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ABSTRACT

The purposes of writing in the foreign language classroom are similar to those in other disciplines. The process approach to writing instruction is useful in any language. Selection of writing topics is based on vocabulary and available skills, and careful sequencing and control of range of topics helps develop proficiency. Writing assignments can be used to integrate other language skills, and the audience should be specified. Students need not always have the same assignment, and activities can be designed to be fun as well as instructive. Once writing is a regular classroom and homework activity, it can be incorporated into testing. Evaluation involves not only error correction but also encouragement of meaningful and interesting communication. Selective, not blanket, error correction that changes depending on proficiency level is appropriate, and an error matrix may be helpful in tracking and diagnosing error patterns. Composite grading, its complexity depending on level, is useful for targeting accuracy, content, lexicon, structure, and idiomatic quality. Writing across the foreign language curriculum can begin in the first weeks of instruction and be carried out throughout the program. Appended materials include suggested writing activities and topics for each proficiency level, and a list of codes for correcting papers. (MSE)

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# Writing Across the (Foreign Language) Curriculum

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Writing in the foreign language classroom! What images does this evoke? Stacks of papers put off until the students have long since forgotten why and what they wrote? Irrelevant topics treated in "fractured French", curious transliterations from English that are often understandable only when retranslated into English, a discouraging sea of red ink and a grade that is difficult to explain to a disgruntled student? No wonder that writing is, of the four language skills, the most neglected in today's classroom. How much more rewarding, in these days of oral proficiency emphasis, to interview our students and evaluate their speaking skills. But it is not only because we shy away from all the grading and feel insecure about evaluating written work that we do so little of it.

Methodological trends are also responsible for the relative neglect of writing in the foreign language classroom. When the audio-lingual approach displaced grammar-translation, writing activities largely disappeared. More recently, the ACTFL Guidelines have helped restore writing to its proper place as one of the four skills, and new texts pay greater attention to it than ever before.

The "writing across the curriculum" movement provided considerable impetus for this change. Traditionally, the teaching of writing took place in English departments, or rather in the "composition" classes forced upon freshmen. There students had to write essays on topics that often seemed irrelevant. Having survived these compulsory exercises, students rarely had to write again. If their major field required writing, skills were often inadequate, due to lack of practice as much as to insufficient training. In the 1970's, however, the place of writing in the curriculum was reexamined and this skill began to be seen as an integral part of education. As Elaine Maimon

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of Beaver College, one of the leading figures in the writing across the curriculum movement, states, writing is a "way to learn, not merely a means of communicating to others what has already been mastered. It is a critical tool of invention and discovery central to all disciplines" (Smith, p. 13).

The purposes of writing in the foreign language classroom are not fundamentally different from those in other disciplines, even if the level is more basic. Writing is a form of learning and serves to reinforce other skills. In a biology class, students prepare laboratory reports describing experiments; in French they write to demonstrate command of vocabulary and structural forms. At the most elementary level, writing is used daily in language classes for homework exercises, quizzes, boardwork, reports, etc. Students put pen to paper to practice spelling and as a reinforcement technique for new verb forms and vocabulary words. Even at this level, however, students are able to use their writing to communicate in the target language. They can, for example, write lists, fill out forms, complete questionnaires, relate phone messages, and do a variety of other tasks that require basically a writing down of memorized material.

As students progress and begin to create with the language orally (the move from mechanical to meaningful to communicative activities in the classroom), they should be pushed to take more risks in their written work, as well. A second-semester French student *is* capable of reaching an intermediate level of proficiency in writing if given enough practice. However, a stumbling block comes in the intermediate courses for the majority of language students. They seem to "fossilize" in production of written French. There is often little difference between the compositions of end-of-semester elementary students and mid-semester intermediate students. A similar plateau occurs in oral proficiency. Once students can take care of basic needs, they continue to build on spoken French by adding "street French" vocabulary or slang and idiomatic expressions. The accuracy level remains low and speech patterns simple.

At this point in the foreign language curriculum, the interrelationship of the four skills takes on a new significance. Reading advanced texts introduces students to a more polished French and encourages them to pattern their own writing on what has been assimilated. Similarly, greater skill in writing will be reflected in more risk-taking in speaking as well as increased comprehension of native speech.

