

Reaching the **intermediate** stage in a language is one of the most exciting milestones in a learning journey. It's the point where everything begins to *work together*—your vocabulary, your grammar, your confidence—and suddenly you can have real conversations, express your thoughts, and connect with people in meaningful ways. Bottom line: it is the moment when you can create with language. It isn't polished, but you are making sense.

But “intermediate” is a broad category. If you've ever wondered what *exactly* you should be able to do at Intermediate Low, Mid, and High, this guide breaks it down clearly and simply.

Use this post to self-assess, set goals, and celebrate your progress.

What Intermediate Speakers Can Do

At the intermediate level, you're no longer relying only on memorized phrases. You can create language, combine ideas, and communicate in a wider variety of situations.

Here's what this looks like:

General Intermediate Abilities

- You can have conversations about familiar topics like school, food, hobbies, and daily life.
- You can ask for and give opinions about things you know.
- You can manage everyday tasks in a store, restaurant, or school setting.
- You can talk about past experiences and future plans using connected sentences.
- You can ask for clarification when you don't understand—and clarify your own meaning when needed.

From here, the intermediate level splits into three sublevels. Let's break them down.

Intermediate Low: Building Confidence with Full Sentences

At this stage, you're moving beyond single words and phrases and beginning to speak in **complete sentences**. You rely heavily on what is familiar, but you're developing the ability to add detail.

What You Can Do:

- Speak in **full sentences** on familiar topics.
- Describe events using **simple present or past tense**.
- Give personal opinions and explain **why** you think or feel a certain way.
- Talk about your experiences and preferences with some detail.
- Respond to open-ended questions using **multiple connected sentences**.

What it feels like:

You can communicate well when the topic is something you know, but conversations may still feel effortful. You might hesitate or restart when searching for words.

Intermediate Mid: Expanding Range and Confidence

Here, your sentences begin linking together more naturally. You can narrate, explain, and compare ideas. You can talk for longer without stopping.

What You Can Do:

- Describe and narrate in **various time frames** (present, past, sometimes future) using connected sentences.
- Compare and contrast familiar experiences or things.
- Support your opinions with reasons, examples, or personal experiences.
- Explain what you do in different places or situations (school, weekends, vacations).
- Maintain conversations on familiar topics with **increasing ease and fluidity**.

What it feels like:

You're becoming more conversational. You can start, maintain, and finish discussions with more confidence. Occasional errors happen, but they don't stop communication.

Intermediate High: On the Edge of Advanced

Intermediate High is often described as the "bridge" to advanced proficiency. You can express yourself in clear, detailed, organized ways—especially about familiar topics.

What You Can Do:

- Handle a wide range of familiar topics with **detail and accuracy**.
- Describe complex situations and tell detailed stories in **multiple time frames** (past, present, future).
- Use transition words (first, then, however, because, in contrast...) to organize what you want to say.
- Explain your thoughts, feelings, and opinions clearly.
- Adjust your vocabulary, register, or tone depending on the audience or context.

What it feels like:

You can participate comfortably in long conversations, interviews, and discussions. Errors still occur—especially with complex grammar—but your communication is solid and reliable.

Why This Matters

Knowing your level helps you:

Set realistic goals

Choose the right materials and activities

Track your progress

Move intentionally toward the advanced levels

The intermediate stage is where true fluency starts to grow. Celebrate it. Lean into it. Keep pushing forward.

What's Your Current Level?

Are you Intermediate Low, Mid, or High?

1. One-Page Teacher and Learner Rubric: Intermediate Speaking

Intermediate Speaking Rubric (ACTFL-Aligned)

Use this rubric to evaluate interpersonal or presentational speaking tasks at the Intermediate level.

