

Working with the winter weather
Dr. Olenka Bilash (obilash@ualberta.ca)
University of Alberta

No matter where we live or what the day, Canadians are accustomed to waking up in the morning wondering what weather awaits that day. We all know the feeling of hearing a morning report of unexpectedly warm winter temperatures (even when we know that they are rooted in global warming) and quickly plan what to wear and what we might do in the nicer weather. So important is weather to our culture that we even have a television station devoted to monitoring local, regional, national and international weather. Through the weather channel we can also expand our knowledge of geography and with time science as we learn how high and low pressure zones, wind systems, currents and jet streams impact the entire globe.

While weather conditions are not so varied everywhere in the world (e.g. in Malaysia the same high temperature of 33 and a low of 31 is reported for many months of the year), nor common topics of discussion, Canada's long agricultural tradition has made weather "an endless source of conversational material. It is common that people talk about the weather when they exchange greetings." (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, n.d., p. 3)

With the impact of daily temperature change, the adaptations to our four season climate, and the fact that discussing the weather is a way to initiate a conversation in many parts of Canada, learning weather terminology is considered a survival topic in Canada. Thus, it is common to hear an exchange like this at the beginning of a lesson in many SL classrooms:

Teacher: What is the day?

Student A: Saturday

Teacher: What is the month?

Student B: January

Teacher: What is the date?

Student C: Today is Saturday, January 28, 2012

Teacher: What is the season?

Student D: Winter

Teacher: What is the weather?

Student E: It is cold.

Student F: It is windy.

Student G: It is sunny.

A more learner-centred scenario might see students doing all of the talking. For example:

Student X: What is the day? (*draws the name of a student from a basket that contains everyone's names on strips of papers, blocks of wood, or popsicle sticks*)

Student A: Saturday

Student X: What is the month? (*draws the name of another student from a basket that contains everyone's names on strips of papers, blocks of wood, or popsicle sticks*)

Student B: January

Student X: What is the date? (*draws the name of another student from a basket that contains everyone's names on strips of papers, blocks of wood, or popsicle sticks*)

Student C: Today is Saturday, January 28, 2012

Student X: What is the season? (*draws the name of another student from a basket that contains everyone's names on strips of papers, blocks of wood, or popsicle sticks*)

Student D: Winter

Student X: What is the weather? (*draws the name of another student from a basket that contains everyone's names on strips of papers, blocks of wood, or popsicle sticks*)

Student E: It is cold.

Student F: It is windy.

Student G: It is sunny.

These types of exchanges have advantages in that a number of students participate and what each says is short, thus insuring success of all. However, at some point the students should be expected to be able to produce more language more independently and in a greater number of everyday life contexts.

In my opportunities as a coach of experienced SL teachers of children, adolescents and adults I have frequently seen teachers take a Q-A approach to their daily routine and recommended that they give students more independence and responsibility by having them create different forms or text types.

Canadian and English speaking countries often have humorous weather reporters and weather reports. They use props, tell jokes, dress up on holidays. Such is not true the world over. You may wish to show weather reports in your SL from other parts of the world, or in other languages, and ask students about the differences they note. This is a

form of intercultural awareness building. See Appendix A for sample weather reports found on youtube in a variety of languages..

Think about the weather report as a long-term project – how can you increase student comprehension and production? For example, it should be easy for students to be able to understand a weather report presented by their teacher who can adjust the speed of presentation and use of props to support the students’ levels of comprehension. With practice students should also be able to understand weather reports presented by their peers. Eventually you hope that they will also be able to understand weather reports on television and radio which are truly authentic and more varied in their patterns.

What follows is an example of a scaffolded sequence of activities for teaching a weather report with accompanying resources, some of which might be of particular benefit for differentiating instruction. The sequence emphasizes the need for teacher modeling, opportunities to learn, rehearse and present, recycle and have fun.

