



# Student Oral Proficiency Assessment (SOPA) Manual

Center for Applied Linguistics  
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## Part 1: Introduction

The Student Oral Proficiency Assessment (SOPA), developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), is an assessment tool that uses a series of tasks to assess PK-8 language learners' listening and speaking proficiency. SOPA tasks can be modified for any language and used in traditional world language programs, such as Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) programs, as well as dual language/immersion programs, heritage language programs, and Indigenous language programs. The SOPA uses a paired interview format, and it is given by a trained administrator. This assessment is done exclusively in the target language, and the estimated assessment time is 20 minutes.

Developed in 1991, the SOPA was originally designed for world language learners in grades 1–4, and its use was expanded over time for students in grades 1–8. The Early Language Listening and Oral Proficiency Assessment (ELLOPA), which is similar in content and structure to the SOPA, was developed in 2001 to best meet the needs of younger learners in grades PK–2. In 2020, CAL received funding from a U.S. Department of Education Title VI International Research and Studies grant to update the SOPA and the ELLOPA and develop a new computer-based training program for administrators and raters of these assessments. During the update process, CAL decided to simplify these assessments and provide a single SOPA that covers grades PK–8 through including two tracks of tasks for students of different proficiency levels. The SOPA includes templates for each task in the two tracks and corresponding rating sheets.

SOPA results are interpreted and reported in alignment with the 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The SOPA is designed to measure student performance at the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels of proficiency identified in these guidelines. SOPA protocols and materials are designed for PK–8 language learners in the United States, and programs interested in using the SOPA for other purposes should contact CAL to determine the feasibility and cost of adapting the SOPA or of creating a new assessment to meet their needs.

This assessment manual provides assessment administrators, language program administrators, instructors, and other SOPA users with guidelines for SOPA training, administration, and rating. This manual contains the following sections:

- Part 2: Overview of the SOPA  
This section provides information about:
  - the purpose of the SOPA;
  - what the SOPA assesses;
  - the design of the SOPA;
  - SOPA tracks;
  - when the SOPA can be administered; and
  - how SOPA results can be used.
- Part 3: The SOPA Tasks  
This section provides an overview of the tasks used in Track 1 and Track 2 of the SOPA and information about adapting SOPA tasks.

- **Part 4: Administering the SOPA**  
This section provides information about:
  - selecting SOPA administrators;
  - preparing to administer the SOPA;
  - creating a positive atmosphere;
  - directions for administering the SOPA; and
  - modifying the SOPA administration procedures.
  
- **Part 5: Rating the SOPA**  
This section provides information about:
  - selecting SOPA raters;
  - SOPA rating materials;
  - preparing to rate the SOPA;
  - directions for rating the SOPA; and
  - modifying the SOPA rating procedures.
  
- **Part 6: Reporting SOPA Results**  
This section explains how to use, report, and share SOPA results.
  
- **Appendices**  
The appendices (found in the SOPA Resource Library) include the following materials to support SOPA administration, rating, and reporting:
  - SOPA Task Templates
  - Sample SOPA Recording Consent Letter
  - SOPA Scheduling Template
  - SOPA Administration Checklist
  - SOPA Rating Scale
  - SOPA Rating Sheets
  - SOPA Information for Schools and Families
  - SOPA School Reporting Form Template

## Funding Acknowledgment

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## Part 2: Overview of the SOPA

### Purpose of the SOPA

The purpose of the SOPA is to determine the highest proficiency levels in speaking and listening that PK–8 language learners can sustain at the time of the assessment. The interactive format of the SOPA elicits conversational speech between an administrator and two students, yielding proficiency ratings for each student in both speaking listening that can range from Novice to Advanced levels as identified in the 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

The SOPA may be used with students enrolled in any U.S. PK–8 world language program, including traditional world language programs (i.e., FLES), dual language or immersion programs, heritage language programs, and Indigenous language programs. The assessment is administered by a trained SOPA administrator and typically rated by a second person, a trained SOPA rater who observes and scores the assessment.

### What the SOPA Assesses

The SOPA consists of a series of tasks conducted entirely in the target language to elicit both academic and social language at varying levels of proficiency. Students are encouraged to say as much as they can so that adequate speech samples may be obtained for accurate ratings, and notes are taken with specific examples of each student’s speech to facilitate assigning accurate ratings. SOPA administrations can also be video recorded to facilitate and verify rating.

The SOPA Rating Scale is based on the 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and targeted for the developmental level of young learners. The scale consists of three major proficiency levels—Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced—each of which is further subdivided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. Students receive ratings in two skill areas: speaking and listening.

### Design of the SOPA

The SOPA uses an interview format to assess a pair of students of similar proficiency levels in a friendly and conversational environment, and it is typically administered by a trained administrator and a trained rater. The administrator primarily conducts the assessment by following the scripts for each task. The rater primarily takes notes and assigns ratings during the assessment and is also in charge of video recording. By having these two roles, the administrator can focus on eliciting language that demonstrates the students’ highest proficiency levels, and the rater can focus on recording elements of each student’s speech to facilitate assigning accurate ratings. Where it is not feasible based on training and staffing, there can be a single SOPA administrator. In these cases, the administrator can focus solely on administration and recording so that ratings can be completed at a later time or serve in a dual role by rating students’ responses in real time. See Part 5 for detailed guidance on administering the SOPA with a single administrator and with delayed rating.

The SOPA has two tracks, or sequenced series of tasks, that begin with an easy activity that students can complete successfully, increase gradually in difficulty, extend just beyond the students’ comfort level to check if their highest proficiency levels have been demonstrated, then return to an easier activity at their comfort level to wind down the assessment. To put students at ease, the SOPA begins with a Warm Up activity and ends with a Wind Down activity, neither of which are rated.

The SOPA design allows for flexibility and customization to meet the needs of your program and your students. SOPA task templates are used to create scripts that reflect your curriculum and the students to be assessed. For each SOPA administration, you determine student pairings and select the SOPA track in advance. Within each track, the task templates include directions for probing for students' highest levels of proficiency and options to adjust questions and end the assessment based on student responses.

## SOPA Tracks

There are two tracks that you can select for the SOPA to provide an appropriate level of difficulty and length of test for your students. The SOPA tracks indicate the sequence of tasks that will be administered. The track must be selected before the assessment is administered. More guidance on track selection is provided in the Preparing to Administer the SOPA section in Part 4 of this manual.

The two tracks differ in both the total number of tasks administered and the highest level of proficiency, or “ceiling,” that the tasks probe. Table 1 summarizes information about the two SOPA tracks.

