

Figure 8: Developmental Writing Program (cont.)**EXPOSITION**

Situation: Read the following poem (short story, article) and write a short paper.

First Year Tasks

1. Write a sentence summarizing the main idea.
2. Write three reasons why you think this is the main idea.
3. Conclude with a personal opinion about the text.

Second Year Tasks

1. Write 2 sentences summarizing the main idea.
2. Discuss the specific aspects of the text that you like/do not like.
3. Conclude with a personal opinion about the text and explain your opinion.

Third Year Tasks

1. Summarize the main idea.
2. Explain specifically how the author communicates the message.
3. Discuss the specific language and imagery in the text.
4. Conclude with an evaluation of the text.

ARGUMENTATION

Situation: Write an article arguing for or against the following statement: Americans are obsessed with physical exercise.

First Year Tasks

1. Introduce the subject.
2. State your opinion.
3. Explain why you believe this.
4. Conclude with a restatement of the subject.

Second Year Tasks

1. Introduce the subject and state your opinion.
2. Support your opinion with three facts.
3. Suggest why Americans are (not) this way.
4. Conclude by showing how your argument proves your point.

Third Year Tasks

1. Introduce the subject, state your opinion, and explain why you believe this.
2. Support your opinion by citing facts.
3. Suggest why Americans are (not) this way and give another informed opinion (i.e., a coach, a doctor).
4. Give an opposing view.
5. Conclude with persuasive statements which prove your point.

Personality differences may also play a role in how students write. Carrell and Monroe's (1993) study of students in both native language and ESL composition classes provides insight into how personality types can affect writing. Using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator they found that students who were "intuitive," "feeling," and "perceiving" performed differently on writing tasks than students who were "sensing," "thinking," and "judging." They posit that students with different personality traits will have different learning styles and will therefore benefit from different approaches to teaching writing. If teachers begin to teach writing from the start, these kinds of issues can be addressed early, thereby helping students to achieve success in writing throughout their FL studies.

10. *Teach writing from the start.*

Research and experience show that high school and college students are able to write extended compositions after as few as four weeks of FL study.

Figure 9: Composition Topic for *Système-D*

You have just received the name of your new French-speaking pen pal in the mail. You want to write him or her a letter, telling something about you and your family, and finding out a little about him or her.

Tasks

1. Use the appropriate letter format.
PHRASES: Writing a letter (informal)
2. Introduce yourself, giving your name, age, and where you live.
GRAMMAR: Prepositions with geographical places; *Avoir* expressions
3. Talk about your family.
GRAMMAR: Possessive adjectives (*mon, ma, mes; son, sa, ses; ton, ta, tes; notre votre*)
VOCABULARY: Family members; Animals
4. Write four things about yourself to describe your personality—including what you like and/or dislike.
VOCABULARY: Personality
GRAMMAR: Verb + infinitive
5. Write four things that you are not, including things that you do not like.
GRAMMAR: Negation with *ne ... pas*; Verb + infinitive
6. Ask three questions.
GRAMMAR: Interrogative *est-ce que*; Interrogative adverbs
7. End your letter with the appropriate closing.

(Designed by R. M. Terry for students at the University of Richmond.)

CASE STUDY

At the University of Richmond, students in first- and second-year French are learning to write using *Système-D* (Noblitt et al., 1992).⁷ This computer writing assistant (reviewed in chapter 3) is particularly well-suited for beginning students, since it provides linguistic support when students need it. This immediate response to linguistic queries gives the novice FL writer a sense of confidence. It is important to note that students writing with *Système-D* make errors typical of their level of study; use of this software does not guarantee error-free compositions.

Students in first-year and second-year French were given the composition topic shown in Figure 9. The following compositions are representative examples of work done by the students in these courses. The first composition was written by a student after four weeks of French study, and the second one was written by a student who had one year of French study. The brackets indicate incorrect spelling, grammar, or use of language structures.

Student #1 (four weeks of French):

[Chère] amie,

Salut! [Ca] va? [Je suis tres bien.] S'il vous plaît, je permets [dire une peu] de moi-même. Je m'appelle Amanda Breziner et j'ai dix-huit ans. J'habite à Dover, Massachusetts aux Etats-Unis. Qu'est-ce qu'il y a dans votre ville? Dover est très petit mais très beau.

J'ai une [petit] famille: ma mère, ma soeur, ma grand-mère. Avez-vous des soeurs ou des frères? Aussi j'ai deux chattes. [Ils appellent] Buttercup et Snowy. Ils sont intelligents et énergiques.