1. **Preparing authentic materials:** Use the internet or cable television networks to find weather reports that students can watch at home or during class. It is possible that students will not be able to understand them at the beginning of this learning sequence, but with teacher guidance and repeated exposure to weather reports students can not only learn to produce a weather report, but also to understand ones on television (with visual support) and radio (the most challenging medium).
2. **Developing the sequence:** Use the picture cues in Appendices B and C to decide what the weather report should contain. The picture cues in Appendix B suggest a sequence of: Greeting, Day, Date, Place #1, Weather, Place #2, Weather, Name, Wish, Farewell. Those in the weather report in Appendix C add high temperature and low temperature to the sequence. The sequence in Appendices D and E add suggestions about what one might do given the weather and advice about what not to forget (e.g. a hat, umbrella or scarf). In previous articles for the ISLA newsletter I have discussed the value of picture cues (Bilash, 2008) and of following Miller’s Magical number of 7 + or – 2 (Miller, 1956) to choose the number of component parts. Note that when students are left on their own they will produce some of what is in the picture cues. However, the picture cue prompts increase the output level of students and challenge them to produce more than they might have on their own.
3. **Modelling:** Take a few minutes with a video camera to provide a brief weather report that students can watch in class. Wear a wig, sunglasses or other disguise to make the weather report more interesting. You might also do this ‘live’ but be sure to follow the same script sequence that you are asking students to follow.
4. **Learning the Sequence or form:** Cut one set of the pictures from either Appendix B, C, D or E (depending on the age and ability level of your students) into cards. After viewing and listening to your video (or live) presentation, give

- groups of two or three students a set of cards and ask them to sequence them according to what they heard. Review it with each group of students by playing the video clip again (or presenting the weather report orally again).
5. **Learning phrases or needed expressions:** In small groups ask students to create their own weather report following the sequence they created. They may ask you for vocabulary, phrases or grammar help while they are doing this because the previous two phases require only student comprehension. For example, if they need help practicing how to say dates use Appendix F in pair or group work, Appendices G and H for practice with making suggestions such as “a great day for _____”,
 6. **Support and challenge:** Give more able students a more challenging weather report sequence. See Appendices D or E.
 7. **On their own:** Give each student a map of either Alberta, Canada or the world and ask them to mark 2-5 places on the map. Then ask them:
 - a. to choose a date and write it on the map
 - b. to draw a weather icon for the imagined and probable weather on that day in that place
 - c. to form small groups of 2-4 students
 - d. to present a weather report with their map to one another in small groups (See photos below.)



8. **Building confidence:** Brainstorm for what makes a good weather report in order to draw students' attention to eye contact, volume of voice, etc. and help develop student confidence. See possible criteria in Appendix I. Encourage them to practice their weather report again with a new partner or group.
9. **Noticing:** Prepare several more short videos (or live) with 'mistakes' in them and ask students to observe each and tell you what was strong/weak according to the criteria. E.g. look at the ground throughout the video OR forget to tell the weather, temperature or advice OR speak so quickly that you cannot be understood. Students will enjoy this but also develop a greater appreciation for the importance of the criteria.
10. **Recycling:** Ask 1-2 students to prepare and give a weather report at the beginning of each class until the end of the school year. This means that they will have to check the weather by internet either at home or in the school so preparation is required. Encourage them to use props, music, video, and be creative. A possible project description can be found in Appendix J. *Videotaping each presentation offers students the opportunity to watch themselves and complete a self assessment of their strengths and set goals for the future. It also enables them to see progress they have made over time and can become a treasured memory in their future.*
11. **Listening comprehension:** Give students a listening task to focus their attention on the presentation of their peers. See Appendix K. This, too, can be differentiated and adapted to the model the teacher provides.
12. **Differentiation:** Since many SL instructors have small numbers of students with a great range of ability and age, weather reports need to be differentiated. In order for all students to succeed at the same general task – producing a weather report – it may be necessary to have slightly different expectations for groups of students. Expand the expectations for a weather report from grade to grade or between students of different ability levels. See Appendices B to E to guide points to be included.
13. **Self Assessment:** *I can statements* help students reflect on their performance and abilities. They also help teachers learn about students' awareness of their proficiency. An *I can statement* itemizes discrete skills and knowledge required to produce an authentic form and helps students to recognize their level of independence in the task. See Appendix L. Choose or adapt an appropriate option for the age and level of your students. Ask students to complete the simple statements before you introduce the 'weather report form' by writing the date in

