

SLPI PAPER #16: OPTIONS FOR REPORTING SLPI RATINGS

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Introduction

As shown on the next page, the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) Rating Scale has 11 rating levels:

1. Superior Plus
2. Superior
3. Advanced Plus
4. Advanced
5. Intermediate Plus
6. Intermediate
7. Survival Plus
8. Survival
9. Novice Plus
10. Novice
11. No Functional Skills

In this paper, we discuss several options for reporting SLPI ratings and we discuss factors to consider in selecting the SLPI ratings and rating levels to be reported.

SLPI Advanced Plus-Superior Plus and Novice Rating Ranges

After several years of experience, we began recommending that the Advanced Plus, Superior, and Superior Plus ratings be reported as a single rating range. The rationale for this is provided in SLPI PAPER #18: *Principles for Development and Refinement of Sign Language Communication Philosophy, Policy, and Procedures Documents*, Principles 10-through-13:

10. **ADVANCED PLUS OR ABOVE SKILLS AS A STANDARD:** The highest standard you should establish for a job is Advanced Plus. Advanced Plus should be a standard only for persons in job positions such as sign language teachers, interpreters (though interpreter certification is preferred for interpreters), and possibly job positions requiring direct communication within critical one-to-one and small group communication situations (for example, mental health and drug counselors).
11. **ADVANCED PLUS and SUPERIOR RANGE SIGNERS EXCELLENT COMMUNICATORS:** Persons with SLPI ratings of Advanced Plus and persons with SLPI ratings in the Superior Range are all excellent sign language communicators. The primary difference between these two groups is “form”; that is, Superior Range signers consistently show native-like/near native-like form, while Advanced Plus level signers (sometimes) show minor form differences that are consistent with adult learners of sign languages. These differences are similar to a person’s accent in a second/adult learned spoken language, with this accent resulting

SIGN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW (SLPI) RATING SCALE^{a, b}

<u>RATINGS</u>	<u>DESCRIPTORS^c</u>
<u>Superior Plus</u>	Able to have a fully shared and natural conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics. All aspects of signing are native-like.
<u>Superior</u>	Able to have a fully shared conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics. Very broad sign language vocabulary, near native-like production and fluency, excellent use of sign language grammatical features, and excellent comprehension for normal signing rate.
<u>Advanced Plus</u>	<u>Exhibits</u> some superior level skills, but not <u>all</u> and not <u>consistently</u> .
<u>Advanced</u>	Able to have a generally shared conversation with good, spontaneous elaboration for both social and work topics. Broad sign language vocabulary knowledge and clear, accurate production of signs and fingerspelling at a normal/near-normal rate; occasional misproductions do not detract from conversational flow. Good use of many sign language grammatical features and comprehension good for normal signing rate.
<u>Intermediate Plus</u>	<u>Exhibits</u> some advanced level skills, but not <u>all</u> and not <u>consistently</u> .
<u>Intermediate</u>	Able to discuss with some confidence routine social and work topics within a conversational format with some elaboration; generally 3-to-5 sentences. Good knowledge and control of everyday/basic sign language vocabulary with some sign vocabulary errors. Fairly clear signing at a moderate signing rate with some sign misproductions. Fair use of some sign language grammatical features and fairly good comprehension for a moderate-to-normal signing rate; a few repetitions and rephrasing of questions may be needed.
<u>Survival Plus</u>	<u>Exhibits</u> some intermediate level skills, but not <u>all</u> and not <u>consistently</u> .
<u>Survival</u>	Able to discuss basic social and work topics with responses generally 1-to-3 sentences in length. Some knowledge of basic sign language vocabulary with many sign vocabulary and/or sign production errors. Slow-to-moderate signing rate. Basic use of a few sign language grammatical features. Fair comprehension for signing produced at a slow-to-moderate rate with some repetition and rephrasing.
<u>Novice Plus</u>	<u>Exhibits</u> some survival level skills, but not <u>all</u> and not <u>consistently</u> .
<u>Novice</u>	Able to provide single sign and some short phrase/sentence responses to basic questions signed at a slow-to-moderate rate with frequent repetition and rephrasing. Vocabulary primarily related to everyday work and/or social areas such as basic work-related signs, family members, basic objects, colors, numbers, names of weekdays, and time. Production and fluency characterized by many sign production errors and by a slow rate with frequent inappropriate pauses/hesitations.
<u>No Functional Skills</u>	(May be) Able to provide short single sign and “primarily” fingerspelled responses to some basic questions signed at a slow rate with extensive repetition and rephrasing.

^aAdapted from US Foreign Service Institute and ACTFL LPI Rating Scales by William Newell and Frank Caccamise

^bThe SLPI was referred to as the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) from 1983 to May 2006.

