

Teaching World Languages: A Practical Guide

Chapter 7: Interpretive Communication Reading, Listening, Viewing

The *Standards for Language Learning in the 21st Century*, (2006), provides the guidelines for foreign language instruction in the United States. The first standard, Communication, includes three parts: The interpersonal mode of communication (conversational communication), the interpretive mode of communication (reading, listening and viewing) and the presentational mode of communication (speaking in a presentation and writing). This module addresses the interpretive mode of communication. For more on the Standards, go to Chapter 2: [Standards for Foreign Language Learning](#).

Interpretive communication includes listening, viewing, or reading a text, such as listening to an announcement on a public address system, watching a movie, or reading a newspaper. The listener, viewer, or reader does not have any way to question the author of the text, ask for repetition, or negotiate meaning. This type of communication is referred to as *one-way communication*.



Fig. 7-1-1 ©SWCockey

When talking about interpretive communication the content of the language input that is listened to, watched, or read is referred to as a “*text*” regardless of the mode. Not all interpretive communication is the same; listening to an announcement in an airport requires a different sort of listening capability than listening to a story on the radio, and reading an ad in the newspaper requires a different sort of reading capability than reading a newspaper article. In addition, listening, viewing, and reading each pose unique challenges:

- **Listening and viewing** involves a sender (i.e. a person, a radio, or a television station), a message, and a receiver (i.e. the listener or viewer). Listeners and viewers must process new messages as they come, even if they are still processing what they have just heard, without backtracking or looking ahead. In addition, listeners and viewers must cope with the sender's choice of vocabulary, structure, and rate of delivery.
- **Reading** is an interactive process that goes on between the reader and the text, resulting in comprehension. The text presents letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs that encode meaning and the reader uses knowledge, skills, and strategies to determine what that meaning is. The reader must cope with the way the writer has structured the material, but can look backwards and forward in the text to increase comprehension.

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Interpretive Communication: Reading, Listening, Viewing

Standard 1.2: Learners understand, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed on a variety of topics. *

*From *Standards for Language Learning in the 21st Century* (2006)

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Objectives and Assessments

Interpretive Communication and Comprehension

Interpretive communication always involves comprehension of a text. Comprehension is usually described as *literal* or *inferential*. Your instructional objectives for comprehension in the target language should include both literal and inferential comprehension, just as they do in the students' first language.

Literal Comprehension is comprehension of the facts that are explicitly stated in a text that is read, listened to, or viewed. A recipe, for example, is a series of explicit statements about ingredients, amounts, and the steps taken in preparation.

Inferential Comprehension is comprehension of ideas or facts derived from inferences, predictions, and elaborations that are based on the literal interpretation of a text. If a student reads that a man is *opening an umbrella as he walks outside*, s/he may infer that *it is raining*, even if the text does not include that specific information. Another example from a recipe might be one that calls for "a can of tomatoes" without telling the reader that s/he needs to open the can and drain the contents.

Examples of Interpretive Communication (that can include literal and inferential comprehension) are:

- Listening to an announcement at a train station
- Listening to a speech or lecture
- Listening to a song
- Viewing a tour of the inside of a house.
- Viewing an advertisement on TV
- Viewing a TV program
- Reading a menu
- Reading directions
- Reading a story
- Reading advertisements on walls, in buses, on trains.



Fig. 7-4-1 ©Andres Rodriguez

Developing Objectives and Assessment Together

Once you have determined the objectives for a course, unit, or lesson, you can develop your assessment and determine how you will use the assessment to evaluate your students. No matter how specific we try to be in objectives, it is what we do to assess student progress that really defines what we expect them to be able to do, and how well. So, it is much better to decide that early on, let the students know your expectations, and then design the instruction to meet the objectives.

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Learning objectives drive all instruction. Content objectives, such as those described in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learners in the 21st Century* (2006), describe *what* students should know, and performance objectives describe *how well* students should be able to perform. You, the teacher, identify learning objectives for the course, thematic units, and lessons. Lesson planning is much easier when you have learning objectives because the objectives determine how you will assess students' progress and what activities you will choose.

We will use a sample unit on food for first year foreign language students to demonstrate how you can plan objectives first, then assessment, and then activities.

Content Objectives – WHAT students should learn

Objectives for interpretive communication are linked to the overarching enduring understandings or themes for the year and the unit. These are the “big ideas,” often related to the culture or cultures of the language under study. They are explored and analyzed by the students in the target language. For more on enduring understandings, see Backwards Design in Chapter 3: [Planning Instruction](#).



Fig. 7-5-1 ©Mathias Rosenthal

Standards-based content objectives are different from the traditional language learning objectives. They describe *functions*, what students can do with the language, rather than specific grammar points or vocabulary. The functions are related to a context, and the context is provided by the topic or theme of the lesson or unit. As you read the learning objectives in the example below, note that they only describe functions in a context. After you have read the example objectives, we will review the objectives and how they determine the grammar and vocabulary that will be taught.

The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (2006) provides sample **progress indicators** for students of all languages for each standard at various levels of proficiency. The progress indicators are all functions: descriptions of what the students can do with the language. These can guide you in developing realistic objectives for your students. The progress indicators are provided for four levels of study, Grade 4, Grade 8, Grade 12, and Grade 16 (senior in college) on the assumption that the students have been studying the language since Grade 1. Since this is not usually the case, teachers can approximate what progress indicators are appropriate for their students by adjusting the years of study and then choosing functions that are appropriate (and of interest) to their students.