the correct column. Once they have completed all steps of the weather report with their own map they can be given this same sheet to complete, writing the new date in the appropriate column. This will help you and your students see the change or growth in their knowledge and performance. This will also help the teacher assess students' self confidence and self perception. Some students may not think that their performance is as strong as you perceive. They may benefit from a conversation with the teacher to help them see their strengths. Others may overestimate their abilities. Watching the video together may also help them to see how they can improve. Videotaping each presentation offers students the opportunity to watch themselves and complete a self assessment of their strengths and set goals for the future. For more on this topic see Bilash (2011).

14. **Authentic material:** Continue to send students youtube clips about weather in your SL to watch. Appendix A may help you.

References

- Bilash, O (2008, Fall). Self Introductions. ISLA Newsletter, 6 (1), 5–12. Edmonton, Canada: International and Heritage Languages Association.
- Bilash, O. (2010). Internet homework assignments for heritage language speakers and learners. ISLA Newsletter, 8 (1), 8–18. Edmonton, Canada: International and Heritage Languages Association.
- Bilash, O. (2011, Fall). Helping students achieve their best. ISLA Newsletter, 9 (1), 17–23. Edmonton, Canada: International and Heritage Languages Association.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada. (n.d.) Climate in Canada. Retrieved January 4, 2012 from integration-net.ca/coa-occe/english/pdf/06climate.pdf.
- Miller, George A. (1956). "[The magical number seven, plus or minus two: some limits on our capacity for processing information](#)". Psychological Review **63** (2): 81–97.

Appendix A

Sites that can help students learn about weather or help teachers teach cross cultural awareness:

Portuguese:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nV7-V3Jklf8>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUtXQWePwGY>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dbrw-LyXHXM>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ej-JRjpKJIU&feature=related>

Russian:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWBGqYXAa-0&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQq8GFEniK8&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDLWxq0CpJk&feature=related>

German

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zP4zaMvV__4&feature=related

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QO3vJFXRAg>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqAlpGWIUyQ&feature=related>

Spanish

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oG7Eeo02bml&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLRf1ggNeg8&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EEhdX05u1Ps>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92wC7JFTQ1U&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aszXrnocjY0&feature=related>

Japanese

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TT-j14ujOQI&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zv10BS60d9Q&feature=related> (3 minutes into the clip)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODyTC2g17Rc>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZyIR3w1a4BU>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6TFvuUDa8A>

Korean

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpur1xH-Px0&feature=related>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkj_O4STdJo&feature=related

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3K_hp_6ascM

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bcGfhRX0fQ&feature=related>

Italian

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiKjkd0AKBs&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4kxjUWUbsA&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2334bugg1yg&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4kpHSvXta8&feature=related>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6fcjum_8-U

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSL_EQ7-wrw&feature=related

Swedish

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYkV5acttNc>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p4en3YaKhQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPmaGhEN1h8>

