Writing in the Secondary Foreign Language Classroom: The Effects of Prompts and Tasks on Novice Learners of French

DENISE PAIGE WAY
Dorchester School District Two
102 Greenwave Boulevard
Summerville, SC 29483
Email: dway@dorchester2.k12.sc.us

ELIZABETH G. JOINER
Department of French and Classics
Welsh Humanities Building
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208
Email: joiner-elizabeth@sc.edu

MICHAEL A. SEAMAN
Department of Educational Psychology
Wardlaw Hall
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208
Email: mseaman@sc.edu

This study investigated the effects of 3 different writing tasks (descriptive, narrative, and expository) and 3 different writing prompts (bare, vocabulary, and prose model) on 937 writing samples culled from 330 novice learners enrolled in 15 classes of Levels 1 and 2 high school French. In order to assess the quality, fluency, syntactic complexity, and accuracy of the writing samples, the researchers employed 4 evaluation methods: holistic scoring, length of product, mean length of T-units, and percentage of correct T-units. Results indicate that the descriptive task was the easiest and the expository task the most difficult. The prose model prompts produced the highest mean scores, and the bare prompts produced the lowest mean scores. Based on these findings, the researchers question whether the description of a novice writer in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986) should be used as a blueprint for curriculum development and textbook construction for secondary novice foreign language learners.

At what point in foreign language (FL) instruction should writing be introduced, and what can reasonably be expected of novice writers? The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986), which delineate expectations for four levels of FL writers, may be seen as a response to this question and, in this regard, have had a major influence on establishing curricular goals for writing since their publication in 1986. Nevertheless, a survey of the literature of FL writing reveals little of the empirical research necessary to establish a solid basis for decisions with respect to the FL writing curriculum.

A number of articles on FL writing have appeared over the last 2 decades (e.g., Barnett, 1989; Dvorak, 1986; Gaudiani, 1981; Magnan, 1985; V. Scott, 1992; M. Scott & Terry, 1992; Terry, 1989), yet most have dealt either with theoretical considerations or with the application of theory to instruction. Few researchers have directly studied writing instruction in FL classes. Consequently, practitioners have had to depend on research from writing in English as a first language (L1; e.g., Emig, 1971; Hunt, 1965) or English as a second language (ESL; e.g., Raimes, 1979; Zamel, 1976, 1985, 1987) when developing instructional procedures for teaching second language (L2) writing. In fact, Silva (1990) found that new approaches based upon L1 writing research are sometimes adopted in wholesale fashion and accepted uncritically in L2 writing instruction. Not only has writing been underrepresented in FL/L2 research, secondary school learners have been virtually ignored in such research. Krapels (1990) found that few studies conducted in...
L2 writing were case studies involving small numbers of subjects, typically advanced L2 female learners at the university level. This finding is disconcerting given that secondary students represent a significant group of FL learners in the United States (Allen, Bernhardt, Berry, & Demel, 1988). In the present study, we begin to address this problem by examining FL/L2 writing instruction for secondary learners.

The paucity of FL writing research has made it difficult to validate the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986) for writing. These Guidelines, which, according to Valdés, Haro, and Echevarriarza (1992), represent "the FL teaching profession’s most coherent statement of writing abilities in FL" (p. 334), posit a progression in task difficulty for each learner level. Descriptive tasks, although executed minimally and in a fragmented manner, are said to characterize novice level FL writing. The development of description continues into the intermediate level, where students are capable of narrative tasks, although organization and depth are lacking. Advanced-level students are able to handle descriptive and narrative tasks in far more depth than intermediate students are. Finally, expository and argumentative tasks characterize the superior level.

Valdés et al. (1992) challenged the assumptions of the Guidelines for writing. These researchers employed a descriptive task with a bare prompt (i.e., a simple statement of the task) and asked novice students of Spanish as a FL at the postsecondary level to write as much as they could about themselves. They concluded that FL students do not start at "ground zero" when writing, as implied by the ACTFL novice designation. Rather, FL novices transfer their competence in L1 to the FL.

