CHAPTER 8

Creative Tools that Facilitate the Advising Process

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The purpose of advising in language learning is to help learners to think more deeply about the language learning process in order to become more autonomous language learners (Carson & Mynard, 2012). The advising process is negotiated through dialogue between a learner and an advisor and this interaction can often be facilitated by the use of various tools. In this paper, the authors who are all (past or present) learning advisors (LAs) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) in Japan, begin by briefly outlining an underpinning theoretical framework for advising in language learning. The theoretical framework draws on both constructivist and sociocultural viewpoints. The authors then describe various tools that can be employed to facilitate the reflective processes.

A Theoretical Framework for Advising in Language Learning

Constructivism

From a constructivist perspective, it is important that language learners are provided with opportunities to reflect and construct and reconstruct their understandings of concepts related to their language learning processes (Adelman Reyes & Vallone, 2008; Von Glasersfeld, 1989). Dialogue with others is a crucial part of the advising process as it provides opportunities for promoting personal knowledge formation (McCarthy, 2012; Mozzon-McPherson, 2012). LAs at KUIS may facilitate this dialogue in a number of ways depending on the needs of the learner. For example, at times an LA may refer to specific strategies or materials. Alternatively an LA might raise awareness of the learning process through questioning and other skills providing
opportunities for the learner to construct and reconstruct understandings and activate schemata.

**Sociocultural theory**

Taking a sociocultural perspective, interaction in advising is mediated through various tools. Mediation is one of the key concepts of sociocultural theory and is defined as the way in which individuals change aspects of the world around them by drawing on tools. A thorough description of mediation and tools is beyond the scope of this paper, see Kozulun, 1998; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Wertsch, 1990; Wertsch, 2007 for more detailed descriptions. The authors suggest that various tools may be used to facilitate the interactions in an advising scenario and that these tools provide opportunities for reflection thus stimulating cognitive and metacognitive processes associated with deeper-level learning (Mynard, 2012).

In order to highlight the relationship between advising tools and the reflective processes, the authors draw on the Dialogue, Tools and Context Model (Mynard, 2012, p. 33) (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. The Dialogue, Tools and Context Model for Advising in Language Learning (from Mynard, 2012, p. 33)](image)

The model shows the advising process from the perspectives of the people involved: the learner and the advisor. The advisor may be a professional learning advisor, a teacher, a peer or another individual who is facilitating the reflective processes for the learner.

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12 Artwork by Noriko Takasago
Cognitive tools

Cognitive tools are artifacts designed to stimulate the cognitive and metacognitive processes and help the learner to understand the learning process more deeply in relation to designing and implementing a successful plan. Cognitive tools might be used by a learner either alone or with other people, before, during or after an advising session. Either as a one-off activity, or as part of a series of activities. In some cases, a cognitive tool can be used in conjunction with dialogue in order to facilitate the process. Dialogue itself is considered to be a tool from a sociocultural theoretical perspective, but in the Dialogue, Tools and Context Model has a distinct place and this is because of the importance of dialogue in advising. The dialogue may be internal, spoken or written (or typed) (Mynard & Navarro, 2010) and this may be greatly facilitated by the presence of a cognitive tool.

The Context

All of the cognitive tools described in the next section of this paper are currently being used by learners and LAs at Kanda University of International Studies as a way to support self-directed learning at the Self-access Learning Center (SALC). The SALC is an English only space designed to mainly support learners’ outside class learning endeavors. It contains over 11,000 materials such as books and DVDs and also provides courses and advising services in order to support the promotion of learner autonomy and self-directed learning. Attendance at the SALC is completely optional and all courses and services offered at the SALC are voluntary. The majority of the advising is done in the target language (English), mainly because of the language policy of the English Language Institute which is where the SALC is situated institutionally. Offering advising programmes in the TL does have advantages, for example, learners have opportunities to develop agency and metacognitive awareness through the medium of English (see Little, 2007; Little, 2012). In addition, learners themselves choose to attend KUIS because of the opportunities to use English extensively and there is an expectation on the part of the students that ELI and SALC services should be offered in English. On the other hand, discussing language learning processes in the TL can present challenges depending on the learner’s TL proficiency, fluency and confidence, so cognitive tools can help to
scaffold the TL advising process (see Thornton, 2012) in addition to stimulating reflective processes. As illustrated in the next section, the main cognitive tools used at KUIS are part of a self-directed learning module. These modules are optional, non-credit bearing courses attached to the Freshman and Sophomore English programme. Learners who complete a module can earn up to ten additional points on their end-of-term course grade. More details of the modules are given in the following sections.

