

**ACTFL LPT**  
LISTENING PROFICIENCY TEST

# ACTFL LISTENING PROFICIENCY TEST FAMILIARIZATION GUIDE



**ACTFL**  
Language Connects

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## What Is the ACTFL Listening Proficiency Test?

The ACTFL Listening Proficiency Test (LPT) is a proctored, standardized test of Interpretive Listening ability as described in the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*. It assesses a test taker's ability to understand and interpret spoken language that has not been encountered previously, without the ability to relisten, ask for clarification, or use a dictionary or other language tools. Test takers listen to audio passages and then answer multiple-choice questions about what they have heard. Each passage has three questions; each question has four multiple-choice answers of which only one is correct. All passages, questions, and multiple-choice answers are presented in the language being tested.

The ACTFL LPT is delivered by computer or tablet via the internet. It presents 10 to 25 test items and is 50 minutes to two hours in length, with the length and the number and types of test items dependent on which of eight test forms is being administered. Each of the eight forms assesses a specific proficiency range, in order to minimize the length of the test.

The goal of the ACTFL LPT is to assess general Interpretive Listening proficiency, rather than what has been learned in a specific program. Test item audio passages are drawn from a variety of sources in the language being assessed. The items include a range of informal and formal speech on general, social, and academic topics, such as daily interactions, reports, discussions, and broadcasts, and they vary in genre, content, length, and complexity depending on the intended level of each task. Test item topics may include business and economics, politics and current events, education, science and technology, arts and entertainment, and other areas.

The ACTFL LPT can measure Interpretive Listening ability in relation to one of three proficiency taxonomies, depending on the type of language proficiency certification needed:

- The ACTFL Proficiency Scale, as described in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024—Listening*
- The Interagency Roundtable (ILR) Skill Level Descriptors
- The Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR)

The ACTFL LPT was developed in partnership with the Institute for Test Research and Test Development. It provides valid and reliable listening proficiency assessment in a format that allows hundreds of candidates to take the test online at the same time. Online access means that an ACTFL LPT can be completed on demand from anywhere in the world, and at a time that is convenient for both the candidate and the proctor. The ACTFL LPT is currently available in the following languages: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

The ACTFL LPT has a rigorous validity argument, constructed using content-related, criterion-related, and construct-related evidence. Validity and reliability reports can be found as part of ACTFL's ACE CREDIT review process at [ACTFL | ACE Review: Bibliography of Technical Reports](#).

## How Does the ACTFL LPT Work?

### Test Forms

The ACTFL LPT is offered in eight test forms, where each form assesses a specific range of proficiency. In institutional settings, the form(s) to be administered are identified by the educational institution or organization. Table 1 provides information on the different test forms, proficiency ranges, and time allotments. These options ensure that the test administered is appropriate for the test taker’s listening ability and is economical in terms of time and effort.

**Table 1. ACTFL LPT Test Forms with Proficiency Ranges and Time Allotments**

Superior								
Advanced High								
Advanced Mid				D		F	G	H
Advanced Low								
Intermediate High			C		E			
Intermediate Mid		B						
Intermediate Low	A							
Novice High								
Novice Mid								
Novice Low								

### Test Length

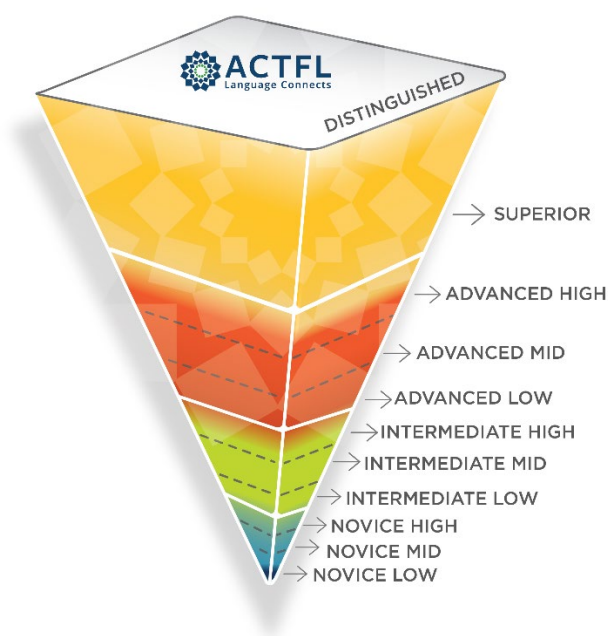
50 minutes for a two-level test (A, B, C, or D)  
 75 minutes for a three-level test (E, F, or G\*)  
 125 minutes for the full-range test (H\*\*)

