AP® French Language

2006–2007
Professional Development
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Special Focus:
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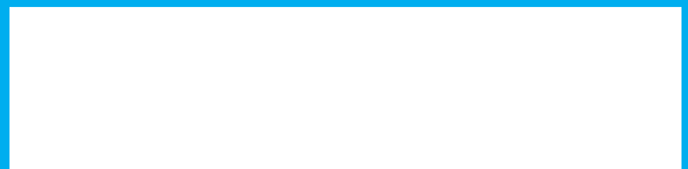

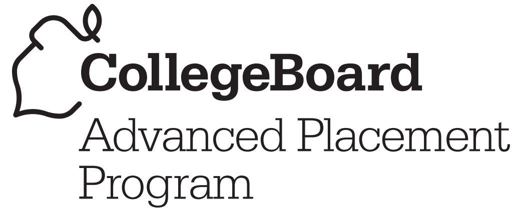

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Important Note: The following set of materials is organized around a particular theme, or "special focus," that reflects important topics in the AP French Language course. The materials are intended to provide teachers with resources and classroom ideas relating to these topics. The special focus, as well as the specific content of the materials, cannot and should not be taken as an indication that a particular topic will appear on the AP Exam.

Introduction

John Lambeth, Editor
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Writing is a tool. It is a tool that we use to express our feelings and our ideas, a tool that we use to inform and to persuade others. It is also a tool that we can sharpen, refine, and personalize. Teaching students to write in clear, well-organized paragraphs has always been a challenge and is perhaps more of one today in the age of email and instant messaging. But teaching students to communicate their ideas through writing is one of the most important things that we do as teachers, and it is no accident that colleges and universities across the country have been giving increased emphasis to writing programs over the past decade.

Teaching students to write well has become one of the primary goals of a liberal arts education. Writing centers have sprung up on every campus; programs with names like "writing across the disciplines" play an increasingly important role as colleges try to make sure that all students, not just the ones in the typically writing-intensive majors, get a chance to improve their writing skills. To this same end, colleges are developing writing-intensive freshman seminars to begin this ongoing training with students from day one of their college education. To the extent that high school teachers are better able to prepare students, high school students will be that much further along and that much more prepared to excel in college.

Writing in a foreign language does present additional challenges, but the fundamentals remain the same: lexical precision, clear syntax, grammatical structures adequate to the complexity of the ideas expressed, and the coherent organization of ideas. The question then is how we help our students develop and hone those skills under our tutelage.

The essays that follow present some wonderful ideas for working on writing in and out of the French classroom. They offer exercises that build vocabulary and that help students understand how to choose words that are appropriate for the context. They help students understand how words embody concepts and express nuance. Other exercises lead students through increasingly complex grammatical structures to show how ideas may be properly coordinated with and subordinated to other ideas, how we distinguish between what *is* and what *may be*, and how we arrange events along a clear timeline so that our readers have a precise idea of what we are saying. These exercises are accompanied by solid explanations of what skills we are trying to develop in each exercise and how those skills contribute to the bigger picture. There are exercises that can be used with students

at lower levels as well as higher levels of proficiency and some exercises that will bring out the best in our students.

I posed the same question to all of the college professor contributors: Think of your own approach to writing in an advanced composition type of class and try to describe what it is that you do. Matuku Ngame, who teaches applied linguistics at Yale University, starts us off with a look at writing as part of the larger process of learning, but he quickly brings his ideas down to earth with some very practical writing assignments that help the students and the teacher understand the writing assignment as a multifaceted project that may be defined according to level, content, context, function, text type, and the degree of accuracy that the teacher expects.

The article by Ann Williams of Metropolitan College of Denver goes directly to the heart of the scoring guidelines used on the AP Exam and suggests strategies and classroom exercises for developing the skills that the system demands. Ann has scored AP French Language essays for years and is currently a Question Leader for the essay-scoring team. She points to five key categories that are considered in the evaluation of an essay: understanding the topic, organization of ideas, vocabulary, grammar and syntax, and fluency or ease of expression. Ann gives specific examples in each category and suggests assignments to develop and reinforce student proficiency in each of them.

Richard Williamson of Bates College bemoans the fact that writing activities, especially in-class writing activities, have been given short shrift in our oral/aural era. He believes that writing needs to be given its full value as a communicative skill to be practiced in class, and he suggests 20 self-contained, in-class writing activities to help students gain ease of expression in a variety of contexts.

Jean-Marie Schultz and Cheryl Krueger are undergraduate language coordinators at the University of California at Santa Barbara and the University of Virginia, respectively. I asked them to think of strategies that they might try to develop for the graduate teaching assistants in their charge. These two articles are a little more theoretical than the others, but they offer an ample dose of practical application. Cheryl's text focuses on the writing process and how to get the students more actively involved in that process, making them more active learners. To help teachers think through the creation and evaluation of writing assignments, she offers some very practical suggestions—several of which appear in a checklist for teachers in her appendix—about selecting a topic, wording the assignment, enhancing students' draft-writing process, and using grading rubrics. Jean-Marie beautifully describes the process of linguistic mapping and its very practical applications in a step-by-step writing process that develops vocabulary and organizational

skills so that the student has a very clear sense of direction at each step along the way. She provides a succinct six-day lesson plan as a model and a schematic for a linguistic map.

Finally, I asked two wonderful high school teachers of French who have very successful AP French classes to share some of their lesson plans. Geneviève Delfosses of Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Virginia, and Davara Potel of Solon High School in Ohio describe in detail activities that they use with students at varying levels to make them better writers.

What I find most fascinating is that all of the contributions overlap on certain key issues of writing, but they each offer a different perspective and a different set of suggestions for working on writing proficiency. This short collection of essays is a treasure trove of good writing practices that any teacher will find stimulating, and I hope that these writing practices are contextualized and presented in such a way that teachers will be inspired to take these as models to create their own exercises.

Learn to Write or Write to Learn?

Matuku Ngame
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Writing is often perceived as an isolated exercise that aims at improving specific linguistic skills. Writing becomes more meaningful when its purpose extends beyond the formal and mechanical linguistic aspects. This paper explores different techniques that can be used to integrate writing in the learning process by using contextualized activities.

Introduction

Writing can be a rewarding and enticing exercise for both teachers and students despite all the myths associated with it. In addition to promoting the acquisition of linguistic and grammatical competence, the practice of writing should also aim at stimulating and developing learning beyond language to cognitive development as a whole. When its objectives and use are extended beyond the realm of mechanical and linguistic aspects, learning to write may be an integral part of cognitive development. This paper explores different techniques that can be used to integrate writing in the learning process by using contextualized activities.

Understanding Writing

Learning the fundamentals about writing is an important starting step for those who are interested in teaching and learning about writing. Writing is not just the process of putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard in order to take notes, make a list, or fill in the blanks. Writing is a conscientious effort of effectively communicating ideas in script forms. Writing is also the product of that effort. One can achieve a whole range of writing competency that may vary from the ability to transcribe to the ability to use the language for creative, literary, and even artistic expression. That is why learning and teaching methodologies may vary significantly depending on many extrinsic variables, namely context.

Scholars often distinguish the process of writing from the product, describing the writing process as the way the writer goes about writing. It includes all the planning strategies, from choosing a topic, planning, writing an outline, making revisions, and so on. In the last decades, approaches to teaching writing have stressed the importance of process (Dvorak 1986, Barnett 1989, and Scott 1996). Even though the writing process is a crucial part of the act of writing, teaching and learning methodology should find a balance between the process and the final product.

Teaching or learning foreign language writing has often been approached with apprehension because of some misconceptions associated with it. The first misconception is that compared to speaking, listening, and reading, writing is not an important skill because it is seldom used. Therefore, it does not figure among the highest priorities in the curriculum of many foreign language programs. Actually, writing is a skill that people use more than they realize. How much time do we spend in front of our computers writing emails, articles, and letters? How many term papers do students write per semester? Even for work, writing is a tool that we constantly use. Students should be encouraged from an early age to develop a culture of writing as much as we develop a culture of reading.

Writing is also perceived as a difficult skill that can be tackled only by advanced students who have attained full proficiency in the target language. That is the reason why writing has often been reserved for higher-level classes. But writing should be taught from the start. Students start developing good writing habits if taught from the start. All depends on the goals and level of competency that one wants to achieve. Developing competency in writing at the beginning level will bear productive results in advanced classes.

An assumption long held is that writing skills in the target language have no connection to writing skills in the native language. The consequence of this assumption is that teachers and students believe that beginning learners have no competence at all when they start a writing class in a foreign language. Yet research has shown that writers may use the same strategies when they are writing in their native language as when they are writing in the target language. Some elements of the process may be similar. Therefore, first language writing strategies can be beneficial in the training of writing skills in the target language.

It is another misconception to say that writing skills are about mastering grammatical competence. Students tend to delay taking writing classes because they are not comfortable with their grammatical competence. Even though grammatical structures of a language may help in the process of writing, they are not the only essential ingredient. Good writing is the product of all aspects of the effort that was put together to form a particular piece. There are other elements that play an important role in writing: the organization, development of ideas, originality of imagination, and so on.

A major misconception about writing assumes that it is an isolated task that has nothing to do with other areas of learning. The consequence of this idea is that writing becomes a boring and tedious endeavor disconnected from other materials. Writing can easily be connected to other disciplines by its very nature. What students write about can go far beyond the scope of foreign language education.

Special Focus: Writing Skills

Writing as a Learning Tool

In the study of the intricacies and complexities of writing, the distinction has often been made between writing as a support skill and writing as composing new text, which is the very act of communicating in the second language. When writing is used as a support skill or a skill-getting activity, the main goal is to practice and acquire a particular skill. A teacher could ask a student to write a paragraph about the student's spring break. The goal of this activity would be to practice and acquire the use of the past tense in French, for example. Using writing skills is meant to improve linguistic skills.

In addition to practice, learners acquire new linguistic competence by using monitoring. Contrary to speaking, writing is often accomplished in isolation. The teacher is not watching over them when they are writing. Writers are sitting down in front of their notebooks or computers alone, relying more on their monitors and often on many other types of helping guides such as dictionaries, grammar- and spell-checkers, thesauruses, and the helping hand of a friend. The external help can be an additional source of learning, if used appropriately.

Teachers can also use writing assignments as a composing activity. For example, students can be asked to write a poem or a short story about a specific topic. The goal of the activity is to teach students to create with language in order to convey meaning, emotions, and so on.

Many scholars have suggested that skill-getting activities are mostly used for beginning levels, whereas composing is reserved for advanced learners. However, as Alice Omaggio Hadley suggests in *Teaching Language in Context* (2001), both processes must be seen as a continuum rather than two separate entities. In order to make writing more meaningful, writing should be viewed as a two-way street, where a writer uses certain mechanical skills in order to learn many other skills.

Bachman (1990, p. 87) describes heuristic as one of the components of language competence. Heuristic refers to "the process of self-discovery on the part of the learner" (Kumaravadivelu 2003, p. 176). Students involved in writing activities engage in a two-way path in which they improve their linguistic competence in the target language and their writing skills while discovering new concepts, ideas that work in concert to develop their cognitive abilities.

Current thinking holds that writing is a central part of the learning process and there is a relationship between writing and cognitive development (Virginia Mitchell Scott 1996, p. xi). In itself, the process of writing involves students in an intellectual exercise that

develops their critical thinking. They use their mental and cognitive skills to reflect on the topic, make a hypothesis about its meaning, and develop a plan of thought that will guide their exercise. When writing, learners analyze, reevaluate their thoughts, recombine their sentences, and make important decisions about the best ways to express their ideas.

Writing as a Multiskill Activity

An ideal classroom activity should also involve skill using and skill getting. Activities should be designed in such as way that learners not only are involved in using a wide variety of skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) but also acquire new ones, for instance, critical thinking, synthesizing, analyzing, and even decision making. For example, it is ideal to pair a writing activity with a reading activity and/or a speaking activity. Before or after writing, students should be encouraged to discuss the process and the content of their work.

There are many ways of exploring new ideas and new areas. Reading and traveling observations are well known for their exploratory benefits. Writing can also be a natural way of exploring new ideas. The use of a journal is a fantastic way to have students keep a log of their thoughts. They may be encouraged to keep a log about, for example, the progress of their activities, their likes and dislikes about a certain topic, and their attitude on certain issues.

