

Introduction to Oral Proficiency Levels Spanish

Part 2 Module 2.9

ACTFL Level: Advanced High/Superior

Topic: Politics

Interview Prompt: *¿Es importante saber de la política si eres estudiante?*

Features of speaker performance:

- Express opinions about abstract/controversial issues
- Support opinions about abstract/controversial issues in response to objections/arguments
- Produce coherent argumentation in extended discourse
- Use anecdotes only to support arguments, not in place of them
- Control use of subjunctive and other low-frequency or complex structures
- Easily use paraphrasing and other strategies to compensate for gaps in lexical knowledge
- Errors still present, but do not distract from the content of the discourse

More About the Advanced High/Superior Speaker: Speakers at the Advanced High/Superior level can participate in conversations on practical, social, professional, and controversial topics. They speak in extended discourse to present, elaborate on, and defend a point of view. They can also provide hypotheses and detailed descriptions to support their arguments by discussing the consequences of a possible course of action. They control low frequency and complex structures (e.g., various uses of the subjunctive) and an ample lexicon to present their arguments in a professional, formal manner.

To read full descriptions of the Advanced High and Superior levels, visit the ACTFL website, type “Speaking” into the search field, and click on the entry entitled “Speaking.” You can also view video clips of interviews in English at this level.

1. Prepare Interview Questions

Here are some sample video interviews of Advanced High/Superior speakers. The topic is politics. As you watch these videos, consider the perspectives of the speaker and interviewer by following the guide provided for you below.

- [Sample Interview: James](#)
- [Sample Interview: Tracy](#)

Speaker perspective: Start by listening to how James and Tracy respond to this prompt: *¿Es importante saber de la política si eres estudiante?* Their performances rate at Advanced High. Although neither language sample fulfills the criteria for the Superior level on the ACTFL scale, they provide a good starting point to understand the features of proficiency at this level. The prompt asks speakers for their opinion on the question of

whether it is important for students to be informed about politics. Expressing an opinion is within the ability of Advanced High-level speakers, but to fulfill the criteria of the Superior level, speakers must demonstrate their ability to express an opinion on a controversial topic, support that opinion in response to objections, and elaborate on both the opinion and the consequences of a hypothetical course of action (e.g. what students could accomplish if they engaged in political activism).

James's performance falls short of the Superior level; he doesn't maintain his discourse in Spanish and he expresses his ideas in a fragmented way, failing in some cases to complete his thoughts. In contrast, Tracy does express an opinion grounded in the issue, and she lists politically oriented topics that she herself is interested in. She does express the opinion that if students banded together, they could possibly influence legislation at the state level. Her response gives evidence of performance at the Superior level, but because the segment ends after she states her opinion, she does not have the opportunity to expand on the opinion or to support it in the face of objections.

Now brainstorm how you might answer this question at the Advanced High/Superior level. Start by deciding what position to take on the topic, and think of it as a social issue that goes beyond your interests or those of your friends. It is helpful to recall what you know about political activism by students, either recent/current or in the past. Practice stating your opinion, and then think how you could expand on that opinion. For example, if you believe that it is important for students to be politically informed and politically active, then think of two or three ways in which heightened political knowledge and activity benefits students as a group (e.g., potential impact on legislation that affects them) and on the wider society. Practice presenting these points to expand on your initial statement of your opinion.

Try to think abstractly (students in general, political knowledge and engagement in general), not simply focusing on some students or some issues. You should also be prepared to think about how you will support your opinion if the interviewer introduces an opposing perspective on the topic.

Interviewer perspective: First, listen again to the speech segments by [James](#) and [Tracy](#). This time, focus on the questions the interviewer asks. As you will see, in neither case does the interviewer ask the speaker to support his/her opinion. The interviewer has a major role in eliciting the opinion, the expansion of the opinion, and the support of the opinion, because speakers are not likely to talk at length about a controversial topic without this type of prompting.

