



ACTFL ORAL PROFICIENCY INTERVIEW FAMILIARIZATION GUIDE

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What Is the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview?

The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI®) is a one-on-one interview designed to identify a test taker’s oral communication proficiency level. It is an assessment of the Interpersonal Listening and Speaking mode, as described in the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages. The ACTFL OPI uses a standardized interactive elicitation procedure in which the tester continuously adapts to the test taker’s expressed interests, provided information, and speaking ability, resulting in a unique interview for each examinee. On average, an ACTFL OPI takes 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

The goal of the ACTFL OPI is to obtain a speech sample from the test taker that the tester can evaluate in relation to the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024—Speaking* in order to assign a specific proficiency rating. To achieve this goal, the tester poses a series of personalized questions designed to elicit the individual’s ability to use spoken language in situations that have not been encountered or rehearsed previously. The ACTFL OPI measures a range of proficiency on the ACTFL scale from Novice to Superior.

The ACTFL OPI is a valid and reliable assessment of speaking proficiency. Its validity and reliability have been evaluated by many studies since its development in 1982 (see for example Dandonoli & Henning, 1990; Stansfield & Kenyon, 1992; Kuo & Jian, 1997; Surface & Dierdorff, 2003); Kissau, (2014); Thompson, Cox & Knapp, (2016); Wallo & Goodwin-Jones (2021)). ACTFL assessments also undergo regular external reviews as part of the ACE Credit review process [<https://www.actfl.org/assessments/college-credit>]. A bibliography of ACTFL’s ACE Review studies can be found at <https://www.actfl.org/assessments/ace-review-bibliography-of-technical-reports>.

How Does the ACTFL OPI Work?

The ACTFL OPI focuses on eliciting a ratable sample of spoken language from the test taker. To be ratable, a test taker’s speech sample must clearly demonstrate the highest proficiency level that the test taker can sustain (known as the “floor”) and the proficiency level where the test taker can no longer sustain the interaction (known as the “ceiling”).

Structure of the Interview

Every ACTFL OPI has four parts: the introduction, the warm-up, the interview, and the cool-down.

- **The Introduction:** The tester confirms the test taker’s identity and reads a statement in English that introduces the interview process.
- **The Warm-Up:** The tester starts the interview by initiating discussion of some general topics at a level that appears comfortable for the test taker. This gives the tester an

initial impression of the test taker’s speaking ability.

- **The Interview:** The tester uses two types of questioning: level checks and probes.
 - **Level Checks** explore the highest proficiency level at which the test taker can function consistently (the floor).
 - **Probes** explore a level above the level checks in order to gather evidence of the level at which the speaker can no longer sustain performance (the ceiling).
 - During this part of the ACTFL OPI, the tester may conduct a role play with the test taker, either as a level check or as a probe.

The tester moves back and forth between level checks and probes several times during the interview in order to elicit evidence that will identify both the floor (the proficiency level that the test taker can sustain) and the ceiling (the proficiency level where the test taker’s language begins to break down).

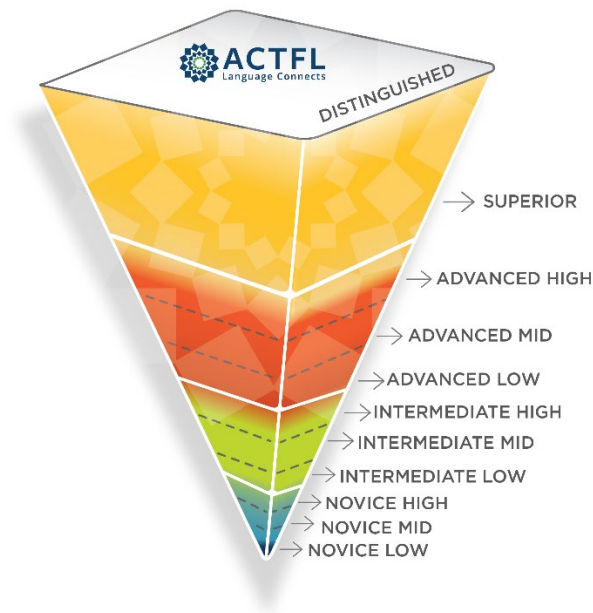
- **The Cool-Down:** The tester asks a few final questions to return the conversation to tasks that the test taker can easily perform and then ends the interview.

Tester Strategies for Eliciting a Ratable Sample

To elicit a ratable sample, successful testers ask open-ended questions that encourage test takers to show their language ability at its best. Testers listen to and process a test taker’s responses before formulating subsequent questions. Testers ask purposeful questions; every question is intended to assess a specific level and function of that level. Testers explore a variety of topics within and across major levels of the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*.

What Does the ACTFL OPI Assess, and What Are the Assessment Criteria?

