

Teaching and Evaluating Writing as a Communicative Skill

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ABSTRACT *The writing tasks that we have our students carry out are often nothing more than academic exercises that have little or no communicative content or purpose. It is incumbent upon us to integrate writing as a communicative act into our present use of writing as a support skill for ensuring student preparation of "traditional" homework assignments and for the purpose of evaluation on paper-and-pencil tests. This article presents (1) the purposes of writing in a second-language classroom, (2) types of writing tasks, (3) proficiency levels in writing, (4) content of writing activities, (5) sample writing activities, (6) evaluating writing samples using both holistic and analytical scoring techniques, and (7) a sample evaluation of student writing.*

Introduction

Of the four skills that are discussed and (supposedly) taught with equal emphasis in our foreign language classrooms, writing is perhaps the most poorly understood and the skill that is given, in fact, the most cursory attention. Second-language instructors realize that writing plays an important role in second language learning; it is one of the four skills. We also realize that writing is a skill that many have not even mastered in their native language. It is incumbent upon us to keep the importance of all four skills in perspective, particularly if we claim to be teaching a *complete* second language program. Just because our students present us with written work does not mean that they have learned to write in the second language. Admittedly, having students write their homework, daily assignments and tests is a convenient way to collect samples of student work that are relatively easy to

evaluate and correct—correction can be done outside of class at our leisure, student products can be read, reread and compared. Unfortunately many teachers consider such assignments to represent the communicative act of writing.

This paper argues for a different view of writing and discusses how and what we teach in building writing as a communicative skill.

The Purpose of Writing in the Second-language Classroom.

According to Magnan (10), there are two basic purposes for writing in the second-language classroom: as a *support* skill (class and homework exercises to practice grammatical forms and structures, vocabulary and spelling) and as a *communicative* skill (to inform, relate, question, persuade, etc.). The writing tasks we normally ask our students to perform fall predominantly in the realm of writing as a support skill. The practice offered by such writing can be useful in that it enhances the students' appreciation of correct spelling (including diacritical marks), syntax, structures, and vocabulary. These writing tasks do indeed have their place on the continuum of the development of writing skills. They fall within the range of what Rivers (14, p. 4) calls "skill-getting" activities in which students not only acquire basic knowledge but demonstrate this knowledge through extensive drilling using pseudocommunicative activities. Such activities, however, are not ends unto themselves but practice for the development of writing as a true communicative skill, and of the ability to use a correct, well-structured target language as a communicative vehicle for effective self-expression. Activities that we require of our students should encompass the entire continuum of writing purposes, beginning with writing that "is directed in some fashion in the lower

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ranges of proficiency to support that which is learned in class (i.e., grammatical structures, vocabulary, discourse features), yet [including] assignments and exercises [that] present language in the context of full discourse so that students learn how to write for communicative purposes" (Omaggio, 12, p. 234). There must, however, be a reason and a need for writing—to share information or to seek information. Most students, even at the beginning level, can write for communication if the tasks they are asked to carry out are realistic, meaningful, occasioned by need, and appropriate to their level of linguistic sophistication.

Of necessity, any second-language course that begins to teach writing, whether it is a beginning-level course or an upper-level composition class, "must inevitably begin at a lower level of language sophistication than would be expected in an English composition course" (Gaudiani, 3, p. 6). Unaware of this fact, students often try to phrase their ideas in the second language as they would phrase them in English. They balk at being reduced to the use of basic "Dick-and-Jane" language and structures in the second language and naturally feel frustrated at being reduced to the linguistic complexity of a five- or six-year-old. On the other hand, students begin by default by examining the components of extremely simple and clear syntax (Gaudiani, 3, p. 6), insofar as appropriate materials, tasks, situations, and guidelines are established.

Types of Writing Tasks

The question now arises: What kind of writing tasks are appropriate for beginning-level students? Larson and Jones (9, pp. 133-4) have categorized writing tasks faced by second-language users into five general areas—areas in which activities can easily be designed, even for our beginning students:

1. *Correspondence*—basic letter-writing, including greetings, closings, and other arbitrary conventions, as well as giving and requesting information.
2. *Providing essential information*—writing notes, which requires a bit of precision, including abbreviated, telegraphic styles.
3. *Completing forms*—a necessary survival skill in many countries that often requires a few stock phrases.
4. *Taking notes*—for academic purposes as well as for messages, reminders, observations.
5. *Formal papers*—for certain academic disciplines and literature courses students will encounter at later stages of foreign language study.