Fig. 7-5-2 ©Alexi Lisovoy

- Can-Do statements and Progress indicators for Grade 4 are appropriate for students who have studied the foreign language in grades K-4, 5-8, or 9-10.
- Can-Do statements and Progress indicators for Grade 8 are appropriate for students who have studied the foreign language K-8, 7-12, or 9-12.

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- Can-Do statements and Progress indicators for Grade 12 are appropriate primarily for students who have studied the same foreign language K-12.
- Can-Do statements and Progress indicators for Grade 16 are appropriate for highly advanced learners.

However, it must be remembered that the Progress Indicators for the Novice Level have been rewritten and replaced by the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements. Intermediate Level and above still retain the Progress Indicators. (See [Resources](#) at the end of this chapter.)

Sample Can-Do Statements and Objectives

For more on Standards and some examples of sample progress indicators, go to Chapter 2: [Standards for Foreign Language Learning](#). For the full sample progress indicators you will need to obtain the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (2006, in press) from ACTFL. Complete sets of the Can-Do Statements and Benchmarks are available on the ACTFL website. www.actfl.org

Below are some sample Can-Do statements for interpretive communication for a first year 9th Grade class studying a unit on food:

- I can recognize some of the items on a grocery list when I hear them spoken.
- I can recognize some of the items on a grocery list when I see them written.
- I can watch a video of a family meal and identify some cultural practices that I see.
- I can watch a video of a family meal and recognize some of the products.
- I can identify some foods and dishes that I see as being breakfast, lunch, or dinner.
- I can listen to a food advertisement and identify the main idea.
- I can identify some menu items.
- I can understand when asked to pass the salad.
- I can understand when asked to identify a particular food.
- I can identify which meal is the topic of a conversation or advertisement.
- I can identify healthy nutritional categories.
- I can identify some items on a food package label.
- I can identify labeled aisles in a supermarket.
- I can follow a simple recipe when viewing a cooking video.
- I can sometimes understand when someone is comparing their daily diet to mine.
- I can understand advertisements for food.
- I can understand the hours of operation of a grocery store or restaurant.

Below are some sample food unit interpretive communication objectives, based on the Can-Do Statements:

Students will be able to:

- Read a simple recipe or grocery list

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- View a video of a family meal, comprehend some of the language and identify some cultural practices and products
- View a cooking video in the Target Language, comprehend the steps in cooking the dish, and identify cultural practices
- View a simple presentation on everyday foods for breakfast, lunch, and dinner in a Target Language country and comprehend the main ideas
- Listen to a Target Language advertisement for a food, comprehend the topic and the main idea
- Listen to an interview with someone comparing Target Language foods from different countries, and identify the main idea, some details and perspectives.

Each content objective is a function, something that the student will be able to do in the target language. The functions occur in the context of the theme – target culture food and meal-taking. The grammar, vocabulary, and cultural information necessary to be able to do the function will be the “language and culture content” of the lessons. You, the teacher, will identify this language content. Some content will be language they already know, this they will review and recycle by using it in this new context. Some language information will be new. This you will introduce in context in various ways.



Fig. 7-7-1 ©Spflaum

Assessment

There are two kinds of assessment that teachers find useful as they teach:

Formative assessment: Most teachers use a variety of tests and evaluations for formative assessment that lets the teacher and student know how well a student is understanding or retaining information *during* a lesson or unit. These tests include pencil and paper tests, rubric-based evaluations, quizzes, and self- and peer evaluations. They need to be quick and flexible, and are often part of the instructional activities.

Summative assessment: This takes place at the end of a unit or course and assesses how well the student is learning the material as a whole, across the standards-based objectives. It is often an integrated performance task and called an *integrated performance assessment* or IPA. You determine the summative assessment after you have identified the general learning objectives for the thematic unit. The activities in the unit should all contribute to the students' ability to succeed on the summative assessment. Ideally, the summative assessment follows the same format as the activities and includes the same rubric for evaluation. You are evaluating how



Fig. 7-7-2 ©Muharrem Kartal

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well the students can *transfer* the knowledge and skills they learned throughout the unit to a new, but similar, task.

Assessment of comprehension of novice learners is particularly challenging, since they have limited resources in the target language to demonstrate what they comprehend. Some teachers allow responses to reading and listening in English so that students can demonstrate their comprehension. Another approach is to provide highly structured tasks based on the reading or listening that requires minimum linguistic knowledge of the target language.

Sample summative assessment, given at the end of unit, for progress activities for a Grade 9, Year 1 class studying a food unit:

Students will work in groups to prepare presentations on the traditional foods of different target language speaking countries and how they are eaten.

1. Each group will research the traditional foods of one country or region. A teacher handout with a series of key questions (in the target language) will guide their research. Resources may include (all in the target language) recipes, menus, short descriptions of foods, videos, pictures, advertisements, interviews, going to a restaurant with food from the region, going to a target culture grocery store, cooking some dishes.
2. In the target language, students in each group will share their information and design a presentation for the class on the traditional foods of their region and how they are prepared and served. The teacher can encourage the students to be creative in developing presentations that will be of interest to the class. These could include skits, PowerPoint presentations, demonstrations of cooking and/or eating, videos, recipe books, etc.
3. Students give their presentations in the target language. Each student in each group participates. Presenters should be prepared to answer questions from other students after the presentation. Each student will listen and view the presentations of the others, take notes, and complete another handout that summarizes the content of all the presentations.

This summative assessment describes the interpretive knowledge and skills the students are expected to have by the end of the unit.

