



ACTFL OPIc

EXAMINEE HANDBOOK

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ACTFL
AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE
TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES



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About the ACTFL OPIc Test

The Oral Proficiency Interview-computer (OPIc) is a valid and reliable means of assessing how well a person speaks a language. The OPIc is a web-based assessment, delivered online, that simulates the live interviews conducted during the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI).

The OPIc elicits a speech sample that allows raters to evaluate your ability to communicate in the language (proficiency) while performing functions you might encounter in real-life. As the OPIc assesses general language proficiency, it is not designed to assess what you learned in a specific language program, class, school, or university; nor is it tied to a specific teaching method or book. Rather than assessing what you “know” about the language, the OPIc is an assessment of what you “can do” with the language. “Proficiency” refers to how well a person can use the language as defined by the criteria established by the official descriptors used as the reference for the evaluation.

There are three different rating guidelines used as the rating criteria for the OPIc assessment, selected according to the ratings required by the client:

- 1 American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)
- 2 Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR)
- 3 Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The type of OPIc required affects some elements of the testing, and in each OPIc, the speaking sample is then compared to the criteria outlined in one of the three guidelines: the [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 - Speaking](#), the [Interagency Language Roundtable Language Skill Level Descriptions - Speaking](#), or the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#). For the purpose of this introduction for examinees, the OPIc assessment in this manual is based on the descriptions and criteria presented in the [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 - Speaking](#). In all cases, the final rating assigned to an OPIc is determined only by comparing the examinee’s proficiency with one of the three guidelines indicated above.

OPIc Test Administration

The OPIc is delivered via the internet on a secure platform that meets the minimum technical specifications stipulated by Language Testing International (LTI). In summary, you will need a computer or tablet with an internet connection that is capable of playing audio and video files, with specific programs and security requirements. You will also need headphones with recording capability. You can access information about the specific device requirements at: <https://www.languagetesting.com/test-delivery-logistics>.

In addition to these technological requirements, the OPIc provides detailed instructions and directions on how to handle the test technology. You will practice how to listen to the questions and record answers. In order to ensure that you understand these instructions, sample questions are provided, so you can practice with OPIc functionality. You will have the opportunity to review the instructions and sample questions a second time before starting the test. Once you are familiar with the system, you will be ready to begin the OPIc. You can take an OPIc remotely, as part of a group, or administered and proctored by a larger company, which will provide the necessary equipment. Also, if you are testing at a university, it might organize a group for which the institution provides the testing site and proctoring services.

Ava – the OPIc Interviewer – An Avatar

Oral Proficiency Interview - computer (OPIc)

You will be tested on how well you speak English.



Meet Ava! She will be your interviewer (and new best friend) during your test.

Next >

Before the interview begins, Ava is introduced. Ava is an avatar figure that personifies the OPIc interviewer. She will guide you through the test by introducing each section of the test and by asking you questions. Having Ava on the screen helps you to engage in a conversation that mimics a one-on-one conversation with a native speaker of the target language.

Background Survey Sample Questions

The first step is the Background Survey, a questionnaire about your life, preferences and interests. The information provided allows you to customize the OPIc to your own interests. The content of the interview is based on topics related to your everyday life, school, work experience, and/or current events happening in your town or city.

Below is a sample of the questions you will answer in the Background Survey:

What best describes your field of work?

- Business / Corporation
- Home Business
- Teacher / Educator
- No work experience

Are you currently working?

- Yes
- No

Are you currently going to school?

- Yes
- No

Where do you live?

- I live alone in a house or apartment.
- I live with non-family members in a house or apartment.
- I live with family members (spouse/children/other family members) in a house or apartment.
- I live in a school or a dormitory.
- I live in military barracks.

Additional questions about activities, hobbies, sports, and travel are included in the survey. To view the full Background Survey, go to the OPIc demo at the site below.

<https://opicdemo.actfltesting.org>

Self-Assessment: Determining the Level of the OPIc

Further, examinees also complete a Self-Assessment survey that helps Ava determine an appropriate proficiency range at which to target the assessment. The information you provide allows Ava to generate a test tailored specifically to your interests and linguistic capabilities.