The OPI assesses spoken language in terms of proficiency, that is, the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in situations the speaker has not rehearsed or encountered previously, as outlined in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024—Speaking*. 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 Inverted pyramid shows the levels.



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 speaking activities that the individual can carry out, such as responding to basic questions about personal identity, giving a set of directions or 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, sociocultural knowledge, and more) to convey spoken messages.
- **Context and content:** The situations or circumstances in which the individual can achieve speaking goals, and the topic areas that the individual is able to discuss.
- **Text type:** The length and complexity of text that the individual can produce, 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 all the criteria contribute to the description of a speaker’s overall proficiency.

Table 1 summarizes the assessment criteria as they relate to the first four major proficiency levels (the ACTFL OPI does not extend to assessment at the Distinguished level).

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

Proficiency Level	Global Tasks and Functions	Context & Content	Text Type	Accuracy
Novice	Communicate minimally with formulaic and rote utterances, lists, and phrases.	Most common informal settings. <i>Most common aspects of daily life.</i>	Individual words, lists, and phrases.	May be difficult to understand even for individuals accustomed to dealing with language learners.
Intermediate	Create with language, initiate, maintain, and bring to a close simple conversations by asking and responding to simple questions.	Some informal settings and a limited number of transactional situations. <i>Predictable, familiar topics related to daily activities and personal environment.</i>	Sentences.	Understood with some repetition by Individuals accustomed to dealing with language learners.
Advanced	Narrate and describe in major time frames and deal effectively with unanticipated complications.	Most informal and some formal settings. <i>Topics of personal and general interest.</i>	Oral paragraphs, connected discourse.	Understood without difficulty by individuals unaccustomed to dealing with language learners.
Superior	Discuss familiar and unfamiliar topics. Support opinions, hypothesize, and deal with topics abstractly.	Most informal and formal settings. <i>Wide range of public interest topics and some special fields of interest and expertise.</i>	Extended discourse.	No pattern of errors in basic structures. Errors almost never interfere with communication or distract from the message.

What Are the Possible Test Outcomes (Proficiency Ratings)?

An ACTFL OPI can be rated at one of the first four major levels of the ACTFL Guidelines:

- **Novice:** The individual can express basic personal information and satisfy a limited number of personal needs using formulaic and rote utterances, lists, and phrases.
- **Intermediate:** The individual can participate in short conversations on predictable topics, ask and answer simple questions, and handle simple transactions using sentence-level communication.
- **Advanced:** The individual can participate in interactions on topics of personal and public interest, narrate and describe in present, past, and future time frames, and handle a situation with a complication using paragraph-length communication.
- **Superior:** The individual can support an opinion, hypothesize, discuss topics in abstract terms, and handle a linguistically unfamiliar situation using multi-paragraph discourse.

At the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels, the ACTFL OPI 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 OPI ratings are thus as follows:

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

The ACTFL OPI rating system does not extend to the Distinguished level.

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

What Is an Official ACTFL OPI Rating?

Official ACTFL OPI ratings are assigned to OPIs that are conducted by ACTFL-certified OPI testers who are contracted by Language Testing International (LTI), the exclusive licensee of ACTFL

assessments. Each Official ACTFL OPI is anonymously double-rated by a second certified tester (this means that they do not know each others' ratings). The two ratings must agree exactly in both the major level and sublevel. The final rating is assigned and an ACTFL OPI Certificate is issued.

Who Are the ACTFL OPI Testers and How Are They Certified?

ACTFL-certified testers are highly specialized language professionals who have completed a rigorous four-phase certification and norming process. That process concludes when a tester demonstrates the ability to consistently elicit ratable speech samples and rate samples with a high degree of reliability.

There are two levels of tester certification:

- **Full Certification:** These testers are authorized to conduct and rate OPIs across all proficiency levels through the Superior range.
- **Limited Certification:** These testers are authorized to conduct and rate OPIs at the Novice and Intermediate levels.

As part of the certification process, tester candidates must take an official ACTFL OPI to confirm their own level of language proficiency. Candidates pursuing Full Certification for a given language must receive a Superior rating in that language. Candidates pursuing Limited Certification must receive a minimum rating of Advanced Mid in the language.

ACTFL tester certification is valid for a four-year period during which testers are required to complete a one-time re-norming and refresher activity. Testers must also recertify once every four years.

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, human reader, 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 to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations.

Where Can I Find Tips for Test Takers?

ACTFL provides the following resources and suggestions:

- **For test takers:** <https://www.actfl.org/assessments/postsecondary-assessments/opi/tips-for-opi-and-opic-test-takers>,
- **For educators:** <https://www.actfl.org/assessments/postsecondary->

How Is the ACTFL OPI Currently Being Used?

Official ACTFL OPI ratings provide a common metric for describing functional speaking ability in a language. Thus, ACTFL OPI ratings are used for a variety of purposes in academic, commercial, and government communities.

