

World Languages Learning Activity Types^{1, 2}

The activity types for world languages presented below aim to provide teachers seeking to integrate technology in a pedagogically meaningful and systematic manner with a scaffold that guides their instructional thinking and decision making while promoting the development of students' communicative competence. These activities draw from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Standards for Foreign Language Learning, which state that communication in the target language is understood as a process that involves three modes: (a) interpersonal, (b) interpretive, and (c) presentational. The interpersonal mode involves two-way written or oral communication with active negotiation of meaning. Because of this feature, speaking, listening, reading, and writing can be involved. The interpretive mode focuses on the appropriate interpretation of meanings (e.g., listening to a broadcast, reading a text, or viewing a movie). Because the author of the news, text, or movie is absent, there are no opportunities for active negotiation of meaning. This mode involves listening, reading, and viewing abilities. The presentational mode is a one-way communication mode; therefore, no opportunities for negotiation of meaning between presenters and audience are provided. This mode involves speaking and writing abilities. Because these communication modes require students to work on different skills as they develop their communicative competence, we have conceptualized and organized these activities into five genres that address different abilities: (a) listening, (b) speaking, (c) reading, (d) writing, and (e) viewing. These activities—combined or alone—are designed to promote communication in the target language (L2) as well as to provide opportunities to explore the connections between the target language and its underlying culture(s).

Listening Activity Types

Listening skills may seem more passive or less demanding than other language skills. However, when students are engaged in listening activities, they employ different competencies. For instance, when trying to comprehend and interpret a message, they need to know morphology, syntax, vocabulary (grammatical competence), the social and cultural expectations of native speakers in the language studied (sociolinguistic competence), how to use pronouns and conjunctions in a cohesive and coherent manner (discursive competence), and how to make educated guesses to compensate for gaps in their knowledge (strategic competence). In sum, listening activities require the interplay of different types of knowledge that go beyond “getting what it was said.”

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Table 1: Listening Activity Types

Listen to a conversation	Students listen to a conversation in L2, either live or recorded (e.g., from a textbook supplement, radio broadcast, skit, guest speakers).	CD; Web audio site
Listen to a teacher's prompt(s)	Students listen to teachers' prompts in L2 (e.g., assignment directions, game prompts, questions).	Podcasts, recorded audio
Listen to a broadcast	Students listen to a broadcast in L2 (e.g., radio, television, news, performance).	Web radio, podcasts
Listen to a poem/song	Students listen to a poem recited or song sung in L2, live or recorded.	CD; Web; iTunes, podcasts
Listen to an audio recording	Students listen to a recording in L2 (teacher- or student-made; professionally produced).	Podcasts; Web
Listen to a presentation	Students listen to a live or recorded presentation in L2 (e.g., guest presentation; student-created oral report; teacher-created lecture).	Presentation software, video/audio conference
Listen to a story	Students listen to a story written and read aloud in L2.	CD; Web; YouTube, podcasts

Speaking Activity Types

When learning a foreign language, speaking skills are crucial to students' engagement and sustained language development. After all, what is the purpose of learning a language if you cannot speak it? The activity types proposed below are appropriate for students with different levels of language proficiency within the continuum described in the *ACTFL Guidelines*.

Table 2: Speaking Activity Types

Have a conversation with a partner/small group	Students converse with a limited number of others in L2 (improvised or with prompts).	Audio/Video conference; telephone
Have a conversation with a large group	Students converse with a large group in L2 (e.g. question-and-answer with a guest speaker; improvisational performance; class discussion).	Audio/Video conference
Perform role plays	Students speak in L2 in character in a simulated situation (e.g., ordering dinner in a restaurant; checking in at the airport; skit, play, impersonation, puppet show).	Video camera, audio recorder
Engage in a question-and-answer activity	Students ask and/or answer questions from others in L2 (e.g., exchange personal information; request directions; interact with guest speaker).	Audio/Video conference