The Self-Assessment will allow you to assess your abilities in the language. It includes five statements that describe different levels of how well a person can speak a language. You should select the description you think most accurately describes your language ability.

If you wish to listen to speech samples at different levels of proficiency on the ACTFL rating scale, please click on this link: [ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES 2012](#)

Below are the Self-Assessment options and the corresponding test forms for each selection. At the time of the test, you will be able to listen to the samples.

Self-Assessment Descriptions	
1	I can name basic objects, colors, days of the week, foods, clothing items, numbers, etc. I cannot make a complete sentence or ask simple questions.
2	I can give some basic information about myself, work, familiar people and places, and daily routines by speaking in simple sentences. I can ask some simple questions.
3	I can participate in simple conversations about familiar topics and routines. I can talk about things that have happened, but sometimes my forms are incorrect. I can handle a range of everyday transactions to get what I need.
4	I can participate fully and confidently in all conversations about topics and activities related to home, work/school, personal and community interests. I can speak in connected discourse about things that have happened, are happening and will happen. I can explain and elaborate when necessary. I can handle routine situations, even when there may be an unexpected complication.
5	I can engage in all informal and formal discussions on issues related to personal, general or professional interests. I can deal with these issues abstractly, support my opinion, and construct hypotheses to explore alternatives. I am able to elaborate at length and in detail on most topics with a high level of accuracy and a wide range of precise vocabulary.

The Self-Assessment choice determines which test format will be generated for you. By completing a background inventory of topics related to your everyday life, school, work experience, and/or current events happening in your town or city, Ava is able to generate appropriate interview topics. The choices made in response to the Background Survey and the Self-Assessment assure that the OPIc generated for you will target your range of abilities and provide questions on topics familiar to you. Each OPIc is unique and is tailored to your interests and your level of functional ability.

OPIc Test Functionality

After completing the Background Survey and the Self-Assessment, you will have the opportunity to confirm that your device meets the technical requirements to run the test. You will record your voice and play it back to confirm that your microphone and headset are working properly. You will not be able to take the OPIc test if your device does not meet the minimum technical requirements. Technical issues can affect the quality of your listening experience and your concentration, so please address any potential issues with your equipment. Make sure you have a device that meets all the requirements fully.

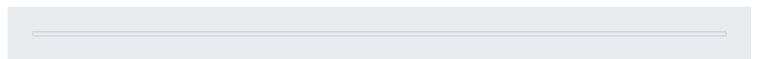
[Sign Out](#)



Pre-Test Setup



- 1 Click the **Play** icon (below Ava) to listen to the recording and adjust the volume.
- 2 To test your microphone, click **Start Recording** speak into your microphone, and click **Stop Recording** when you are finished.
- 3 Click **Play Recording** to make sure you can hear your voice.



[Next >](#)

Make sure that all programs are closed and eliminate all possible distractions. Before beginning the test, you will receive the following reminder:

[Sign Out](#)



Before we start...



Remain on the Test Page

Do not open any other site, page, or program while the test is in progress, or the test will close, and you will have to go through the log-in process again.



Do not Refresh or Go Back

If you refresh the page or click on the **Back** button during the assessment, the test will close, and you will have to go through the log-in process again.



Speaking

Give a very detailed response to each question to show how great you are!



Time is Precious

You have 30 minutes to complete this test. The clock starts after clicking **Begin**.

 If you experience technical difficulties, relax. You can always sign back in within 2 hours.

Are you ready?

[Begin >](#)

Once you finish, the system will announce that you have completed the test.

[Sign Out](#)

Congratulations!

You have successfully completed your test.



We've got your responses, and our certified raters will rate them very soon.




Relax!
You deserve it.

It is advisable to test your device before the day of the test. You can do so by going to the System Check page by clicking on this link: <https://actfltesting.org/systemcheck>

Oral Proficiency Interview - computer (OPIC)

Let's make sure your computer meets all of the required system checks.

