



# MICHIGAN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT



## ECPE 2021 Test Report

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# 1. Description of the Test

## 1.1 General Description

The Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE) is a standardized advanced level English-as-a-foreign language examination designed by Michigan Language Assessment. It is a test of general language proficiency in a variety of contexts. The four component skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking are evaluated through a combination of tasks.

The ECPE is aimed at the C2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001) and is valid for the lifetime of the recipient. An ECPE certificate is recognized internationally as official

documentary evidence of advanced proficiency in English, and is accepted by some universities as evidence of proficiency in English.

Michigan Language Assessment is committed to the excellence of its tests, which are developed in accordance with the highest standards in educational measurement. All parts of the examination are written following specified guidelines, and items are pretested to ensure that they function properly. Michigan Language Assessment works closely with test centers to ensure that its tests are administered following set procedures, in a way that is fair and accessible to test takers and that the ECPE is open to all people who wish to take the exam. Test preparation resources are available on the Michigan Language Assessment website.

**Table 1: Format and Content of the ECPE**

Section	Time	Description	Number of Items
Listening	50 minutes	<b>Part 1:</b> Short conversations followed by a question. The recording is played once.	20 questions
		<b>Part 2:</b> Short talks delivered by a single speaker followed by six questions each. The recording is played once.	18 questions
		<b>Part 3:</b> Discussions with multiple speakers followed by six comprehension question each. The recording is played twice.	12 questions
Reading	55 minutes	<b>Grammar:</b> An incomplete sentence is followed by a choice of four words or phrases to complete it.	16 questions
		<b>Cloze:</b> Two informational passages each contain ten deletions. Each deletion is followed by a choice of four words or phrases to complete the text for grammar and meaning.	16 questions
		<b>Vocabulary:</b> An incomplete sentence is followed by a choice of four words or phrases to complete it.	20 questions
		<b>Reading:</b> Three reading passages are each followed by six comprehension questions.	18 questions
Writing	45 minutes	Test takers choose between an article/proposal task or an essay task. Three sources in the form of simple charts, graphs, figures, and quotations are provided, at least one of which should be incorporated into the test taker's response.	1 task
Speaking	30 minutes	Two or three test takers participate in a semi-structured, multistage task with two examiners.	5 stages

## 1.2 Test Format

The ECPE tests all four skill areas: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. As of May 2021, the exam has been revised to reflect feedback from test users, changes to the test-taker population, and new thinking in language assessment. Table 1 describes the format and content of the revised ECPE.

## 2. Scoring and Reporting of Results

### 2.1 Explanation of Scoring

The listening and reading sections of the ECPE are scored by computer at Michigan Language Assessment. Each correct answer contributes to the final score for each section, and there are no points deducted for wrong answers. A scaled score, ranging from 0 to 1000, is calculated using Item Response Theory. This method ensures that scores are comparable across different administrations, and that the ability required to pass a section or to receive a high score remains the same from year to year.

The writing and speaking sections are graded according to scales established by Michigan Language Assessment (see our website for the rating scales). The writing section is assessed by at least two Michigan Language Assessment certified raters, and the speaking section is conducted and assessed by two Michigan Language Assessment certified speaking examiners.

ECPE test takers who achieve an average score of 650 or higher are awarded a Certificate of Proficiency. Additionally, those who achieve a score of 840 or higher in all four sections are awarded a Certificate of Proficiency with Honors.

### 2.2 Procedures for Reporting Scores

All test takers receive an Examination Report that provides the overall result for the ECPE (Honors/Pass/Fail) and section results with a brief description of the test taker's performance. ECPE section scores are reported in five bands. The score report also provides a numeric score for each section.

**Table 2: ECPE Performance Range**

Score Band	Scaled Score
Honors (H)	840–1000
Pass (P)	750–835
Low Pass (LP)	650–745
Borderline Fail (BF)	610–645
Fail (F)	0–605

Test takers are given these results so that they will know the areas in which they have done well and those areas in which they need to improve. The numeric score provides test takers with more precise information on their performance. For example, a test taker who receives a band score of Pass (P) in the listening section of the ECPE will be able to see if his or her score is at the top of the band – close to an Honors (H) – or if it is closer to a Low Pass (LP).

