



Canada School
of Public Service

École de la fonction
publique du Canada

CANADA SCHOOL
OF PUBLIC SERVICE
ÉCOLE DE LA FONCTION
PUBLIQUE DU CANADA



INTERACTION CANADA
Pre-SLE Session - Level C
Oral Interaction Interview

Teacher's Guide

INTERACTION CANADA
Pre-SLE Session–Level C
Oral Interaction Interview

Teacher's Guide

Canada School of Public Service
Language Training Centre
Research and Development

Pre-SLE Session–Level C Oral Interaction Interview Teacher’s Guide is part of the Communicative English at Work Program, Canada School of Public Service.

Special thanks to those who contributed to this project.

Catalogue: SC103-33/1-2007E
ISBN: 978-0-660-19745-6

This work is protected by copyright. Any adaptation or reproduction in part or in whole of this publication, by any means whatsoever, is forbidden without the prior written authorization of Public Works and Government Services Canada, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5 or copyright.droitdauteur@pwgsc.ca.

© Canada School of Public Service, 2007

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
Part A—Phases of the OI	
1. Warm-up	1
2. Detailed Explanation—Present	3
3. Detailed Explanation—Past Narration	5
4. Opinion	5
5. Role-plays	6
5.1 Counsel and Advise	7
5.2 Persuade	7
5.3 Use tact	8
6. Cool-down	8
7. Hypothesize	8
Part B—Interviews and Advice	
1. The Practice Interview	9
1.1 Correction	9
2. The Simulation Interview	11
3. Some Practical Advice	12
3.1 General	12
3.2 Warm-up	12
3.3 Detailed Explanation—Present	13
3.4 Detailed Explanation—Past Narration	13
3.5 Opinion	14
3.6 Role-play	14
3.7 Hypothesizing	15

INTRODUCTION

This document is addressed to teachers who wish to have a better working knowledge of the Level C Oral Interaction interview (OI).

Part A explains the focus, form and philosophy of the OI, and how it unfolds. It also gives some examples of the key questions and techniques that are used by the OI assessors to get a useable sample of language to establish the level of bilingualism. These questions and techniques may be used and adapted by the teacher in the practice and simulation interviews.

Part B discusses the difference between the practice interview and simulation interview as used in language training and the various methods of correction that can be used to help the student best prepare for the OI. It also has a section of practical advice to the teacher and interviewer.

PART A–Phases of the OI

In general, there are six phases to the OI at Level C:

- warm-up
- detailed explanation
- detailed explanation (past narration)
- opinion
- role-play
- cool-down

A seventh element exists, but it is not given a separate interview segment like the others. That element is hypothesizing. It may appear anywhere in the interview, initiated by the interviewer or it may come spontaneously from the candidate. Whichever way it happens, the interviewer will verify that the candidate has this ability at some point during the interview.

1. Warm-up

The purpose of the warm-up is to put the candidate at ease and to allow the interviewer to make initial contact. It also permits the interviewer to get a general impression of the candidate's ability and, in this way, will affect how the interview unfolds. If the candidate appears at ease and fluent from the beginning, this will permit the interviewer to plunge directly into a verification of the Level C functions.

The interviewer introduces himself/herself and elicits an introduction from the candidate and then proceeds to some small talk. At this stage it is the interviewer who does most of the talking and initiates the conversation. It is at all times supposed to be reassuring to the candidate. The small talk may take many forms. Since in the real situation the candidate is arriving from outside, there is the possibility of questions about traffic or parking problems, especially if the weather is inclement. The weather itself is also a favourite subject for small talk, heat waves in the summer, cold snaps in the winter, etc., or a heavy snowfall, rainfall or thunderstorm. All are grist for the interviewer's mill.

Other subjects are hobbies, vacations or themes related to specific times of the year. In the summer time, for example, the interviewer could ask, "Have you taken your vacation yet this summer?"

The interviewer is very attentive to the responses in the warm-up because they may lead into other topics and questions and may provide inspiration for opinions or even role-plays later in the interview. Imagine that the candidate replies, "No, I haven't. I've been much too busy working overtime." This would lead very naturally into a discussion of the candidate's work and the reason for the overtime and the various other questions that it implies. There could even be an opinion question about the effects of overwork on employees or a role play where the candidate convinces his/her boss to hire more staff to handle the extra work. It is not always that such natural lead-ins occur, but the interviewer (or teacher) must be vigilant for them.

NOTE: The warm-up is the part of the interview that is the most difficult for the simulation interviewer or practice teacher to simulate because the student is not coming from the outside to an interview and he/she is already well known to the teacher and may also be known to the interviewer. This can often make the warm-up quite artificial and difficult to duplicate and it requires imagination, creativity and hard work to make the warm-up real.

