

The American Sign Language Proficiency Interview ASLPI

Description

The American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI) is a structured conversation of about 20 minutes which is carried out between a candidate and a trained interviewer. The ASLPI was modeled after the Educational Testing Service model, the Language Proficiency Interview (LPI). The ASLPI attempts to give the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate the level of proficiency at which he or she is able to perform in ASL in a realistic conversational situation. Following the interview, the candidate's performance is given a numerical rating that can range from 0-5. These ASLPI proficiency levels are described below.

The interview procedure and associated rating system were originally developed by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the US Department of State and have been used by that Department and other government agencies to measure language proficiency in language learning programs and for selection and employment purposes. This has been slightly adapted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and incorporated as part of its LPIs which are administered by ETS. Results of the LPI are currently being used not only for teacher training and certification, but also in connection with the Peace Corps Training Programs, course credit for language study, and other areas of language assessment requiring a highly face-valid measure of speaking proficiency. The ASLPI has been used at CSUN since 1992 as evaluation of credential candidates' ASL proficiency prior to their student teaching of DHH students.

The ASLPI has borrowed the interviewing procedure and associated rating system from ETS-LPI. Adaptations were made with respect to ASL as a language, particularly in the execution of signs and sign-word order. The candidate's performance will be given a numerical rating based on the descriptions below.

Content of the Interview

There are no set questions or topics in the interview to which candidates are expected to respond. However, several broad based areas of conversation topics are covered, including general autobiographical information. Examples of areas covered are size and composition of family, current past areas of residence, personal interest and hobbies, work related topics (past and current job activities), educational experiences, current events and contemporary issues. A variety of additional topics are discussed, depending on the background and interest of the candidate.

The interview does not require a detailed knowledge of facts about, or close familiarity with any particular area or topic. The intent is not to "quiz" the candidate but to provide an opportunity for the individual to demonstrate the highest level of signing performance of which he or she is capable within a relatively free conversational setting.

Preparation for the Interview

It is not possible to study or train for the ASLPI in any effective manner within the span of a few days preceding the interview. Because of the wide-range nature of the conversation, it would probably not be helpful to study specific vocabulary lists or to prepare, in advance, a series of responses to a set topic. A more appropriate preparation for the interview would involve:

- A detailed reading of this document and familiarization with the interview procedure described
- Conversational practice in a situation similar to the interview process (see below). This would be particularly helpful for someone who has not had frequent opportunity to converse on a one-to-one basis in the language of the interview.
- An effort to sign as accurately and extensively as possible in the actual interview situation. Although the interviewers are experienced in leading candidates to sign readily and openly, candidates can facilitate the process by making a conscious and continuing effort during the interview to present the best possible sample of their signing performance.
- Some practice in signing in front of a video camera. Each ASLPI is videotaped for both rating and record keeping. Although the videotaping is relatively unobtrusive, candidates who have any concerns about this aspect of the interview may wish to carry out some practice interviews in front of a camera.

The Interview Process

On the date set for the interview, the candidate should report to the site 30 minutes before the interview is scheduled. This allows time for checking-in and other administrative details. It is also helpful to warm-up prior to the interview.

The interview is conducted in a quiet room. A video camera is set up to record the interview. There are typically 3 raters and one interviewer for each interview.

The interview itself involves approximately 20 minutes of conversation beginning at a relatively simple level and increasing in pace and linguistic complexity to the point of maximum candidate performance.

Language Proficiency Levels

A candidate's performance on the ASLPI is given a numerical rating from 0-5. The ratings are descriptions that indicate the kinds of real-life situations in which the individual is considered capable of speaking in an appropriate and effective manner. By referring to these descriptions, the nature and language performance represented can be determined.

Level 0- Unable to function in the language

Signed production limited to occasional isolated signs; little or no comprehension of even the most simplified and slow signing; essentially no functional communication in the course of the interview.

Level 1- Able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements

Can ask and answer questions on highly familiar topics, within the scope of a very limited language experience; can understand simple questions and statements, allowing for slowed signing, repetition, or paraphrasing; signing vocabulary inadequate to express anything by the most elementary needs; error in production and grammar are frequent but can be understood by a native signer used to dealing with people attempting to use ASL.

Level 2- Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements

Can handle with confidence but not facility most social situations, including introduction and casual conversations about current events, and deal with work, family, and autobiographical information; language competence sufficient to handle limited work requirements, not involving linguistic complications or difficulties; can get the gist of most knowledge; has signing vocabulary sufficient to communicate simply with some circumlocution; "accent" though often quite faulty, is intelligible; can usually handle elementary constructions accurately, but does not have a thorough or confident control of the grammar.

Level 3- Able to sign ASL with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social, and professional topics

Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease; comprehension is quite complete for normal rate of signing; vocabulary is broad enough that it is rarely necessary to grope for a sign; "accent" may be obviously non-native; control of grammar is good; errors virtually never interfere with understanding.

Level 4- Able to use the language fluently and accurately on all level normally pertinent to professional needs

Can understand and participate in any conversation within the range of his or her experience with a high degree of fluency and precision of vocabulary; should rarely be taken for a native but can respond appropriately even in unfamiliar situations; errors of execution and grammar are rare.

Level 5- Language proficiency equivalent to that of a sophisticated native signer.

Has complete fluency in the language such that his or her signing is fully accepted by native signers as native in all of its aspects, including breadth of vocabulary and idioms, colloquialisms, and pertinent cultural references.

Except for Level 5, a “.5” value may be added to each of the above levels. The “.5” indicates the individual’s performance substantially exceeds the minimum requirements for that level but fails to meet all the requirements for the next higher level. A “.5” rating, therefore, does not represent a midway point between two levels, but is used to indicate a degree of performance that approaches but does not satisfy in all respects the requirements of the higher level. Including the “.5” values, the possible interview ratings are: 0, 0.5, 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, 5

Linguistic Areas Rated in the Interview

Grammatical Accuracy: Since structure is a fundamental aspect of ASL, grammatical accuracy receives close attention. The interviewer will typically attempt to stimulate discussion require use of various moods, tenses, and persons beyond the simple narrative present and first person (“I”) forms. Appropriate use of the directionality word-signs, noun placement, non-manual signals, negation, and other aspects of language structure will also be evaluated.

Vocabulary: The range of the individual’s signing vocabulary is tested throughout the interview. Candidates are given the opportunity to use vocabulary appropriate to a variety of topics. One word may have several potential signs for different concepts and the use of appropriate signs in a certain context will be observed and analyzed.

Fluency: The speed of the candidate’s signing is not an important aspect of fluency as this term is used in this interview context. Rather, fluency refers to overall smoothness, continuity and naturalness of the signing in absence of pauses for rephrasing sentences, grouping for signs, and so forth. Fluency is evaluated during the middle and latter stages of the interview, when the candidate has the chance to “warm-up.”

Accent/Pronunciation/Production: ASL signing has it certain patterns of production of signing which is critical to the whole conversation and to being an effective sign communicator. Particular signs must be produced in a certain manner for clarity. For this reason, the candidate’s ability to produce the signs in a clearly comprehensible manner is evaluated throughout the interview. Native-like accent is not an important factor except at levels 4 and 5.

Comprehension: The general level of comprehension is evaluated on the basis of conversational performance during the interview when the individual attempts to respond to statements or questions asked by the interviewer. There is no videotape in which the candidate has to read for comprehension ability.