\* This is a semi-adaptive version of the test, which ranges in time from 50 to 75 minutes and offers tasks at higher or lower levels depending on the test taker’s responses. This is the test to choose if the test taker’s proficiency is unknown and/or all candidates should be administered the same test and not select ranges individually.

\*\* This is the full-range test.

## What Does the ACTFL LPT Assess, and What Are the Assessment Criteria?

The ACTFL LPT assesses listening in terms of proficiency, that is, the ability to understand language effectively and appropriately in situations the listener has not practiced or encountered previously, as outlined in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024—Listening*. The *Guidelines* characterize the development of language proficiency as a continuum with five major levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished. Each level represents a range of ability (what an individual can do with language) that includes all of the prior levels. The LPT assesses listening ability from Novice Low through the Superior level.



The primary distinction between the levels is the functions and tasks (**F**) that an individual at that level can accomplish. With effort and exposure to the language over time, an individual develops the degree of accuracy (**A**) and control of context and content (**C**) and text type (**T**) that are required to accomplish increasingly complex functions and tasks. An individual's level of proficiency is thus defined by the four **FACT** criteria:

- **Functions and tasks:** The types of listening activities that the individual can carry out, such as recognizing spoken words and phrases, following oral instructions, or interacting with professional colleagues in a meeting.
- **Accuracy:** The degree to which the individual can use linguistic features (including grammar and syntax, vocabulary, stress and intonation, discourse structure, sociocultural knowledge, and more) to process aural messages.

- **Context and content:** The situations or circumstances in which the individual can achieve listening goals, and the topic areas that the individual is able to handle.
- **Text type:** The length and complexity of aural text that the individual can understand and process, ranging from words and phrases to sentences, paragraphs, and multi-paragraph discourse.

These assessment criteria are evaluated holistically based on the test taker’s overall performance. A proficiency rating is awarded based on how evidence of all the criteria contributes to the description of a listener's global proficiency. Table 1 summarizes the assessment criteria as they relate to the first four major proficiency levels.

**Table 1. Assessment Criteria for Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior Levels**

Proficiency Level	Global Tasks and Functions	Context & Content	Text Type	Accuracy
<b>Novice</b>	Can derive meaning by recognizing key words and formulaic phrases that are highly contextualized and have been rehearsed.	The most common informal settings. <i>Most common aspects of self and daily life.</i>	Individual words, lists, phrases, and some limited formulaic information.	Primarily relies on vocabulary to derive meaning from aural messages. Has great difficulty distinguishing sounds and tones (in tonal languages) that differ from those of other known languages. May derive meaning by recognizing structural patterns that have been practiced in familiar contexts.
<b>Intermediate</b>	Can follow oral input related to familiar, routine tasks such as understanding announcements, instructions, directions, and other highly contextualized messages. Can comprehend simple stories and short descriptive messages within familiar contexts.	Routine informal settings and limited tasks involving the exchange of simple information. <i>Familiar, predictable topics related to self and daily routines and activities.</i>	Understands sentence-level utterances and some longer discourse.	Has sufficient control of the structures and conventions of oral language to understand short, non-complex messages on familiar topics. Can recognize when clarification is needed or miscommunication occurs. Generally relies heavily on knowledge of familiar cultural norms and expectations.
<b>Advanced</b>	Can comprehend the main idea and supporting details of narrative, descriptive, and straightforward persuasive oral discourse in all major time frames. Can follow when narration or conversation includes an unexpected turn of events.	Informal settings and some routine formal settings. <i>Topics of personal and general interest.</i>	Understands connected, cohesive discourse of at least a paragraph in length. Can extend to two or more paragraphs on familiar topics.	Can fully understand complex and descriptive discourse with connected language and cohesive devices. Understands most language spoken in standard dialect and at normal speed; has difficulty understanding rapid spoken language and non-standard accents/dialects.
<b>Superior</b>	Can follow reasoned oral argumentation expressed	Most informal and formal settings. <i>Practical,</i>	Understands clearly organized and	Understands widely used idiomatic expressions,

