A student assignment designed for a business French course is described. The assignment, a student research paper, is intended to promote both active learning and integration of skills. It is short and completed early in the course. Students are assigned topics and must research, organize, and summarize in French. It is expected that each student will produce multiple drafts, with teacher supervision; only the final draft is graded. The paper is allotted 20 percent of the course grade. A copy of each paper is distributed to all students so they may use them as personal resources. Potential topics and topic areas include possible careers and job opportunities, the general importance of French language to business, job search methods and job interviews, further educational opportunities, and original topics based on business-related events or processes. Other related activities that can be used in the classroom include proficiency-oriented exercises, use of authentic French documents, and role-playing. Students are encouraged to invite visitors they have met during their research. Contacts with French firms may also result in internship opportunities. The research paper assignment handout, which includes notes on 13 potential topics, is appended. Contains 75 references and 14 notes. (MSE)
ACTIVE-LEARNING APPROACHES TO THE

BUSINESS FRENCH COURSE:

THE BUSINESS FRENCH RESEARCH PAPER
The increasing economic interdependence of European nations, combined with a growing awareness of the essential role of international commerce in general, create a need for employees fluent not only in the language of business but in another tongue and culture. At the same time, students are becoming more and more "practical" and concerned with the payoff of their education. Employers, for their part, seek employees who can think quickly on their feet, are prepared to deal with new situations, and know how to find new resources. As Colette Verger Michael remarks, the knowledge required to work daily in a business setting is immense, and therefore, a pedagogy stressing the acquisition of a "méthode de travail" aids the student in his or her "application de la langue dans des situations déterminées mais se renouvelant sans cesse" (1981, p. 18-19). Preparing the student for a job can be very much part of a liberal arts education, if one believes, as I do, that a business French course should be interactive, and, above all, should stress the active learning of integrated skills. The job-related assignments described below develop a student's language skills as well as his or her analytical ability and thus should satisfy potential employer, present student, and the professor.

The active learning of integrated skills that I propose combines many aspects and goals of "active learning (Bonwell and Eison, 1991; McKeachie et al., 1990; Eison, 1990; Frederick, 1987; Higgs, 1984)" and "communicative" language teaching (Jeffries, 1986; Sheils, 1988; Russo, 1983) with proficiency-oriented goals (Magnan, 1986, p. 429; Byrnes, 1987; Hirsch, 1985). Reading the literature on these approaches can and should benefit all Foreign Language (and other) professors (see Gleason, 1984, 1985; Weimer, 1988).
According to this literature, a successful learning and teaching experience should be learner-centered (Sheils, 1988, p. 1; Jeffries, 1986, p. 1) and promote the greater responsibility and autonomy of students (Sheils, 1988), who should themselves create the "knowledge" which is learned (Johnson et al., 1991). The priority must be on understanding and expressing meaning (communicating) (Russo, 1983; Sheils, 1988, p. 7) in context (Omaggio, 1984, p. 51; Jeffries, 1986, p. 1) using meaningful and realistic tasks (Dufeu, 1983; Jeffries, 1986; Herman, 1987) that develop creative thinking skills (Jeffries, 1986, p. 1). Such an interactive (Omaggio, 1984, p. 51) and cooperative (Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Johnson and Holubec, 1990; Johnson et al., 1991a, 1991b) approach is skill-based rather than knowledge-based (Snyder et al., 1987, p. 45; see Rivers, 1981). Skills should be integrated—not treated as separate entities in the classroom (Savignon, 1983, p. 82; Whitley, 1993, p. 139)—something that is neglected in most Business French texts (Rusterholz, 1987, 1990) which tend to "emphasize secretarial French and office procedures" (Lewis, 1988, p. 14). "The test of a good teacher," according to Carl E. Schorske, is:

Do you regard 'learning' as a noun or a verb? If as a noun, as a thing to be possessed and passed along, then you present your truths, neatly packaged, to your students. But if you see 'learning' as a verb!—the process is different. The good teacher has learning, but tries to instill in students the desire to learn, and demonstrates the ways one goes about 'learning.' (cited in McCleery, 1986, p. 106)

Active-learning and proficiency-oriented exercises using news articles (and other authentic materials) and designed to be useful beyond the classroom (e.g. the Business Research Paper) facilitate such motivated learning by the students. "Students learn
what they care about and remember what they understand (1984, p. 51)," writes Ericksen. Motivation, Walter Lambert feels, is one of the most basic factors in language learning (1972). This is confirmed by Dana Strand's research as reported in her article "French for Field Work: A Specific-Purpose Language Course" (1984).

