Language Strategy Use Inventory

Objectives

- To help students gain awareness of new strategies they can use in language learning

- To have students identify others who have tried similar and different strategies

- To enhance language learning (if any part of this activity is done in the target language)

Materials Needed

Duplicable handout *Language Strategy Use Inventory* (p. 165)

Instructions

1. Facilitate a group discussion on ways the students can take greater responsibility for and control over their language and culture learning. Students should give examples of specific strategies they think might work best for them in learning a language. (**Note:** For maximum benefit, we suggest that this activity be done after students do the Learning Style Survey—see activity on p. 139.)

2. Have students take the Language Strategy Use Inventory (on p. 21 of the *Students' Guide* or give them a copy of the handout that follows). The goal is to raise their awareness of the strategies they can use. Since the survey can take 30 minutes, it may be easiest to assign as homework. Alternatively, you may choose parts of the survey to assign ahead of time or to do as an in-class activity.

3. Depending on time, you could have an open discussion where students share strategies they use frequently. You could also have students circulate and find three others whose responses were similar to their own and two whose responses were different. If you have time for the second option, have students provide brief reports on their findings to the group, such as whether it was easy or difficult to find other students with similar results or whether they noticed any patterns across the group.

Debriefing

1. Facilitate a general discussion about strategies students think might work for them, including some they have tried and some they haven't tried but think may be useful.

2. Refer students to the "Comments Regarding the Language Strategy Use Inventory and Index" at the end of the survey (either in the *Students' Guide* or the handout) to ensure they reflect upon the concepts behind the survey and understand the benefits of recognizing their own strategies.

3. Explain that students may favor a few strategies over others. Encourage them to explore different strategies so they will have a number of possible strategies from which to choose. Specifically ask students to identify a set number of additional strategies they will try in each of the skill areas.

Tip

This activity is a useful ice-breaker activity to do early on in a course or study abroad program.

Adaptations and Extensions

After completing the activity, highlight some of the specific strategies students can use with a simple strategy training activity, such as the *Listening Strategy Training* (p. 25) or *Reading Strategy Training* (p. 29) so students can experience the concept of strategies training in context.

The survey could be translated into the target language for more advanced language students. Even if the surveys are done in English, the face-to-face part of the activity could be done in the target language to maximize language learning. This is true even for beginning or intermediate language learners, since you can provide model questions for lower-level students.

Language Strategy Use Inventory

Andrew D. Cohen and Julie C. Chi

The purpose of this inventory is to find out more about yourself as a language learner and to help you discover strategies that can help you master a new language. Check the box that describes your use of each listed strategy. The categories are: *I use this strategy and like it*; *I have tried this strategy and would use it again*; *I've never used this strategy but am interested in it*; and *This strategy doesn't fit for me*. Please note that "target" language refers to the new language you are learning.

Listening Strategy Use

	I use this strategy and like it	I have tried this strategy and would use it again	I've never used this strategy but am interested in it	This strategy doesn't fit for me
Strategies to increase my exposure to the target language:				
1. Attend out-of-class events where the new language is spoken.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Listen to talk shows on the radio, watch TV shows, or see movies in the target language.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Listen to the language in a restaurant or store where the staff speak the target language.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Listen in on people who are having conversations in the target language to try to catch the gist of what they are saying.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strategies to become more familiar with the sounds in the target language:				
5. Practice sounds in the target language that are very different from sounds in my own language to become comfortable with them.	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Look for associations between the sound of a word or phrase in the new language with the sound of a familiar word.	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Imitate the way native speakers talk.	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Ask a native speaker about unfamiliar sounds that I hear.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Strategies to prepare to listen to conversation in the target language:				
9. Pay special attention to specific aspects of the language; for example, the way the speaker pronounces certain sounds.	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Try to predict what the other person is going to say based on what has been said so far.	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Prepare for talks and performances I will hear in the target language by reading some background materials beforehand.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Strategies to listen to conversation in the target language:

12. Listen for key words that seem to carry the bulk of the meaning. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

13. Listen for word and sentence stress to see what native speakers emphasize when they speak. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

