



ACTFL OPI

EXAMINEE HANDBOOK

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ACTFL
AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE
TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Table of Contents

About the ACTFL OPI Test	4
OPI Test Structure and Protocol	5
Linguistic Functions and OPI Question-Types	8
NOVICE LEVEL	8
INTERMEDIATE LEVEL	9
ADVANCED LEVEL	9
SUPERIOR LEVEL	10
Sample Questions.....	11
NOVICE.....	11
INTERMEDIATE.....	11
ADVANCED	11
SUPERIOR.....	12
Expectations for Each Major Level	13
NOVICE.....	13
INTERMEDIATE	13
ADVANCED	13
SUPERIOR.....	14
Sublevels	15
The HIGH Sublevel	15
The MID Sublevel.....	15
The LOW Sublevel.....	15
Tips for Optimal Performance on the OPI	16
Logistics.....	16
Personal preparation	16
Test-taking tips	16
Rating the OPI	18
Frequently Asked Questions about the OPI.....	19
Policies & Guidelines for the Use of the OPI.....	21
Questions? Contact us	22



About the ACTFL OPI Test

The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is a valid and reliable means of assessing how well a person speaks a language. It is a 15-30-minute one-on-one interview between you and a certified ACTFL tester. The OPI is an assessment that is carried out in the form of an interview, but follows an established structure and protocol in order to elicit a ratable speech sample. The interview is interactive (it invites the speaker to actively participate in the communicative exchange), and continuously adapts to the speaker's interests and abilities. The OPI simulates a casual conversation in which the tester guides the conversation to examine a variety of linguistic functions across diverse topics. The interview elicits a speech sample in which the tester assesses your ability to communicate in the target language (proficiency) while performing the functions that you might encounter in real-life situations.

As the OPI assesses general language proficiency, it is not designed to assess what you have learned in a specific language program, class, school, or university, nor is it tied to a specific teaching method or book. Rather than assessing what you “know” about the language, the OPI is an assessment of what you “can do” with the language.

“Proficiency” refers to how well a person can use the language as defined by the criteria established by the official descriptors used as the reference for the evaluation.

There are three different rating guidelines used as the rating criteria for the OPI assessment, selected according to the ratings required by the client:

- 1 American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)
- 2 Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR)
- 3 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The speaking sample obtain during the OPI interview is compared to the criteria outlined in one of the three guidelines: the [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 - Speaking](#), the [Interagency Language Roundtable Language Skill Level Descriptions - Speaking](#), or the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#). For the purpose of this introduction for examinees, the OPI assessment in this manual is based on the descriptions and criteria presented in the [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012- Speaking](#). In all cases, the final rating assigned to an OPI is determined only by comparing the examinee's proficiency with one of the three guidelines indicated above.

Each OPI is unique, tailored to your interests and your level of functional ability. The content of the interview is based on topics such as in areas related to your everyday life, school, work experience, and/or about current events happening in your local area, or even on a global scale. The tester will invite you to speak on a variety of topics while checking different linguistic functions. There is no right answer, so you should focus on providing a spontaneous and genuine response, just as you would in a real-life conversation, instead of repeating memorized or improvised material.

As the interview progresses, the tester will explore a variety of contexts (at school, between friends, in a formal environment, etc.). The tester will ask open questions inviting you to elaborate and provide full responses while guiding you through the OPI structure.



OPI Test Structure and Protocol

The goal of the OPI is to obtain a ratable speech sample that both demonstrates the highest level at which you can function consistently, and the quantity and quality of your functional ability. Additionally, the sample will provide evidence of your control over the functions at the next higher level of proficiency on the ACTFL scale.

A tester evaluates the sample and assigns a rating that matches the speaker’s functional ability to the descriptors in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012- Speaking. Since all samples are compared to these proficiency guidelines, all ratings in all languages refer to the same criteria. You can review the descriptors in detail at: [ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES 2012](#). This site also includes a translation of the document and samples at each major level for at 10 languages.

