

BEST Plus FAQ

Below you will find frequently asked questions and answers about the BEST Plus. As your own questions arise, please review this FAQ for answers. If you don't find your answer here, please contact Marlana Patton at mpatton@englishatlarge.org or call 781.395.2374.

1. What is the BEST Plus, and why is English At Large administering it?

The BEST Plus is a standardized assessment that examines English speaking and listening skills in a one-to-one setting. The letters B-E-S-T stand for “Basic English Skills Test.” The word *plus* was added because this test represents a dramatic update of the original BEST test.

Like all adult basic education programs funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE), English At Large is required to administer standardized assessments to eligible learners. The BEST Plus is deemed appropriate for very low level ESOL learners, so English At Large will use it to assess its very low level ESOL learners.

2. Who is required to take the BEST Plus?

Existing and new low-level ESOL learners (with a student performance level of 0 – 1) must take the BEST Plus.

3. When and where will the BEST Plus be administered?

The BEST Plus will be administered to English At Large learners in a one-to-one setting in a public location—probably a library.

4. How long does the assessment take?

Assessments vary in length, depending on the learner's knowledge of English. They appear to average between 20 and 30 minutes. Learners will be told to budget an hour for the rare case that the assessment requires a full 45 minutes.

5. How often must my learner take the BEST Plus?

After their initial BEST Plus assessment, eligible learners are required to take the BEST Plus once every fiscal year and once upon exiting the program.

English At Large administers the BEST Plus in May/June, September, and January. Learners must take the BEST Plus as soon as possible after they receive a tutor. They must then take the BEST Plus in May/June of that year, if their initial administration is not a May/June administration. Once the learner gets on the May/June administration schedule, they take the BEST Plus annually every May/June

6. How will my learner know when and where to take the BEST Plus?

Learners will receive notification of the BEST Plus requirement by mail, as will their tutors. Within a few weeks of that letter, they or their designated contact person will be contacted by an assessor. The assessor will work with the learner to set up a date and time for the assessment.

7. Does the BEST Plus replace the English At Large intake assessment process?

No. The BEST Plus is a standardized assessment that is a requirement of the Massachusetts DOE. English At Large administers the BEST Plus in addition to the current intake assessment.

8. Who administers and scores the BEST Plus?

English At Large volunteers who participate in training offered by SABES—a professional development organization that is funded by the Massachusetts DOE—will be certified to administer and score the BEST Plus. Tutors do not administer the BEST Plus to their learners. Scores will be communicated back to tutors by letter.

9. What if my learner does not improve his/her score from assessment to assessment? Are there negative repercussions for my learner or for me as their tutor?

No. There are no negative repercussions for either the learner or the tutor. It will be important to emphasize this fact to the learners and that it is impossible to fail this test.

10. What if my learner refuses to take the BEST Plus?

If your learner refuses to take the BEST Plus, he or she may continue tutoring with you but will not be matched with another tutor once they are no longer with you.

11. Will tutors receive their learner's scores?

Yes. English At Large will communicate your learner's scores to you by letter.

12. Can tutors show the scores to the learners?

You may show the score to the learner, but the scores will simply be a number with little meaning. It is important for the learner and the tutor not to become overly concerned with the number. They should instead focus their energy on improving listening comprehension skills, increasing language complexity, and ensuring clear communication, which are the primary skills addressed in the BEST Plus scoring rubric.

13. Can a tutor accompany a learner during the BEST Plus administration?

No. Tutors may not be in the same room when the BEST Plus is administered.

14. How can we prepare our learners to be successful with the BEST Plus?

Learners who participate in spontaneous speaking and listening practice will be most comfortable with the assessment. The format of the BEST Plus is conversational. Assessment questions frequently elicit expressions of opinion, descriptions of daily routines, and descriptions of pictures.

Learners should have opportunities to practice providing full and detailed answers to questions and to practice using clear pronunciation and good use of English grammar.

15. The BEST Plus does not reflect my learner's strengths in writing. How can it fully assess his/her literacy level?

While it is true that the BEST Plus focuses on speaking and listening abilities and does not offer a comprehensive view of literacy ability, no standardized assessment is ever 100% accurate or completely comprehensive.

16. Will my learner ever have to take the REEP writing assessment?

Because the BEST Plus is administered in a one-to-one setting, it is less efficient for English At Large to administer than the REEP, which is administered to groups. As a result, once low-level learners improve their English skills enough, they will be transitioned to the REEP writing test.

17. What information is reported to the DOE?

Learner names and scores are reported to the Massachusetts DOE. The goal is not to single out a particular learner, but rather to provide cumulative statistics for the state to report to the federal government.

18. My learner has a disability. Will that be accommodated?

If your learner has a disability, please contact Christine Ellersick by email at cellersick@englishatlarge.org or by phone at 781.395.2374 to make special accommodations.