Active learning is valuable to all language classes, and thus many of the Business French assignments that follow can easily be adapted to other Foreign Language Business courses. My course best serves the upper-level student, however, "because the depth of grammar and structure needed in a commercial course" exceeds the level of the beginning or intermediate student who has other needs in order to facilitate communication in a foreign tongue before he or she can acquire the means to profit from the suggested activities.

I. THE BUSINESS RESEARCH PAPER

"One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it--you have no certainty, until you try," proclaims Sophocles (in Rogers, 1983, p. 163). Learning how to learn is the thing. Students do this by seeking out specific information and actual contacts, summarizing their findings, and then making their own suggestions to their peers in the short "Business Research Paper" which is assigned at the beginning of the term. The project's short length, early completion, and distribution to each student shows them that the entire course is designed as a resource--that is, not to finalize their studies, but to open up new possibilities that they may pursue later.

A. Purpose: Students learn how to find resources, organize, and then present them in a useful fashion to their peers. They learn problem solving skills, how to get
things done quickly, organizational effectiveness, and how to communicate useful information efficiently. They establish actual contacts, obtain results and feedback (see Sheils, 1988, p. 219) and get the satisfaction of completing a project. Teacher and student roles are expanded; the teacher functions as resource, facilitator, stimulator, and adviser, while the student enjoys greater independence from the teacher and becomes responsible for his or her own intellectual development. The student hopefully achieves "the urge and the ability to get at the facts, and the judgement to evaluate them," which Goheen claims are the necessary goals of education (in McCleery, 1986, p. 45).

B. Procedure:

1. If possible, one student should be assigned to each topic, although some topics are easily divisible. For instance, several students could easily extend the first topic (see the Appendix) into more than thirty careers without overlapping each other. A greater variety of topics assures that the student will be able to access a greater quantity of resources from his or her peers.

2. The student researches, organizes the results, and summarizes them in French, making sure to emphasize sources that the reader can follow up with a letter or a phone call. Because the paper should serve as an easily-usable resource, its length should be limited to between three and five typewritten pages.

3. Several drafts of the document will most likely be needed before a final, polished version is obtained. The professor helps refine the form, presentation, and expression of the paper. Writing should be viewed as a learning process in action that will serve the writer in the future.
4. The grading process should reflect the importance of the Business Research Paper as foundation of the course. Twenty percent of the grade for my Business French course is attributed to the paper. Although this percentage could be justifiably higher, I find that students react negatively if the grade has a more significant impact on the final course grade. They express concern that they might possibly lower their final course grade irretrievably despite my reiteration that the paper should be seen as a process and that drafts are not graded, and thus, can not hurt their final grade. In fact, a better grade often results from multiple drafts. The grade, as indicated in the Appendix, reflects both the content of the paper and the level of French.

5. Each student receives a copy of each paper which I have reproduced in booklet form. The sharing of results promotes a cooperative environment which, in turn, fosters more active learning. Students also have the opportunity to discuss problems they encountered and share the solutions they attempted. The students appear eager to share their results since they have invested time and effort in order to write something which will undergo not only the professor’s scrutiny but that of the other students.

C. Topics

1. Possible Careers and Job Opportunities (#1, 2, 3, 10, 12)

As noted in the Appendix, possible topics range from a description of several careers using languages to a compilation of the results of calls to at least ten employment agencies. The first topic covers a wide range of possible careers while the second, third, tenth, and twelfth topics encourage students to discover specific companies that may hire foreign language speakers.
The resulting papers often include names, addresses, telephone numbers and short descriptions of a wide variety of agencies and firms that seek employees with foreign language skills in the United States, in French-speaking Canada (#12), and abroad. The student can quickly access the names of the firms (which are frequently located in many different states), the name of the personnel director, and information on compensation for relevant skills.