Until recently, the writing process has been largely ignored in favor of the finished product. The teaching of writing was often seen as identical with the teaching of editing. A shift in focus has raised the question: What does a writer do to produce texts? One helpful pattern has been established by Stephen N. Tchudi (pp. 35-50):

1. Preparing to write.
2. Organizing to write.
3. Writing.
4. Revising content and organization.

(Here the process may become circular, since the writer may go back to one of the prewriting stages and start over.)

5. Proofreading for accuracy.
6. Presenting the text.

What are the implications of the "process approach" for elementary and intermediate language programs? Research has shown that the more direction students receive in a writing assignment, the more successful the outcome, for writer and reader alike. The process of writing needs to be taught, in French as well as in English. Claire Gaudiani states that "effective second language writing practice seems to necessitate more assiduous guidance by teachers than native language composition does" (p. 38). The first step for the foreign language teacher is selecting a topic appropriate to the linguistic level of the student. Then follow a variety of intermediate steps to guide the student toward a finished piece of writing. Our students only rarely do "research" but the usual language class activities such as learning vocabulary, listening to tapes, looking at videos, reading cultural or literary materials, practicing conversation skills in groups can all be prewriting exercises when followed by a related assignment which either reinforces or expands the other activities. Organizing and focusing are fairly easy since assignments are short and linguistic skills restrict expression, but even the simplest of sentences must be logically sequenced.

Writing is improved when students prepare a series of drafts, with feedback (from peers or teacher) concerning content, not just grammar, preceding each revision. Peer-editing (Gaudiani, pp. 13-15) can be effective at this stage, encouraging students to be responsible for each other, allowing them to share ideas, and teaching them to read critically. This last point is especially difficult, since students often do not recognize mistakes. In the foreign language class, revision often is synonymous with proofreading, although presentation and organization of ideas should not be overlooked. The final product can serve as an impetus to skill development in other areas when students read or listen to each other's writing and react. The process approach to writing is ideally suited to foreign language classes since listening, speaking and reading can be integrated so naturally with it. Lest its length and complexity deter teachers once again from using more writing in the beginning/intermediate sequence, not all assignments need to be taken

through all stages. Many can begin and end in the classroom, and some out-of-class writing, such as journals, should not be taken through the process if students are to write what they really think.

How is the teacher to decide which topics are appropriate and how can we use them to improve proficiency? Most of us base our choices strictly on lexical and grammatical skills. Beginning students should not write on topics for which they do not have the necessary vocabulary, since using a dictionary can be hazardous to their health! However, it is appropriate to teach intermediate students dictionary skills and to encourage the acquisition of a personal vocabulary. Students' control of grammatical structures must also be taken into consideration. They cannot hypothesize when they have learned neither the conditional nor the subjunctive, but this sort of concern is only a beginning. If teachers want writing that is lively and not just correct, topics should be interesting to students. For example, describing an ideal husband or wife will generate better prose than portraying an ideal hotel room.

The audience for and the purpose of a writing assignment should be clearly indicated. If students always write only for the teacher, they have no incentive to vary their prose. Students can write for themselves (lists of chores, journals), for the teacher, classmates, friends, and for mythical readers. Writing assignments are also more meaningful if they grow out of a need, even a fictional one, such as preparing a description of oneself so that one can be recognized by a stranger. Thus, the written word can serve to communicate real information.

Careful sequencing of topics, avoiding novice or intermediate-low activities for students who should be more sophisticated, will also help develop proficiency. Just as reading texts are sequenced, going from practical, basic information, through description and simple narration, to more abstract prose, so writing assignments should move from lists, through description and narration to hypothesizing. Since most students will only use more difficult structures if they have a reason to do so, writing assignments should gradually increase in difficulty, challenging students to expand their skills. Once students have tried a new structure to express a more complex idea on paper, they may find it becoming a part of their spoken language.

Appendix A lists a series of topics prepared according to the ACTFL Guidelines. The range of writing activities increases as the levels go up, since students have greater control of the language. In many cases, a writing assignment on the novice level can be a pre-writing exercise (oral or written) on the intermediate level, and depending on expectations, an intermediate-low activity can be expanded to become more challenging for more proficient students. The Guidelines are pragmatic and present the writing skill in

its most functional aspects. However, the list includes suggestions for creative writing activities at every level as well.

