



american council on the teaching of foreign languages

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ACHIEVING ADVANCED LOW PROFICIENCY ON AN ACTFL OPI (SPANISH)

I. The rating of Intermediate High on an ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) indicates the following:

At the Intermediate level:

- You fulfilled **all** of the requirements for the Intermediate level (*creates with language by asking and answering questions about familiar topics, in sentences and strings of sentences*).
- Both the quantity and quality of your speech at the Intermediate level were consistently strong across **all** the assessment criteria.

At the Advanced level:

- You demonstrated the ability to function at the Advanced level **most of the time**.
- You were **unable to sustain** Advanced level performance* across all the rating criteria all of the time.

*The Advanced level speaker can consistently narrate and describe in all major time frames, as well as handle a situation with a complication—all in paragraph-length or connected discourse across a variety of topics. Furthermore, the Advanced level speaker is a full partner in the conversation and is consistently understood by a native speaker who has no experience dealing with non-native speakers of the language in question.

II. Crossing the border from Intermediate High to Advanced Low:

For the Intermediate High speaker, crossing the threshold to Advanced Low will require focused and systematic practice at the Advanced level across a variety of content areas. Such practice should be structured in a way that results in your ability to:

- Consistently maintain major time frames when narrating and describing in oral paragraphs.
- Consistently maintain fluency, volume of language, variety of vocabulary in connected, oral paragraphs while narrating, describing, explaining, clarifying, elaborating, or illustrating.
- Maintain sufficient accuracy when narrating and describing in oral paragraphs* so that you would be understood, without confusion, by a native speaker of the language who is not accustomed to dealing with language learners.

* It would be a mistake to simply try to eliminate errors by minimizing speech production. Even the most accurate language, if not demonstrated within sustained oral paragraphs, will not be rated Advanced.

III. Recommendations for reaching Advanced-level proficiency

1. Work with a conversation partner or tutor who is familiar with the requirements of the Advanced level of speaking proficiency. Your conversation partner should provide opportunities for you to speak extemporaneously. Keep in mind that Advanced level speech is that which is produced by a full conversational partner. It is not rehearsed or prepared speech.
2. Practice the correct use of appropriate past tenses to maintain descriptions and narrations semantically and syntactically in past time. Practice reflexives in all tenses. Review and practice prepositional use, especially that which occurs in certain verbal expressions (i.e. conjugated verb preceding infinitive).
3. Keep a written journal in which you record interesting events, both personal and of a more general nature (e.g., current events in your community, city, country, etc.) Identify new vocabulary and phrases that are necessary to talk about these events. First write notes about the events, then practice telling them to a conversational partner while only referring to your notes.
4. Practice telling stories. Be sure to tell the whole story from beginning to end. Use words and phrases that support the chronology of your story (primero, después, luego, finalmente). With a conversational partner, practice explaining and/or clarifying specific so that the listener is not in any way confused about the chronology of events.
5. Act out role plays in which you must resolve a situation with an unexpected turn of events (e.g., a lost wallet, a missed airplane, locked door, etc.) Role play practice is particularly helpful in developing strategies to “think on your feet.”
6. Use connecting words within and between sentences (sin embargo, como, puesto que, además, además de, aparte de, sin embargo, así que, por eso, por un lado...por otro lado, también...tampoco, a pesar de que..., en cuanto a..., con respecto a..., desde...hasta..., ...no sólo...sino (que) también). These connectors (and others) can help you to develop greater clarity, organization, and depth in your speech.
7. Practice describing familiar people, places, objects, buildings, cities, etc. Begin with simple sentences. Add to these sentences multiple adjectives, adjectival and adverbial clauses to add to the richness of the description. Use

dependent clauses to add richness to your descriptions. Describe in a way that “paints a picture” for the listener.

8. Increase exposure to Spanish TV and/or listen to Spanish radio stations (news broadcasts constitute excellent examples of narrations and descriptions in the past). Practice retelling events you have heard reported on the radio or TV.
9. Read newspapers, magazines and books in Spanish. Retell events from reading.
10. If possible, participate in immersion experiences in a Spanish speaking country. The more “time on task,” performing real-world functions across a variety of contexts in Spanish the more likely that one will achieve Advanced level proficiency.