Familiarizing standard-setting panelists with the CEFR:
A three-step approach to attaining a shared understanding of just-qualified candidates

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Introduction

Standard setting is the process of establishing cut scores on a test. When linking to the CEFR, familiarizing panelists with the descriptors most relevant to the test task is an essential part of the process. Specifically, the concept of the just-qualified candidate is important for panelists to understand in order to judge with accuracy the point of separation required for the cutscore to be set (Zeidler, 2014). How to define 'just-qualified' and confidently apply this concept to judgements is an underexplored area in existing standard setting literature.

In this poster we outline our three-step approach to familiarizing panelists with the CEFR using a recent four-skill linking study as an example.

Figure 1: Overview of Three-Step Approach to Familiarization

Step 1 Pre-Study Activity → Step 2 Descriptor Sorting Activity → Step 3 Defining the Just-Qualified Candidate

Selecting the Scales

Factors to consider: skills being tested, CEFR levels targeted, descriptor relevance to test tasks

Figure 2: Example Task Type

Task 1
Tell me what you see in the picture and tell me a story about it.

Task 2
Tell me about when you played a video game or other type of game.

Task 3
Some people always try to win when playing a game. Others just like to play games for fun. Which do you prefer? Give your opinion and reasons to support it.

Figure 3: Example CEFR Scale

SUSTAINED MONOLOGUE: DESCRIBING EXPERIENCE

Level	Descriptor
B1	Can clearly express feelings about something experienced and give reasons to explain those feelings.
	Can give straightforward descriptions on a variety of familiar subjects within his field of interest.
	Can reasonably fluently relate a straightforward narrative or description as a linear sequence of points.
	Can give detailed accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions.
	Can relate details of unpredictable occurrences, e.g. an accident.
	Can relate the plot of a book or film and describe his/her reactions.
	Can describe dreams, hopes and ambitions.
	Can describe events, real or imagined.
	Can narrate a story.
A2	**Can tell a story or describe something in a simple list of points.**
	Can describe everyday aspects of his/her environment e.g. people, places, a job or study experience.
	Can give short, basic descriptions of events and activities.
	Can describe plans and arrangements, habits and routines, past activities and personal experiences.
	Can use simple descriptive language to make brief statements about and compare objects and possessions.
	Can explain what he/she likes or dislikes about something.
	Can describe his/her family, living conditions, educational background, present or most recent job.
	Can describe people, places and possessions in simple terms.
	Can say what he/she is good at and not so good at (e.g. sports, games, skills, subjects).
	Can briefly talk about what he/she plans to do at the weekend or during the holidays.
A1	**Can describe him/herself, what he/she does and where he/she lives.**
	Can describe simple aspects of his/her everyday life in a series of simple sentences, using simple words and basic phrases, provided he/she can prepare in advance.
Pre-A1	**Can describe him/herself (e.g. name, age, family), using simple words and formulaic expressions, provided he/she can prepare in advance.**
	Can say how he/she is feeling using simple words like 'happy', 'tired', accompanied by body language.

Step 1 Pre-Study Activity
Purpose: Introduce panelists to the CEFR

Activity Description
- Panelists given an online worksheet a week before the study
- They review several CEFR scales and descriptors
- They describe characteristics of an average and a just-qualified candidate at each level

Activity Outcomes
- Introduce panelists to the relevant CEFR levels
- Get panelists thinking about the boundaries between levels
- Introduce the concept of the just-qualified candidate

Figure 4: Example Pre-Study Activity

Step 2 Descriptor Sorting Activity
Purpose: Train panelists to distinguish between CEFR levels

Activity Description
- Panelists are provided envelopes which contain a set of decontextualized CEFR descriptors
- They consider each descriptor and sort them by level
- They enter their responses into an online spreadsheet for analysis

Use of online spreadsheets allows for automated evaluation of panelists' responses and anonymous presentation of the results.

