

Texas Oral Proficiency Test (TOPT) Preparation

- Pre-test Self- assessment prepares you to determine your own confidence in your abilities. Please screen yourself and hand the sheets to the representative.
- Our representative will assess you using the Oral Language Screener. This process will take about 10 minutes each, so be prepared to step up and assess immediately.
- If you are ready to sign up for the TOPT test, please do by _____ for the _____ exam date. If you are not ready to take and pass the test, you may wait and take the test later. We will provide remediation for you, but do practice on your own using your own resources and these tips.

PREPARING FOR THE TOPT

TOPT information at: <http://www.topt.nesinc.com/> Specifics on test preparation are on pages 37- 52. Be sure to carefully study for the test ahead of time using the bulletin.

The TOPT is designed to assess the oral language proficiency required of teachers seeking a certificate in Spanish, French, or bilingual education. The explicit purpose of these tests is to identify those candidates for certification who have demonstrated the level of oral proficiency required to perform satisfactorily in Texas classrooms. Candidates are asked to respond to specific speaking tasks in order to demonstrate their proficiency in the language.

This 90 minute test session will be taken via headphones with taped directions. You will not be able to stop and will be assessed on the quality of your answers.

Test Format

The TOPT is a criterion-referenced test. This means that the rating that a candidate receives is determined according to a standard set of criteria. Performance is not rated by how one candidate compares to another. Each form of the test has five questions for each of the three types of test questions. Thus, there is a total of 15 test questions plus a set of warm-up questions. The three question types are described below.

◆ Picture-Based Questions

The candidate looks at a picture or series of pictures in the test booklet and responds to verbal questions about the pictures. The tasks include such undertakings as giving directions, describing activities in a familiar setting, or telling a story.

◆ Topic Questions

The candidate is given a description of a situation and is asked to explain or discuss a topic, such as describing a procedure step by step, presenting advantages and disadvantages, explaining and defending a point of view, or imagining a hypothetical situation and commenting on it.

◆ Situation Questions

The candidate is given a description of a real-life situation (e.g., giving advice to a friend, apologizing for having offended someone, making a formal presentation to a group) and is asked to respond to it. In this section, *how* the candidate responds is especially important since these situations require the tailoring of language to the situation and to the listener.

TOPT SCORING SCALE

1 The level 1 (or Intermediate Mid) speaker is able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated, basic, and communicative tasks and social situations. He or she can talk simply about self and family members and can ask and answer questions and participate in simple conversations on topics beyond the most immediate needs (e.g., personal history and leisure time activities). The length of spoken statements is increased over that at lower levels, but speech may be characterized by frequent long pauses, since the smooth incorporation of even basic conversational strategies is often hindered as the speaker struggles to create appropriate language forms. Although misunderstandings arise, the Intermediate Mid speaker can generally be understood by listeners who are accustomed to dealing with speakers at this level.

2 The level 2 (or Intermediate High) speaker is able to handle most uncomplicated communicative tasks and social situations. He or she can initiate, sustain, and close a general conversation with a number of strategies appropriate to a range of circumstances and topics, but errors are evident. Limited vocabulary still necessitates hesitation and may bring about slightly unexpected circumlocution (the use of an unnecessarily large number of words to convey meaning or to express an idea). There is emerging evidence of connected discourse in speech, particularly for simple narration and/or description. The Intermediate High speaker can generally be understood by listeners not accustomed to dealing with speakers at this level, but repetition may be required.

3 The level 3 (or Advanced) speaker is able to satisfy the requirements of everyday situations and routine school and work requirements. He or she can handle with confidence, but not with facility, complicated tasks and social situations, such as elaborating, complaining, and apologizing. The Advanced speaker can narrate and describe with some details, linking sentences together smoothly. He or she can communicate facts and talk casually about topics of current public and personal interest, using general vocabulary. Shortcomings can often be smoothed over by communicative strategies, such as filling pauses, stalling, and using different rates of speech. Circumlocution that arises from vocabulary or syntactic limitations very often is quite successful, although some groping for words may be evident. The Advanced-level speaker can be understood without difficulty by most native speakers of the language.

4/5* The level 4/5 (or Advanced High) speaker is able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday, school, and work situations. He or she can discuss concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. There is emerging evidence of the ability to support opinions, explain in detail, and hypothesize. The Advanced High speaker often shows a well-developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms with confident use of communicative strategies such as paraphrasing and circumlocution. Appropriate vocabulary and intonation are effectively used to communicate fine shades of meaning. The Advanced High speaker often shows remarkable fluency and ease of speech, but under the demands of higher-level, complex tasks, language may break down or prove inadequate.