CRITERIA	MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS	YOUR SYSTEM INFORMATION	STATUS
Bandwidth	Connection speed of 1,000 Kbps per candidate.	Connection Speed: 841,165.52 Kbps	✓
Web Browser	Desktop Tablet	Safari v12.0.2	✓
Microphone	A microphone is required.	<div style="display: flex; gap: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: #f4a460; padding: 5px; border-radius: 3px;"> Start Recording </div> <div style="background-color: #f4a460; padding: 5px; border-radius: 3px;"> Play Recording </div> </div>	⌚
Video	You must be able to view video.		⌚

Next >

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OPIc Test Format

The goal of the OPIc is to gather a sample of your speech that demonstrates the full range of your functional speaking ability. The test will provide evidence of the linguistic functions you can perform consistently, and those over which you may have limited control, or from which you may breakdown. The OPIc structure is based on one of five test forms, each of which targets a specific range of proficiency.

	Targeted Proficiency Levels	Range of Possible Ratings Assigned
Form 1	Novice Low – Novice High	Novice Low – Intermediate Low
Form 2	Novice High – Intermediate Mid	Novice Low – Intermediate High
Form 3	Intermediate Mid – Advanced Low	Novice Low – Advanced Low
Form 4	Advanced Low & Advanced Mid	Intermediate High – Advanced High
Form 5	Advanced High & Superior	Advanced Low – Superior

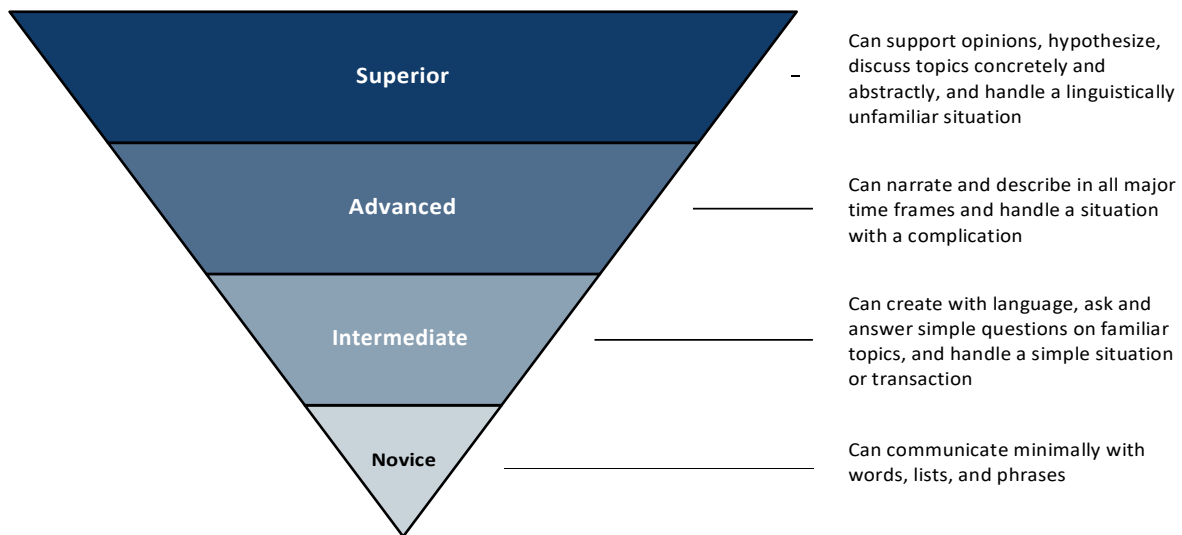
Having targeted test forms keeps the test to under 40 minutes. OPIcs that are focused on assessing lower ranges of speaking proficiency will have a greater number of questions/prompts at the Novice and Intermediate levels; those focused on the higher ranges of speaking proficiency will include fewer lower-level prompts and will focus on the higher ranges of proficiency (Advanced & Superior). Prompts are organized into sets, or testlets, around specific topics exploring linguistic functions at different proficiency levels. For example, a testlet might include 3 prompts at the Intermediate level, or a combination of 2 prompts at the Intermediate level and 1 at the Advanced level. The number of prompts and testlets, and the overall format of the test, are determined by the expected range of proficiency.

Prompts invite you to perform linguistic functions associated with different levels on the ACTFL Proficiency scale through the avatar, Ava, who will ask you to speak on a variety of topics based on your responses to the Background Survey, and to execute different linguistic functions through a series of prompts based on your Self-Assessment. This combination allows you to tailor the OPIc experience to your own interests and linguistic abilities. There is no right answer to the prompts, so you should focus on providing a spontaneous and genuine response just as you would in a real-life conversation, instead of relying on the use of memorized or rehearsed material.