A detailed description of one topic on each level follows, in order to illustrate how such activities can be used effectively in the classroom. Certain steps provide opportunities for practice of the other skills. It is especially important for language students to recognize the interrelationship of the four skills in order to be motivated to "transfer" what they learn from one area of language study to another. In these illustrations, certain assumptions are made about the "typical language student's" proficiency across the four skills. However, since it does not develop at the same rate in all students, or even at the same rate for each skill in the same student, we cannot emphasize enough the necessity of getting to know your own students' general level of proficiency in the four skills before making assignments such as these.

For the typical novice-mid to novice-high student, the elementary language teacher might want to try the following activity:

#### STEPS:

1. Students brainstorm about what they think would make a good French dinner by supplying vocabulary words of food items. One student writes the items suggested on the board; all students help with the spelling.
2. Each student prepares a menu at home, with some guidance beforehand, such as explaining the different categories that are usually found on menus in a French restaurant.
3. When the menus are brought in to class, students work with partners to act out the restaurant scene. One student is the waiter/waitress, the other orders from his menu. Then they switch roles.
4. To elaborate on this theme, students write the dialog they have just practiced or, if the students are especially strong, they prepare at home a description in the present tense of what happens at the restaurant.

This activity encourages practice in speaking, reading, and writing. It reviews specific vocabulary items (food); verbs such as *aller*, *arriver*, *commander*, *manger*, *aimer*; and it requires the use of the partitive article. It can be used to review numbers, if the teacher wants to include prices as part of the assignment.

At the intermediate-low to intermediate-mid level an appropriate speaking/writing activity might resemble the following:

**STEPS:**

1. Invite a French native to visit the class. Tell the students something about the person, then explain how they will select the topics for discussion.
2. The class as a whole brainstorms about the possible topics (French youth, politics, food, etc.). One student writes the list of topics on the board. Student discuss the pros and cons of each topic, and a vote is taken.
  - (a) In taking a simple vote, the students practice numbers: pronunciation, sound/symbol relationship in the transcription, and addition.
  - (b) For the more advanced class, vote could be made by written ballot: each student lists two choices and gives a written explanation about why they are the best. These choices and explanations are written on separate slips of paper, and grouped by topic. The number of votes for each topic is counted by a different student, who reads the explanations that go with them.
3. Once the topics for discussion are selected, the students are divided into small groups which are each assigned one of the topics. In groups, students write at least one question per person.
4. Either the teacher checks the questions, or they can be exchanged from group to group for peer-editing.
5. The final set of questions is typed by a volunteer from each group, with copies for all members of the class, the teacher, and the visitor who should receive it prior to the visit.
6. Before the visit, in a small group session, each member practices reading aloud the questions, with pronunciation check by the teacher. At this time, students can, if they wish, choose the particular question they want to ask.
7. During the visit, each group of students is given equal time for discussion of its topic (e.g. five groups @ ten minutes = 50 minutes of class). This avoids the usual problem of getting stuck on one subject and never getting to the rest of the topics.
8. Every student asks one question.

9. As a follow-up to the visit, several writing activities are possible:
- (a) Students write an account of the discussion that resulted from their question.
  - (b) Students write a summary of the discussion of their group's topic. This would include some information about each question in the group.
  - (c) Students write a statement about each topic discussed.
  - (d) Students write about the topic that interested them most, and explain why.
  - (e) Students write a letter of thanks to the visitor in which they elaborate on one topic: why it was of particular interest, for example.

This activity encourages practice in speaking and writing, and, if the silent vote is taken, in reading as well. It focuses on the use of the interrogative. In writing the explanation of their silent vote, students express personal preferences. The voting procedure reviews numbers. The written account of various aspects of the discussion requires some simple note-taking, and the thank-you letter focuses on an altogether different function in writing. The students will acquire new vocabulary and strengthen their knowledge of a variety of verbs (and control of their forms) in their work with the various topics of discussion.

For classes in which the students' levels of proficiency in writing range from intermediate-high to advanced, and where many can sustain an advanced level in listening and speaking, a slightly more complex activity might be appropriate and fun! This centers around the search for a murderer and can be done over a period of several days, or even weeks, depending on the amount of time the teacher wants to devote to it. The scene is set by giving the class this information: "Last night between the hours of 10 pm and midnight, a horrible murder was committed. Half of you in this room are suspects! To prove your innocence, you must find an irrefutable alibi." The teacher then leads the class through these steps:

1. Divide the class in half. One half are the suspects; they choose a partner with whom they claim to have spent the previous evening. From the other half of the class, students are selected to be the judge, the prosecutor, the defense lawyer, and members of the jury.