Table 1. SOPA Track Summary

Track	Recommended program types	Grade levels	Target proficiency levels	Number of tasks
1	Traditional world language programs	PK-8	Novice Low-Intermediate Mid	3
2	Dual language/immersion programs	PK-8	Novice Low-Advanced High	5

Track 1 is recommended for students expected to perform at or below the Intermediate Mid proficiency level and/or for students enrolled in traditional world language programs. Track 2 is recommended for students expected to perform above the Intermediate Mid proficiency level and/or for students enrolled in dual language or immersion programs. Figure 1 shows the structure of each track and the SOPA tasks that are included.

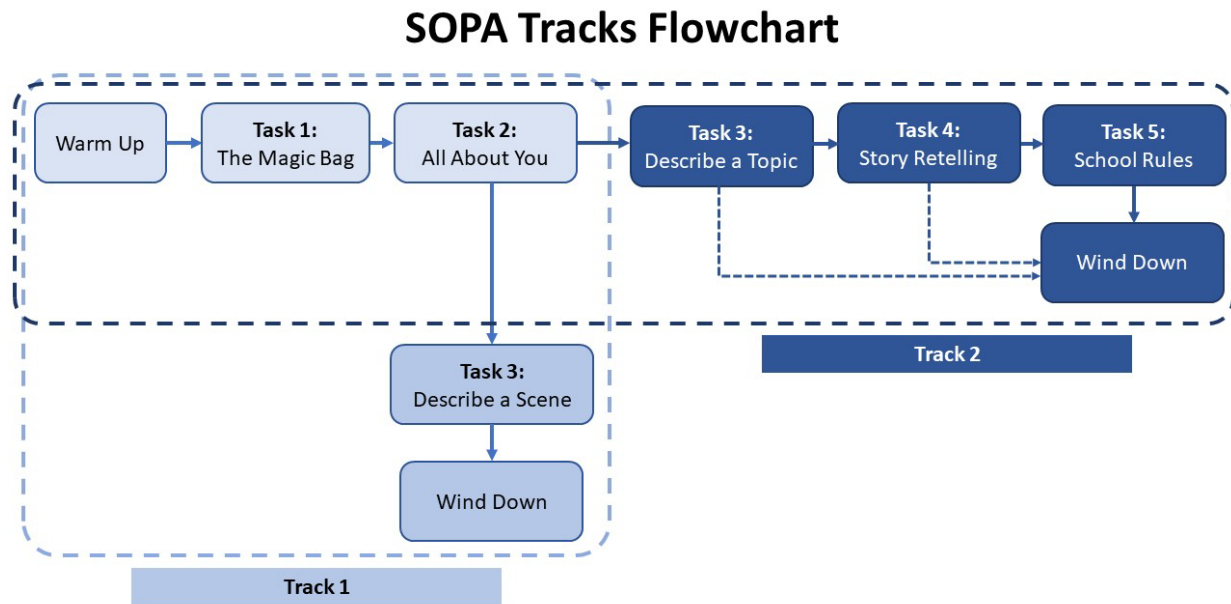


Figure 1. SOPA Tracks



As shown in Figure 1, the Warm Up task, Task 1: Magic Bag, and Task 2: All About You are used at the beginning of both SOPA tracks. If you have selected Track 1, you will follow Task 2 with Task 3: Describe a Scene and the Wind Down task. If you have selected Track 2, you will follow Task 2 with Task 3: Describe a Topic, Task 4: Story Retelling, and Task 5: School Rules before the Wind Down task. The tasks in both tracks vary in level of difficulty, the first being the easiest and the last task before the Wind Down being the most challenging. Figure 2 shows the progression of proficiency level targets for the tasks in Track 1.

## SOPA Track 1

Recommended for students expected to perform at or below the Intermediate Mid (IM) proficiency level and/or for students enrolled in traditional world language programs.

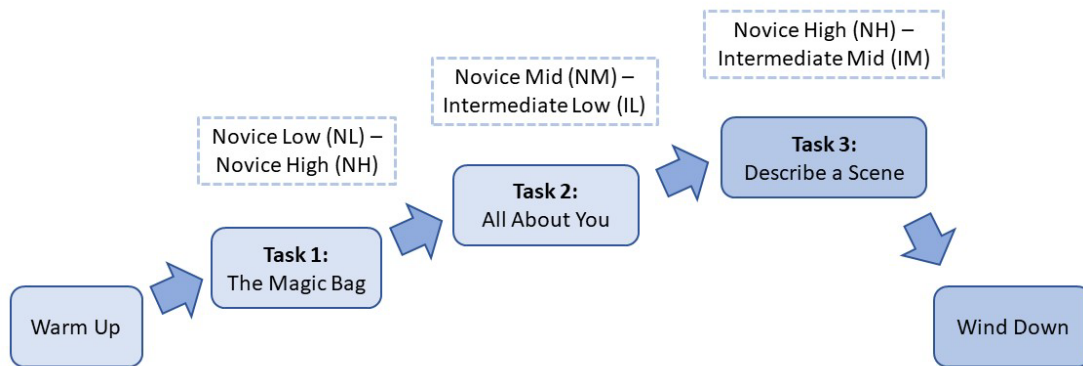


Figure 2. Track 1 Tasks

As shown in Figure 2, the proficiency targets for tasks in Track 1 increase from Novice Low to Intermediate Mid, and each task targets a specific range of proficiency levels.

- Task 1: The Magic Bag targets the Novice Low to Novice High proficiency levels;
- Task 2: All About You targets the Novice Mid to Intermediate Low levels; and
- Task 3: Describe a Scene targets Novice High to Intermediate Mid.

The Warm Up and Wind Down tasks are not rated and therefore do not target specific proficiency levels.

Figure 3 shows the progression of proficiency level targets for the tasks in Track 2.

## SOPA Track 2

Recommended for students expected to perform above the Intermediate Mid proficiency level and/or students enrolled in dual language or immersion programs.