- The students will conduct research on traditional foods and how they are served and eaten by reading, viewing, and listening to recipes, menus, short descriptions of foods, videos, pictures, advertisements, interviews with natives of the country, going to an authentic restaurant with food from the region, going to a target language grocery store, cooking some dishes.
- Each student will listen and view the presentations of the others, take notes, and complete another handout that summarizes the content of all the presentations.

Evaluation of student performance on these tasks can be done using the [rubric](#) described below in *Performance Criteria*.

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For more information about assessment and performance assessment, go to Chapter 4: [Assessment](#). At the end of the chapter you will find a list of assessments commonly used for oral proficiency in K-12 along with short descriptions and links to resources.

How well students are expected to comprehend what they read, listen to, and view is determined by the performance criteria for interpretive communication for their level.

Performance Criteria – HOW WELL students should be able to do what they learn

Performance criteria allow you to give your students a clear, concrete idea of how well you expect them to meet the content objectives. They describe briefly what performance looks like for students who “Meet Expectations,” who “Exceed Expectations,” and for those who “Do Not Meet Expectations.”

ACTFL has developed guidelines for performance objectives, *Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners* (1998, 2002), and rubrics, published in the *ACTFL Integrated Performance Assessment (2003)*. The guidelines and criteria are based on research and have been validated on large numbers of students studying western languages that are commonly taught in the U.S.



Fig. 7-9-1 ©SWCockey

They represent reasonable expectations of student progress in these languages of time they have studied the language. The ACTFL Novice Learner range for western languages, such as French and Spanish, includes students who have studied a language in grades K-4, 5-8, or 9-10. The Intermediate Learner range includes students who have studied a language K-8, 7-12, or 9-12. The Pre-Advanced Learner range is primarily students who have studied the same language K-12.

Sample Rubric for Interpretive Communication for Grade 9, Year 1 learners for progress on the food unit, adapting criteria from the ACTFL Integrated Performance Assessment rubrics (Criteria and text in **RED** are added by the authors. They have not been pilot-tested nor validated as the IPA-based criteria are, but are relevant to the tasks and skills described below:

Criterion	Exceeds Expectations 3 points	Meets Expectations 2 points	Does Not Meet Expectations 1 point
Literal Comprehension			
Identify Topic	Can usually identify the topic of a text chosen by the teacher.	Can often identify the topic of a text chosen by the teacher.	Cannot identify the topic of a text chosen by the teacher.
Recognizing Words	Recognizes learned words and phrases about food.	Recognizes some or most learned words and phrases about food.	Can recognize only a few learned words and phrases about food.

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Finding the main Idea	Can identify main ideas in texts.	Can identify main ideas in texts. (reading/listening/or viewing) about target culture foods.	Can identify a few ideas about target culture foods in familiar contexts.
Finding supporting details	Can identify main ideas and some supporting details.		
Interpretive (Inferential) Comprehension Can infer meaning from clues such as titles, pictures (written text), actions, setting (video), voice tone, setting (audio) Inferring meaning of unknown words from context Inferring ideas from context and known words Inferring authors' point of view	Can infer author attitudes about foods from text and context clues independently or with help.	Can make inferences about meanings of words or text from clues independently.	Can occasionally make inferences about meanings of words or text from clues with help.
	Can infer the meaning of many unknown words from contexts such as pictures, gestures and expressions, and from other words.	Can infer the meaning of some unknown words from contexts such as pictures or gestures and expressions.	Cannot infer meaning of unknown words.

This rubric and any other performance rubric *can and should* be adapted to the age, topic, and interests of your students. As you can see from the rubric, in their research the developers of the *ACTFL Performance Guidelines K-12* and IPA found that novice level learners were limited to recognizing key words and phrases and in being able to identify the most important ideas in texts. Novice learners' (4th Graders) skills are limited to literal comprehension and inferential comprehension was not seen until the Intermediate level (8th Grade). However, we have included inferential skills. "Can infer meaning from clues such as titles, pictures (written text), actions, setting (video), tone of voice, setting (audio)." That is because the Novice level rubrics are based on expectations of 4th graders, and we believe that 9th graders will be able to make inferences because this ability is consistent with their level of maturity and they should be used to making inferences in their English interpretive communication. This is the kind of adjustment you need to make when adapting proficiency guidelines, progress indicators, and rubrics to your own classes.

Your rubrics should be part of your activities, not just brought out at the end. For example, if you are going to show the students a TV advertisement for a food, make the rubric a little more specific to what the students will be doing. Give the students a copy of the rubric before they begin, then have them think about the meaning of the criteria for their performance on the activity. What are key words and phrases? How can a student maximize chances of recognizing



Fig. 7-10-1 ©Oni Ahdi

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them? What is the main idea? How might the student identify the main idea from what s/he sees and hears? What is an inference? How might s/he use clues in the TV advertisement to guess the meaning and intent of the author?

Activities can be selected and designed with these criteria from the rubric in mind, so that they advance the quality of the students' use of the language.