Proficiency Levels in Writing

What is a realistic expectation of proficiency for

performance in writing at the beginning level? Magnan (10, p. 112) states that "Novice-level writing is common in Levels I and II of secondary school and in first-year college courses. Since students in the same course typically demonstrate a range of proficiency levels, we would not, however, expect all Level I and II or first-year college students to write on the novice level."

It must be pointed out, however, that the proficiency level as tentatively suggested by Magnan is merely an educated approximation. Since we should not expect all students to write at the same level, it is feasible that certain beginning-level students could indeed be writing at the lower end of the ACTFL Intermediate level, Intermediate-Low for example.

Although the word "create" is one essential component in determining proficiency at the Intermediate level in any of the four skills, students, even at the Novice-Mid level, can and do indeed *create* in the foreign language. While it is true that this creativity is limited by their knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, and structures, with strategically designed writing tasks, students can be moved away from the rote mimicry of producing only transcriptions of familiar words or phrases and of reproducing materials from memory (ACTFL, 1, p. 5).

Content of Writing Activities

The Intermediate level of proficiency in particular is often called the "ego level," for second-language learners tend to talk most readily about themselves. This is very understandable if we realize that the vocabulary that students are taught in lower-level courses tends to focus principally on the students' immediate environment, including lexical items that will allow them to talk specifically about themselves—family members, school, home, travel, work, daily routine, etc.,—what the ACTFL *Guidelines* label as "biographical information," and "familiar and personal topics." Students will respond most readily to tasks arising from their own experiences and knowledge. Therefore, a good source of content material and a relatively non-distracting topic for early writing activities is the students themselves. The texts produced will be meaningful because the students themselves create them.

Many new proficiency-oriented textbooks stress personalization of activities and vocabulary in pseudocommunicative contexts. Beginning-level students tend to talk about themselves and their personal experiences and environment in such activities. This tendency can be used advantageously and can be transferred from speaking (the primary skill stressed in most classrooms) to writing, thereby maintaining

go from speaking
to writing

total continuity between skills in the use of vocabulary and grammar while underlining, with the teacher's prompting, the structural and stylistic differences between the two skills.

Sample Writing Activities

One functional and realistic task is correspondence. However, it is unrealistic to expect beginning-level students to perform well on such an open-ended extended activity at early stages of second-language learning when they have not yet been exposed to many aspects of extended discourse: paragraph development including coherence and cohesive elements, as exemplified through the use of subject and object pronoun substitutes, relative pronouns, conjunctions, compound and/or complex sentences, sequencing (temporal) adverbs, etc. Communicative writing activities should of necessity be sequenced from the point of view of teacher control as well as of length and complexity of the writing sample required. Similarly, such activities should move from a focus on one or a selected number of points for formative evaluation (grammar, thematic vocabulary, etc.) to more global tasks for summative evaluation.

WRITING ACTIVITY 1: One quite practical task is to have students develop a message sequentially in a given context beginning with a telegraphic style, moving to the style of postcard writing and ending with the message in an amplified letter format. Each stage will involve less and less teacher control and more and more substantive content and length. (See Figure 1.) Such sequenced activities afford students the practice necessary for developing their communicative skill in writing.

- A. You have just arrived in France for a semester study abroad. Your French teacher has asked you to send a telegram when you arrive. Fill out the following telegram form, telling your teacher that you are in Paris, that there are 15 students in your group, that you like them, and any other pertinent information. Don't forget...you pay per word! [NOTE: Using an actual telegram form not only provides an authentic touch but adds a true reading task since such documents call for additional information as well as give instructions—the name and address of the *destinataire* as well as of the *expéditeur*, how the form is to be filled out (*en CAPITALES, laisser une case blanche entre les mots, etc.*)].
- B. Now you have been in Paris for a month. You send a postcard to your teacher giving him/her more information about your classes, your

fellow students, what you do all day long, etc. [NOTE: This message is written basically in the present tense and focuses on the student and his or her daily routine. A postcard can be reproduced or designed using actual dimensions. Students will not be tempted to ask how much they should write since the physical space for the message is clearly limited and the content suggested. Students will respond to the task differently: some will only provide the required information while others will "try their wings" and be creative. Nonetheless, there is a certain protocol that must be followed in writing postcards. For instance, students should be expected to address and date the postcard correctly.]