Linguistic Functions and OPIc Prompts

OPIc prompts elicit different functions associated with the different levels on the ACTFL Proficiency scale. For each of the major levels of proficiency, there are specific types of communicative tasks that you must address to show what you can do in the language. The OPIc might ask for the same functions in different contexts or topics in order to determine the quantity and quality of your functional ability. The rating that is associated with a particular proficiency level must demonstrate all functions of that level.

Below is a visual representation of the ACTFL scale with concise information about the four major levels tested by the OPIc. As you can see, the ACTFL scale covers a full range of proficiency from Novice to Superior.



NOVICE LEVEL

Novice-level prompts invite you to make lists of basic vocabulary and to repeat memorized expressions and phrases that beginner learners tend to use. Novice-level questions are included at the lower levels in the Self-Assessment.

Types of Questions and/or Requests	Examples of Novice-Level Questions
Lists	What colors are in the room?
Phrases	What do you like to do in your free time?

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

All interviews include prompts at the Intermediate level, and all speakers will have the opportunity to speak about their routines and personal interests. Intermediate-level prompts invite you to speak in sentences about simple everyday activities on familiar topics.

Types of Questions and/or Requests	Examples of Intermediate-Level Questions and/or Requests
Simple description of a person, place or thing	Describe your best friend. What does he or she look like?
Simple description of an activity or event	Tell me what you do after school every day.
Ask questions to get something you want or need	You would like to get a hotel room this weekend. Ask three or four questions to find out what is available.

ADVANCED LEVEL

Advanced-level prompts invite you to speak about autobiographic topics and beyond. You will have the opportunity to talk about yourself, and about your work or your community. The primary focus of the Advanced-level prompts is on narrations and descriptions in paragraph-length discourse in the major time frames (present, past and future).

Types of Questions and/or Requests	Examples of Advanced-Level Questions and/or Requests
Detailed descriptions of people, places, and things from your present and your past	You said you travel for business. Tell me about the last place you went on a business trip. Where did you go on the last trip you took? Tell me your impressions of what you saw on your last trip.
Detailed stories about something that has happened, is happening, or will happen	You said you like to ski. Tell me the story of how you learned to ski. How old were you? Where did you learn how to ski? Tell me the whole story of how you learned to ski from beginning to end in as much detail as you can.
Handle a complication that arises in a transaction	You are traveling with your friend. You have a pre-paid hotel reservation for a room with twin beds. When you arrive, the room the hotel gives you has only a single bed in it. Go to the receptionist, explain the problem and convince the receptionist to give you the type of room you reserved.
Report on a current event	Weather-related events are always in the news. Tell me about a recent weather event that you are following in the news.

Role-plays are also a part of the OPIc for both the Intermediate and the Advanced levels. Role-plays present social transactions or situations you might encounter in real-life (i.e., introducing yourself to a friend, buying tickets). Instructions to this task will be presented in English in two consecutive prompts: The first prompt proposes the situation, and the second prompt proposes a complication to the situation. For example, the first prompt might require you to make a doctor’s appointment, and the second might require you to make changes to the appointment with an explanation and alternative options. Once the task in the role-play is completed, the rest of the prompts will be presented in the target language.

SUPERIOR LEVEL

Superior-level questions invite you to reflect thoughtfully about issues and problems of our society. These questions require you to organize your ideas in a logical manner and provide more complex elaboration.

Types of Questions and/or Requests	Examples of Superior-Level Questions and/or Requests
State and support an opinion	Air travel has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. Speak about the most significant changes that have been made and comment on why you believe these new procedures are effective or not. Be sure to provide arguments to support your point of view.
Hypothesize about possible conditions and outcomes	What are some air travel changes that could be adopted by airlines and airports to improve the travel experience? Suggest some changes and describe what impact these changes would have on the traveler if they were adopted.
Discuss topics in general, abstract terms	Access to health care is an important issue in most countries. Pick one country and describe its health care system and benefits to the general public in comparison to the health care system of another country.