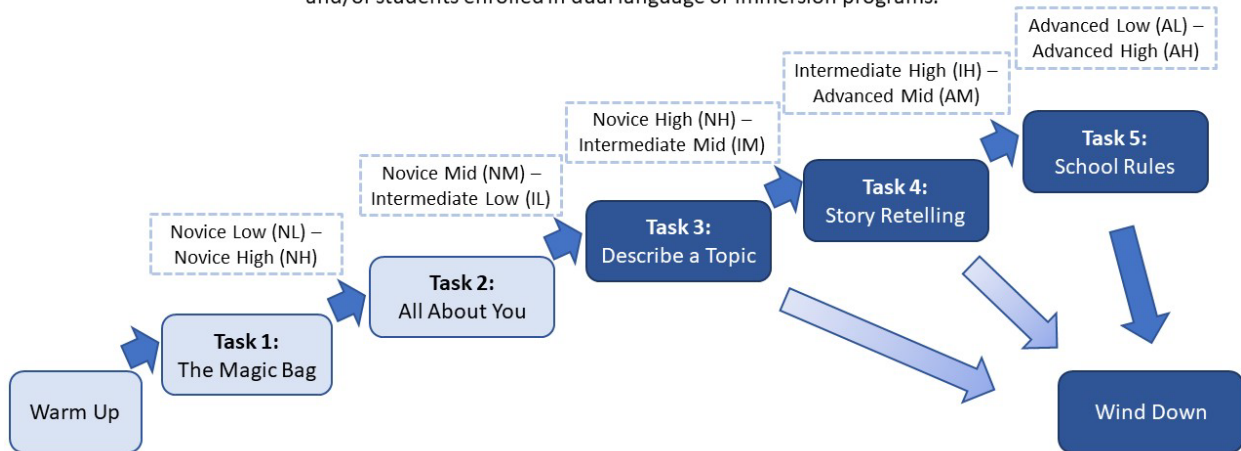


Figure 3. Track 2 Tasks

As shown in Figure 3, the proficiency targets for tasks in Track 2 increase from Novice Low to Advanced High, and each task targets a specific range of proficiency levels.

- Task 1: The Magic Bag targets the Novice Low to Novice High proficiency levels;
- Task 2: All About You targets the Novice Mid to Intermediate Low levels;
- Task 3: Describe a Topic targets Novice High to Intermediate Mid;
- Task 4: Story Retelling targets Intermediate High to Advanced Mid; and
- Task 5: School Rules targets Advanced Low to Advanced High.

The Warm Up and Wind Down tasks are not rated and therefore do not target specific proficiency levels. For Track 2, there are multiple exit points for students who have reached their ceiling, and administrators have the option of winding down from the assessment after Task 3, Task 4, or Task 5.

### When the SOPA Can Be Administered

The SOPA can be administered at any time during a course or program but is often given at the beginning of a course or program or as a summative assessment after students have completed a course or program. Although the SOPA can be used with students in any grade PK–8, which grade levels to assess is generally determined by the local district or language program and depends mainly on the reason for the assessment. For example, if the goal of the assessment is to gather baseline data for a new program, the lower grades (K, 1, and/or 2) would most likely be assessed. If the assessment is being used to determine how well students are progressing in a program that includes grades 1–8, then a combination of grade levels, such as grades 3, 5, and 8, could be assessed. Longitudinal studies on the same students' progress over several grade levels may also be possible in some programs.

When the SOPA is administered annually, students' ratings are expected to reveal gradual progress in the target language. The amount of progress depends on many factors, such as the type of program, frequency of instruction, exposure to the language outside of the classroom, and individual differences in learning outcomes. It is important to consider how different factors may affect students'

progress from year to year, and you should think about your goals and the goals of your program when thinking about the best time to administer the assessment.

## How SOPA Results Can Be Used

Results from the SOPA provide ratings of student proficiency in speaking and listening and rating justifications that can be used for reporting, giving feedback, and planning classroom instruction. SOPA results can be used to:

- support placement of students into appropriate classes or programs.
- assess student performance at the end of a unit, class, or program.
- inform curriculum development, instructional planning, and grading.
- evaluate program effectiveness and support strategic planning and advocacy.
- communicate with various stakeholders about learning outcomes.
- comply with accountability reporting requirements for your school or district.

While the SOPA assessment is designed to be used for a number of purposes, it is also important for users to understand what the results mean in terms of what students know and can do in the target language. Ideally, SOPA results should not be used as the only source of information about a student's ability or proficiency in the target language. Rather, they are used in conjunction with teacher observations and other assessments of student ability. Comparing students' SOPA results with the results of other classroom- or program-based assessments (such as projects, portfolios, and other performance tasks) will give teachers a more complete understanding of what students have learned and what they still need to learn.

When interpreting SOPA results to make decisions about instruction, teachers and program administrators should keep in mind the purposes of the assessment. Remember, students' performances on the SOPA will give no indication of their reading or writing abilities in the target language, and these skills must be assessed separately.

## Part 3: The SOPA Tasks

This section contains an overview of the tasks used in each SOPA track. Track 1, which is generally recommended for students with lower proficiency levels and/or for students who are enrolled in traditional world language programs, includes three tasks in addition to the unrated Warm Up and Wind Down. Track 2, which is generally recommended for students with higher proficiency levels and/or for students who are enrolled in dual language or immersion programs, includes five main tasks; the first two tasks are the same as for Track 1.

### Track 1

#### Warm Up

The purpose of this task is to put students at ease and warm up for the assessment; it does not target specific language and is not a rated task. This Warm Up is designed to help make sure that students understand what to do during the assessment and are comfortable responding. As the two students enter the room, the SOPA administrator makes them feel comfortable by greeting them and asking their names. The administrator asks the students to write their names on name tags or index cards. These serve as a reminder to the administrator to call the students by name so that they will know who is to respond. The administrator then provides brief instructions for the assessment and asks if there are any questions.

#### Task 1: The Magic Bag

The purpose of this task is to assess listening comprehension by asking students to follow basic commands and to assess oral fluency by asking students to respond to questions. It targets the Novice Low to Novice High proficiency levels, and students are expected to produce single words and short phrases using familiar vocabulary during this task. The administrator should ask both students an equal number of questions, and it is important to provide opportunities for each student to perform the same kind of actions or answer the same kind of questions.

At the start of this task, the administrator places a bag containing 15–20 objects related to a familiar topic in the middle of the table and asks one student to empty the bag. The administrator first asks the students to point to the different objects and then group different objects together. After the students have successfully responded to listening comprehension prompts, the administrator asks three simple and parallel questions of each student related to identifying and naming the objects.

#### Task 2: All About You

The purpose of this task is to assess listening comprehension and oral fluency by giving students opportunities to respond to a series of informal questions about themselves. It targets the Novice Mid to Intermediate Low proficiency levels, and students are expected to produce words, phrases, and short sentences using familiar vocabulary during this task. The administrator should select two topics (e.g., pets, holidays, weather, school) that are familiar and appropriate for students and may also use graphics with illustrations of each topic.

Beginning with one student, the administrator asks each student the same three questions about a topic. Then, beginning with the other student, the administrator asks each student another set of three questions about a new topic.

There is an alternate Task 2 template for younger learners that uses graphics and a puppet to ask the questions in order to engage students in PK–2.