Reaction papers or imitations are also ways to encourage students to reflect on the material. This is often appropriate for literature or culture classes. It is interesting to have students react to a certain topic in order to have them reflect upon it. Some instructors have their students imitate a piece of writing in order to elicit some kind of empathy with the author.

Steps for Designing a Writing Activity

1. **Establishing Context**
   Establishing a contextual framework is an important step to the effective teaching of writing. This framework is based on the language learning continuum established by the Articulation and Achievement Project in 1996. When designing a writing activity, the instructor asks herself a series of questions related to the following.

   Students' characteristics: What is the level of students? Are these students beginners, intermediate, or advanced? Are they at high school or college level? What personal characteristics, physical or mental, should be considered to better meet their needs? The level of competency is crucial to a teacher's lesson plan because it determines the levels of difficulty of the task and the teacher's expectations. It takes into account learners' characteristics including social backgrounds, personal characteristics, strengths, and challenges. Several studies have found that different learners use different writing strategies according to their learning styles (Jensen and DiTiberio 1984, 1989; Carrell and Monroe 1993). Writing activities should be adapted to these characteristics.

   Language functions: What are they going to do with language? Does the activity require students to solve problems, order a meal, or select from a catalog? Will the writing exercise include narration, comparing and contrasting, description? Depending on the level of students, there may be more than one language function in a writing exercise.

   Text type: What format of text is expected from students? Are they expected to produce a dialogue, a film script, a letter, a poem, or an essay?

   Content: The content or the subject matter is the substance of writing. What the writing is about is what attracts the reader. The subject must be interesting. If it has some appeal to the learner's interests, she will be more engaged in the writing process. One way of achieving this characteristic is to give students choices instead of giving them just one topic.

   Giving students the opportunity to express themselves in a wide range of areas is an important principle in achieving linguistic proficiency (Hadley 1986). However, when one's job is to teach writing, it becomes a little harder to achieve the intended variety. The teacher may involve students in creating topics. The teacher may be assured that

students writing about topics of their own choice will probably be motivated to write. Reaching out across the curriculum can help widen the scope of subjects. It is also a way of tapping into diverse arrays of students' interests.

The emphasis in many schools' programs on "writing across the curriculum" reflects an interest in the value of writing for promoting thinking and learning in all academic disciplines (Virginia Mitchell Scott 1996, p. xi).

Context: It is essential to provide realistic meaning to the writing activity. Instead of being a dry assignment in isolation, the activity will be meaningful to writers and eventually readers when it fits into the overall curriculum sphere. Writing activities will achieve better results when the teacher provides clear background information about the topic. Is the activity a reaction paper to a reading done in class, for example, or a continuation of a play performed at school?

Linguistic accuracy: What is the level of accuracy expected from students? Even though accuracy may be a fluid terminology, the teacher should have in mind what he or she expects from his or her students. Establishing clearly defined rubrics is an important way of establishing what the instructor expects from students. The teacher may decide about the seriousness of language mistakes depending on the objectives of the unit.

2. **Setting Objectives and Expectations**
   The instructor should set clear and specific objectives for the writing assignments according to the lesson and curriculum objectives. Apart from assigning the topic and giving directions in terms of length, it is better to provide explicit descriptions of goals and expectations. This can be done in the form of rubrics, as exemplified in appendixes A and B. The instructor may also predict pitfalls that are common with this type of assignment.

3. **Prewriting Activity**
   Brainstorming: This is an opportunity for the instructor to announce the topic, tie it to material previously learned or discussed, and explain its importance and the main objectives of the projects.

   Discussion: In class, students can discuss their assignment with the teacher. Students have the opportunity to express their choice of the topic and their main orientations. It is also a good idea to have students discuss their ideas in class with the teacher or classmates for feedback.

Planning: It is a good idea to have students write the plan of their composition before they start writing it. The instructor will use the plan to correct, redirect, or modify the main points of the discussion.

Research: Some projects may involve doing library research, answering a questionnaire, reading, and so on.

4. **Writing**
   Students are given a reasonable amount of time to accomplish their project.

5. **Postwriting Activity**
   The instructor may want to provide a good sample essay and discuss what makes it a good essay. Students have the opportunity to ask questions and see for themselves what is expected of them.

   The teacher may want to discuss an example of a bad essay, pointing out technical and linguistic inaccuracies. If a grade was assigned, the instructor is required to check the grade against the rubrics to make it clear to students what the grade represents.

6. **Correction**
   Students may be given an opportunity to correct their essays in light of the instructor's remarks. A final grade is assigned for the rewrite.

Activities

Activity 1

Level: This activity is designed for beginning students.

Content: Famous people

Context: World history

Function: Description of physical and moral traits

Text type: Descriptions in paragraph length

Accuracy: Students demonstrate good command of the present tense and the use of pronouns, copulative verbs, and adjectives in the target language. Vocabulary is limited. Syntax structures are not varied.

Task
The writing assignment may read as follows:

> Here are a few names of influential figures in world history. Find out physical and personality traits of an important person of your choosing. Write two or three paragraphs about the personality of your choice.

Prewriting Activity
Brainstorming*:* Instead of describing people in the classroom, the teacher can introduce a topic as a problem that students have to solve. The teacher may get information on what topics students are learning in history, American politics, or social sciences and gather a few names of influential historical figures.

Students write ideas on the person they would like to write about. They may jot down main ideas and even preconceptions about the historical figure.

Planning: Students write an outline of the essay. They may also write the introduction and the conclusion of their essay. This allows them to establish the direction and the extent of their work.

Discussion: Individually, in small groups or as a class, students have the opportunity to discuss their ideas with their peers and/or their instructors. This is a good time for them

to ask questions, refine their goals, and fine-tune their ideas. This step gives the teacher a good opportunity to answer questions and give specific guidance.

Research: Students conduct some research in order to obtain specific information about the physical and personality traits of the historic figure of their choice. Different techniques may be used for research. Students can go to the library and read more about their historic figure. They can use interview techniques to obtain more information. They may find a movie that involves the person. Whatever technique students use, the goal is to obtain information.

Writing
Depending on the assignment, students have a specific date to turn in their homework.

Postwriting Activity
It is important that the instructor discuss two sample essays in class. An excellent student sample serves as a model. The teacher points out positive elements. The average essay is used to show negative elements such as structural inadequacies and technical and linguistic inaccuracies. If a grade was assigned, the instructor is required to check the grade against the rubrics to make it clear to students what the grade represents.

Correction: Students may be given an opportunity to correct their essays in light of the instructor's remarks. A final grade is assigned for the rewrite.

Activity 2

Level: This activity is designed for intermediate and advanced learners.

Content: Mourning

Context: African culture, reading of *Une si Longue Lettre* by Mariama Bâ

Function: Comparing, contrasting

Text type: Comparison in paragraph length

Accuracy: Students demonstrate good command of idiomatic language and mastery of contrasting and comparing techniques. They should also be able to use fairly correct advanced moods such as the conditional and subjunctive.

Task
The writing assignment may read as follows:

> After you have read the first chapter of *Une si Longue Lettre* by Mariama Bâ, discuss how the tradition of mourning differs from your own. What is the same and what is different?

Prewriting Activity
Brainstorming: Students read the first chapter of *Une si Longue Lettre* by Mariama Bâ. They have a debate about the customs of mourning in the book, comparing it to the customs in their native culture.

Planning: Students write a plan for their work.

Discussion: Discussion in class

Writing

Postwriting Activity

Correction

Activity 3

Level: This activity is designed for advanced students.

Content: Totems

Context: African culture, reading of *l'Enfant noir* by Camara Laye

Function: Analysis, giving opinions

Text type: Analysis in paragraph length

Accuracy: Students demonstrate good command of idiomatic language and mastery of advanced moods such as the conditional and subjunctive.

Task
The writing assignment may read as follows:

After you have read the first chapter of *l'Enfant noir*, discuss what the serpent represents and your opinions about the relationship between the serpent and the protagonist.

Prewriting Activity
Brainstorming: Students read the first chapter of *l'Enfant noir* by Camara Laye. The teacher talks about totems and their meaning in some cultures around the world.

Planning

Discussion

Writing

Postwriting activity

Correction

Conclusion

Writing classes may become interesting and stimulating when activities are used in specific contexts, integrating multiple intelligences and expanding across the curriculum. The above activities have the potential to engage students in writing activities that span beyond the requirements of a typical writing class. They stimulate their curiosity and open up new boundaries of linguistic and cultural discoveries.

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Appendix A

Rubric for Advanced Level

Language

5 Evidence of skilled use of a variety of syntactic structures and idiomatic language
4 Clear evidence of some appropriate and sophisticated structures
3 Clear evidence of attempts to use appropriate and sophisticated language with significant errors
2 Minimal use of appropriate and correct syntax, evidence of glaring errors
1 Hard to follow because of errors
0 Unintelligible language

Organization

5 Well-developed and well-organized paragraphs, use of topic and summary sentences
4 Good evidence of structuring of paragraphs
3 Some attempts at organization, but few topic, development, summary sentences
2 Hard to follow, organization undermines intelligibility
1 No evidence of planning
0 Incoherent

Content

5 Original and well-thought-out content
4 Appropriate to assignment
3 Generally good work, but facts may be unsupported, repetition or clichés are apparent
2 Careless development
1 No effort to make content significant
0 Incoherent or widely inappropriate

Appendix B

Rubric for Lower Level

3 Beyond expectations
2 Meets expectations
1 Below expectations
0 Off task

To Get Started, You Need a Good Map

Jean-Marie Schultz
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Introduction

One of the most difficult aspects of writing is knowing how to begin. There are many reasons for this. First and foremost, writers must have an idea of what they want to say, which can take considerable time and effort if they have not particularly thought about a given issue. To begin writing, therefore, writers must think about the question set before them, reflect on their own position, and think through all the reasons supporting their opinion or analysis, which also needs to be backed up with specific examples. Once this work has been done, writers must then set about organizing the material logically in order to present a compelling argument.

As can be seen from this brief description, which does not take into account other writing issues such as authorial voice, readership, diction, style, and grammar, the composing process involves a great deal of mental activity. It is no wonder, then, that writing is often perceived as a particularly challenging task, even for the most skilled writer; yet this is precisely the task that our students face when they tackle the essay portion of the AP Exam for an AP language or literature course. Within the restrictive time limit of the exam period, which places an additional constraint upon the task at hand, students must respond to a question that they have never seen before, develop a thesis, generate supporting examples and discussion, and set forth their ideas in a coherent essay, all using the most correct grammar, syntax, and vocabulary they can without the aid of a dictionary or grammar reference book.

In order to help our language students meet the challenges of the essay portions of the exam, it is important to provide them with specific strategies for doing so effectively and efficiently. One technique that helps students with idea generation and organization from the very beginning of the writing process is semantic mapping.

Semantic Mapping Defined

Semantic mapping is a technique that has been used successfully for years in English composition classes. Its flexibility is such that it can be tailored to meet the needs of the earliest grade-school learners, of graduate students embarking on their dissertations,

and of professional writers (Buckley 1981). Semantic mapping can best be described as a method of brainstorming that involves the setting down on paper in random order of as many ideas related to the topic at hand as possible. Once the generation of ideas has been exhausted, the writer then begins to draw the "map," connecting as many similar ideas as possible and eliminating any that do not fit the topic. The writer then reconsiders the map and uses it to refine his or her ideas and subsequently to order them logically. Once the map has been developed, the essay writing itself can begin, since the writer basically has a plan that he or she can follow to guide the writing process.

Advantages of Semantic Mapping for the Foreign Language Classroom

Semantic mapping has a number of features that make it ideal for the foreign language classroom. Because the technique can be made simple for young students or very elaborate for sophisticated writers, it is particularly suitable for foreign language learners from their first year of language instruction through their last AP course in language and/or literature. It provides them with a strategy for dealing with any writing topic, from personal essays on family or leisure activities, to expository essays presenting an opinion on some contemporary issue, to analytical essays on literary topics. In addition, the fundamentally discussion-based and interactive aspect of the initial brainstorming phase of semantic mapping makes the technique conducive to language teaching, since it emphasizes oral communicative skills and the negotiation of meaning in addition to writing.