Sample Questions

Below are some sample question types. There is a note accompanying each sample to indicate what an appropriate response should contain at the targeted level:

NOVICE

What things are outside your house? Trees, cars . . . name all the things you see outside your house.

Note: If you are a Novice-level speaker, you should be able to provide words, lists, and phrases.

INTERMEDIATE

Tell me about the different rooms in your home. Do you have a favorite room? What does it look like?

Note: If you are an Intermediate-level speaker, you should be able to talk about your favorite room using sentences and enough details for the listener to know what the room looks like.

OR:

What is your normal routine at home? What kinds of things do you do at home during the week and on the weekends?

Note: This is also an Intermediate-level question. For this question, if you are an Intermediate-level speaker, you should be able to speak in sentences about your daily habits and the things you usually do when you are at home — during the week and on the weekends.

ADVANCED

I'd like you to tell me your favorite memory about a good friend. It can be a story that involves you and your friend together, or a story that you know about your friend. Talk about this memory in as much detail as you can.

Note: This is an Advanced-level question. When you respond to it, you are expected to be able to produce a paragraph-length response. This means that the sentences you produce must be organized and connected to each other with a beginning, middle and end. At this level, you are also expected to use the appropriate time frames.

For this prompt, your response should be in the past time frame, and the person listening to your response should be able to understand when the action or event happened in addition to what happened with your friend. Advanced-level speakers do not need sympathetic listeners who have to fill in the gaps of the narrative or description in order to understand the speaker's idea. If you are at the Advanced level, you should be able to do all of these things in your response.

SUPERIOR

Nowadays, communication through digital resources is increasingly maintained among young people through social media, texting, instant messaging, etc. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of relying solely on digital resources for interpersonal communication? How do these changes in communication affect contemporary society?

Note: At the Superior level, you will be expected to produce extended discourse, which means that your responses will need to develop into multiple paragraphs in length. The paragraphs must be well-organized and connected. They also need to be easily understood for all educated native language listeners. In addition to the length of your responses, you need to be able to deal with complex topics that may require you to express your opinion or deal hypothetically or abstractly with the subject.

To respond to the example above at the Superior level, you should talk about changes in society caused by digital resources and interpersonal communication. Your focus on the topic should be on a large scale (how it affects people, communities, countries, the world, etc.) and not simply your life and personal experiences (that would most likely be an Advanced-level response). Your response should have few, if any errors. A pattern of errors (such as problems of agreement, missing language features, etc.) that distract the listener from your message, is considered breakdown from the Superior level to the Advanced level.



Rating the OPIc

ACTFL-certified OPIc raters are highly specialized language professionals who have completed a rigorous training and certification process. ACTFL only certifies raters who are able to consistently produce a high degree of rating reliability. The quality and reliability of the rating process is very important to us, and we work very hard to provide the best quality and accuracy of the final ratings.

All OPIc ratings are assigned according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 - Speaking, unless a rating on the ILR or CEFR rating scale is requested. Once an OPIc is completed, the rater will review and analyze the sample to determine the final rating. In order to receive a rating, you must meet all of the requirements of that level (noted in the guidelines). After considering the functional ability during the interview, the rater will compare the sample to the descriptors in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 - Speaking. To determine your rating, the rater uses all of the information gained from reviewing your speech sample and then chooses the best sublevel to match what you can do in the language.

Final Rating

Once the rater submits the rating through the LTI Test Rating System, LTI will process the rating. Once a final rating is assigned, an official rating is reported. The final rating is assigned after all ratings have been recorded.



Expectations for Each Major Level

A final rating indicates both a major level and a sublevel on the ACTFL scale. The ACTFL scale has 4 major levels that correspond to the OPIc: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior. Each level represents a range in which speakers demonstrate sustained functional ability of the linguistic functions associated with that level. The sublevel indicates a more precise range associated with the quality and quantity within the major level.

NOVICE

A Novice-level speaker is able to produce words and some phrases. Some of these words and phrases may be memorized. This is a natural process that happens when people first start studying a language and is perfectly acceptable at this level. It should not be confused with using Rehearsed Material (see below for more details). In fact, it is the way new students of a language build their vocabulary, a sense of sentence structure, and, ultimately, the ability to create with language (Intermediate). A Novice-level speaker may be able to provide lists, such as the names of the days of the week, colors, names of family members, objects, etc. At this level, the speaker is not able to produce sentences yet.