There are four stages in an OPI:

	Stages of the OPI
Warm-up	The tester initiates the interview touching on a variety of topics to have an initial sense of your speaking ability. The interview begins at the Intermediate level, expecting that at least a basic conversation can take place. Most questions are of a general nature about your life and interests. Keep in mind that the tester’s objective is to hone in on your proficiency level, not your personal information. Topics are not meant to be of a personal nature, so, if you feel uncomfortable or are not allowed to speak about a topic, you can let the tester know that you do not want to talk about a particular topic. Testers are trained to pivot to a different topic when necessary.
Level Checks	Level checks explore the highest level at which you can function consistently. The tester selects specific topics and expands on them by asking several questions on the same topic. As the interview progresses, the demands of the questions might increase in complexity, inviting you to show your speaking ability at its best. You should provide complete responses to show the best type of discourse that you can (sentences, strings of sentences, paragraphs, extended discourse), with the best quality and comprehensibility that you can produce. All these elements together are taken into account to arrive at the final rating.

Probes	Probes explore one level above the level checks in order to gather evidence of the level at which the speaker can no longer sustain performance. This confirms that the level checks were targeted at the correct level. The tester must elicit evidence of linguistic breakdown, in order to show a clearly ratable sample. The level of your control over linguistic functions during probes also provides information for the final rating. The tester will alternate level checks and probes in order to avoid too much time at the level of breakdown. The tester’s task is to elicit a clearly ratable sample, and to maintain your focus on the content of your responses rather than on the linguistic challenges you might encounter. You should focus on providing the best response possible and follow the tester’s cues in providing your best performance throughout the OPI.
Wind-down	As the OPI draws to a conclusion, the tester will ask a few questions to return the conversation to linguistic functions you can easily perform. The tester might ask a few questions to touch on other topics, and to check that all the functions of the level are demonstrated. The wind-down takes a short time, and then the interview will end.

Before the OPI begins, your tester will read the statement below in English that serves as an introduction to the interview process.

OPI INTRODUCTION

I am a certified proficiency tester who has been asked to evaluate your speaking proficiency in (*language*). This is a test of your ability to express yourself in (*language*). Please use (*language*) throughout the interview.

The interview is being recorded and will last between 15 and 30 minutes. This recording shall remain the sole property of ACTFL/LTI and shall not be released to you or to any other party under any circumstances. The ACTFL Testing Office shall only provide the final rating.

During the interview, we will discuss a variety of topics. If you are uncomfortable with, or not authorized to speak about a topic that I may introduce, please let me know and we will discuss another topic. There may be instances when I need to interrupt you in order to change to a different topic.

Your personal opinions and points of view will not in any way affect your rating. However, in some cases, your ability to state and support opinions will be evaluated.

At some point during the interview, I may ask you to participate in a role-play situation with me. I will introduce the role play in English; then you and I will act out the situation in (*language*).

Your participation in the interview is very important and will help you to show your (*language*) ability at its best.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Once the tester reads this statement, you can ask any questions that you may have about the testing process. Once the tester answers any questions, the tester will switch to the testing language and the OPI will begin. After this moment, speak the testing language only.

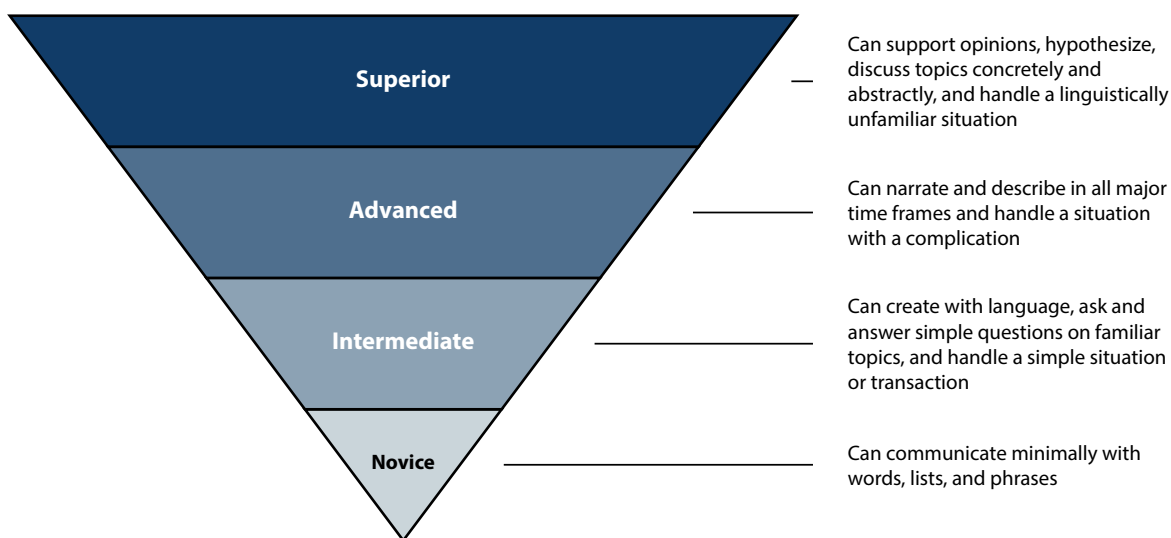
Role-plays are also a part of the OPI, but they may function as a level check or a probe. Role-plays represent social transactions or situations you might encounter in real life. The role-play works like a mini-drama in which both you and the tester take on different roles. The tester will choose to present to you a simple situation or social transaction (e.g., introducing yourself to a friend, buying tickets), or a situation with a complication (e.g., reporting an accident, returning a defective item). Other, more complex situations might require you to deal with a topic abstractly or handle a linguistically unfamiliar situation. During the role-play, the tester will guide you to complete the task proposed in the situation. Once the task in the role-play is completed, the tester will continue asking questions that solicit different linguistic functions.