2. The class is given time for small group work. The suspects work with their partners to create an alibi. At the same time the other half of the class will divide into groups of three or four to discuss the "crime" and the questions they would like to have answered.
3. At the end of the small group session, the suspects are instructed to write their statement of defense which they turn in without letting their partners read it. At the same time the lawyers submit a separate set of questions which they intend to ask the suspects; these should be based, in part, on the small group discussions in which they participated.
4. After allowing enough time for accuracy check and self-correction of the written work turned in thus far, the case is brought to trial. As each suspect is questioned by the lawyers, his or her partner leaves the room. Each member of the jury takes notes during the proceedings in an effort to find contradictions in the testimony of one group of suspects. (A variation would be to tape the proceedings and have the members of the jury listen to the tape again before choosing the guilty party; this gives additional practice in listening, and also makes it possible to play back the contradictory testimony to the two students who are found guilty.)
5. At the end of all testimony, each member of the jury is instructed to decide who the guilty party is and to justify his decision in writing.
6. After allowing enough time for accuracy check and self-correction of this written work, the statements of the members of the jury are read aloud in class. A tally of the verdicts can be kept on the board, so that when the last one has been read, the guilty party is obvious.
7. When the trial is over, the judge writes a summary of the proceedings, including the sentence chosen for the criminals. This is also checked for accuracy and self-corrected, then read aloud to the class.

This activity differs from the others in that the students do not have the same assignment. They all get practice in writing, speaking, and listening but in different formats and at different stages of the trial. Some students

will be narrating and describing, some note-taking, and others summarizing. The assignments are equally challenging, but this division of labor makes students dependent on each other for the completion of their work. They are motivated to do a good job, since the opposite could have a snowball negative effect on the steps that follow. The variety of assignments is also much more interesting for the class and the teacher alike. In this activity, the suspects practice using the indefinite past and the imperfect in their statements of defense; the lawyers focus on the use of the interrogative; the members of the jury use indirect discourse in their attempts to point out the discrepancies in testimony; and the judge works with both the past tenses (in the summary of the proceedings) and with the future (in the sentencing).

Once writing is a regular activity, both in the classroom and as homework, it can be incorporated into testing. Because dictionaries are not available, topics for which students have the necessary structural and lexical skills must be chosen carefully. Since it takes a great deal more time for students to "free write" on a test than to fill in blanks with verb forms, topics should be simpler and shorter than on an at-home writing assignment, with clear indications as to how much is to be written, which tests spelling and vocabulary, a brief postcard, and similar descriptive topics. On a more advanced level, story-completion is very effective. The grading of such exercises is more difficult, but a system of one-half for content and one-half for form is satisfactory, albeit a bit subjective as to content. If what the student says is incomprehensible, or irrelevant to the assignment, no credit is given. If the student writes exceptionally well, extra points can be added. It may be more tedious to grade such exam parts, but they are at least as important as sentence transformations.

How do we evaluate our students' writing? If writing is a means of communication, the focus should be on audience, thought, content, and purpose, with accuracy as only one criterion among many. The teaching of writing is not synonymous with error elimination. If only grammatical perfection is rewarded, students will limit themselves to producing error-free prose, whether or not it is interesting or even meaningful. Students must be made aware of just who their audience is before they tackle a writing assignment. In real-life we always write for a reason, and there is always a real-life receiver of the written text. This could be anyone, including the writer himself (as is the case with a shopping list, for example). In real-life we also want to know that our text has indeed been received by its audience, and we really don't expect to have our message returned to us covered with red ink and suggestions for correction! It is important, therefore, for us as teachers to spend a few minutes focusing on the appropriate reader response for any

given writing assignment. If we have asked our students to take on a certain mindset for the writing, then we must have a corresponding mindset for the reading. We should not simply return the work with comments about the grammatical structures.

This is easy enough at the higher levels of the language curriculum, where it becomes fairly automatic. We comment on the student's analysis of a literary work; we agree or disagree with his opinion on a political issue; we notice his style; we congratulate him on his insight; we rave about his creativity. The weaker and/or lazier student will also receive the appropriate reader response: a clear statement about the poor quality of the writing and our degree of disappointment! At the lower level in the curriculum, the types of responses that are appropriate for the audience (or reader) are as varied as the topics that are possible for assignment. If our students write a post card to their French teacher, then we give them a real-life response to their message. Other ways in which the intended audience of the student's writing becomes a real-life audience if students write letters to French pen pals or even to students in another class; the answers they receive will be authentic reader response.

