

Introduction to Oral Proficiency Levels Spanish

Part 1 Module 1.5

ACTFL Level: Intermediate High

Key Feature: Explain and describe in detail most of the time

1. Prepare to Observe

About the Intermediate High Level

Speakers at this level waver between the Intermediate Low/Mid and Advanced Low/Mid levels. Their proficiency may be hard to evaluate because they are able to speak at the Advanced Low/Mid level most of the time, but not consistently. A second important feature of the Advanced Low/Mid level is giving explanations. Explanations can take various forms. Giving instructions or going through the steps in a process is a type of explanation; speakers may also explain the pros and cons of a course of action or the causes and consequences of a situation.

Explanations at the Advanced Low/Mid level are detailed and, above all, they are well organized. Speakers at that level typically frame their responses before they start, indicating to the listener how they will organize their explanation. For example, a speaker might start an explanation by saying *Hay tres aspectos importantes de X. Primero...*; or the speaker might start by saying *Hay ventajas y desventajas de vivir en casa cuando uno estudia en la universidad. Una ventaja es...*

However, speakers at the Intermediate High level typically cannot organize their explanations in this manner. Some speakers jump into the explanation without announcing (or having) a plan; others frame their responses at the beginning but lose track of the plan as they are speaking.

To read a full description of proficiency at the Intermediate High level, see the [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking](#). You can also view video clips of interviews in English at this level.

Interview Questions

Speakers are rated at this level based on their responses to questions designed to elicit speech at the Advanced Low/Mid level. The interview questions encourage topic development by asking for clarification and details, types of questions that elicit the Advanced Low/Mid-level feature of explaining in detail—in this case eliciting a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of common living arrangements for college students. You may wish to examine speech samples at the Advanced Low/Mid levels to see speakers produce well-organized explanations of advantages and disadvantages and compare them to the Intermediate High speakers in this module. For example in Module 1.7, watch Advanced Low/Mid speakers Abigail or Amy talk about sports.

Appropriate question types for speakers at the Intermediate High level include the following:

- Topic opener: *¿En Austin tú vives en un apartamento?*
- Request for explanation: *¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas de vivir en una residencia versus en un apartamento?*
- Follow-up question to elicit more details: *¿Y hay otras ventajas?*

What to Expect

Although Intermediate High speakers will be able to provide information about their preference for living arrangements, they may not frame their responses by first giving an overall preference statement and then explaining the reasons for their preference. Because this level, like all levels in the ACTFL proficiency scale, encompasses a range of abilities, you should expect to find stronger and weaker speakers who fulfill the criteria of the level. Weaker speakers give less information with more hesitation, whereas stronger speakers may be more fluent, providing more information and showing some evidence of understanding the need to organize the information.

2. Watch the Interviews

There are two video interviews in this module, and you will be watching each interview twice. When you watch the first interview in which Claire talks about the advantages of living with her family rather than on campus or in an apartment with other students, you will notice that she expresses her preference, sometimes in a long stretch of speech and sometimes in one-sentence responses.

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

[Interview: Claire \(topic - apartment living\)](#)

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

Interview Questions	Question Type	Features of Response
1. <i>¿Tú vives en un apartamento o en un dormi...?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Request for explanation <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up	
2. <i>¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas de vivir con la familia versus en un dormitorio o en un apartamento con otros estudiantes?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Request for explanation <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up	

3. <i>¿Cuáles son las ventajas fuera de que tu tía paga todo?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Request for explanation <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up	
4. <i>¿Quién lava la ropa y todo eso?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Request for explanation <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up	
5. <i>¿Y tu tía prepara la comida más que nada?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Request for explanation <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up	

In the next video, Sarah talks about the advantages of living in an apartment rather than in a university dormitory. In the first viewing, focus on the interview questions, which are provided in the table below, and complete the column about question type.

[Interview: Sarah \(topic - apartment living\)](#)

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

Interview Questions	Question Type	Features of Response
1. <i>¿Tú vives en un apartamento aquí en Austin?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Request for explanation <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up	
2. <i>¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas de vivir en un apartamento en vez de vivir en un dormitorio?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Request for explanation <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up	
3. <i>¿Por qué?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic opener <input type="checkbox"/> Request for explanation <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up	

3. Analyze Speaker Performance

Review of the Intermediate High Speaker

A hallmark of the Intermediate High level is inconsistency and struggle. Speakers at this level are on the border between Intermediate Low/Mid and Advanced Low/Mid. When asked questions that elicit features of the Intermediate Low/Mid level, they respond confidently, fluently, and accurately. But when asked questions that elicit the performance feature at the Advanced Low/Mid level, such as giving comparisons and other types of explanations, they struggle to organize their responses effectively. They give information, but do not organize the information to respond to the question in a full and well-structured way.

Questions for Analysis and Discussion

Refer to the descriptions of the Intermediate High level in this module and the notes you took while watching the video clips. Consider these questions on your own or discuss them with a small group.

1. Claire mentions in her response to another speaking task that she is from Iran. Students of Spanish with different native languages may have different learning challenges and different linguistic profiles. Can you tell in this speech sample that Claire's native language is not English? If so, how? Does it affect her performance in this speech sample or the rating given to her performance?
2. Claire's video clip contains many non-productive interviewer questions; that is, yes/no and directed information questions that elicit only brief responses. Listen again to this video clip. If you were the interviewer, what questions would you ask, especially in the second half of the interaction, to elicit longer stretches of speech?
3. Sarah's longest stretch of speech includes this very long complex sentence (pauses and hesitation markers deleted): *Me gusta vivir en un apartamento más porque yo tengo mi propio cuarto y no me gusta compartir mi cuarto con otra persona y cuando uno se vive en los dormitorios tiene que tener una cama acá y otra muy cerca y no me gusta ese aspecto porque usualmente uno no va a tener la misma vida que la otra persona.* What conjunction does Sarah use to connect these sentences? Is this way of speaking typical for speakers at the Intermediate Low/Mid or the Advanced Low/Mid level? Why does the function of explaining in detail require the ability to produce complex sentences?
4. Why do you think that these speakers are rated Intermediate High? What are the weaknesses of their explanations that keep them out of the Advanced Low/Mid level?