

Introduction to Oral Proficiency Levels Spanish

Part 1 Module 1.3

ACTFL Level: Intermediate Low/Mid

Key Linguistic Feature: Maintain simple conversation

1. Prepare to Observe

Introduction to the Intermediate Low/Mid Speaker

Speakers at this level are independent communicators. They are consistently able to create their own meaning spontaneously in sentence-level discourse and can sustain discourse at that level over several turns. They can talk about familiar topics, such as family, interests, and academic subjects. They can talk about other people also, such as friends or family members. They have enough control of grammar to talk about events and routines in the present. The Intermediate Low/Mid designation in this resource is broad, encompassing both Intermediate Low and Intermediate Mid in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

To read full descriptions of the Intermediate Low and Intermediate Mid levels, see the [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking](#). You can also view video clips of interviews in English at this level.

Interview Questions

The task of interviewers at the Intermediate Low/Mid level is to elicit the principal speaker feature: maintain a simple conversation. Open-ended questions and polite requests are the best question type for this purpose. A polite request such as *Cuéntame un poco de tu ciudad* gives learners little guidance; the burden of what to say and how to say it falls on them. Appropriate question types for speakers at the Intermediate Low/Mid level include the following:

- Open-ended questions: *¿Qué te gusta hacer en tus horas libres?*
- Polite requests: *Cuéntame un poco de tu familia.*

You will also find yes/no and directed information questions in video clips at this level. They serve as topic openers and topic continuers. Interviewers use yes/no questions at this level to which the answer is most often no, since it is natural to continue with additional information to set the record straight.

- Topic openers: *Te especializas en español, ¿verdad?*
- Topic continuers: *¿Tú eres el hijo único?*

What to Expect

The Intermediate Low/Mid level encompasses a range of abilities, so you should expect to find stronger and weaker speakers who fulfill the criteria of the level. The range of abilities is captured in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (available on the ACTFL

website), which allow raters to distinguish between Intermediate Low and Intermediate Mid proficiency levels.

All speakers at the Intermediate Low/Mid level are able to sustain a simple conversation. They talk about familiar topics in the present tense, often producing several sentences in a row. Strong speakers at this level may organize their speech, whereas weaker speakers tend to produce a collection of sentences on the same topic, but without framing the topic. You will hear examples of this discourse organization in the video interviews for this level.

2. Watch the Interviews

There are two video interviews in this module, and you will be watching each interview twice. In the first viewing of Hannah’s interview, focus on the interview questions, which are provided in the table below, and complete the column about question type.

[Interview: Hannah \(topic - academic major\)](#)

In the second viewing, focus on Hannah’s responses and write your notes in the third column. You may notice that Hannah is not a big talker.

Interview Questions	Question Type	Features of Response
1. <i>¿Cuál es tu especialidad?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Open-ended <input type="checkbox"/> Polite request <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No or Directed information as topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No as topic continuer	
2. <i>¿Por qué te interesa tanto el español?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Open-ended <input type="checkbox"/> Polite request <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No or Directed information as topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No as topic continuer	
3. <i>¿No hay nada en particular que te guste?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Open-ended <input type="checkbox"/> Polite request <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No or Directed information as topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No as topic continuer	
4. <i>¿Y el tema dentro de la literatura latinoamericana que te gusta más?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Open-ended <input type="checkbox"/> Polite request <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No or Directed information as topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No as topic continuer	

As you listen to the next video, notice how Emily is a stronger speaker than Hannah. Although her video clip is only 10 seconds longer than Emily's, she speaks with greater fluency and confidence. The speech samples of the two speakers differ in other ways as well, which you will explore in the analysis section afterward.

In the first viewing of Emily's interview, focus on the interview questions, which are provided in the table below, and complete the column about the questions type.

Interview: Emily (topic - academic major)

In the second viewing, focus on Emily's responses and write your notes in the third column.

Interview Questions	Question Type	Features of Response
1. <i>¿Cuál es tu especialidad?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Open-ended <input type="checkbox"/> Polite request <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No or Directed information as topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No as topic continuer	
2. <i>¿Por qué te interesa tanto la publicidad?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Open-ended <input type="checkbox"/> Polite request <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No or Directed information as topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No as topic continuer	
3. <i>¿Quieres trabajar en el área de publicidad más que español?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Open-ended <input type="checkbox"/> Polite request <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No or Directed information as topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Yes/No as topic continuer	

3. Analyze Speaker Performance

Review of the Intermediate Low/Mid Level

The hallmark of the Intermediate Low/Mid level is to sustain a simple conversation across multiple turns. To do this, learners have to be able to provide information about themselves—their families, interests, academic plans, and so forth. Most of the interview questions are phrased as open-ended or polite requests; these question types and the follow-up questions are designed to elicit a speech sample of several sentences on each topic.

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines distinguish between strong and weak performances at this level with two different proficiency levels: Intermediate Low and Intermediate Mid. Intermediate Low speakers may produce single-sentence responses; the interviewer must ask additional questions to elicit a speech sample long enough to rate. Intermediate

Mid speakers are fluent, confident speakers at their level. They are not rated higher than Intermediate Mid because they do not meet the criteria of a higher level, but their performance on targeted linguistic features is often quite impressive.

Questions for Analysis and Discussion

Refer to the descriptions of the Intermediate Low/Mid level provided at the beginning of this module and to the notes you took while watching the video clips. Consider these questions on your own or discuss them with a small group.

1. The interviewer talks to two learners about the same topic; they receive the same proficiency rating for this speech segment. Examine her questions to the two learners again. Does she ask the same questions? Do her questions serve the same functions? Why or why not?
2. Hannah says very little in this speech sample. Do you agree on the rating of Intermediate Low/Mid that she received? Justify your response.
3. Here is the longest sentence that Emily produces (pauses and hesitation markers deleted): *Me encanta las ideas creativas y también la comunicación y quiero usarlos juntos y pienso que puedo hacer eso y puedo trabajar y disfrutarme mucho.* What conjunction(s) does Emily use to connect these sentences? Is this way of speaking typical for speakers at the Intermediate Low/Mid level? What would you expect from speakers at a higher level?
4. Watch the two video clips again, and then read the descriptions of the Intermediate Low and Intermediate Mid levels of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Can you match up the descriptions to the speech samples from Hannah and Emily? Support your response connecting specific language from the level descriptions with parts of the two speech samples.
5. What aspects of Emily and Hannah's social presentation (personality, confidence level, etc.) might be connected to their language proficiency? Do you agree that Emily is a stronger speaker than Hannah?