This "appropriate reader response" which the teacher must give to the piece of writing is the first half of the job. Perhaps the most difficult thing we as language teachers can ask ourselves to do when presented with certain types of writing is to concentrate only on that first half. This is especially important, for example, with a dialog journal in which we want to maintain a real dialog in the target language while at the same time encouraging students to take risks in their expressive writing. For this, we must create an atmosphere of trust by becoming an interested and uncritical interlocutor. It has been suggested that for certain types of assignments it is appropriate to avoid all negative feedback by underlining everything that is correct in blue ink.

But students do make mistakes, and how do we best respond to them? There seems to be a consensus that teacher correction has little effect on the improvement of student writing but opinions are divided as to the usefulness of student correction. Lalande (1982) states that writing improves when all errors are indicated by the teacher and students correct them. At the other extreme is Semke (1984) whose research indicates that "corrections do not increase writing accuracy, writing fluency, or general language proficiency, and they may have a negative effect on student attitudes, especially when students must make corrections by themselves" (p. 115). Most foreign language teachers would probably agree with her statement that "the amount of free-writing assigned often may be determined more by the amount of

time a teacher has to correct it than by the amount believed to be most beneficial to a student's learning" (p. 195). But are we willing to follow her advice and respond only to content? Grammatical errors numerous enough to interfere with understanding cannot be ignored, and even the less serious mistakes should be brought to the student's attention. A system of selective, rather than blanket, error correction can be developed which changes from level to level. All errors are not created equal and a mistake in past participle agreement in level 1 is certainly less serious than incorrect subject/verb agreement. Students in level 4 who make errors in gender should be penalized more than beginners. Different types of writing assignments also require different standards. In-class writing will not produce the same level of accuracy as an assignment that has gone through pre-writing, peer editing, and revising before being turned in.

A correction code (Appendix B) simplifies the evaluation of writing. By placing the symbol in the margin of a paper, the teacher can easily identify the types and frequencies of errors. This correction code is for levels 1-4 of French and can easily be adapted for other languages. It uses obvious abbreviations and symbols so that both evaluator and writer understand quickly what the problem is.

Over the years some language teachers have also found an error matrix helpful for keeping track of their students' writing errors. Ted Higgs explains how he uses such a matrix in his Spanish classes (pp. 673-78): he combines it with a correction code, to create an "active-correction process" for the students. They are responsible for correcting their mistakes based on the hints the teacher with the code. The matrix helps the teacher discover the weaknesses and track the progress of individual students, of the class as a whole, and even across sections of the same course.

In its simplest form, the matrix contains an axis for the students' names, an axis for the correction code, a column for the total number of errors, and a space for the grade assigned. This type of matrix is appropriate for all levels since a weight or value can be changed as the students move through levels. The final grade is based in part on the total number of error points.

Assigning grades is certainly the most difficult and unpleasant part of evaluating writing. If we reject the goal of grammatical perfection, while reacting to errors based on their seriousness according to level, and accept the focus on content, we must find a way to incorporate all of these elements. Claire Gaudiani's four point system in which there are separate grades for grammar and vocabulary use, stylistic technique, organization of material and content (p. 20) is useful in evaluating upper-level writing, but

not appropriate for beginning or intermediate students. Wilga Rivers (1968) also suggests a composite grade, based on grammatical accuracy, lexical choice, variety of structure, and general idiomatic quality, with emphasis changing as students acquire greater skill.

In levels one and two, a simpler, two-part system works well, since what students can write is limited. One-half of the grade is based on a global evaluation of content. Does the student write for his audience? Does he communicate his ideas effectively? The other half of the grade is for grammatical accuracy. Using the error grid, the total number of points is added up for each student. Then a graduated scale is devised whereby the lowest number of points produces the highest grade. For instance, if the range of points missed is from 8 to 30, 8-10 would be an A, 11-15 a B, 16-20 a C, 20-25 a D. The curve changes, depending on error intervals in specific classes. The grading scales can vary from assignment to assignment, or from level to level. The accuracy grade is then averaged with the content grade.