Implementing a Semantic Mapping Lesson

The implementation of an effective semantic mapping lesson should take place over the several days prior to the due date of an assigned essay. On the first day in class, the teacher should present the essay topic or topics and ask students to think about them overnight. When students arrive in class the next day, the teacher can open discussion about the topics, soliciting students' reactions to them. **Initial warm-up discussion** generally takes from five to ten minutes, at the end of which students should settle on one topic only for the semantic mapping demonstration.

At this point the teacher moves the activity to the board, informing students that they are now going to write a **sample group essay** that will demonstrate how they might address the writing task on their own. With a specific topic having been decided, the teacher writes the main idea in an abbreviated form on the board. For example, if the essay question is on the role that travel plays in the personal development of young

people,[1] the teacher might write simply "travel" or "travel and personal development" on the board. If the question is on the ambiguous nature of passion as applied to a specific character in a text,[2] the teacher can write "the ambiguity of passion" on the board.

From here, the most intense **brainstorming** work begins as the teacher encourages students to respond to the topic with as many ideas as possible. When students offer an idea, the teacher should encourage them to elaborate on it and particularly to back it up with specific examples either from their personal experience or current events in the case of an expository essay topic or with specific examples from the literary text under discussion.

In order to generate further discussion and particularly to encourage students to think through issues critically, the teacher should also encourage them to present alternate interpretations and points of view. For example, in the case of the travel essay, students might be encouraged to think more abstractly about the topic. Is it really necessary to actually go to another country? Is it possible to travel vicariously through reading or studying a different culture? For a literary essay using Molière's *School for Wives* as an example, students might be encouraged to ask whether Arnolphe really loves Agnès. Is it possible that he himself is his true passion? If so, how does his passion mislead him? During the brainstorming process, the teacher plays the very active role of discussion moderator and recorder, writing student responses and specific examples in abbreviated form on the board, clustering them around the main topic.

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[1] One of the sample AP French Language essay questions reads:

> Un proverbe français dit: "Les voyages forment la jeunesse." Selon vous, quel rôle est-ce que les voyages peuvent jouer dans le développement personnel des jeunes de votre âge?
>
> (A French proverb says, "Travel molds youth." In your opinion, what role can travel play in the personal development of young people your age?) (College Board 2003).

[2] One of the sample AP French Literature essay questions reads:

> "Les passions sont des vents qui font aller le vaisseau et le submergent." Cette pensée de Voltaire souligne la nature ambiguë et contradictoire des passions. Montrez comment cette ambiguité de la passion s'applique à l'un des personnages suivants: Arnolphe dans *L'École des femmes*, Pierre dans *Pierre et Jean*.

("Passion is like the wind that both propels the vessel and submerges it." Voltaire's idea emphasizes the ambiguous and contradictory nature of passion. Show how the ambiguity of passion applies to one of the following characters: Arnolphe in *School for Wives*, Peter in *Peter and Jean*.) (College Board 2003).

Given the time constraints of the typical language class session, it is generally advisable to end the first mapping session at the point where discussion seems to exhaust itself, which often corresponds to the end of the class period. At this point, teachers should encourage students to think about the issues raised for the next day when discussion can be continued. Because the next day's lesson will pick up from where the discussion ended and will depend upon the ideas generated and recorded on the board during this session, it is important for teachers to write down on a piece of paper as exactly as possible the ideas recorded on the blackboard. The next day, the recorded material can then be reproduced easily for continued discussion. Moreover, having a paper copy of the ideas can also help teachers in their preparation for the follow-up lesson by allowing them to study the ideas and to formulate their own interpretations before assuming a more directive role.

For the next day's lesson, the **teacher's role shifts** from that of facilitator and recorder to one of guide helping students to see the connections between their ideas and the **cause-and-effect relationships** between the various concepts. This focus on interconnections is a crucial step toward the development of a compelling thesis and solid organizational structure for the subsequent essay. The first step, then, is to ask students if they notice any ideas that seem to fit together. What holds these ideas together? Is there a key concept to be found? What examples support this concept? It is equally important to ask students to focus on any ideas that do not seem to belong to the most salient idea clusters and even to be contradictory to them. Is there a way to reconcile the seemingly contradictory elements with the dominant ideas? This is a key step in helping students develop their **critical thinking skills**, since they are forced to confront alternate opinions and interpretations.

One of the weaknesses in much student writing is, in fact, the failure to take any opposing arguments into account. That is, once settled on a position, less mature writers will often argue strenuously and almost blindly for that position, but without acknowledging any alternatives. Their paper may at first blush seem well grounded, but the argument is easily dismantled when opposing examples and analyses are offered.

Once students have discussed both the dominant idea clusters and any opposing issues, they are ready to develop the **thesis statement** of the group essay. At this point, teachers should encourage students to be as theoretical as possible, which can be accomplished fairly easily by emphasizing the need to think *why* their statements are significant or *how* the author of a literary text may be using a given concept, theme, rhetorical device, image, symbol, character, and the like. An emphasis on the *how* and *why* of the potential core opinion or interpretation is key to helping students learn how to analyze an issue or a text and subsequently to develop an interpretative thesis statement. A reflective, original thesis

is, in fact, a key contributor to the production of a compelling essay that distinguishes itself from the majority of obvious, stereotypical responses.

Teachers thus need to guide students in the development of the thesis statement, assuring that it is theoretical in nature. In addition, they need to help students with linguistic issues, for the effective expression of the thesis statement may well depend upon certain idioms relevant to the topic or to certain genre conventions, as is particularly the case for the literary essay.

The development of the thesis statement is one of the most difficult aspects of writing. With this now accomplished, students are ready to begin the third organizational phase of the semantic mapping process. First, the idea clusters need to be reconsidered in light of the thesis statement. **What ideas support the thesis? What ideas do not belong?** The teacher can again play the role of guide and recorder, crossing out any ideas that are not related to the thesis statement. This elimination process is important, for it conveys to students the message that not all the ideas they have regarding a given topic are pertinent, no matter how interesting they might be. At the same time, eliminating ideas helps students develop their organizational skills by zeroing in on what is directly important to the topic.

After eliminating any irrelevant idea clusters, the actual mapping process begins. At this time, students should be encouraged to consider the remaining clusters hierarchically. What would be the **first premise** to be established for presenting a convincing argument? **What examples support this premise?** A line should be drawn connecting this premise and the supporting examples. What points of discussion are relevant to these examples? Again a line should be drawn connecting the discussion elements with the specific examples. Once students have dealt with the first premise, which will then become the first paragraph of the essay, they should then move to the second, third, and all subsequent premises, handling them in the same way. Teachers should encourage students to target the key concept of each premise, which becomes the topic sentence of the paragraph, the supporting examples, and the discussion of the examples, all of which are connected by lines drawn on the board.

The teacher can further assist in the organizational process by numbering the individual concept clusters according to their position in the paper. The final semantic map thus contains the main topic with the thesis statement in the middle of the board, with all supporting premise clusters, examples, and discussion elements radiating out from the center. Again, due to time constraints, teachers may want to copy the semantic map onto

a sheet of paper for the next day's class discussion, during which students will take the material from the semantic map and transfer it to a standard linear outline format.

From Semantic Mapping to Outlining

The transfer of the semantic map to the standard outline format is an optional but useful step in the language classroom. It is optional since the map itself, with its intersecting lines and numbered idea clusters, can be used as the sole outline. For the purposes of the actual AP Exam, where time is of the essence, working directly from the semantic map is, in fact, far more efficient than taking the intermediary step of transferring ideas to a more fully developed outline. For the language classroom, however, outlining can prove very useful for the development of both writing and linguistic skills.

In terms of writing, during the outlining phase, students essentially take the abbreviated idea clusters from the semantic map and transfer them to the **standard outline form**, which makes use of roman and arabic numerals and uppercase and lowercase letters, that they have used since grade school. The hierarchical ordering of ideas to produce a fundamentally linear construct also helps students visualize more precisely what their final papers will look like. They can see better the form that their paragraphs will take and how the argumentation of the paper will flow. They can see what their topic sentences will be, what examples they will use, and how they will discuss those examples.

In terms of language, the standard outline can prove invaluable for providing students much-needed vocabulary and for helping them construct grammatically correct sentences. In order to maximize the linguistic effect, teachers should thus encourage students to **use complete sentences** in the standard outline for expressing the various abbreviated idea clusters in the semantic map. In the in-class version of the outlining exercise, the teacher obviously plays a key role by helping students write correct and linguistically appropriate sentences.

In addition to these two goals, outlining serves a third function in the foreign language classroom. In that outlining intersects with the type of work students do in their English and other writing-intensive courses, it helps them perceive the relationship between these courses and their language classes. The relationship between language study and other disciplines coincides, in fact, with the "connections" goal of the *Foreign Language Standards*, namely to "reinforce and further [students'] knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language" (*Standards* 1999, p. 9).

Conclusion

Semantic mapping and outlining are powerful tools for helping students learn to write more effectively and efficiently. At the same time, these techniques also bolster critical thinking and linguistic skill development. In the preliminary stages of idea generation, which is crucial to writing, semantic mapping helps writers tackle issues in a flexible and creative way. By fostering random and associative thinking about a topic, the brainstorming that is an integral part of the process encourages writers to play with various concepts and possibilities. At first blush some of these possibilities may seem to have little to do with the subject at hand; however, they often lead to the generation of other significant and relevant ideas. Moreover, in that semantic mapping is not constrained by any immediately perceivable need for structure, it essentially imitates the way in which people think, with one idea leading to another seemingly unrelated idea in an associative manner.

In terms of actual writing processes, which often strike students as so challenging precisely because there are so many constraints in play all at once (organization, style, grammar, diction, voice, audience, and so on), semantic mapping basically eliminates many of these, allowing students to target the essentials of content development without concern for what they say and how they say it. The connection of ideas and subsequent numbering of them in the later stages of the mapping technique helps students target the initial organizational issues of writing, but again without forcing them to adhere immediately to a narrowly defined and constraining structure. Semantic mapping is thus a dynamic procedure for helping students get started on both content and organization.

Semantic mapping can thus be used very effectively under AP language and literature exam conditions. For the classroom situation, however, outlining can provide a structured counterbalance to the more free-form semantic map. As described above, use of a standard outline takes the writing process one step further, moving the freer form of the map to a more structured and linear one that mirrors more precisely the form of the eventual essay. Moreover, if students are encouraged to translate their idea clusters of the map into full sentences for the outline, they can practice a more elaborate version of language use without the same level of risk as in their final essay, where they are accountable for grammar and written expression. The outline is still, after all, preliminary to the final essay.

Within the general context of the composing process, then, mapping and outlining respond to two different but equally necessary types of thinking. The free-form, associative generation of ideas essentially imitates the trajectory of cognitive processes in general, as thoughts come and go sometimes with seemingly little reason. The semantic

map is thus like a well-functioning global positioning system that triangulates between where you are and where you want to go. The outline, on the other hand, functions more like the traditional road map with its grid of roads to follow that shows more precisely which route to take.

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Sample Lesson Plan

Day 1: Presentation of the essay topic

Day 2: Discussion of all topics ending in the selection of one specific topic

Day 3: Brainstorming session on the topic for writing an in-class group essay
- Idea clusters should be put on the board.

Day 4: Discussion of idea clusters with an emphasis on most salient clusters
- Unrelated or irrelevant ideas should be eliminated.
- Students should be encouraged to take alternate and opposing ideas into account.
- The session should end with the formulation of a thesis statement.

Day 5: Discussion of idea clusters in relation to the thesis statement
- Lines should be drawn between related clusters and supporting examples and discussion elements.
- Clusters should be numbered hierarchically according to what premise should be established first.
- At this point, students can write their essays based on the semantic map, or they can continue the next day with the outline.

Day 6: Transference of semantic map to a standard outline
- Students should be encouraged to produce complete sentences.
- The teacher can help students with vocabulary and grammar.
- After producing an outline, students can write their essays.

