

Simple Guide for Language Proficiency Interviews

This guide helps native speakers interview language learners to figure out their level based on the **CEFR** (the standard scale from A1/Beginner to C2/Mastery). Think of this as a "stress test" for their language skills—start easy, push until they struggle, then end on a high note.

1. How the Interview Should Flow

The interview follows a simple path: start easy, get harder, then finish with something comfortable.

Phase 1: The Warm-up (Mandatory Questions)

- **Goal:** Make the learner feel comfortable and lower their stress.
- **CRITICAL RULE: USE BABY-SIMPLE LANGUAGE.** * Do **not** use complex words, idioms, or long sentences.
 - If you use language that is harder than the level you are testing, the learner will "crash" before the interview even begins.
 - Think of this as setting a low-bitrate connection—keep it clear and basic.
- **What to ask:** You **must always** ask these three things using this exact simple phrasing:
 1. "What is your name?"
 2. "Where is your hometown?" (Wait for answer) "Tell me about it."
 3. "What are your hobbies?" or "What do you do for fun?"
- **Time:** 1 minute.

Phase 2: The Level Check

- **Goal:** See if they can handle the basics of their suspected level.
- **Strategy:** Ask questions that require more than a one-word answer.
- **Rule:** Use language that matches their level. If they are a beginner, don't ask "What are the socio-economic implications of your career?" ask "Do you like your job? Why?"
- **Time:** * **Beginners (B1 and below):** 2 minutes.
 - **Advanced (B2 and above):** 3–4 minutes.

Phase 3: Pushing to the Limit (The "Ceiling" Test)

- **Goal:** Find the point where the learner starts to struggle.
- **Strategy:** Gradually make the questions harder. Only use "big words" here to see if they understand them. Stop when they clearly can't find the words or their grammar falls apart.
- **Time:** * **Beginners (B1 and below):** 1–2 minutes.
 - **Advanced (B2 and above):** 3–4 minutes.

Phase 4: Ending the Interview

- **Goal:** End on a positive note so they feel good about the experience.
- **Strategy:** Ask one last very easy question about their weekend or say "It was great talking to you!"
- **Time:** 30–60 seconds.

2. Timing Rules

Learner Level	Total Time	Why?
B1 and Below	Max 5 Minutes	Beginners get tired quickly. Keep it short and simple.
B2 and Above	8–10 Minutes	Advanced learners need more time to show off complex grammar.

3. How to Grade the Learner

Level	Can they speak smoothly?	Do they know enough words?	Is the grammar okay?	Can they keep the conversation going?
A1-A2 (Beginner)	Very slow; long pauses.	Only knows basic words (family, food, shopping).	Makes lots of mistakes even in simple sentences.	Can only answer; can't really "chat."
B1-B2 (Intermediate)	Generally smooth; B2 has very few pauses.	Can talk about most topics and some slang.	Good at simple stuff; B2 handles hard grammar well.	Can start and finish a conversation easily.
C1-C2 (Advanced)	Fast and natural.	Knows almost every word, including deep or technical ones.	Very few mistakes; sounds like a native.	Can talk about anything (science, politics, feelings).

4. Question Bank (Ideas for your Interview)

Beginner (A1-A2) – Simple & Direct

- "Where do you live? Is it a house or an apartment?"
- "Tell me about your family."
- "What did you do yesterday?" (Checks **Past Tense**)

Intermediate (B1-B2) – Opinions & Plans

- "Tell me about a vacation you liked. What happened?"
- "Is it better to work from home or in an office? Why?"
- "If you won a lot of money tomorrow, what would you do?" (Checks "**What if**" logic)

Advanced (C1-C2) – Deep & Complex

- "How is social media changing how people talk?"
- "If you were the leader of your country, what would you change?"
- "Is it more important to protect nature or make money for the country?"

5. Tips for the Interviewer

The "Simplicity First" Rule

- **NEVER** use a difficult word when a simple one works. (e.g., Use "Start" instead of "Commence," or "Hard" instead of "Formidable").
- In coding terms, don't use a Double when an Int is all you need. Keep the overhead low.

Let Them Talk

- Don't do all the talking. You are the "interviewer," not a friend at a cafe.
- Use small sounds like "Mm-hmm" or "I see" to keep them going.
- **Don't correct them.** If they make a mistake, just keep going.

What to do if they are silent

- **The 5-Second Rule:** Wait 5 seconds before helping. They might just be thinking.
- **Try again:** If they don't understand, ask the same question using even easier words.
- **Move on:** If they still don't get it, go back to an easier topic to help them relax.

Spotting the "Break Point"

Look for:

1. They start using their native language because they forgot the word.
2. They start using very "baby-ish" sentences (e.g., "Me go store.")
3. They look very stressed or completely stop talking.