

Tips and Advice for the Spanish OPI

I took the OPIc (computer version) in May 2011, but I never took the phone OPI. If my advice is only applicable to the OPIc, I'll make sure to note that at the beginning. These tips and tricks and advice aren't in any particular order. I just wrote them down as they came to me.

1. If you need an Advanced Low for the OPI, the two biggest things that you will be evaluated on are your ability to use the preterite and imperfect tenses correctly and the ability to maintain the tense you're speaking in. Making errors in the preterite/imperfect is what separates Advanced Lows from Intermediate Highs. Reverting to an easier tense (often the present) is common for speakers when they get nervous or flustered while in the middle of answering a question. This will separate the Ad Lows from the Int Highs as well.
2. Descriptions are key. They don't have to be lengthy, they just have to be grammatically correct. Make sure that you can consistently match your adjectives to your nouns (in number and gender) and that you maintain the verb tense. You may have a question asking you to describe something in the present, and then another question asking you to describe the same thing in the past. Practice describing objects or events with words that would make the listener picture the object or event clearly in their head.
3. Evaluators aren't going to mark you down for individual errors, like saying "las chicas buenos." But, if you continue to get your agreement wrong (combining masculine nouns with feminine adjectives, etc.), it becomes a pattern of errors and they WILL mark you down.
4. If you do make the occasional error, DON'T DWELL ON IT! Forget about it and move on. I know this is easier said than done (I could still tell you the individual errors I made on my OPI), but you have to do it. Otherwise, you'll lose your focus and possibly commit more errors. It's okay to correct yourself if you misspeak, but do it RIGHT AWAY ("vi a dos chicas buenos - em, buenas"). Going back to correct errors is going to reflect badly on your score and you'll end up getting lost in wherever you were in your answer. Remember, you won't get knocked down for stand-alone

so that you don't end up just sitting silent for the whole question. There is a certain amount of wiggle room when it comes to the questions. For example, if you were asked how to perform a certain function on a cell phone (true question from my friend's OPI), you can straight-out say that you are technologically illiterate and haven't the faintest clue of how to use your phone. But don't stop there. Go on to say that you would consult a friend who's good with technology and describe the questions you would ask him about the function. Just make sure that you don't get too far away from the question and that you stay within the time limit. Remember, they're looking for grammatical accuracy, not necessarily truth.

----> A lot of #5 and #6 is applicable to the phone OPI as well, but your interviewer can't ask you

12. Most people that receive Intermediate High know how to use the preterite and imperfect correctly but they didn't provide sufficient examples of their knowledge. Time markers are key in these types of questions. Commit to memory a list of time words that belong specifically to one tense or the other. Like "ayer" would go with preterite, whereas "cada dia" would go with imperfect. Another good idea is to fit in one or two instances of sentences that have both tenses (just make sure you use them correctly). The most common is where you have one action interrupting another action (preterite interrupts imperfect). Try to use as many distinct examples of preterite and imperfect as you can, even if you have to make stuff up.
13. Try to use as many verb tenses as possible where appropriate. Preterite/imperfect is hammered pretty hard, but it's not a bad idea to use present, future, conditional, present perfect, and past perfect if you can make it natural. Just make sure that you know where each tense falls on the timeline (past perfect before preterite, present perfect before present, etc.)
14. Practice telling stories (even if it's only to yourself, still do it out loud) that /P <MCID 5>> BDC 53 677.59 487.0