

Feedback from French 3/4 instructors:

Challenges while teaching writing:

- Not knowing how to integrate discussion of writing into the time-frame of the chapter; time management
- Not knowing how to effectively and efficiently give feedback on writing
- Students generally do not consider French 3/4 a writing class
- “[Instructors] are not given the mentorship or materials to help strike a balance between foreign language instruction and teaching composition.”

Issues with students’ writing:

- Extreme discrepancies in the levels of French writing, especially concerning literary analysis
- Students do not understand what constitutes a literary analysis
- Students give an observation about, or resume of, the text and do not know how to present an *argument* about it
- Difficulty using textual evidence – inability to provide actual citations from a text
- Impatience with the focus on literary analysis and eagerness to explore other forms of writing
- Students unable to understand that both their analysis and their grammatical use of the language are at stake in their compositions
- Blurry boundary between plagiarism and using online resources
- Validating different kinds of students and their expectations in the foreign language classroom

Feedback from French 102 instructors:

Issues with students’ writing:

- *What is a thesis?* Students don’t know.
- How to quote textual evidence
- Logical progression of an argument is missing. Need for better connections/transitions at each part of the writing (sentence, paragraph, essay)
- Ideas are stronger than their ability to express them. Grammar and syntax fall apart when they try to express more complex ideas. (They can talk about what they did last weekend but can’t talk about what an author is saying in the text they read.)
- How to connect the micro-level of the analysis (close reading) to larger historical, cultural, aesthetic issues
- Need to have better expressions in French, “verbal forms”, that help students describe what the author of a text is doing (beyond “*il dit que*”, “*elle pense que*” – phrases needed that indicate the motion and dynamics of a particular author’s thoughts)

Feedback from former French 3/4 students:

Comments on writing assignments:

- Students appreciate the process of revision (one student said that they never rewrote essays and that the compositions were a “one-shot game” – another student said that multiple drafts would have been fundamental to improving errors)
- Students generally experience the second draft as grammatical revision. They are not pushed to nuance the argument or to work on analytical skills. (“Generally, for the second draft, I just corrected grammar mistakes”; “I liked how we were allowed to correct our grammar but I would have liked the opportunity to correct my content as well”)
- Students want and expect written feedback on their essays.
- Students do not like peer editing. They enjoy discussing their topics and arguments with classmates but giving concrete feedback is stressful (“feels condescending”; “I don’t have the right vocabulary to talk with my partner about his work in depth”; “peer editing days were days when some students came unprepared because the actual instructor would not look at the drafts”)

Issues with writing in the next level foreign language class:

- Students feel that they need to write at a higher, more formal level than they are used to and the texts that they are writing on are more complicated. (“...the complexity of the pieces that we are reading and at which we are expected to write is much higher. In particular, poetry is proving more difficult for me because the analysis is much more abstract than fictional short stories. My biggest problem right now is expressing my thoughts/ideas in a level of French that is sophisticated enough. That is, there is a big discrepancy between my writing skill level in French and the thoughts/ideas I have.”; “...since the register of language in writing is much higher than in speech, [writing assignments] can be confusing”)
- Students feel unprepared for, or slightly uneasy with, literary analysis (“My current writing assignments [102] are markedly more difficult because the analysis is more extensive and the standards of writing are more demanding. They are generally more formal”; “...a higher level of French was expected in analyzing a poem. French 102 studies a lot deeper in the writing techniques of literature, rather than focusing on grammar”; “This course (102) is far more technical in content, in that my essays will analyze aspects of classical poetry and themes in literary criticisms”; “I am not used to the form of writing in French 102”)

Writer’s log (Adapted from Peter Elbow and Mary Sorcinelli)

1. What is the main point of your essay?
2. How did the writing go? What was the most challenging part of writing this paper?
3. What are your questions for me, the instructor reviewing your writing?
4. What is *one new thing* you tried in this paper that you would like to have double-checked or verified? (grammar, syntax, vocabulary, style, etc.)
5. Are there any sentences or expressions you are uncertain about?
6. What are three new words that you looked up for this paper that you would like to remember?