### Task 3: Describe a Scene

The purpose of this task is to assess listening comprehension and oral fluency by asking students to follow and give basic commands and describe a scene. It targets the Novice High to Intermediate Mid proficiency levels, and students are expected to produce phrases and sentences during this task. The administrator should select a scene (e.g., house, classroom, school) that is familiar to students, and the scene should include an image of the location as well as manipulative objects or people that can be moved.

During the first part of this task, the administrator asks the students to point to various objects that are already in the scene and then to place specific objects and people in different parts of the scene. During the second part of this task, the administrator asks the students to give each other commands to place other objects or people within the scene. In the final part of the task, the administrator asks each student to answer two questions about what is happening in the scene, then places different objects in unusual positions and asks each student to describe what is strange and how to fix the scene.

### Wind Down

The Wind Down is the final task for this track. The Wind Down gives students an opportunity to finish the assessment feeling positive and comfortable; it does not target specific language and is not a rated task. The administrator chooses a fun activity that both students can complete successfully, such as singing a familiar song, playing Simon Says, or answering simple questions. The administrator concludes this activity by congratulating and thanking the students for their participation and presenting them with a small reward, such as a sticker.

## Track 2

### Warm Up

The purpose of this task is to put students at ease and warm up for the assessment; it does not target specific language and is not a rated task. This Warm Up is designed to help make sure that students understand what to do during the assessment and are comfortable responding. As the two students enter the room, the SOPA administrator makes them feel comfortable by greeting them and asking their names. The administrator asks the students to write their names on name tags or index cards. These serve as a reminder to the administrator to call the students by name so that they will know who is to respond. The administrator then provides brief instructions for the assessment and asks if there are any questions.

### Task 1: The Magic Bag

The purpose of this task is to assess listening comprehension by asking students to follow basic commands and to assess oral fluency by asking students to respond to questions. It targets the Novice Low to Novice High proficiency levels, and students are expected to produce single words and short phrases using familiar vocabulary during this task. The administrator should ask both students an equal number of questions, and it is important to provide opportunities for each student to perform the same kind of actions or answer the same kind of questions.

At the start of this task, the administrator places a bag containing 15–20 objects related to a familiar topic in the middle of the table and asks one student to empty the bag. The administrator first asks the students to point to the different objects and then group different objects together. After the students have successfully responded to listening comprehension prompts, the administrator asks three simple and parallel questions of each student related to identifying and naming the objects.

## Task 2: All About You

The purpose of this task is to assess listening comprehension and oral fluency by giving students opportunities to respond to a series of informal questions about themselves. It targets the Novice Mid to Intermediate Low proficiency levels, and students are expected to produce words, phrases, and short sentences using familiar vocabulary during this task. The administrator should select two topics (e.g., pets, holidays, weather, school) that are familiar and appropriate for students and may also use graphics with illustrations of each topic.

Beginning with one student, the administrator asks each student the same three questions about a topic. Then, beginning with the other student, the administrator asks each student another set of three questions about a new topic.

There is an alternate Task 2 template for younger learners that uses graphics and a puppet to ask the questions in order to engage students in PK-2.

## Task 3: Describe a Topic

The purpose of this task is to assess listening comprehension and oral fluency by asking students to describe an academic topic. It targets the Novice High to Intermediate Mid proficiency levels, and students are expected to produce phrases and sentences during this task. The administrator should select an academic topic that is familiar to students from one of their subjects such as science, math, or social studies and then select one complex picture or multiple pictures that show a process, sequence, or related elements within this topic.

During this task, the administrator alternates between students, asking them to describe the pictures or elements of the picture in order. If students cannot describe what is happening at the sentence level, the administrator may ask follow-up questions to elicit additional language. At the end of the task, if one or both students responded with only lists of words or short phrases, the administrator proceeds to the Wind Down task. If both students responded to questions with sentences, the administrator proceeds to Task 4: Story Retelling.

## Task 4: Story Retelling

The purpose of this task is to assess listening comprehension and oral fluency by asking students to narrate actions in the past. It targets the Intermediate High to Advanced Mid proficiency levels, and students are expected to produce connected sentences or paragraph-level speech. The administrator should select eight pages from a picture book that is familiar to students and complex enough to elicit responses with connected sentences.

At the start of this task, the administrator shows the cover of the book and explains to the students that they will take turns telling the story. The administrator asks each student to tell what happened on four pages of the book, alternating between the students while going through the pages in order. If students respond to a question with limited language, the administrator may ask follow-up questions to elicit additional language. For students in grade 1 or below, at the end of the task, the administrator proceeds to the Wind Down task. For students in grade 2 or above, if one or both students had difficulty narrating the story or responded with at most single sentences, the administrator proceeds to the Wind Down task. If both students easily narrated the story using connected sentences, the administrator proceeds to Task 5: School Rules.

## Task 5: School Rules

The purpose of this task is to assess listening comprehension and oral fluency by asking students to express an opinion and provide reasons to support their opinion. It targets the Advanced Low to

Advanced High proficiency levels, and students are expected to produce paragraph-level speech with extended, organized, and detailed language. The administrator should create a page listing three new school rules that are interesting and relevant to students and may include illustrations or simple labels to support each rule.

At the start of this task, the administrator presents the students with three rules that the school is considering and asks each student to pick one rule to talk about. Then each student is asked to explain if they think the school should have the rule, and the reasons why or why not. If students respond to a question with limited language, the administrator may ask follow-up questions to elicit additional language.

### Wind Down

The Wind Down is the final task for this track. The Wind Down gives students an opportunity to finish the assessment feeling positive and comfortable; it does not target specific language and is not a rated task. The administrator chooses a fun activity that both students can complete successfully, such as singing a familiar song, playing Simon Says, or answering simple questions. The administrator concludes this activity by congratulating and thanking the students for their participation and presenting them with a small reward, such as a sticker.

### Adapting the SOPA Tasks

SOPA tasks can be scripted for use in any language and adapted for your language teaching context. Using the SOPA task templates (see Appendix A), you can create task scripts in the target language that reflect your curriculum, performance objectives, and student interests and select supporting materials that are engaging and appropriate for your students. The scripts support consistent administration across students, so it is important to prepare and follow them.

The first page of each task template describes the task purpose, language functions, proficiency level targets, language expectations, required and optional materials, estimated length, and tips for administration. The following pages provide detailed information about what the administrator should do and say throughout the task and give instructions for moving on to the next task.

Starting with the second page of the template (see Figure 4 below), the Instructions section is where you will write your task script. In this section, black text provides context for what to do during each part of task administration. Blue text indicates the instructions and questions you need to script in the target language and say aloud to your students. Red text provides samples of questions to use in the script, including follow-up questions to elicit additional language if needed based on student responses.

### **Part 2: Responding to Simple Questions**

Spread all of the objects out on the table again. Alternate between the students by asking each student a question in turn. Script 6 questions in total. Questions should be parallel for the two students.

