

The French Program

Assessment Exercise: Review and Improve our Advanced Grammar and Composition Sequence

- Part I: Statement of the Problem.
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Course Description

- Students of French beyond the first two years follow a program of study that takes them from grammar instruction, conversation and short readings (2A,B,C) to the analysis of complex texts and the writing of long papers in French (5-8 pages) (e.g. French 120 “Camus and Ethics”).
- The 100A/B two-quarter sequence (Advance Composition & Grammar) is intended to help them make this transition.
- Typically there are between 20-30 students in 100A/B. They are most frequently French majors and minors, and also Comp Lit majors, and English majors.

Part I: Statement of the Problem.

- Students frequently have a hard time making the transition from lower-division language courses to upper-division writing and reading courses. The two-quarter series 100A-100B has traditionally bridged the gap.
- Students have complained that they do not feel sufficiently prepared. Professors in the upper-division courses have complained that students do not write well. 100A and 100B are not doing their job!

Why might 100A and 100B be failing to provide our students with the preparation they need?

- There has never been a stable curriculum or a set syllabus for the sequence.
- The sequence has been taught in the past by a rotating set of professors and lecturers, some of whom have little background in teaching this level.
- The textbook changed every term, according to the instructor's preferences.
- No Student Learning Outcomes were identified for either section of the sequence. Therefore, nobody knew precisely what the students were to have achieved at the end of each section.
- Due to the recent (and continuing) budget cuts in the School of Humanities, the French Program has been understaffed. The 100A/B sequence has often been taught by temporary lecturers who have less knowledge of what is expected of students in the upper-division seminars.

Phase I: Developing objectives

- Thanks to the generosity of the Assessment Grant Program, we were able to initiate a thorough review of the 100A/B sequence in Fall of 2012.
- Our method consisted primarily in gathering data and formulating a new set of Student Learning Objectives.
- We met several times over the summer of 2012 to examine the materials used previously in the course. We also consulted the guidelines of ACTFL as well as guidelines from the emeritus Language Supervisor to generate a new set of Student Learning Objectives far more precise than the earlier ones.

	ACTLF Proficiency Guidelines		Carrie Noland's Objectives		Emeritus Language Supervisor Objectives	
	Advanced Low/Mid	Advanced Mid/High	100A	100B	100A	100B
Grammar	Know major time frames. Good control of the most frequently used target-language syntactic structures.	Good control of a range of grammatical structures.	Major time frames (emphasis on present tense and past tenses). Relative, demonstrative & interrogative pronouns. Expressions of time (duration, links between moments), cause & consequence (<i>pourquoi, parce que, lorsque, à cause de</i>)	Major time frames (emphasis on subjunctive & conditional) Active & passive voice; pronominal verbs Adjectives	Major time frames. Object pronouns; relative pronouns. Discussion of grammatical problems arising from texts.	Discussion of grammatical problems arising from texts.
Vocabulary	Good control of a range of general vocabulary.	Good control of a fairly wide general vocabulary	Self/Relationships Places (house, monuments, etc)	Emphasis on vocabulary needed for analytical writing & argument		Literary terms. Formulae for introducing topics, making transitions, refuting an argument, reporting another writer's

						position and argument.
Writing	<p>Ability to narrate & describe in major time frames with some control of aspect.</p> <p>Able to compose simple summaries.</p> <p>Thoughts expressed clearly and supported by arguments.</p> <p>Incorporate limited number of cohesive devices.</p> <p>May resort to redundancy and awkward repetition.</p> <p>May rely on patterns of oral discourse and the writing</p>	<p>Able to develop arguments and construct hypotheses.</p> <p>Show ease of expression.</p> <p>Able to write about a variety of topics with significant precision and detail.</p> <p>Can narrate and describe in the major time frames with solid control of aspect.</p>	<p>Able to write about personal experience:</p> <p>"Le <u>récit</u> personnel"</p> <p>Able to describe "Description des <u>lieux</u>"</p> <p>Able to summarize & analyze (toward textual analysis)</p> <p>"<u>Compte rendu critique</u>"</p>	<p>Able to analyze a short text</p> <p>"<u>L'explication de texte</u>"</p> <p>Able to write an argument</p> <p>"<u>L'essai argumentatif</u>"</p>	<p><u>Organization</u></p> <p>Able to define an arguable thesis & write a clear thesis statement.</p> <p>Will be able to develop an effective introductory paragraph.</p> <p>Will choose an appropriate pattern of organization.</p> <p>Will show relationship among main points and thesis.</p> <p>Will develop an effective conclusion.</p> <p><u>Function</u></p> <p>Will be able to introduce a topic and thesis.</p> <p>Will give supportive evidence.</p> <p>Will express cause-effect relationships.</p> <p>Will use effective transitional devices</p>	<p><u>Organization</u></p> <p>Students will be able to write resumes involving identification and paraphrase of the main ideas in texts.</p> <p>Will be able to organize and present evidence to support a thesis coherently.</p> <p><u>Function</u></p> <p>Will use citations effectively to support a thesis with reference to a text.</p> <p>Will be able to write an argument.</p> <p>Will be able to analyze and critique a text in a way that shows</p>

