

## 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 interview is conducted via teleconference using an on-line app called Zoom. The purpose of the LPI is to verify that a J-1 scholar applicant's listening and speaking 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 Visa 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 item ready at the time of your interview appointment:

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

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 be 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. (Scholars may schedule a maximum of three three proficiency interviews per 12 month period.) 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 improve his or her English communication skills during the J-1 program. Scholar applicants who receive this language proficiency rating will be required to enroll in EPPIC's [Scholar Member Program](#) and to participate in EPPIC's specialized language support programming, which includes workshops on academic writing and speaking, individual consultations with language specialists to focus on specific speaking and writing tasks, and weekly speaking groups to improve both everyday and academic communication in spoken English in a university setting.

A **'Not Passing'** rating indicates that:

- ☒ The candidate has not yet demonstrated the English language communication skills necessary to carry out duties as a visiting scholar at Penn State. Candidates receiving this rating 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?

As noted above, if you receive a 'not passing' rating on your English proficiency interview, and still wish to be considered for the J-1 exchange scholar program, then you should seek out language instruction and practice that will help you improve your listening and speaking skills in English, so that you will succeed in meeting the English proficiency standard for the J-1 scholar program. This language instruction may involve a formal course, one-on-one lessons with a language teacher or tutor, working with an English language learning app, or other means of systematic support for learning and practicing English.

After working to improve your English, you may reschedule a second interview. However, a minimum of 20 business days (not including Saturdays and Sundays) must pass between the first and second interview. Scholars may schedule up to three (3) language proficiency interviews per twelve-month period.

\*Note: If there were specific technical problems during the interview (e.g., poor internet connection, problems hearing the interview questions due to low volume or poor sound quality), you may request to reschedule your interview. Rescheduling requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis following review of the interview recording.

## 6. If I need to improve my English proficiency for a second interview, what actions do you recommend?

The best way to be improve your English language proficiency for an interview assessment is to **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 written comments provided to you in your interview results to identify specific areas where improvements in your English are needed.
- Pursue independent study and practice of English to prepare for a future proficiency interview:
  - Take an English course focusing on speaking and listening skills in English.
  - Schedule individual lessons or practice sessions with a private teacher or with a skilled peer/colleague to practice conversation, discussing your research, and listening 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.
  - Search for internet-based videos of lectures and presentations in English in your area of study, or TED talks (of which there are thousands, on a wide variety of topics) in English; use available video transcripts for those videos, or set the video settings with subtitles in English, to help you understand what is being said. View those videos multiple times, until you can understand what is being said without reference to the written transcript or subtitles.
- Schedule time each week to practice speaking and interacting in English, either with a teacher, a tutor, a colleague, or a friend who speaks English fluently.
- As you go through your daily activities, narrate those activities to yourself mentally in English (e.g., “Now I am eating breakfast. I will walk to the university at 9 am this morning. Today I will collect and organize data samples. Later I will meet with my supervisor to review progress on our current research project.”)
- Do your best to relax in a future interview, to overcome the nervousness that can have a negative effect on interview performance. (Frequent practice of listening and speaking in English will help.)