Appendix A

Sample Outline

I. Introduction
   A. Context for discussion
   B. Thesis statement

II. Idea 1
   A. Example 1
      1. Discussion
      2. Discussion
   B. Example 2
      1. Discussion
      2. Discussion
   C. Example 3
      1. Discussion
      2. Discussion

III. Idea 2
   A. Example 1
      1. Discussion
   B. Example 2
      1. Discussion
      2. Discussion
   C. Example 3
      1. Discussion
      2. Discussion
   D. Example 4
      1. Discussion

IV. Idea 3
   A. Example
      1. Discussion

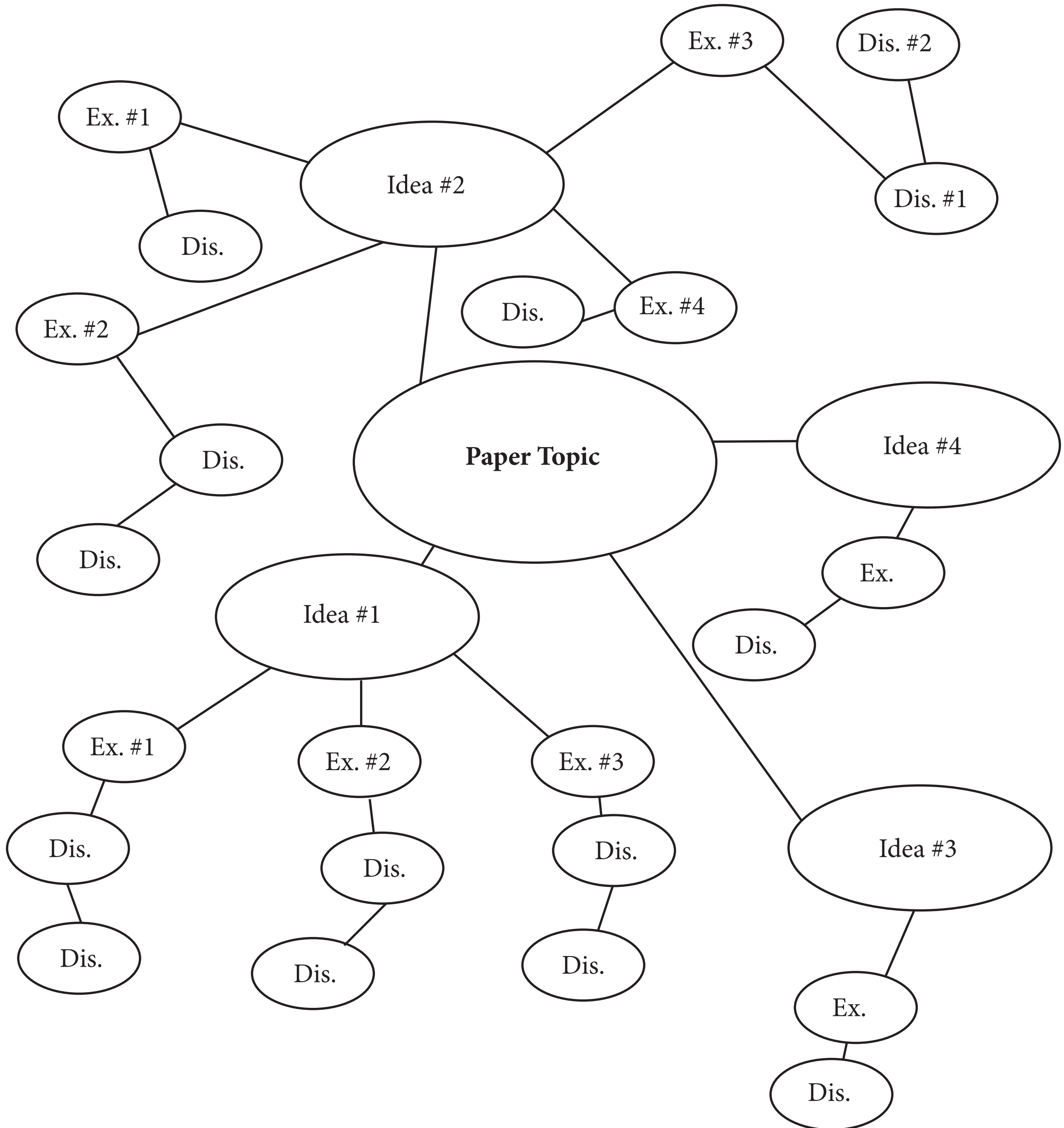
V. Idea 4
   A. Example
      1. Discussion

VI. Conclusion
   A. Synthesis of topic discussion
   B. Presentation of interpretation or thesis statement with its ramifications

Appendix B

Sample Semantic Map

Ex. = Example
Dis. = DiscussionEx. #3



Teaching Composition with Rubrics

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Developing student writing proficiency in a foreign language poses a special set of challenges. First, students writing in a foreign language are faced with the difficulties inherent in any situation in which they have to write in their native language. They have to organize their ideas, to consider their intended reader, and to communicate. On top of this are the limitations created by the fact that they are still learning the language that they are in the process of using.

The goal of this article is to describe the teaching of writing as a process that builds skills and at the same time helps students apply those skills. Without the skill-building aspect, students remain stuck at their level of language proficiency, and without application they don't arrive at their ultimate goal of using the language for communication. Both parts of this process depend on strategies—those we use to teach and those that the students learn to apply when they write independently.

The scoring guidelines designed for the evaluation of the AP® French Language essay lend themselves well to such a consideration of how to improve writing proficiency. Students are asked to write about a specific topic in a clear and concise manner (due in part to the 40-minute time constraint) with the language skills that they actually have at their disposal. Despite these very specific constraints, because the final score of an AP essay is based on both accuracy and fluency, the elements that make up a good composition are the same as for any type of written communication. Accuracy and fluency make real communication possible. The teacher's role is to convince students of this imperative and to help them achieve these goals.

In the AP scoring guidelines, which remain essentially the same from year to year, there are different types of headings that help AP Exam Readers decide how well a student has succeeded. These can be helpful as teachers consider where their students are at any given moment in the development of their writing skills. The most comprehensive headings deal with the student's overall competence as reflected in the essay. Ranging from the brutal "Demonstrates Incompetence" to "Demonstrates Excellence," these headings allow the reader to situate the essay in a general category. Along with these are the headings that help the reader to determine the control that the student demonstrates over the language. Is it poor control? Fair? Strong? Then the reader turns to the criteria within each of the categories. It is here that these rubrics can help from a pedagogical perspective.

In looking at the rubrics, in particular at the notations given in the 5–6 category (Suggests Competence/Fair Control) and above, it becomes apparent that the following contribute to a good essay:

- Understanding the topic
- Organization of ideas
- Vocabulary
- Grammar and syntax
- Fluency and ease of expression

While none of these is surprising, we are often amazed that student writing doesn't always reflect these priorities. Students are perhaps easily distracted as they write and so focus on one or two of these areas while neglecting the others. If they keep the five points in mind as they write they are less likely to make those mistakes that frustrate them so much when we return their papers ("Darn, I knew that...!"). We can begin by defining each of these points and then look at ways to help students build and apply their skills.

Understanding the Topic

A student's first encounter with the task at hand is the topic. It is obvious that students writing for different purposes will find the "topic" challenging for different reasons. A student writing to a pen pal will face different issues than one writing to reserve a hotel room or one trying to get college credit through the AP Program. Students in the first case can choose from any number of things to write about, can refer to a dictionary or French-speaking friend and they can even select their topics based on what they know how to say, rather than writing from the heart! In the second case there are more constraints, as the writer has a specific goal to accomplish and probably wants to ensure a positive outcome for very practical reasons. Here, adjective choices could mean the real difference between a large quiet room and a small noisy one. And in the final instance? Students writing on an imposed topic without a dictionary face a special challenge. They have to find their own voice and at the same time respect the foreign language. How can the teacher help these students to help themselves?

Teachers want their students to succeed. Perhaps for this reason, some of us give "nice" topics as students develop their foreign language skills. We have students write about what they know (and about what they know how to write about). Early on in language classes we cover the basic topics treated in the chapter themes of all our textbooks and we later broaden the scope to include current events, issues that come from literary or cultural readings, and topics inspired by previous AP Exams. The problem arises when the students encounter a topic that seems completely new and different. And in spite of

our best intentions, we simply can't cover it all. What we can do is to help students make the most of what they know.

This involves reading essay questions—question after question after question. It's not necessarily with the intent of having students write an essay on each topic, but rather to get them used to actually reading the question. Sample questions from previous AP French Language Exams can be found in the Exam section of the AP French Course Home Page on AP Central: apcentral.collegeboard.com/frenchlang. The issue, then, is how to read.

First, students read the question for overall understanding. Most have several parts in order to prompt sophisticated writing in the best students, so this can be intimidating. But a good question also contains prompts for weaker students. There is almost always something that any student at this level can understand. Here's an example of an essay prompt taken from the *1997 AP French Language Exam:*

> Il semble qu'on ait toujours eu besoin de héros ou d'héroïnes, c'est-à-dire de personnes qui puissent inspirer les autres ou qui puissent servir d'exemples pour les jeunes. Y a-t-il des héros ou des héroïnes aujourd'hui? Justifiez votre réponse en donnant des exemples précis.

At first blush, the question poses a challenge for the weaker student. The use of the subjunctive (which students are expected to understand and use) simply doesn't look as familiar as the indicative. It looks intimidating. Thus, the first step in dealing with the question is to seek elements that are familiar. The cognates "*héros*" and "*héroïne*" are a place to start. Other words like "*inspirer*," "*exemples*," and "*jeunes*" are also easy to identify. Another helpful approach to the vocabulary in the question is to have students work with word families throughout their years of language study. The concept is most likely familiar to them from their native language, but they forget to apply it at crunch time, hence the importance of working with word families on a regular basis. First, present the most common notions about word families, such as prefixes and suffixes that modify the root word in a foreseeable manner. A simple illustration using the word "*parfait*" can serve to remind them that the prefix "*im-*" implies the opposite, the suffix "*-ment*" changes the feminine form to an adverb, and you can also help them to guess the meaning of the unfamiliar verb "*parfaire*." Then give several words with a common root (*grand*, *grandissant*, *agrandir*; *café*, *caffeine*, *décaféiné*; *ami*, *amitié*, *amical*; etc.) and ask students to figure out the meaning of each. As a follow-up, give groups of 15 to 20 words from several word families and ask them to "reunite the families," deducing the meaning of each "member" based on its form.

Once students have done what they can with the vocabulary of the topic, the second step is for them to reformulate the question in their own words. Although this may seem time-consuming, it will serve the dual purpose of clarifying the question and, later, allowing students to use the lexicon of the question without employing the ill-advised technique of simply repeating the question. When I asked an intermediate-level college student to reformulate the question above, I got this result:

> On a toujours besoin de héros ou d'héroïnes. Ce sont les [*sic*] personnes qui inspirent et servent d'exemples pour les jeunes. Est-ce qu'il y a des héros ou des héroïnes aujourd'hui? Justifiez votre réponse. Donnez des exemples précis.

This person obviously understood the question and is now ready to organize an essay. But what about the student who doesn't understand the subtleties of the question? In a reformulation, this problem will become clear, but so will the elements that the student *does* comprehend (the cognates and vocabulary mentioned above). Even weaker students can then begin to conceive of an answer to the parts of the question they understood. It is worth noting that even in "normal" writing situations (with a dictionary and without the time constraint) students struggle to fully understand a topic. The strategy of reformulation helps in such cases as well, giving the student tools for circumlocution when necessary.

Organization of Ideas

The next concern for the student is organization. No matter how many times teachers insist that an outline is useful for constructing a successful essay, it is apparent that this falls by the wayside when the time comes to write. What students often don't realize is the fact that even when they sit down to write an informal letter they have an idea about what they want to say. First, they think about who will be reading what they write and why they are writing. Unconsciously they have formulated some type of outline or they wouldn't be putting pen to paper. Bringing this process to the conscious level can help students to see the value of actually writing a brief outline for *any* written communication. This can be broken down into manageable pieces by suggesting the following format:

1. For whom are you writing?
2. Why are you writing it? ("Because Mme X told me to" is not helpful.)
3. List at least three things that you want to make sure you cover.

This may seem absurd at first, but when students get used to the process (and recognize that they usually have this information in their head anyway) they see that it really doesn't

take much time. In the context of a two-page formal essay, this process reminds them that they are writing for a reader who wants to understand their ideas but who doesn't want to struggle to follow their presentation. They need to remember that the reader picks up the essay with the hope that after reading it he or she will know more about what the student thinks. If the student doesn't know where the essay is going, chances are that the reader won't know either. The list of things the student wants to cover can easily be transformed into a coherent introduction that will let the reader know what to expect.

