

TEF & TCF Canada, explained in plain English

What the two exams actually contain, what the score you have been told to get is really asking of your French, and what to do about it — written for people applying to Canada from India.

The one thing most candidates are never told

Express Entry talks in **CLB** (NCLC in French). Every French course on earth teaches in **CEFR** — A1, A2, B1, B2. Nobody joins the two up for you, so people study for months without knowing whether they are anywhere near their target.

CLB 5 asks for roughly B1 French. CLB 7 asks for roughly B2. That single sentence is the reason this guide exists.

Who this is for

Express Entry candidates adding French for CRS points, anyone sitting TEF or TCF Canada, and complete beginners deciding whether it is worth starting at all.

What it is not

Not official. Formats and score tables change. Confirm anything decision-critical with your test centre or the official body before you rely on it.

The two exams, side by side

IRCC accepts both for Express Entry, and they are worth the same points. Choose on which format suits you, not on which is "easier" — the preparation overlaps almost entirely.

TEF Canada

Run by the CCI Paris Île-de-France (*Le français des affaires*).

MODULE	TIME
Compréhension écrite — reading	60 min
Compréhension orale — listening	40 min
Expression écrite — writing	60 min
Expression orale — speaking	15 min

TCF Canada

Run by France Éducation International.

MODULE	TIME
Compréhension écrite — reading	60 min
Compréhension orale — listening	35 min
Expression écrite — writing	60 min
Expression orale — speaking	12 min

Question counts and section splits vary by version and are revised periodically — the timings above are the stable part. Check the current candidate handbook for the session you book.

What each module actually asks of you

Compréhension écrite (reading)

Notices, emails, articles, forum posts. The difficulty is rarely the vocabulary — it is answering under a clock, where every option looks plausible until you find the line in the text that decides it.

Compréhension orale (listening)

Announcements, voicemails, short exchanges, then longer interviews and bulletins. **The audio plays once.** This is the module that most often caps the final band, and the one that cannot be crammed in the last month.

Expression écrite (writing)

Marked against a rubric — structure, register, connectors, accuracy. That is good news: a rubric is learnable in a way that "write better French" is not, but only with somebody correcting you.

Expression orale (speaking)

Short, with preparation time before each task. Candidates lose marks to silence and to hedging far more often than to grammar. Fluency you can hold under pressure beats accuracy you cannot.

What your target score is really asking for

A1	Greetings, numbers, very simple sentences. Everyone starts here.
A2	Routine exchanges, simple emails, familiar topics.
B1	CLB 5 Enough French to earn points — the realistic first target.
B2	CLB 7 Where French starts changing your profile properly.

These are approximate alignments, not a conversion formula — the exams score you on their own scale and IRCC converts that to CLB. But they are the right mental model, and they answer the question a course brochure never does: *how much French is this, really?*

The official cut scores

Both exams report a scaled score, not a raw count. These are the published boundaries for the two bands that matter most.

TEF Canada			TCF Canada		
MODULE	CLB 5	CLB 7	MODULE	NCLC 5	NCLC 7
Reading /300	151–180	207–232	Reading /699	375–405	453–498
Listening /360	181–216	249–279	Listening /699	369–397	458–502

Sources: TEF Canada per-skill conversion tables; TCF Canada NCLC conversion on the 100–699 scale. Checked August 2026. Both bodies revise their tables — verify before you rely on a number.

Your weakest module decides your outcome

Express Entry looks at all four abilities. Three strong modules and one weak one does not average out in your favour — the weak one is what your French is worth. Most candidates discover this a fortnight before the exam, having spent six months on reading because reading felt like progress.

What actually works, in order

1 • Find out where you are before you buy anything

Not a guess, not a YouTube "what's your level" video. People misjudge themselves in both directions, and the plan for A2 and the plan for B1 have almost nothing in common.

2 • Listening from day one, every day

It is the slowest skill to build and the audio plays once on exam day. Starting it early is the single biggest predictor of whether B2 is reachable at all.

3 • Get your writing corrected by a human

Writing improves only against feedback. Self-study produces confident, fluent, consistently wrong French — and the rubric marks exactly the things you cannot see in your own work.

4 • Learn the format last, not first

Practising papers below A2 measures nothing and teaches nothing. Build the language; exam technique is a few weeks of work at the end.

5 • Sit full mock papers under a real clock

Almost nobody does this, and it is where the surprises live. Untimed practice measures your French; timed practice measures your score.

Start with the free assessment

Ten minutes, no sign-up, nothing to pay. You find out which rung your French is on and exactly what your target score is asking for — then, if you want it, a free demo class with a real teacher who has already read your result.

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