Henry (1996) could not replicate the findings of Valdés et al. (1992) with novice, university-level students of Russian. She concluded that novice FL learners of Russian are characterized by the Guidelines’ descriptions of early learning. Further, she hypothesized that the lower starting point exhibited by FL students of Russian may be due to differences in the Russian and English alphabets. The novice FL students of Spanish may have benefited from the fact that Spanish shares a common alphabet with English.

Koda (1993) investigated task difficulty by eliciting two writing samples, descriptive and narrative, from American university students enrolled in two levels of Japanese. Her findings indicate that a descriptive task places fewer linguistic and cognitive demands on students than a narrative task. She also found vocabulary knowledge to be the best predictor of composition quality.

The purpose of our study was to examine the writing capabilities of novice FL learners at the secondary level. Specifically, we wanted to determine how secondary learners of French would respond to descriptive, narrative, and expository tasks. We also investigated the efficacy of three different prompts and examined the interaction of tasks and prompts in terms of overall writing quality, fluency, syntactic complexity, and accuracy.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Students from three public high schools located in the Berkeley (SC) County School District with student populations of between 1,100 and 1,500 voluntarily participated in this study. These students formed a sample of 330 novice learners from 15 classes of French as a FL. Of these, 212 were enrolled in French 1, and 118 were enrolled in French 2. Because FL is considered a college preparatory course in this district, these students were typically enrolled in other college preparatory courses, honors courses, and Advanced Placement courses. The results of a prewriting background questionnaire indicated that none had any exposure to French that might unduly affect the study.

Two teachers from the participating schools, each with 18 years experience teaching French in this district, agreed to assist the principal researcher, who had 17 years experience. The three teachers, all native speakers of English certified to teach French, were the only French teachers in their respective schools. Two of the teachers were using the same textbook while the third was using a different series; however, the Level 1 textbooks were comparable in their treatment of topics for secondary novice learners. All three teachers conducted similar writing activities in their beginning classes, including frequent short dialogues in class to accompany each lesson as well as several independent writing projects, such as descriptions of people, in French 1 and narrative accounts of a typical day or of a trip in French 2.
None of the three had attempted expository writing at the novice level prior to this study.

**Materials**

The writing tasks involved three different modes of discourse: descriptive, narrative, and expository. Each task was presented in the context of a reply to a teenage pen pal from France, Marie. The descriptive task required students to describe themselves, their families, their pets, their classes, their pastimes, and their likes and dislikes. The narrative task required students to provide an account of a typical day, including their morning routine, when they leave the house for school, what they do in class and with their friends, and what they do in the evening. The expository task required the students to write a letter about American teenagers in general, explaining their role in society, their views on education and politics, their role in the family, their leisure time activities, and their goals for the future.

The three types of writing prompts designed for this study consisted of a bare prompt, a vocabulary prompt, and a prose model prompt, which was a composite model pen pal letter compiled from actual letters written by French teenagers. The bare prompt was a simple explanation of the task presented in English only. The wording in the bare prompt was repeated in the vocabulary and prose model prompts to ensure uniformity in the three prompts. The vocabulary prompt also contained a list of words and expressions in French with English definitions. In constructing the vocabulary list, an effort was made to include the expressions used in the composite prose model prompt in order to facilitate comparison. The prose model prompt consisted of the wording from the bare prompt and a composite pen pal letter. (See Appendix A for examples of the descriptive task with the three prompts.)

**Design**

Each student was given a different writing task on each of three occasions. To avoid order-confounding effects due to writing tasks, three different orderings of the writing tasks were randomly assigned to the three schools. Thus, students in one school completed the descriptive task first, students in another school completed the narrative task first, and students in the third school completed the expository task first. Similarly, the second and third tasks given were different in each of the different schools, but participants in each school completed all three tasks by the end of the three writing occasions.

A different writing prompt was used for each writing task given to a student. To avoid order-confounding effects due to writing prompts, the six possible orderings of the three prompts were evenly and randomly distributed in each of the 15 classes. Thus, while all students in a class received the same writing task at the same time, students in the class received different prompts for this task.

