Assignment SM/01/04

A Trial of Tasked-based Materials in an L2 Classroom:
Implementation and Outcomes

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1   Introduction

During the production of a set of materials for a short unit of work and their subsequent trial in an L2 classroom, three separate assumptions about the material's suitability were made: a) schematic (how much relative world knowledge do the students have), b) systemic (do the students have the necessary language structures to complete the assigned tasks), c) interpersonal (are the students comfortable with the assigned material). Other aspects considered included the learners' communicative strategies, the instructional situation, and the combined effects of these factors. The criteria above formed a useful conceptual basis for the design of writing materials used in the classroom and helped guide decisions on how best to incorporate a focus on form and function within both a task-based methodology and a larger communicative syllabus. An attempt was made to see the learners as active participants in the learning process, ones who are forming and testing hypotheses in the process of creating an internalized system of how the target language works. In this respect, Stern (1992: 200) claims that "subject matter with which the L2 learner is familiar is easier to handle than topics which are entirely novel." The unit of work discussed below was one in a series of business-oriented language units and part of a wider curriculum covering topic areas such as negotiating, telephoning, and presentations. However, for the purposes of this paper, discussion will focus on the unit of business-related writing tasks, results from a trial of these materials in the classroom, the learning objectives that were met, and comments upon additional outcomes.

1.1 Materials

The unit's focus was a variety of business-oriented writing tasks appearing in a larger, process-driven syllabus. Included within this framework were procedures for basing task selection on an analysis of learners' needs, criteria for task sequencing, and a certain amount of attention to form. Decisions on what sorts of materials to devise for the class under discussion were informed by Fein and Baldwin's topic grading and content selection list (in White 1988: 67) which has as a focus the three criteria of pedagogic merit, affective considerations, and practicality. In addition, the Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 87) materials evaluation model was consulted to structure tasks which appropriately matched the audience, aims, content and methodology of the unit of work. There was also an attempt to balance 'process' aspects of the tasks with some 'product' focus as well. The resulting exercises were 'application activities,' defined by Richards and Lockhart (1996: 165) as ones in which students complete written assignments incorporating rhetorical and discourse devices using ideas and information of their own. The syllabus was seen as cyclical, introducing prototypical language with a move to more authentic language as the unit progressed. Closed-task structures fit this overall model and provided students with clear goals, more support, and opportunities to recycle new vocabulary and rhetorical devices (see Appendix A).

The unit was designed to cover a period of approximately four hours, divided between two classes of two hours each, and equivalent in length to a chapter from a course book on the students' regular syllabus. In addition, individual exercises and subsequent tasks had time limits placed on them. This was, in part, to reinforce the

notion that process considerations and fluency should take precedence over accuracy and product objectives, even though a balance between the two was sought whenever possible. Parts 1, 2, and 3 divided tasks between sentence and paragraph construction, developmental exercises involving a formal business proposal, and an evaluated post-task presentation, respectively (see Appendix A). In addition, students were required to complete an out-of-class homework assignment involving the composition of business correspondence documents of their choice (see Appendix B). Finally, a 'Vocabulary & Sentences' worksheet (see Appendix D) rounded out the unit. Throughout, the unit was informed by the means/needs analysis framework outlined in White (1988: 36) and attempted to set up the 'process-product' dichotomy he discusses in which tension must always exist between a linear and graded organization of content and the non-linear, functional use of language.

A more detailed discussion of the tasks the students engaged in will be presented below, as will an explanation of the general contextual background in which the trial of the materials took place. A review of the literature on the topic and additional comments regarding the results of the trial will also be outlined. Finally, the implications of such procedures on current teaching practice will be discussed. Where reference is made to a particular exercise or task, refer to the attached appendices.

1.2   Methodology/Learning Objectives

In general, the unit of work was designed for students who wanted to improve their business writing ability but might also conceivably be used with a class of students

attempting to build less specific language writing skills. Throughout, it combined language relevant to the students' needs with a limited amount of skills oriented instruction with the aim of building 'cohesion' (grammatical and/or lexical relationships between the different elements in a text) and 'coherence' (relationships which link the meanings of the sentences in a text) into their writing. Post-task assessment criteria consistent with such a linguistic model focused on: the overall structure of learners' written compositions; their development and cohesion; and whether or not they were written in language appropriate for their intended purpose and audience.

The aims cited above were to be achieved through the use of a cycle of tasks that attempted to balance fluency, accuracy and complexity in the learners' writing. Skehan (1998: 150) claims that these goals are in a state of mutual tension and that successful implementation of a task will have to consider each of these elements in order to maximize learner potential. One way this might be achieved would be through what Willis (1990: 6) refers to as an 'eclectic' approach to syllabus design and implementation involving language structures realized through presentation and practice, then supplemented by a freer use of language to consolidate what has been learned. The task-based materials discussed above in **1.1** incorporated notions of an 'informed' eclectic methodology (Richards and Rodgers: 158) by which is meant that various design features and procedures are selected and drawn from different methods, relating explicitly to program objectives. The three-part task cycle outlined in Willis (1996: 8) in which a pre-task step is followed by a task-planning-report phase was part of this arrangement. Willis claims that this sort of manipulation of circumstances of communication in the classroom places a focus on form within a task-based

methodology and that tasks involving a presentation to the class or preparation of written output demand a higher level of accuracy.