^cFor all SLPI rating descriptors, **first statement (in bold type) always a statement of ASL communicative functioning**, with all remaining statements (regular type) descriptors of ASL form (vocabulary, production, fluency, grammar, and comprehension).

from the influence of her/his native spoken language on pronunciation/production of the second/adult learned language. The important point is that Advanced Plus and Superior Range signers are excellent communicators and very good to excellent sign language models. Therefore, considering (a) the above, (b) the difficult, time consuming, and resource consuming task of distinguishing among Advanced Plus, Superior, and Superior Plus signers; and (c) PRINCIPLES #10, #12, and #13, we recommend that, when conducting ratings and establishing standards, the Advanced Plus, Superior, and Superior Plus ratings be combined and reported as a single rating range; that is, *Advanced Plus-Superior Plus Skill Level Range*.

12. **SKILL LEVELS OF SKILLED, EXPERIENCED INTERPRETERS AND SIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS WHO ARE ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNERS:** Our experience with the SLPI has shown that skilled, experienced interpreters and ASL teachers, who are adult sign language learners, most often achieve ratings of Advanced Plus and sometimes achieve ratings of Superior. This supports that Superior Plus is a very exclusive rating that is generally achieved only by native signers. It also supports that Advanced Plus is a skill level that a select number of adult sign language learners will achieve and that Superior is a skill level that a very select number of adult sign language learners will achieve.
13. **PRIMARY USE OF THE SLPI IS WITH ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNERS:** Like the Language/Oral Proficiency Interview (L/OPI), the assessment tool that the SLPI is based on, primary SLPI use is for assessment of adult language learners, with the highest rating scale level range (Superior/Superior Plus) based on knowledgeable native/native-like language users. This range is what adult language learners look to as their model, but they generally do not achieve, and are not expected to achieve, this highest skill level range. In brief, the Superior Rating Range for both the L/OPI and the SLPI is basically a theoretical construct that provides the “upper” anchor for both the L/OPI and SLPI Rating Scales.

In addition, we now recommend that Novice and Novice Plus be reported as a single rating range; that is, the Novice Range. The rationale for this is that whether a person receives a rating of Novice or Novice Plus, the recommendation will be the same; that is, enroll in a basic sign language course. The same could be stated for someone receiving a rating of No Functional Skills (NFS), but experience has taught us that people prefer knowing they are in the Novice Range versus NFS-Novice Range.

For programs adopting the above, SLPI official ratings are reported as follows:

1. Advanced Plus-Superior Plus Range
2. Advanced
3. Intermediate Plus
4. Intermediate
5. Survival Plus
6. Survival
7. Novice Range
8. No Functional Skills

Another Option for Reporting SLPI Ratings Considering the Concept of Plus Level Ratings

Given the variety of reasons for SLPI use, and given the introduction of the SLPI Individual Rater Procedure (see SLPI PAPER #9, *Options for Conducting and Sharing Results of SLPI Ratings*), we have considered other options for reporting SLPI results.

One of these options is the following:

1. Advanced Plus-Superior Plus Range or Advanced Plus and Above Range
2. Intermediate Plus–Advanced Range
3. Survival Plus–Intermediate Range
4. Novice Plus–Survival Range
5. Novice
6. No Functional Skills

In addition to what was discussed earlier about the Advanced Plus-Superior Plus Range, the option immediately above is based on the concept of what is meant by plus ratings and their importance to effective use of sign language for communication. By definition, plus ratings are related to the next higher rating level; that is, interviewees' exhibit some of the skills of the next higher rating level, but not all and not consistently.' Therefore, generally interviewees rated Survival Plus are more like interviewees rated Intermediate than interviewees rated Survival, and generally interviewees who are rated Intermediate Plus are more like interviewees rated Advanced than interviewees rated Intermediate. In addition, results of a study by Long, Stinson, Kelly, and Liu (1999) showed that NTID students' perceptions of "ease of communication in the classroom" were highest for instructors with SLPI ratings in the Advanced Plus-Superior Plus range, followed by instructors in the Intermediate Plus-Advanced range, with instructors in the Survival Plus-Intermediate range receiving the lowest ratings for communication ease. For the two ratings "within" each of these three SLPI rating ranges, students did not make distinctions for ease of communication. Based on the construct of the SLPI, students in the Long et al. study probably were viewing the functional communication of instructors within these three ranges as nearly the same and not counting as heavily the "form" distinctions which are made in SLPI ratings. Additional support for reporting ranges of Survival Plus-Intermediate and Intermediate Plus–Advanced comes from the rating construct associated with the SLPI; that is, functional communication is always the first criterion in a rating decision, with analysis of form either supporting or pulling the rating down. Therefore, it is often the case that interviewees receiving Survival Plus ratings are functioning at the Intermediate level with their form not quite supporting an Intermediate rating. The same is true for the rating range Intermediate Plus–Advanced. This rating construct is reflected in the following two principles from SLPI PAPER #18:

2. JOB ENTRY SKILL LEVELS, STANDARDS, AND JOB COMMUNICATION NEEDS:
 - A. Types and frequency of job communication situations in which sign language is used should be considered when establishing job entry skill levels and standards.
 - B. All established skill levels (entry, standards, additional goals, incentive levels, etc.) should -
 - 1) Be of benefit to work and social communication needs and goals within the environment for which the skill levels are established.
 - 2) Consider appropriate use of program assessment and skill development resources.