For levels three and four, when students are more skilled, one-half of the grade is still based on the ideas expressed. Style and organization are worth one-fourth, and the remaining one-fourth of the grade is for accuracy, using the same system as for levels one and two, i.e. establishing a curve based on the error frequency in the class. This demonstrates to the students that accuracy alone is not the goal of writing.

The principles and approaches of the writing across the curriculum movement and process writing can help foreign language teachers enjoy bringing writing back into their curriculum. The process can begin in the first weeks of the elementary class, and continue throughout the subsequent levels. Only when writing becomes an integral part of a well-articulated program can students achieve true proficiency.

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## Appendix A

### *NOVICE-MID*

dehydrated sentences

scrambled dialogue

dialogue completion—supply questions or answers

scrambled story—four or five sentences are given out of order, students must find the proper sequence

sentence completion—"In the summer I like . . ." etc.

matching pictures and captions

### *NOVICE-HIGH*

#### *Lists: Nouns*

You are preparing dinner. Make a list of what you will buy and where.

You are going on a trip to \_\_\_\_\_. Make a list of what to pack.

You are getting ready for the fall semester. Make a list of what to take back to school.

Create a menu for an imaginary restaurant. Be sure you include all major categories of food which compose a meal in your foreign country. (Prices may be added).

#### **Verbal expressions (infinitives)**

Your son/daughter has just arrived home for vacation. Make a list of chores for him/her.

You have just arrived at home. Make a list of what you would like to do during vacation.

Your plans and projects for the summer: Make a list of what you want to accomplish.

You are going on a trip to \_\_\_\_\_. Make a list of things you want to see and things you want to do.

Your schedule: List your activities for a typical day/week, with times and details.

Make a list of what you would like to do, if you could do anything you wanted.

Make a list of what you wish you had done in the past, if it had been possible.

*Dialogues:* You are at a table in the cafeteria. A foreign student sits down. Introduce yourself and find out as much as you can about the other student.

You and a friend are at a café. Order for yourself, find out what the friend wants. Include the waiter's lines.

You and your parents are out to dinner. Order for yourself, for them and include the waiter in your dialogue.

You are taking the plane/train/bus. At the ticket counter, get information about schedules and prices.

*Sentence completion:*

Coordinate, e.g. I like French because

Dependent, e.g. I wish that

I am going home so that

Relative, e.g. I hate women/men who

If clauses, e.g. If it snows tomorrow

*Miscellaneous:*

Supply hotel registration form, ask students to complete.

Weather report: write a weather report for tomorrow. Then revise it according to what the weather was really like.

Explain your likes and dislikes to the residence halls director, so that you can be matched with an appropriate roommate.

Write directions for your French teacher on how to find your dorm/favorite night spot/favorite restaurant.

Structured poetry: cinquins, calligrammes, (concrete poetry), haiku, etc.

*INTERMEDIATE-LOW*

*Notes:*

You are going out. Leave a note for your parents (roommate) telling them where you will be, with whom you are, when you will be back.

Ask them to take care of something for you.

You are going out and want your roommate (friend) to join you. Explain where you are, who will be there, how long, and what you are doing.

Your roommate is out when his/her parents call. Leave a note telling him/her that they will be coming to visit, with details about their plans.

You are a parent, leaving your child for the evening/weekend. Leave a note for the babysitter with instructions. Be sure you tell him/her where you can be reached and what your child may or may not do.

You are sick. Write a note to your foreign language teacher, explaining what is wrong with you, how long you expect to be absent and ask for the assignments you are missing.

*Postcards:*

Send a card to your teacher from Paris/Madrid/Berlin/Moscow, etc.

Pretend you are eight years old and at camp for the first time. Send your parents a postcard.

You are a parent. Send a postcard to your eight-year old who is at camp.

Send a card to your boy/girlfriend from Florida where you are spending Spring Break.

Your flight to Europe has just landed. Send a card to your parents that you have arrived safely. Include some details about the trip/weather.

You are living in a space colony. Send a postcard home to earth.

You are Romeo and have just been banished to Mantua. Send a postcard to Juliet in Verona.

You are Hamlet. Send a card to your friends at the university in Germany, telling them how things are at home.

You are Penelope. Write a card to your husband, Ulysses, who has been gone for seven years.

You are Ulysses. Write to your wife Penelope.