Testers are experienced at making the OPI process effortless and adaptable. As such, you might not recognize the various components of the interview while tasks are changing and the level of complexity alternates from one level to another. While you are responding to questions and tasks, the tester is making decisions and choices that give you the opportunity to show your best functional ability while eliciting a ratable sample. Your job is to focus on responding to the questions, and to show your language ability at its best.

Linguistic Functions and OPI Question-Types

OPI questions elicit different functions associated with the different levels on the ACTFL Proficiency scale. For each of the major levels of proficiency, there are specific types of communicative tasks that you must demonstrate. The tester will likely probe similar functions on a variety of topics in order to determine the quantity and quality of your functional ability. For a rating that is associated with a specific proficiency level, all functions of that level must be demonstrated.

Below is a visual representation of the ACTFL scale with concise information about the four major levels tested by the OPI. As you can see, the ACTFL scale covers a full range of proficiency from Novice to Superior.



NOVICE LEVEL

Not all interviews include Novice-level questions; only those which have demonstrated evidence of breakdown at the Intermediate level will be asked questions at the Novice level.

Types of Questions and/or Requests	Examples of Novice-Level Questions
Lists	What colors are in the room?
Phrases	What do you like to do in your free time?

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

All interviews begin at the Intermediate level, and all speakers will have the opportunity to speak about their routines and personal interests.

Types of Questions and/or Requests	Examples of Intermediate-Level Questions and/or Requests
Simple description of a person, place or thing	Describe your best friend. What does he or she look like?
Simple description of an activity or event	Tell me what you do after school every day.
Ask questions to get something you want or need	You would like to get a hotel room this weekend. Ask three or four questions to find out what is available.

ADVANCED LEVEL

Advanced-level questions invite speakers to speak about autobiographic topics and beyond. The tester will ask you to talk about yourself, your work, and/or your community. The tester's questions provide you the opportunity to respond with detailed narrations and descriptions in paragraph-length discourse in the major time frames (present, past and future).

Types of Questions and/or Requests	Examples of Advanced-Level Questions and/or Requests
Detailed descriptions of people, places, and things from your present and your past	You said you travel for business. Tell me about the last place you went on a business trip. Where did you go on the last trip you took? Tell me your impressions of what you saw on your last trip.
Detailed stories about something that has happened, is happening, or will happen	You said you like to ski. Tell me the story of how you learned to ski. Tell me the whole story of how you learned to ski from beginning to end in as much detail as you can.
Handle a complication that arises in a transaction	You are travelling with your friend. You have a pre-paid hotel reservation for a room with twin beds. When you arrive, the room the hotel gives you has only a single bed in it. Go to the receptionist, explain the problem and convince the receptionist to give you the type of room you reserved.
Report on a current event	Weather-related events are always in the news. Tell me about a recent weather event that you are following in the news.

SUPERIOR LEVEL

Superior-level questions invite you to reflect thoughtfully about issues and problems of our society. These questions require you to organize your ideas in a logical manner and provide more complex elaboration.