## 3. Interpreting ECPE Results

The ECPE is aimed at the C2 level of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001). Language users at this proficiency level:

Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express [themselves] spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

(Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24)

Therefore, ECPE certificate holders are expected to be comfortable engaging with abstract ideas and concepts. They are interactive oral English speakers; they contribute to the development of discussion, can generally understand conversational questions, can grasp both the gist and details of a conversation delivered in Standard American English, and can understand extended spoken discourse. They also have a wide-ranging and flexible vocabulary as well as a strong grasp of English grammar. They can understand written

materials that are encountered in both general and specialized professional contexts as well as in university-level reading. Additionally, they are able to communicate in standard written English with good expression and accuracy.

When interpreting an ECPE score report, it is important to remember that the ECPE estimates a test taker’s true proficiency by approximating the kinds of tasks that they may encounter in real life. Also, temporary factors unrelated to a test taker’s proficiency, such as fatigue, anxiety, or illness, may affect exam results.

When using test scores for decision-making, it may be worth checking the date the test was taken. While the certificate is valid for the holder’s lifetime, language ability changes over time. This ability can improve with active use and further study of the language, or it may diminish if the holder does not continue to study or use English on a regular basis. It is also important to remember that test performance is only one aspect to be considered. Communicative language ability consists of both knowledge of language and knowledge of the world. Therefore, one would need to consider how factors other than language affect how well someone can communicate. For example, in the general context of using English in business, the ability to function effectively involves not only knowledge of English, but also other knowledge and skills such as content knowledge and business skills.

## 4. Test-Taking Population

This section presents an overview of the test takers who took the ECPE in 2021, providing demographic information for the test population. Every test taker completed a registration form which asked for their gender, date of birth, and first language. Cases where information was not given or was not correctly given were treated as missing data. Note that this report does not include the results of a cohort of test takers who took the previous version of the exam in early May 2021. Those candidates had originally registered to take the ECPE in December 2020, but the administration was rescheduled for May 2021 due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. As a result, they were included in the 2020 report. Candidates who took the revised version of the exam in May 2021 are included in this report.

Table 3 lists the first language backgrounds of the test takers. The test takers represented 11 different first language backgrounds, but it should be noted that the test population primarily consisted of test takers whose first language was Greek, Portuguese, or Spanish.

Tables 4 and 5 present the distribution of test takers by age and gender. Table 4 shows that the majority of the ECPE test takers were under 20 years old (78.63%). This suggests that test takers tend to take the ECPE while still in formal schooling and before they attend university. Additionally, Table 5 shows that a greater percentage of the test takers who took the ECPE were female than male. These distributions are similar to previous administrations of the exam.

**Table 3: List of First Language Backgrounds**

Albanian	Czech	Italian
Bulgarian	Farsi/Persian	Portuguese
Cambodian	French	Spanish
Chinese (Cantonese/Mandarin)	Greek	

**Table 4: Distribution (in %) of ECPE Test Takers by Age**

Age	% of Test Population
≤12	0.35
13 - 16	69.57
17 - 19	8.71
20 - 22	7.94
23 - 25	5.61
26 - 29	3.44
30 - 39	2.75
≥40	1.57
Missing Data	0.07

**Table 5: Distribution (in %) of ECPE Test Takers by Gender**

Gender	% of Test Population
Male	43.15
Female	56.79
Prefer Not to Say	0.01
Prefer to Self-Describe	0.00
Missing Data	0.04

## 5. Test Statistics

This section presents an overview of the test statistics for the 2021 ECPE, with the exception of the data from the cohort mentioned above that took the previous version of the exam. It provides information on both test taker performance and the reliability of the exam. It is important to note that the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in historic disruptions in testing, teaching, and learning. While measures were taken to minimize the impact of these disruptions, caution should still be used when comparing the results to previous years.

## 5.1 Distribution of Results for the Exam as a Whole

Table 6 shows the percentage of test takers who received an Honors, Pass, or Fail for the ECPE. It shows that the pass rate for the 2021 ECPE was 77.66%.