INTERMEDIATE

An Intermediate-level speaker is able to speak at the sentence level. The sentences that this type of speaker generates allow her or him to express ideas and engage with other speakers of the language socially. Intermediate-level speakers can tell people what they want to order at a restaurant, what they regularly do at work, what they need to do to arrange to rent a car, etc. They can tell people what they are thinking, and they can formulate questions to find out information. On the other hand, an Intermediate-level speaker is not able to organize and connect those sentences to form paragraphs, nor is this type of speaker able to control the language well enough for a listener to be able to understand whether an action or event happened in the past, present, or future.

ADVANCED

An Advanced-level speaker is a storyteller. At this level, the language production is paragraph-length. That means a speaker's responses are organized, with a beginning, middle, and end. It also means that there is a connection, not only among ideas, but also among the sentences of a response. Advanced-level speakers use paragraphs to tell stories that happened in the past, actions that take place in their daily lives, and events that are going to happen in the future. When someone listens to an Advanced-level speaker, there is no confusion about what happened or when it happened. As with Intermediate-level speakers, speakers at the Advanced level can handle social transactions such as, for instance, renting a car. They can, however, handle these transactions at a high level, using language to address complications that might arise during the transaction (e.g., a car not being available, or a reservation being lost). This ability allows them to find solutions to resolve the transaction successfully. In addition, Advanced-level speakers can begin talking about things that they did not personally experience; but they cannot talk about these things for an extended period of time without returning to topics that are part of their lives and their own experiences.

SUPERIOR

A Superior-level speaker is able to produce responses that are multiple paragraphs in length. These paragraphs are organized with a beginning, middle, and end, to express opinions and deal with topics that are no longer part of the speaker's everyday experiences. Rather, a Superior-level speaker deals with topics on a societal, and sometimes on a global level (i.e., he or she talks about how issues affect society and countries). Superior-level speakers are not only able to accomplish all of the tasks of the other levels (i.e., they can tell stories and control time in their responses, etc.), but they are also able to talk about ideas at a higher level than speakers at any other level.

Superior-level speakers understand what level of language they are supposed to use in each situation, and they can speak it at whatever level is necessary to communicate their ideas successfully.



Sublevels

Sublevels provide a more precise description within the level. The three sublevels are: High, Mid, and Low. Sublevels are assigned in the ACTFL scale for Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced. Superior does not have sublevels. Sublevels provide details of the major level in terms of the quantity and quality of language produced, and the functional ability demonstrated at each major level.

The HIGH Sublevel

Speakers at the High sublevel communicate with ease and confidence when performing the functions of their respective major level. They are capable of functioning most of the time at the next higher major level, but they are unable to sustain functional ability at the next higher level without intermittent lapses or evidence of difficulty.

For example, a *Novice High* speaker can create with language and produce sentences at the Intermediate level, but he or she would not be able to maintain that level of production all the time. There will be evidence of breakdown when the speaker would not be able to sustain the criteria of the Intermediate level and would resort to performing at the Novice level (words and phrases).

The MID Sublevel

There are many kinds of speakers that match the description of the Mid sublevel, depending on the amount of speech produced, the quality of the speech (how well the speaker communicates) in all of the functions associated with the level, and/or the degree to which he or she controls language features from the next higher major level.

For example, an *Intermediate Mid* speaker can express his or her own ideas by creating sentence-level responses consistently throughout the test, asking questions and providing information to handle a social transaction (finding out information about a business, buying/selling something, dealing with travel situations, etc.), with good quality and an abundance of language. Additionally, an *Intermediate Mid* speaker can generally demonstrate some features of the Advanced level.

The LOW Sublevel

Speakers at the Low sublevel work hard to hold on to the major level of proficiency for which they have qualified. They meet the minimal requirements for the level, and do not break down to the major level below.