Contacting firms can produce varied results. Firms might exist in France under a different name or tend to hire their employees from within France. Further potential difficulties include firms that may transfer the caller frequently and appear rude and uncooperative, while others, perhaps, seem too forthcoming. The student learns which firms are unresponsive, and, at the same time, that tenacity pays off. The more frequently the student asks questions the better his or her questioning skills will become. The student’s research proves useful to the other students who now know more of the hiring practices of additional firms which they may choose to contact themselves.

2. General Importance of Foreign Languages to Business. (#4, 7, 11)

The fourth, seventh, and eleventh topics induce a slightly more traditional product, since students who choose these tend to describe how knowing French and francophone culture helps the potential employee to be more useful to international businesses. The eleventh topic stresses a still “hot” topic: how does the EC and other recent changes in Europe affect business? A good place to start answering this question might be Koop’s “Education et formation professionnelle dans l’Europe de 1993” (1992) or Marthan’s article (1992) which introduces some useful economic terms.
3. The Interview (#5, 6)

"An important component of the foreign language business course should be information on how to apply for available positions," writes Spinelli (1985, p. 6). She suggests assignments involving the writing of business letters and résumés, as do many authors. Interviewing skills are no less important, however, and the Business Research Paper provides an excellent opportunity to address them. The student choosing the fifth topic gives concrete suggestions for the job interview and résumé, while the one who selects the sixth topic interviews an entrepreneur who successfully incorporates foreign languages into their daily routine. In both cases, the student learns how to interview and how to respond to an interview. The latter topic indirectly indicates which agencies or companies might be more open to employees with foreign language skills.

These papers are pedagogically sound for several reasons. If, for instance, a student were assigned a reading text about the all-important interview, the student might skim it, bored by the dry tone. When that article is authored by a classmate, the student maintains her interest throughout. In both cases, the student's complete list of sources should prove useful to anyone seeking more advice. The reports about interview techniques that I have received tend to be better than any relevant articles that I have read.

4. Further Educational Opportunities (#8)

The eighth topic delineates ways to further one's Business French education through degree or certificate programs of which the entrance requirements and specific purposes are briefly described.

5. Marketing and Its Cultural Implications (#9)
American companies often use French to appeal to their customers, as do many French firms who advertise in the United States. The student may question the reasons behind these strategies as well as their cultural implications, and whether the answers to these questions (and more) may aid the student to further his or her career opportunities.

6. **Potpourri (#13)**

   Students may consult the vast amount of documentation that I possess, pursue their own leads, and then write a short report (#13). Others propose original and often topical subjects—from the employment possibilities due to international events (such as the Olympic Games or the opening of EuroDisney) to the time-consuming efforts and bureaucratic knowledge needed to obtain the foreign work permit.

**II. OTHER RELATED ACTIVITIES**

The Business Research Paper described above complements the proficiency-oriented exercises—such as recreating a job interview or opening a bank account—and the use of actual French documents and objects that characterize my classes. When we discuss banking, my students recreate a variety of situations, using my actual correspondence with the *Banque Nationale de Paris* and my checks; the students open an account, change traveler’s checks, get change, deposit cash and checks, and discuss stocks and other investments. The procedure is simple: I usually divide the students into small groups where they practice their roles using situation-description cards that I give them (e.g., the teller is very difficult and they should complain, or perhaps they have lost their checkbook), and then regroup for short reenactments. The entire exercise is conducted in the target language and goes far beyond Gerald Herman’s
correspondence-based exercises (1987) for it promotes face-to-face interaction and
variables, and thus more realistic linguistic communication (Dufeu, 1983, p. 43).