INTERMEDIATE LOW

Communication

- Speaks in full, formulaic sentences on familiar topics
- Responses contain simple details
- Can handle basic everyday tasks (store, school, restaurant)

Language Control

- Mostly present tense
- Occasional use of basic past tense
- Frequent errors but meaning is generally clear

Vocabulary

- Uses high-frequency vocabulary
- Struggles when reaching beyond familiar topics

Conversation Skills

- Answers open-ended questions with multiple simple sentences
- Hesitates often; needs support or prompting

INTERMEDIATE MID

Communication

- Produces strings of connected sentences
- Can describe, explain, and narrate in simple past, present, and emerging future

Language Control

- Stronger control of present/past
- Errors don't impede comprehension
- Attempts more complex structures

Vocabulary

- Expanding vocabulary for a wider range of familiar topics
- Can support opinions with reasons or examples

Conversation Skills

- Maintains conversations with minimal support
- Can compare, contrast, and add detail

INTERMEDIATE HIGH

Communication

- Speaks in detailed, organized, extended discourse
- Can describe, narrate, and explain in multiple time frames

Language Control

- Generally accurate on familiar content
- Uses transition words to organize ideas
- Errors appear in complex structures but do not affect meaning

Vocabulary

- Uses precise vocabulary for familiar and some unfamiliar topics
- Can adjust language depending on context or audience

Conversation Skills

- Participates fully in conversations
- Can clarify, restate, and expand ideas independently

2. Student Self-Assessment Checklist (Printable)

Check all that apply to see your current Intermediate speaking level.

INTERMEDIATE LOW — I Can...

- ✓ Speak in full sentences about familiar topics (school, family, hobbies)
- ✓ Describe events in simple present or past tense
- ✓ Give my opinions and explain why in a basic way
- ✓ Share preferences and personal experiences
- ✓ Respond to open-ended questions using several connected sentences

INTERMEDIATE MID — I Can...

- ✓ Describe and narrate in different time frames (past/present/future)
- ✓ Compare and contrast familiar things
- ✓ Support my opinions with reasons and examples
- ✓ Explain what I do in different situations or places
- ✓ Keep a conversation going on familiar topics with growing ease

INTERMEDIATE HIGH — I Can...

- ✓ Discuss a wide range of familiar topics with detail and accuracy
- ✓ Tell detailed stories and describe complex situations in multiple time frames
- ✓ Use transitions (first, however, because, finally...) to organize ideas

- ✓ Explain my thoughts and feelings clearly
- ✓ Adjust my language depending on who I'm talking to

3. Speaking Task Cards (Intermediate Low-Mid-High)

Use these for speaking assessments, stations, warm-ups, or interpersonal tasks.

INTERMEDIATE LOW — Task Cards

1. Describe your daily routine.
2. Talk about your family. Who are they? What are they like?
3. What do you do after school or on weekends?
4. Describe what you did yesterday.
5. What foods do you like? What foods do you dislike? Explain why.
6. Describe your classes and teachers.
7. Talk about a place you like to go and what you do there.
8. Tell me about your hobbies or free time activities.

INTERMEDIATE MID — Task Cards

1. Compare two places you know well (your town vs. another, two stores, etc.).
2. Tell a story about something memorable that happened to you.
3. Explain your opinion about school lunches, uniforms, or social media—and give reasons.
4. Describe what you usually do on vacation and what you did last time you traveled.
5. Explain how to do something (make a recipe, play a sport, organize your room).
6. Describe your daily routine on a weekday compared to the weekend.
7. Talk about your future plans and why they are important to you.
8. What is an important tradition or celebration in your life? Explain it.

INTERMEDIATE HIGH — Task Cards

1. Describe a complex situation you've dealt with and how you handled it.
2. Tell a detailed story using past, present, and future.
3. Explain your opinions about a current issue and give supporting examples.
4. Compare two different cultures, communities, or groups you know about.
5. Describe how your life has changed over time and why.
6. Explain your goals for the future and what steps you will take to achieve them.
7. Discuss a problem in your community and propose a solution.
8. Describe an event, trip, or experience in rich detail using transitions.

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