For instance, an *Advanced Low* speaker is able to just hold onto the Advanced level by producing short paragraphs and minimally controlling the corresponding linguistic functions in the appropriate major time frames. He or she can narrate and describe in the past, present, and future, but the listener may need to make an effort to understand the intent of the speaker's message. Additionally, an Advanced Low speaker can handle social interactions with complications (e.g. lost reservations, a borrowed item that got broken, etc.), but may struggle to do so.

A rater evaluates the sample and assigns a rating that matches the speaker’s functional ability to the descriptors in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 - Speaking. Since all samples are compared to these proficiency guidelines, all ratings in all languages refer to the same criteria. You can review the descriptors in detail at: [ACTFL PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES 2012](#). This site also includes a translation of the document and samples at each major level for at least 10 languages.

Telephonic Testing

LTI also offers the option to take the *Telephone OPIc*. You can take the test from your own private location and/or use remote proctoring using a web-based proctoring service. Telephonic testing is based on the OPIc format with prompts and questions that are similar to those of the internet version. An avatar asks the questions, and you respond to them just as you do on the internet version of the OPIc.

The *Telephone OPIc* can be administered in one of two ways:

- 1 The test-taker first accesses the testing website to complete the Background Survey and Self-Assessment just as with the internet version of the OPIc. Once these are completed, the test-taker calls in with the phone number and access code provided to him/her to begin the test. Please note that the use of landline telephones is generally preferred given that cell phone connections are not always reliable.
- 2 The client sets up “fixed-form” testing where a specific range of proficiency is tested and/or specific questions are asked during the test. (This option is reserved for commercial clients.)

Testing telephonically may prove more efficient for institutions and individuals who do not have access to the internet or the necessary computing equipment.



Tips for Optimal Performance on the OPIc

Logistics

- Scheduling of an OPIc is handled by LTI. Please follow its instructions closely. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact LTI immediately.
- Make sure that the area where you are taking the OPIc is quiet. If you are taking a proctored test, the proctor has prepared the area where you are taking the test. But if the test is un-proctored, make sure you find a quiet place, without background noise or interruptions.
- Make sure that your device meets all of the connection requirements. Please check your settings in advance.
- During the interview, you are not permitted to review documents or dictionaries, or ask for help. Rely exclusively on what you can do in the language on your own. If the rater detects that you are receiving assistance, the test will not receive a rating.

Personal preparation

The best advice for doing well on the OPIc is PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! The OPIc is an assessment of what you can do with your language at the time of the test. Your final rating describes your general functional ability, that is, the level at which you show full control over the functions, and your current communicative skills. Only language development over time will impact your rating. Last-minute language learning, grammar review or vocabulary practice will most likely not improve your final results. Knowing more about the language will not affect your rating unless it reflects on what you can do. Practice communicating naturally in the language, focusing on the message rather than just the language forms.

As with any test, you should prepare by being well-rested and alert, maintaining a positive attitude throughout the test. During the OPIc, enjoy the conversation and speak as much as you can.

Test-taking tips

- It is to your advantage to warm up by speaking the language before the assessment begins, so you do not waste the first few minutes getting used to speaking the language. Doing so will prepare you to communicate in the language at your best.
- Listen carefully to the prompts and respond accordingly. If your answer is incomplete or does not respond fully to the request, you will not have another opportunity to answer. Listen to the prompt carefully and make sure you provide a response to the question that is being asked.
- Speak only in the target language and avoid using slang or words from other languages. Demonstrate, to the best of your ability, that you can function in a monolingual environment. If you do not know a word or expression, explain or paraphrase in order to convey your message as clearly as possible. Use other words, explain, or give examples to get the message across and maintain the conversation.