- C. After two and a half months, you are beginning to feel homesick. You send a letter to your teacher. In this letter, you continue to tell about your experiences in Paris: where you have been, whom you have met, what you have done, etc. Be sure to let your teacher know how much you miss your parents! [NOTE: Now the content of the message calls for information written primarily in past time. While the message still focuses on the student, the time frame is different. The length of the letter automatically calls for more extended writing covering a wider range of possible topics. You should provide the students with a piece of stationery including the (authentic or fictitious) letterhead of their hotel. It is suggested that lines be drawn on the page so that reading the letters will be made easier.]

As opposed to the more global writing task presented above in Part C, writing activities can focus on specific points of grammar, yet retain a true communicative, authentic flavor. The sample activities below all focus on selected elements of the target language but are framed in realistic contexts.

WRITING ACTIVITY 2: There are several inventive ways to evaluate students' functional knowledge of past tenses that do not call for the mechanical replacement of infinitives by appropriate past tense forms. For example, in *Cher Journal Intime* below, there is no explicit indication that the student is to use the *passé composé*. The instructions, however, indicate situationally that the focus of the activity is on past actions. It should be noted that, in order to make the task realistic, a reason must be given for just why the American student is writing this diary in French!

Cher Journal Intime. In your personal diary (which you keep under lock and key

FIGURE 1

 N° 698		<h1 style="margin: 0;">TÉLÉGRAMME</h1>		Étiquettes		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"> Timbre à date </div>		N° d'appel : _____ INDICATIONS DE TRANSMISSION	
Ligne de numérotation			N° télégraphique		Taxe principale Taxes accessoires Total . .		N° de la ligne du P.V. : _____ Bureau de destination Département ou Pays		
Ligne pilote									
Bureau d'origine			Mots						
Date			Heure		Mentions de service				

Services spéciaux demandés : <small>(voir au verso)</small>	Inscrire en CAPITALES l'adresse complète (rue, n° bloc, bâtiment, escalier, etc...). le texte et la signature (une lettre par case ; laisser une case blanche entre les mots) :
	Nom et adresse
TEXTE et éventuellement signature très lisible	
Pour avis en cas de non remise, indiquer le nom et l'adresse de l'expéditeur :	
<small>(Ces indications ne sont transmises et taxées que sur demande de l'expéditeur.)</small>	

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and which you have written in French so that your roommate [brother/sister/parents] can't read it), you make your last entry for this year. This entry is a summary of the memorable occasions and activities you participated in during 1988. Fill in this page of your diary. [NOTE: It is logical to provide the students with a reproduction of a page from a diary that includes the day and the date. In this manner, the amount of material to be written is limited by the size of the page.]

WRITING ACTIVITY 3: Another very interesting and entertaining activity for testing the functional knowledge of past tenses, in this case, the *passé composé*, is to have students write the story of a fairy tale based on an illustration. In their story, you may limit them to the number of sentences that are required. Should there be a need for additional vocabulary, you can provide it, since the focus of this activity is on the correct use of the past tense in a well-known context and not the use of specific vocabulary.

Un conte de fées. Below is a picture based on a famous story that you certainly recognize. Write six sentences in French to tell *what happened* in this story. In case you don't remember the story very well, you might have to make up some parts. That's fine. Here is some helpful vocabulary:

<i>le loup</i>	wolf	<i>le lit</i>	bed
<i>la forêt</i>	forest	<i>la grand-mère</i>	grandmother
<i>le panier</i>	basket	<i>tuer</i>	to kill
<i>les yeux (m)</i>	eyes	<i>les dents (f)</i>	teeth

[NOTE: Clearly, the object of this activity is to test the accurate and appropriate use of the *passé composé* in the narration of a series of past actions. For this reason, distortions in the story do not count. As a logical follow-up to this activity, the same illustration may be used later as a prompt for a retelling of the story, this time including both description (*l'imparfait*) and narration (*le passé composé*). The fact that a well-known context is the basis for the writing task helps the student see the logical development of ideas in lengthier writing activities.]

