

A Note on ACTFL Levels for Parents

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has developed foreign language proficiency levels for students. Rather than describing the number of words or verb tenses a student knows, these levels describe **what a student can do**, with a series of “I can do...” statements. ACTFL has established standards for interpersonal, presentational, interpretive and intercultural communication for 11 levels; novice low through distinguished. Detailed Performance Descriptors for each level are available at the ACTFL website.

Here’s a very simplified and summarized view of the Novice and Intermediate Level.

	Topics	How	“I Can” Examples	Typically Attained <i>After</i> *
Novice Low	Very familiar topics	Memorized words or phrases, aided by hand gestures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce myself (name, age). • Say how I feel. • Name activities I do every day. 	2 years of high-school language study
Novice Mid	Very familiar and everyday topics	Memorized words, phrases and simple sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask and answer questions about school, food, activities. • Say what I like and dislike about having a pet. • Say what school subjects are my most and least favorite. 	2 years of high-school language study
Novice High	Familiar and everyday topics	Simple sentences most of the time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange information about things to do in my town. • Describe a simple process such as how to make something. • Exchange ideas about ways to stay healthy. 	7 years of a content-based language program in K-6
Intermediate Low	Familiar and everyday topics	Simple sentences and appropriate follow-up questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a conversation to determine how we should spend our spring break. • Interact to request a repair service for a broken appliance. • Tell a simple story about a childhood memory. 	7 years of immersion K-6 or 4 years of high school or 2 semesters of college
Intermediate Mid	Variety of familiar situations	Sentences and series of sentences and a variety of follow-up questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support my point of view on rules or policies such as phone use, dress code, or requirements for driving. • Exchange opinions about a movie and express whether the book or movie is better. • Give a presentation about a famous person or historical figure and give basic points about the merits of their contributions. 	6-8 years of study, including Advanced Placement (AP) level or 4-6 semesters of college
Intermediate High	Variety of situations, sometimes involving complications	Connected sentences and paragraphs and a variety of questions across various timeframes (past, present, future)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with an airline representative to make the necessary changes to an already-ticketed flight. • Explain the series of steps taken to complete a task or experiment and describe the results. • Present my reactions to a current event and explain what led to the event being in the news. 	6-8 years of study, including Advanced Placement (AP) level or 4-6 semesters of college

Source: ACTFL.com; <https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements>;
https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/TLE_pdf/OralProficiencyWorkplacePoster.pdf

*Certain languages can take more or less time.

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