Other

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8t_kHxeSObw

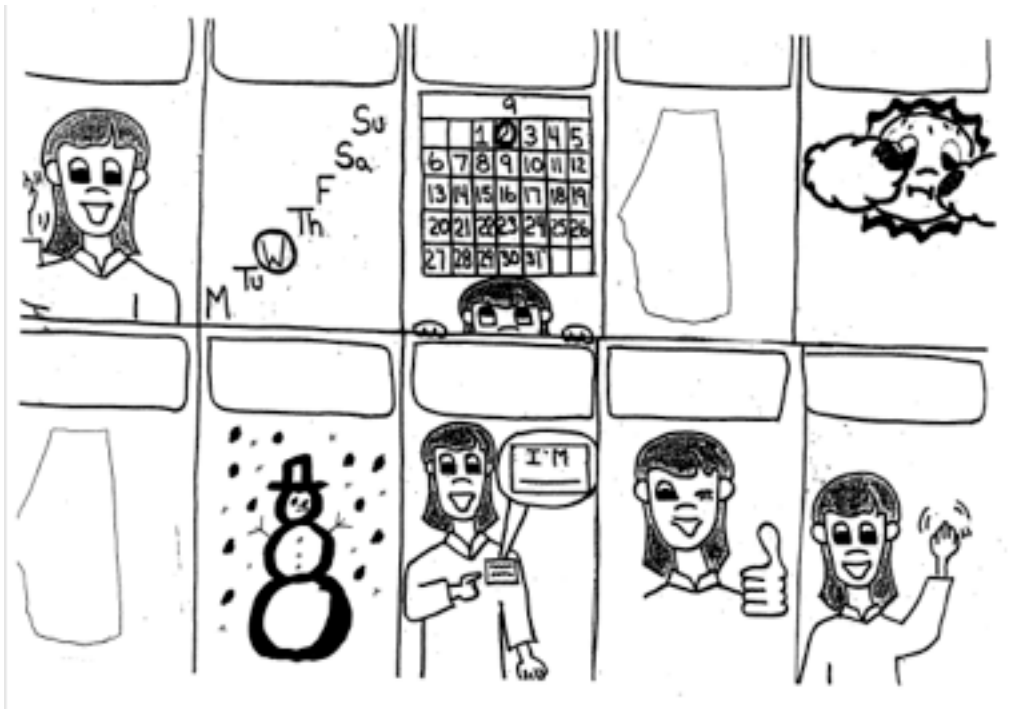
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6-GQzC-Jes&feature=related>

If sample clips above are not available in your SL, perhaps you can create some weather reports with your students and post them on youtube? Or, use the youtube ‘call’ to request a weather report in your language.

Appendix B – simple weather report (female commentator)

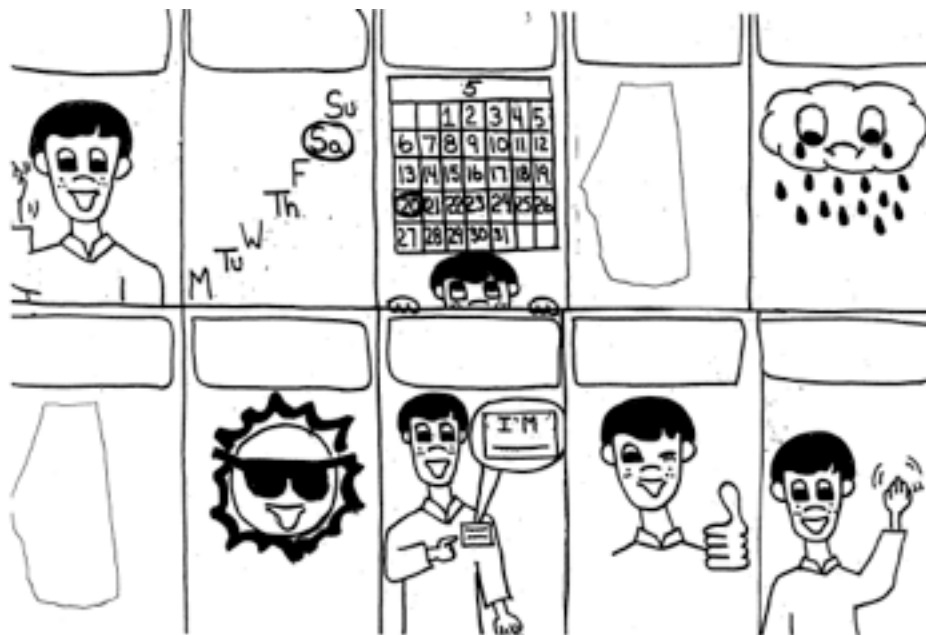
Instructors may wish to cut the picture cues into cards for students to sequence. These sheets may also be used as is for students as reminders of what to say. Try not to let students write a text and read it; instead, have them use the pictures to cue them.