To use the example of the AP Exam and the topic of "heroes today," the questions could be answered in the following way:

1. For whom are you writing?
   For a French teacher somewhere who doesn't know me but who wants me to do as well as I can on this test. He or she has perhaps read 300 essays on the same topic.
2. Why are you writing it?
   I want to show that I can write in French and I have something interesting to say about the topic. I want a good score on the AP Exam.
3. List at least three things that you want to make sure you cover.
   I want to say that
   1) Heroes have always existed (Ulysses, Helen Keller).
   2) Athletes are the heroes of our time.
   3) Some athletes are good examples for young people (Tiger Woods).
   4) Some are bad examples (Mike Tyson).

While the answers to questions 1 and 2 may seem mostly unchanging from context to context, they will in fact vary according to the situation. Students need to think about the fact that writing for their teacher is not the same as writing for someone who doesn't know them. As teachers we want to encourage our students when they write and thus our reactions to our own students' writing may seem kinder than those of an anonymous (but certainly not hostile) reader. Many of us use terms like "needs improvement" rather than "suggests incompetence" because in the classroom situation we can still help. Such is not the case when an essay is submitted for external evaluation or when a letter has been put in the mail. Concerning question 2 above, there may be times when students don't feel that they have anything relevant to say about the topic. In that case, it's better to recognize the problem from the outset and work with it, rather than to plunge ahead blindly, hoping for inspiration. Topics like "fashion," "living on another planet," or "the role of art in society" may not be for everyone, but students who recognize that the topic isn't something they would choose to write about on their own can often deal with the question in a way that expresses their problem with the topic. This approach would not be considered off-topic if the topic is in fact treated, and it might lead to a very interesting essay.

Vocabulary

Once the approach to the topic is clear in the student's mind, he or she begins the daunting task of actually writing the essay. Since the student has already identified vocabulary from the question, vocabulary can be a safe place to start. Using the notion of semantic fields, students can start with the key words they have identified in the question and build around them. One model for such an activity is to have students write a key word and surround it with a circle of related words. A student with a strong command of French might come up with:

Exploits	*Énergie*	*Effort*
Adversité		*Reconnaissance*
Succès	*HÉROS*	*Courage*
Sacrifice		*Exceptionnel*
	Combat	

A weaker student might find words like *gagner, action, distinction, important, danger* and *admirable*. Doing activities of this nature in class throughout the learning process, beginning in the first year, gets students used to the idea that there are word associations that can help them to write with richer vocabulary. Asking students to use a French-French dictionary to prepare their own versions of semantic fields is more learner-oriented than a teacher-generated vocabulary list and students are often amazed at the great number of cognates they find. They have more French at their disposal than they think. Because limited vocabulary is one of the criteria that keeps students at the "Suggests Incompetence" level for the AP Exam, it is important that students allow all the vocabulary that they know to work for them. In the "Demonstrates Competence" category, "varied and generally appropriate vocabulary" is needed and students who have become accustomed to "playing" with words can more easily achieve this level.

Grammar and Syntax

For students to demonstrate competence, however, they also need to write using correct grammar and syntax. This is the area in which language teachers excel and with which students are bombarded from their first days of language study. One of the biggest problems for students at all levels occurs when they try to say things that they simply do not know how to say. Teachers tend to be very generous readers and we become very proficient at "interpreting" student sentences. Unfortunately, this can be a disservice to the writers-in-training. If they rely on the reader to seek out the meaning in their essays, they will not have the intuitive sense that clear communication has to come from them. It may

seem unnecessary to suggest here that when students write for communicative purposes (as opposed to teacher-guided practice) they should write at their level of proficiency. They should not allow themselves to think in their native language as they approach their writing, for this will lead to problems, especially in syntax. Many students seem to think of writing as though it were like putting together a salad. They toss the ingredients into the bowl one by one, believing that if they're all there the salad will be good. Tossing the words into a sentence, unfortunately, does not have the same result.

It might be better if they conceive of writing sentences as similar to building a house. One starts with the foundation and the frame. The frame, for a sentence, varies in complexity from student to student, depending on each student's level of French. The key is for them to use what they clearly know as a point of departure. As they go through language courses they can practice building their sentences from the inside out, so to speak. To describe a heroine, a student can start with the most basic sentence. *Une heroine est une femme.* Adding an adjective (*Une heroine est une femme courageuse*) and then perhaps a relative clause (*Une heroine est une femme courageuse qui risque sa vie pour ses principes*) leads to sophisticated writing without the students running the risk of getting lost in his/her own sentence. Some students may not be able to go far in such an exercise, especially under the pressure of an exam. They will, however, be writing more clearly at their own level, which, while it may not push them into "Demonstrates Competence," will allow them to suggest the competence that they have.

Another technique that proves useful is inspired by the notion of "pastiche" often used in composition manuals to help students explore style. In the largest sense, a "pastiche" activity asks the students to read a passage by a writer whose style is worthy of imitation, such as Flaubert. They are then to imitate the style of the author as they write their own composition. A more manageable application of this exercise is to focus on individual utterances. Students are given model sentences that include a specific grammar issue with which they are struggling. They are then asked to write their own sentences but to respect, for example, the verb tenses or moods in the model. Such a transformation might be:

> Si j'*avais su que* tu *venais*, j'*aurais acheté* un gâteau.
>
> Si tu m'*avais dit que* tu *n'aimais pas* les films d'horreur, nous *aurions regardé* un film d'amour.

Students are thus required to use the *si* clause and to respect the sequences of tenses and moods. They are prompted to change as much of the rest as possible, including the subjects of the clauses and other information conveyed. This type of activity can be used

for any grammar point and also for teaching vocabulary in cases where the same word can be used in different ways.

> J'ai *des parents* qui habitent en Californie. ⟶ Nous avons *des parents* qui parlent espagnol.
>
> *Mes parents* travaillent trop. ⟶ *Les parents* de mon ami ont une belle maison.

Activities of this nature oblige students to consider the form and the meaning of what they are writing. While application of this technique may not be possible when a student is actually writing an essay, it provides useful preparation and it leads to greater grammatical accuracy. It also leads to fluency.

Fluency and Ease of Expression

It is this fluency, this hard-to-define aspect of writing, which is the overriding influence when we read student work. We know it when we see it, or more precisely, we keenly sense when it isn't there. In this context, it might be useful to consider it as an overall level of comprehensibility. Each of the above—organization, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax—contributes to this criterion. And it seems so subjective. The "hidden skill" demonstrated by our best students seems to be an awareness of what they can successfully do in order to communicate with the reader. They get and keep our attention, their errors do not force us to guess at meaning, and there is a sense that they have something to say. They haven't used artifice (a subjunctive or idiomatic expression dropped in "because the reader wants them") and they don't count on us to interpret their writing. They don't make us work very hard. We know what they mean. When Samuel Beckett, early in his career, chose to write in French he saw clearly how the constraints of writing in a foreign language could become advantages. If we can communicate the pleasure of that challenge to our students, our work will be easier and their hard work will lead to writing proficiency.

Lesson Plan for Improving Composition Skills: Observe/Identify—Practice—Implement

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Goals

1. Students will understand the requirements of a very good/excellent essay as stated in the AP French Language scoring guidelines.
2. Students will identify elements of a sample student essay that contribute to excellence in writing.
3. Through practice with a certain number of these elements (vocabulary, structure) students will gain control of their use.
4. Students will explore a framework for composition ("MP3").
5. Students will implement the elements practiced and the framework in composition work.

Target Audience

Upper-level French class (IV, V, AP). Please note that the strategies outlined in this plan can and should be adapted for implementation at all levels of language study. All students must be given repeated opportunities to recognize excellence in writing, to practice elements that contribute to excellence in writing, and to regularly practice writing.

Time Frame

Approximately 80 minutes. This plan can be carried out in one class or broken into segments over several classes.

Materials Needed and How to Find Them

Note: To order copies of particular AP Exams and other AP publications, go to the College Board's online store: store.collegeboard.com.

1. Official 9-point AP French Language essay-scoring guidelines:
   - AP Central, the College Board's Web site for AP teachers (apcentralcollegeboard.com)
   - *2003 AP® French Language Released Exam*, p. 67

2. Student essay that received an 8 or a 9 on the AP French Language Exam:
   - AP Central
   - *1998 AP® French Language Released Exam*, pp. 63–65
   - *2003 AP® French Language Released Exam*, pp. 68–69
   - *How to Prepare for the AP® French Advanced Placement Examination*, pp. 136–137
   - Copy of a former student's AP French Language Exam free-response booklet: Schools can pay a fee to have the free-response booklets of the students sent to their AP coordinator.
3. Another essay prompt for advanced students:
   - Teacher-generated
   - Prompts from previous AP French Language Exams: AP Central, Released Exams, *AP French Course Description*
   - *AP French: Preparing for the Language Exam*, pp. 154–158
   - *Triangle: Applications Pratiques de la Langue francaise, Manuele de l'Etudient,* pp. 63 - 68.

Procedures

Segment 1: What Is My Writing Target?
Goal: Students will understand the requirements of a very good/excellent essay as stated in the AP French Language scoring guidelines.

The teacher distributes a copy of the AP French Language scoring guidelines to all students and then explains each level of the rubric, allowing for questions from the students. At the highest level of the rubric, level 9, the following concepts are critical: variety and accuracy in vocabulary and grammatical structures at a level that is higher than **core** or **basic**, use of idiomatic French, and the general organization of the essay. I explain to my students that **core** and **basic** vocabulary words and grammatical structures are the ones that students should have learned to use correctly in French 1 and 2. It is important that the students realize that an essay does not have to be perfect to receive the highest score and that achieving a score of 7, 8, or 9 is an attainable goal.

Segment 2: What Does It Look Like When a Student Is Meeting That Writing Target?
Goal: Students will identify elements of a sample student essay that contribute to excellence in writing.

The teacher then distributes a copy of a sample AP French Language essay to each student in the class. Students work in pairs or small groups. They read through the essay and highlight vocabulary words, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical

structures that contribute to the excellence of the sample essay. I allow about 10 minutes for this work.

Below is a student example that I have used with my class (AP French Language Examination, 2003). The student who wrote this essay received a score of 5 on the AP Exam, so the essay probably received a very high score.

Essay prompt:

> Dans un monde qui semble devenir de plus en plus impersonnel, quel est le rôle de l'amitié dans la vie des jeunes? Discutez en utilisant des exemples précis.

Student sample (original text, no corrections made):

> On ne sait pas le moment précis où le monde a commencé à devenir de plus en plus impersonnel, mais on voit tous les jours les preuves de cet hypothèse, et on peut prévoir le dénouement tragique si l'amitié ne sauve pas les jeunes.
>
> On est, maintenant, au milieu de l'âge informatique, ou il y a une popularité augmentant des appareils éléctroniques qui remplacent la nécessité d'être avec d'autrui, tels que l'ordinateur et les jeux-vidéos. Autrefois, quand les enfants s'ennuyaient, ils devaient chercher les autres enfants avec qui ils puissent jouer. Par contre, aujourd'hui il ne faut que la télévision ou les jeux-vidéos. Alors, quelques enfants perdent la capacité de jouer avec les autres, et cela devient un problème quand ils sont adultes et ils ont besoin de travailler en groupe. À cause de la vie impersonnelle et la possibilité de s'amuser seul, comment communiquer et créer les liens intimes se manque. Quant à ce problème, l'amitié peut le résoudre en formant les personnalités des jeunes, et en leur enseignant comment communiquer avec les autres gens.
>
> La communication, malheureusement, devient aussi de plus en plus impersonnelle. Les lettres autrefois écrites à main sont en ce moment souvent tapées et généralisées. De nos jours, cependant, on reçoit les lettres des entreprises qui commencent: "Cher client ..." ou les lettres des universités qui disent: "Cher étudiant ..." L'art d'écrire une lettre est aussi diminué grâce à le courier électronique. Ça nous permets d'éviter complètement le contact direct, et encourage l'usage des mots brefs qui ne conviennent pas du tout à la langue parlant. Donc, on ne sait plus comment

> entendre, pas seulement écouter. Les rapports qu'apportent l'amitié aident à garder cette information élémentaire et s'apprendre la patience.
>
> Sans l'amitié, on évolue peut-être à un peuple qui ne sait ni la communication ni les nuances de partager sa vie. La beauté de la vie et ce qui sépare les êtres humains des singes viennent de la capacité de se plaindre ou célébrer—les activités qui ne sont point possibles sans l'amitié. Comme les pompiers ne permettent pas à un feu de détruire une maison, l'amitié à le pouvoir de nous sauver de l'incendie d'un monde impersonnel et de nous arrêter de détruire les liens précieux entre nous et les autres gens de nos espèces. Nous dépendons sur nos amis de nous soutenir quand il y a de la difficulté, et aucune personne ne peut vivre toute seule. La plupart des plaisirs, soit les vacances soit les activités quotidiennes, devient plus agréable avec les amis—donc, l'importance de l'amitié.