14. Pay attention to when and how long people tend to pause. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

15. Pay attention to the rise and fall of speech by native speakers—the "music" of it. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

16. Practice "skim listening" by paying attention to some parts and ignoring others. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

17. Try to understand what I hear without translating it word for word. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

18. Focus on the context of what people are saying. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

19. Listen for specific details to see whether I can understand them. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strategies for when I do not understand some or most of what someone says in the target language:

20. Ask speakers to repeat what they said if it wasn't clear to me. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

21. Ask speakers to slow down if they are speaking too fast. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

22. Ask for clarification if I don't understand it the first time around. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

23. Use the speakers' tone of voice as a clue to the meaning of what they are saying. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

24. Make educated guesses about the topic based on what has already been said. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

25. Draw on my general background knowledge to get the main idea. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

26. Watch speakers' gestures and general body language to help me figure out the meaning of what they are saying. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

What other listening strategies do I use?

Vocabulary Strategy Use

Strategies to learn new words:

27. Pay attention to the structure of the new word. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

28. Break the word into parts that I can identify. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

29. Group words according to parts of speech (e.g., nouns, verbs). ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

30. Associate the sound of the new word with the sound of a word that is familiar to me. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

31. Use rhyming to remember new words. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

32. Make a mental image of new words. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

33. List new words with other words that are related to it. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

34. Write out new words in meaningful sentences. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

35. Practice new action verbs by acting them out. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

36. Use flash cards in a systematic way to learn new words. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strategies to review vocabulary:

37. Go over new words often when I first learn them to help me remember them. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

38. Review words periodically so I don't forget them. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strategies to recall vocabulary:

39. Look at meaningful parts of the word (e.g., the prefix or the suffix) to remind me of the meaning of the word. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

40. Make an effort to remember the situation where I first heard or saw the word or remember the page or sign where I saw it written. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

41. Visualize the spelling of new words in my mind. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strategies to make use of new vocabulary:

42. Try using new words in a variety of ways. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

43. Practice using familiar words in different ways. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

44. Make an effort to use idiomatic expressions in the new language. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

What other vocabulary strategies do I use?

Speaking Strategy Use

Strategies to practice speaking:

45. Practice saying new expressions to myself. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

46. Practice new grammatical structures in different situations to build my confidence level in using them. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

47. Think about how a native speaker might say something and practice saying it that way. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strategies to engage in conversation:

48. Regularly seek out opportunities to talk with native speakers. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

49. Initiate conversations in the target language as often as possible. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

50. Direct the conversation to familiar topics. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

51. Plan out in advance what I want to say. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

52. Ask questions as a way to be involved in the conversation. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

53. Anticipate what will be said based on what has been said so far. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

54. Try topics even when they aren't familiar to me. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

55. Encourage others to correct errors in my speaking. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

56. Try to figure out and model native speakers' language patterns when requesting, apologizing, or complaining. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strategies for when I can't think of a word or expression:

57. Ask for help from my conversation partner. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

58. Look for a different way to express the idea, like using a synonym. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

59. Use words from my own language, but say them in a way that sounds like words in the target language. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

60. Make up new words or guess if I don't know the right ones to use. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

61. Use gestures as a way to try to get my meaning across. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

62. Switch back to my own language momentarily if I know that the person I'm talking to can understand what is being said. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

What other speaking strategies do I use?

Reading Strategy Use

The column headers (rotated):
- I use this strategy and like it
- I have tried this strategy and would use it again
- I've never used this strategy but am interested in it
- This strategy doesn't fit for me

Strategies to improve my reading ability:

63. Read as much as possible in the target language. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

64. Try to find things to read for pleasure in the target language. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

65. Find reading material that is at or near my level. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

66. Plan out in advance how I'm going to read the text, monitor to see how I'm doing, and then check to see how much I understand. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

67. Skim an academic text first to get the main idea and then go back and read it more carefully. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

68. Read a story or dialogue several times until I understand it. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

69. Pay attention to the organization of the text, especially headings and subheadings. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

70. Make ongoing summaries of the reading either in my mind or in the margins of the text. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

71. Make predictions as to what will happen next. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strategies for when words and grammatical structures are not understood:

72. Guess the approximate meaning by using clues from the context of the reading material. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

73. Use a bilingual dictionary to get a sense of what the equivalent word in my native language would be. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

74. Use a target language dictionary to see how words are defined by means of other target language words. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

What other reading strategies do I use?

