

Culture Learning Strategies Inventory

Objectives

- To highlight the strategies students already have for communicating across cultures
- To help students recognize additional strategies for improving their cross-cultural communication

Materials Needed

Duplicable handout *Culture Learning Strategies Inventory* (p. 175)

Background Information:

pp. 33-39

Relevant Pages in *Students' Guide*:

pp. 29-35

Suggested Time Frame:

30 minutes to complete the survey; 20 to 45 minutes for discussion

Instructions

1. Before students complete the inventory, take a few minutes to discuss the experiences students have had in making transitions among groups, such as moving from rural to urban communities, changing high schools, exposure to different religions, or traveling around or living in another country. Ask them to consider how they learned rules in their new environment and what the experience was like emotionally. The goal is to help them identify some of the easy-to-recognize, common-sense strategies (“I asked my sister who had been there before me.”) as well as others that are less tangible (“I found it easy to make new friends. I don’t know—maybe I am more open to meeting new people.”).
2. Have students take the inventory (on p. 29 of the *Students' Guide* or give them a copy of the handout that follows). 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 as homework or to do as an in-class activity. Ask them to consider their past experiences when they fill out this inventory. Point out that the inventory mentions culture learning strategies students might use when they study abroad; however, if they haven’t or don’t plan to study abroad, they can answer the questions based on the cross-cultural situations they have encountered or are likely to encounter.
3. Depending on time available, you could have an open discussion where students share strategies they use most frequently and/or divide the students into small groups to discuss which strategies they have used and liked, and which strategies they are interested in learning more about. Group the students either based on their interests or the topics you plan to cover. For study abroad orientations, any of the strategies should fit your program. For a language classroom, some strategies that might fit are: strategies for communicating with people from another culture, strategies for making judgments about another culture, and strategies for dealing with different communication styles.

Debriefing

1. Discuss strategies students think may work for them, including some they have tried and some they have not tried but think could be useful.
2. Refer students to the “Comments Regarding the Culture Strategy Inventory and Index” at the end of the survey, either in the *Students’ Guide* or on 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 various 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 during this experience.

Note: Many students have been exposed to the idea that cultures differ and that we should respect these differences. However, students may or may not have had a great deal of experience in developing strategies for learning about the ways cultures differ and how they can prepare to respond to cultural differences. Being effective in cross-cultural situations is often assumed to be easy, so students may find the idea of breaking down strategies for culture learning to be a bit odd, unnecessary, or not useful. Be prepared for some resistance from students by sharing your own stories of navigating cross-cultural situations, letting students know about the kinds of strategies you have used in those situations. If your students have a great deal of experience in successfully interacting across cultures, have them share stories from their specific experiences, making sure they do not talk in general terms only.

Adaptations and Extensions

This can be a great activity for a language classroom if the survey is translated into the target language for more advanced language students.

You could also show the students a film in which you find a particular character is successful in interacting across cultures. Ask the students to identify why the character is successful. What specifically can be attributed to the context, the skills of the person, or the adaptability of all involved? In a language classroom, you could use a film in the target language, which could highlight different ways of looking at successful interaction across cultures.

Culture Learning Strategies Inventory

R. M. Paige, J. Rong, W. Zheng, and B. Kappler



The purpose of this inventory is to find out more about yourself as a culture learner and to help you discover strategies that can help you understand and adapt to cultures that are different from your own. Culture learning strategies can be difficult to pinpoint because when we function well in an environment, we are often no longer conscious of the strategies we use. And perhaps more important, we may not always be conscious that we are *not* functioning well in a new environment! This inventory asks you to consider what you do and what you might do to be effective in a new culture. The specific strategies listed here, while not exhaustive, are comprehensive in terms of what research, theory, and experience suggest are important to consider for how you acquire the knowledge and skills to function well in a new environment.

When taking this inventory, 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*.

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

Pre-Departure Strategies

Strategies for when I am in surroundings that are culturally different from what I am used to:

- | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Consider ways in which different cultures might view things in different ways (e.g., how different cultures value “alone time” or independence). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Figure out what cultural values might be involved when I encounter a conflict or when something goes wrong. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Think about different cross-cultural perspectives to examine situations in which I seem to offend someone or do something wrong. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Use generalizations instead of stereotypes when I make statements about people who are different from me. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Counter stereotypes others use about people from my country by using generalizations and cultural values instead. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Make distinctions between behavior that is personal (unique to the person), cultural (representative of the person's culture), and universal (shared by humans). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Look at similarities as well as differences among people of different backgrounds. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

What other strategies do I use when I'm in surroundings that are culturally different than what I'm used to?

Regents of the University of Minnesota. From the Maximizing Study Abroad series published by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition. See: carla.umn.edu/maxsa/guides “Culture learning strategies inventory” can be found on pp. 173–181 in *Maximizing study abroad: An instructional guide to strategies for language and culture learning and use* (2009) by Kappler Miikk, B., Cohen, A.D. & Paige, R.M. (with Chi, J., Lassegard, J., Maegher, M. & Weaver, S.), and the survey can be found on pp. 21–35 in *Maximizing study abroad: A students' guide to strategies for language and culture learning and use* (2nd ed.) (2006) by Paige R.M., Cohen, A.D., Kappler, B., Chi, J. and Lassegard, J.