Table 1 provides the task and prompt sequences used in the study. Students in each class were randomly assigned to each of the six prompt sequence conditions. For example, though all the students in School 1 completed the descriptive writing first, the narrative writing second, and the expository writing last, approximately one-sixth of these students were given the bare prompt with the descriptive task, the vocabulary prompt with the narrative task, and the prose prompt with the expository task. (This can be seen by matching the first prompt sequence row with the School 1 task sequence row in Table 1). The random assignment of task sequences to schools, and of prompt sequences to students in each school, removed the systematic bias that could occur if only certain task-prompt combinations were used in a school, or if only particular sequences were possible.

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task and Prompt Sequences Used in Each School</th>
<th>Descriptive</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Expository</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School 1 Task Sequence</strong></td>
<td>Bare</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Prose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompt Sequences</td>
<td>Bare</td>
<td>Bare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prose</td>
<td>Prose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School 2 Task Sequence</strong></td>
<td>Expository</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School 3 Task Sequence</strong></td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Expository</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Though the design controls for school-treatment confounding, as well as for order effects, it is not a fully crossed within-subjects design. Each student received only three of the nine possible task-prompt combinations. Though this meant that we could not test for a task by prompt interaction, we decided that this disadvantage was outweighed by the reduced requirement for writing samples (i.e., three instead of nine) provided by the design.

Procedure

Three writing samples were collected from each student during three consecutive months. All students received a writing packet that contained a task sheet, a sheet of unlined paper for outlining, a sheet of lined paper for the final response, and a postwriting questionnaire. Each teacher read the instructions from a prepared script, making sure students read the directions carefully, were aware of the 30-minute time limit, and did not use any reference materials or other resources to complete the task. As an incentive, students were told that they would receive credit for completing each task to the best of their ability. The same procedure was followed each time a writing sample was collected.

Instrumentation and Scoring

Each writing sample was scored using four different measures: holistic scoring, length of product, mean length of T-units, and percentage of correct T-units. These measures assess overall quality, fluency, syntactic complexity, and accuracy, respectively. Scores for each writing sample were entered into SPSS 9.0 (1999), which was used for all data analyses.

Holistic Scoring. A modified version of R. S. Scott and Rodgers’s (1993, 1995) rubrics for holistic scoring served as the basis for training the three teachers who scored the writing samples. Following the example of Scott and Rodgers, the teachers used separate rubrics for scoring Level 1 and Level 2 papers in order to account for greater complexity in the writing of Level 2 students. During a two-part training session, the three teachers reached an interrater reliability of .96 for the 18 Level 1 anchor papers they scored and .93 for the 18 Level 2 papers (SPSS 9.0). In an effort to control teacher bias in the holistic scoring, no teacher scored his or her own students’ writing samples, but each teacher scored the samples from the other two schools. Thus, two raters scored each writing sample. The average of these two scores was used as the holistic score.

Length of Product. The number of French words in each sample was used to measure fluency. Larsen-Freeman and Strom (1977) and Reid (1990) endorsed this measure of writing; and both Koda (1995) and Henry (1996) used length of product in their FL writing studies as an indicator of fluency. For this study, articles, whether elided or not, were counted as individual words.

Mean Length of T-Units (MLTU). The T-unit, which consists of a main clause plus any embedded subordinate clauses or phrases, was originally proposed by Hunt (1965) as a measure of maturity in L1 writing development. Hunt found that the MLTU, which is obtained by dividing the number of T-units into the total number of words in the writing sample, is a reliable measure of syntactic complexity and that gradual lengthening of T-units occurs from grade to grade.

Percentage of Correct T-Units. The percentage of error-free T-units in each sample was used to indicate accuracy in writing.

