English Language Proficiency Interview (LPI) for J-1 Visa Exchange Scholars

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is the Language Proficiency Interview?

The Language Proficiency Interview (LPI) is an English language oral proficiency interview that is carried out by a trained English language proficiency specialist at Penn State. The purpose of the LPI is to verify that a speaker’s proficiency in English is sufficient to participate successfully as a visiting exchange scholar and to function on a day-to-day basis in the United States, in compliance with U.S. Department of State requirements for the J-1 Program.

2. Is advance preparation required for the LPI?

The LPI assesses general language proficiency in English, and therefore no specific advance preparation is needed. You may want to speak English for a few minutes on your own before the interview begins, as a warm-up.

Please have the following materials ready at the time of your interview appointment:

1) A form of **official identification** that includes a recent photo and your name written in Latin script

2) **Headphones** that can be used during the interview if needed.

**Note:** Scholars may not consult any written materials or other resources (e.g., people, texts, websites, on-line translators, dictionaries) during the interview.

If the interviewer concludes that the scholar is consulting outside sources during the interview, the interview will deemed invalid, the interview fee will be forfeited, and there will be a mandatory waiting period of three months before the scholar may schedule a second proficiency interview. The scholar’s PI or faculty sponsor will be notified of the invalid interview.
3. What happens during the interview?

The interviewer will engage you in conversation about various topics related to your academic interests and to everyday life. You will also be asked to perform a role-play involving a situation you are likely to encounter while visiting the United States.

4. How can I interpret my rating on the Language Proficiency Interview?

A ‘Passing’ rating indicates that:

✓ The candidate has demonstrated the language skills necessary to navigate daily life in the U.S., to request assistance if necessary, and to perform J-1 program duties.

A ‘Conditional: Support Required’ rating indicates that:

✓ The candidate is considered to have sufficient English skills to initiate his or her basic program duties, but is required to register for English language support services from EPPIC upon arrival at Penn State to continue to develop his or her English communication skills during the J-1 program. Scholar applicants who receive this language proficiency rating will enroll in EPPIC’s Scholar Member Program for full access to EPPIC’s specialized language support services.

A ‘Not Passing’ rating indicates that:

☒ The candidate has not yet demonstrated the language skills necessary to pursue an extended stay as a visiting scholar at Penn State. Candidates receiving this score are encouraged to improve their language proficiency by pursuing additional language instruction and practice in their home countries before re-applying for a J-1 Exchange Scholar visa (see below for suggestions on improving English skills).

5. If I receive a ‘not passing’ rating, what should I do next?

First, please understand that the language proficiency interview is not a test of specific grammar points or vocabulary in English. The interview is an assessment of how clearly speakers express their ideas in English, can understand everyday questions, and can exchange information in a variety of situations. So, if you did not receive a passing score on the interview, then it will be helpful to practice the above skills in English to improve your proficiency.
[*Note: If there were technical problems during your interview (e.g., poor internet connection, problems with sound volume or poor sound quality), you may request to reschedule your interview.]

To improve your English language proficiency for an interview assessment, we recommend that you **practice listening and speaking in English**. Below is a list of suggestions for language learning to prepare you for a future oral proficiency interview:

- Review the comments provided to you following the interview to identify specific areas where you may improve your English.

- Pursue independent study and practice of English, for example:
  - Take an English course focusing on everyday communication skills in English.
  - Schedule individual lessons or practice sessions with a private teacher or with a skilled peer/colleague to practice everyday conversation and listening skills in English.
  - Use an English language learning tool on a regular basis each week. Many learners of English find that mobile apps or internet-based lessons and recordings (podcasts) that teach English are useful for improving their listening comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary, speaking skills, and conversational strategies in English.

- Do your best to relax in a future interview, to overcome the nervousness that can have a negative impact on interview performance. (Practice will help.)