Remember that the pictures are cues for the day, date, places and weather and that students do not necessarily have to say the precise one indicated on the card.



Appendix C –different basic weather report (male commentator)

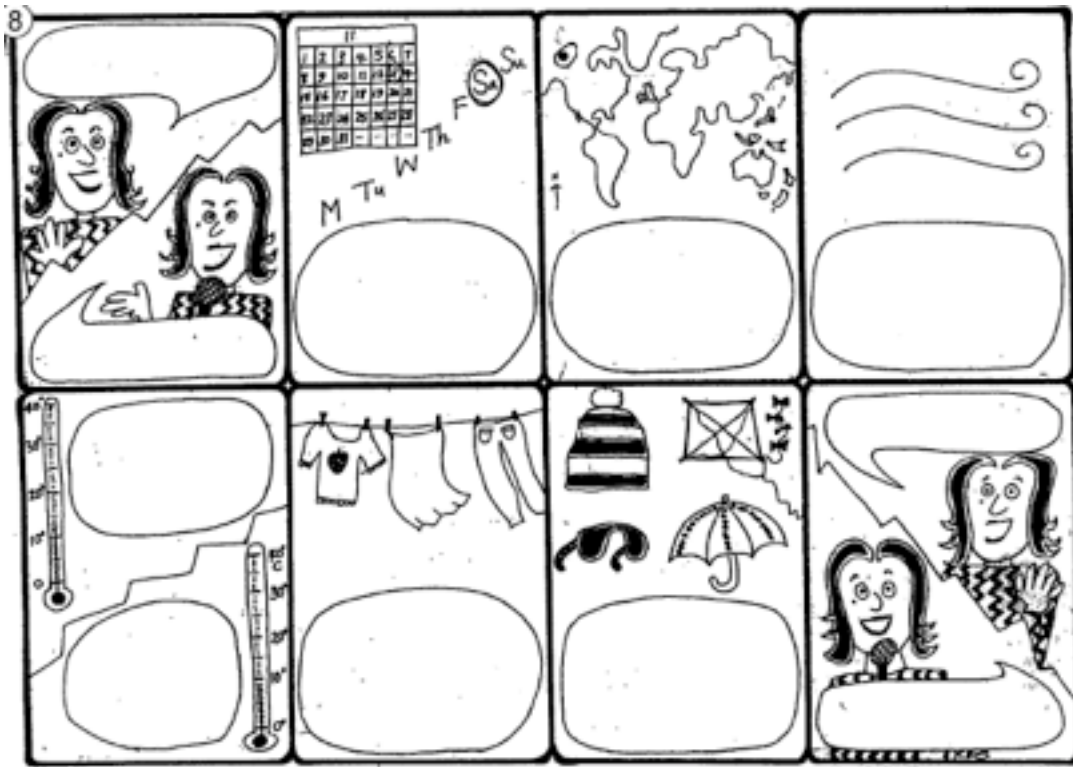
Instructors may wish to cut the picture cues into cards for students to sequence. These sheets may also be used as is for students as reminders of what to say. Try not to let students write a text and read it; instead, have them use the pictures to cue them. *Remember that the pictures are cues for the day, date, places and weather and that students do not necessarily have to say the precise one indicated on the card.*



Appendix D – more advanced weather report (female commentator)

Instructors may wish to cut the picture cues into cards for students to sequence. These sheets may also be used as is for students as reminders of what to say. Try not to let students write a text and read it; instead, have them use the pictures to cue them.