Students then share the elements they have highlighted. The teacher can write them on a master list on a transparency. Students may also recognize errors that have been made, and these can be discussed. My students suggested the following items for the master list:

Vocabulary	**Structures**
le moment où	*Phrase avec si*
précis	Relative pronouns
les preuves (*une preuve*)	*soit...soit*
le dénouement	*ni...ni*
les appareils	*ne...point*
autrui	Direct object pronoun (*le résoudre*)
par contre	*en* + present participle (*en formant*)
un lien	
malheureusement	Indirect object pronoun (*leur enseignant*)
tapé	*ne...que*
une entreprise	
éviter	
un incendie	
les pompiers	
soutenir	
tel que	

Once we have established a list, we discuss any less-familiar words and expressions. I select five or six words and/or structures that would have a high frequency of use in

writing in general, words and structures with which my students need practice. This can change depending on the class and student needs. These items will be used in their next writing assignment. Students will be able to use these target expressions and others on their own, naturally, if they are given repeated opportunities to practice them. The six we practiced for our writing were: *le moment où* (*au moment où*), *par contre*, *tel que*, *soutenir*, *soit…soit*, *la preuve*. We put several examples of each on a transparency. Students were encouraged to contribute examples.

Segment 3: **What Will Be the Framework of My Essay?—The MP3 System**
Goal: Students will explore/implement our framework for composition, the "MP3" system.

My students use what I call the "MP3" system to set up the framework of a composition. Mastery of this system enables them to better understand what is being asked and to organize their response extremely rapidly.

M = *maîtriser la question* (master the question—interact with the question to analyze it and know what is being asked)

P = *planifier la réponse* (plan the response—set up a quick outline: main point, ideas for details, and appropriate vocabulary/structures)

3 = *trois idées* (aim for a brief introduction and then develop three main ideas with supporting details and examples)

The AP French Language essay has a 40-minute time limit, and striving for three main paragraphs seems to fit that time frame well.

M: Mastering the Question
Students need to read the question carefully, but their work does not end there. They then need to interact with the question by underlining, circling, or highlighting its most important elements. From there, they write a thesis statement.

The teacher shows them a sample essay question on a transparency, for example, the question from the 1983 AP French Language Exam:

> La situation de la femme dans notre société est-elle la même maintenant que dans le passé? Selon vous, que devrait-elle être à l'avenir?

The teacher guides the students in the identification of its most important parts and then helps them create a thesis statement that embodies the important elements but doesn't just repeat the question. The students are now ready for the second and third parts of the MP3 process.

P and 3: Planning the Response with Three Main Ideas
Before beginning to write the essay, the teacher works with the students to draft an outline that includes the thesis statement and the three main ideas they will use to develop their essay. By leaving room on the paper between the three main ideas, students can fill in brief notes for supporting details/examples and also have space to jot down any pertinent vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, transition words, and structures that come to mind. The five or six words/structures that we practiced from the example student essay are included in the outline. With practice, students should be able to carry out the MP3 system on their own in about three to five minutes and then be organized and ready to write. The students then write in class if time permits; otherwise, this becomes a homework assignment.

Conclusion

The three segments of the process described above should be repeated numerous times during the academic year. Students need to have the opportunity to read samples of excellent writing at regular intervals. They need to repeatedly practice the vocabulary, expressions, and structures that will bring more sophistication to their writing. Finally, they need to have the opportunity to practice an organizational schema like the MP3 system.

My upper-level students are carrying out writing in some form every week. They frequently write a full essay or carry out the correction of an essay that I have coded for errors, but I sometimes use a shortcut version of the MP3 system in class, simply to provide more practice with the development of the organizational schema. I give them the question. They take five minutes to interact with the question, write a thesis statement, and create their outline. They then develop in writing only one of the three main ideas. I give them 15 minutes to write this paragraph. Papers (preparation work and paragraph) are turned in. I check the quality of the thesis statement and the organizational tool and then evaluate the paragraph written.

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Counting the Minutes, Minutes Count: In-Class Writing Activities

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Of the several variables that influence the learning of a second language, time is certainly predominant. A clear correlation exists between the level of proficiency attained and the number of hours studied. Not surprisingly, the foreign language profession in the United States has advocated for a lengthy sequence of study in the second language, beginning in elementary school and, in middle and secondary school, having at least the same amount of instructional time as awarded to the study of English, math, science, and social studies. However, even in an ideal environment with a sympathetic school administration, the second language teacher always seems harried to accomplish all she must: time to play a cassette or a CD for listening comprehension, time to allow students to practice their oral skills and then work on the pronunciation of the French "R," time to discuss the proper etiquette for eating a meal in several francophone cultures, and, of course, a myriad of exercises to help students bridge that profound gap between skill getting and skill using. Obviously, what is shoved to the side, placed into that nebulous category of "if time permits," relegated to homework, or even neglected entirely is the writing skill.

Now writing in the French class may occur, but it is too often limited to filling in blanks with verb forms or vocabulary or to writing down responses to a list of questions, or even a *dictée*. As Davis (1994) remarks, "historically, writing as a communicative skill has not been given much attention in the foreign language classroom" (p. 141). Indeed, we pay way too much attention to form: adjective agreement, gender of nouns, verb conjugations, idiomatic expressions ("*il fait beau*"), and the like. Thus, when a student receives a short composition corrected by the teacher, she is often overwhelmed by the abundance of red and discouraged by the few remarks on content or organization. Researchers on writing in English and in a second language have stressed the critical need to view writing as a process, to devote both in-class and out-of-class time to it, and to use writing tasks that are creative and communicative (Dvorak 1986, Osterholm 1986, Barnett 1989, Davis 1994, Krug 2004).

The adoption of longer periods of instruction by many American secondary schools (80 to 90 minutes every other day) may be detrimental to second language learning in some aspects, but the "extra" time can be used most beneficially for what I shall call "free writing," or writing exercises that will not be corrected or graded by the teacher.

Especially at the more advanced levels of instruction—for instance, an AP French language course—free writing should become an integral part of the curriculum.

What follows is a series of in-class writing exercises that I have used successfully in advanced French language courses, in French composition courses, and also in first-year seminars, taught in English, whose goals include attention to the writing skill. Many of these exercises can be adapted to other levels of proficiency or used with lower expectations of performance. They all share these characteristics:

- They promote active learning. (Writing does not need to be a passive skill.)
- They require limited time to complete (five to ten minutes).
- They encourage discussion.
- They remain mostly ungraded.
- They engage *all* students.
- They may be expanded into longer, more formal assignments.

I. *Un bref résumé*

At the beginning of class, students summarize the main events or ideas of the reading, or they agree or disagree with the character or author. They can also give the point at which they became hopelessly lost in the text.

Example:

> Chapitre 7, *Pierre et Jean*[3]
> Dans ce chapitre il y a la répétition beaucoup de fois de "jaloux," et il est bien évident que la maladie de Pierre est la jalousie. Nous voyons, enfin, la réaction de Jean quand il apprend la vérité de sa naissance en parlant avec sa mère.

II. *Inventer et voler*

Students jot down everything they know about a particular topic, e.g., *la cuisine française*, *la révolution française*, *le métro*. They may "invent" details if they so wish. While selected writers read their descriptions, others in class may steal and record any information they hear. A brief discussion is necessary: what is true?

III. *Le titre d'un poème*

When presenting a poem in class, students can free-write on the poem's title before they read the rest of it. (For me and my students, "free writing" means that you can write

[3] The examples provided are real, with actual student responses (anonymous).

whatever comes to mind. There is no need to write in complete sentences, although you should try, and you should try, as well, to write continuously for five minutes.)

After having read the poem, students set it aside and write down all the images they can remember, then they free-write about one of the images.

IV. *Une comparaison*
Students create a metaphor or a simile that compares two items of discussion:
La cuisine française est comme une bonne promenade dans un jardin de fleurs, mais la cuisine américaine est comme la chute d'eau de Niagara.

V. *La suivante*
At the end of class, students write a brief summary of the day's discussion and prepare three questions to ask at the beginning of the next class period.

VI. *Une histoire spontanée*
Students are presented with four or five disparate sentence fragments. They must create a story with them, adding what they wish.

Example:

- un petit café sympathique
- une tempête
- une odeur de cierge
- un quartier ouvrier
- flotter

Vous étiez dans un petit café sympathique quand je vous ai vu. Est-ce que c'était dans un quartier ouvrier de la ville? Je ne sais pas. Je me souviens seulement d'une odeur de cierge et de vin rouge qui flottait dans l'air. Et je me souviens de la tempête dans mon coeur.

VII. *La thèse*
Students need to write only one sentence, but this sentence must be a thesis statement, e.g., a one-sentence summary of an essay's argument. Students can write thesis statements that summarize assigned readings, class discussion, or even a larger work-in-progress, such as a study of a cultural artifact.

Example:

Pierre et Jean

Dans ce roman Maupassant présente une vision très pessimiste d'une famille qui tombe en désordre à cause du manque de communication.

VIII. *Une bonne question*

Students write quiz or exam questions based on the reading or class discussion. It is important that the teacher use one or more of them!

IX. *Un examen facile*

Occasionally, the teacher can distribute a practice exam question, perhaps one from a previous exam. Students answer it within a strict time limit. The teacher collects the answers and reads a random sampling with class discussion upon its merits. As a follow-up, the teacher can read all of the answers, then scan one that might receive an A into the course Web site (or one that might receive a D). During the next class, students can discuss this answer and give it a grade. I need to mention that the writing questions on the AP French Language Exam are available, with various answers that have received different scores. The Chief Reader presents the rationale for the score, highlighting the essay's strengths and weaknesses.

X. *Rites de passage*

In the advanced French language and composition courses that I have taught, students gather their writing, done both in class and outside of class, into a portfolio. One of the mandatory sections of the portfolio is the "*rites de passage*," which has more of an out-of-class component than in-class. It seems to work best as follows.

In class, students jot down an event or experience that represented an initiation, a ritual, or a passage into young adulthood. Fairly common responses are graduation from secondary school, getting one's own car, the first significant job, and an athletic or artistic achievement.

Students then try to re-create this event from their point of view, using a first-person narrator, although this is not a requirement. (Some students have used a friend's perspective, retelling the story in a creative way.) They have two weeks to refine the chronology of the event and to respond to the question, "Why does this experience represent a passage into adulthood for you?"

I schedule five *rites de passage* into my semester curriculum. Students can easily present two or three, but they must reflect more profoundly on their biography to come up with five.

XI. *Un début*
Students write five, single-sentence openings to possible short stories. They discuss these potential story openings with a peer in class then select the most promising one. Outside of class, they will write the story, which is intended to be *short*.

XII. *Un objet inconnu*
Students bring to class a specific object that may have an interesting history or a story behind it. As the object is being passed around, the student narrates the story or history. (One student asked the class to follow her. She had parked an aging VW Bug in front of the classroom building and described to us the origin of several of its dents.) Classmates should take notes about each object by writing down interesting facts, phrases, and words. They should not worry if what they are writing makes no immediate sense. These notes can be voiced and compared. Then, each student composes a poem from the notes, using the objects and their description in any manner or order he or she chooses. Unless the teacher wishes to devote several, successive class periods to this exercise, it is wise to do it over several months, with two or three students each time.

XIII. *Une bonne definition*
A student selects a word randomly from *Le Petit Robert* and asks her peers to write a two-to-three-sentence definition of it.

Example:

> "une spatule"
>
> C'est l'intérieur d'un fusée spatial où les astronautes mangent leurs repas. M. Spock passe trop de temps dans la spatule du fusée *Enterprise*, et il crée des problèmes.

XIV. *Question du jour*
In the first five minutes of class, students write a response to a question about their reading or about the previous day's class discussion. They need to know at the outset that some will be asked to read their responses out loud, so they should prepare an intelligent answer.

Example:

> Dans le chapitre 7 de *Pierre et Jean,* qu'est-ce que Jean apprend et quelle en est sa réaction?