Types of Questions and/or Requests	Examples of Superior-Level Questions and/or Requests
State and support an opinion	Air travel has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. Speak about the most significant changes that have been made and comment on why you believe these new procedures are effective or not. Be sure to provide arguments to support your point of view.
Hypothesize about possible conditions and outcomes	What are some air travel changes that could be adopted by airlines and airports to improve the travel experience? Suggest some changes and describe what impact these changes would have on the traveler if they were adopted.
Discuss topics in general, abstract terms	Access to health care is an important issue in most countries. Pick one country and describe its health care system and benefits to the general public in comparison to the health care system of another country.



Sample Questions

Below are some sample questions types. There is a note accompanying each sample to indicate what an appropriate response should contain at the targeted level:

NOVICE

What things are outside your house? Trees, cars . . . name all the things you see outside your house.

Note: If you are a Novice-level speaker, you should be able to provide words, lists, and phrases.

INTERMEDIATE

Tell me about the different rooms in your home. Do you have a favorite room? What does it look like?

Note: If you are an Intermediate-level speaker, you should be able to talk about your favorite room and provide some details about what the room looks like using sentences.

OR:

What is your normal routine at home? What kinds of things do you do at home during the week and on the weekends?

Note: This is also an Intermediate-level question. For this question, if you are an Intermediate-level speaker, you should be able to speak in sentences about your daily habits and the things you usually do when you are at home — during the week and on the weekends.

ADVANCED

I'd like you to tell me your favorite memory about a good friend. It can be a story that involves you and your friend together, or a story that you know about your friend. Talk about this memory in as much detail as you can.

Note: This is an Advanced-level question. When you respond to it, you are expected to be able to produce a paragraph-length response. This means that the sentences you produce must be organized and connected to each other in a story with a beginning, middle and end. At this level, you are also expected to use the appropriate time frames.

You mentioned that you will get married next month. Can you describe how the reception hall is going to be decorated? Provide details so I can imagine it.

Note: This is an Advanced-level question asking for a description. When you respond to it, organize your description and provide details so your tester gets a clear idea of what the place is going to look like.

For these prompts, your response should be in the appropriate time frame, and the tester should be able to understand when the action or event happened in addition to what the place looks like. Advanced-level speakers do not need sympathetic listeners who have to fill in the gaps of the narrative or description in order to understand the speaker's idea. If you are at the Advanced level, you should be able to do all of these things in your response.

SUPERIOR

Nowadays, communication through digital resources is increasingly maintained among young people through social media, texting, instant messaging, etc. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of relying solely on digital resources for interpersonal communication? How do these changes in communication affect contemporary society?

Note: At the Superior level, you will be expected to produce extended discourse, which means that your responses will need to develop into multiple paragraphs in length. The paragraphs must be well-organized and connected. They also need to be easily understood for all educated native language listeners. In addition to the length of your responses, you need to be able to deal with complex topics that may require you to express your opinion or deal hypothetically or abstractly with the subject.

To respond to the example above at the Superior level, you should talk about changes in society caused by digital resources and interpersonal communication. Your focus on the topic should be on a large scale (how it affects people, communities, countries, the world, etc.) and not your life and personal experiences (that would most likely be an Advanced-level response). Your response should have few, if any errors. A pattern of errors (such as problems of agreement, missing language features, etc.) that distract the listener from your message, are considered breakdown from the Superior level to the Advanced level.



Expectations for Each Major Level

A final rating indicates both a major level and a sublevel on the ACTFL scale. The ACTFL scale has 4 major levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior. Each level represents a range in which speakers demonstrate sustained functional ability of the linguistic functions associated with that level. The sublevel indicates a more precise range associated with the quality and quantity within the major level.

NOVICE

A Novice-level speaker is able to produce words and some phrases. Some of these words and phrases may be memorized. This is a natural process that happens when people first start studying a language and is perfectly acceptable at this level. It should not be confused with using Rehearsed Material (see below for more details). In fact, it is the way new students of a language build their vocabulary, a sense of sentence structure, and, ultimately, the ability to create with language (Intermediate). A Novice-level speaker may be able to provide lists, such as the names of the days of the week, colors, names of family members, objects, etc. At this level, the speaker is not able to produce sentences yet.