	<p>through supported opinion, conjecture, and hypothesis. Can process oral communication that deals with abstract concepts, contains cultural references, and uses specialized vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. Can understand formal and informal spoken language on general social and professional topics, and can comprehend linguistically complex extended discourse.</p>	<p><i>professional, and social topics treated both concretely and abstractly.</i></p>	<p>articulated oral discourse that can extend from several paragraphs to extended discourse.</p>	<p>cultural references, and the cultural norms and expectations that commonly apply in routine and professional speech. Understands the mood, feeling, emotion, or stance expressed in oral communication, including emotional overtones such as irony, sarcasm, or humor.</p>
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## What Are the Test Items Like?

ACTFL LPT test items focus on the main idea, supporting detail, and at higher levels the inferences and connections the test taker can make in relation to the content and organization of the audio passages they hear.

### Novice Level Example

#### Lottery Drawing

The following is a transcript of the sound sample that can be found on the ACTFL website [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org)

*First the daily number.... Draw the first digit please... Two... The second digit... Seven... And the third digit ... Nine.*

#### Rationale for Rating

*Listeners need only comprehend formulaic language that consists of two lists of numbers—one ordinal and one cardinal. Listeners need to process a message that is compartmentalized and has limited cohesion. The specific context of the message—a lottery drawing—allows listeners to anticipate speech that they can then recognize.*

### Intermediate Level Example

#### Weather Report

The following is a transcript of the sound sample that can be found on the ACTFL website

[www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org)

*103 the record high today... 101 out at the airport. Today is now the 85th day this summer we've seen 100-degree heat – number one on the all-time list by a mile. 69 days... the old record. We're not going to hit a hundred for the next several days, so can we end the summer with this being the final number? Nice round 85 days, let's hope so. Ah, out there, right now, skies are clear. It's 101 in the city. At 8:00 tonight, 94... At 10 P.M. tonight, forecasting 87 degrees...*

### Rationale for Rating

*Listeners must be able to comprehend a speaker using loosely connected language on the very familiar topic of weather. Listeners need to follow a speaker who communicates entirely in the present time and communicates a set of facts in a predictable way. Listeners are helped by the redundancies within the message and by their familiarity with the content of the message that allows them to hear what they expect to hear.*

## Advanced Level Example

### Flight Attendant News

The following is a transcript of the sound sample that can be found on the ACTFL website [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org)

*The flight attendant is well on his way, I think, to becoming a folk hero. Talk about a dramatic exit. Flight attendant Steven Slater told the passenger to sit down when Jet Blue's Flight 1052 from Pittsburgh pulled up at the gate at JFK yesterday afternoon. The passenger refused, continued removing his luggage from the overhead bin, and that luggage accidentally struck the flight attendant. Mr. Slater demanded an apology. The passenger declined, using a not-very-nice four-letter word, and that set Slater off. He turned on the public address system, and used the same four-letter word in front of all of the passengers, in particular directed to that man who had refused to sit. He then activated the inflatable slide, grabbed some brewskies, and slid his way out of a career as a flight attendant. Mr. Slater got home quickly. It wasn't long before the police showed up to arrest him.*

### Rationale for Rating

*Listeners must be able to comprehend a speaker telling an uncomplicated story. The story, set in past time, deals with a newsworthy incident that requires no special knowledge on the part of the listeners to be understood. Listeners need to process authentic, connected speech that is several paragraphs long. This speech is lexically and structurally uncomplicated. The discourse is straightforward and is generally organized in a clear and predictable way.*

## Superior Level Example

### AL GORE: Global Warming Testimony @ Congress 3.21.07



The following is a transcript of the sound sample that can be found on the ACTFL website [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org).