- In academic contexts, the ACTFL OPI is used for placement; for formative and summative assessment; and for determination of the fulfillment of exit or graduation requirements. Establishing proficiency outcomes in terms of the descriptors contained in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024 – Speaking* provides a framework for design and development of curricula for language courses and course sequences. Proficiency testing of students is also used as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of language programs.
- Teacher certification boards in some states require teacher candidates to provide evidence of spoken language competency as demonstrated through an official ACTFL OPI. In some cases, an ACTFL OPI rating can be used to waive certain language course requirements for teacher certification.
- In business and government communities, ACTFL OPI ratings can be used for certification, hiring, and promotion in multilingual positions.

How Can I Schedule an ACTFL OPI?

To schedule an ACTFL OPI, contact LTI.

www.languagetesting.com
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 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

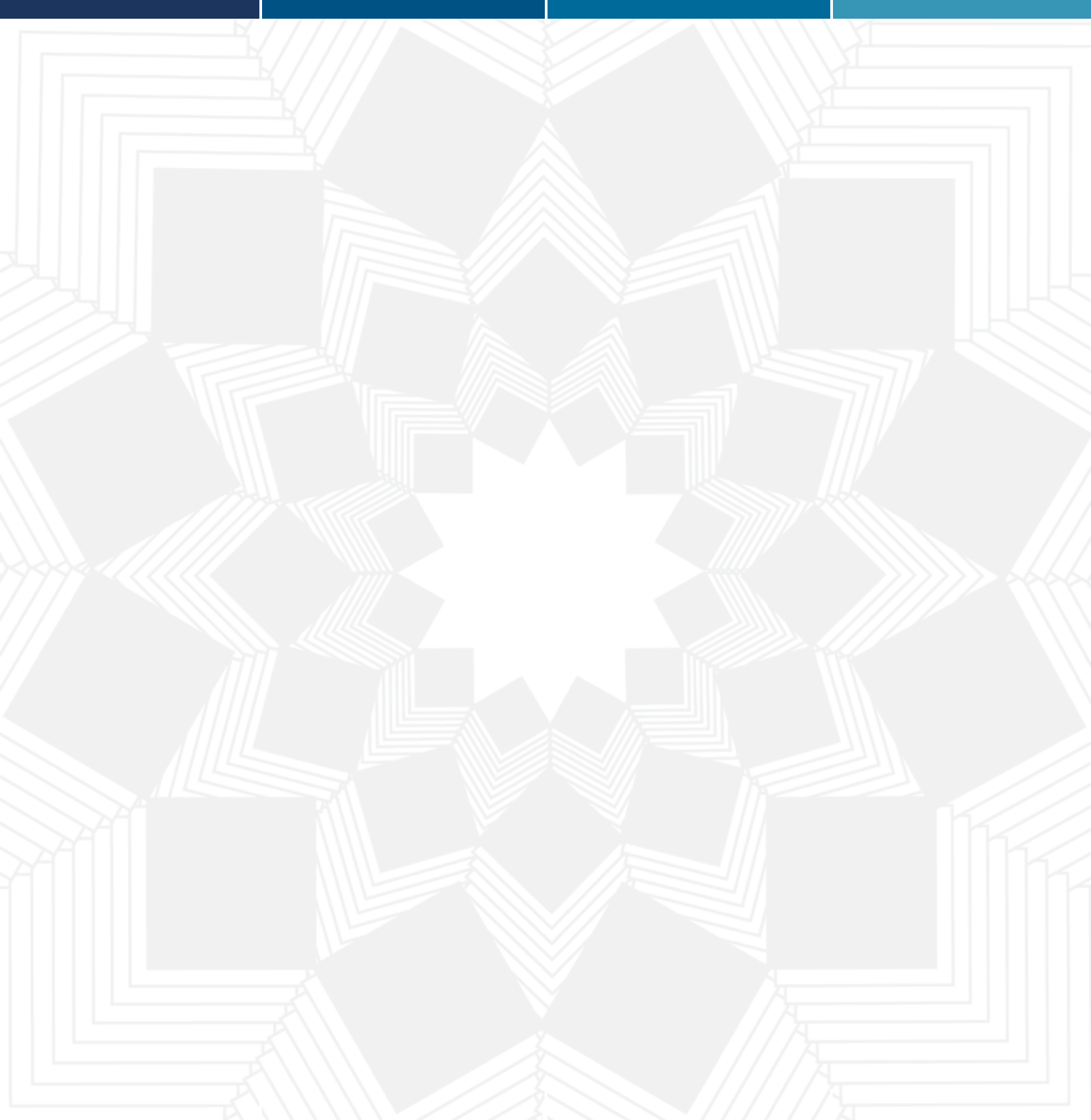
<https://www.actfl.org/assessments>

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>



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