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The next portion of the Culture Learning Strategies Inventory looks at the culture learning strategies you think you will use once you are in the country of your study abroad experience, referred to in this inventory as your “host country.” If you have studied abroad before, you may want to complete this inventory according to what you did last time. Or you can fill it out by indicating which strategies you think you *will likely* use in a variety of situations.

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

In-Country Strategies

Strategies I (will likely) use to adjust to a new culture and cope with culture shock:

- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 8. Explain my cross-cultural experiences (the good and the difficult) to my family and friends at home. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Consider what my friends living in the host country say about people from my own culture, using what I know about cultural bias. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Strive to keep myself physically healthy. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Assume that some moments of culture shock are normal culture learning experiences and not worry about them too much. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Use a variety of coping strategies when I feel I have “culture shock overload.” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Keep reasonable expectations of my ability to adjust to the new culture, given the length of my stay and my particular study abroad program. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

What are other strategies I could use to deal with culture shock?

Strategies for dealing with difficult times in the new culture:

- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 14. Keep in touch with friends and family back home by writing letters and emails. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Keep a journal or a diary about my experiences. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Participate in sports and other activities while abroad. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Find someone from my own culture to talk to about my cultural experiences. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Relax when I'm stressed out in my host country by doing what I normally do back home to make myself comfortable. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

What are other strategies I could use to deal with difficult times in the new culture?

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 making judgments about another culture:

- 19. Observe the behavior of people from my host country very carefully.
- 20. Analyze things that happen in my host country that seem strange to me from as many perspectives as I can.
- 21. Consider my own cultural biases when trying to understand another culture.
- 22. Refrain from making quick judgments about another culture.

What are other strategies I could use for making cultural judgments?

Strategies for communicating with people from another culture:

- 23. Don't assume that everyone from the same culture is the same.
- 24. Investigate common areas of miscommunication between people from my host culture and my own culture by reading books and by talking to people who know the two cultures well.
- 25. Read local newspapers to better understand the current political and social issues in my host country.
- 26. Build relations with local people by finding opportunities to spend time with them.
- 27. Help people in my host country understand me by explaining my behaviors and attitudes in terms of my personality and culture.

What are other strategies I could use for communicating with people from other cultures?

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 deal with different communication styles:

- 28. Consider using different types of communication styles when talking with someone from a different culture.
- 29. Try a different approach when my communication style doesn't seem to be working well.
- 30. Listen to whether my conversation partners are indirect or direct in their communication styles.
- 31. Mirror the communication style of my conversation partners (i.e., if they are always indirect, I try to be indirect too).
- 32. Respect the way people from other cultures express their emotions.
- 33. Refrain from disagreeing right away so that I have a chance to listen to what others are trying to communicate.

What are other strategies I could use to deal with different communication styles?

Strategies to understand nonverbal communication in another culture:

- 34. Learn about the ways in which people in my host country use nonverbal communication.
- 35. Examine how my own nonverbal communication is influenced by my culture.
- 36. Observe which nonverbal communication differences are most difficult for me to adjust to in my host country.
- 37. Practice using a variety of different nonverbal communication patterns.
- 38. Figure out how far people stand from each other in my host country and try to keep the "right" distance from others.
- 39. Observe the gestures that people use in my host country.
- 40. Ask friends in my host country to explain the meaning of different gestures to me.
- 41. Try to use eye contact in a way that is appropriate in my host country.

What are other strategies I could use to understand nonverbal communication?

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 interact with people in the host culture:

- 42. Join clubs or organizations to meet people who have interests like mine.
- 43. Ask people in my host country about their perceptions of my country and culture.
- 44. Go to the market in my host country and interact with people in the shops.
- 45. Hold back on making judgments about other people based on my first impressions.

What are other strategies I could use for interacting with hosts?

Strategies to use with my homestay family:

- 46. Find out from my homestay family what I can do to help around the house.
- 47. Ask my homestay family about smoking rules in the house and observe those rules if I smoke or invite over friends who smoke.
- 48. Get permission before bringing someone to my homestay family's house.
- 49. Share pictures of my own family with my homestay family.
- 50. Teach games common in my own country to my homestay family.
- 51. Enlist the help of a friend in my host country when I have a conflict with my homestay family to help me understand the situation.
- 52. Figure out the household rules for eating, smoking, using the bathroom, dressing around the house, and helping out by observing and asking questions.
- 53. Ask my host family about their views on privacy and being alone rather than assume that we share the same views.

What are other strategies I could use for interacting with homestay families?

Post-Study Abroad Strategies

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 use when I return home:

- | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 54. Find a group of people who have had similar study abroad experiences to talk to and share experiences. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 55. Participate in activities sponsored by study abroad and international groups back home. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 56. Take a language class that will help me keep up with the language of the country I studied in (if applicable) and/or take classes on subjects I became interested in during my study abroad adventure. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 57. Volunteer for an international organization or work with international students. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 58. Share my feelings and experiences with friends and family, without expecting that they will relate to all that I say. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 59. Try to stay connected with friends I made while studying abroad. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 60. Give myself time to readjust to my own country. | | | | |

What are other strategies I could use when I return home?

Comments regarding the Culture Learning Strategies Inventory

- The purpose for completing this survey is to become more aware of the strategies you use and could use to enhance your culture learning. 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 culture learning for a given strategy or for your culture learning 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 cultural proficiency. 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 culture 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.