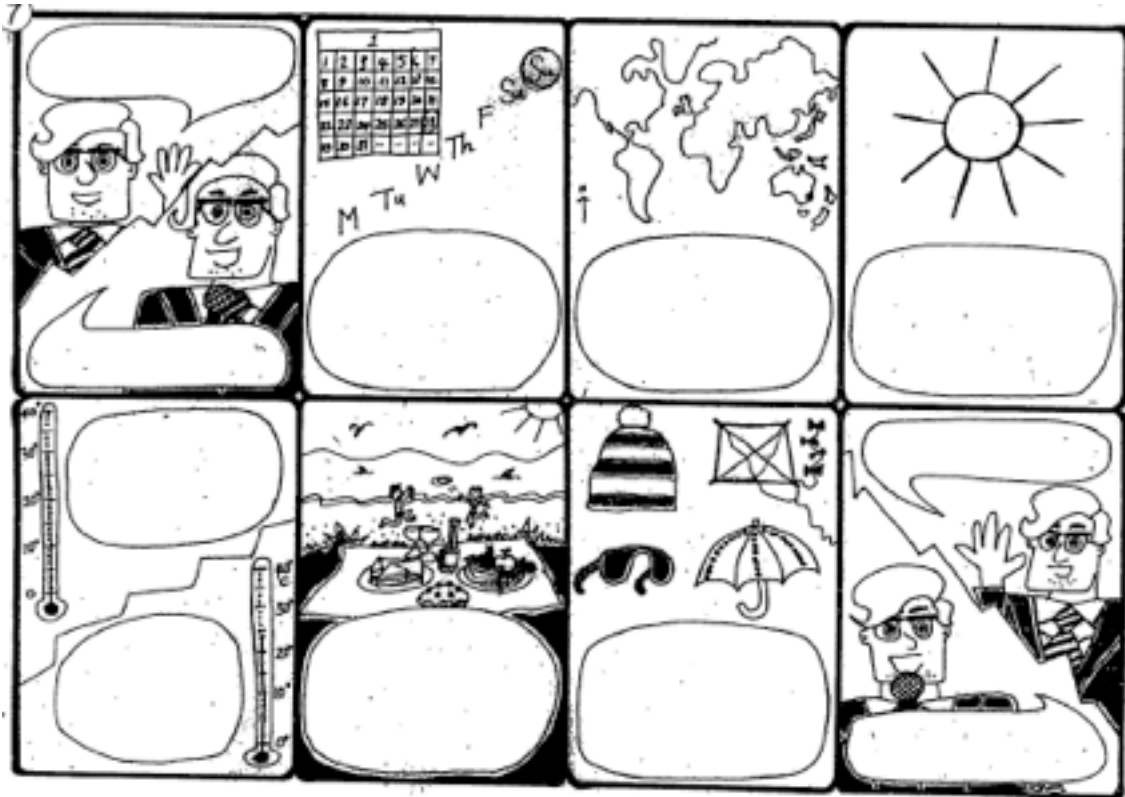
Remember that the pictures are cues for the day, date, places and weather and that students do not necessarily have to say the precise one indicated on the card.



Appendix E – more advanced weather report (male commentator)

Instructors may wish to cut the picture cues into cards for students to sequence. These sheets may also be used as is for students as reminders of what to say. Try not to let students write a text and read it; instead, have them use the pictures to cue them.

Remember that the pictures are cues for the day, date, places and weather and that students do not necessarily have to say the precise one indicated on the card.



Appendix F – pair practice for saying dates

Practice saying days, dates and years. (Change the letters at the bottom to the first letter(s) of each day of the week in your heritage language.)





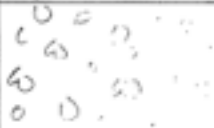



1. Today is Thursday, August 17, 2012.

1.	17. 08.12	2.	19. 04.13
	S M T W Th F Sa		S M T W Th F Sa
3.	12. 03.11	4.	21. 06.14
	S M T W Th F Sa		S M T W Th F Sa
5.	25. 10.15	6.	31. 05.17
	S M T W Th F Sa		S M T W Th F Sa