**Examples of Cognitive Tools**

**The First Steps Module**

The First Steps Module (FSM) is an eight-week self-directed learning module for freshman students, during which LAs work with individual students. It is voluntary for learners who are interested in becoming better at language learning.

The module consists of seven basic units written in English: Needs Analysis, Time Management, Learning Styles, Resources, Affective Strategies, Learning Strategies, and Balancing Your Learning. The main goals of the module are:

- Become a better language learner
- Become a more independent learner
- Learn how to use the Self-Access Learning Center SALC effectively
- Write an effective learning plan for self-study

In each unit, there are many activities for learners to try, and the assigned LA writes comments on the activities that the students have attempted in the unit. In addition to that, the learners write a weekly reflective journal in English by answering two to three prompts which guide them to think more deeply about the content of each unit (Noguchi & McCarthy, 2010).

Following this is an area for the LA to respond to what the student has written in the reflection. The LA gives written feedback on each learner’s reflection utilizing advising skills (Kelly, 1996) to facilitate the development of the learners’ awareness of themselves as a learner and their internal dialogue. Students’ responses to the LA’s questions and comments facilitate interaction between the two. See Mynard and Navarro (2010) for more details about advisor-learner dialogue in written form, also
see Thornton and Mynard (this volume) for details of how LAs respond to students’ reflections on the First Steps Module. In the next section, another cognitive tool to facilitate dialogue between learners will be discussed.

**Shared Reflections**

The importance of learning through interaction with others, by having opportunities to discuss one’s ideas and be exposed to alternative views has long been recognized by educational psychologists. Rodgers (2002) sees interaction in a community as an important part of the reflective practice process as it gives value to experiences that a single learner may feel are unimportant, helps one to appreciate experiences from a new angle and can sustain motivation.

While the FSM is built around interaction between learner and advisor, predominantly in the form of a written dialogue, the self-directed format of the module also results in students having very limited contact time with peers. Although the FSM does include two short lunchtime workshops, and LAs encourage learners to complete the module activities with their friends, without a regular classroom-based course, we are unable to create a forum which will ensure that this kind of interaction takes place on a regular basis. This lack of interaction means that learners are denied opportunities to engage with and learn from each other.

To address this need for interaction, a Sharing Reflections tool was introduced to the FSM. Each week, LAs take examples of student reflections deemed insightful or typical of the learners’ work and paste seven or eight of them onto a sheet, with an optional comment box at the bottom of the page. This sheet is then included in the pack, for students to read and comment on if they so choose. In introducing this sheet, it was hoped that learners would benefit from reading other students’ ideas, as they could engage with module content more deeply, and be motivated by other students’ efforts and experiences. It was also hoped it might help students less sure of how to write effective reflections to understand what kind of writing was expected of them. Data from a research project designed to investigate the shared reflections identified that the tool served a number of functions for learners, both cognitive and affective. Through reading and sometimes commenting on peers’ reflections, learners were able to gain a deeper understanding of module content, learn about new learning strategies
and ideas, and be motivated to learn English and complete the module. See Thornton (2010) for more details of the project.

The Learning Plan

After completing seven FSM units in which the learners have developed reflective dialogue with LAs, they produce a personalized eight-week learning plan as a final project of the course (Appendix 1). In other words, the learning plan is considered to be a flexible learner-designed bespoke syllabus which develops through the dialogic process.

There are seven parts to the plan which correspond to the seven FSM units that the learners completed. For the first two sections of the plan, the learners write in detail their goals and why they want to improve them. After they explain their goals, they write about their learning styles and interests. Then, they write about the resources they will use to achieve their goals.

Following this is the SURE+E planning stage (Appendix 2). Learners write how they will Study, Use, and Review the resources they have chosen to achieve their goals. After this, there is a section for Enjoy, in which the learners explain what they do to enjoy English. Finally, the last section of the personalized learning plan is the Evaluation stage. In this section, students should describe in detail how they can check if they are making progress towards their goals.