INTERMEDIATE

An Intermediate-level speaker is able to speak at the sentence level. The sentences that this type of speaker generates allow her or him to express ideas and engage with other speakers of the language socially. Intermediate-level speakers can tell people what they want to order at a restaurant, what they regularly do at work, what they need to do to arrange to rent a car, etc. They can tell people what they are thinking, and they can formulate questions to find out information. On the other hand, an Intermediate-level speaker is not able to organize and connect those sentences to form paragraphs, nor is this type of speaker able to control the language well enough for a listener to be able to understand whether an action or event happened in the past, present, or future.

ADVANCED

An Advanced-level speaker is a storyteller. At this level, the language production is paragraph-length. That means a speaker's responses are organized, with a beginning, middle, and end. It also means that there is a connection, not only among ideas, but also among the sentences of a response. Advanced-level speakers use paragraphs to tell listeners stories that happened in the past, actions that take place in their daily lives, and events that are going to happen in the future. When someone listens to an Advanced-level speaker, there is no confusion about what happened or when it happened. Like Intermediate-level speakers, Advanced-level speakers can handle social transactions, for instance, renting a car. They can, however, handle these transactions at a high level, using the language to address complications that might arise during the transaction (e.g., a car not being available, or a reservation being lost). This ability allows them to find solutions to resolve the transaction successfully. In addition, Advanced-level speakers can begin talking about things that they did not personally experience; but they cannot talk about these things for an extended period of time without returning to topics that are part of their lives and their own experiences.

SUPERIOR

A Superior-level speaker is able to produce responses that are multiple paragraphs in length. These paragraphs are organized with a beginning, middle, and end, to express opinions and deal with topics that are no longer part of the speaker's everyday experiences. Rather, a Superior-level speaker deals with topics on a societal and sometimes a global level (i.e., he or she talks about how issues affect society and countries). Superior-level speakers are not only able to accomplish all of the tasks of the other levels (i.e., they can tell stories and control time in their responses, etc.), but they are also able to talk about ideas at a higher level than speakers at any other level. Superior-level speakers understand what level of language they are supposed to use in each situation, and they can speak it at whatever level is necessary to communicate their ideas successfully.



Sublevels

Sublevels provide a more precise description within the level. The three sublevels are: High, Mid, and Low. Sublevels are assigned in the ACTFL scale for Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced. Superior does not have sublevels. Sublevels provide detail of the major level in terms of the quantity and quality of language produced, and functional ability demonstrated at each major level.

The HIGH Sublevel

Speakers at the High sublevel communicate with ease and confidence when performing the functions of their respective level. They are capable of functioning most of the time at the next higher major level and may spontaneously raise the exchange to that level, but they are unable to sustain functional ability at the next higher level without intermittent lapses or evidence of difficulty.

For example, a *Novice High* speaker can create with language and produce sentences at the Intermediate level, but he or she would not be able to maintain that level of production all the time. There will be evidence of breakdown when the speaker would not be able to sustain the criteria of the Intermediate level and would resort to performing at the Novice level (words and phrases).

The MID Sublevel

There are many kinds of speakers that match the description of the Mid sublevel, depending on the amount of speech produced, the quality of the speech (how well the speaker communicates) in all of the functions associated with the level, and/or the degree to which he or she controls language features from the next higher major level.

For example, an *Intermediate Mid* speaker can express his or her own ideas by creating sentence-level responses consistently throughout the test, asking questions and providing information to handle a social transaction (finding out information about a business, buying/selling something, dealing with travel situations, etc.), with good quality and an abundance of language. Additionally, an *Intermediate Mid* speaker can generally demonstrate some features of the Advanced level.

The LOW Sublevel

Speakers at the Low sublevel work hard to hold on to the major level of proficiency for which they have qualified. They meet the minimal requirements for the level, and do not break down to the major level below.

For instance, an *Advanced Low* speaker is able to just hold onto the Advanced level by producing short paragraphs and minimally controlling the corresponding linguistic functions in the appropriate major time frames. He or she can narrate and describe in the past, present, and future, but the listener may need to make an effort to understand the intent of the speaker's message. Additionally, an Advanced Low speaker can handle social interactions with complications (e.g. lost reservations, a borrowed item that got broken, etc.), but may struggle to do so.