RESULTS

The final number of writing samples collected was 937 out of the total possible 990 samples. Some samples were not collected because of absences. These absences were for typical reasons (e.g., sickness) and therefore did not systematically bias the results. Table 2 presents the means for each of the four instruments of the writing score achieved with each task-prompt combination for each level of learner. Comparisons can be made both within and across learner levels for the length of product, the MLTU, and the percentage of correct T-units. Because different holistic scoring rubrics were used for the two levels, comparison across levels is not possible on the holistic measure.

Overall Quality

Figure 1 illustrates the mean holistic writing scores for the writing samples provided by Level 1 French students. (Only Level 1 patterns are illustrated for this and most other measures because the general pattern of mean scores for Level 2 writing samples closely follows the pattern for Level 1 writing samples. The few exceptions are noted in the narrative.) The overall quality was highest for descriptive writing and lowest for expository writing. The exception to this result is that Level 2 learners earned similar scores for
Descriptive and narrative writing whether prompted by bare or vocabulary prompts. The substantial drop in mean holistic scores for expository writing indicates that this task was the most difficult for all students in the study. The prose model prompt elicited the best writing when evaluated holistically, regardless of the writing task. The bare prompt typically resulted in the worst writing. The vocabulary prompt elicited writing samples that usually were of higher quality than those obtained with a bare prompt, but of lower quality than samples obtained with a prose model prompt. (See Appendix B for representative writing samples.)

Simultaneous planned comparisons were conducted using Tukey’s (1953) honestly significant difference (HSD) procedure with a .05 nominal significance level. This procedure provides 95% confidence in the conclusions made for each complete set of results. The comparisons revealed that the higher quality writing elicited by the prose model prompt is, indeed, due to this type of prompt and is not a chance outcome. The only comparison involving this prompt that was not statistically significant was the comparison with the vocabulary prompt for the narrative writing samples. All other comparisons of the prose model prompt with other prompts were statistically significant for each type of writing sample. In addition, the vocabulary prompt resulted in significantly higher holistic scores on the expository writing samples than did the bare prompt for Level 1 learners.

The design of the study does not allow for an inferential test of the interaction between type of writing and writing prompt, given that each student provided only three of the nine possible task-by-prompt combinations. Nonetheless, the figures for all measures suggest that there is little, if any, important interaction. That is, the effect of switching prompts is very consistent across types of writing tasks.

Fluency

Figure 2 illustrates the mean length of product (number of words) for the writing samples provided by Level 1 French students. Descriptive writing samples were the longest. Narrative writing samples were, on average, about 10 words shorter than the descriptive samples, and expository writing samples were, on average, about 20 words shorter than the descriptive samples. For each type of writing, the prose model prompt elicited longer writing samples than either the bare prompt or the vocabulary prompt.

Tukey comparisons verify that the prose model prompt elicited longer writing samples than the
bare prompt for all three types of writing. The evidence is not strong enough to support that uniformly longer writing samples are obtained with prose model prompts than with vocabulary prompts, though descriptive results suggest that this is the case. The vocabulary prompt, in turn, elicited longer writing samples than did the bare prompt. These differences are significant for the narrative and expository tasks.

As expected, Level 2 learners were more fluent than Level 1 learners for all types of writing ($p < .05$), but the type of prompt did not significantly interact with the level of learner. In sum, prose model prompts yielded higher fluency for all types of learners.

Syntactic Complexity

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the means of the MLTU for the writing samples provided by Level 1 and Level 2 French students, respectively. Means for both levels of learners are graphed here to illustrate the similar, but not identical, patterns of mean differences that occurred for the different levels on each measure. Also, the scores on each type of writing are not easily described for this outcome measure.

The syntactic complexity was greater for expository than for descriptive writing, but results for other types of writing varied according to the type of prompt used. Although the narrative writing was more complex than the descriptive writing when a prose model prompt was used, the complexity of these types of writing was about the same when the other prompts were used.

For all types of writing, the prose model prompt substantially increased syntactic complexity. Tukey comparisons verify that this increase is a nonchance finding. Comparisons also reveal a significantly higher complexity for writing elicited with the vocabulary prompt than for that obtained with the bare prompt for both descrip-
tive and expository writing. There were no statistically significant differences in syntactic complexity for levels of learners, nor did the level interact with the type of prompt.