Role-playing is also useful for teaching students about the job interview.
Students write a resumé in the French style with specific jobs in mind. Given a
variety of job ads taken from foreign language newspapers published abroad or in the
U. S. (Le Monde, Le Figaro, etc.) as well as some guidelines for questions to pose, students practice applying and then interviewing. The change of identity and
perspective (Herman, 1987, p. 13) "ensures that everyone will have a chance to
change roles and to initiate correspondence as well as to respond to letters received," writes Carney (1986, p. 47). This exercise may easily be combined with the writing
of actual job letters and the encouragement of students to interview with actual
firms.11 In class, when the students play either employer or potential employee, they
learn which questions are relevant—for instance what professional qualifications
employers would expect, what education they expect, what work conditions they
propose, etc.—and where one advertises for a secretary vs. an executive at the same
time that they develop interview skills. In addition, they can acquire some peer-
learning skills if the student author of the "business Research Project" topic focussing
on interview suggestions (# 5) functions as a mini-expert for his or her classmates.
The PICS video "Décrocher l'entretien" vividly illustrates the pitfalls to avoid and the
strategies to use in the process.

These activities help to cultivate the students’ questioning abilities—the
students learn to go beyond a simple yes/no question to a more complex question—and
thus augment their critical thinking skills.12 Perhaps, most significantly, role-
playing promotes group work, problem solving and interpersonal skills—all of which
are cited by employers as skills they seek (Carnevale et al., 1988, p. 8). "The abilities to conceptualize, organize, and verbalize thoughts, resolve conflicts, and work in teams are increasingly cited [by employers] as critical" according to Carnevale, Gainer and Meltzer, since these skills are basic to a firm wishing to remain competitive. Because the group exercises I propose develop organizational effectiveness, negotiation, team-work, creative thinking, problem solving as well as listening and oral communication, they address the workplace's needs for integrated skills. Problem-solving skills should be used throughout the student's life (McKeachie et al., 1990). Several textbooks have good suggestions to aid the teacher in recreating appropriate situations to achieve these goals.' I often incorporate conversation textbooks such as Revue, Contextes, and Du Tac au Tac and oral testing into my class planning, as business texts often neglect the oral (1990; 1989; 1991).

Tying the Business Research Paper and the role-playing together is a visit to an actual business where the employers use French. For instance, in the Chicago area, students may visit Europa books where the employees frequently correspond in French. In Green Bay, the paper, machine, and trucking industries export to french-speaking countries, and are surely listed with the Wisconsin World Trade Center. A local award-winning cheese firm, Auricchio, has a French national sales director.

Students should be encouraged to invite visitors based on the contacts made in their research papers, and thus start their own professional network. Community guests provide students with a perspective often not found in textbooks (Lance, 1987). They may be invited to present the organization and operation of their department to the class and to answer pre-arranged or spontaneous questions. Contacts with these firms support the goals and activities of the Business French course in several ways.
As Françoise Watts remarks in reference to the visits of French businessmen to her classroom, the students "see firsthand the need for an applied study of foreign languages" and gain access to professional opportunities (1992, p. 237). Students may become more tolerant of cultural differences, and especially of businesses, which, from a distance, might appear uninteresting. For instance, one of my guest speakers admitted that he did not "dream of working with toilet paper" before starting at a local firm that produces that very thing, but now loves his career which provides him with many exciting opportunities.

An ideal follow-up to a visit or visitor would be a business internship with an international firm. As Laura Walker remarks "of the top 500 corporations in the United States, an estimated 80 percent have subsidiaries or financial interests in foreign countries" (1985, p. 17). Thus, such opportunities do exist or can be created through the efforts of the student and of the teacher. The student should contact the nearest French Consulate for a list of French firms and then proceed to contact them. Some companies welcome interns as they too may benefit from the possible future employment of the student.\footnote{14}

The use of current domestic and foreign articles to supplement the aforementioned activities reveals what is happening in the business world. For instance, right now many businesses are stating that they are hiring liberal arts majors rather than business majors. Students can learn from articles that discuss current trends in the international business world, and deal with French-speaking areas such as Québec, Switzerland, Belgium and parts of Africa.

The training of American students who aspire to play a part in the international trade carried out between businesses in their country and
those in the French-speaking world will be deficient unless it takes account of the important economic ties that link the United States to areas such as Québec, Belgium, and Switzerland and of the possibility for increased economic relations with developing countries in North and West Africa,

writes Dugan (1984, p. 365). "It is time to make the economic systems and cultures of these countries an integral part of the curricula and testing instruments for programs and courses in business French," he adds (1984, p. 365). Ideally, students would be required to learn of recent trends and international practices from publications such as L'Express, Journal Français d'Amérique, and business journals of the target language (L'Expansion, Le Nouvel économiste, Capital, etc.).