*Descriptions:*

You are writing a tourist brochure about your region. Describe its geographic features, climate and cultural/sports offerings. Say why people should visit.

You are meeting someone you have never seen before. Write a description so that they can recognize you at the airport.

Describe a famous person, but leave out the name. Your classmates will try to guess who it is.

Describe a famous place, but leave out the name. Your classmates will try to guess what it is.

Write a letter to a friend at home, describing your room at school.

Describe your family in a letter to a French pen pal.

Describe yourself in a letter to a new French pen pal.

Describe your high school (or previous) foreign language teacher to your present foreign language teacher.

You have just been given the name of your new roommate. Write him/her a brief letter describing yourself.

Write to your best friend from high school and describe your latest boy/girlfriend.

Describe your favorite season and tell why you like it.

### *Journals:*

**Personal journal:** Write three to five sentences in French every day about what you are doing and how you feel.

**Dialogue journals**—write questions and reflections for your foreign language teacher to respond to.

**Foreign language class journal**—write every day that you have class, reacting to what has gone on, or using what you have learned.

### *Miscellaneous:*

You are applying to study abroad. Outline your academic career from the end of high school to the present.

You are applying for a summer job. Outline relevant biographical information.

Write a want ad. Exchange with classmate and write letter applying for job. (teacher supplies examples in target language of both ad and letter styles)

Supply captions for pictures/words for cartoon bubbles.

Your French friend wants you to go out with her cousin. Make a list of questions to ask your friend about her cousin to determine if you are willing to accept the date.

**INTERMEDIATE-MID****Short letters:**

A friend is in the hospital. Send him/her a cheerful letter.

You are angry at your boyfriend/girlfriend. Write a short letter telling him/her why.

Write a note to a friend inviting him/her to visit you during the next vacation period.

You have spent a week at the home of friends at the beach. Write them a thank you letter.

Your grandparents have just sent you a wonderful present. Write them a thank you letter.

Write a letter introducing yourself to someone in another French class. That person will answer.

Send your parents an invitation for dinner at your dorm/fraternity/sorority.

Write a letter to a French hotel (chosen from guidebook) reserving a room for a short stay.

You want to study in France. Write a letter to a French university of your choice, asking for information.

You want to break a date but do not have the courage to confront your date. Write him/her a note with your excuses.

Your roommate is messy. Write him/her a note explaining how you feel and ask him/her to "clean up his/her act."

A French student is planning to study at your university. Write to him/her with information that would not be found in the catalogue.

**Descriptions:**

The ideal wife/husband.

The ideal professor.

The ideal student.

The typical student at your university.

The ideal parent.

The ideal child.

The ideal roommate.

An ideal vacation.

What is an American? Describe a typical American. You will read your description to some of your classmates who will agree or disagree with you.

The stereotypical Frenchman. What stereotypes do Americans have about the French? You will compare your ideas with those in your class and come up with a "cliché" portrait.

Compare life in the U.S.A. today and in the 1960s.

You are an object (beach, car, book, etc.) of your choice. How does the world look to you?

*Rewrites:*

Rewrite a simple story in another tense.

Rewrite a narrative as a dialogue.

Rewrite a dialogue as a narrative.

Rewrite a simple story from the point of view of another character in the story.

Insert connector-words in paragraph/story.

Add adjectives and adverbs to make a story more interesting.

*Résumés of oral work:*

Listen to a passage on tape, write a summary of what was said.

Interview with a native speaker. Prepare questions, then summarize responses.

Students present skit. Others write what happened.

*Miscellaneous:*

You are a restaurant reviewer for your student newspaper. Write a description of a restaurant you know well and tell your readers why or why not they should go there.

You are a film reviewer. Write a review of a film you have seen recently.

You are a fortune teller. Write a prediction for someone in your class.

**INTERMEDIATE-HIGH**

*Description/Narration:*

Go to a park and describe in detail what you see.

You have lost your wallet and you go to the "lost and found

office" to try to find it. You must describe the wallet *and* its contents.

Hand out several xeroxed pictures of people in interesting or strange places. Take the picture you find the most interesting and describe the situation and the setting. Give as many details as possible — what time is it, what is the weather, where does this take place, what is the atmosphere, what are the smells, what are the noises, etc?

Talk about your work schedule as a student. How do you organize your time?

Describe the worst vacation you have ever had.