WRITING ACTIVITY 4: In evaluating the students' ability to express themselves in future time, either through the use of the *futur proche* (*aller* + infinitive) or the use of the future tense, an interesting activity is that of having students send you a greeting

card during Christmas break. For cultural authenticity, it would be more appropriate to have them send a New Years card, a fact that you can explain before the activity.

Une carte pour le prof. In order to impress me with the wealth of knowledge you have gained in this class, shortly after you arrive home for Christmas break, you send me a card...written entirely in French! You include a note telling me what *you, your family and your friends ARE GOING TO DO* during vacation. [NOTE: It is again suggested that a real card be copied, for both authenticity and size of the writing space. In this, as in all other activities mentioned, there will often be significantly more language provided by the student than just the specific area being tested. How to cope with errors that appear in other aspects of the writing sample will be addressed in the section entitled "Evaluating Writing Samples."]

WRITING ACTIVITY 5: The following activity simply sets the tone in which the use of the subjunctive is logical and appropriate. Nonetheless, students are allowed to avoid the subjunctive where possible, thereby indicating not only that they understand when this form of the verb should be used but just how it is used.

Une invitation. You have been invited to a dinner party at a friend's home next Saturday night. Unfortunately, you have already made plans. Since this invitation calls for an R.S.V.P. in writing, you must respond. Send your regrets to the friend who has invited you, and explain why you cannot attend. [NOTE: It is important to provide students with a (simulated) piece of note paper on which they are to write their R.S.V.P. Not only do you evaluate their handling of the subjunctive, but the sociolinguistic and functional appropriateness of their response in carrying out this task.]

WRITING ACTIVITY 6: Another excellent writing task is responding to a letter from an imaginary pen pal. In this situation, the student is given a letter that contains basic information about the pen pal as well as numerous questions. The letter that the students receive can be purposefully seeded with vocabulary and structures that have been recently studied in class and that are to be tested. At this early stage in the development of the students' writing

ability, providing a model allows the students to imitate the style and form of the letter, furnishes certain vocabulary items, and prompts specific yet personalized answers.

Une lettre de France. You have just received a letter from your French pen pal. In this

letter, your pen pal asks you some questions and makes some comments. Write your reply to this letter. (See Figure 2.) [NOTE: It is again advisable to furnish students with lined paper on which they are to write their responses.]

FIGURE 2

Paris, le 5 avril 1988

Cher/Chère _____,

Merci pour ta carte d'anniversaire. Comment est-ce que tu savais la date? Tu ne m'as jamais dit la date de ton anniversaire—oh, si tu me la dis, je vais donc t'envoyer aussi une jolie carte.

Dis-moi quelque chose sur la vie universitaire aux USA. Combien de cours suis-tu à l'université? Ici en France nous suivons 3 ou 4 cours pendant l'année. Quels cours suis-tu actuellement? Tu aimes tes profs? Tu as du contact avec tes profs? Ici, nous avons très peu de contact avec nos profs. Nous les écoutons en classe, et après, c'est fini.

Dans notre cours de sciences politiques, on étudie le gouvernement américain et on a vu un film tourné à Washington— quelle belle ville! As-tu jamais visité Washington? Les sciences po, j'aime. C'est mon sujet préféré. Je voudrais travailler dans le gouvernement après avoir fini mes études. Et toi? Quel est ton sujet préféré? En quoi est-ce que tu te spécialises?

Où habites-tu quand tu es à l'université? On m'a parlé de camarades de chambre. As-tu un(e) camarade? Que penses-tu de ton/ta camarade? Vous vous entendez ou non? Ici, j'habite seule.

Je te quitte maintenant pour faire mes devoirs (à notre école, on travaille dur!).

Grosses bises,
Jacqueline

Evaluating Writing Samples

Once students have had practice in these prewriting aspects of skill development, we are confronted with the ominous problem of evaluation — “ominous” because many teachers are hesitant to assign subjective grades to student work, since such grades are frequently based on impressions. Discrete-point scoring, on the other hand, is easy, quick, and objective; such grades can easily be accounted for and explained. In addition, we often feel that written work calls for meticulous (and tedious) correction, yet the inordinate amount of time spent in correcting written work is seldom rewarded by improved student performance on subsequent tasks. Semke (15) notes, as well, that “the amount of free-writing assigned often may be determined more by the amount of time a teacher has to

correct it than by the amount believed to be most beneficial to a student's learning” (p. 195).

