

TCF Canada and TEF Canada cheat sheet

Format, NCLC score charts, timing strategy and scoring basics for both tests, on a few printable pages.

Checked against official sources on October 6, 2026

Interactive version: nclcfrench.com/tcf-tef-cheat-sheet

QUICK ANSWER

The TCF Canada and the TEF Canada both test listening, reading, writing and speaking, and IRCC accepts both. The TCF has 39 questions per comprehension test and three writing and speaking tasks; the TEF has 40 questions and two sections each. For Express Entry most people aim for NCLC 7 in all four skills. On the TEF, enter the "Équivalence ancien score", never the score out of 699.

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TCF vs TEF at a glance

The official structure of both tests, from France Éducation internationale (TCF Canada) and Le français des affaires, CCI Paris Île-de-France (TEF Canada). Full detail: [TCF Canada exam format](#) and [TEF Canada exam format](#).

TCF Canada

Section	Time	Format
Compréhension orale	35 min	39 questions
Compréhension écrite	60 min	39 questions
Expression écrite	60 min	3 tasks
Expression orale	12 min	3 tasks

Total: 167 min · Results valid 2 years for IRCC · Retake wait: 20 days

TEF Canada

Section	Time	Format
Compréhension écrite	60 min	40 questions
Compréhension orale	40 min	40 questions
Expression écrite	60 min	2 tasks
Expression orale	15 min	2 tasks

Total: 175 min · Results valid 2 years for IRCC · Retake wait: 20 days

The one rule people get wrong: the TEF score column

Your TEF Canada certificate shows two sets of numbers. For Express Entry, IRCC tells you to enter **only the "Équivalence ancien score" column** (listening /360, reading /300, writing and speaking /450). The "Score / 699" column is not compatible with Express Entry, and IRCC warns that entering the wrong scores may lead to a refused application. TCF Canada scores go in as printed. Not sure what your numbers mean? Use the [NCLC score converter](#).

TCF Canada score chart: NCLC levels

Listening and reading are scored out of 699, writing and speaking out of 20. Your NCLC level for each skill is the row your score falls in. The cut-offs are not the same for listening and reading. More detail: [TCF score chart](#).

NCLC	Listening (/699)	Reading (/699)	Writing (/20)	Speaking (/20)
10	549–699	549–699	16–20	16–20
9	523–548	524–548	14–15	14–15
8	503–522	499–523	12–13	12–13
7	458–502	453–498	10–11	10–11

6	398–457	406–452	7–9	7–9
5	369–397	375–405	6	6
4	331–368	342–374	4–5	4–5

TEF Canada score chart: NCLC levels (ancien score)

These are "Équivalence ancien score" values, the ones Express Entry uses. Each skill has its own scale: listening /360, reading /300, writing and speaking /450. More detail: [TEF score chart](#).

NCLC	Listening (/360)	Reading (/300)	Writing (/450)	Speaking (/450)
10	316–360	263–300	393–450	393–450
9	298–315	248–262	371–392	371–392
8	280–297	233–247	349–370	349–370
7	249–279	207–232	310–348	310–348
6	217–248	181–206	271–309	271–309
5	181–216	151–180	226–270	226–270
4	145–180	121–150	181–225	181–225

What NCLC 7 and NCLC 9 unlock in Express Entry

Points from the IRCC Comprehensive Ranking System criteria. Your full score depends on age, education and work experience too, so check it in the [CRS calculator](#).

What you get	NCLC 7 in all four skills	NCLC 9 in all four skills
French bonus (additional points)	25 points, or 50 if you also have CLB 5 or more in all four English skills	Same: 25, or 50 with CLB 5+ in English
French as your first official language	17 points per skill (16 with a spouse or partner)	31 points per skill (29 with a spouse or partner)
French as your second official language	3 points per skill	6 points per skill (capped at 24 in total, 22 with a spouse)
Skill transferability: language + post-secondary education	13 or 25 points, depending on your education	25 or 50 points, depending on your education

French-language category draws

Eligible: the minimum is NCLC 7 in all four skills

Eligible

NCLC levels count per skill: your lowest skill decides the bonus and the category. Skill transferability uses your first official language. See how French moves your score in the [CRS calculator](#).

Timing strategy for each section

Official times are in the table at the top. The splits below are our suggestions, not rules from the test owners.

Section	TCF Canada	TEF Canada
Listening	Each recording plays once and questions get harder as you go. Answer fast, never leave a blank (a wrong answer scores 0, the same as a blank) and let go of a missed question.	Each audio plays once and you cannot go back. Use the few seconds before each audio to read the question and options.
Reading	About 1 minute 30 per question on average. Move quickly through the short early texts to save time for the long ones at the end.	You can move freely between questions. Skip a hard one, flag it mentally and come back. Fill in every answer before time runs out.
Writing	One 60-minute clock for three tasks, done in order. We suggest about 10, 15 and 25 minutes, plus a few minutes to count words and re-read.	Section A has 25 minutes and Section B has 35. Unused time does not carry over, so plan, write and re-read inside each section.
Speaking	Task 1 has no preparation: have a flexible self-introduction ready. Use the 2 minutes of task 2 preparation to list question topics, not full sentences. Task 3 starts straight away.	No separate preparation time is published. Read the document and start within seconds: about ten questions in Section A, five or more arguments in Section B.

How the TCF and TEF are scored

TCF Canada. Listening and reading are multiple choice. Only correct answers count, weighted by the difficulty of each question, and the total is turned into a score out of 699. Writing and speaking are marked out of 20. On computer, writing may get a first marking from FIDELIA, an automated marking aid; the second marking is always done by a person. Your speaking interview is recorded and rated a second time by France Éducation internationale.

TEF Canada. In listening and reading, a correct answer is worth 1 point and a wrong or blank answer 0. The total is converted into a calibrated score that accounts for question difficulty. Writing is assessed by two independent markers. Speaking is always recorded: the examiner gives a first rating and a second evaluator rates the recording.

On the TCF, word counts are a hard limit. A writing task outside its word range, off topic, missing or copied from the documents can be rated "A1 non atteint" (below A1). The TEF sets minimums only. Ready-made phrases for both tests: **TCF and TEF writing phrases**.

Results, validity and retakes

	TCF Canada	TEF Canada
Results	Up to 15 working days after France Éducation internationale receives the session	1 to 10 working days after the test, in an online space
Valid for	2 years from the date results are issued	2 years from the date the certificate is issued
Wait before retaking	20 days	20 days
Same day	Not stated by the test owner	All four tests must be taken the same day

For Express Entry, IRCC requires results less than 2 years old both when you create your profile and when you submit your PR application. Book your retake with the expiry date in mind.

How to use this cheat sheet

Start by finding where you are today: take the **free 10-question French level check**, then a full timed **free TCF or TEF mock test**. Mark your score for each skill in the charts above and circle the weakest one.

Spend most of your practice time on that weakest skill, because the lowest of your four NCLC levels sets your French bonus. For speaking, rehearse with **TCF and TEF speaking questions**; for writing, learn the connectors and letter formulas in **the writing phrases sheet**.

Re-read the timing strategy the week before your exam, and check the official format with the test owner in case it has changed.

Ready to test yourself?

Take a full timed TCF Canada or TEF Canada mock test in the real format, with an NCLC estimate for every skill.

Start a free mock test



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