Repeat	Students repeat what someone else says in L2 (e.g., tongue-twister games; “Whisper Down the Lane”/”Telefono Descompuesto;” oral exercises).	Podcast, audio recorder
Have an informal debate	Students debate an issue in L2.	Audio/Video conference; audio recording
Deliver a presentation	Students deliver an (in)formal presentation (e.g., advertise a product, present a report; perform a commercial for a tourist destination).	Presentation software; video recording
Create an audio/video recording	Students create a recording (e.g., a commercial for an invented or real product; “how to do it” demonstrations; a song or rap).	Audio recording/ video recording; podcast
Tell a story	Students tell a lengthy or short story in L2.	Audio recording/ video recording
Sing	Students sing a song in L2.	Audio recording/ video recording
Define terms orally	Students provide L2 definitions for L2 words.	Audio recording
Describe something	Students describe an object, person, place, or idea in L2.	Audio recording
Recite	Students recite a rehearsed piece in L2 (e.g., poem, quotation, common phrase).	Audio recording

Writing Activity Types (both expository & creative)

Writing in L2 focuses on both the process and the product. When working with writing skills, students can engage in all three modes of communication— interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. In addition, writing abilities involve the same four competencies mentioned above (grammatical, sociolinguistic, discursive, and strategic) that enable learners to convey meanings with accuracy across cultures. The activities proposed below address both expository and creative writing skills.

Table 3: Writing Activity Types

Engage in a question-and-answer activity	Students ask and answer questions about different topics (e.g., daily routines, personal traits, target culture, likes and dislikes).	Email; word processor; chat, online discussion
Write a paper	Students compose a written response (e.g., position paper, essay, report) to a prompt (e.g. art critique, passage from textbook, newspaper article).	Word processor, blog, wiki
Label objects	Students prepare labels to match to objects in the class, at their homes, and/or at school.	Word processor; drawing program; concept mapping software

Define terms in written form	Students use new and old vocabulary to compose a glossary of terms (e.g., glossary of terms for textbook chapter, literary piece read in class or as a homework)	Word processor; concept mapping software, wiki
Write a sentence/paragraph	Students write a sentence or paragraph to describe an object, situation, and/or place.	Word processor; concept mapping software
Create a comic	Students create a comic strip to apply functions, culture, grammar, and/or vocabulary related to a given topic.	Word processor; drawing program; comic creation software; Photoshop
Write a script	Students write a script for a soap opera episode, a comedy skit, or a play.	Word processor, wiki
Write a poem	Students write a poem (e.g., haiku, cinquain, diamond, concrete poetry).	Word processor, wiki
Write a letter	Students write a letter in response to a prompt (e.g., penpal/keypal communication, letter to a family member, letter to the Editor, a complaint).	Word processor; Email
Create a game	Students create a game to practice vocabulary, grammar, language functions, culture (e.g., flash cards, Bingo, Jeopardy).	Word processor; drawing software; game creation software; presentation software
Write a story	Students write a story inspired by personal experience, a cultural topic, or a literary work read as part of course assignments.	Word processor, wiki
Write journal entries	Students write journal entries using targeted grammar structures and vocabulary (e.g., diary, blog, dialogue journal).	Word processor; blog; wiki; Email list; discussion forum
Create a book	Students create a book (e.g., biography, cookbook, poem collection, picture book).	Word processor; drawing software; presentation software; Web authoring software
Participate in an online discussion	Students engage in online discussions and take a stand on assigned topics (e.g., global warming, bilingual education, international policy).	Discussion forum, chat room, text messaging, personal response system
Create a test	Students create a topic or chapter test with a peer (e.g., multiple choice, cloze, true or false, matching pairs).	Word processor; test creation software; Web authoring software
Create an illustration accompanied by text	Students create a map, a concept map, word pictures, a mural, or a storyboard to illustrate historical events or cultural topics related to a textbook unit.	Drawing software; concept mapping software; presentation software