Research has shown that holistic scoring of students' written work can be as effective, if not more effective, than objective discrete-point scoring techniques, and that it offers a very strong measure of validity and reliability, especially when overall attained writing proficiency is to be assessed (Kaczmarek, 8; Mullen, 11; Evola, Mamer, and Lentz, 2; Homburg, 5; Perkins, 13). Reliability in scoring can be improved, especially if the grader establishes criteria to focus the reader's attention on significant aspects of the compositions and sets a common standard for judging the quality of the writing (Perkins, 13, p. 654).

Holistic scoring involves one or more readers assigning a single grade based on the total impression of a

whole text. Since, in holistic scoring, the entire written text is evaluated as a whole, it is important to establish the specific criteria upon which the evaluation is to be based prior to undertaking the evaluation. This does not mean establishing a catalogue of precise individual errors that might appear, but rather deciding what impact the errors that are present have on the overall tone, structure, and comprehensibility of the writing sample.

"Holistic evaluation is usually guided by a holistic scoring guide which describes each feature and identifies high, middle, and low quality levels for each feature" (Perkins, 13, p. 655). This scoring guide should be based on the realistic expectations appropriate to the level of the course as spelled out in the course objectives, the specific course content—grammar, vocabulary, and structures—and the emphasis placed on the various elements of the subject matter of the course, as well as on the earliest stages of true composition techniques that might have been taught or discussed and practiced.

By spelling out the scoring guide in advance, graders can avoid falling prey to many of the causes of the diversity of judgment among graders or among papers evaluated by one grader: "1) flavor and personality

('style as the revelation of a personality, individuality, originality, interest, and sincerity'), 2) organization and analysis, 3) quality of ideas, 4) usage, sentence structure, punctuation, and 5) wording and spelling" (Perkins, 13, p. 654).

Because of the subjectivity inherent in holistic scoring however, we need to guard against judging the whole text in terms of only one of its aspects (for example, the grammar and spelling). "In grading, as in giving feedback, we should not let attention to errors in mechanics overshadow more communicative aspects" (Magnan, 10, p. 130). Commenting on the statements made and ideas found, that is, on the *content* of the writing sample, underlines for students the value of their communicative effort and is far more beneficial than the copious outpouring of red ink to highlight errors.

Examples of Holistic Scoring Techniques

An excellent example of holistic scoring is found in the procedures used in evaluating the Advanced Placement Examinations in foreign languages, as suggested by Johnson (7) in a publication from the Educational Testing Service (See Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

SCORING THE ADVANCED PLACEMENT EXAMINATION

Demonstrates Superiority	9	<i>Strong</i> control of the language: proficiency and variety in grammatical usage with few significant errors; broad command of vocabulary and of idiomatic French.
Demonstrates Competence	8	<i>Good</i> general control of grammatical structures despite some errors and/or some awkwardness of style. Good use of idioms and vocabulary. Reads smoothly overall.
	7	
Suggests Competence	6	<i>Fair</i> ability to express ideas in French: correct use of simple grammatical structures or use of more complex structures without numerous serious errors. Some apt vocabulary and idioms. Occasional signs of fluency and sense of style.
	5	
Suggests Incompetence	4	<i>Weak</i> use of language with little control of grammatical structures. Limited vocabulary. Frequent use of anglicisms which force interpretations on the part of the reader. Occasional redeeming features.
	3	
Demonstrates Incompetence	2	<i>Clearly unacceptable</i> from most points of view. Almost total lack of vocabulary resources, little or no sense of idiom and/or style. Essentially gallicized English or <i>charabia</i> .
	1	
Floating Point		A one point bonus should be awarded for a coherent and well-organized essay or for a particularly inventive one.

Source: Johnson (7, p. 19)

The score that is given to any particular exam is determined largely by the student's use of language as measured against this scale. Skill in composition at a more advanced level is also taken into account, with some importance being given to factors of *content* (Does the writer really address the question?), *length* (Is the essay of sufficient length to provide an adequate basis for scoring? If not, points may be deducted.), and *organization* (Is the essay "well organized and coherent"? Good organization is a plus-value, while lack of organization may affect the score negatively, especially if there are few compensatory features.) (Johnson, 7, p. 18).