Now let's put all the [objects] back together in the center of the table.

Ask Student B Question 1, then ask Student A the parallel question.

Ask Student B Question 2, then ask Student A the parallel question.

Ask Student B Question 3, then ask Student A the parallel question.

### **Sample Questions**

- **What is this?** [Point to object]
- **How many [type of objects] do you see?**
- **How many [big/small/color] ones do you see?**
- **Which [object] is bigger, an [object] or an [object]?**
- **Can you name an/another [object] that is not on the table?**
- **Which [object] is your favorite?**

Transition to the next task:

Great! [Student B], can you put everything back in the Magic Bag?

If needed, help Student B to put all of the objects back in the bag. Put the bag away and out of sight.

Figure 4. SOPA Task Template

Use the template to script everything you will say and do during the task. You may wish to create multiple scripts for a task to address different materials and topics that interest your students. After your scripts are developed, try them out with a colleague to make sure the scripts work as expected and ask for suggestions for improvement. Sample SOPA task scripts for different languages, teaching contexts, and types of learners are included in the SOPA Training Program along with additional guidance and examples to support you in adapting tasks for your students.

To create scripts that give your students their best chance to show what they are capable of doing in the target language, think about the characteristics of your students, the content and materials they have encountered in your classroom, and what is practical for test administration. As you develop scripts, consider the following questions:

- What are your students' ages and developmental levels?
- What are your students' backgrounds and connections to the culture(s) associated with the target language?
- What topics or concepts are your students familiar with?
- What materials and resources are available to you?
- What linguistic and cultural elements do you want to include?

### **Adapting SOPA Tasks for Young Learners**

When adapting SOPA tasks for younger learners, it is important to make sure that the tasks are engaging and positive for students in early elementary grades as this will help them give their best performances on the assessment. Use age-appropriate manipulatives, props, and resources that



students are familiar with and that put them at ease during the assessment. Additional visuals and puppets can make activities more interesting for young learners while also aiding them in understanding the administrator's questions and commands. See the alternate template for Task 2: All About You for a model of using puppets to engage these students. Think about which topics students will most enjoy talking about and which materials they will most enjoy interacting with when developing task scripts. These strategies and supports are developmentally appropriate and align with best practices for teaching and learning in the early elementary classroom.

### Adapting SOPA Tasks for Dual Language/Immersion Programs

If you are assessing students in a dual language or immersion program, you can script tasks to address specific content-area topics and language that have been covered in the target language throughout the course of instruction. This may be particularly relevant in creating scripts for Task 3: Describe a Topic and Task 4: Story Retelling in Track 2. You might also consider expanding on other tasks to incorporate some content-area language that students have learned and practiced leading up to the assessment.

### Adapting SOPA Tasks for Less Commonly Taught, Indigenous, or Heritage Language Programs

There are a number of considerations to make in developing SOPA task scripts to assess students in less commonly taught, Indigenous, or heritage language programs. Linguistic and cultural diversity are particularly relevant in these contexts, and you may want to script tasks to ensure that the topics, materials, and resources being used reflect different language varieties or perspectives from majority and minority cultures associated with the target language. This may be particularly relevant in choosing the book for Task 4: Story Retelling. For heritage language programs, it is also important to think about students' backgrounds and experiences related to the language and culture when adapting tasks to ensure that all learners have an equitable and positive experience during the assessment.

## Part 4: Administering the SOPA

### Selecting SOPA Administrators

SOPA administrators play a crucial role in ensuring that students are able to give their best performances on the assessment; documenting students' performances and determining students' proficiency levels; and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of ratings. It is important that the SOPA be administered by individuals who are 1) trained in administering the SOPA, through completing the SOPA Training Program and reading this manual, 2) experienced in working with children, and 3) highly proficient in the target language. The SOPA Training Program must be completed prior to administering the SOPA to students.

In addition to these three requirements, SOPA administrators should be able to put nervous students at ease, manage pairs of students so that they have equal opportunities to respond to SOPA tasks, and use student responses to decide when to use follow-up questions and to select the next task. Trained SOPA administrators can assess their own students or students they do not teach; in both cases, administrators need to switch from the role of teacher to an objective test administrator.

### Preparing to Administer the SOPA

After completing training, follow these steps to prepare to administer the SOPA:

1. Choose the grade levels and classes to assess.

Your local district or language program typically determines when the assessment is administered, and this decision often depends on the reason for the assessment. The SOPA can be administered to students in any grade from PK through 8.

2. Obtain parental consent for video recording.

If SOPA administrations are being video recorded for rating or training purposes, you may need to obtain parental permission as required by local policies and procedures. If consent is needed, consent letters (see Appendix B) should be translated into the language(s) understood by parents and guardians. Collect consent letters and make plans for administration to accommodate students who cannot be recorded.

3. Select the SOPA track.

SOPA administrators need to select Track 1 or Track 2 before administering the assessment. Track 1 is recommended for students expected to perform at or below the Intermediate Mid proficiency level and/or enrolled in traditional world language programs. Track 2 is recommended for students expected to perform above the Intermediate Mid proficiency level and/or enrolled in dual language or immersion programs. You may need to use both tracks to assess different pairs of students in your program. If you are unsure of which track to use, prioritize the expected proficiency level of your students over program type. Figure 4 presents questions to consider in selecting the SOPA track.

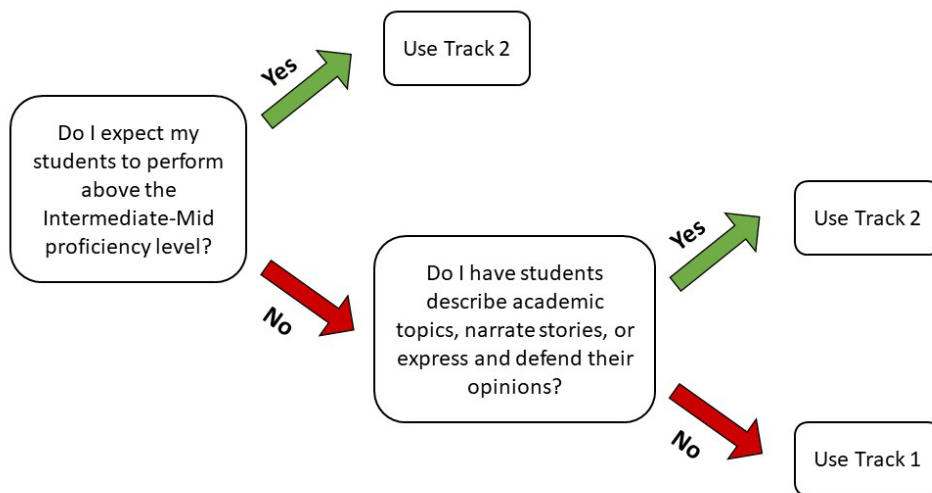


Figure 5. Track Selection

As shown in Figure 5, start by asking yourself if, based on previous observations or classroom assessments, you expect your students to perform above the Intermediate Mid proficiency level. If the answer is yes, it is recommended that you use Track 2, as this track includes tasks that target Intermediate High to Advanced High proficiency levels.