Once students have completed the learning plan, they submit it to their assigned LA along with their Unit One through Unit Seven module pack. The LA reviews the module pack and comments on the learners’ personalized learning plan. It is hoped that this process will allow learners to understand how to create a personalized learning plan. If they want to, they can use the learning plan they created in the FSM in the next module, the Learning How to Learn Module (described in the next section).

The Learning How to Learn Module and Sophomore Module

The Learning How to Learn Module (LHL) and the Sophomore Module (SM) are tools provided for learners who have completed the FSM. In the LHL, learners are allowed to select the focus area of their choice. While the LHL is for learners who completed the FSM in their first semester of their first year, the SM is for learners
who have completed the FSM, and, for some of them, also the LHL. As the name suggests, the SM is offered only to second year learners. There are four types of SM: Writing, Speaking, Reading, and Media English.

Both the LHL and the SM provide opportunities for learners to experiment with what they have learned in the FSM. In these modules, learners actually design and implement a learning plan, and evaluate their progress with the support of an LA. Learners engage in dialogue with an assigned LA through written documents and three face-to-face advisory sessions throughout a semester. In the advisory sessions, advisors may utilize some of the cognitive tools described in the following sections in order to make an advising experience more effective. Meanwhile, the modules are designed in a way that learners can monitor, experiment, and reflect, by interacting with other learners and by selecting and using appropriate resources so that the learners can develop a deeper level of cognitive and metacognitive awareness. In the following section, four supplementary cognitive tools will be discussed.

**Strategy Sheets**

One of the identified challenges of advising in the second language is establishing a meaningful dialogue that both facilitates the development of autonomous learning behavior and also raises awareness of language learning strategies. Strategy development, in other words, the development of specific actions that help make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, and more effective (Oxford, 1990) is an integral part of the learner-advisor dialogue that is promoted in our self-access centre as it means, essentially, helping learners develop the necessary skills for active, self-directed involvement in their language learning.

Research has shown that learners who use a greater range of appropriate strategies remain more motivated and become more proficient language users (Song, 2004; Lai, 2009; Radwan, 2011). However, there exist two specific challenges affecting advising on language learning strategies. First of all, strategies are often unobservable. It is difficult to see the different strategies being used by learners, particularly in a self-directed learning context, i.e. outside of the classroom. Secondly, strategies are often used unconsciously. A lot of the strategies used by learners are ‘instinctive, unthinking, and uncritical’ (Oxford, 1990). These challenges need to be managed carefully in advising sessions, particularly when LAs are trying to navigate the complexity of raising awareness of the kinds of strategies that learners are using,
the different kinds of strategies that are available to them, and at the same time, suggesting new strategies that would make their learning more effective.

To help LAs manage these two challenges, a tool referred to as ‘Language learning strategy sheets’ was created (see Appendix 3 for an example). The tool uses Rubin and Thompson’s (1996) self-assessment sheets as a model. There are four sheets in total; One sheet for each of the four main language skills. Each sheet contains Likert-scale questions asking learners how often they use a particular strategy. The different strategies are presented in question form to encourage personal reflection and detailed discussion (Thornton, 2011). By answering the various questions either before, during, or after an advising session, it can become easier for the learners to explore which strategies they are already using, as well as becoming aware of new ways of learning. This reflective discussion, facilitated by the strategy sheets, is a starting point into the introduction of language learning strategies.

By having the strategies on printed sheets, learners are afforded the time to read the different strategies carefully, relieving learners of the burden of accessing such information through their interactions with the advisor. This is particularly helpful for lower proficiency learners, who sometimes find it difficult to process information face-to-face (Thornton, 2011).

In the end, the sheets, which can be used independently or with the help of an advisor, are tools for facilitating the complexity of language strategy acquisition. They help ensure the practical application of learner autonomy by offering flexibility and creating the opportunity for learners to make informed choices about their individualized language learning.