Depending on the interviewers assessment of the candidate's level of stress or nervousness, the warm-up may take from one minute to several minutes.

2. Detailed Explanation—Present

This is in many ways the most important part of the OI because it is the subjects discussed here that form the foundation for the rest of the interview. The detailed explanation is directly related to the candidate's job, his/her tasks, duties and responsibilities. The answers provided give rise to sub-questions which delve deeper and deeper into the details of the candidate's work. In order for the OI to be efficient, *there are no empty or undirected questions*. Each one must target an aspect of the job and seek to go deeper into it. In the ideal interview, the first ten minutes accomplish this task and provide everything necessary for the narration, opinion and role-play sections which follow.

The real interview always begins with the question of where the candidate works, for which department or section, etc., and this open question leads to others.

Example: "OK. Let's talk about your job. Which department do you work for?"
"I work for Statistics Canada."
"And what do you do exactly?"

It is the responsibility of the interviewer to guide the candidate by his/her questions to give a good sample of detailed explanation. The type of subquestions chosen facilitate this process of moving deeper into the candidates duties and responsibilities and quite often contain elements that require **clarification** of something already mentioned.

Example: "I'm not quite sure I understand what you mean by Could you explain . . . to me? Could you give me a concrete example of . . . ?"

or

"When you say that managers in the Public Service have to be flexible and adapt quickly, what exactly do you mean?"

Reformulation is also a technique that is used to elicit a more detailed explanation, especially if it is deliberately incomplete or inexact because it encourages the candidate naturally to give a larger sample and provide the corrected or completed information.

Example: "If I understand correctly, you and your team are responsible for . . . and Is that right?"

Closed questions are sometimes useful to get essential information quickly and provide what is necessary to continue with the other segments of the interview such as the role-play. Note that they should be used consciously and judiciously for that specific purpose and should not form the bulk of the questions asked.

Example: "Do you have enough personnel to handle the responsibilities that we just discussed?"

In addition to providing essential information to the interviewer, closed questions of this type can easily lead to detailed explanation of the organization of the workplace or the division of work in the workplace and even open a door to improvements that the candidate would like to see made or various shortcomings that the candidate sees within the section where he/she works.

During the course of the detailed explanation segment, the interviewer wants first to get an overall view of the candidate's duties and responsibilities and then zero in on one or two of them for the in-depth view.

Example: "A few minutes ago, you told me that your team is responsible for submissions to Treasury Board. What exactly does a submission to Treasury Board consist of? How do you go about preparing one?"

Words like "what exactly" or "how" or "why" can be key to obtaining detailed explanation.

Examples: "What exactly do you do to . . . ? How do you . . . ? In what way do you . . . ? Why is it necessary to . . . ?"

If the responses are too simple or vague, the interviewer insists on more detail by asking another question on the same subject or reformulating the same question rather than going on to another subject.

When a large enough sample of detailed explanation has been obtained, the interviewer can go on to another function by using a **transition**. Transitions are important because they allow the candidate to see a certain logic in the way that the interview is unfolding. Also they avoid abrupt breaks in the communication and allow the interview to more closely resemble a conversation which is the ideal situation. Transitions often make reference to something the candidate said at an earlier point.

Example: "Good, very interesting. A little while ago, you told me that when you arrived in this department, you had to restructure the division that you're presently working in. I'd like you to tell me exactly how this restructuring took place."

3. Detailed Explanation–Past Narration

This segment of the interview allows candidates to demonstrate that they can explain not only in present time situations, but also, by using the various past forms of verbs—simple past, past progressive, past perfect, habitual past and the present perfect (for past to present ideas). Since candidates are expected to have a reasonably solid mastery of these verb forms even at a B level, any problems encountered here could cause the interviewer to abandon a C level interview and default to a B level format for the rest of the interview. Candidates are often required to talk about an important project, to tell how they got their present job, to describe and explain any special training they have taken, to give details of their work history or to describe a significant business trip. The role of the interviewer is to elicit a coherent, fluid retelling and explanation of these events and not just a listing of facts in the past tense. If the responses are not sufficiently fleshed out, the interviewer asks more precise subquestions.

Example: “Tell me about the project, from beginning to end. Leave nothing out.”