Accuracy

Figure 5 illustrates the mean percent of correct T-units for the writing samples provided by Level 1 French students. Accuracy was highest for descriptive writing and lowest for expository writing. Regardless of type of writing, accuracy was by far the highest when a prose model prompt was used. Tukey's simultaneous procedure verifies that the effect of the prose model prompt is real for each type of task. Differences in accuracy achieved using the bare and vocabulary prompts were slight.

Although learners from the two levels did not differ significantly in the accuracy of their descriptive writing, the differences in accuracy for narrative and expository writing were statistically significant ($p < .05$) in favor of the Level 2 students. As with the other measures, the level of learner did not interact with the prompt to affect accuracy.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

On the one hand, the descriptive task generally proved to be the easiest of the three tasks, followed by the narrative task. These findings replicate Koda's (1993) results. On the other hand, V. M. Scott (1996), in a review of L1 writing research, reported that those learners found narrative tasks easier than descriptive tasks. The expository task was the most difficult for the FL students, which is consistent with L1 writing research findings (V. M. Scott, 1996).

Prompts also had a significant effect on the writing samples of novice learners. The bare prompt usually produced writing with the poorest overall quality (holistic scores), the least fluency (length of product), the least syntactic complexity (MLTU), and the lowest accuracy (percentage of correct T-units). The prose model prompt consistently produced writing samples with the best overall quality, the greatest fluency, the greatest
syntactic complexity, and the highest accuracy, regardless of the task. The vocabulary prompt typically ranked second, though writing samples produced with a vocabulary prompt also exhibited the most aberrations from the general patterns. For example, the vocabulary prompt produced the worst holistic scores and the lowest accuracy for Level 1 writing samples on the descriptive task. In addition, the vocabulary prompt produced the lowest accuracy on the expository task for both Levels 1 and 2. The less experienced Level 1 students had greater difficulty than the Level 2 students in using vocabulary lists effectively.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FL CLASSROOM

The results of this study indicate that task difficulty is an important variable in writing, particularly at the beginning levels. The novice secondary school learners in this study performed better on descriptive than on narrative or expository tasks. It should be noted, however, that the present-tense narrative tasks were within the capabilities of both Level 1 and Level 2 students. As expected, performance on the expository task was poorer for students at both levels.

The ACTFL Guidelines Reconsidered

Although the results of this study support the order of tasks implied by the ACTFL Guidelines (1986), they cast doubt upon the Guidelines' characterization of the novice and intermediate levels. The novice secondary school learners in this study were able to go beyond novice-level tasks such as listing and filling out forms with autobiographical information. Indeed, their writing samples showed them to be capable of writing short description and minimal narration, tasks that the Guidelines place at the intermediate level. Given the results described above and the findings of Valdés et al. (1992), teachers and curriculum planners should avoid setting expectations so low that they may not challenge the full writing potential of novice FL writers, especially if the lan-
language in question shares an alphabet with the students' native language.9

In addition, the current Guidelines for writing leave the context relatively unspecified. It is not clear, for example, whether the writer is responding to or initiating the message, nor is it stated whether the writer has access to reference materials such as dictionaries and other reference books, which are available in most normal writing situations. Because factors such as these may have a significant effect on the writer’s performance, they should be specified in any revisions of the Guidelines.