If you do not expect students to perform beyond the Intermediate Mid level, think about your classroom activities. Ask yourself if you typically have students describe academic topics, narrate stories, or express and defend their opinions. Many of these tasks are content-related and may therefore be included in curriculum and instruction within dual language and immersion programs. If you have covered these types of tasks and would like to know more about students' proficiency in these language functions, you should use Track 2. If your students do not perform these tasks, regardless of your program type, and you expect your students to have lower proficiency levels, you should use Track 1.

4. Prepare and review the scripts for each SOPA task.

Before administering the assessment, it is important to create and familiarize yourself with scripts for all SOPA tasks in the track(s) you will administer. These scripts include everything you will say in the target language and do during the task based on topics and materials you select to match the needs of your students. Whether you are preparing new scripts or gathering scripts that were previously developed, check that all scripts are complete in line with the task templates as this will ensure that you are providing the same input and instructions to all students being assessed. Finally, print and put your scripts in order so that you can easily move between tasks during the assessment.

5. Match pairs of students.

Student pairs for SOPA administration should be matched as closely as possible based on their perceived level of speaking proficiency in the target language and their social compatibility in order to obtain ratable speech samples. When students are mismatched in speaking

proficiency, it is harder for the SOPA administrator to probe for the highest level of the more advanced student while also including the other student in tasks above their comfort level, and both students may say less than they are capable of. When students are mismatched socially, shyer students may withdraw and not demonstrate what they can really do in the language.

Pairing of students is best done by the students' language teacher. Be sure to also check for parental permissions to pair students who will be video recorded.

6. Create an assessment schedule.

After students have been paired appropriately, prepare the daily schedule (see Appendix C). Time slots of 30 minutes should be scheduled for each pair to allow for up to 20 minutes of assessment and 10 minutes for setup between sessions. The schedule identifies student pairs and the track to be used for each pair and provides a space to record relevant information about each student. Provide the teacher and SOPA administrator(s) with a copy of the schedule so that they can follow the order of the assessments and account for each student who was assessed.

7. Gather materials and set up a room for administration.

Based on the selected SOPA track(s), gather all materials you need for SOPA administration. These include printed SOPA scripts, SOPA Rating Sheets for each student pair, and the SOPA Rating Scale (see Part 5 for detailed information on rating materials); manipulatives and other materials for each task as listed in the SOPA scripts; and rewards to be given out at the end of the assessment.

Reserve a quiet room with enough space for SOPA administration and video recording. The room should have a table and four chairs, with furniture appropriate to the students' size. A round table that allows both students to sit near each other and reach the assessment materials is ideal. The room should be as free as possible from visually distracting materials such as posters and objects that are not part of the assessment.

## Creating a Positive Atmosphere

SOPA administrators set the tone for students' experiences during the assessment. Administrators are responsible for creating a positive, safe environment for students so that they feel comfortable and assured that they are all being given the same opportunities to understand and perform to the best of their ability. Creating a positive atmosphere starts with matching student pairs appropriately and setting up a quiet room without distractions for administering the SOPA. It is important for administrators to establish a non-threatening environment to help ensure that students feel at ease during the assessment, and consequently, demonstrate their highest levels of proficiency.

When students arrive, make sure to greet them with kindness and introduce yourself to make them feel more comfortable speaking with you. If there are multiple people observing the assessment, it is important to introduce students to everyone in the room and explain that they are here to learn more about the activities. Throughout the assessment, it is appropriate to provide encouragement to students as they respond with a smile and kind words, such as "Thank you" or "That's great!" To end the assessment on a positive note, finish with the Wind Down activity that both students can complete successfully, congratulate the students, and thank them for participating. Consider also offering them a small prize or choice of reward.

SOPA administrators need to remember that students come from diverse backgrounds and have different learning experiences that can impact how comfortable they feel when being assessed. Younger children in particular may be reluctant to speak with SOPA administrators who are unfamiliar. If you do not know the students you are assessing, you may want to have a conversation with their classroom teachers to learn more about the students. It may also be helpful to have their teacher introduce you and explain the SOPA in advance so that students are more likely to engage with you on the day of administration. To put students at ease, you can refer to the SOPA as an activity or interview.

## Directions for Administering the SOPA

Complete the same steps at the beginning of the assessment for each new student pair. First, fill in the assessment information and student names on both pages of the SOPA Rating Sheet. Verify the students' names as they enter the room and mark any changes on the schedule. Introduce yourself and everyone present and direct students where to sit. Set up microphones if they are being used and confirm that the students and assessment materials are clearly visible. Then, begin the Warm Up task.

During the assessment, follow the scripts for each task in your selected SOPA track. Remember that the goal of the assessment is for the students to say as much as they can in the target language. Maintaining a relaxed and supportive atmosphere will help them to do their best. If a task is clearly too difficult for one student or for the pair, provide answer options, ask simpler questions, or move on to the next task. It is also important to make sure that neither student dominates the responses, whether due to greater proficiency in the target language or a more outgoing personality. Throughout the assessment, the administrator should practice the following techniques:

- Explain to the students why you are doing these activities (e.g., to help the teachers improve teaching; to find out what students can say). Encourage them to say as much as they can.
- Call the students by name, using their name tags or cards. This is especially important for video recording.
- Give students equal opportunities to answer questions and alternate who is asked a question first.
- Make smooth transitions from one task to the next using the scripts you have prepared in advance.
- Consider pacing so that students do not feel hurried. Adjust the time spent on each task to the proficiency level and responses of the students.
- Give students time to think about answers. Do not provide immediate assistance, but if they become uncomfortable, give contextual clues (e.g., answer options, facial expressions, gestures) and then go on with the assessment.

To complete the assessment, administer the Wind Down task, which includes thanking the students and offering a reward, then dismiss students from the room. If there is time before the next assessment, review and discuss rating notes. Reset task scripts, assessment materials, and microphones for the next pair of students. Using the checklist in Appendix D, you can confirm that you are following important steps for administration before and during the assessment.

## Modifying the SOPA Administration Procedures

Although the SOPA is designed to be administered in person to pairs of students following standardized procedures, there may be situations in which you need to modify the administration procedures to accommodate students with disabilities and to meet program needs.