Je suis sportive, je joue [] tennis en été. J'aime l'été! Je suis toujours heureuse sauf quand je suis fatiguée. Je suis enthousiaste de [la école] et [ambitieux à mes cours]. J'aime chanter et jouer [à la théâtre musicale]. Quand je suis seule, j'aime lire et écouter la radio. [Usually] j'écoute la radio chaque matin avant [] école.

Je n'aime pas [veiller en retard] quand [j'ai devoir]. Quelquefois je regarde la télévision [tout nuit]. Je déteste des [réclames à nuit]. Des gens sont très stupides. Aussi, je n'aime pas beaucoup de bruit, spécialement lorsque je dors. J'aime voyager mais je déteste dormir [à] les avions.

[Comment-vous] aimez voyager? Aimes-tu ton cours? Quel [temp] fait-il? [Ecries moi] bientôt.

Sincèrement, Amanda⁸

[Dear friend,

Hello! How are you? I am very good. Please, I permit to say a little about myself. My name is Amanda Breziner and I am eighteen years old. I live in

Dover, Massachusetts in the United States. What is there in your town? Dover is very little but very beautiful.

I have a little family: my mother, my sister, my grandmother. Do you have sisters or brothers? Also I have two cats. Their names are Buttercup and Snowy. They are intelligent and energetic.

I am athletic, I play tennis in the summer. I like the summer! I am always happy except when I am tired. I am enthusiastic about school and ambitious in my courses. I like to sing and perform in musical theater. When I am alone, I like to read and listen to the radio. Usually I listen to the radio every morning before school.

I don't like to stay up late when I have homework. Sometimes I watch television all night. I hate advertisements at night. Some people are very stupid. Also, I don't like a lot of noise, especially when I am sleeping. I like to travel but I hate to sleep in airplanes.

How do you like to travel? Do you like you course. What is the weather like? Write me soon.

Sincerely, Amanda]

Student # 2 (one year of French):

[Cher] Angelique,

Bonjour! Je m'appelle Owen. Je suis ton nouveau "stylo copain." J'ai [vingt et un] ans, et j'habite à Arlington, Virginia. Je pense que je suis sympathique, mais je suis très [orienté] aussi! J'aime jouer [tout] les sports, mais j'adore jouer [] golf. (Je joue au golf mal pourtant!) J'aime regarder [] baseball, [] football, et [] football américain à la télévision, et j'aime jouer [ils] aussi. J'aime fêter avec mes amis [sur] les week-ends.

Je n'aime pas [] gens qui sont impolis ou embêtants. Je [deteste] [] gens qui visitent mon appartement et partent quand l'appartement est sale! [Je] [deteste] que j'ai une blessure à ma poitrine aussi (elle blesse).] Je n'aime pas les New York Yankees.

Ma famille est très sympathique d'habitude. Ma mère, Laurie, a quarante-huit ans (!) et elle est infirmière. Mon père, Dwight, a quarante-[neuf] ans et il aura cinquante ans [à] novembre. Il adore les Boston Red Sox. Mon frère, Peter, a dix-neuf ans. Il [alla] à un college à West Virginia pour un an, mais il [travailler] à la "Sept-Onze" maintenant. Ma [chiene], Sasha, est très âgée.

Je désire [connaître de toi]. Est-ce que tu parles anglais bien? Est-ce [] tu penses que O.J. Simpson est coupable? Ou, est-ce que tu penses que Cato [] tué Nicole et Ronald? Ecrivez bientôt!

Ton ami, Owen⁹

[Dear Angelique,

Hello! My name is Owen. I am your new "pen pal." I am twenty-one years old, and I live in Arlington, Virginia. I think that I am nice, but I am very oriented [?] also! I like all sports, but I love to play golf. (I play golf badly

however!) I like to watch baseball, soccer, and football on television, and I like to play them too. I like to party with my friends on the week-ends.

I don't like people who are impolite or bothersome. I hate people who visit my apartment and leave when the apartment is dirty! I hate when I have a wound on my chest also (it wounds) [?] I don't like the New York Yankees.

My family is very nice generally. My mother, Laurie, is forty-eight years old (!) and she is a nurse. My father, Dwight, is forty-nine years old and he will be fifty in November. He loves the Boston Red Sox. My brother, Peter, is nineteen years old. He went to a college in West Virginia for a year, but he to work at the "Seven-Eleven" now. My dog, Sasha, is very old.

I desire (want) to know of you. Do you speak English well? Do you think that O.J. Simpson is guilty? Or, do you think that Cato killed Nicole and Ronald? Write soon!

Your friend, Owen]

Despite the relatively short amount of time spent studying French, both of these students succeeded in writing compositions that show originality and are comprehensible. In addition to being able to write from the earliest stages of language study, elementary- and intermediate-level students are overwhelmingly positive in their reaction to using this computer writing assistant.¹⁰

CONCLUSIONS

As stated in the hypothesis of this chapter, FL writing should be taught at all stages of language study. Our students are members of an academic community that frequently measures students' performance by their writing. Therefore, it is critical that we foster the development of this skill in the FL curriculum.