4. Opinion

As was mentioned earlier, it is important to make transitions between functions and proceed to the next one in a logical way so that the candidate does not become lost or confused. For the opinion question, there is a sort of preamble to give the candidate a chance to get an idea of the question and prepare his/her arguments. Usually the opinion question is related to something that the candidate has said earlier. For example, if the candidate said that he/she hadn't taken any vacation because of extra work and overtime, this fact could be related to an opinion question on stress in the workplace or stress management. It is preferable to choose a subject that has some relevance to the candidate—something that has affected his/her life so that the opinion can be genuine and not just an intellectual exercise. However, it is essential to remember that the opinion question is not directly related to the candidate's field of expertise. That would be more likely to elicit detailed explanation than an opinion. The interviewer forces the candidate to defend his/her opinion by taking an opposing view point or playing devil's advocate.

Two things to remember:

- The candidate is not asked opinion questions that require specialized knowledge nor is the candidate asked the opinion of other people.
- The candidate is never contradicted or told that his/her opinion is wrong or mistaken.

5. Role-plays

The role-play is not pertinent unless it is related to something that was said earlier in the interview. The candidate is reminded of what he/she said so that the parameters are clearly established.

The interviewer is very careful to assure that the student knows exactly what is expected of him/her and has all the necessary information.

At C level there are three types of role-play. Each one gives different roles to the interviewer and the candidate. The type of role-play selected is often related to the professional situation of the candidate.

Type of role-play	Interviewer's role	Candidates's role
Counsel and advise	The person who requires the counsel or advice. He/she is at the same level in the hierarchy as the other player.	The person who provides the counsel or advice and shows empathy for the other person. He/she is at the same level in the hierarchy as the other person.
Persuade	The person who has the authority and who can raise objections: usually a boss or client.	The person who must attempt to persuade the other who has the authority.
Use tact	The person with whom one has to approach a difficult subject. Quite often it requires a reprimand of some sort. Usually, but not always, this person is in a subordinate position.	The person who usually has the authority and must give bad news, give a reprimand or approach a delicate situation.

5.1 Counsel and Advise

Example: “If you recall, you told me a little while ago that you had some trouble when you were first promoted to the position of director. You said that one of your colleagues who felt that he was in line for the promotion was not happy because it had gone to you instead. Is that right? OK. Now I’d like to do a role-play with you based on that situation. You will be yourself in the role-play and I will be a colleague of yours, another director who is an old and valued friend. I have asked you outside of the workplace to a restaurant for a coffee to discuss a problem that I have. One of my team leaders is giving me trouble. He won’t take direction and he challenges my authority constantly, even in front of others. I know that you have a lot of experience as director, a lot more than I do and I know that you have handled similar situations very well. I need you to give me some advice on how to handle this situation and about what action I can take. I ask it in the name of our long-time friendship. Do you understand the situation? Do you have any questions before we start? OK. I’ll begin: *‘Thanks for accepting my invitation (name of candidate)’*”

In the role-play, the interviewer does not accept the candidate’s advice right away, but will find reasonable excuses not to, things that make the situation more complex. This challenges the candidate to give more samples of advice than he/she would do if everything were accepted right away.

5.2 Persuade

At Level C persuasion is at an **abstract** level, not like Level B where persuasion involves negotiating concrete things.

Example: “You mentioned earlier that you feel that more term employees should be hired in your division and that consultants are brought in too often. I’d like to do a role-play with you in which we imagine that I am your boss and that I’ve just told you that I intend to bring in a consultant to head a new project. You come to my office to convince me to hire a term employee instead because you feel that it’s a better solution for the organization. Since my idea on the matter is more or less made up, I won’t immediately agree with your ideas, but you will continue to try to convince me. Is the situation clear? Any questions? OK, I’ll begin. *‘Hi (name of candidate), did you want to talk to me about something?’*”

5.3 Use tact

In this role-play the interviewer is subordinate to the candidate. At first he/she denies the accusations of the candidate, then accepts them little by little and finally co-operates in finding a solution to the problem.

Example: "In talking about your responsibilities, you mentioned that you used to have problems with one of your teams, that their work wasn't always up to standard and that they frequently missed deadlines. I'd like to do a role-play with you based on that situation. In the role-play, I will be the team leader of this problem team and you will be yourself—my boss. You have called me into your office to criticize the work of my team and to talk about the improvements that you feel are necessary. Since you know that this is a touchy subject and you also know that I am quite sensitive, you know that you will have to be firm but tactful. Is the situation clear? Do you have any questions? No? OK, then, I'll start. *'Hi, (name of candidate) you wanted to see me? Sounds serious; what's happening?'*"

6. Cool-down

This segment is similar to the warm-up but it is generally shorter. It is a way of gently easing out of the interview situation. Usually the interviewer asks a couple of questions about the candidate's short-term plans.