- Group discusses the results of the sorting activity, focusing on descriptors that were frequently incorrectly classified

Activity Outcomes
- Panelists build a shared understanding of the relevant CEFR levels
- By using decontextualized descriptors, panelists are forced to consider the levels in isolation from each other, and therefore, more effectively distinguish between them

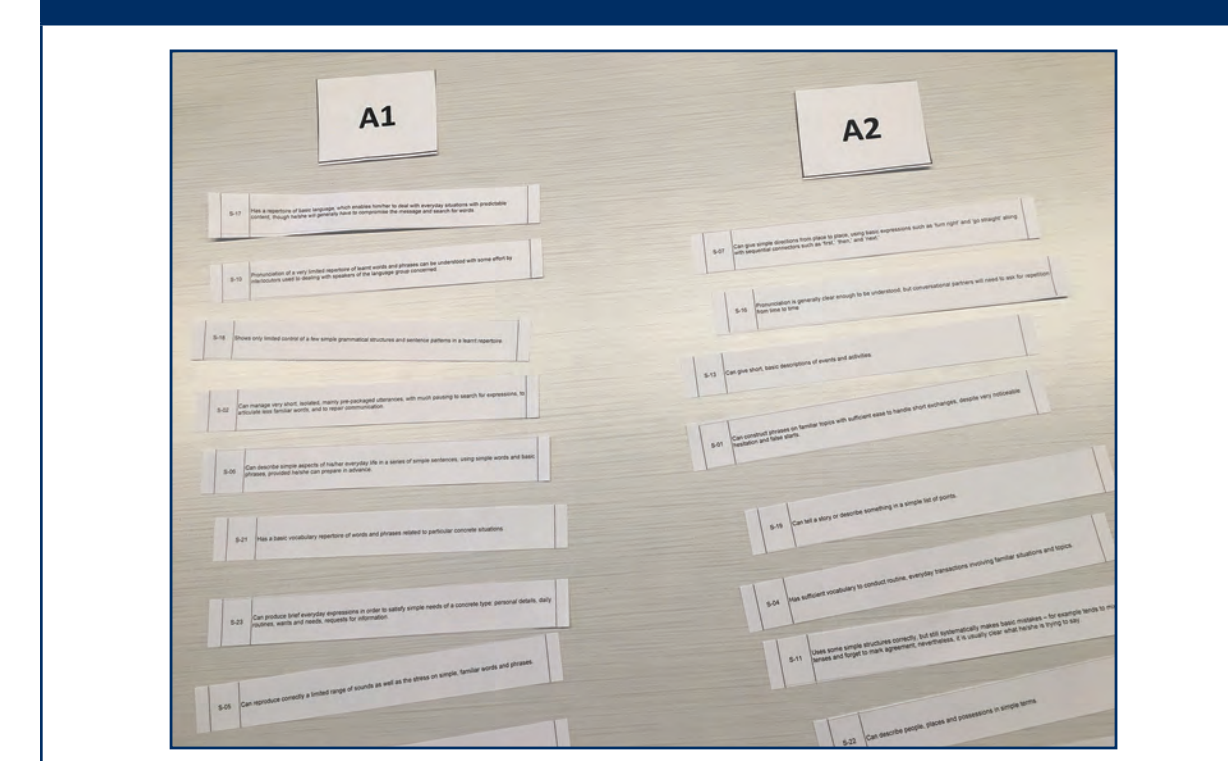### Figure 5: Example Sorting Activity

Figure 6: Example Discussion Tab

Step 3 Defining the Just-Qualified Candidate
Purpose: Focus panelists in on the key characteristics that define the just-qualified candidate

Prior to the study ...

Facilitators create their own just-qualified definitions for each of the levels in question to:
- begin building a shared understanding of test-taker abilities at each boundary
- help guide panelists through the same process

B1 Just Qualified Sample Definition

> Enough language and communicative skills to get by
> **Beginning of connected and extended speech** (more than a simple exchange)
> Presents information as linear sequence of points
> Frequent pausing and hesitation
> Grammatical mistakes but can keep going/reasonably accurate with simple patterns
> Limited to familiar/personal topics
> **Can provide brief or simple details about experiences and feelings**

During the study ...