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Teaching Materials

Authentic Materials

Authentic materials for interpretive practice include anything written or spoken by native speakers and for native speakers that involves one-way communication. They can include:

- Radio and television programs
- Public address announcements (airports, train/bus stations, stores)
- Speeches and lectures
- Telephone customer service recordings
- Advertisements and commercials
- Poems and songs
- Recipes
- Menus
- News articles
- Comic strips and comic books
- Signs and posters
- Labels
- Instructions for putting things together like model cars or furniture
- Books, children's books, magazines, newspapers
- Online news, articles, stories

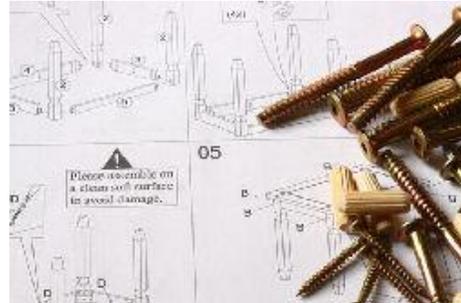


Fig. 7-12-1 ©Christian Bridgwater

Semi-Authentic Materials

Semi-authentic materials are texts that are based on authentic materials but have been edited, simplified, or adapted for language learners. They can include:

- Reading texts in language textbooks, or developed by the teacher, that are based on authentic texts
- Reading texts developed by the teacher adapted from authentic texts to be accessible to students
- Audio texts based on authentic texts but adapted for language learners such as target language news webcasts (See [Resources](#)), Video, or YouTube presentations designed for language learners

Evaluating Difficulty of a Text

The criteria listed below can help you judge the relative ease or difficulty of a listening or reading text for a particular purpose and a particular group of students.

- How is the information organized? Does the story line, narrative, or instruction conform to familiar expectations? Texts in which the events are presented in natural chronological

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order, which have an informative title, and which present the information following an obvious organization (main ideas first, details and examples second) are easier to follow.

- How familiar are the students with the topic? Remember that misapplication of background knowledge due to cultural differences can create major comprehension difficulties. Students, for example, may find the marriage of a young woman to an older man inappropriate or "creepy." They may need your help to understand that movie viewers in the target culture world would consider this a happy ending.
- Does the text contain redundancy (repetition of the same idea in different ways)? At the lower levels of proficiency, listeners may find short, simple messages easier to process, but students with higher proficiency benefit from the redundancy of the language.
- Does the text involve multiple individuals and objects? Are they clearly differentiated? It is easier to understand a selection with a doctor and a patient than one with two doctors. In other words, the more marked the differences between individuals or objects, the easier the comprehension.
- Does the text offer visual support to aid in the interpretation of what the listeners hear? Visual aids such as maps, diagrams, pictures, or the images in a video help contextualize the listening input and provide clues to meaning.

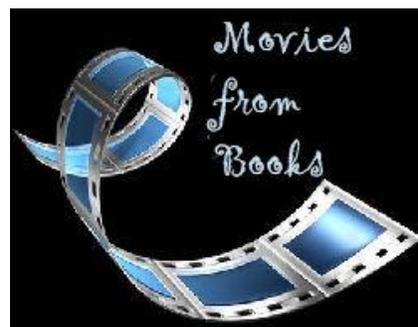


Fig. 7-13-1 ©Fabian Kerbush

The difficulty of a task is not the same as the difficulty of a text. You may ask novice students to view a video of a highly familiar news event and identify the topic. Even if the actual text is difficult, there will be lots of clues (pictures, names, maps, etc.), which will allow the students to complete the task. You may also ask a more advanced student to read quite a simple text, but to draw complex inferences about culture and perspectives from the text. This is much more difficult. Take care to match the text and the task to the proficiency level of your students and your educational purpose in using the text.

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Activities

Integrated Performance Activities and Task-Based Instruction

Many teachers present interpretive communication skills in the context of a *task-based approach* to language teaching. Using a task-based approach, each unit you teach includes one or more meaningful tasks for the students to accomplish in and with the language. The tasks are often *integrated performance tasks*; they integrate the goals of all the standards. They usually follow a three-part format, each part focusing on one of the modes of communication:

1. The first part of the task is finding out information about the topic. This is the interpretive communication piece.
2. Then students share this information with others in a group. This is the interpersonal communication piece.
3. Finally the students make a product and/or prepare and give a presentation for the larger group on the topic. This is the presentational communication piece.

For more on integrated performance tasks and assessment go to Chapter 3: [Planning Instruction](#).

Sample integrated performance activity for 9th Grade, Year 1 students studying a food unit:

Students will prepare a traditional target culture dish and present it to the class. They will work in groups to (1) watch a cooking video that demonstrates how to prepare the dish and read a recipe for the dish (interpretive), (2) talk in the target language in small groups to determine the order of the steps in preparation and the ingredients required, using a structured handout from the teacher (interpersonal), and (3) present the dish to the class along with an oral description of how it was prepared and a written recipe in the target language with pictures and annotations to help classmates understand unfamiliar vocabulary and phrases (presentational).

Preparing Students for Interpretive Activities

It is through listening/viewing and reading that students gain their information about the content of a unit topic, and the vocabulary and structures related to the topic. This knowledge prepares them for the rest of the activities in the unit.

What knowledge you select to present will be determined by the goals of the task, the texts you and/or the students choose to use for the research, and what the students already know.

How you present the new information to prepare students to read, listen, and view in the target language will include:

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- Assessing students’ background knowledge of the topic and their knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar needed for comprehension of the texts.
- Providing context and developing background knowledge about the topic.
- Clarifying cultural information that is important for understanding the text (but leaving as much information as possible about perspectives for the students to infer).
- Teaching some essential vocabulary (but leaving as much as possible of the new vocabulary for students to discover in the context of the text).
- Identifying some unfamiliar grammar that is essential to comprehending the text and explaining it. Leave as much grammatical structure as possible for the students to “discover” for themselves; you can always clarify in the context of the text. Remember that it is not usually necessary for students to understand all the grammatical points in a text, to comprehend main ideas or many of the details. Do not try to teach everything in every text.
- Identifying the kind of text the student will be listening to, viewing, or reading – and any special markers or text structures that can help them anticipate or comprehend the content. (For example, a recipe lists ingredients under the heading “Ingredients;” preparation directions are often written in bulleted or numbered format.