Each rating is fully described in the ACTFL Guidelines. You can study the guidelines in detail by clicking on this link: [ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES 2012](#). The site includes a translation of the document and samples at each major level in at least 10 languages.



Tips for Optimal Performance on the OPI

Logistics

- Scheduling of an OPI is handled by LTI. Please follow their instructions closely. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact LTI immediately.
- BE ON TIME. Scheduling is very precise, so be sure you are on the line at your exact scheduled time. If you have last-minute problems and you cannot be on time, contact LTI immediately.
- Make sure that the area where you are taking the OPI is quiet and that the phone lines are clearly audible. If you are taking a proctored test, the proctor has prepared the area where you are taking the test. But if the test is un-proctored, make sure you find a quiet place, without background noise or interruptions.
- LTI highly recommends taking the OPI with a landline as cell phone communication is not always reliable. If you cannot access one, communicate with LTI immediately so they can assist you. Check your landline to confirm the quality of the communication. The OPI will be recorded, and if the sound quality is faulty, the test might not take place.
- During the interview, you are not allowed to review documents or dictionaries, or ask for help. Rely exclusively in what you can do. If the tester detects that you are receiving assistance, the test will be discontinued or cancelled.

Personal preparation

The best advice for doing well in the OPI is PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! The OPI is an assessment of what you can do with your language at the time of the test. Your final rating describes your general functional ability and your current communicative skills. The final rating describes your sustained functional ability, that is, the level at which you show full control over the functions. Only language development over time will impact your rating. Last-minute preparation will most likely not affect your functional ability throughout the interview, and last-minute language learning, grammar review or vocabulary practice will most likely not improve your final results. Knowing more about the language will not affect your rating unless it reflects on what you can do. Practice communicating naturally in the language, focusing on the message rather than just the language forms.

As with any test, you should prepare by being well-rested and alert, maintaining a positive attitude throughout the test. Your tester is trained to help you in the process, so relax and enjoy the conversation.

Test-taking tips

- While the Warm-up is a time to connect with the interview process, it is to your advantage to warm up by speaking the language before the assessment begins so that you do not waste the first few minutes getting used to speaking the language. Doing so will prepare your mind to communicate in the language at your best.

- Listen carefully to the tester’s questions and respond accordingly. If your answer is incomplete or does not respond fully to the request, the tester may restate, or follow up with other questions. Listen to the tester carefully and address the tester’s request. Make sure you provide a response to the question that is being asked.
- Speak only in the target language and avoid using slang or words from other languages. The tester may ask you to explain or restate in order to demonstrate that you can function in a monolingual environment, without the support of your interlocutor. If you do not know a word or expression, explain or paraphrase in order to convey your message to the tester. Use other words, explain, or give examples to get the message across and maintain the conversation.
- There may be instances when the tester may need to interrupt you. Do not worry. Interruptions or changes of topic may happen when the sample is sufficient, and it is necessary to move on to another question or topic. If the tester restates the initial question, make sure you address the question being asked.
- Do not prepare for the OPI by memorizing responses. Do not try to lead the tester into topics that you may have practiced in advance. The tester has been trained to recognize rehearsed/memorized material, which may negatively impact your rating, whereas creating authentic answers to the questions will provide better at-level responses.
- If the tester requests that you ask questions, make sure you formulate your questions appropriately for the target language about the proposed topic.
- If you are asked to tell a story about an experience that took place in the past, make sure you tell the story in detail using appropriate time frames and structures. If you are asked to speak about a future plan, you should also make sure you use the appropriate forms and structures for that time frame too. Sustained control of the time frames is required for the Advanced level. While a lack of control of aspect (i.e. present perfect vs. past perfect) does not prevent you from sustaining functional ability at the Advanced, lack of control over the time frames may result in breakdown to a lower level of proficiency.
- Do not focus on verb formations (or any other grammar point) exclusively. The Advanced level requires control over the use of connectors, time indicators, and other language elements that may contribute to the development of the narration in paragraph-length discourse.
- Short answers can work against you because they do not show the breadth and depth of your speaking ability. Provide as many details as you can.
- Point of view with well-organized arguments. Try to maintain the abstract treatment of the topic: a description of facts about what happened is an Advanced-level explanation, whereas a consideration of the issues involved in the problem provides a Superior-level treatment of the topic.
- If you are asked to speculate about some possible conditions and/or outcomes, make sure you use the appropriate hypothetical structures for that language. Maintain the hypothetical treatment throughout your response. Consider the topic from an abstract perspective.