Administrators may provide accommodations in the administration procedures for students with disabilities as long as the accommodations do not compromise the purpose of the SOPA as an assessment of speaking and listening proficiency. Permissible accommodations include frequent breaks, individual administration, or extended time for students who are normally provided extended time during testing.

If you need to administer the assessment to a single student rather than a pair of students, ask only the questions listed for Student A in the task template. Disregard instructions related to taking turns. During Task 3 of Track 1, fill in for Student B by asking the student to give commands to you.

If your program is unable to administer the SOPA in person, video technology can be used for virtual administration. To reflect the face-to-face and interactive elements of the assessment, administrators and students must use video throughout the assessment. It is not allowable to administer and rate the SOPA based only on audio. For virtual administration, students and SOPA administrators need to have a stable internet connection and use a video-enabled device, such as a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or desktop computer. It is important to select a video conferencing platform that is accessible and easy to use, and it may be helpful to choose a platform that students already know. If you prepared manipulatives for certain tasks, it is also important to think about how they can be used in virtual administrations. You may consider sending the manipulatives to students at home or preparing digital versions of manipulatives that are appropriate for the tasks. Throughout administration, make sure to look into the camera so that students stay engaged and know when it is their turn to speak during each task. If you experience technical difficulties that disrupt the connection before the end of the assessment, restart the session as soon as possible and continue where you left off. If you are unable to immediately resume the session, reschedule the assessment at a later time and start with the task that was interrupted.

If you need to administer the SOPA by yourself, you will be responsible for setting up and operating the recording equipment and for verifying student information as well as following the scripts to administer each task. If you are also planning to rate students' performances in real time during administration, include additional time in the schedule to allow you to take rating notes and evaluate each task during the assessment, and complete global ratings and rating notes after the students leave the room. See Part 5 for more detailed information on rating the SOPA.

It is important to note that validity research for the SOPA has not been conducted with the modifications for individual or virtual administration listed in this section.

## SOPA Administration Resources

The following resources for administering the SOPA are included in the Resource Library:

- Appendix A: SOPA Task Templates
- Appendix B: Sample SOPA Recording Consent Letter
- Appendix C: SOPA Scheduling Template
- Appendix D: SOPA Administration Checklist

## Part 5: Rating the SOPA

### Selecting SOPA Raters

Typically, the SOPA is given by an administrator and rated by a second, trained rater who observes the assessment session. SOPA raters are responsible for documenting student performances on the assessment and assigning accurate, reliable ratings to determine their proficiency levels. It is important that the SOPA be rated by individuals who are 1) trained in rating the SOPA, through completing the SOPA Training Program and reading this manual, 2) very familiar with the SOPA Rating Scale, and 3) highly proficient in the target language.

In addition to these three requirements, SOPA raters should be able to apply rating procedures consistently across students, take efficient and relevant rating notes, evaluate the highest level of proficiency sustained by students to assign global ratings, and write rating justifications that provide examples of student speech to support these ratings. Trained SOPA raters can rate assessments that they administer (if there is a single administrator-rater) or SOPAs administered by others (if the standard procedure of one administrator and one rater is followed); in both cases, they should base ratings only on what students say during the assessment, not what teachers think they may be capable of.

### SOPA Rating Materials

The SOPA assesses student performances against predetermined criteria rather than in comparison to other students. SOPA raters evaluate students' listening comprehension and oral fluency during the assessment against the descriptions or criteria on the SOPA Rating Scale (see Appendix E).

They apply these criteria to document evidence of student performance, rate the highest level of speaking and listening sustained for each task, and assign a global rating based on the full assessment on the SOPA Rating Sheet (see Appendix F). Note that the SOPA Rating Sheet is aligned to the SOPA tracks, so it is important to select the correct rating sheet for Track 1 or Track 2 based on which track is administered.

The SOPA Rating Scale includes three major proficiency levels—Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced, each of which is subdivided into Low, Mid, and High levels. Level descriptors are based on the 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and are appropriate for the developmental level of young learners. The top section of the rating scale provides level descriptors for speaking in terms of quantity and function of speech, vocabulary, and comprehensibility. The bottom of the rating scale provides level descriptors for listening including supports needed for comprehension. Table 2 describes the salient features of the three main proficiency levels in the SOPA Rating Scale.

Table 2. Main Levels for SOPA Rating

	Novice	Intermediate	Advanced
Speaking	Memorized words and phrases; uses simple language on very familiar topics; communicates minimally with pauses and breakdowns	Simple conversation at sentence level; uses language creatively on everyday topics and some academic topics; generally comprehensible	Paragraph-level discourse; maintains discussions on wide variety of topics; easily comprehensible with fluency of speech
Listening	Isolated words and high-frequency phrases; requires repetition and visual supports	Sentence-level speech in new contexts; requires slow-downs for unfamiliar topics	Main ideas and details in connected speech on range of topics; normal rate of speech

The SOPA Rating Sheet is used to assign ratings efficiently and document all information needed to support reporting of student ratings. At the top of the rating sheet, fill in the assessment date, language, class, administrator, rater, and student names. The rating sheet has two pages, one for Student A and one for Student B, and it is important to write the full name for each student on the appropriate sheet. For each task and separately for each student, use the Notes section to take notes on the language the student produces and their listening comprehension as related to the proficiency level expectations for the task which are shown in the Proficiency Levels section immediately below the task name. Next, compare this evidence to the SOPA Rating Scale to evaluate the highest level of speaking and listening the student sustains during the task and record these levels in the Evaluation section. After all tasks are completed, review the Notes and Evaluation results across tasks to determine the highest levels of language the student was able to sustain in speaking and listening during the assessment. Indicate these levels and describe how the student’s performance corresponds to the ratings you assigned in the Global Rating & Justification section.

### Preparing to Rate the SOPA

After completing training, SOPA raters must become thoroughly familiar with the levels and descriptions in the SOPA Rating Scale and the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines to which it is aligned. SOPA raters who are paired with a SOPA administrator should also follow these steps to prepare to support the assessment:

1. Practice using recording equipment.

Gather equipment for video recording which may include additional microphones to capture student voices. Arrange the recording equipment and microphones in the room designated for SOPA administration to ensure that student voices can be heard. Because you need to capture nonverbal as well as verbal responses, it is important that both students and the materials they are using are clearly visible. Test all elements of recording, including saving digital files.

2. Review the assessment schedule and the SOPA task scripts.

The assessment schedule provides the information you need to label the SOPA Rating Sheets and keep accurate records. Become familiar with the SOPA task scripts so that you will be



ready to prompt the SOPA administrator as needed to probe for more language, move to another task, or end the assessment.