Sample pre-listening or viewing activities:

- Brainstorming background information on the topic
- Looking at pictures, maps, diagrams, or graphs
- Reviewing familiar related material
- Reading/listening to/viewing something else that is relevant
- Predicting the content of the listening text

Sample pre-reading activities:

- Brainstorming background information on the topic
- Reviewing familiar related material
- Using the title, subtitles, and divisions within the text to predict content and organization or sequence of information
- Looking at pictures, maps, diagrams, or graphs and their captions
- Skimming to find the theme or main idea and eliciting related prior knowledge

Pre-reading activities are most important at lower levels of language proficiency and at earlier stages of reading instruction. As students become more proficient at using reading strategies, you will be able to reduce the amount of guided pre-reading and allow students to do these activities themselves.

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Criteria for Interpretive Communication Activities

When developing activities, be sure you can answer these questions:

- What is the value of the activity?
- How does it relate to the overall objectives and goals of the lesson, unit, and course?
- What will students be expected to accomplish as a result of completing the activity?
- How will student accomplishment be evaluated?

When developing activities:

- Construct the activity around a contextualized task.
- Make sure the students have a clear purpose for reading/listening/viewing.
- Check the level of difficulty of the task.
- Have realistic expectations of information recall.
- Provide visual support.

Sample Activities: Informational and Fictional Text

Interpretive communication is comprehension; it takes place in the mind of the reader, listener, or viewer. There is no external action that lets you, as the teacher, know what the students are comprehending, or if they are comprehending. For this reason, interpretive activities almost always link reading or listening with an action that demonstrates comprehension. This action, like filling out a form, following a map, taking notes, or writing a summary, may also help students comprehend the text by focusing their attention on significant parts or helping them think about and synthesize the information after reading or listening.

Many listening/viewing activities are designed to teach students how to glean the information they need from a text that they do not wholly understand. Since students are language learners, they need to develop the skills to learn language from interpretive activities.

We will consider two kinds of text: informational and fictional. Remember that “text” can refer to any communication that is based on words including books, magazines, movies, T.V. programs, radio newscasts.

- *Informational text* is a text whose primary purpose is to impart information such as a newspaper story, a book about history, directions, a TV newscast, a cooking video, a radio weather report, a documentary.

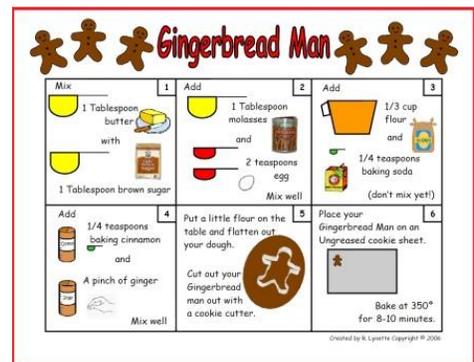


Fig. 7-16-1 ©Misty Sparks

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- *Fictional text* is text that is about something that is imaginary such as stories, poems, song lyrics, novels, movies (that are not documentaries), and T.V. programs that are fictional stories.



Fig. 7-17-1 ©MSWord

Two general kinds of interpretive activities are:

Activities that emphasize **literal comprehension**: comprehension of explicit, stated, specific information. This information may include the main idea, if it is explicit. A fictional text usually has elements such as characters, setting, plot, theme, and sometimes mood.

Activities that emphasize **inferential (interpretive) comprehension**: comprehension of implied information through making inferences on the basis of background information and context clues. This information may include the main idea if it is implied, and not stated. Inferential comprehension is very important to much fiction, where, oftentimes, important elements of a story, poem, or film must be inferred.



Fig. 7-17-2 ©sherrie smith

Literal Comprehension Activities

The basic elements of an informational (not fictional) text, whether it is read, viewed, or listened to, are:

- **The topic** – what the text is about
- **The main idea** – what the text is saying about the topic
- **The supporting details** – the ideas, examples, concepts that the author uses to support the main idea.



Fig. 7-17-3 ©Sevaljevic

These elements can be either stated or implied. When they are stated explicitly, students can read (or hear) them directly from the text. Literal comprehension activities typically ask students to read/view/listen to a text and extract explicit information for a specific purpose. The difficulty of the activity can vary according to the complexity of the task and the text.

Watching an Interview – Literal comprehension – Informational Text

This activity stresses inductive teaching, encouraging students to use strategies to stretch as far as possible to figure out what they do not know on the basis of what they already know of the language and their background knowledge. It is designed for our model unit for Year 1, Grade 9 students studying a food unit. The techniques and content can be adapted to any level and any topic.

In a food unit, students view a video of an interview with someone from the target culture they are studying who is telling about what foods s/he eats for breakfast, lunch and dinner in

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order to learn what foods they typically eat for which meals. If you cannot find a video like this, you can have the students interview you (and try to video the interview), or you could interview some target language friends and video the interview, or interview target language friends where one takes the role of interviewer and the other the role of person interviewed. The students will use information from this interview in written and oral presentations of their own on foods from the country. The students will be familiar with some, but not all, of the key vocabulary, grammar, and expressions from previous lessons in the unit.