Reading	<p>Able to understand conventional narrative and descriptive texts with a clear underlying structure though their comprehension may be uneven. These texts predominantly contain high-frequency vocabulary and structures.</p>	<p>Able to go beyond comprehension of the facts in a text, and to begin to recognize author-intended inferences. An emerging awareness of the aesthetic properties of language and of its literary styles permits comprehension of a wide variety of texts.</p>	<p>Able to read short literary texts and relate texts to personal experience. Able to do some textual analysis.</p>	<p>Able to read short literary texts and analyze critically.</p>	<p>Able to do detailed reading of varied short texts. Will be able to recognize major themes in text. Will review reading strategies (skimming, scanning, cognate recognition, etc.).</p>	<p>Able to read progressively longer texts (short stories). More in-depth, close reading of selected passages in a text (tone, point of view, etc.). Able to find main ideas in texts and recognize relationship between main idea & supporting evidence. Will develop ability to use formal analysis of sentence structure to make meaning clear.</p>
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	FRENCH 2A	FRENCH 2B	FRENCH 2C
Grammar	<p>Present & past tenses. Pronominal verbs. Expressions with "<u>depuis</u>" Expressions with "<u>venir de, être en train de, aller + inf.</u>". Articles & <u>partitif</u>. Adjectives & adverbs; comparative & superlative</p>	<p>Interrogative pronouns & adjectives. Negative expressions. Object pronouns; relative pronouns Subjunctive.</p>	<p>Pronominal verbs with past tenses. Uses of infinitive & gerund. Future & conditional. Le passé simple.</p>
Vocabulary	<p>Self, family life, education, relationships Places (Paris, cities) Food & meals Politic & national identity</p>	<p>Social classes, education & professions Hobbies & past-times Immigration & multiculturalism <u>Francophonie</u>, countries & regions, travel</p>	<p>Art & Media Vocabulary from "<u>Mr Ibrahim & les fleurs du Coran</u>"</p>
Writing	<p>Will be able to write short paragraphs about personal experience. Will write short descriptions of places such as own city. Will write short expository paragraphs about what it means to be an American. Will write short argument about importance of voting. Will be able to write 300-400 word composition using vocabulary and structures studied in class.</p>	<p>Will be able to write short paragraphs about personal experience. Will write short responses to fiction and non-fiction class readings. Will be able to write a <u>300-400 word</u> analysis of a text using citations.</p>	<p>Will write short responses to fiction and non-fiction class readings. Will be able to write a <u>300-400 word</u> analysis of a text using citations.</p>
Reading	<p>Will be able to identify main ideas in text and get the gist of the text. Will be able to understand and</p>	<p>Will be able to identify main ideas in text and get the gist of the text. Will be able to understand and discuss</p>	<p>Will be able to understand and discuss longer texts (short stories). Will be able to read short novel</p>

Phase II: Developing a syllabus

- At the end of the summer we met with the two instructors of the sequence and discussed the new SLOs and how to achieve them.
- Instructors presented a draft of their syllabus.

Phase III: Evaluation

Method: We instituted a set of “rubrics” for assignments at each level; and a procedure for collecting and evaluating student work.

- In the Spring Quarter we reviewed a sample of essays from 100A & 100B, which helped us to see more clearly what problems still need to be addressed.
- We conducted an open-ended interview with both instructors

Results

- Not a lot of difference between 100A and 100B essays in terms of language (syntax/vocabulary). Some students still made basic grammar mistakes but overall the essays were rated average to above average by all reviewers.
- Essays in 100B (three pages) were longer than in 100A (one page) but did not lose in quality of writing which may show a gain in confidence.
- Instructors needed more structure and a more uniform syllabus

Issues and Future Actions

- We decided to institute a survey at the beginning of each class to determine how the students acquired their French.
- We decided to use a diagnostic writing sample to identify students who may need extra grammar review and plan with them an individualized grammar review/or to identify students who can skip to the next level.
- The need for a single textbook to be assigned to both classes so that there is greater continuity and logical development. We are currently exploring different textbook options with the next set of instructors who will take over the sequence in 2013-14.

Conclusion

- The assessment exercise permitted us to examine more closely the entire French curriculum and the articulation between the different levels.