3. Review the SOPA Rating Scale and the SOPA Rating Sheets.

Thoroughly review the SOPA Rating Scale to become familiarized with the descriptors for each sublevel as well as the SOPA Rating Sheets to prepare for notetaking.

## Directions for Rating the SOPA

The objective for SOPA raters is to assess the highest level of language a student can sustain in speaking and listening based on the evidence that students produce across tasks. You will assign separate ratings for speaking and listening, and students may have different proficiency levels in each. Follow these procedures to assign ratings for each student in the pair on the SOPA Rating Sheet:

1. Take thorough notes during the assessment.
2. Evaluate the highest level of proficiency in speaking and listening demonstrated for each task.
3. Review notes and evaluations across tasks.
4. Assign a global rating for speaking.
5. Assign a global rating for listening.
6. Write justifications for the global rating.

Effective rating notes record information about student language that helps you match the student's speech and comprehension to the level descriptions in the SOPA Rating Scale and assign accurate, reliable ratings. Remember to record instances where a student receives assistance with answers from the other student. When you are taking notes during administration, maintain a pleasant expression. If your notetaking makes students nervous, you or the administrator can explain that these notes are used to help teachers in their teaching, not to focus on mistakes. To be thorough but efficient in notetaking, focus your notes based on the students' proficiency levels:

- For Novice-level speaking, write *exactly* what students say to determine accurate ratings.
- For Intermediate- and Advanced-level speaking, write *specific examples* of speech that demonstrate the *highest proficiency* level sustained. Record examples of *key features* of the speech that reflect the descriptors of the SOPA Rating Scale.
- For all levels of listening, write *specific examples* that show student understanding or a lack of comprehension. Note that while higher level SOPA tasks are designed to elicit speech at higher proficiency levels, they may not provide enough input for students to clearly demonstrate listening comprehension at higher proficiency levels (e.g., Intermediate Mid or above). For these tasks, if students show full understanding of the task instructions and questions and were successful in responding to the task, rate their listening proficiency at the same level as their speaking proficiency. If students are not able to successfully complete the task and/or demonstrate that they partially or fully misunderstand the task instructions and questions, read the descriptors of the lower levels in the SOPA Rating Scale and rate their listening proficiency accordingly.

**Global ratings** are a final, summary evaluation of the evidence you see across all SOPA tasks; they are not based on a calculation that includes ratings for each task. Instead, global ratings represent the highest levels of speaking and listening proficiency that the student demonstrates during the assessment. A student will likely demonstrate evidence of a range of proficiency levels across the SOPA, depending on the varying demands of the tasks. Therefore, evidence of the global rating may be seen

only in a single task that targets that level of performance. If you are rating during administration by a paired SOPA administrator, it may be appropriate to review your notes with the administrator and confirm agreement on ratings.

When writing rating justifications, remember that these are meant to capture why you rated the student's overall performance at a particular sublevel. **Rating justifications** should include descriptions of how the student's speech and listening comprehension correspond to the global ratings you assigned and provide examples that support the ratings. They may include information about what additional evidence would be needed to determine a higher level.

## Modifying the SOPA Rating Procedures

Although it is recommended to have two people administer the SOPA, one who serves as the administrator and one as the rater, other options for rating the SOPA may be used to meet your program needs.

A single SOPA administrator may serve as both administrator and rater at the same time following the rating procedures outlined above. In these cases, extra time must be built into the assessment schedule to allow for taking notes and completing evaluations after each task as well as assigning global ratings and writing rating justifications at the end of each assessment. Alternatively, if the assessments are being recorded, the administrator can focus solely on administration and they or another trained rater can complete ratings at a later time. See Part 4 for more detailed information on administering the SOPA.

Video recordings can be used to rate SOPA assessments after they are administered, either by the SOPA administrator or a different trained rater. The same materials and procedures are used when rating the SOPA based on recordings as when rating in real time. Video recordings can also be used for double rating or rating verification. To come to a final rating agreement, time must be allotted for rating discussion, consensus, and documentation of final ratings.

## SOPA Rating Resources

The following resources for rating the SOPA are included in the Resource Library:

- Appendix E: SOPA Rating Scale
- Appendix F: SOPA Rating Sheets

## Part 6: Reporting SOPA Results

How you share SOPA results should be aligned with your purposes for using the assessment, for example for placement, summative assessment, program evaluation, or making decisions about instruction. SOPA results can be shared in various formats and levels of detail to different stakeholders to provide information about learning outcomes and give effective feedback for student learning.

You can share reports of individual SOPA results, which may include rating notes and feedback on task performances, with teachers, parents/guardians, and directly with students as appropriate for their ages. Individual SOPA reports should include more information about task performances and the rating scale to help parents or students understand how to interpret the results. They can also be accompanied by a one-page information sheet to help stakeholders understand more about the design and purpose of the SOPA (see Appendix G).

It can also be helpful to share global ratings and aggregate results within your language program, with school administrators and leadership, and even in the larger community to advocate for your program.

To report SOPA results at the school level and facilitate data analysis, you can use a school reporting form (see Appendix H) that includes students' first language(s), the date of the assessment, the teacher or class, and global ratings for speaking and listening. For programs assessing multiple grade levels or languages, different reporting forms can be completed for each grade level and language assessed.

### SOPA Reporting Resources

The following resources for reporting on the SOPA are included in the Resource Library:

- Appendix G: SOPA Information for Schools and Families
- Appendix H: School Reporting Form

## Appendices

All appendices can be found in the SOPA Resource Library on the SOPA Training Program website. The relevant subsection of the SOPA Resource Library is listed for each appendix.

### Appendix A: SOPA Task Templates

This can be found under *Resources for SOPA Tasks* in the SOPA Resource Library.

### Appendix B: Sample SOPA Recording Consent Letter

This can be found under *Resources for SOPA Administration* in the SOPA Resource Library.

### Appendix C: SOPA Scheduling Template

This can be found under *Resources for SOPA Administration* in the SOPA Resource Library.

### Appendix D: SOPA Administration Checklist

This can be found under *Resources for SOPA Administration* in the SOPA Resource Library.

### Appendix E: SOPA Rating Scale

This can be found under *Resources for SOPA Rating* in the SOPA Resource Library.

### Appendix F: SOPA Rating Sheets

This can be found under *Resources for SOPA Rating* in the SOPA Resource Library.

### Appendix G: SOPA Information for Schools and Families

This can be found under *Resources for SOPA Information* in the SOPA Resource Library.

### Appendix H: SOPA School Reporting Form Template

This can be found under *Resources for SOPA Rating* in the SOPA Resource Library.