14. INTERMEDIATE OR SURVIVAL PLUS LOWEST SKILL LEVEL STANDARD RECOMMENDED
 - A. The lowest skill level standard we recommend is Intermediate or Survival Plus. The reasons for this are:
 - 1) Intermediate is the first SLPI rating level at which a person has the sign language skills needed to participate in a conversation with some confidence.
 - 2) Survival level signers and below require on-going support to maintain their skills, thus placing undue stress both on resources available for developing and maintaining sign language communication skill and on assessment services.
 - 3) Because functional communication is always the first criterion in a rating decision, with analysis of “form” either supporting or pulling the rating down, it is often the case that interviewees receiving Survival Plus ratings are functioning at the Intermediate level, with their form not quite supporting an Intermediate rating.
 - B. Rather than establish the Survival skill level (or below) as a standard, we recommend that staff participate in professional development activities such as those listed below, with participation in the SLPI procedures optional:
 - 1) Workshops on techniques/strategies for communicating effectively with Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing people; for example, use of environmental cues, natural gestures, writing, distance communication devices, and relay services.
 - 2) Workshops that provide and discuss information and strategies for effectively working with interpreters.
 - 3) Workshops on Deaf culture and community.

- 4) Successful completion of an approved program sign language communication skills development experience (generally two sign language courses) or achieving an Intermediate or Survival Plus SLPI rating.

The plus range reporting option may be useful when establishing standards for job positions where a “Survival” or “Intermediate” rating is considered not to be adequate to perform the job but the Survival Plus-Intermediate Range or the Intermediate Plus-Advanced Range is considered acceptable. To illustrate, suppose a program wishes to use a range reporting system to conserve resources devoted to the overall SLPI procedures. Further, suppose that in setting the standard for houseparent staff a person with an Intermediate Rating would not be considered sufficiently skilled to perform the job. However, if an Intermediate Plus Rating would be considered satisfactory, the rating range of “Intermediate Plus–Advanced” would satisfy this circumstance.

When both the Intermediate Plus and Advanced skill levels are established as standards, SLPI results may appropriately be reported as follows:

1. Advanced Plus-Superior Plus Range
2. Advanced
3. Intermediate Plus
4. Survival Plus–Intermediate Range
5. Novice Plus–Survival Range
6. Novice
7. No Functional Skills

Two Level Option for Reporting Ratings When SLPI Used as a Screening Tool

Another option when the SLPI is being used as a screening tool is to set two levels; that is, “at or above the screening level” or “below the screening level”. For example, if the screening level is Intermediate Plus, results could be reported as “Intermediate Plus or Above Skill Level Range” and “Below the Intermediate Plus Skill Level”.

Conclusion

With regard to applying a “rating reporting system” within the context of implementing a sign language program policy, there are many factors to consider, including the goals of the policy, entry skill level expectations and standards, allocation of resources, and whether the SLPI Individual Rater Procedure, SLPI Two Rater Team Procedure, or SLPI Three Rater Team Procedure is being used. If the SLPI is being used in a context where the primary emphasis is on professional development, an SLPI rating reporting system that includes the Novice and Advanced Plus-Superior Plus Ranges, with all other SLPI Rating Scale ratings reported as exact rating levels, may be most appropriate. The rationale for this is that the greater the number of exact rating levels reported, the more often people taking the SLPI will see improvements in their sign language communication skills reflected in their SLPI ratings. Ranges under such circumstances may become a disincentive to people who are trying hard to improve their sign language communication skills; that is, if too many ranges are used, progress may not be discernable from one administration of the SLPI to another, although real changes in sign language communication skills may have occurred. If the SLPI is being used when there is a

need to allocate resources judiciously or it is being used as a screening tool, the use of more ranges may be appropriate. Finally, the two and three rater team procedures lend themselves to reporting a greater number of exact rating levels than does the individual rater procedure, though this should not be the primary factor in determining the most appropriate SLPI rating reporting system for a program.

There are many factors to consider in reaching a decision for the most appropriate rating reporting system and we encourage programs to carefully consider their sign language program goals, sign language communication entry skill level expectations and standards, resources, and other factors important to their use of the SLPI.

Reference

Long, G., Stinson, M., Kelly, R., & Liu, Y. The relationship between teacher sign skills and student evaluations of teacher capability. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 144 (5), 354-364.