Activity Description
- Put panelists in small groups
- Ask them to share their pre-study just-qualified definitions and agree on key characteristics
- Ask each group to add to a running list of key characteristics on a whiteboard
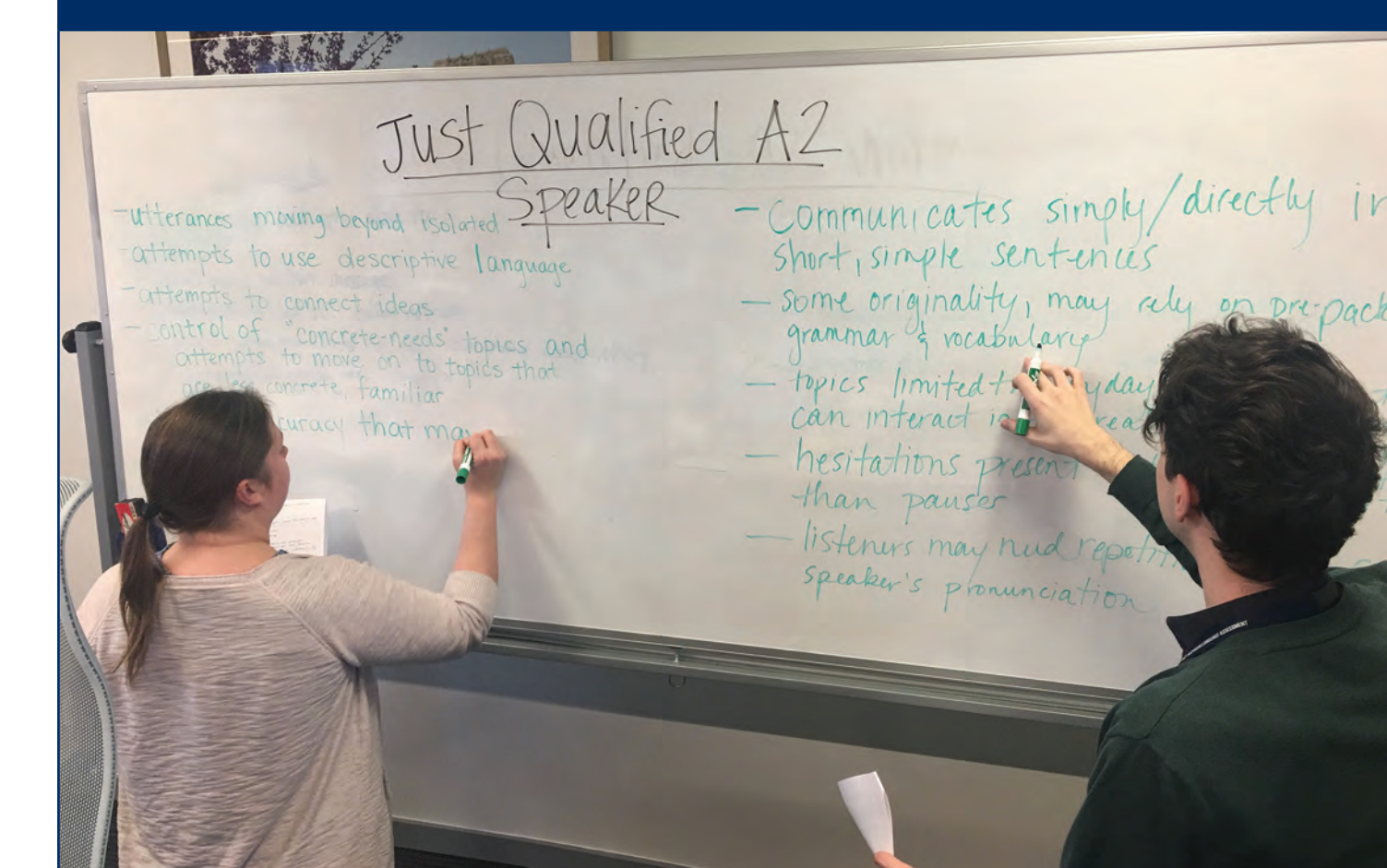- Discuss the newly-formed group definitions among the entire panel

Here, facilitators can use their own pre-study definitions to guide the conversation, fill in gaps, or add to panelists' ideas, but should be careful not to impose their definitions on the group since the goal is for the panel to develop a shared understanding of each just-qualified level.

- Modify definitions until the panelists are satisfied

Activity Outcomes
- Definitions are created with buy-in from all panelists
- Panelists have a written just-qualified definition to refer to during the judgement rounds
- Panelists enter the judgement rounds envisioning the just-qualified candidates in a shared way, increasing the likelihood of reaching consensus on cut scores

Figure 7: Example Just-Qualified Activity

Strategies

✓ **Compare descriptors at adjacent levels and read between the lines**

A2: "can manage simple, routine exchanges"

B1: "can enter unprepared into conversation on familiar topics"

Just-Qualified B1:
can go just beyond those simple exchanges and begin to converse in a more extended manner

✓ **Adjust qualifying language in the descriptors**

B1: "can give detailed accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions"

Just-Qualified B1:
can provide brief or simple details about experiences and feelings

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