Wants, Interests, and Needs (WIN)

With self-directed learning at KUIS, most interaction between learning advisors and learners is related to the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (PIME) of a learning plan. Goal setting therefore becomes an important initial step as without clear goals it is difficult to evaluate the relevance of any part of the learning plan. If the learning plan is considered to be a learner-designed bespoke syllabus, as mentioned above, then just as in syllabus design, a needs analysis can guide learners towards relevant, focused goal setting. Bringing in the concept of wants and interests in addition to needs (WIN) results in a more emotionally relevant analysis (Morrison, 2011). The dialogue between an LA and a learner that considers
all three components of WIN can result in objectives which are more specific thereby leading to a more focused learning plan.

The model has three distinct stages (see Figure 2): WIN analysis (Awareness Raising), Diagnostic, and WIN analysis (Focus). LA guidance through these stages is designed to enable learners to make more informed choices about their goals.

![Figure 2. WIN Analysis (Morrison, 2011, p. 17)](image)

**WIN analysis (Awareness Raising)**

The LA can guide learners to consider all three areas to promote a greater understanding of possible language learning aims. A simplified example (Morrison, 2011) could be:

- **Wants**: to improve my spoken English (speaking in informal situations with friends)
- **Interests**: communicating about daily life (talking about the weekend, work, free time activities etc.)
- **Needs**: to improve paragraph structure for academic essays

Having considered the variety of these goals, the LA can ask the learner to prioritize these. One way an LA could do this is by encouraging the learner to consider the immediacy of these goals, or to consider which objectives may be covered if he or she is also attending classes or regularly in a situation that will
address particular goals. With guidance from the LA, a learner can select self-directed objectives and prioritize these in an informed way.

**Diagnostic tool**

Before applying a diagnostic tool (see appendix 4 for an example), learners must prepare to keep a copy of the target activity text i.e. what they will listen to, read or produce, so that this can be referred to as an aide-mémoire during the application of the diagnostic tool. The learner then does the target activity and applies the tool, which is effectively a framework to think through the successes and challenges encountered when carrying out the target activity. The initial results of piloting of this tool appear to show that through considering the language produced or received through the framework of the diagnostic tool, many learners are better able to consider their needs than learners who have not used it. However, LAs may also need to provide support to stimulate the learners to consider their cognitive processes, as focusing on the thoughts as well as the language seems to elicit more clarity about the mental challenges occurring during the target language activity.

**WIN analysis (Focus)**

The focusing stage of the WIN analysis requires that learners consider their needs from the diagnostic activity and choose the ones they want to address. The final focus is on interests and is likely to be linked to genre and topics if this has not been covered in the awareness-raising step. In dialogue the LA can check if the learner is satisfied with the choices made before moving on the planning stage.

**The Flower**

During advising sessions, LAs are faced with learners of varying language proficiency levels and at different metacognitive stages, which may at times result in the advisor having to consider more creative approaches to assist the learner in connecting various elements of their learning. The “flower” tool (illustrated as Figure 3) was inspired by Leni Dam’s (1995) design of the same name. Dam described her flower tool as a “negotiation model” interlinking the following elements: the learner’s role, the teacher’s role, learning materials, aims, evaluation and activities. Her model was designed specifically as a means of helping classroom teachers to incorporate
various aspects of learner autonomy into their classes during the lesson planning stage. The version of the flower developed by one of the authors (McCarthy) was designed purely by chance during a particularly challenging advising session out of a need to help a lower-proficiency level learner understand the deeper connections between his learning goals, learning materials, learning style, learning strategies, reflection and time-management. The learner seemed to respond well to the visual stimuli and over the subsequent weeks, the flower became the central tool in helping him to monitor his weekly self-directed learning plans. Later, the author also found the flower tool to be useful in reinforcing good self-directed learning practices with learners of a higher-proficiency and metacognitive level, as well as a simple method of introducing self-directed learning concepts to larger groups during orientation workshops.

