

Ways to enhance your language proficiency in preparation for the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview



Here is a list of useful resources that provide opportunities to develop your proficiency outside the language classroom:

- Volunteer somewhere where you will have access to target language speakers. If you are a Spanish major and live in Lincoln, El Centro de las Américas (2032 U St Lincoln, NE 68503, (402) 474-3950) is a great place to start or Juan Diego Center (Catholic Charities) in Omaha.
<http://www.ccomaha.org/take-action/volunteer> ...
- Make friends in town that are speakers of the target language (you can do this by asking your language professors about information on the language tables). If you attend a regular language “table”, you will not only have the opportunity to speak the language on a regular basis, you will meet others in your same situation and you can arrange regular more frequent meeting times to get together and converse in the target language.
- Get cable or Internet access to TV programs and movies, podcasts, etc.. in the target language and make a point to watch them regularly. A recommended time per day is one to two hours of target language input.
- Read target language newspapers daily. This will help you keep up with current events in the target culture as well as help maintain your vocabulary and reading proficiency level.
- Read for fun in the target language. Choose a book series you enjoy in English and purchase it in the target language online. The Internet Bookshop or Amazon often has these available. For example, one student loved the Harry Potter series and began to read these again but in the target language. Another student read Manga books in the target language. Another strategy is to read a favorite bestseller, but read it in the target language.

- Take your current language classes very seriously and maximize your chances to speak, read, write and listen in the target language while in class. Ask your professor for tips on how to improve your proficiency level.
- Get to know the other students in your program who are in your language group. Arrange to speak only in the target language with them when you see each other and in methods class, etc. Work as a team to help each other and share resources and target language practice opportunities.
- Go to the ACTFL OPI site <http://www.languagetesting.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/OPI-FAQ-20121.pdf> and become familiar with the requirements to pass at the Advanced Low level. Test yourself and do practice questions to see if you are ready. Visit this site for examples of questions found on the exam:
<http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/>

Study Abroad: Immersion in the language and culture



Going abroad does not guarantee that you will automatically raise your language proficiency level. You must surround yourself with native speakers, a homestay is the best way to increase your language proficiency. Avoid English speakers in order to begin to think and dream in the target language.

Here are some recommendations to help you raise your language proficiency level while studying abroad:

- Choose a program that will allow you the option of staying with a host family.
- List on your preferences for the host family to stay with a family that has children as this will increase your opportunities for interaction in the community.

- Make your study abroad experience as long as possible. The longer the better, and the more chance you will have at raising your proficiency level to Advanced Low. We recommend a full year of study abroad.
- Set up a blog or take a journal so that you can write in the target language daily about your experiences. Take the journal with you (whether it is in your phone or a hard copy) wherever you go and record new words you learn. Make a point to study those words when you get home, and try to use them that day in your journal or oral conversations.
- Volunteer in the community. This could take the form of tutoring in English or helping in your area of talent. For example, one student had a lot of experience in choirs, and volunteered to help out with a children's choir.
- Join a choir, book club or coach an athletic sport through a club or after school program. This will allow you to acquire vocabulary not learned elsewhere.
- DO NOT spend time outside of school with people who will influence you not to speak the target language. If you must spend time with people who are not speakers of the target language (or even if they are speakers of the target language, but speak English well), let them know FROM THE VERY BEGINNING that you are going to make the most of your experience by only speaking in the target language. This is very important, and probably one of the biggest factors in whether or not you acquire an advanced level of language proficiency.

What can I do when I return from my study abroad experience to maintain my proficiency level?



One of the biggest mistakes we see students make is that they assume that once they have reached a language level they will stay there. This is a myth. You will need to

make a conscious effort to maintain (and continue to improve) your language level once you have returned. Here are some suggestions for how to do this (many of which are things you could do before going abroad as well).

- Maintain a close relationship with your host family from your study abroad experience and try to stay in daily or weekly contact with them via email or Skype.
- Make friends in town who are speakers of the target language (you can do this by asking your language professors about information on the language tables). If you attend a regular language “table”, you will not only have the opportunity to speak the language on a regular basis, you will meet other people that are in your same situation and you can arrange regular more frequent meeting times to get together and converse in the target language.
- Get cable or Internet access to TV. programs and movies, podcasts, etc.. in the target language and make a point to watch them regularly.
- Read target language newspapers daily. This will help you keep up with current events in the target culture as well as help maintain your vocabulary and reading proficiency level.
- Read for fun in the target language. Choose a book series you enjoy in English and see if you can get it in the target language online. The Internet Bookshop or Amazon often has these available. For example, one student loved the Harry Potter series and began to read these again but in the target language. Another student read Manga books in the target language.
- Attend or audit a language class (even if you don’t need the credit) just to practice your language skills and continue to improve your language proficiency.