7.	16. 07.20 S M T W Th F Sa	8.	08.11.00 S M T W Th F Sa
9.	30. 12.12 S M T W Th F Sa	10.	13. 05.12 S M T W Th F Sa
11.	11. 02.13 S M T W Th F Sa	12.	04. 09.12 S M T W Th F Sa

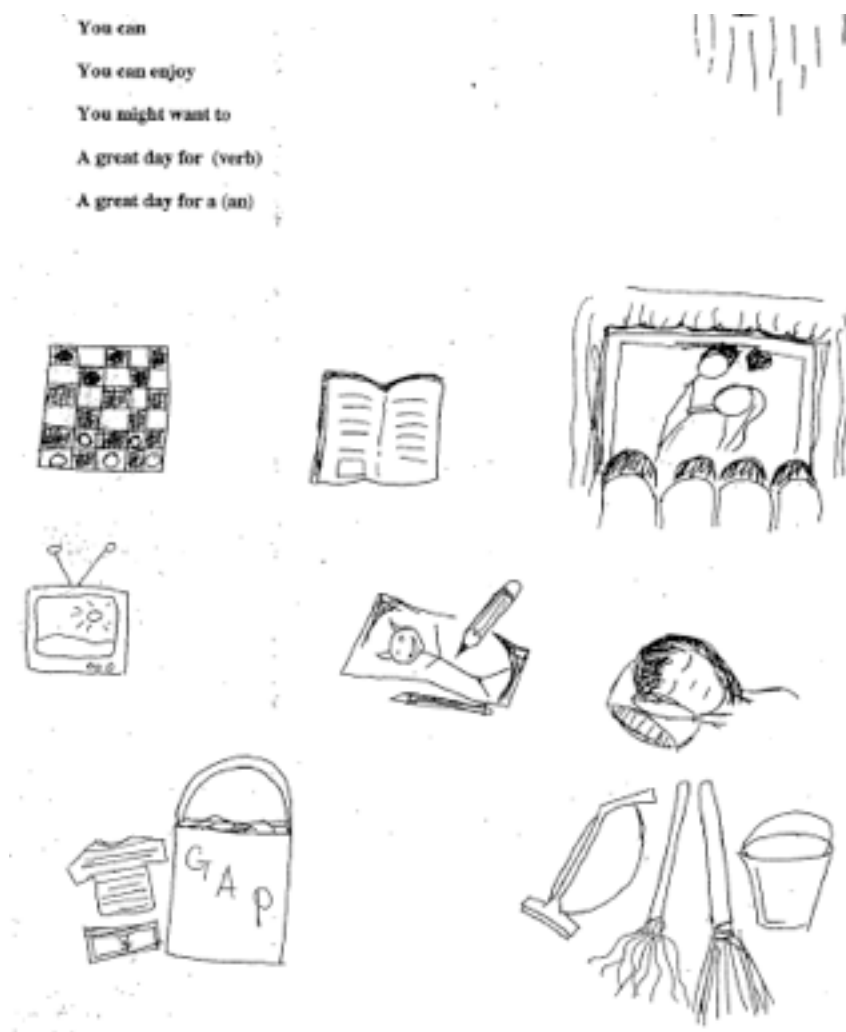
Appendix G – practice sheet for making a suggestion

Practice sheet (if required) for A great day to....

Look at the weather.	Write the sentence.	Choose an activity.	Write the sentence.
			
			
			
			

Appendix H - practice sheet for making a suggestion

More practice ideas for ‘suggestions about what to do under certain weather conditions’



Appendix I - What makes a good weather report?