XV. *Tableaux*
Students must describe a picture. I prefer to scan an illustration from a magazine; a reproduction of a painting by such artists as Magritte, Toulouse-Lautrec, Van Gogh, and Watteau; or even a stick figure. Then I display it on a screen to the class; it is important that all students be able to see it clearly. Of course, you can also select an image directly from good sources on the Web. Students can share their descriptions with the class or with a peer. During the semester or term, students can develop more fully one of these *tableaux*, which will be added to the portfolio and graded.

XVI. *Journal*
Although a few minutes of personal journal writing in class can be productive—students always have something to write about—it is an activity better completed outside of class. More preferable as an in-class assignment (because it is more engaging of others) would be to ask students to write about one or two events that occurred recently or will occur soon.These events can be school related (most are!), but students should be encouraged to discover what is happening in the community, the state, and the world. If a class Web site exists, some of these events can be posted.

XVII. *La carte postale*
Susan Rava (1998) has explained in detail the advantages of teaching writing through postcards, real cards she gathers on trips abroad or blank pieces of paper. To make postcard writing as interactive and as creative as possible, I suggest the following modus operandi.

Student A writes on the card what he will, then "sends" it to Student B, who responds on her own card and "sends" it to Student A.

For brevity, it is advisable to end the exercise at this point. However, I have allowed students to continue with one or two more cards and am surprised how easily they can succeed in creating a meaningful exchange. Krug (2004) underlines the effectiveness of a letter requesting information or responding to a hypothetical job ad.

XVIII. *Un message instantané*
A teacher can remove the formal constraint of a postcard or a letter and allow two students to write electronic messages (IM) for a short period of time. The caveat, of course, is that the classroom must be equipped to permit such messaging, either with a wireless system and enough laptops for everyone or with a computer at each desk. Because writing should occur, ideally, as a regular in-class activity, I do not advocate moving the entire class to a language resource room for five minutes of IM-ing.

XIX. *Chère Héloïse*
Students have no difficulty in detailing often complicated and dramatic situations that need the good advice of Héloïse (their partner). To help them prepare for this writing exercise, the teacher should announce that the activity will take place during the next class. Students then have sufficient time to reflect upon an interesting imbroglio. After two students have written their letters, they exchange them and write a brief response. An option is to have the writer read her letter to the class and seek the students' general advice before divulging the advice given by the real Héloïse, her partner. Of course, students can also proffer advice in writing.

XX. *Mon opinion*
Given a statement such as "*il vaut mieux manger pour vivre que vivre pour manger*," students need to express their opinion in three or four sentences. Their opinions can then be used to generate discussion. I have found that students reluctant to voice an opinion in class seize this opportunity to write it down. Finally, a teacher can pass out note cards or small pieces of paper near the end of class and ask students for their opinion on what they have been doing. By reviewing these notes, the teacher can better prepare for the following class.

Foreign language teachers have often compared their work to that of an instrumental music teacher: practice makes perfect. I would like to change the metaphor: writing is like riding a bike—the more our students write, the easier it will be and the better they will become.

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Improving Composition Skills in the AP French Language Course

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On the AP® French Language Exam, the composition and the fill-ins together count as 25 percent of the grade. AP teachers, therefore, spend a lot of time teaching their students how to write a good essay. They have them write outlines, learn appropriate connecting words, and work extensively on vocabulary. They edit many compositions, sometimes with elaborate coded systems, and regularly have students review their mistakes.

Without a doubt, all of these exercises improve students' writing ability, but I recommend the occasional use of some playful activities, *activités ludiques*, as a more enjoyable way for students to work on these skills. I use two such games, described below, with my students, and find them a stress-free way to improve students' writing ability. These activities can be adapted for all levels of instruction, including level I. In addition to giving students practice in composition, they sharpen their analytical eyes and help prepare them for the fill-in section of the AP French Exam.

La chasse aux erreurs

Step One

- Divide the class into groups. Small groups (about four students per group) work best. I find that using larger groups often results in two group members doing all the work while the rest hang back.
- Give a marker and a big piece of newsprint to each group.
- Give the groups the same *very precise* writing task. For instance, if the class is reviewing *passé composé* versus *imparfait*, a task could be: "*Ecrivez une aventure au passé. Utilisez un minimum de cinq verbes pronominaux, huit imparfaits*." Always set minimum requirements; students can go beyond them if they wish.
- Set the time limit. Twenty minutes works well.
- Set the rules: one person (the secretary) writes, no English may be spoken, all members of the group must contribute ideas. The secretary must write legibly and in big letters.
- Decide if all mistakes will count, or only those in a particular area of study—for example, in the task given above, the teacher might count only mistakes involving the *passé composé* and *imparfait*. At AP level, I opt for the first choice: everything counts, even accents.

Step Two

- When the time limit is up, have the students tape the writings on the blackboard.
- The creators of story #1 do not speak. The other groups critique story #1—not for its quality, but for its grammatical and vocabulary mistakes. A volunteer is sent to the board to underline the errors with a marker and write the correct form. The teacher does not give any help or hints.
- The teacher tallies the number of mistakes the class found in story #1 and writes the number at the bottom of the paper.
- The teacher asks the class if they are sure they have caught all errors and corrected them accurately.
- The teacher then points out errors that were missed, correct forms that were labeled incorrect, or corrections that were inaccurate. These errors count as *positive* points for group #1, and each one erases one of the tallied errors. This step is essential to motivate all the groups to examine the stories carefully and try to catch all the errors made by rival groups. Students confer with each other to make sure they have the right correction, and this is an excellent learning process.
- Once all the stories have been graded, the group with the smallest number of tallied errors is the winner and gets a reward. Bonus points are the currency of choice in my classes, but candy is also very much appreciated.

La chaise musicale informatisée

- Reserve a computer lab that has at least one station for three students. Two students per computer also works very well. This activity can be done with pen and paper if no lab is available, but it is much easier to do the editing part on a computer.
- Again, give each group a *very specific* task. The task may be open creative writing, but must have a specific requirement. This can be a certain number of words, or a certain number of syntactic forms. For instance, if the class is studying relative pronouns, you could request "*une histoire avec 10 pronoms relatifs avec au moins une fois dans le texte 'dont,' 'ce que,' 'duquel,' 'lesquelles,' 'où.'*"
- Give a specific time limit, 10 minutes maximum, for each round. (Although the game is called "musical chairs," actually playing music is too distracting. Set a timer or call time yourself.)
- The student who types the best is the group secretary and the other two suggest ideas and correct errors.
- When the timer rings, students save their story *without closing the file* and move to the next computer station. Their task is to edit the story that the other group has just written, and write some more until the timer rings again. You may need to adjust the time down, if students are very prolific.

- This activity can easily take a whole class period. Students really enjoy reading what their peers have created and they are challenged by the task of finding and correcting mistakes.
- Ten minutes before the end of class, announce that the students will now treat the story that they are currently editing or continuing as *their own*. They will be graded on that story and the accurate correction of all errors. After finishing the story, they must write their three names at the top of the page and either print it or send it to the teacher's account, according to what has been decided ahead of time.
- If there is enough time, ask each group to take turns reading their edited stories aloud.
- One could also ask each group to recall three of the most common mistakes they found and share them with the class, but generally it is best just to let the students have fun and continue editing the stories to the best of their ability.

Because these two activities are more like games than work, and are done cooperatively, students enjoy them and improve their writing skills without feeling stressed.

An Emphasis on Process from Assignment Through Assessment

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Introduction

Successful writers show awareness of their audience and approach composition as a **nonlinear process**. Distilled from research on second-language writing (Magnan 1985, Zamel 1982), these words are among the most repeated of language teachers' mantras. To help students become successful writers in a second language (and across the curriculum), teachers create assignments informed by a cognitive process theory and its practical implications (Flower and Hayes 1981, Barnett 1989). This approach emphasizes the writing process and not just a final written product. It makes sense, but how does it work? And how is it working?

In a class committed to process writing, students prepare compositions in multiple drafts, often incorporating prewriting, peer-editing, and self-editing guides. Since student editing raises a number of problems (e.g., overlooking mistakes and introducing new ones), teachers also review first drafts, identifying errors to be corrected, providing thoughtful commentary, and offering reactions, advice, and encouragement in marginal notes. It is therefore disappointing to see students furtively skimming these drafts for circled mistakes and written comments in order to plug in revisions as quickly as possible. Weary teachers might well ask themselves: whose process is it?

Flower and Hayes clearly distinguish **stage models** of writing from a **cognitive model** (367–368), emphasizing that writing in linear stages (prewriting, composing a draft, revising a draft), while a useful approach, does not automatically foster cognitive processes. In other words, students writing in stages might indeed rewrite, rethink, and clarify meaning, but only in discrete units and in disconnected phases. A draft-and-editing process can become for students (and teachers) no more than a labor-intensive way to organize a highly **linear** (not cognitive) process: there is no guarantee that a writer working in linear stages will constantly replan, rethink, reassess goals, rewrite, and clarify meaning throughout and across stages. It is no wonder teachers become discouraged when they find themselves applying these cognitive strategies to students' writing while the students do not.

What, then, can teachers do to help students hone the skills of a good writer? How can

students become more engaged in cognitive process? This article offers practical solutions for building attention to this process within the familiar structure of a **stage writing model**. It involves no more than a revision of three tools normally used when assigning compositions: the **description of the assignment itself**, **editing guides**, and **grading criteria**. When these three elements work together toward a common goal, reinforcing one another through shared wording, students are more likely to understand and practice process writing.

Defining Goals

Ideally, students should ask themselves several questions throughout the composition process; they should apply most of these questions equally, often, and simultaneously to matters of form and meaning:

- Who are my (real or fictive) readers? How do I reach them? What will confuse, distract, or tire them? How can I appeal to these readers, make myself clear, make my writing interesting?
- What is the purpose of this writing task? What am I trying to do: convince, persuade, amuse, list facts, give instructions?
- What are my editorial responsibilities?

The first and second groups of questions highlight awareness of the reader and attention to the communicative task. All matters of grammatical accuracy, stylistics, organization, and rhetoric ideally serve these purposes. Writers should keep these questions in mind throughout the composition process. The question of editorial responsibility is a practical but equally important one, usually considered right at the beginning so that writers may budget their time and just before turning in the final product or any drafts along the way.

While each writing assignment targets specific goals, the underlying purpose of writing pedagogy is to focus students on these basic questions. Thus it is important to repeat, rephrase, clarify, and reinforce these questions throughout the stages of the linear writing process, from the wording of the assignment through the explanation of assessment criteria.

Wording the Assignment

The first step in reinforcing writing goals is to articulate them in the very wording of the assignment. For example, imagine that students have watched and discussed the film *Kirikou et la sorcière* and are ready to write a composition related to it. The composition assignment boils down to this: "Write a review of the film *Kirikou et la sorcière*." We can fine-tune this assignment by asking the same sorts of questions we hope students will ask themselves and by reflecting these questions in the wording of the assignment itself.

Teacher Task: Rephrasing the Assignment to Reflect Its Goals

Assignment: Write a review of *Kirikou et la sorcière*.

Who is the implied reader?
You have been asked to write a review of the film *Kirikou et la sorcière* for a student newspaper.

What is the functional task?
Convince your student readers that this children's film is either appropriate or inappropriate for their age group.

How can this review be structured to carry out functional and communicative goals and to reach the implied reader?
Begin with a brief introduction supplying basic information about the film (year, genre, director, popularity). Make your case by discussing first the style of the film (images and music, for example), then the plot and its message. Remember that we read reviews to get general information and a critique of the film, not to learn the entire plot and, above all, not to be told the ending.

What language can serve these goals?
The present tense is normally used in reviews of books and films. In a film review, it is appropriate to address the reader directly with rhetorical questions. The imperative and subjunctive moods are useful in persuasive writing.

What are the editorial demands?
Write 150 words, typed, double-spaced. [Include due dates and any other administrative guidelines for each draft.]

Appendix A offers a sample checklist for teachers planning writing assignments.

Prewriting
Prewriting activities need not be limited to drafting sentences and paragraphs. Examining model texts, discussing their own preferences as readers, and brainstorming approaches to the assignment will all promote critical thinking about students' writing. If time allows, have students read a film review. Ask them to identify effective strategies the writer uses to keep the readers' attention, to make points, and to be persuasive. In small groups, have students put themselves in the place of target readers. Ask them think about and discuss where they look for film reviews, what information they hope to find, and what types of reviews they like best and why. If time does not permit either of these prewriting

activities, take five minutes to lead a brainstorming session directly linked to the wording of the assignment and map answers on the board: What kinds of sentences get the reader's attention? What does the reader need to know about the plot? What expressions could help persuade the reader?