This scale is actually composed of three different scales, each of which offers progressively finer distinctions. The largest divisions on the left denote degrees of competence; the numerical scale in the center expands the five categories to nine, indicating whether the student is in the upper or lower category; and the narrative descriptions spell out in detail the conditions that must be met for a composition to fit into a certain category (Johnson, 7, p. 18). Such a scale may not be appropriate for evaluating the work of beginning-level students, but may be altered to fit the focus and emphasis of the training in writing that has been provided. (Appendix A provides a sample of student writing in response to the activity found in WRITING ACTIVITY 6 along with an evaluation of the sample based on the Advanced Placement holistic scoring scale as well as on two other scales mentioned below.)

The following is a set of teacher-made holistic criteria developed for the writing task outlined in WRITING ACTIVITY 6 in a second semester beginning French class. At this point, students had been studying the imperfect tense, indirect object pronouns (*lui/leur*), *savoir*, object pronouns (*me/te/nous/vous*), *dire/écrire/lire*, and disjunctive pronouns. Accordingly, the criteria address these specific grammar points in addition to all preceding material studied.

- 4 Answers all questions appropriately. Good use of pronoun substitutes. Smooth style. Wide range of vocabulary. Adds extra comments. Appropriate use of articles. Genders correct. Good control of variety of verb forms; primarily present, but some use of past and future times. Letter dated.
- 3 Questions answered adequately. Appropriate pronoun substitutes in general. Readable, although not smooth. Vocabulary somewhat limited—more or less copies cues in responses. Few additional comments. Fair control of articles and genders. Verb forms limited—mostly pre-

sent with some errors; few past and future times.

- 2 Limited responses to most questions. Basically copies cues. Rough in style. Very limited vocabulary. No additional comments. Poor control of articles and genders. Few pronoun substitutes. Almost completely in present tense with numerous errors.
- 1 Answers only a few questions. No control of pronoun substitutes. Copies cues with little variation. Weak vocabulary, use of articles and genders. All in present, sometimes inappropriate, with many errors. Poor grasp of communicative effort.

Examples of Analytic Scoring

Another potential scoring technique for writing is analytical scoring which involves separating the various features of a composition into individual components for scoring purposes. It should be noted that the rubrics for the components in the left-hand column of Figure 4 on the next page can be altered to match those elements that have been stressed in your own classes. Here again, this method of evaluation depends on a predetermined marking scheme which focuses on the key elements to be evaluated. No matter what components are used, clear definitions must be set up in advance to indicate the specific elements included under each heading as well as the aspects of writing that are included in each of these components.

Furthermore, it is evident that the descriptions of each rating (from 1-5 in the case illustrated) must be spelled out in detail. Descriptions of each end of this Likert-type scale should be given with 5 being "outstanding" and 1 being "poor," for example. In addition, exactly what is included in each of the components must be clarified: What do you mean by "grammar"? Is vocabulary appropriateness as well as variety to be included under "vocabulary"? What is meant by "mechanics," "fluency," "relevance"?

For the students, it is psychologically beneficial to add comments on the text, beginning with positive points and then progressing to more specific criticisms of aspects of their work.

There are several advantages to analytical scoring, as Perkins (13) points out:

1. It shows students how their particular grades were determined;
2. It provides a reliable score even among several different graders, because the grader's scoring is focused.
3. It provides helpful feedback on each piece of writing submitted "to determine the degree of

FIGURE 4

	5	4	3	2	1	COMMENTS:
Grammar						
Vocabulary						
Mechanics						
Fluency						
Relevance						

Source: Heaton (4, pp. 136-7).

mastery of a given learning task and to pinpoint the part of the task not mastered” (p. 656).

There are also several disadvantages to analytical scoring, most of which can be alleviated if care is exercised at the outset in the design of the scale:

- 1. The grader might establish *a priori* an immoderate standard; some graders may try to use an absolute standard of quality.
- 2. Various features in the writing sample are isolated from context and scored separately. A written text is clearly more than the sum of its parts.
- 3. The grader’s choice of categories can be vague and certainly arbitrary.
- 4. The scoring weights for each category must be adjusted for different writing tasks that include different kinds of discourse.