... teachers cannot expect students to produce communicatively complex language without practice. Students need opportunities to reflect in terms of that language's propositions or idea units. The ability to engage in discourse beyond descriptive or factual sentence series, to articulate wishes, requests, gratitude, or irritation in a manner that reveals sensitivity to the foreign norms, commences with cognitive practice. FL students need early, consistent opportunities for such practice, because sophisticated language can only develop from sophisticated thought (Swaffar, 1991, 270).

In defining a coherent approach to teaching FL writing, it is important to recognize both the short- and long-term goals of this endeavor. In the short term, we want students to practice the target language in a modality other than speech so that they are able to communicate a message to a designated community as well as to perform adequately in courses that focus on academic writing. In the long term, we want to increase students' overall cognitive func-

tioning. The act of writing in the FL, just as writing in L1, requires students to think critically. When FL students are required to write beyond the sentence level from the start, they learn to communicate ideas with a reader without the pressure of face-to-face communication, to record experience, to explore a subject, to become familiar with the conventions of written discourse in the target language, and to discover the link between writing and thinking (Raimes, 1983).

Finally, in rethinking we need to reinvent. FL teachers need to recognize: 1) that students are often cognitively mature adults whose writing competence is already fairly well defined, 2) that teaching must take into account the complexity of the FL writing process, 3) that writing with computers can help students engage in FL writing process from the start, and 4) that teaching writing is more than evaluating the product. The traditional paradigm, which included writing in the FL curriculum after students had already attained some mastery of the target language, is no longer valid. This book offers a challenge to the traditional paradigm, proposing that teaching FL writing is a pedagogical imperative at all levels of language study.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

1. Analyze the strategies that teachers use for teaching writing in lower-level language courses as well as upper-level literature and civilization courses.
2. Compare the writing of advanced-level language students who had an opportunity to write expository and argumentative essays from the beginning of their language study to those who did not.
3. Compare the writing of students at all levels who complete formal pre-writing exercises to those who do not.
4. Determine whether sentence combining and reformulation exercises help elementary-level language students increase the syntactic complexity of their writing.
5. Devise a measurement instrument for evaluating task difficulty. Then, analyze the relationship between task difficulty and student performance.
6. Compare the writing of elementary-level language students who use a computer writing assistant and those who do not.

Notes

1. In a study involving 1,373 students and 59 teachers of French and Spanish from 12 universities, Harlow and Muyskens ("Priorities for Intermediate-Level Language Instruction," *The Modern Language Journal* 78(2):141-154,

1994) found that writing ranked relatively low on a list of priorities for intermediate year university instruction. Both students and teachers responded to questionnaires designed to assess immediate goals and the importance of activities to achieve those goals. Speaking, listening, and developing self-confidence were top-priority goals for both students and teachers. With regard to the activities for achieving goals, students and teachers ranked speaking in the target language as most important, however, they had differing views about writing. Teachers ranked writing third on the list of 19 activities, whereas students ranked writing 10th. Given the low ranking that students give to writing activities, the authors suggest that there is a need to reevaluate the approach to writing.

2. Stephen Krashen's Monitor Theory is described in detail in his book entitled *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982).

3. The Army Specialized Training Program came into being during the 1940s in response to the international threat of war. First used at the Defense Language Institute, this program sought to train young men for work in defense and espionage. The goal of instruction was to achieve superior listening comprehension and native-like speech.

4. It is important to note that any approach to FL teaching may incorporate a proficiency orientation.

5. The traditional French *explication de texte* is an excellent tool for teaching students how to do a close reading of a text as well as a way of teaching them to developing an awareness of various textual features when they write.

6. This developmental writing program was first described in Scott's "Write From the Start: A Task-oriented Developmental Writing Program for Foreign Language Students," in R. M. Terry, (Ed.), *Dimension: Language '91*, Valdosta, GA: The Southern Conference on Language Teaching.

7. Professor Robert Terry at the University of Richmond provided the material for this case study.

8. Thanks to Amanda Breziner at the University of Richmond for allowing her composition to be published in this study.

9. Thanks to Owen Rodgers at the University of Richmond for allowing his composition to be published in this study.

10. Surveys regarding the use of *Système-D* are given to students every semester at Vanderbilt University. An average of 350 elementary- and intermediate-level students use the software during the fall semester and an average of 250 elementary- and intermediate-level students use the software during the spring semester. Responses indicate that more than 95 percent of the students like the software and feel that they learn a great deal when they use it.

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