Writing Strategy Use

Column headers (vertical):
- I use this strategy and like it
- I have tried this strategy and would use it again
- I've never used this strategy but am interested in it
- This strategy doesn't fit for me

Strategies for basic writing:

	I use this strategy and like it	I have tried this strategy and would use it again	I've never used this strategy but am interested in it	This strategy doesn't fit for me
75. Practice writing the alphabet and/or new words in the target language.	☐	☐	☐	☐
76. Plan out in advance how to write academic papers, monitor how my writing is going, and check to see how well my writing reflects what I want to say.	☐	☐	☐	☐
77. Try writing different kinds of texts in the target language (e.g., personal notes, messages, letters, and course papers).	☐	☐	☐	☐
78. Take class notes in the target language as much as I can.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Strategies for writing an essay or academic paper:

79. Find a different way to express the idea when I don't know the correct expression (e.g., use a synonym or describe the idea).	☐	☐	☐	☐
80. Review what I have already written before continuing to write more.	☐	☐	☐	☐
81. Use reference materials such as a glossary, a dictionary, or a thesaurus to help find or verify words in the target language.	☐	☐	☐	☐
82. Wait to edit my writing until all my ideas are down on paper.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Strategies to use after writing a draft of an essay or paper:

83. Revise my writing once or twice to improve the language and content.	☐	☐	☐	☐
84. Try to get feedback from others, especially native speakers of the language.	☐	☐	☐	☐

What other writing strategies do I use?

Translation Strategy Use

Strategies for translation:

85. Plan out what to say or write in my own language and then translate it into the target language. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

86. Translate in my head while I am reading to help me understand the text. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

87. Translate parts of a conversation into my own language to help me remember the conversation. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Strategies for working directly in the target language as much as possible:

88. Put my own language out of mind and think only in the target language as much as possible. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

89. Try to understand what has been heard or read without translating it word for word into my own language. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

90. Use caution when directly transferring words and ideas from my own language into the target language. ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

What other translation strategies do I use?

Comments regarding the Language Strategy Use Inventory and Index

- As said in the introduction to this survey, the purpose for completing it is to become more aware of the strategies that you use and could use to enhance your language learning and use. You should then learn more about those strategies and how to make them work for you. Being an effective strategy user starts with paying greater attention to the strategies you do use, as well as to how you use them and to the results you are getting from using them.

- Just because you use certain strategies frequently doesn't mean you are using them effectively. One goal of this survey is to help you reduce the use of a single strategy and use others more. Taking stock with regard to your strategy use can involve cleaning house a bit; it can lead to using strategies that simply don't work less often and using others that have more potential.

- You may also find that you have been too hasty in rejecting a strategy just because it didn't work on a given task. Perhaps it would pay to give that strategy a second chance on another or the same task, but this time taking more care to make sure that it produces the results you want. Strategies aren't good or bad—their impact depends on our preferences and sometimes our ability to make the most of the strategy.

- This inventory doesn't provide you a score on your language strategy use for a given skill or for the language overall. You will notice that the instrument purposely avoids having you rate the strategies by frequency of use. We felt that this approach isn't very helpful for those exploring the options for strategy use to enhance language development. In fact, "frequency" is deceptive because the reason you use a strategy a lot is because you need to use it a lot to make it work!

- Not all strategies listed in this inventory will be useful for the language learning tasks you may encounter, but many of them are thought to have some value, depending on your style preferences and the learning contexts in which you find yourself.

- The listing of strategies in this inventory is in no way viewed as all-inclusive of strategies within the skill area. Rather, it is seen as a place to start. We encourage you to cultivate your own personal repertoire of strategies, picking and choosing from strategies to suit your needs. Research has shown that the broader the repertoire of strategies a learner has, the greater the likelihood of success.