At KUIS, learners are first introduced to the concepts of self-directed learning as individual units in the First Steps Module, but it was observed by LAs that some students had completed the course without a clear understanding of how the different components complemented each other. This resulted in LAs using their own individual methods of helping these learners to see and understand the various interconnecting components of self-directed learning. For this author, the flower tool thus became a visual representation of how the components fit together as a whole, each individual component being able to stand alone but also connected to and influencing the other components through its core – the learner’s goals. Figure 3 is an illustration of the flower tool in practice. In the orientation workshop of the LHL, the learners were given a choice between writing their plan in the linear format as presented in the LHL and designing their plan in the more visual flower format. The two learners who chose this advising tool had the lowest proficiency level of English within the group of eight. Both learners were encouraged to write their thoughts and ideas in this visual format as an aid for later discussion in the one-to-one advising session. As advising sessions at KUIS are conducted in the learner’s second language, this type of support was found to be an easier method of helping these learners to explore, identify and express ideas about their self-directed learning.
Figure 3. The “flower” advising tool in practice.

For the learners described above, the main advantage of the flower tool was that they could clearly see the interconnection between the various aspects of their learning plan as they engaged in the self-directed learning process. By continuously reflecting on the question, “How does this connect to the other areas?” the learners were able to monitor and make better decisions about the different aspects of their learning. For those interested in utilizing this tool in their advising practice, it is suggested that it be provided as an option among other advising tools, in order to give
learners an alternative from which to select the tool that best suits their style of learning and proficiency/metacognitive level (see McCarthy, 2011).

**Wheel of Language Learning (WLL)**

Facilitating learners’ reflective process is one of the elements which is central to advising in language learning. However, it is not always easy for advisors to lead advisees to undertake deep reflective processes. As mentioned by Kelly (1996), advisors may have to use a variety of skills to support learners’ self-management processes by introducing macro-skills, and at the same time, focus on the quality of the dialogue by introducing micro-skills. Such skills include guiding, modeling, supporting, giving feedback, evaluating, linking, paraphrasing, summarizing, questioning, interpreting, reflecting feelings, and several others. However, the overuse of such skills may lead advisors to dominate the dialogue which goes against the learner-centered approach.

Kato and Sugawara (2009) and Yamashita and Kato (2012) focus on a tool called the Wheel of Language Learning (WLL), which can be effectively used to help learners clarify their learning issues. In the WLL activity, an advisee is asked to rank his/her current satisfaction levels on six areas of self-directed language learning: goal-setting, materials selection, time-management, evaluation, learning strategies, and motivation (as shown in Figure 4). Advisees are informed that the center of the wheel is zero, which refers to complete dissatisfaction, and that the outer edge is ten, which refers to complete satisfaction. Then, advisees are encouraged to talk about the reasons for this self-evaluation, where the conversation will be controlled not by advisors but by advisees. The six areas in the WLL can be changed by the advisor to make it more suitable for the advisee. Advisors may also ask the advisee to label each category by themselves.

The WLL was created to: 1) give visual support to learners, 2) help learners see how each area is linked, and 3) encourage learners to control the conversation with an advisor. The results of the study by Kato & Sugawara (2009) indicated, in general, sessions between an advisee and advisor became much livelier and longer when the WLL was used. Moreover, by introducing Action-oriented Language Learning Advising (ALLA) as mentioned by Kato & Sugawara (2009) together with the WLL, advisors are more likely to be able to guide advisees into positive action.
The WLL is most effectively used in mid-term or end-of-semester advising sessions as the tool can be used to support an extended advisor/advisee relationship. Serving as a visual too, the WLL has advantages over text based tools not only for visual learners but other types of learners. Further benefit can be observed in an L2 advising context where visual aid eases the language barrier.

![Wheel of Language Learning](image)

Figure 4. Wheel of Language Learning

**Conclusions**

This paper has given a brief description of a number of cognitive tools that have been used to stimulate dialogue and reflection in the advising process at KUIS. Tools like the ones described in this chapter may arise to fulfill a need identified by learning advisors and they are likely to be modified over time and customized to suit the styles of the LA and learner. Many tools can be customized by the students themselves indicating that the learners are truly taking charge of their own language learning. Ongoing action research is recommended in order to examine the effectiveness of the cognitive tools once introduced. The tools described in this chapter are in various stages of an action research process and research is being approached in slightly different ways. For example, the modules are currently being
evaluated as part of a thorough curriculum review process which will take several years. Supplementary tools and smaller tools which constitute the modules may be constantly revised based on experimentation. In order to do this, LAs are examining the way in which learners use the tools and learners’ perceptions of using them. Some of the tools begin life as experimental and supplementary activities designed to scaffold the advising process. With time, and after several revisions, the tools may become incorporated into core elements of practice. In this way, the tools may have an impact the field of advising in general.