Fig. 7-18-1©Tomacco

1. Give the students a handout with a chart where they can write notes on the specific foods the person mentions for each meal.
2. Share the objectives and the assessment rubric of the activity with the students. The students brainstorm what they think the person might say and the teacher – or a student – writes the results on the board.
3. Play the video through one time and let the students work in groups to confer and write down what they have picked out so far. Encourage them to use strategies to try and figure out unknown words or expressions. Students match their predictions to what they have heard.
4. Students watch the video in small segments discovering the words for foods and meals for their charts, and also working out what they do not know. Coach the students, giving hints, encourage guessing, sometimes give new information in the context of the video or affirm guesses. Generally make the students stretch to comprehend as much as possible on their own. Take note of what is new information and what old information gives the students difficulties.
5. Together with the students, review the charts and identify what information – vocabulary, grammar, cultural information – is new and what needs reinforcement.
6. Combine coaching and direct instruction to help the students with language and cultural information. Remember that students do not need to understand everything they see or hear in an authentic text. They just need to gather enough information to complete the chart. They may find this frustrating, so you will need to remind them that -- even in English -- they rarely pay attention to every single word they see or hear.
7. Students watch the video one more time straight through to confirm the information in the charts, and to experience more fluent listening comprehension.
8. Show the students a video of another person from the same place who is asked the same questions and then ask the students to compare the responses of the two respondents either orally or in writing. Performance on this activity could be evaluated using a rubric. If students can transfer some of their learning from the first to the second task, this tells you they made progress in listening comprehension.



Fig. 7-18-2 ©Igor Yegorov

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This basic procedure for teaching listening/viewing comprehension can be used with any informational texts to be listened to or viewed including weather reports on the radio or TV, newscasts, instructional videos (such as cooking videos), documentary movies, TV broadcasts – or short clips from such broadcasts – programs about science and/or animals, and programs about famous people. How you conduct an activity will be largely determined by the authentic materials or semi-authentic materials you find (or adapt) that meet your objectives.

Reading a Story – Literal Comprehension – Fictional Text

Students are given a simple written folk tale that is authentic or semi-authentic (the tale is authentic, but the text has been adapted for novice learners, often by the teacher). While authentic texts are always preferable, it is difficult to find authentic stories that are simple enough for novice learners. However, this kind of activity can, and should, be used with authentic texts whenever possible. While this activity has been designed for our model unit Grade 9, Year 1 students, it can be adapted for students of all levels and for any topic.



Fig. 7-19-1 ©Onza

The teacher gives the students a target culture folk tale to read that is related to the theme of the unit. S/he also gives the students a handout in the target language that either asks questions or has blank spaces to be filled out based on literal comprehension of the story. The teacher also finds or draws small pictures or symbols that can represent each of the major episodes of the story, copies them a few times, cuts up the pictures and puts sets into envelopes for groups to work with in the class. As a final activity, the students will put the pictures of the main events in order and retell the story.

1. Choose an authentic folk tale, related to the theme of the unit that will build on what the students have already learned and give them new information about the theme. The most common stories and the simplest are the best. Look for ones that are not too complex. Check the number of episodes, discrete events, in the story. Three to five would work well for this activity. If you are making a semi-authentic version, rewrite the story using vocabulary and structures that are authentic but closer to what the students already know.
2. Make up a handout with questions or fill-in-the-blank exercises that rely on literal comprehension: What are the names of the characters? Where is this? What happens first... next... next... at the end.
3. Share the objectives and the assessment rubric of the activity with the students. Then give them the handout and the story.
4. Conduct any specific pre-reading activities that are appropriate for the task, eliciting background information about the topic and giving any direct instruction if necessary in vocabulary, grammar, or culture that are critical to a basic understanding of the text. However, leave as much vocabulary and grammar as possible for the students to identify and figure out on their own. Teach the minimum before they read the text, the students will understand and retain what they learn in the context of the text much better.

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5. Have the students preview the text to make predictions about the content. Coach them in predicting; encourage them to think about what they already know about the topic, about stories, and what they can guess from pictures, the title, subheadings, captions, etc.
6. Divide the students into pairs; ask them to read through the story once silently, then to take turns reading aloud to each other, then to work together to fill out the questions on the handout. During this time you can move from pair to pair coaching, giving information, answering questions, encouraging them to stretch their understanding.
7. Review the answers on the handouts as a class and discuss any questions.
8. Give each pair of students a set of pictures that represent the main events of the story. They can be pictures of the event, or just an object or symbol that represents the event. Ask the students to practice retelling the story to each other using the pictures. Remind them to review the rubric to see what defines performance that “Meets Expectations.”
9. Students can retell the story either in larger groups or to the whole class. You will need to see each student for enough time to assess performance. You may ask students to self-evaluate and/or peer evaluate by filling out the same rubric. Your evaluation of the students’ reading comprehension should focus on how well the retelling reflects comprehension of the story, not the fluency of their language production – that is another kind of communication.



Fig. 7-20-1 ©Jodielee

The basic steps of this activity can be used with stories, videos of stories, songs and poems (with modifications), movies, and TV episodes. The final evaluating part of the activity can be the finished handout, a retelling, a written outline, a series of pictures, a skit that the students write and then act out, a skit with puppets, or a full-blown play written and acted by the students.

Inferential Comprehension Activities

In an informational text, some of the elements, topic, main idea, and supporting details, can be implied rather than explicit. Readers/viewers/listeners use the learning strategies associated with inferencing – making inferences and predictions from background knowledge, context, pictures, titles, voice tone, gestures – to figure out what is not stated directly.



Fig. 7-20-2 ©SWCockey

Reading an Advertisement- Inferential Comprehension- Informational

Advertisements are particularly useful in teaching inferential comprehension since there is usually a lot that is implied and not stated. Also, for older novice learners, it is an opportunity to apply what they already know from their native language about advertisements to the target language. Advertisements with pictures give students non-verbal clues that can deepen their understanding even if their language is limited.

