territorial Regulatory Authority. See "Communications Screening Interview" developed by the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia, as an example of such a process currently used by a regulatory authority.

**Trigger #2 for fluency testing**

A complaint is received by the University or Provincial or Territorial Regulatory Authority from a customer, patient or health professional about the student/candidate, concerning a lack of fluency. The alleged deficiency in fluency must be confirmed through an appropriate process approved by the Provincial or Territorial Regulatory Authority.

**Fluency tests**

There is a number of acceptable English fluency testing instruments for professionals available in Canada. The following seven tests were reviewed during the development of this report.

**The Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees (CanTEST)**

Offered by the University of Ottawa. Tests for each of the four communication components.

**International English Language Testing System (IELTS)**

Offered by University of Cambridge. Tests for each of the four communication components

**Michigan English Language Battery (MELAB)**

Offered by the University of Michigan. Tests for three communication components; does not test for speaking fluency.

**Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)**

Offered by Educational Testing Service. Tests for reading and listening/comprehension communication components.

**Computerized Test of English as a Foreign Language (C-TOEFL)**

Offered by Education Testing Service. Tests for three communication components; does not test for speaking fluency. Is administered with an "Essay Rating Score" (ERS).

**Test of Spoken English (TSE)**

Offered by Educational Testing Service. Tests for speaking skill.

**Test of Written English (TWE)**

Offered by Educational Testing Service. Tests for writing skill.

Because not all tests assess the broad range of skills deemed necessary for a practicing Pharmacist, the following test combinations and minimum scores are recommended options for the national model standards:

Tests for skill in:	Option #1	Option #2	Option #3	Option #4	Option #5
Reading	TOEFL Score: 580	C-TOEFL Score: 237	CanTEST Score: 4.5	MELAB Score: 85	IELTS Score: ≥ 6 In this module Overall score of ≥ 7
Writing	TWE Score: 5	ERS Score: 5	CanTEST Score: 4.5	MELAB Score: 85	IELTS Score: ≥ 6 In this module Overall score of ≥ 7
Listening & Comprehension	TOEFL Score: 580	C-TOEFL Score: 237	CanTEST Score: 4.5	MELAB Score: 85	IELTS Score: ≥ 6 in this module. Overall score of ≥ 7.
Speaking	TSE Score: 50	TSE Score: 50	CanTEST Score: 4.5	TSE Score: 50	IELTS Score: ≥ 6 in this module. Overall score of ≥ 7.

**French Fluency Requirements**

All students/candidates who have received an accredited Canadian university degree in Pharmacy in the French language will not be required to undergo further testing unless a 'trigger' suggests that a test for French fluency is necessary.

Candidates seeking licensure in Quebec should note that Charter of the French Language (R.S.Q.c.C-11) regulations require:

1. no less than three years of full time secondary or post-secondary instruction in French;
2. successful completion of the fourth or fifth year secondary level examinations in French as the first language; or
3. a secondary school certificate in Quebec, from and after the school year 1985-86

In all other cases, candidates must obtain a certificate issued by the Office de la langue française or hold a certificate defined as equivalent by regulation of the Government.

**Trigger #1 for fluency testing**

A pharmacist, who has been recognized as a preceptor by a Provincial or Territorial Regulatory Authority, identifies a candidate who has demonstrated less than adequate language fluency. This perceived inadequacy must be confirmed by a standardized interview approved by the Provincial or Territorial Regulatory Authority.

**Trigger #2 for fluency testing**

A complaint is received by the University or Provincial or Territorial Regulatory Authority from a customer, patient or health professional about the student/candidate, concerning a lack of language fluency skills. The alleged deficiency in communication must be confirmed by a standardized interview approved by the Provincial or Territorial Regulatory Authority.

**Fluency tests**

Because not all tests assess the broad range of skills deemed necessary for a practicing Pharmacist, the following test and minimum scores options are recommended options for the national model standards:

1. A minimum score of 5 in each of four testing categories for the Test pour étudiants et stagiaires au Canada (TESTcan), or
2. Tests approved by the Quebec government, as per the Charter of the French language

\\way\inspre\langfluency reqmnts-canada.doc