Rating the OPI

ACTFL-Certified OPI testers and raters are highly specialized language professionals who have completed a rigorous training and certification process. ACTFL only certifies testers and raters who are able to consistently produce a high degree of reliability. The quality of the OPI rating process is very important to us, and we work very hard to provide the best quality and accuracy of the final ratings.

Once an OPI is completed, the tester will review and analyze the sample to determine the final rating. In order to receive a rating, you must meet all of the requirements of that level (noted in the guidelines). After considering the functional ability during the interview, the tester will compare the sample to the descriptors in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012- Speaking. To determine your rating, the tester uses all of the information gained from reviewing your speech sample and then chooses the best sublevel to match what you can do in the language.



Frequently Asked Questions about the OPI

Who takes the OPI test?

The OPI is an assessment of speaking skills in a target language that is used by individuals, companies and organizations, like students in Canada, the New York City Department of Education in the United States, employees at Samsung in Korea, and many other clients around the world. ACTFL assessments have become the tests people trust to have an expert assessment of their communicative abilities in a language based on well-respected and reliable language proficiency guidelines (ACTFL, ILR, CEFR).

Why do candidates take the OPI?

Many people take the OPI every year. The people who take the OPI usually fall into one of two categories: 1) Individual test-takers and people who have been directed to take the OPI by a company, academic institution, etc., and; 2) Individuals who take the OPI to have credentials that validate their language proficiency levels, so they can work as bilingual employees, translators, interpreters, tutors, etc. Companies, universities, schools, hospitals, and other types of organizations often require current and potential employees to take the OPI to ensure that they can speak the language at a level that will allow them to do their work successfully. In both cases, knowing exactly what a person can do in a language and being able to validate it against nationally-recognized assessment tools such as the ACTFL Guidelines and the ILR Descriptors provides individuals and potential employees with life and career opportunities. It also provides companies, universities, and other organizations the certainty that they have employees who can use the language well enough to do their jobs successfully.

How is the OPI test administered?

Language Testing International (LTI) administers the scheduling, testing, and rating of all OPIs.

Preparing to take the OPI

The best way for you to prepare is to practice listening to and speaking the language in real-world situations. Try your best to find situations in which you have to use the language to communicate. For instance, you can try going to a restaurant where the target language is spoken and talk to the waiter or waitress while ordering your food.

Finding other people who speak the language and meeting them for coffee or tea is another good way to improve your skills. When you get together, make a rule about using only the target language when you talk to each other. Practice telling them stories about things you do regularly at home, school, or work. Tell them stories about things that happened to you in the past or your plans for the future. Getting into discussions that require you to express your opinion about anything, from the news to sports or entertainment, will also help you improve what you can do in the language.

Working to build your skills, so you can communicate in the language as someone would do in the real world, is the best way to get ready to take the OPI.

To be successful on the OPI, it is also important to understand what a speaker can do at each level of proficiency so that you can understand what is expected of you when you respond to the prompts. The descriptions of the four major levels of the OPI are included in previous sections in this booklet.



Policies & Guidelines for the Use of the OPI

Confidentiality

During the OPI, your responses will be recorded. This recording shall remain the sole property of ACTFL and LTI. It will not be given to you or discussed with anyone else under any circumstances. Only your final rating will be released.

Rehearsed Material

The OPI is a test of your ability to express yourself spontaneously in a language. Certified ACTFL OPI Testers/Raters will evaluate what you can do in the language when you are speaking. In order to do this effectively, your responses must be authentic. While you should make every effort to improve your abilities in listening and speaking, to understand the language and be understood, you should not try to memorize responses prior to taking the OPI. If you prepare a response or use responses from online sources or books, you will not receive an accurate rating. Proficiency is characterized by spontaneous language use. ACTFL OPI raters are experienced in identifying rehearsed responses, so, if you use them, you may not receive a rating for your test.

It sounds simple, but practicing your listening and speaking skills as much as you can in the target language is the best preparation for a successful OPI assessment. We wish you success in improving your language skills for your next OPI test.



Questions? Contact us

If you have any additional questions, please contact us at:

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