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Students read an advertisement from a magazine or from the Internet for a particular food product in the target language to prepare themselves to write their own ad for another food product for a target language magazine.

1. Choose an advertisement in the target language that gives information about the product, but implies more than is stated. The ad should have a picture that implies a main idea or important supporting detail that is not stated in the text such as, “Eating our candy will make you good looking and popular.”
2. Develop a handout that asks students to identify the main idea (explicit or implicit) and some supporting details (also explicit and implicit).
3. Share the objectives and the assessment rubric of the activity with the students. Then give them the advertisement and the handout. Go over the handout to make sure students understand the questions and what they mean.
4. Have the students brainstorm what they already know about the topic and also what they know about advertisements in general. You may need to help them with some vocabulary to explore these ideas.
5. Let the students work in pairs or small groups. Have them examine the advertisement. Help them use the pictures, the layout, any titles, the colors, and the words they recognize to try to figure out the literal meaning of the text: the explicit, stated, main idea and supporting details. Coach students in their use of strategies, make them stretch their language skill to understand as much as possible in the explicit text. The students can write the explicit information on the handout. They should be able to copy most of it. Remember that in many advertisements, loan words or transliterated words from other languages will appear: “milk shake,” “pizza”, “super market,” “hot dog,” “sushi” etc. These will delight your students once they recognize the vocabulary.
6. Once the students have identified the explicit meaning of the text, then encourage them to look for implicit ideas and details. Students often enjoy digging out advertising techniques and tricks, and they can be very good at it. Coach them with language, but let them work out the implicit messages on their own. You may need to help them with finding the words and writing these answers in the handouts.
7. For the assessment part of this activity, you can give students another advertisement and the same handout and see how well they can infer the implicit meanings in the second advertisement.



Fig. 7-21-1 ©SWCockey

Listening to a Song – Inferential Comprehension – Fiction

Inferential comprehension is reading/viewing/listening to fiction to understand the ideas and feelings that are not stated in the text, but are implied by what is



Fig. 7-21-2 ©MSWord

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present in the text. This activity is designed for the 9th Grade, Year 1 class of our sample unit, but it can be adapted to any level, age, and topic.

While studying a unit on friends, students will listen to a song. It could be any genre you think would interest your students. They will study the lyrics, and explore what is implied, but not stated in the song. Make sure the lyrics and the implications in the song are appropriate for your students. Later the students will develop a presentation on Popular Music in the target culture World. The objective of this activity is for students to be able to understand and appreciate popular songs from the target culture world.

1. Choose a song that is appropriate for your class and that you think your students will enjoy hearing. You might even play several songs to them, and ask them to make the choice.
2. Develop a handout that asks questions about the stated and unstated information in the song. For example, if stated, “To whom is the song addressed? Where is the singer?” Unstated information might be: “How does s/he feel? What does s/he want?”
3. Share your objectives, the rubric and the plan for the activity with the class. Go over the handout.
4. Do some pre-listening activities including brainstorming what students already know about songs, love songs, and popular music. Introduce or review vocabulary to express some of the ideas called for in your questions. These might be words about feelings and moods and vocabulary about songs: lyrics, music, names of instruments, singer.
5. Play the song all the way through for the students. Divide students into pairs or small groups to work on the questions in the handouts. Then, with the goal of identifying the stated information, use the techniques for listening described in the “[Watching an Interview](#)” activity, to go through the song in segments, having students pick out information that will answer specific questions about stated facts. Encourage the students to use strategies to stretch their comprehension, give them new information and respond to guesses as appropriate. Have students compare answers across groups.
6. Review the questions in the handout about unstated information that must be answered by making inferences. Model what making an inference is by answering one of the questions yourself and explaining the reason for the inference.
7. Play the song again all the way through or in segments; let the students continue to work in pairs or small groups to find the answers to the questions about unstated information. Students may need help with vocabulary and structures that represent the ideas that are not stated in the song. Keep track of these words and structures to use later in this and other lessons.
8. Compare answers across groups. In some cases there may be more than one “correct” answer since the ideas are unstated and open to interpretation.
9. Give the students copies of the lyrics in the target language. Ask them to check their answers to questions on the handout with the lyrics. Do they want to make any changes? Why?



Fig. 7-22-1 ©Clarsen55

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10. Review the new vocabulary from both the song and what has been generated in discussing and answering the questions. Ask students which words they would like to include in their class vocabulary lists. Write them down for later use.
11. You can evaluate the students' progress by reviewing the answers on their handouts and/or by playing another song



Fig. 7-23-1 ©MSWord

for them, giving them the lyrics, and handing out the same questions. How well they can respond to questions that require making inferences about the second song (given you help with any new vocabulary and structures) will tell you if they can transfer what they learned about inferential comprehension of songs in the target language.

This kind of activity can be done with reading, movie and TV clips, poetry, any kind of fictional text. You can vary the difficulty of the text and the difficulty of the questions you ask. This is an important way to help students dig deeper into the unspoken attitudes and assumptions that exist within the target language culture.

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Learning Strategies: What the Learner Does

Learning strategies are the thoughts and actions that learners employ to help them learn. They may be observable, such as taking notes, or covert, such as thinking about the text and making predictions to oneself about what is going to happen. Most students can learn how to use strategies more effectively; when they do so, they become more self-reliant and better able to learn independently



Fig. 7-24-1 ©Ximagination

Specific strategies you can teach that can help students comprehend more quickly and effectively when listening, viewing or reading include:

Previewing: reviewing titles, section headings, and photos/graphics to get a sense of the structure and content of a selection. For movie clips and other viewing activities, this can be done by watching the clip with the sound turned off.