*And our world faces a true planetary emergency. I know the phrase sounds shrill, and I know it's a challenge to the moral imagination, to see and feel and understand that the entire relationship between humanity and our planet has been radically altered. We quadrupled human population in less than one century from 1.6 billion in 1900 to 6.56 billion today. Population is stabilizing of its own accord as girls are educated and women are empowered and family planning that's culturally acceptable in country after country becomes widely available, and most importantly as child-survival rates increase and infant and maternal mortality... mortality decreases... when those things happen and especially when literacy among women increases around the world, the birth rates come down. The death rates come down, and then the birth rates come down, and it's stabilizing, but having multiplied by four the numbers of people on this planet, and we're going from over six-and-half now to over 9.1, almost certainly within the next 40, 45 years, that in itself causes a big change in the relationship between humanity and the planet.*

*Secondly, our technologies are thousands of times more powerful than any our grandparents had at their disposal. And so, even though we're more skillful and more effective in doing the things we've always done - exploiting the Earth for sustenance, providing for our families, and going about productive lives - the side effects of what we're doing sometimes now outstrip the development of extra wisdom to make sure that we handle these new powers in a way that doesn't do unintended harm. And somehow, we've also adopted kind of a short-term way of thinking that is also more different than what our grandparents more commonly used. Ah, we, in the markets, Congressman Bartlett said global warming is the biggest market failure in history. I kind of agree with that. If you look at the markets, the short-term focus is just dominant now. Quarterly reports, day traders, if you look at the entertainment business, and the media business, and even the news business, its overnight polls, and how many eyeballs can you glue to the screen; you know the phrases...*

### **Rationale for Rating**

*Listeners must be able to comprehend a speaker who is addressing a professional audience—here, members of Congress—on the abstract topic of humanity and the planet and who is using precise vocabulary (shrill) and phrasing (exploiting the Earth for sustenance) and even an idiom (how many eyeballs you can glue to the screen). Listeners must be able to understand a speaker using a standard dialect and talking on a subject with which the listeners may have varying degrees of familiarity and opinions. Listeners must be able to follow the speaker as he constructs an argument in extended discourse that includes cultural references.*

*Listeners who comprehend this passage are able to understand lengthy, formal discourse intended for an audience of educated native-speaker non-specialists.*

## **What Are the Possible Test Outcomes (Proficiency Ratings)?**

The ACTFL LPT is machine-scored, with each item assessed as either correct or incorrect. The

scoring procedure considers the intended level of the passage, the difficulty level of the three questions, and the test taker's responses to the questions. An algorithm then uses the data points to assign a final rating.

The ACTFL LPT can be rated at one of the first four major levels of the ACTFL *Guidelines*:

- **Novice:** The individual can recognize key words, true aural cognates, and formulaic expressions that are highly contextualized and highly predictable, such as those found in introductions and greetings. They can understand words and phrases from simple questions, statements, and high-frequency commands that they have learned and rehearsed.
- **Intermediate:** The individual can understand simple, minimally connected speech that conveys basic information on highly familiar or everyday topics using high-frequency vocabulary. Individuals at this level are generally able to comprehend one utterance at a time while engaged in routine listening tasks such as understanding highly contextualized messages, straightforward announcements, and simple instructions and directions.
- **Advanced:** The individual can understand the main ideas and most supporting details in connected discourse on a variety of general interest topics. They can understand connected speech that is lexically and structurally uncomplicated and is organized in a clear and predictable way. They understand basic social norms and etiquette, can recognize formal and informal forms of speech, and sometimes understand references to major historical or cultural events.
- **Superior:** The individual can follow cohesive discourse with clear relationships of ideas given in a standard dialect. They can process reasoned oral argumentation expressed through supported opinion, conjecture, and hypothesis, as well as oral communication that deals with abstract concepts, contains cultural references, and uses specialized vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. They generally understand the mood, feeling, emotion, or stance expressed in oral communication, including emotional overtones such as the use of irony, sarcasm, or humor.

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, the ACTFL LPT rating can also reference one of three sublevels: Low, Mid, or High. The sublevels indicate how well the individual meets the criteria for the major level, and also how close the individual's proficiency is to sustaining the criteria for the next major level.

- **Low:** Baseline performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel have consistent ability to meet the criteria for the level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may demonstrate some hesitation in doing so, but they are able to sustain communication with regard to all of the criteria. They demonstrate little ability to carry out communication functions that typify the next-higher major level.
- **Mid:** Solid performance at the level. Individuals at this sublevel demonstrate skill in

carrying out the functions of the major level in all level-relevant communication situations. They may also exhibit partial ability to carry out communication tasks that typify the next-higher major level.

