

Introduction to Oral Proficiency Levels Spanish

Part 2 Module 2.3

ACTFL level: Intermediate Low/Mid

Topic: Academic Major

Prompt: *¿Cuál es tu especialidad aquí en la universidad? ¿Por qué te interesa?*

Features of speaker performance:

- Maintain simple conversation
- Express own meaning
- Produce complete sentences in present
- Control basic vocabulary related to familiar topics; e.g., home, family, school
- Comprehensible to people who have experience with language learners

About the Intermediate Low/Mid Speaker: Speakers at the Intermediate Low/Mid level typically combine learned elements of the language in novel ways (e.g., beyond the language samples presented in their textbooks) to express their intended message. They tend to respond briefly in single sentences or in a series of sentences. When they produce several sentences in a single response, the sentences may have the same structure (e.g., *mi hermano es cómico, mi hermana es seria, mi madre es...*). Speakers at these levels can express themselves best when talking about simple, personally relevant and familiar topics, such as family, home, school, and friends.

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.

1. Prepare Interview Questions

Here are some sample video interviews of Intermediate Low/Mid speakers. The topic is academic majors. As you watch these videos, consider the perspectives of the speaker and interviewer by following the guide provided for you below.

- [Sample Interview: Hannah](#)
- [Sample Interview: Emily](#)

Speaker perspective: Listen to how Hannah and Emily respond to this prompt: *¿Cuál es tu especialidad aquí en la universidad? ¿Por qué te interesa?* Their language samples are good examples of performance at the Intermediate Low/Mid level on the ACTFL scale. They produce complete sentences, conjugate their verbs, and control the vocabulary to give basic information about their respective majors at the university.

Now brainstorm how you might answer this question. What aspects of your major could you mention to demonstrate your ability to fulfill the criteria of the Intermediate Low/Mid level? Start by thinking about how to express your course of study. The names

of some majors may not be easy to express in Spanish (e.g., Plan II; Civil, Architectural, and Environmental Engineering), or you may want to explain that you are majoring in Chemistry but you are also pre-med. Then plan how you will respond to the second part of the prompt—why this major interests you—by thinking about how to express your professional plans and goals. If you have not yet decided on a major, you will want to plan how to say what your probable major is and why you are interested in it. Your goal is to give as much information as you can and, if you are able, to organize the information into categories. Although speakers at a higher level of proficiency are able to respond to this question in a more sophisticated way (e.g., explaining how you came to be interested in your major), you should focus on conveying information about your studies in as fully as you can at the intended level.

Interviewer perspective: First, listen again to the speech segments by [Hannah](#) and [Emily](#). This time, focus on the questions the interviewer asks. As you listen, write down the follow-up questions the interviewer asks and take note of how the speaker responds. You will see that the most successful questions (i.e., those that prompt the speaker to produce more language) are open-ended. They take the form of questions (e.g., *¿Por qué te interesa...?*) or requests (e.g., *Cuéntame más sobre...*).

Now work together to brainstorm questions that you might ask to follow up on the first prompt. Remember that your purpose is to encourage the speaker to produce language in the present tense to give lots of information about his or her major and related studies. Also 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, 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 1–2 minutes in length. Put away your notes from the preparation phase; you should not use any notes during the interview, so that your interaction will be natural and spontaneous.

After producing the interview, work together to **transcribe the speech segment**. Working together, start by transcribing 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
¿Cuál es tu especialidad aquí en la universidad? ¿Por qué te interesa?	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 produce information about his/her major that is comprehensible?
- Is the response substantial (lots of information)?
- Does the speaker produce additional information in response to follow-up questions?
- Is the speaker able to produce complete sentences, rather than words and short phrases?
- Are the verbs forms (person/number endings) correct all/most of the time?
- Does the speaker control the vocabulary needed to talk about his/her studies and academic interests?
- Is the speaker reactive (brief responses), or does he/she respond to the prompt by offering information in series of sentences?

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

- **Below Intermediate Low:** Cannot sustain simple conversation; not always able to produce complete sentences in response to interviewer questions.
- **Intermediate Low/Mid:** Fulfills the criteria for the task, sometimes with ease and fluency and sometimes producing a lot of language. Produces information in utterances ranging from 1-2 sentences to several sentences long.
- **Above Intermediate Mid:** Goes beyond the criteria for the task by, for example, telling an anecdote (narration in past time) or talking about the demographic changes in the town over time.

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 open-ended follow-up questions?
- If the interviewer asks closed-ended questions, do they serve to open up a new topic (e.g., *¿Quieres estudiar medicina en el futuro?* [yes/no question] *¿Por qué quieres ser medico/a?* [open-ended follow-up question])

- Do the follow-up questions fit logically with the content of what the speaker has just said?
- How does the interviewer bring the speech segment to a close? Is it accomplished smoothly? If not, what suggestions do you have for how the interviewer might have done so?
- 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?