The Use of Authentic Prose Models

The prose model prompts in this study appeared to offer students a more effective stimulus for writing than a bare prompt or a vocabulary list. Given that students prompted by the prose model performed better on all measures, one might assume that these students simply copied the pen pal letter or altered it only slightly. Our examination of their responses, however, did not indicate that this was the case. For example, the response letter included in Appendix B (third example) contains mistakes of form that could have been avoided by copying the model (see Appendix A). The personalized content of the student’s letter, including the fact that she states that she plays the flute “Comme tu,” indicates that the prose model was taken as a real letter to be read and answered. The effectiveness of the prose model prompt suggests that the reading-writing connection commonly used in L1 instruction should be utilized more in the FL setting.10

Though bilingual vocabulary lists are commonly included in secondary textbooks, this practice seems to assume that writing (or speaking) a FL amounts to nothing more than translating word for word from L1 to the FL with little regard for linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural differences between the L1 and the FL. This study supports the inclusion of more in-context vocabulary and more authentic, level-appropriate prose models to read, to analyze, and subsequently to imitate.
FL teachers should be mindful of the writing tasks and prompts they assign. Arbitrary assignments, such as writing a description of oneself for the teacher, are devoid of realistic context and remove writing from its communicative and interactive purposes. Vygotsky (1978) stressed the importance of meaningful social interaction in language acquisition. Responding to letters, such as the pen pal letters in this study, simulates real life social interaction, albeit written. On the one hand, the prose model prompt clearly enabled the students to move toward their potential as writers through interaction with more capable peers, in this case native writers of French. On the other hand, their performance with the bare prompt is, no doubt, more indicative of their ability to undertake writing tasks totally on their own.

Further Research and Conclusions

The finding that tasks and prompts do make a difference in writing performance should prompt replication of this study with other populations of different ages and ability levels and with different languages, including those with different writing systems. Longitudinal studies designed to examine the progress of students who regularly use prose model prompts could yield some important information about the long-term effects of the prose model prompt in writing instruction. Studies using different writing tasks could provide further information about task difficulty. Even though the expository task in this study proved the most difficult of the three tasks, some novice students were able to express themselves adequately in this mode when given a prose model prompt. Other prompts—a picture or a series of pictures, for example—could be investigated as well.

Writing is a communication skill, and FL writing instruction can and should include real-life, interactive tasks. A letter exchange between French and American students, whether via electronic mail or conventional mail, would provide ample authentic models to use in FL writing instruction while, at the same time, fostering cross-cultural communication and furnishing students with a source of written input.
If we are to produce proficient FL writers capable of expressing themselves in authentic situations and in an authentic manner, we must wean ourselves from excessive reliance on theory and methodology derived from L1 or ESL research and begin to build our own research base. Without ignoring work in related fields, we must recognize the unique characteristics and situation of the FL learner and take responsibility for developing theory and related practices that correspond to the realities of writing in a FL. Additional FL-specific research may either support or challenge the assumptions of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for writing, but, ultimately, such research will improve classroom instruction, enabling us to reach the goal of better written expression on the part of our students.

### NOTES

1. The paucity of research in FL writing may reflect Magnan’s (1985) assertion that writing is a neglected skill in FL instruction, an assertion supported by Swaffar’s (1991) analysis of beginning FL textbooks. Swaffar found that writing opportunities, if included at all in FL textbooks, are often peripheral activities.

2. V. W. Scott (1996) recommended using expository tasks from the very beginning level of FL instruction.

3. Terry (1989) advocated the use of the pen pal letter as an effective, real-life writing task.

4. We used vocabulary prompts because Koda (1993) found that there is a high correlation between vocabulary and overall composition quality.

5. Gaudiani (1981), Dvorak (1986), and Terry (1989) advocated the use of prose model prompts. These are common in L1 writing instruction (Kroll & Reid, 1994).

6. R. S. Scott and Rodgers’s (1993, 1995) 20-point, four-category scale was modified to an 8-point, four-category scale for this study. The modified scale allowed for discrimination but was less cumbersome than the 20-point scale.

7. Terry (1989) noted that holistic scoring is reliable and valid in reflecting overall composition quality, particularly when raters are trained.

8. Many researchers are unaware that Tukey’s (1953) HSD procedure provides simultaneous control of the Type I error rate and is more powerful if it is used instead of, rather than after, the traditional analysis of variance (Seaman, Levin, & Serlin, 1991).

9. It should be remembered that although the students in the Valdés et al. study (1992), who were enrolled in Spanish, seemed to bypass the novice level, the students of Russian, who were the subjects of Henry’s (1996) study, did not.

