

When learners begin learning a new language, their first major milestone is the **Novice level**—a stage full of excitement, growth, and early wins. Novice learners are just starting to build their foundation. They use memorized words, short phrases, and simple sentences to communicate about the most familiar parts of their lives.

But the Novice level includes a wide range of abilities—from single-word responses to short nearly complete sentences. Understanding these sublevels (Novice Low, Mid, and High) helps teachers differentiate instruction, set goals, and celebrate progress.

Below is a clear guide to what Novice speakers *can* do, followed by a teacher-ready **Novice Speaking Rubric** you can use for assessments, conferences, portfolios, and progress monitoring.

## What Novice Speakers Can Do

Novice speakers rely heavily on memorized language—but they can still communicate meaningfully. Here's what the Novice range looks like in the classroom.

## Novice Speaking: General Abilities

- I can greet someone and introduce myself.
- I can ask and answer simple questions about myself (age, likes, family, hobbies).
- I can describe my daily routine using simple words or memorized sentences.
- I can ask about school and free time—and answer the same questions.
- I can make simple plans with a friend (meet up, do homework, go out).
- I can name common objects and describe pictures in short phrases.
- I can express likes and dislikes.
- I can answer simple questions with single words, lists, or short phrases.

As learners progress, they move from individual words → memorized phrases → short, simple sentences. That growth leads them into **Novice High**, where they begin to *create* their own language.

# Novice Low: Getting Started

Novice Low speakers rely almost entirely on memorized language. They communicate using:

- Single words
- Labels
- Very short chunks

Typical abilities:

- Say their name and where they're from
- Answer simple yes/no or one-word questions
- Name objects (colors, classroom items, food)
- Express basic likes/dislikes in lists
- Describe a person or photo using isolated words

## Novice Mid: Building Phrases

Novice Mid speakers use **memorized phrases and simple sentences** about familiar topics.

They can:

- Introduce themselves with memorized sentences
- Describe family, school, routines, and hobbies in simple language
- Ask and answer basic questions
- Make simple plans with a friend
- Use present-tense memorized structures

## Novice High: Simple Sentences and Short Exchanges

Novice High speakers begin to **create with the language**. They move beyond memorized chunks and start forming their own short sentences.

They can:

- Answer questions about themselves using short, complete sentences
- Describe photos, people, and routines
- Ask and answer questions independently
- Give simple information in response to prompts
- Maintain very short, simple conversations

Novice High is the bridge to the Intermediate level.

## **Novice Speaking Rubric (Teacher Use)**

*A one-page, ACTFL-aligned rubric for assessing Novice-level speaking tasks.*

### **NOVICE LOW**

#### **Communication**

- Uses isolated words, lists, and memorized phrases
- Responds with single words or short chunks

#### **Language Control**

- Frequent errors
- Pronunciation sometimes impedes understanding

#### **Vocabulary**

- Very limited; high-frequency words only
- Can name common objects and familiar people

#### **Conversation Skills**

- Needs prompting
- Struggles to respond independently

# **NOVICE MID**

## **Communication**

- Produces simple memorized sentences
- Gives basic personal information

## **Language Control**

- Mostly present tense
- Errors don't prevent understanding

## **Vocabulary**

- Growing set of high-frequency words
- Can talk about school, hobbies, family, daily routine

## **Conversation Skills**

- Can ask and answer simple questions
- Can participate in scaffolded exchanges

# **NOVICE HIGH**

## **Communication**

- Produces short, simple, original sentences
- Can describe photos, people, and routines

## **Language Control**

- Meaning is clear despite errors
- Begins to combine sentences

## **Vocabulary**

- Sufficient to talk about familiar topics
- Can provide simple details

## **Conversation Skills**

- Asks and answers questions independently
- Sustains short conversations with support

## How to Use This Rubric in Your Classroom

Here are a few ways world language teachers are using this rubric successfully:

### ✓ Speaking Checks

Use the rubric during weekly or biweekly quick checks: describe a photo, answer questions, or complete a role-play.

### ✓ Student Conferences

Help learners understand what they *can do* and set goals for the next sublevel.

### ✓ Portfolios

Include the rubric in speaking portfolios along with recordings, transcripts, or speaking reflections.

### ✓ Targeted Feedback

Highlight one descriptor from each category so students know exactly how to level up.

### Final Thoughts

The Novice level is where learners build the foundation for every future success in the language. With clear expectations, scaffolded speaking tasks, and rubrics like the one above, students gain confidence and momentum—moving toward longer, smoother, more spontaneous communication.

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