

ORAL EXAMS  
USEFUL SUGGESTIONS

Four stages: Warm-up, Level check, Probe, Wind-~~down~~. (list of material)  
Remain aware of interview phase: level & purpose of question.

(Function, Content & accuracy)

Keep a relaxed atmosphere - avoid sensitive topics.

Candidate must do most of the talking. Watch for recycled vocab.

Use "minimal" encouragers. Indicate attentiveness and interest.

No "baby talk". Try to maintain a natural "focused" conversation.

Questions may be rephraseable: from elaborate to simple.

Avoid gestures which reveal meaning.

Avoid questions answerable "yes/no", unless purposeful leading quest.

Are you getting a rateable sample? Great variety with minimum content.

Recognize the merit of circumlocutions. (Unless a discrete point test)

Elicit forms other than the first person singular.

Pace and method may vary markedly from classroom. (Pauses are rateable).

Have them ask you questions also (designate tense).

Possible grading criteria: -use of material on your list  
-comprehension, accent, grammar, vocab., fluency  
-function, content, accuracy  
-overall impression (language production and communication)

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Immediate feed-back (evaluation sheet) -to take notes or not?

Have some props or situations ready.

Possibility of "dramatic" role playing.

Prepare your students for the oral exam "interview" (illustrate?)

Record some interviews: -self evaluation, accurate evaluation,  
student feed-back, "communication?"

Consider native speech patterns and cultural differences.

THEORY AND REALITY

It is best not to test your own students.

Length, conditions and scheduling of interview.

Objectivity of your exams at first vs. value.

Logistics.

ORAL PROFICIENCY TESTING  
Method, Advice, Question Types

Retain normal speaking pace and tone unless absolutely impossible. Avoid "caretaker" speech.

Don't take time for corrections and teaching.

Talk as little as possible.

Be patient -- wait through pauses: they are both painful and productive.

Be sure to obtain a ratable sample.

FOUR STAGES

Warm-up                      Level Check                      Probes                      Wind-down

SOME QUESTION TYPES (from ETS Manual)

TYPE	EXAMPLE	OPTIMAL LEVEL(S)
1. Yes/No	Do you live in _____?	0 - 0+ (Novice)
2. Choice	How did you get here, by car or bus?	0+ - 1 (Novice-Intermediate)
3. Polite request	Would you describe this room, please?	All
4. Information (4A with props -- maps, assumed roles, etc.)	Who was with you? Why . . . ?	0+ - 3 (Novice - Superior) 0+ - 1 (Novice/high - Int.)
5. Familiar situation	Please order a hotel room with a double bed and bath at the cheapest rate. NO SERIOUS COMPLICATION	0+ - 1+ (Novice/high - Int./high)
6. Candidate interviews tester	Please ask me some questions, such as where I live, etc.	0+ - 1 (Novice/high - Int.)
(6A Ask & Tell	I have to leave for a minute. Would you please ask (partner) about X and then tell me when I get back?	I - 2 (Int.-Advanced)
7. Rephrasable question	Tell me about bicameral legislatures? Then: Tell me about legislatures with two houses.	not below 1+ (Int./high)
8. Hypothetical	If you . . .	3 - 4+ (Superior)
9. Unfamiliar	Directing tailor to make suit.	3 - 4+ (Superior)
10. Descriptive prelude	Set up complex idea and ask subject's analysis of own thoughts.	3 - 5 (Superior)
11. Conversational prelude	-- two testers set the stage by discussing X and then seek subject's opinion	3 - 5

TESTING KIT

Suggested Topics For An Oral Test

Introductions and Greetings

Sample Opening Questions:

- Have you been waiting long?
- How did you get to FSI?
- Have you been in this building before?
- Did you have difficulty finding this office?

Topics useful for all levels:

Training and experience with the language  
Most recent assignment abroad

- Type of work and responsibilities
- Problems on the job
- Problems of the country, its government, economy, etc.
- Living conditions, travel, recreation
- Earlier assignments (as above)
- Next assignment
- People and events in the news (descriptions, not opinions)

Topics for  
S-0+ to S-2+  
(*Novice - Adv/High*)

- Family and House
- Date and Time
- Weather
- Giving Directions
- Situations:
  - Getting a hotel room
  - Buying a train ticket
  - Changing money
  - Taking a taxi

Topics for  
S-2 to S-4  
*Advanced to Superior (mid-range)*

- Explanation of American terms and culture (e.g. "red tape," "Buy American" act, U.S. system of education)
- Reasons for career choice
- Visa interview or other job situations

Topics for  
S-3+ to S-5  
*Superior (mid-range) to Native*

- International politics
- Cultural differences
- Dictation of letter on assigned topic
- Translation from English

GENERAL STRUCTURE

THREE PLANES:

FOUR PHASES:

WARM-UP

LEVEL CHECK

PROBES

MIND-UP

(Iterative process)

PSYCHOLOGICAL:

Put candidate at ease.