- Do not prepare for the OPIc by memorizing responses. Do not try to lead the conversation into topics you have practiced in advance. The raters have been trained to recognize rehearsed/memorized material, which may negatively impact your rating, whereas creating authentic answers to the questions will provide better at-level responses.
- When prompted to ask questions, make sure you formulate your questions appropriately for the target language about the proposed topic.
- If you are asked to tell a story about an experience that took place in the past, make sure you tell the story in detail using appropriate time frames and structures. If you are asked to speak about a future plan, you should also make sure you use the appropriate forms and structures for that time frame too. Sustained control of the major time frames is required for the Advanced level. While a lack of control of aspect (i.e. present perfect vs. past perfect) does not prevent you from sustaining functional ability at the Advanced level, lack of control over the time frames may result in breakdown to a lower level of proficiency.
- Do not focus on verb formations (or any other grammar point) exclusively. The Advanced level requires control over the use of connectors, time indicators, and other language elements that may contribute to the development of the narration in paragraph-length discourse.
- Short answers can work against you because they do not show the breadth and depth of your speaking ability. Provide as many details as you can.
- If you are asked to state and support your opinion, make sure you support your point of view with well-organized arguments. Try to maintain the abstract treatment of the topic: a description of facts about what happened is an Advanced-level explanation, whereas a consideration of the issues involved in the problem provides a Superior-level treatment of the topic.
- If you are asked to speculate about some possible conditions and/or outcomes, make sure you use the appropriate hypothetical structures for that language. Maintain the hypothetical treatment throughout your response. Consider the topic from an abstract perspective.



Frequently Asked Questions about the OPIc

Who takes the OPIc test?

The OPIc is an assessment of speaking skills in a target language that is used by individuals, companies, and organizations around the world: From students in Canada, to the New York City Department of Education in the United States, to employees at Samsung in Korea, the OPIc has become the test people trust when they want to learn what they can do in a language.

Why do candidates take the OPIc?

Thousands of people take the OPIc every year. The people who take the OPIc usually fall into one of two categories: 1) individual test-takers and people who have been directed to take the OPIc by a company, academic institution, etc., and 2) individuals who take the OPIc to have credentials that validate their language proficiency levels, so they can work as bilingual employees, translators, interpreters, tutors, etc. Companies, universities, schools, hospitals, and other types of organizations often require current and potential employees to take the OPIc to ensure that they can speak the language at a level that will allow them to do their work successfully. In both cases, knowing exactly what a person can do in a language and being able to validate it provides individuals and potential employees with life and career opportunities. It also provides companies, universities, and other organizations the certainty that they have employees who can use the language well enough to do their jobs successfully.

Who administers the OPIc test?

Language Testing International (LTI) administers the scheduling, testing, and rating of all OPIcs.

Preparing to take the OPIc

The best way for you to prepare is to practice listening to and speaking the language in real-world situations. Try your best to find situations in which you have to use the language to communicate. For instance, you can try going to a restaurant where the target language is spoken and talk to the waiter or waitress while ordering your food.

Finding other people who speak the language and meeting them for coffee or tea is another good way to improve your skills. When you get together, make a rule about using only the target language when you talk to each other. Practice telling them stories about things you do regularly at home, school, or work. Tell them stories about things that happened to you in the past or your plans for the future. Getting into discussions that require you to express your opinion about anything, from the news to sports or entertainment, will also help you to improve what you can do in the language.

Working to build your skills, so you can communicate in the language as someone would do in the real world, is the best way to get ready to take the OPIc.

To be successful on the OPIc, it is also important to understand what a speaker can do at each level of proficiency, so you can understand what is expected from you when you respond to the prompts. The descriptions of the four major proficiency levels are included in previous sections in this handbook.



Policies & Guidelines for the Use of the OPic

Confidentiality

During the OPic, your responses will be recorded. This recording shall remain the sole property of ACTFL and LTI. It will not be given to you or to anyone else under any circumstances. Only your final rating will be released.

Rehearsed Material

The OPic is a test of your ability to express yourself spontaneously in a language. Certified ACTFL OPic Raters will evaluate what you can do in the language when you are speaking. In order to do this effectively, your responses must be authentic. While you should make every effort to improve your abilities in listening and speaking, to understand the language and be understood, you should not try to memorize responses prior to taking the OPic. If you prepare a response or use responses from online sources or books, you will not receive an accurate rating. Proficiency is characterized by spontaneous language use. ACTFL OPic raters are experienced in identifying rehearsed responses, so, if you use them, you may not receive a rating for your test.

It sounds simple, but practicing your listening and speaking skills as much as you can in the target language is the best preparation for a successful OPic assessment. We wish you success in improving your language skills for your next OPic test.



Questions? Contact us.

If you have any additional questions, please contact us at:

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