Peer Reviewers, Not Peer Graders

It is tempting to abandon peer editing altogether. Students often feel uneasy, threatened, and defensive when their manuscripts are criticized by their peers, and they have limited faith in the credibility of such feedback (Amores 1997). While conscientious students resent having to clean up the work of more careless students, weaker students are embarrassed by their mistakes. And across the board, peer editors introduce new errors in an attempt to be helpful. Yet what is more valuable to a writer than having her work read and critiqued before publication?

Perhaps "peer editing" is a misnomer. Neither writers nor readers glean great rewards from "editing" each other's work in language classes. However, reading for comprehensibility, clarity, flow, and style is a real-life task that emphasizes the dialogical relationship between reader and writer while promoting reflection and analytical thinking. When peer review is guided not toward editing and evaluating but instead toward identifying effective writing strategies and need for clarity, everyone benefits from the process. In fact, *reviewing* manuscripts may be more beneficial to students' writing than *being reviewed*. Give peer reviewers just one or two questions of style and readability closely related to the communicative function (Which paragraph did you find the most persuasive and why? Is there a sentence or a paragraph you do not understand?) and leave the editing to the writer and instructor.

Appendix B offers a checklist for teaching, assigning, and grading drafts with editing guides.

Self-Editing

Like peer-editing guides, self-editing guides may feel like a burden if they are limited to a checklist of grammar points and editorial requirements. Writing—even in one's native language—provokes anxiety, leads to procrastination, and stirs self-doubt. Self-editing that is not just focused on accuracy allows students an outlet for their anxiety about writing, as it offers explicit guidelines toward rethinking and rewriting compositions. Consider dividing the self-editing guide into three parts: an editorial checklist, a language focus, and a pause for reflection on the writing process. Including a brief editing guide for each draft draws further attention to process and progress.

Student Task 1: A Sample Self-Editing Checklist for the First Draft
Editorial focus:
____Assignment turned in on time following format guidelines [number of pages, etc.]

____Checked spelling and accents

____Checked conjugations and basic agreements of nouns and verbs, nouns and adjectives

Sample language focus [one or two per essay]:
- Name two types of structures or sentences you used to persuade the reader.
- What rhetorical questions did you use to engage the reader?

Possible questions for reflection about the writing process [just one or two per essay]:
- What was the most challenging part of this essay?
- What do you think you accomplished best?
- What would you like to work on as you revise this essay?
- Are you happy with how, when, and where you worked on this essay?

Student Task 2: A Sample Self-Editing Checklist for the Final Draft
Editorial checklist:
____Assignment turned in on time following format guidelines [number of pages, etc.]

____Checked spelling and accents

____Addressed corrections and clarifications suggested by [the teacher, peer editors]

Sample language focus:
- Identify two grammar or stylistic points you would like to improve as you write essays for this course.

Sample questions for reflection on writing:
- Besides correcting mistakes, how were you able to make the essay readable and easy to follow the second time around?
- Did you learn anything about your own writing process that can apply to future writing for this and other courses?

Grading Criteria

It is tempting to think of writing in terms of "form" (structure and grammatical accuracy) and "content" (everything else). However, form and content are deeply linked: grammatical errors and failure to find *le mot juste* may obscure, modify, or transform meaning, just as the desire to express meaning through a given tone determines linguistic and discursive choices. While the separation of form and content grades delivers a clear message about a student's need to work on language accuracy, it also conveys a false sense of security about the readability. A student who earns a C in form and an A in content has learned that mediocre writing has had no effect whatsoever on the comprehensibility of the writing. The student who, less commonly, earns an A in form and a C in content has trouble seeing why a grammatically accurate paper is not enough.

A holistic, descriptive grading scale can reinforce the symbiotic nature of form and meaning and reaffirm the communicative goals of the assignment. Descriptive grading criteria may also eliminate the problem of how to "count" each draft that has led to the final product. Grading each draft separately can produce inflated final grades if teachers are reluctant to give anything below a C on the first draft. Conversely, earning very low grades on first drafts hardly motivates students to revise and rewrite. Yet if students think first drafts do not figure in the final grade, they are tempted to write quickly and carelessly, saving the "real" work for draft two.

By wording descriptive grade guides to encompass performance on *all* drafts, teachers not only underscore the importance of attentive writing in all stages, but also emphasize that each step of what appears to be a linear process actually contributes to an overlapping whole. See appendix C for a sample of descriptive grading criteria.

Conclusion

When the separate components of writing assignments reflect and reinforce one another, they promote nonlinear approaches to writing through their very example: the assignment itself demonstrates a reflective, overlapping, nonlinear approach. Implicit and explicit prompts to practice the habits of effective writers provide students the knowledge and strategies they need to improve their writing. Eventually students will have to compose in French and in their native language without such a thorough support system. With confidence built through guided practice, these independent writers will have internalized some successful habits, and they will know exactly whose process it is.

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Appendix A

Assigning Writing Topics: A Checklist for Teachers
The description of the assignment should reflect all of the elements you will consider when grading the composition. Use this checklist each time you assign a topic, set up editing exercises, and grade a writing assignment.

Selecting a Topic
_____The composition topic fits naturally with the content (theme, cultural focus, reading, film, vocabulary) and functional grammar (describing events that happened in the past, giving advice, persuading, requesting information) recently stressed in the course.

_____Instead of starting from scratch, use writing assignments in the textbook/workbook for inspiration, revising and refining according to your taste.

_____Is the topic interesting to you? Do you think it will motivate students to write?

_____To deflect attention from the writer to the reader, try to build in one degree of critical distance from the students' personal experience when composing assignments (Krueger 2001, p. 21).

Wording of the Assignment

When wording the assignment itself, check to see that it accomplishes the following:

_____Clearly identifies the **implied reader** and clearly states the **communicative focus** (Is it a modern version of a fairly tale directed toward children? An ironic rewriting of a fairly tale directed toward young adult readers?)

_____Clearly reinforces **functional purpose** (describing, narrating, persuading, supporting an opinion, informing, requesting information, giving advice, and so on)

_____Clearly states **structural focus**. If students are to write a letter, remind them to use salutation, closings, and so on. If they are writing a dialogue, should they identify speakers at the beginning? If they are writing a persuasive essay, should they have an introduction and conclusion?

_____Clearly states any **linguistic focus**: pertinent vocabulary lists, grammar structures, past assignments

_____Clearly states **editorial requirements**: due dates for all drafts, spacing, word or page count, minimal spelling and accuracy expectations for each draft, and so on

_____Clearly states or refers students to posted **grading criteria**

Appendix B

Draft Writing: A Checklist for Teachers
Draft-Writing Process

_____Clearly state what is expected of each draft. Should the first draft handed in for evaluation be a “rough” draft, or are there some expectations of accuracy, structure, proofreading, and so on?

_____Let students know how they will be graded. Is each draft graded separately? Is every stage considered in the final assessment of the process?

____Give feedback on the first draft you collect. Underline errors and note their nature (*accord, orthographe, genre*, and so on) Spell these out the first time you write them, then abbreviate naturally. Students should not need a key to decipher your abbreviations.

Be sure to give stylistic advice as well. You may want to use one color of ink for *fautes évitables,* i.e., anything (vocabulary, structure, style, grammar) that the students should have been able to do correctly using nothing but the textbook (and a dictionary to check gender). Use a different color to indicate corrections they could not have made themselves, comments, and general advice for revising. Whether or not you use this color coding, make sure students understand that they are not penalized for taking risks and that some mistakes are not acceptable, even on the first draft.

_____After correcting the first composition, determine how many *fautes évitables* will be acceptable on the **first** draft of future papers for an A, B, C, D, or F. Suggestion: one mistake every 20 words.

_____Do not use peer editing as a way to get one student to correct the other student’s grammar mistakes. Instead, have peer editors work more authentically as peer reviewers or referees: focus on readability, comprehensibility, and structure. Have students read papers aloud in small groups in class before turning them in. Allow them to make corrections.

____Self-editing: focus on process, not just grammatical accuracy. Provide a self-editing checklist for the final draft on which students take stock of their process and progress.

Appendix C

A Sample of Descriptive Grading Rubrics

The Mid-C Paper (75)
A C paper generally meets the requirements of the assignment for which it is written. The paper may have some good features but is consistently weak in one of the following areas: preparation and editing (particularly, but not exclusively, on the first draft), grammar, vocabulary, syntax, structure, and attention to the reader. The paper may be mechanically correct and well organized but repetitive (relative to the course level) in terms of content, syntax, grammar, or style. In many C papers, there seem to be some good ideas, but it is up to the grader to draw them out because they are obscured by errors in grammar, word choice, and/or spelling. In C papers, many sentences and expressions too often read as if they were translated word for word from English to French and therefore would not be comprehensible to a native speaker of French.

The Mid-B Paper (85) and Mid-A (95)
These papers exceed the basic requirements of a C paper. The difference between an A and a B paper involves the degree to which the writer was able to showcase his/her command of the language skills acquired so far, the way in which the writer shows creativity and variety within and despite the limits of the language studied so far, the writer's ability to express thoughts in French without translating directly from English, the writer's ability to raise and keep the reader's interest, and the care taken to polish each draft.

The B and A paper share the following features; however, the B paper may not do so consistently or may have one area that needs improvement.

Preparation and Editing
- All planning guides, drafts, and other preparatory assignments are turned in on time, according to the format assigned.
- The final version of the paper is turned in on time.
- The paper shows that the student has carefully checked all spelling (this includes accents and elisions), on **all** drafts of the paper. Students are encouraged to use dictionaries and French spell-checkers. Be careful, though, as French spell-checkers (like the English ones) require some thinking before we select "Replace." Use your spell-checker's learning tool.

Vocabulary and Grammar

- **All drafts** are free of quotes in English. Exceptions: proper nouns and titles ("*Gone with the Wind*"), the names of businesses and locations ("Main Street"), and location-specific events ("The Walkathon").
- Nearly all **basic** agreements are correct, even in the **first draft**. These include noun/verb, adjective/noun, and gender agreements. Be sure to allow yourself time to go over these systematically.
- The paper shows a solid—though not necessarily perfect—understanding of the grammar structures studied in this course so far.
- The "focus grammar" and/or "focus vocabulary" for this assignment are used very well, though not necessarily perfectly, on the **first draft**.
- The paper (**in all versions**) shows an understanding of French idiom (the French say "*Je vais bien*," not "*Je suis bien*") and syntax (the French put most adverbs *after* verbs) emphasized in the course up to this point.
- The vocabulary used **in both drafts** is fairly rich and varied relative to the quantity learned so far.
- The quality of French is overall completely acceptable and sometimes even impressive.
- The final draft demonstrates that the student has refined and revised grammar, syntax, and vocabulary and enhanced readability according to suggestions.

Attention to the Reader

- The paper corresponds to the topic assigned (a letter versus a persuasive essay versus a restaurant review). This is important for **all drafts**, though slight misunderstandings may be ironed out for the **final draft**.
- The writer shows an awareness of the reader (real or fictional); the tone (frank, kind, persuasive, angry, ironic) and register (formal, casual) are appropriate to the writing task. This is especially important in the **final draft**.
- The **first draft** of the paper demonstrates a real effort to use organizational elements specific to the assignment (greeting in letters, transition words in persuasive essays, and so on) well. These are fine-tuned in the **final draft**.
- The **final draft** demonstrates that the student has incorporated suggestions for stylistic improvements.

Mid-D (65) and Below

The paper is consistently lacking in more than one of the categories: preparation and editing, grammar, vocabulary, syntax, attention to reader. The D paper often gives the impression of having been written too quickly. There is little evidence of revision and editing. It does not demonstrate the writer's mastery of material studied so far. It is often difficult to decipher: the reader has to mentally rewrite the paper to understand it.

Zero

- The paper has been copied completely or in part from another student or another source.
- The paper has been written with the help of a translation program. (Be careful: these programs give strange and poor translations.)
- The paper has been corrected and rewritten by another person (a tutor, a friend) rather than edited according to guidelines given (peer editing, self-editing, and so on).

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