You have witnessed an accident. Write the police report.

Hand out an interesting or unusual picture that has at least two people in it. Create a "story" about the people in this picture, beginning at a point in the past and bringing them up to the moment the picture was taken.

(Have students make four lists on the board: List 1 will have 20 names of people in general, celebrities, professional titles, job descriptions, etc. List 2 will have 20 place names. List 3 will have 10 dates, times, seasons, historical periods. List 4 will have 10 different weather or atmospheric conditions. Write the items of separate slips of paper, divide them into four stacks by category, divide students into groups of two or three.) Choose a representative for your group. Each representative will draw items from the stacks: 3 from category 1, 3 from category 2, 1 from category 3, 1 from category 4. After reading the eight items your representative has collected, brainstorm in your group for 5–8 minutes about possible scenes/stories that can be created around the items. At home you will each write your own version of the story.

What is the funniest thing that ever happened to you? Recount in detail the circumstances (where were you, what were you doing, who were you with, . . . ?)

Imagine that you are a writer in the year 2050 who is asked to write your biography. Write about your whole life, including some details of your death (when, where, how, etc.). Use the third person pronoun as subject, since you (the writer) are writing the biography of someone else (you the person).

Look out your window and describe two people you see. Explain in detail what they are doing, what they are wearing, what they look like, etc.

Relate an incident that occurred in your life in which it was extremely embarrassing to have arrived late.

**Letters:**

Choose a classmate and exchange three letters with her/him. (After letters have been corrected, have them read in class.)

You are in jail in a foreign country. Write a letter to your parents explaining what happened and what you would like them to do.

You are unhappy with your grade in your FL class. Write a letter to your teacher explaining why it should be changed.

Advice columnist: Write a letter in "Dear Abby" style. Exchange with someone in class and answer the letter with advice.

**Miscellaneous:**

Explain a typical American holiday to a foreign friend (Halloween, Thanksgiving, Fourth of July).

Imagine that you are the professor. What would you do?

Imagine that you are the president of your university. What changes would you make?

Name three things that you are afraid of, and explain why.

**Directions:**

A young Frenchman(-woman) who is coming to visit you will rent a car at the airport. Write the directions for him/her to follow to get to your house.

Write directions for how to play your favorite sport/game.

**ADVANCED**

Imagine that you are late for an appointment. You have absolutely no excuse for your tardiness. Invent a completely unbelievable story to use as an excuse.

Imagine that in ten or fifteen years there is no gasoline left. How would we go long distances? Think of several solutions to this problem, and explain them in detail.

"The family is an institution that is dying." Discuss the pros and cons of this statement.

Does France have a good reputation in our country? Why or why not?

Is a society without classes possible?

For or against the death penalty — what is your opinion?

What do you think about advertising? Choose an ad that you like, another that you don't like, and explain why.

Do the kinds of clothes people wear make a difference? Explain, giving examples.

Choose a painting you like. Describe it, then imagine that it comes to life. What happens?

Give students an excerpt from a literary work, and have them analyze the style in class. Have them write on a similar topic, imitating the techniques of the author.

Look out of your window and take the first person you see whom you do not know personally. Imagine what this person's life is like.

Relate a turning point in your life.

(Give students a French cartoon.) Explain what is funny about this cartoon.

Is it possible to be smart, sensitive, and happy? Explain.

Choose a book that influenced you. Describe the book and how it changed you.

Compare the enjoyment you get from reading a novel to that of seeing a film.

You have received two failing grades for the semester. Explain this to your parents in a letter.

Retell the story of Little Red Riding Hood from the point of view of the wolf.

Are you for or against living together before marriage? Justify your opinion.

For or against a language requirement?

Should there be a universal language?

What is your idea of utopia?

## Appendix B

### Correction Code

angl	anglicism (inappropriate translation from English)
art	article
aux	wrong auxiliary (avoir vs. être)
g	gender (masculine/feminine)
inf	infinitive needed here
m	mode (subjunctive vs. indicative)
n/a	noun/adjective agreement
pl	placement (adjective, adverb, negation, etc.)
pn	pronoun
prep	preposition
sp	spelling (includes accents, contractions, elisions, etc.)
s/v	subject/verb agreement
t	tense
v	vocabulary (wrong word)
X	delete, not necessary
?	not clear
^	something is missing
+	nicely done!