Examples: "What are you planning to do after the interview? Do you have any plans for the weekend? When are you going back to work?"

7. Hypothesize

The ability to deal with hypothetical questions is a function that is verified at some point in the interview. It may appear in the detailed explanation segment.

Example: "How would you react if your supervisor set you a deadline that was unfair?"

It may appear in the narration segment.

Example: "What would you have done if you hadn't been accepted for the MT Program?"

A counsel and advise role-play is a natural place for spontaneous hypothesizing, on the part of the candidate, to occur.

Example: "If I were you, I would go talk to the boss right away."

or

"If I had been in that situation, I would have reacted differently."

The interviewer remains sensitive to hypotheses and checks if one does not appear spontaneously.

PART B–Interviews and Advice

1. The Practice Interview

The practice interview is not a complete interview, nor is it a simulation. It is, in essence, a teaching tool. The interviewer is also teacher and facilitator. He/she helps the student with any problems and provides exact vocabulary when necessary.

The practice interview concentrates on certain functions of Level C. During the Pre-SLE Session, which is a concentrated revision process, the various functions are introduced at different times. At the beginning of the session, Detailed Explanation is the first function to be introduced and logically this would be the area of concentration for the first days. As other functions are introduced during the session they can be incorporated into the interview as the previous functions are de-emphasized or dropped.

1.1 Correction

Correction is an essential part of the practice interview. It should always be given in a positive way and it is essential for the interviewer to be pleasant and patient at all times. Correction should be encouragement and it is essential for students to regard their mistakes as part of the learning process. Each error is seen as an opportunity for improvement.

At this stage of the training, students have already studied the necessary grammar and constructions. Generally speaking, the mistakes that they tend to make are not made out of ignorance of the correct way of saying it but are more a symptom of lack of practice. They have not yet incorporated all these factors into their second language and made them their own. The correct forms have not become automatic. It is for this reason that correction in the practice interview takes a special form.

It is important to develop fluency in the student. A good rate of delivery is essential to obtaining a Level C. For this reason we do not want to break the flow of communication, to stop the conversation to give detailed explanation of a point of grammar, for instance. In the first place, it is not necessary as most students know the correct form even though they have difficulty in using it consistently. In the second place, it effectively kills fluency if the student is stopped cold in his/her tracks so that the interviewer can explain at length. Therefore, correction should take a more subtle form.

It is simply necessary to indicate, subtly, to the student that an error has been made. This indication can take many forms and experienced teachers generally develop their own styles. The exact methods suggested here may or may not appeal to everyone. Use any method you like as long as it does not stop the communication process.

Examples:

Gestures:

A finger pointing backwards over the shoulder to indicate past time or a raised eyebrow as a non-specific sign that there is a problem encourage the student to auto-correct, and auto-correction is the first step to the elimination of the error.

Sounds:

There are three types that are used to indicate a problem or to supply something that is missing. They are immediate and spontaneous but not intrusive and do not break the communication or interfere too much with a good rate of delivery. Note that these sounds should be neutral in tone and not negative. Students should not have the impression that they are being criticized.

Sounds: 1.

Various sounds indicate that there is a problem. They do not identify the problem. They should be very brief and not too intrusive and let the student know that he /she has made an error and needs to auto-correct. Students adapt very quickly to the style of the interviewer and communication is not broken.

Sounds: 2.

Use sounds that supply a missing word ending. Word endings are extremely important in the English language and Francophone students especially have problems with them. Final consonants, the third-person singular, plural and possessive "s" pose many problems as do the past tense "ed" endings. These missing sounds in the student's speech can be immediately supplied by the interviewer.

Sounds: 3.

Use sounds that supply a missing phoneme such as the aspirated "h".

Of course, it is perfectly acceptable for the interviewer to take brief notes during the practice interview, and these can be used in a feedback session after the interview has finished. This feedback would concentrate on patterns observed in the student's speech that require special attention. These feedback notes could be given to the student to use in follow-up activities which also include a recording made of the interview.

2. The Simulation Interview

The simulation interview matches as much as possible the actual OI interview. It contains all the segments and all the functions. It has two purposes, the first is to help the teacher diagnose problem areas for special remedial attention and the second is to accustom the student to the “official” interview format, so that they will be more at ease when the big day comes. This interview is given by a teacher/assessor trained for this purpose.

During this interview the class teacher is present but does not help or teach. He/she does not make gestures or sounds. The teacher is present only to take notes. Ideally, he/she is not visible to the candidate. The interviewer does not take notes, but concentrates on the smooth flow of the interview, assuring smooth transitions between functions and assuring that sufficient samples of all functions are obtained. The interviewer does not count individual mistakes but tries to develop an overall feeling for the student's performance.