In any course, active student involvement is desirable. Real life activities such as the Business Research Paper and role-playing using authentic and meaningful contexts and documents encourage student participation and enhance student resumés. Because of the oral and active nature of the integrated skills based activities that I suggest, students achieve true learning by applying classroom knowledge to practical problems and experiencing the learning process in action. This article suggests that worthwhile activities can be identified and incorporated into a Business French course where language and knowledge of a foreign culture are viewed as a means to further personal and professional goals, and where motivated learning takes place.
Appendix

BUSINESS RESEARCH PROJECT

Pick one and only one topic. Only one person per topic.

Research and then type up a 3-5 page paper on one of the following topics. A preliminary version is due on February 21, 1994. The preliminary version does not have to be complete. This version will not be graded, but I will tell you if you are on the right track and will correct structural and grammatical errors so that your final product will be better. I am, of course, available for consultation during my office hours and by appointment.

The final version is due on March 2, 1994 before 17h30.

These papers are intended to be useful to all of you. They will be distributed, so that you may learn more about another area and about available resources. The paper must be written in French. Grades will be determined by both content and level of French.

Topics:

1. Possible careers: Write up a paragraph on each one and list resources so that an interested party could follow up on that career. Indicate if language skills are compensated.

For instance: Stewardess

Teacher (of French or of English as a Second Language)

Contact at a University for foreign students

Careers in Banking (International Trade and Finance)

Journalist.
Careers in translation (United Nations; technological translations, business translations, academic translations, etc.)

Careers in Sales (import/export, etc.)

Careers in travel.

Develop at least ten careers. The Department of Labor may be of use and may possibly provide statistics on reimbursement for these positions. Cite your sources.

2. Call at least ten Temporary Agencies and Employment Agencies and enquire into possible jobs where you could use French (with either a Liberal Arts background or a Business background). Explain pay differentials: do the language skills add to your paycheck? Compile the results for us. You must have at least ten positive results. Please cite your sources.

3. Call American (and most likely large) companies where language comes into use. Sample companies might include Sara Lee, Mc Donalds, Coca Cola, an international hotel chain... Do these firms provide opportunities to actually work abroad? You may ask if there are any employees that use Foreign Languages in their firm. Present some case studies. Also note any businesses that are having a France (or other French-speaking nation) promotion this year this year and may be able to provide some references. Please get a minimum of ten positive results. Get advice.
4. Research the importance of Foreign Languages to business. I'd suggest that you contact the authors of the many articles that appear on this very topic (See *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* as well as French papers). I can give you further names. These people may in turn give you suggestions for learning more! Please list all sources.

5. Give us suggestions for the Interview (!): what skills should a Foreign Language student highlight? How can the student obtain an interview, and how should he/she present him/herself in the best light? How should she or he modify his/her résumé? Please list all sources.

6. Interview a successful entrepreneur or business person who uses language in their job. How did they get the job? Do they have suggestions?, etc. What would they do to prepare themselves better, now that they have seen what the workworld requires? Ask them about possible resources for a student such as yourself.

7. List and describe briefly useful organizations representing Foreign Language careers. In teaching alone there are many such associations: AATF, AATG, ACTFL, MLA, MMLA, NEMLA. There are similar associations for bankers, translators and other careers listed above. You may and should include Unions.
8. Highlight the further education opportunities for those of you who would like to continue your Business French learning. For instance, several universities offer specialized programs and/or Master's degrees. The Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Paris offers a variety of certificates (and courses to prepare for the exams) and a nearby Alliance Française may offer such courses as well. What are the advantages (and disadvantages) of these programs. Are there any entrance requirements?

9. Gather examples of American marketing which uses French to attract consumers and will compare the results of such techniques with actual French ads. What American products lend themselves to such an approach? You will give a short class presentation illustrating your findings. The research portion of your project should list names and addresses of firms that use French in their advertising as well as suggestions of other firms that might be open to such advertising.