10. On a Postwriting Questionnaire, 85% of students who completed the descriptive task with the prose model indicated that they read the entire letter before starting their response. Percentages for the narrative and expository tasks were 95% and 82%, respectively. Furthermore, the Postwriting Questionnaire revealed that 31% of those who were given the basic prompt began their descriptive letters by outlining their thoughts in English. This was true of only 18% of those who had the vocabulary prompt and of only 8% of those who used the prose model. Similar results were obtained with respect to the narrative and expository tasks.

### REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
Prompts for the Descriptive Task

Bare Prompt
You have just received a letter from your French pen pal, Marie. In her letter, she describes herself and her lifestyle. Answer her letter by describing yourself, your family, your pets, your classes, your pastimes, and your likes and dislikes.

Vocabulary Prompt
You have just received a letter from your French pen pal, Marie. In her letter, she describes herself and her lifestyle. Answer her letter by describing yourself, your family, your pets, your classes, your pastimes, and your likes and dislikes. You may want to use the vocabulary list below as a guide for ideas to include in your letter; but do not feel obligated to use them all, and please feel free to add your own ideas.

s’appeler = to be named
aimer = to like
habiter = to live
avoir = to have
avoir ... ans = to be ... years old
devenir = to become
ranger = to arrange, tidy
s’amusser = to have fun
aller = to go
être = to be
manger = to eat

la littérature = literature
le français = French
l’anglais (m.) = English
les maths (f.) = math
les sciences = science
l’histoire (f.) = history
la chose = thing
le cours = course, class
la matière = subject
les yeux (m.) = eyes
les cheveux (m.) = hair
blond = blond

regarder = to watch, look at  
écouter = to listen to  
travailler = to work  
détecter = to hate  
là famille = the family  
le (beau-) père = (step) father  
là (belle-) mère = (step) mother  
là soeur = sister  
là chien = dog  
là chat = cat  
là copain/la copine = friend  
là école (f.) = school  
là lycée = high school  
là collège = middle school  
là musique = music  
là sport = sports  
là télé = TV  
là radio = radio  
là cinéma = movies (theater)  
là jeux vidéo (m.) = video games

Prose Model Prompt
Read the following letter which you have just received from your French pen pal, Marie.


À bientôt!

Marie

Now write a letter back to Marie describing yourself, your family, your pets, your classes, your pastimes, and your likes and dislikes.

APPENDIX B
Representative Writing Samples and Scoring

Descriptive Task—Bare Prompt (Level 1)

Holistic = 4.5  
Length = 61 words  
Mean Length of T-Units = 5.5  
Percentage of Correct T-Units = 25%

Descriptive Task—Vocabulary Prompt (Level 1)
Mes cours sont le français, l’anglais, l’algèbre, et les sciences. Ma préférée la matière est le français.

Holistic = 4.5  
Length = 84 words  
Mean Length of T-Units = 7.0  
Percentage of Correct T-Units = 25%

Descriptive Task—Prose Model Prompt (Level 1)

Holistic = 5  
Length = 94 words  
Mean Length of T-Units = 6.3  
Percentage of Correct T-Units = 33%

Tribute to Jean-Charles Seigneuret

Jean-Charles Seigneuret, Professor Emeritus from the University of Cincinnati and MLJ editorial board member from 1980 to 1989, passed away on January 19, 2000. Born in Lisieux, France, in 1937, Dr. Seigneuret grew up in northern France and Paris, completed his high school studies in Montreal, and in 1958 received a bachelor’s degree from the University of British Columbia, a master’s and Ph.D. in French literature from the University of California at Los Angeles. He joined UC in 1982 and later served as Head of UC’s Department of Romance Languages and Literature.

A respected teacher and scholar of medieval literature, Dr. Seigneuret published four book reviews in the MLJ.


In addition, two of his books were reviewed in the Journal.


The MLJ recognizes and expresses gratitude for his lasting contributions to foreign language learning and to the Journal.