- **High:** Performance with quality and quantity at the level. Individuals at this sublevel communicate with ease and confidence when performing the functions of the level. They are capable of functioning much of the time at the next higher major level, but they are unable to sustain language at that level without evidence of difficulty.

Possible ACTFL LPT ratings are thus as follows:

- Novice Low
- Intermediate Low
- Advanced Low
- Superior
- Novice Mid
- Intermediate Mid
- Advanced Mid
- Novice High
- Intermediate High
- Advanced High

For more information on the proficiency ratings, see the documents *Overview of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024* and *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024—Listening*.

## What Is an Official ACTFL LPT Rating?

Official ACTFL LPT ratings are assigned to those LPTs that are conducted under the supervision of a proctor and delivered and scored by Language Testing International (LTI), the exclusive licensee of ACTFL assessments. Clients can request an ACTFL rating (according to the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024 – Listening*), an ILR rating (according to the U.S. Government’s Interagency Language Roundtable *Skill Level Descriptions for Listening*), or a CEFR rating (according to the *Common European Framework of Reference*). Results are stored in LTI’s Test Management System and are made available, along with the ACTFL Certificate of Listening Proficiency, to authorized users through the LTI Client Site. Individual candidates testing directly through LTI (rather than through an organization) can access their results and certificate by logging into their account on [languagetesting.com](https://www.languagetesting.com).

## What Accommodations Are Available?

Several types of testing accommodations are available for candidates with a documented need. These may include extended testing time, extended breaks, screen magnification, oral interpreter for directions, testing environment adjustments, and blank scratch paper, depending on the test type and the individual candidate’s needs. Accommodations can be requested from LTI. LTI’s accommodation team works with candidates and the organizations they’re testing through to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations. For more information on accommodation support and how to request an accommodation, please visit <https://www.languagetesting.com/academic-test-accommodations>.

## How Is the ACTFL LPT Currently Being Used?

Official ACTFL LPT ratings can be used for a variety of purposes in academic, commercial, and government communities.

- In academia, ACTFL LPT ratings can be used for admissions, placement into language programs, general assessments, or exit/graduation requirements.
- In business and government communities, ACTFL LPT ratings can be used for certification, hiring, and promotion in multi-lingual positions.

## How Is the ACTFL LPT Proctored?

The ACTFL LPT must be administered in a secure, proctored environment for test security. Proctoring options will be communicated at the time of order from LTI's website (for individual candidates not testing through an organization) or as part of the account setup for organizations looking to test their learners or candidates.

## How Can I Schedule an ACTFL LPT?

To schedule an ACTFL LPT, contact LTI.

[www.languagetesting.com](http://www.languagetesting.com)  
[support@languagetesting.com](mailto:support@languagetesting.com)  
1-800-486-8444

## About ACTFL Assessments

ACTFL is proud to offer a variety of assessments to support language educators and learners in higher education and beyond. From placement to graduation and certification, ACTFL has an assessment for each step of the postsecondary journey with options available for institutions and individuals. ACTFL assessments measure language ability based on skill level for the most accurate results possible. ACTFL assessments also undergo regular external reviews as part of the American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service (ACE CREDIT®) review process [[ACTFL | College Credit](#)].

ACTFL proficiency tests are used worldwide by academic institutions, government agencies, and private corporations for purposes such as academic placement, student assessment, program evaluation, professional certification, hiring, and promotional qualification.

- Placement: A non-proctored proficiency-based framework in a computer adaptive solution designed to assist in the placement of incoming post-secondary learners
- Documentation: Measure and evaluate program effectiveness or student progress and benchmarks to achieving badges, credits, or certification
- Teacher Certification: ACTFL language proficiency assessments are accepted by most states for some component of their teacher certification process. You should review your state or program's certification requirements so that you can be sure which assessment(s) are required.

For more information on ACTFL assessments, visit

<https://www.actfl.org/assessments>

For information on Proficiency and Assessment workshops, visit

<https://www.actfl.org/professional-learning/individual-workshops>

For information on ACTFL tester and rater training, visit

<https://www.actfl.org/assessments/tester-rater-certifications>