Create a newspaper/newsletter/news magazine/brochure	Students synthesize information from textbooks, encyclopedias, and/or websites and develop a print-based or electronic periodical.	Word processor; desktop publishing software; Web authoring software; wiki
Create a chart/table	Students compile and synthesize information from different sources and organize it in charts and/or tables.	Word processor; spreadsheet
List word families	Students develop word clusters (e.g. “Familias de Palabras”).	Word processor; concept mapping software
Edit	Students assist each other with their writing projects (e.g., peer editing).	Word processor; wiki
Take notes	Students record relevant information on course topics (e.g., presentations, field trips, videos).	Word processor; concept mapping software; wiki (for collaborative note-taking)

Reading Activity Types

The cognitive processes involved in reading in a foreign language are similar to those described for the listening skills. Students bring into play grammatical, discursive, sociolinguistic, and strategic competences when attempting to comprehend and interpret a written message. The following activity types may be performed either silent or aloud.

Table 4: Reading Activity Types

Read a story	Students read and analyze stories by relevant authors from their target language to get acquainted with different literary styles (e.g., J. Borges, A. Matute, H. Quiroga).	Web; ebook reader
Read a poem	Students read and analyze poems by authors from different nationalities and literary traditions (e.g., P. Neruda, J. Hernández, G. Mistral, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz).	Web
Read a newspaper/magazine	Students read and extract information from newspapers and magazines from different countries where their target language is spoken.	Web
Read a book/novel	Students read and analyze books and novels from different literary traditions and authors (e.g., G. Garcia Marquez, J. Cortazar, E. Zola, L. Esquivel).	Web; ebook reader

Read a letter	Students read letters from newspapers or magazines, family archives, legal documents (e.g., from and to editors, from one family member to another one, legal notifications).	Email; Web
Read a textbook	Students read and extract information from textbooks (e.g., cultural notes, grammar, vocabulary lists).	Web; ebook reader; CD
Read a comic (e.g. for children; political cartoon)	Students read a comic and relate it to the cultural and/or political reality/realities represented (e.g., “Mafalda,” “Maitena,” “Asterix,” “Ramón”).	Web
Read a chart/table	Students read chart(s)/table(s) to extract information and to connect it to course topics (e.g., weather service, census data by languages, health issues by countries).	Web
Read an article (e.g. encyclopedia entry; Web page)	Students read article/s to further their knowledge about course topics (e.g. encyclopedia entry; Web page; electronic journals and magazines).	Web; CD
Read a diary/journal	Students read entries from peers’ diaries/journals posted online.	Web; blog

Viewing Activity Types

Viewing abilities are critical for “zooming into” the target language culture. Through viewing activities, students can observe authentic interactions among native speakers, learn about differences among dialects, accents, registers, and body language without leaving the boundaries of their classroom. As with reading and listening, students learning an L2 bring into play the same four competencies to comprehend and interpret a message. The viewing activity types below vary in the degree of challenge offered to students in terms of comprehension and interpretation of meanings.

Table 5: Viewing Activity Types

Watch a performance	Students attend a live performance or watch a recorded event (e.g., DVD of Ballet Folklórico de México, concert, play).	UStream, Web; DVD; YouTube
Watch a video	Students watch contemporary or classic movies, video clips of commercials, documentaries, to enhance comprehension of course topics.	Web; DVD; YouTube; Hulu

Observe a live interaction	Students attend or watch interactions in the target language to get acquainted with different communication styles (academic and non-academic) in different settings (e.g., sporting event, at the airport, a job interview, at the doctor's office).	Web; Webcam; videoconference; UStream
View an exhibit	Students take physical or virtual field trips (e.g., to an art museum, cultural artifacts, other students' works, school exhibition).	Web; Web-based virtual fieldtrip; videoconference
View image(s)	Students use images to elicit information about course topics (e.g. pictogram; photographs; drawings).	Web; CD

References:

National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (2006). *Standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century*. Yonkers, NY: Author.

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (1998). *ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners*. Yonkers, NY: Author.