Using selective attention: Searching for and attending to familiar words and phrases that will help with overall comprehension.

Using background knowledge: using existing knowledge of the topic to help infer the meaning of the text, written, audio, or visual.

Making inferences: using existing knowledge, and clues such as content clues, pictures, titles, setting, voice tone, captions, to make guesses about general text meaning and about meanings of specific words and phrases.

Predicting: using knowledge of the subject matter to make predictions about context and vocabulary and to check comprehension; using knowledge of the text type and purpose to make predictions about discourse structure; using knowledge about the author to make predictions about the presentation or writing style, vocabulary, and content.

Skimming and scanning: using a quick survey of the text to get the main idea, identify text structure, confirm or question predictions. For listening and viewing tasks, this can be done by listening to just the beginning and end of a selection.

Use Cognates: looking for words that may be cognates with or borrowings of words in a familiar language. In most target languages, these borrowings will have to do with popular culture and with technology.



Fig. 7-24-2 ©SWCockey

Paraphrasing: stopping at the end of a section to check comprehension by restating the information and ideas presented.

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Note taking and making graphic organizers: taking notes on what is read, seen or heard to aid comprehension of the whole text, making a graphic organizer or lists to organize information to understand it.

Using resources: finding information on the Internet about the topic to help comprehension, cooperating with others to discuss a text, looking up important, unfamiliar words in a dictionary or asking the teacher. Using resources appears at the end of this list because it is usually the first strategy that comes to mind. You want to encourage them to use other strategies first rather than being tied to their target language dictionary, Google Translate, or Wikipedia.

Teachers can help students learn when and how to use reading strategies in several ways.

- By modeling the strategies aloud
- By allowing time in class for group and individual previewing, predicting, and evaluation activities.
- By encouraging students to talk about what strategies they think will help them approach a particular activity, then talking afterwards about what strategies they actually used.



Fig. 7-25-1 Wordle

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Teaching Strategies: What the Teacher Does

- Devise activities with an eye to improving students' abilities to transfer knowledge from one area of learning to another.
- Develop students' awareness of the interpretive process and interpretive strategies by asking students to think and talk about how they listen and read in their native language.
- Allow students to practice the full repertoire of interpretive strategies by using authentic listening, viewing, and reading materials.
- Show students the learning strategies that will work best for the listening or reading purpose and the type of input. Then explain how and why students should use the strategies.
- Have students practice interpretive strategies in class and ask them to practice outside of class in their homework assignments. Then encourage students to be conscious of what they're doing while they complete listening and reading assignments.
- Encourage students to evaluate their comprehension and their strategy use immediately after completing an assignment. Then build comprehension checks into in-class and out-of-class interpretive assignments, and periodically review how and when to use particular strategies.
- Encourage the development of listening and reading skills and the use of listening and reading strategies by using the target language to conduct classroom business: making announcements, assigning homework, describing the content and format of tests.
- Do not assume that students will transfer strategies used from one task to another or from one language to another. Explicitly mention how a particular strategy can be used in a different type of interpretive task or with another skill, or ask students to think about how they would deal with a similar interpretive task in English.

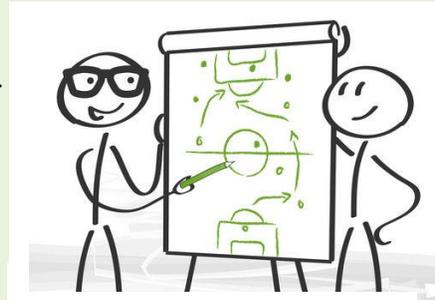


Fig. 7-26-1 ©Trueffelpix

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Includes resources on integrating strategy instruction into a language lesson. Learning strategies charts are available in multiple languages in the Appendices. Twenty learning strategies are highlighted.

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TV newscasts from around the world in many languages.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Rubric for Interpretive Communication for Grade 9, Year 1 learners for progress on the food unit, adapting criteria from the ACTFL Integrated Performance Assessment rubrics (Criteria and text in **RED** are added by the authors. They have not been pilot-tested nor validated as the IPA-based criteria are, but are relevant to the tasks and skills described below.)

Criterion	Exceeds Expectations 3 points	Meets Expectations 2 points	Does Not Meet Expectations 1 point
Literal Comprehension			
Identify Topic	Can usually identify the topic of a text chosen by the teacher.	Can often identify the topic of a text chosen by the teacher.	Cannot identify the topic of a text chosen by the teacher.
Recognizing Words	Recognizes learned words and phrases about food.	Recognizes some or most learned words and phrases about food.	Can recognize only a few learned words and phrases about food.
Finding the main Idea	Can identify main ideas in texts.	Can identify main ideas in texts. (reading/listening/or viewing) about target culture foods.	Can identify a few ideas about target culture foods in familiar contexts.
Finding supporting details	Can identify main ideas and some supporting details.		
Interpretive (Inferential) Comprehension			
Can infer meaning from clues such as titles, pictures (written text), actions, setting (video), voice tone, setting (audio)	Can infer author attitudes about foods from text and context clues independently or with help.	Can make inferences about meanings of words or text from clues independently.	Can occasionally make inferences about meanings of words or text from clues with help.
Infering meaning of unknown words from context Infering ideas from context and known words Infering authors' point of view	Can infer the meaning of many unknown words from contexts such as pictures, gestures and expressions, and from other words.	Can infer the meaning of some unknown words from contexts such as pictures or gestures and expressions.	Cannot infer meaning of unknown words.