* For purposes of reporting results, no distinction is made between the individual scores of "4" and "5"; these are collapsed into the category of "4."

PREPARATION

Oral proficiency in a language is acquired over a period of time through continual practice and use of the spoken language. The sole purpose of the test is to allow you to demonstrate your oral proficiency in the language. However, it is to your advantage to know what level of ability you are expected to demonstrate to receive a passing score on the TOPT and to become familiar with the unique testing format of the TOPT before you actually take the test. The information in this section is designed to help you obtain information and practice materials that will assist you in doing your best on the test.

General Preparation Notes

1. Determine whether you are ready to take the TOPT. The following is a description of the level of speaking proficiency a person who passes the TOPT is generally expected to demonstrate in his or her speech.

- ◆ Carry out a conversation in Spanish in a clearly participatory manner.
- ◆ Initiate, sustain, and bring to closure a wide variety of communicative tasks, including requests, explanations, and short explanatory talks, and tasks that require the use of diverse communication strategies due to a complicated or unexpected situation.
- ◆ Handle the linguistic demands of routine social, school, and work situations, including complaints, apologies, and elaborations.
- ◆ Narrate in present, past, and future tenses.
- ◆ Describe people, places, and events.
- ◆ Link facts, details, and thoughts together smoothly into paragraph-length utterances as opposed to speaking in sentences.

These abilities reflect, in general, the level of proficiency required to obtain a passing score of "6" on the TOPT and to exhibit the characteristics of an "Advanced" speaker on the Proficiency Guidelines Scale developed by the ACTFL.

2. Become comfortable with the method of test administration. You may want to practice responding to items in Spanish while speaking into a tape recorder in order to become accustomed to this process.

3. Enhance your speaking ability by practicing.

Although you may speak Spanish well, you may also be "rusty" if you have not used the language for a long time. This can be detrimental to your performance on a speaking test, so practice before taking the test.

Study TABLE 10: DESCRIPTION OF THE SCORING SCALE BY FEATURES OF PERFORMANCE PROFICIENCY to see the rubric criteria for the various scores.

If candidates do not pass the test, their score reports will indicate one or more of the following areas for improvement in their oral response:

1. Function: Failure to address the communicative task. The speaker has difficulty in achieving the communicative purpose of the test item (e.g., story, explanation, instructions, opinion, argument). Significant elements of the oral response requested in the test item are left out or miscommunicated.

2. Content: Few ideas, insufficient organization. The speaker has limited ability to organize the response, such that the response may be disjointed or unclear. Thus, the oral response is reduced to a series of discrete sentences or ideas, which may lack main ideas, conclusions, and transitional phrases. Although the response may be linguistically correct, it may lack a sufficient amount of information or the same idea may be repeated several times.

3. Vocabulary: Use of limited, inaccurate, and/or misformed words. The speaker has inadequate vocabulary to express the necessary information. Control of basic, high-frequency vocabulary may be good, but serious gaps may occur when talking about topics of broader interest. The speaker may talk in generalities and avoid details. The speaker may choose incorrect or vague words, may use misformed versions of low-frequency words, and may repeat key details.

4. Grammar: Inappropriate use of tense, mood, agreement, syntax. The speaker uses past tense sporadically or not at all, or the past tenses may be used in the wrong contexts. There may be consistent grammatical errors, either in language forms themselves or in the choice of form or tense for the context. Present tense forms may be inaccurate.

5. Comprehensibility: Lack of intelligibility at times. The speaker fails to get the meaning across in the absence of needed vocabulary or correct forms. The message is seriously flawed or even severely incomprehensible. The speaker's pronunciation may interfere with communication. At times, the response is not easily intelligible. Speech may be so slow or hesitant that it would impede comprehension. The speaker may fail to use circumlocution when he/she cannot produce specific words.

6. Sociocultural Fit: Failure to use culturally acceptable speech. The speaker fails to tailor the language to the audience. There may be little or no attempt to convey the information in the appropriate register. The speaker may fumble for words to express concern and to involve others in the situation. *Tú* and *usted* (Spanish) are mixed or otherwise used inappropriately.

7. Fluency: Lack of flow, long pauses, fumbling for words. The speaker's response is characterized by long pauses, struggles for expression, extreme brevity, or even complete linguistic breakdown. The speaker may use English or give up, rather than find another way to express the thought.