Proves to candidate what he or she can do

Proves to candidate what he or she cannot do

Returns candidate to level at which he or she functions most accurately

Gives candidate feeling of accomplishment

LINGUISTIC:

LS HANDBOOK ON QUESTION TYPES

Reacquaints candidate with language if necessary

Checks for functions and content which candidate performs with greatest accuracy

Checks for functions and content which candidate performs with least accuracy

(Chance to check that the iterative process is complete)

EVALUATIVE:

VERBAL REFLECTIONS

Gives testers preliminary indication of level of speech and understanding skills

Finds candidate's S-level

Finds candidate's U-level

Finds level at which candidate can no longer speak accurately

(Gives global rating)

Finds level at which candidate can no longer understand accurately

## TESTING KIT

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### QUESTIONS FOR EXAMINERS

1. Are the first questions natural, friendly, easy to understand?
2. Are questions requiring only short answers avoided?
3. Are the topics varied? Is transition from one topic to another natural? Is the examinee given a chance to expand on one topic before another is introduced?
4. Are there too many vague questions? (e.g. "What do you think of the situation in the Congo?")
5. Is the examinee forced to express his opinion about U.S. Government Policy? (e.g. "If you were President, what would you do about Human Rights?") "How did you like the State-of-the-Union Message?")
6. Are the questions appropriate for the ability of the examinee? Is the S-2 asked easy enough questions? Is the S-4 asked hard enough questions? (Consider vocabulary, structure, subject matter.)
7. Is the examinee given the opportunity to talk sufficiently about the past? the future?
8. Is he given the opportunity (or forced, if necessary) to use the present subjunctive (including commands)? the past subjunctive? On the other hand, are there too many subjunctive questions?

QUESTION TYPES IN RELATION TO CANDIDATE PERFORMANCE  
(CAPSULE CHARACTERIZATION)

<u>ACTFL/ETS LEVEL</u>	<u>ILR LEVEL</u>	<u>CANDIDATE</u>	<u>TECHNIQUE</u>
NOVICE	0 - 0+	SINGLE WORDS MEMORIZED MATERIAL RECYCLES MATERIAL FROM TESTERS BAREST COMMUNICATION	*PROPS *YES/NO QUESTIONS *CHOICE QUESTIONS
INTERMEDIATE	1 - 1+	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS PAINFUL PAUSES	PROPS *POLITE REQUEST *INFORMATION QUESTIONS *S-I SITUATIONS *CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS TESTERS *ASK & TELL
ADVANCED	2 - 2+	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS SOME DESCRIPTION SOME NARRATION PRODUCTIVE PAUSES SOME POLITE GAP FILLERS	INFORMATION QUESTIONS S-I SITUATIONS WITH COMPLICATIONS *REPHRASABLE QUESTIONS *(HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS)
SUPERIOR	3	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FULL DESCRIPTION FULL NARRATION CORE GRAMMAR BASICALLY CORRECT SOME CIRCUMLOCUTION IN VOCABULARY SOME SUPPORTED OPINION	INFORMATION QUESTIONS REPHRASABLE QUESTIONS *UNFAMILIAR SITUATIONS *HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS *DESCRIPTIVE PRELUDE QUESTIONS INFO PASS
	4	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS EXTENSIVE DESCRIPTION EXTENSIVE NARRATION PRECISE VOCABULARY & IDIOMS FULL SUPPORTED OPINION	INFORMATION QUESTIONS REPHRASABLE QUESTIONS UNFAMILIAR SITUATIONS CALLING FOR TAILORING LANGUAGE HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS DESCRIPTIVE PRELUDE QUESTIONS *CONVERSATIONAL PRELUDE QUESTIONS

\*SIGNIFIES NEW QUESTION TYPE

( ) SIGNIFIES A TYPE WHICH MAY APPLY TO A GIVEN LEVEL