It is evident that a high degree of flexibility should be maintained in using analytical scoring, since the components or weightings assigned to the various components might have to be changed. For example, at the beginning level, the evaluation might focus on grammar and vocabulary, shift to relevance at the second-year level, and in upper-level courses, shift again to organization, thereby subsuming mechanics and fluency into the category (Perkins, 13, p. 657).

Conclusion

Irmscher (6) summarizes the confused priorities that arise from the lack of clearly defined values in the teaching and evaluation of writing:

Evaluation obviously implies values, but many teachers evaluate without defining them or just

feel frustrated because they can’t quantify the value they hold. Without clearly defined values, it is impossible to make consistent judgments and discriminations. And it is better yet if we can verbalize them so that commenting and grading do not seem personal without reference to objective criteria...Lacking a set of values [teachers]tend to deal only with particular flaws... Not knowing what else to do, teachers proofread instead of reading critically. Thus, error-free writing becomes synonymous in the minds of students with good writing, but of course it isn’t necessarily (Irmscher, pp. 142-3).

Likewise, there must be a value inherent in the writing task that we ask our students to perform, and this value must go beyond the desire for a high grade. We write to communicate both to ourselves and to others. We write because we need to communicate for social, business and professional reasons; we need to find out information; we need to give information; we need to have a written record of certain information—lectures and messages, for example. When the need to write exists, the motivation to write is present. Our students must have a need to write in the second language. However, even in the pseudocommunicative atmosphere of the classroom, they can be given realistic writing tasks. These tasks must not go beyond the students’ limits for self-expression in the second language, nor must they require students to say things that they would not normally be expected to say or to comment on things about which they have no knowledge.

With these caveats in mind, we can seriously begin integrating true writing skills into our curriculum, not

merely by adding on but by rethinking and restructuring activities to reflect real language use.

NOTES

¹ Several current textbooks that are based on functional aspects of communication, for example Alan Chamberlain and Ross Steele, *Guide pratique de la communication* (Paris: Didier, 1985), include sections on inviting ("Inviter," "Accepter une invitation," "Refuser une invitation," and "Remercier, Répondre aux remerciements," [pp. 17-20] that provide useful phrases and expressions as well as samples of written invitations and R.S.V.P.'s. The information and illustrations can be given to students prior to using this sort of writing activity.

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APPENDIX I

Evaluation of Writing Sample

The writing sample below is in response to the test item illustrated in WRITING EXERCISE 6, student responses to a letter from a French pen pal. The sample is faithfully transcribed from the student's handwritten response.

2/24/88

Chère Jacqueline

Bonjour! Comment allez-vous? Je suis comme-ci comme ça. Je suis heureux que tu as aimé la carte d'anniversaire. Je savais la date parce que je jamais une date. Je suis très intelligent!!

La vie de l'université est agréable, mais il n'est pas très intéressante. Mes cours sont ennuyement, mais le français est le mieux cour. Je suis cinq cours à l'université pendant le semestre. Je suis le français, l'histoire, l'anglais, les sciences politiques et la biologie. Mes profs sont bon. Oui, j'ai du contact avec mes profs.

L'université est près de Washington, mais j'habite en Connecticut dans l'été. J'ai visité l'université de Georgetown dans Washington D.C. ce weekend. Je préfère les sciences politiques aussi. Je vais être un lawyer. Mon spécialisé est les sciences politiques et l'anglais.

J'habite le Marsh à l'université. J'ai un camarade de chambre, nous avons un bon relationship.

Maintenant, je sors parce que mon prof de français est impatient.

Grosses bises,

Chris

Evaluation:

a. *Holistic scoring* (Advanced Placement): Since this activity comes from the second semester of a beginning-level class, it would very inappropriate to use the AP scoring scale as it is presently written, since it calls for evaluating the use of complex structures and "occasional signs of fluency and sense of style." Nonetheless, we may use the general descriptions provided for the purpose of illustration. We can clearly tell from the outset that this sample does not fall in the 1-4 range (incompetence). We can also see that it does not deserve a 9 (superiority) due to the number of errors that appear in the sample—errors in grammar, syntax and vocabulary. Furthermore, this student has not taken advantage of the opportunity to go beyond simply answering the stimulus questions in the letter by adding additional comments or reactions. This student response does not read smoothly. In answering a letter, the correspondent cannot assume that the reader remembers all the questions asked in the original letter. In this particular response, the student has simply answered the questions asked in the order in which they appear, and he makes no effort to remind the writer of exactly which question he is answering. We are now confronted with placing this sample somewhere in the rating range of 5-8. This student does demonstrate a certain weakness in vocabulary control: *Mes cours sont ennuyusement; j'habite en Connecticut; Je vais être un lawyer; nous avons un bon relationship*. On the other hand, he does show that he has a good grasp of the names of the subjects he is studying, he uses appropriate adjectives (*La vie de l'université est agréable; mon prof de français est impatient*). As for his control of grammatical elements, he tends to show a functional knowledge of past tenses (*Je savais la date; J'ai visité l'université de Georgetown...ce week-end*), although he did omit the verb *oublier* at the beginning of the letter. There is a slight weakness in adjective agreement: *Mes profs sont bon; Mes cours sont ennuyusement*, and he confuses the adverb *mieux* with the adjective *meilleur*.

There are only two examples of pronoun substitution, and in one instance, there is an error: *La vie de l'université est agréable, mais il n'est pas très intéressante; J'ai un camarade de chambre, nous avons un bon relationship* (although this is an example of a comma splice). Because of the number of errors in a variety of cases (although in most cases these types of errors occur only once), because of certain weaknesses in vocabulary choice and use, and because of the slightly disconnected nature of the text, this sample is rated as a 7 (Demonstrates Competence): "Good general control of grammatical structures despite some errors..." Although a rating of 7 states that the text "Reads smoothly overall," it must be kept in mind that this work is a product of a second-semester beginning-level student. At this elementary level, the text does indeed read relatively smoothly, based on (1) the limited amount of writing that students at this level are asked to do; (2) the lack of insistence on higher-level writing using the various elements found in extended discourse in beginning-level courses; and (3) the relatively limited amount of risk-taking that a beginning-level student will use in willfully going beyond what the instructions call for—in this case, "Write your reply to this letter." A rating of 5 or 6 would place it too low in evaluating his ability, while an 8 would be too generous with respect to this sample of writing.

b. *Holistic scoring* (teacher-made criteria): According to the criteria which were specifically created for this test item, the student clearly does not fall into the category of a 1 or a 2. He has willingly added extra comments in his response to the letter. The criteria spelled out in a rating of 4, however, are apparently beyond the specifics presented in the student text: there is limited and inaccurate use of pronoun substitutes, the style is not smooth, the vocabulary is relatively limited to the words provided in the stimulus text, and additional comments are rather limited. He does show an acceptable and accurate use of most articles. Genders are often incorrect. There is a preponderance of present tense usage; there are three examples of past

tenses and one indication of future time (*Je vais être un lawyer*). The letter is dated, but incorrectly since he has used the American style of date rather than the French style. Therefore, this sample receives a rating of 3. Such a rating can easily be converted to a numerical or letter grade and can be weighted in relation to the entire test.

c. *Analytic scoring*: If the sample chart for analytic scoring is used, the specific descriptive criteria for the ratings (1-5) as well as for the categories (Grammar, Vocabulary, etc.) must be spelled out in advance. Such a scoring chart is valuable to the student in that he/she can see exactly where the weaknesses in the writing sample appear. The rating scale may be defined as 5 = excellent, 3 = good, 1 = poor. The grammar and

vocabulary categories are relatively self-explanatory. Mechanics can be described as the appropriate use of pronoun substitutes, varied sentence structures and logically sequenced writing. Fluency can be defined as the amount of additional information the student provides, i.e., does the student go beyond what is called for in the stimulus and contribute additional information or comments? (This definition of fluency is similar to that in oral proficiency where it essentially means amount of talk.)

Finally, relevance can be defined as relevance and appropriateness of comments and responses to the stimulus provided. Using these definitions, the writing sample would be evaluated as

	5	4	3	2	1
Grammar		✓			
Vocabulary			✓		
Mechanics			✓		
Fluency		✓			
Relevance	✓				

The score for this writing sample would then be the average of the five scores: $19 \div 5 = 3.8$. If 5 = A, 4 = B, 3 = C, 2 = D and 1 = F, then Chris' score on this writing task would be a C+.