

Substantive Equality of Official Languages

Canada has two official languages: French and English.

Individuals have the right to receive services from federal institutions in the official language they choose.

Federal institutions have a duty to communicate with the public and provide services in both official languages. Their communications and services must be of substantive equality regardless of the official language chosen.

Substantive equality is the standard used to ensure respect for the right to receive services and communications in the official language an individual chooses.

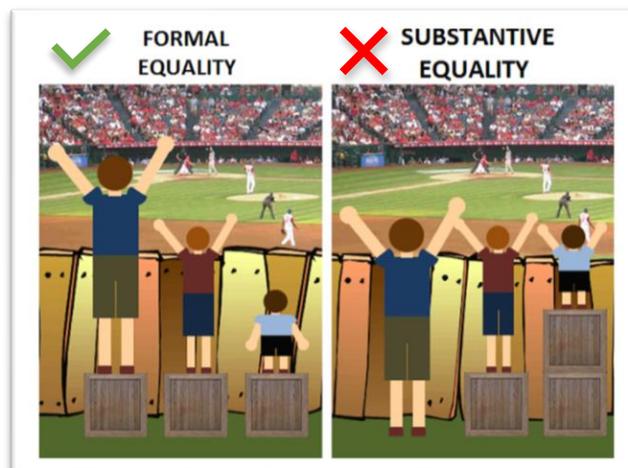
Substantive equality considers differences.

Substantive equality considers the differences between the linguistic majority and minority. Providing the same quality of service to both groups means adapting the services to the needs of each group.



Don't confuse substantive equality with formal equality.

Formal equality is when the institution provides identical services to both linguistic groups without considering the differences between them.



Substantive equality doesn't compromise.

Federal institutions must take steps to ensure the services provided to both linguistic groups are of the same quality.

The result of the steps taken by the institution, not the steps themselves, determines whether there is substantive equality. Making a reasonable effort to accommodate both linguistic groups is not enough. Substantive equality is not measured by costs or other practical considerations.

Substantive equality depends on the result: the services are of the same quality when the individual receives them.

The four criteria of substantive equality

Substantive linguistic equality means the two official languages are equal in status, use, access and quality.



Both languages have the same status.

Equal status

French and English have the same status. One language is not more important than the other, even if more people use it in a particular region. Neither linguistic group should feel it is secondary to the other.

That's why, for example, the signs on the buildings of public institutions use the same size letters in both languages. It's also why the French and English versions of information documents and forms of federal institutions have the same value.



People can use the official language they choose.

Equal use

Individuals have the right to receive services from a federal institution and communicate with it in the official language they choose.

A federal institution can't make anyone receive services or communicate with it in a language just because the person understands or uses it every day.



Services are equally accessible in both languages.

Equal access

For individuals to really have the right to use the official language they choose, the services must be as accessible and attractive in one language as in the other.

For example, the waiting time for a service must not be longer in one language than in the other. Federal employees don't all have to be bilingual, but services must be equally accessible in the two languages.



The services are of the same quality in both languages.

Equal quality

Substantive equality is not achieved if the quality of service is better in one language than in the other. But this doesn't mean there's a precise standard of quality. A service can be equally bad in both languages.

To offer services of substantive equality, the needs and characteristics of the two linguistic groups must be considered. So, a service might be offered in a different way to one linguistic group than to the other.