10. Companies that teach French to their employees. A short list includes L'Oréal, Encyclopedia Britannica, Otis Elevator Co., M & M Mars, Inc., Pepsi Cola International, Honeywell, IBM, Michelin Tire Corporation and Euro-Disneyland. Do they teach French to all of their employees or to a select few? Why? Would they hire someone like you? What qualities do they desire? What companies in your opinion should teach or encourage the teaching of French to their employees? Are there any local (or not so local) companies interested in doing so? There is no need to limit yourself to
French for this project, but if you choose another Foreign Language as an example, please be clear on your reasons for doing so.

11. *L'Entreprise et l'Europe: 1992 and beyond.* What are the recent and future changes in store for American businesses (and possibly for you)?

12. There are many resources in Québec. Consult Gill's article "Québec--Resources for French for Business" and the office of the nearest Québec Government Delegation. Other resources include the Québec Government Publishing House, the *Université du Québec* and the *Université de Montréal*, banks, insurance companies, and other businesses with their headquarters or major branches in Montréal. Follow up some of these contacts. Which were the most helpful? How?

13. Contact the information and documentation sources on my list. You must begin immediately to allow time for responses. Please feel free to suggest other topics, but please have them approved by me before commencing your research.

The Public Library as well as the University of Wisconsin--Green Bay Library may be able to help you find some resources.
NOTES

This article is a substantially revised and expanded version of two papers presented at the Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions (April 5, 1990 and April 15, 1994).


Franchise-Amérique publishes occasional special supplements devoted entirely to business French. They did so in May 1993, for instance (see French For Business And International Trade, 1993, p. 3).

Paul Simon, the State Senator of Illinois, also stresses the importance of the relationship between language and business (1987). See also Hoegl, 1986; Strand, 1984; and Strasheim, 1987. Johnson and Johnson (1991) remark that in order to prepare students to live in the real world, class experiences should parallel actual career experiences and reflect the increased interdependence of the world. Dugan discusses the need to expand our discussions to include all French-speaking countries (1984).

2. In her "Commercial Language Courses: Supply and Demand," Laura Walker concurs with my thesis. She notes the growing interest of both students and of businesses which increasingly seek employees with international skills, (1985, p. 17).
The practical aspect of the business French course motivates American students to study Foreign languages according to Claude Le Goff (1987).


4. Current news articles confirm this link, e.g., Edie Gibson, (1989, sec. 19, p. 3).

Many articles that have appeared in the last few years mention the increasing demand of Foreign Language skills (see Hechinger, 1989; Singer, 1989, etc.). For a statistical survey of the interest in Foreign Languages for Business Courses, see Grosse, 1985; her and Voght’s follow-up, 1991; and their survey of current bibliography of business- and foreign language-related articles (Grosse and Voght, 1991).

5. See the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for further information (1987).

6. Myers and Strasheim stress the increased learning of motivated students (1979; 1987). McKeachie et al., advise active learning instructional activities if the objectives of a course are to promote long-term retention of information. Such courses should facilitate student "motivation for continued learning" (1990, p. 1-2).


Rusterholz proposes a list of twelve important oral functions (e.g., greeting and taking leave; inviting, accepting and refusing invitations) to be integrated into a Business French course (1990). Most of these functions are developed in a variety of contexts (including business situations) in my previous (and prerequisite) course, Conversation and Composition. I would argue that preparation of the majority of
these functions before undertaking the Business French course will provide a better environment for active business French learning as described in this article.

8. The Modern Languages Association publication *Foreign Languages and Careers* by Honig and Brod lists several useful sources (1979, p. 31).

9. You can review banking vocabulary with exercises (e.g. the "Business Survey" and the Omaggio-inspired "Jigsaw Puzzle") suggested by Spinelli (1985).

10. Sheils proposes some creative ways to divide students into small groups (1988, p. 10-13).

11. Others who suggest that students may contact actual companies include Spinelli, 1985, p. 7; Herman, 1987, p. 12-20; and Forti-Lewis, 1989, p. 2.


13. See the Business French texts by Dany et al., 1975; M. M. Lentz, et al., 1979; and Perla (1985) for sample advertisements. Bragger et al.'s first-year text *Allons-y* contains ads as well as a set of colored transparencies reproducing these (and more) in the accompanying teacher's kit (1992).

REFERENCES


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27


