

Introduction to Oral Proficiency Levels Spanish

Part 2 Module 2.6

ACTFL Level: Advanced Low/Mid

Topic: The Past

Interview Prompt: *¿Cuál fue la experiencia más chocante para ti cuando eras joven?*

Features of speaker performance:

- Tell stories about past events; keep discourse in past tense
- Express (and sometimes support) opinions on abstract issues
- Explain and describe in detail
- Produce coherent discourse across groups of sentences
- Control distinction between preterite and imperfect in context of storytelling
- Comprehensible to people who may not have experience with language learners

About the Advanced Low/Mid Speaker:

Speakers at the Advanced level can participate fluently and actively in a conversation. They can talk about a range of topics that are autobiographical or that relate to concrete events removed in time and/or space (e.g., tell a story about an event in the past; summarize something that happened on campus). They can talk in a coherent fashion to fulfill a variety of tasks, including narration, comparison and contrast, explanations; and they can talk about the past or the future, keeping their discourse in the appropriate time frame and, as they progress through the Advanced level (i.e., Advanced Mid and Advanced High), control the use of preterite and imperfect when narrating and describing in past time.

To read full descriptions of the Advanced Low and Advanced 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 Advanced Low/Mid speakers. The topic is the past. As you watch these videos, consider the perspectives of the speaker and interviewer by following the guide provided for you below.

- [Sample Interview: Jessica](#)
- [Sample Interview: Laura](#)

Speaker perspective: Start by listening to how Jessica and Laura respond to this prompt: *¿Cuál fue la experiencia más chocante para ti cuando eras joven?* Their language samples are good examples of performance at the Advanced Low/Mid level. The prompt asks for a story about a memorable event, which checks the Advanced-level function of

narration and description in past time. The challenges for the speaker are (a) to come up with a good story to tell; (b) to recount the events with narrative and descriptive (contextual) detail; and (c) to control the linguistic elements needed to narrate and describe in past time.

Now brainstorm how you might answer this question at the Advanced Low/Mid level. Take a minute to think of a good story of something that happened to you as a child or young adult. It may trigger your memory if you quickly run through emotions that usually accompany a narrative of personal experience—*terror, sorpresa, trauma, vergüenza, alegría*—until a story comes to mind. Then think of the details you will recount—first the events, and then the surrounding descriptive detail. Finally, be aware of the need to keep your discourse entirely in the past, and to distinguish between what happened (preterite) and what was going on at the time (imperfect). Your goal should be to recount a detailed and engaging story.

Interviewer perspective: First, listen again to the speech segments by [Jessica](#) and [Laura](#). This time, focus on the questions the interviewer asks. As you will see, both speakers had trouble thinking of a story to tell. As an interviewer, you may need to ask some additional questions to help the speaker think of a good story. Running through some emotion words may help the speaker remember a good story; or, if you have been working with the same partner for awhile, you may know enough about his/her life to suggest some topics. Then, once the speaker begins to tell his/her story, you should ask brief questions that elicit additional details.

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 an interesting story about a past event. Your questions should include these: *¿Pero qué hacía Fulano mientras...?* (to elicit descriptive detail); *¿Y qué pasó después?* (to elicit more narrative detail). As the interviewer, you should adopt the persona of an engaged listener who is eager to hear the speaker's story. 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 first 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 the interview, 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
<i>¿Cuál fue la experiencia más chocante para ti cuando eras joven?</i>	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 a story that includes lots of narrative and descriptive detail?
- Is the context explained well, such that it would be comprehensible to listeners not familiar with the place, event, or people involved in the story?
- Is the speaker able to produce additional information in response to the follow-up questions?
- Is (all or most of) the response comprehensible?
- Is the speaker able to link sentences together to form more complex expressions?
- Is the speaker able to keep his/her discourse in the past?
- Does the speaker control the preterite and imperfect?
- Does the speaker have the vocabulary needed to convey the details of the narrative?
- Does the speaker tell a story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end?
- Does the speaker organize the story logically and coherently?

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

- **Intermediate High.** Provides information about the event, but does not keep discourse in the past consistently.
- **Advanced Low/Mid:** Fulfills the criteria for the task, sometimes with ease and fluency. Sometimes produces a coherent story that focuses on the events and enriches them with descriptive details; sometimes may not produce a long or detailed story. Sometimes more emphasis on events and less on descriptive detail. Keeps discourse in the past consistently, but may not deploy preterite and imperfect appropriately.
- **Advanced High.** Goes beyond the criteria for the task by, for example, introducing dialogue, imitating the characters in the story, or discussing the social ramifications of the event.

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 help the speaker expand on the events or descriptive detail of the story (e.g., *¿Tenías mucho miedo?* [yes/no question] versus *Cuéntame lo que pasó.* [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?