The interviewer's feedback is, of necessity, general and concentrates on larger aspects of the interview. Is the student elaborating enough on the questions asked? Is he/she giving large enough samples of the required functions? Is he/she speaking in paragraphs, etc.? This feedback is given to the teacher present during the interview who will incorporate the information, along with his/her notes taken during the simulation interview, into an overall feedback session for the student. The student feedback session should be given by the class teacher as soon as possible after the interviewer has given the teacher his/her input to keep student stress at a minimum.

Simulation interviews should *always* be recorded and used by the student in follow-up activities.

3. Some Practical Advice

3.1 General

Make sure that students know the following:

- They have to talk a lot and elaborate on the answers that they give. They must supply a large sample of language to prove that they are at Level C.
- They should listen to the questions and respond using the same constructions. A past tense question must be answered with past tense verbs. Hypothetical questions must be answered with hypotheses, etc.
- They should not try to control the interview. That is not their responsibility and, in any case the interviewer will not permit it. They are simply to react to the questions asked.
- They must answer the questions directly. Long preambles to their answers are not necessary and may cause the interviewer to think that they have misunderstood the question.
- They are permitted to ask for repetition or clarification if something is not clear; however, this should not happen too often.
- If they do not want to talk about something, a previous job for example, they should not bring it up. Once it has been mentioned, it is fair game.
- It is not necessary to be truthful or give the complete story. It is the language used that is important not the truth.

3.2 Warm-up

- The warm-up should be interesting and relaxed. It should set the conversational tone of the interview.
- The pleasant relaxed atmosphere established in the warm-up should continue for the duration of the interview.
- Try to find subjects that are interesting to the student.
- Keep it short, not more than five minutes.
- Do not forget that this is the only time that the question of hobbies can be brought up.

3.3 Detailed Explanation—Present

- Ask **open questions** about the student's present job. Questions re previous jobs will elicit narration.
- Go deeper into the explanation by using forms like: "what exactly . . . , how . . . , why . . . , tell me in detail"
- Do not jump from subject to subject. Exploit the same subject for as long as possible to allow the student the maximum opportunity to give a detailed explanation.
- Relate the questions logically to one another so that the interview seems like a conversation and not a questionnaire.
- Control the interview. Do not let the student go off in all directions. Always bring him/her back to the question asked.
- The detailed explanation should not last more than 10 to 15 minutes.

3.4 Detailed Explanation—Past Narration

- Work history is a good place to start; then try to vary the subjects.
- Try to find an event or anecdote that lends itself well to narration.
- Narration is not simply a listing of past items. Insist on logical linking of events using the appropriate linking constructions. Students must speak in paragraphs.
- Ask subquestions to guide the student, especially if he/she seems short of ideas.

3.5 Opinion

- The opinion should be related to the world of work but not to the specific field of expertise of the student. If it is directly related to the student's work, you will elicit detailed explanation instead of opinion.
- The opinion question should not require specialized knowledge.
- The opinion should not be related to the opinion of others. There is no way for the student to know what other people think of a question.
- Make sure that the student speaks in general terms so that the opinion does not degenerate into a narration of specific examples or anecdotes from the student's personal experience.
- Remember that there are no wrong opinions. The student should not be contradicted; however, you can and should play devil's advocate to challenge the student to defend the opinion.

3.6 Role-play

- Specify that it is a role-play situation.
- Make it clear that the student plays him/herself in the role-play.
- Explain your role in the role-play.
- Explain the situation to be explored in the role-play.
- Make sure the student knows what is expected of him/her.
- Identify the moment that the role-play begins. "OK, let's begin."
- Stay in character throughout the role-play.
- Identify the moment that the role-play ends. "The role-play is now over" or "That's the end of the role-play."
- Although the candidate must be challenged, he/she should be permitted to succeed in attaining the goal specified. If the role-play is persuasion, let yourself be persuaded by the end.

3.7 Hypothesizing

- Students should know that hypothesizing is part of the interview and they should be encouraged to do so spontaneously in situations where it is appropriate.
- Emphasize the need for hypothesizing in the counsel and advise role-play. It is almost impossible to be successful in this type of role-play without hypothesizing.
- As interviewer, stay alert for the use of hypotheses. If one does not occur spontaneously, ask questions that will encourage students to hypothesize.
- It is not necessary for students to repeat the “if” clause in response to a question asked by the interviewer as this is very rarely done by first language speakers. However, in spontaneous offerings of hypotheses, students should use the full construction.