Now work together to brainstorm questions that you might ask to follow up on the prompt. Remember that your purpose is to have a discussion about an important topic in the wider society. Come up with three groups of questions that correspond to the types of language that you want to elicit: (a) questions that elicit the expansion of the initial statement of opinion; (b) questions ask the speaker to support that opinion in response to

an opposing point of view; and (c) questions that ask the speaker to imagine the consequences of a hypothetical event. Some examples include:

- **Expanding on the opinion.** *En tu opinión, ¿es suficiente informarse sobre los temas políticos del momento, o es necesario ser políticamente activo también? ¿Por qué?*
- **Supporting the opinion.** *Comprendo lo que dices, pero algunas personas opinan lo opuesto—que es mejor que los estudiantes se dediquen a sus estudios, y que luego en el futuro, será el momento propicio para participar en discusiones y actividades políticas. ¿Cómo respondes a este argumento?*
- **Hypothesizing about the consequences of a course of action.** *¿Cuál sería el impacto en las campañas electorales si el 50% de los estudiantes universitarios trabajaran a favor de su candidato? ¿Afectaría el resultado de las elecciones presidenciales?*

Work together to write more questions for these three elicitation purposes. As the interviewer, you should adopt the persona of an intelligent, well-informed interlocutor who wants to engage the speaker in a serious intellectual discussion. Keep in mind that you will have to think quickly to ask questions that follow up on the specific content of what the speaker has just said. This means that although you can—and you should—prepare follow-up questions, you cannot just read the questions from your list. Instead, you will have to modify your questions and/or prepare new ones on the spot so that the resulting speech segment sounds like a coherent conversation.

2. Produce the Interview

Working in pairs or small groups, the interviewer asks the prompt and the follow-up questions, and the speaker responds. Record your speech segment on video, if possible; if not, audio is acceptable. (It is easier to transcribe from video.) Aim for a segment that is 2–3 minutes in length. Put away your notes from the Preparation phase; you should not use any notes during this phase, so that your interaction will be natural and spontaneous.

After producing the interview, work together to transcribe the speech segment. To see the relationship between interviewer questions and speaker responses, it is helpful to lay out your text as follows:

Interviewer	Speaker
¿Es importante saber de la política si eres estudiante?	Response
Follow-up question 1 (Question type?)	Response
Follow-up question 2 (Question type?)	Response
etc.	etc.

3. Evaluate the Speaker

Looking only at the speaker's performance, and keeping in mind the linguistic features associated with this level, discuss the following:

- Does the speaker express an opinion, support that opinion, and hypothesize about possible consequences?
- Is the opinion well developed?
- Is the speaker able to expand on the opinion and defend it against objections in response to the follow-up questions?
- Is the speaker able to link ideas together in coherent and sophisticated discourse?
- Does the speaker control the constructions (e.g., subjunctive) needed to defend opinions and speak hypothetically?
- Are grammatical errors few enough that they do not distract the listener from the message?
- Is the speaker able to speak at length about ideas and concepts?
- Does the speaker develop and sustain an argument?

What proficiency level do you give to the response? Select among the following and justify your choice with evidence from the speech sample:

- **Below Advanced High/Superior:** Does not fulfill the criteria of the Superior level. Recounts experience rather than argue a point of view.
- **Advanced High/Superior.** Fulfills the criteria for the task, and does so with ease and fluency consistently or most of the time. Produces a coherent argument, develops it, and supports it. Talks about ideas, principles, and issues, using anecdotes and examples only for (not instead of) illustration. Sometimes recounts experience rather than argue a point of view.
- **Above Advanced High/Superior:** Fulfills and goes beyond the criteria for the task with ease and fluency.

4. Analyze the Interviewer

Now consider the interviewer's performance. Looking at the questions the interviewer asked, discuss the following questions:

- Does the interviewer ask the speaker to expand on his/her initial statement of opinion?
- Does the interviewer advance an opposing position to elicit supported opinion?
- Does the interviewer maintain a formal tone and sustain the abstract, controversial nature of the topic?
- Do the follow-up questions fit logically with the content of what the speaker has just said?
- Do the follow-up questions encourage the speaker to produce more language? If not, what problems do you see?
- How does the interviewer allow the speakers to demonstrate the extent of their proficiency?

