

## Improving language proficiency & Preparing for testing

Learning a language is like playing a sport. You can study tennis, watch others play tennis, and learn the rules of tennis, but you can't really play it well without PRACTICE!

Studying grammar and vocabulary from a book has much less impact on your second language proficiency than PRACTICING the language. This requires active learning that extends beyond the classroom.

In your language classes, make the most of opportunities the teacher has created for you to practice the language. Outside of class, look for daily opportunities to read, listen to, and especially SPEAK the language. Attend language conversation hours or any type of activity that allows you to be immersed in the language. Look for speakers of the language with whom you can practice speaking. Listen to music in the language on your iPod. Watch movies in the language, and when you are watching a DVD in English, turn on the subtitles in the language. Read about topics that interest you in that language on the internet.

Proficiency tests broadly include descriptions, narrations, explanations and supported opinions. You can perform similar tasks on your own. Find a book or magazine and practice describing pictures from it. Tell stories about what you did on a particular day. Discuss topics that appear in magazines or newspapers. As you practice over a period of weeks, you will likely notice that more and more of your "passive" vocabulary will become "active," and your overall fluency will increase.

## Campus resources for proficiency

CeLTA's website (<http://celta.msu.edu/>) lists conversation hours, movies, lectures, and other language-related activities on their calendar and at <http://celta.msu.edu/culture/info.php>. A conversation partner database also allows you to connect with speakers of the language you are studying.

The Language Learning Center (<http://llc.msu.edu/>) has language learning software, satellite TV programs, and language learning software.

We have many different international student organizations which will help you meet speakers of the language you are speaking. Visit the Department of Student Life (<http://studentlife.msu.edu/>) for a listing.



# Language Proficiency: Tips and Resources for Teacher Candidates

**Center for Language Teaching Advancement  
College of Arts and Letters  
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**Center for Language Teaching Advancement**

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# About Language Proficiency

Oral language proficiency refers to your ability to USE and COMMUNICATE in the language orally. It is determined by performance in speaking the language, and not the highest level language course completed.

The scale we use to measure a student's oral proficiency is the "ACTFL scale" which has ten proficiency levels and is the national standard. See <http://www.languageTesting.com/scale.htm> for a description of these levels:

- Superior
- Advanced-High
- Advanced-Mid
- Advanced-Low
- Intermediate-High
- Intermediate-Mid
- Intermediate-Low
- Novice-High
- Novice-Mid
- Novice-Low

## Oral proficiency assessment

We use both the SOPI (Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview) and the ACTFL OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview) at MSU to measure proficiency. The SOPI is available for French, German, and Spanish, and the ACTFL OPI for other languages. A computerized ACTFL OPI (OPIc) is also available for Spanish.

# Proficiency Assessments

## Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI)

The SOPI consists of a warm-up "simulated conversation" followed by 15 questions, or recorded "prompts" which students respond to. Answers are recorded.

The warm-up, which is not scored, is the only part of the test that requires students to comprehend what someone is saying in the target language. From that point on, the directions are in English, and only the "prompt" is in the target language. Students wear a headset with earphones and a microphone. They hear a voice from the master tape which mostly duplicates what they read in the test booklet. The microphone will record their spoken responses to the questions. This test is administered at the Language Learning Center (<http://llc.msu.edu/>). Results from the MSU administered SOPI are accepted by the Michigan Department of Education but not in other states at this time. The cost is \$95.

## ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI)

In the ACTFL OPI, a trained interviewer speaks to the student and the interview is recorded. At MSU, this interview is normally done via a proctored phone conversation. A carefully structured conversation begins with warm-up questions, then with questions that probe the student's level. The interview is interactional and conversational in nature. The cost is \$164. The computerized version of this test (OPIc) is available for Spanish for \$95.

# Requirements for Teacher Candidates

## TE proficiency requirements

Students who wish to teach French, German, Italian, Latin (reading/writing only) or Spanish are required by the Michigan Department of Education to demonstrate an "Advanced-Low" level of proficiency before they can be certified to teach those languages.

Students who wish to teach Japanese, Chinese, Russian or Arabic are required to demonstrate an "Intermediate-High" level of proficiency to become certified.

Secondary education students with teaching majors in world languages must demonstrate the required level of proficiency (and pass the appropriate MTTC) to progress to the teaching internship year.

Students should visit <http://celta.msu.edu/assessment/sopi.php> to view test dates and register for a SOPI test for French, German, and Spanish. Contact the CeLTA testing office at (517) 432-6770 to register for an OPI proficiency test for all other languages.



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