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References


**Appendix A: Learning Plan**

**TASK 1: Now try planning your own study using this system.**

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<th>MY SMALL GOAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>Choose something to focus on and study based on your Small Goal.</td>
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<th>STUDY it</th>
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<td>Practice the language in a different setting</td>
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<th>USE it</th>
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<td>Review what you learned regularly so that you don’t forget it</td>
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<th>REVIEW it</th>
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<td>Put yourself in the language environment</td>
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<th>ENJOY it</th>
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<tr>
<td>Once in a while, you should evaluate your SURE system. Is your study system working? Are you reaching your goals to improve your weak area?</td>
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<th>EVALUATE it</th>
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Appendix B: The SURE + E Model

“SURE + E” Practice and Learning
This unit will help you with the Learning section of your LEARNING PLAN.

To be a good language learner it is important that you are able to notice new language. Noticing new language means recognizing something you don’t yet know but you think you need to know. For example, when you watch a movie in English or talk to a native speaker, you will notice a word, phrase, grammatical expression, gesture, etc. that you don’t know.

Noticing new language is a very important first step to understanding and using the language, but in order to learn successfully you also need to study step by step.

To learn language, make sure you have a good balance of the SURE + E (Study it, Use it, Review it, and Enjoy it PLUS Evaluate it) model.

Study it!
Choose something to focus on and study it.

Use it!
Practice the language in a different setting. For example, you could try using new phrases you have learnt in a conversation.

Enjoy it!
Put yourself in the language environment. For example, read stories, watch movies, listen to music, send emails and chat to friends in English.

Review it!
It is really important to remember to review the language from time to time.

Evaluate it!
You should regularly check if your SURE model is working! To see some of the ways you can evaluate your SURE model, see pages 3 and 4.
Appendix C: Strategy sheet

READING
How often do you do the following things to improve your reading skills?
5 = always 4 = usually 3 = sometimes 2 = rarely 1 = never

Preparing to read
1. Do you notice differences in genres (magazine articles, novels, text books) to understand the text?
2. Do you choose texts appropriate to your level?
3. Before you read, do you think about what the story is about?
4. Do you use titles, pictures, text structure to understand what the text is about?

Reading
5. Do you think about how much time it will take you to read the text/story (set a time limit)?
6. Do you use your knowledge of the topic to understand unclear parts of the text?
7. Do you try to get a general idea of the whole text by reading important parts (introductions, paragraph topic sentences, conclusions)?
8. Do you skip unfamiliar words/ phrases and continue reading to get the general idea?

Reflecting
9. Do you check the words you skipped?
10. Do you ask yourself questions in order to check how much you understand?
11. Do you take notes or write summaries of what you read?

Look at your answers. Are you already using effective strategies? Which areas can you improve on? If you’d like to get more information on these, or any other learning strategies, please come and talk to a Learning Advisor! ☺️

The Next Step:
Strategies I’m going to try:

Materials I can use:
(Ask a learning advisor for some ideas)

Review: Will you continue using this strategy? Why, why not?
Appendix D: Speaking Diagnostic Tool

1. What kind of speaking do you want to improve?
   Presentation, classroom discussion, casual conversation, speaking exam or something else?

2. Record yourself while you speak (about 5 minutes).

3. Listen to the recording; give yourself a score for each section and fill in the chart below. If you are not confident to do this you can always ask a friend or a teacher in the Practice Centre to help you.

   1 = poor   2 = not too bad   3 = good enough   4 = good   5 = no problems

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fluency and Coherence</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
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4. What areas do you think you need to work on?

**Fluency and Coherence:**
- Thinking of ideas
- Organizing your ideas
- Speaking fluently
- Paraphrasing
- Something else
- ________________

**Grammar:**
- Becoming more accurate
- Using complex grammar
- Something else
- ________________

**Vocabulary:**
- Using more academic vocabulary
- Using more idioms, phrasal verbs
- Using a range of vocabulary (synonyms)
- Something else
- ________________

**Pronunciation:**
- Pronouncing individual sounds
- Pronouncing words in sentences
- Stress and weak forms
- Intonation
- Something else
- ________________