1. Greet the audience
2. Speak clearly
3. Speak loudly
4. Do not speak too slowly
5. State the day and date (day, month, year)
6. Tell the facts – state the weather in 5 places
7. Tell the high and low temperatures for the day of EACH city
8. Offer suggestions about what to do
9. Be cheerful

10. Use colourful visuals
11. Point to the visuals as you report
12. Look at the audience
13. Say good bye/give a friendly wish
14. Tell your name

Appendix J – Descriptions of possible weather report projects for students of varied age and proficiency levels

Level 1 - You are a weather reporter for a group of tourists who just arrived from a country where your SL is spoken and cannot yet speak English. Choose a day from this week and make a map that includes the places you want to talk about. Include the following in your report:

- i. Greeting
- ii. Day, month, date, year
- iii. City and weather (at least 2 cities)
- iv. Reporter name
- v. Wish-closing
- vi. Use a map
- vii. Use props to increase audience interest

Level 2 - You are a weather reporter for a group of tourists who just arrived from a country where your SL is spoken and cannot yet speak English. Choose the date and places you wish and research the actual weather in those places on that date. Include the following in your report:

- i. Greeting
- ii. Day, month, date, year
- iii. City and weather (at least 3 cities)
- iv. High-low temperature
- v. Advice (e.g. Don't forget your....)
- vi. Reporter name
- vii. Wish-closing

- viii. Use a map
- ix. Use props to increase audience interest

Level 3 - You are a weather reporter for a group of tourists who just arrived from a country where your SL is spoken and cannot yet speak English. Choose the date and places you wish and research the actual weather in those places on that date. You may choose a date in the future and imagine the weather, places and advice you would give, but do research for accuracy. Include the following in your report:

- i. Greeting
- ii. Day, month, date, year
- iii. City and weather (at least 5 cities)
- iv. High-low temperature
- v. Advice (e.g. Don't forget your....)
- vi. Suggestions (e.g. a great day to...)
- vii. Reporter name and name of station
- viii. Wish-closing
- ix. Use a map
- x. Use props to increase audience interest

Appendix K - Listening component

As each student presents the weather report, other students listen and complete the following with words/pictures. These sheets can also be used while listening to authentic TV, radio or youtube clips.

Level 1: Are you listening? Do you understand?

What is the date? _____

City	Weather
------	---------

1.	
2.	

Level 1: Are you listening? Do you understand?

What is the date? _____

City	Weather	High temperature	Low temperature	Advice
1.				
2.				
3.				

4.				
----	--	--	--	--

Level 3: Are you listening? Do you understand?

What is the date? _____

City	Weather	High temperature	Low temperature	What can you wear	What can you do
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					

5.					
----	--	--	--	--	--

Appendix L – I can statements

Name _____

Goal (objective)	I think I can do this independently	I think I can do this with help & guidance	I do not think that I can do this yet
1. I can say my name.			
2. I can say the day and date.			
3. I can tell the weather outside.			
4. I can say hello and goodbye.			
5. I can understand when someone tells me the day and date.			
6. I can give a weather report.			
7. I can understand when someone tells me the day and date in SL.			
8. I can understand a weather report by my classmate in SL.			

Name _____

Goal (objective)	I think I can do this independently	I think I can do this with help & guidance	I do not think that I can do this yet
1. I can say my name.			
2. I can say the day and date.			
3. I can tell the weather outside.			
4. I can say hello and goodbye.			

5. I can understand when someone tells me the day and date.			
6. I can give advice in SL about what is needed according to the weather.			
7. I can make a suggestion in the SL about what to do according to the weather.			
8. I can tell the daily high and low temperature in SL.			
9. I can give a weather report.			
10. I can understand when someone tells me the day and date in SL.			
11. I can understand a weather report by my classmate in SL.			

Name _____

Goal (objective)	I think I can do this independently	I think I can do this with help & guidance	I do not think that I can do this yet
1. I can say my name.			
2. I can say the day and date.			
3. I can tell the weather outside.			
4. I can say hello and goodbye.			
5. I can understand when someone tells me the day and date.			
6. I can give advice in SL about what is needed according to the weather.			
7. I can make a suggestion in the SL about what to do according to the weather.			
8. I can tell the daily high and low temperature in SL.			
9. I can give a weather report.			
10. I can understand when someone tells me the day and date in SL.			

11. I can understand a weather report by my classmate in SL.			
12. I can understand a weather report on TV in SL.			
13. I can understand a weather report on radio in SL.			