**Table 7: Percentage of ECPE Test Takers Who Received an Honors, Pass, or Fail**

Honors	Pass	Fail
0.04	77.62	22.34

## 5.2 Distribution of Results by Section

Table 7 shows the percentage of test takers in each band for every section of the ECPE. The data indicates that a typical ECPE test taker will perform better on the writing and speaking sections and that the listening and reading sections are more challenging.

## 5.3 Reliability Figures for Listening and Reading

Test scores are a numerical measure of a test taker's ability. *Reliability* refers to the consistency of the measurement. In theory, a test taker's test score should be the same each time the test is taken or across different forms of the same test. In practice, even when the test conditions are carefully controlled, an individual's performance on a set of test items will vary from one administration to another due to variation in the items across different forms of the same test or due to variability in individual performance. Among the reasons for this are temporary factors unrelated to a test taker's proficiency, such as fatigue, anxiety, or illness. As a result, test scores always contain a small amount of measurement error. The aim, however, is to keep this error to a minimum. For

**Table 6: Percentage of Test Takers in Each Score Band for the Four Sections of the ECPE**

Section	Honors	Pass	Low Pass	Borderline Fail	Fail
Listening	11.46	19.37	35.69	13.09	20.39
Reading	17.14	19.84	32.70	11.73	18.58
Writing	0.24	15.69	61.44	21.71	0.92
Speaking	6.54	24.30	58.02	10.15	0.98

high-stakes exams such as the ECPE, a reliability figure of 0.80 and above is expected and acceptable. In addition to monitoring reliability, the estimated variability in test taker performance is also monitored through the standard error of measurement (SEM) estimate.

Reliability and SEM estimates are obtained for each administration of the ECPE. The reliability estimates are calculated in Winsteps using the KR-20 (Kuder-Richardson Formula 20) method. The SEM estimates are calculated using the reliability estimates and the scaled scores. In this report, the reliability and SEM estimates are summarized as averages across the different 2021 ECPE administrations. For the listening section, the average reliability estimate was 0.84, and the average SEM estimate was 46.99. For the reading section, the average reliability estimate was 0.88, and the average SEM estimate was 41.17. These values demonstrate that the reliability figures for both exam sections are above the minimally acceptable value of 0.80. Additionally, the SEM estimates as a proportion of the 1000-point scale are very small. These values suggest good consistency of measurement for the ECPE listening and reading sections.

#### **5.4 Rater Agreement Figures for Writing**

The raters for the writing section are highly proficient speakers of English who are trained and certified according to standards set by Michigan Language Assessment. Each essay is rated separately by two accredited raters using an analytic rating scale, and an essay is evaluated by a third rater if the original two raters have non-adjacent scores for any of the analytic scoring categories.

For quality control purposes, Michigan Language Assessment also monitors overall rater performance by looking at the percentage of within tolerance agreement and pass/fail agreement between the two original raters. Within tolerance agreement is defined here as being within  $\pm 2$  score points of each other, and pass/fail agreement is defined as agreement on whether an essay should be awarded a passing grade or a failing grade. In this report, these two rater agreement figures are summarized across

the different 2021 ECPE administrations. The overall within tolerance agreement percentage was 72.16%, and the overall pass/fail agreement percentage was 74.01%. Both of these values are reasonably high, which suggests good agreement among raters.

#### **5.5 Rater Agreement Figures for Speaking**

The examiners for the speaking test are highly proficient speakers of English who are trained and certified according to standards set by Michigan Language Assessment. Each speaking performance is rated separately by two accredited examiners using an analytic rating scale. The final score awarded is the sum of the examiners' scores.

For quality control purposes, Michigan Language Assessment also monitors overall examiner performance by looking at the percentage of within tolerance agreement and pass/fail agreement between examiners. Within tolerance agreement is defined here as being within  $\pm 2$  score points of each other, and pass/fail agreement is defined as agreement on whether a speaking performance should be awarded a passing grade or a failing grade. In this report, these two agreement figures are summarized across the different 2021 ECPE administrations. The overall within tolerance agreement percentage was 94.91%, and the overall pass/fail agreement percentage was 97.29%. Both of these values are reasonably high, which suggests good agreement among examiners.

## **6. References**

Council of Europe (2001). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.