White (1988: 72) refers to Munby's list of skills which research into writing processes suggests should be incorporated in a writing syllabus. Criteria for grading these skills, he suggests, might be to think of them in terms of their 'concreteness' or 'abstractness':

> One set of skills could be established on a linguistic basis, such as expressing relations within a sentence, for which formal criteria could be invoked, while another set of skills, based on conceptual criteria, would include generating, planning and organizing.

Skills focused on in the unit of work under discussion included: using invention and discovery techniques to generate ideas; organizing ideas according to various criteria, including the writer's own plan as writing proceeds; identifying and developing a theme or viewpoint; and providing thematic unity to a text through the use of lexical and grammatical devices to achieve overall cohesion and coherence. McDonough and Shaw (1993: 181-2) state that considerations of both 'cohesion' and 'discourse coherence' make up some of the criteria used when evaluating a piece of writing as communicative or not, and that sentence-level critiquing and grammar practice is not omitted but is "set in the context of a longer purposeful stretch of language." Having a learner look at specific texts and discover for themselves some of the ways English encodes meaning can assist in this process.

2   General Contextual Background

2.1   Classes

A trial of the materials from the short unit of work described above was
conducted on a small group of eight Japanese students with TOEIC scores of between
550-750. All of the students had some experience communicating with foreigners;
perhaps on the job, traveling, or in English conversation class. They possessed a
substantial knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and had studied and could recognize
a large number of idioms. The students were all employees of a foreign insurance
company and ability to communicate in English was a daily requirement them. A formal
needs analysis of the class indicated that all of the students were interested in raising
their proficiency levels in general English, but with special emphasis on reading,
writing and presentation skills within a business environment. Taking into consideration
the student's familiarity with the target language, this suggested that a focus on
business-related situations and tasks would be of most relevance to them and fit the
overall criteria of classroom needs.

3   Review of the Literature

3.1   Task - Based Methodology

Willis (1990: 3) states that task-based learning (TBL) sees language as the
driving force in language acquisition with the task itself "central to both syllabus

planning and methodology." He states that there are two central principles to task-based learning, the first being that:

> units of syllabus organization should be tasks which define what outcomes can be achieved through language, rather than linguistic terms as such. The second principle is that learning will be effective only if it is related closely to language use and involves relating form and meaning.

He goes on to comment that one feature of task-based learning is that learners carrying out a task are "free to use any language they can to achieve the outcome – language forms are not prescribed in advance." However, he does not dismiss the study of language form if acquisition is to be maximized. He cites Skehan (1996) who argues for a need to focus on accuracy within a task-based methodology, and attention to language form within a task-based cycle. Willis ends his summary of task-based learning by stating that the challenge for TBL is to devise a methodology which:

> affords learners the freedom to engage natural learning processes in the creation of a meaning system, but which also provides them with incentives to 'restructure' their system in the light of language input.

The Prabhu model of a procedural syllabus outlined in White (1988: 103-4) lends support to task-based activities in which learners meet the demands made on their understanding and expression by "bringing into play such internal systems as they have developed so far." The language selection which arises from such a sequence of tasks will be "based on 'the needs of the activity/discourse and manageability for learners.'" McDonough and Shaw (1993: 188-89) reduce sequencing of such kinds of materials and activities to three items: 1) variation in the size of linguistic 'building blocks,' 2) paralleled stages in the process of writing, and 3) task complexity. Such sequencing is

an essential part of what Stern (1992: 138-9) refers to as the need for the gradual introduction and recycling of language items so that learners can develop a network of associations and a "global picture of a particular grammatical topic."

3.2 Pedagogic/Authentic Tasks

Long and Crookes (in Willis et al. 1993: 4) argue that classroom pedagogic tasks should be "systematically linked to communicative tasks that the learner will be likely to perform outside the classroom." They go on to argue for a specification of the task-based syllabus in terms of pedagogic tasks derived from authentic style tasks:

> working with relatively advanced learners with needs that can be clearly defined it is certainly possible to offer pedagogic tasks which relate immediately and directly to real world tasks.

Such tasks, therefore, can be of value and have a clear pedagogic relationship to real-world language needs. White (1988: 84) makes the point that once we recognize the functional use of language, the learners' needs change and are determined "not by the content of the language system but by the exploitation of that code by users in the world of affairs." Schmitt and McCarthy (1997: 318) claim that learners should be given tasks which "simulate situations in which they are likely to use the second language outside the learning environment" and add that we should assess the learner's ability to deal with lexical items as they occur in whole texts and a discourse task framework.

One of the overall aims of the unit was for target forms and other language generated in the brainstorming sessions to be recycled from task to task. This would

allow the syllabus to be cyclical, introducing prototypical language and then moving closer and closer to more authentic language as tasks progressed, possibly aiding acquisition. Skehan (1998: 150) lends support for the kind of cyclical task arrangement. Such a methodology, he states, is an opportunity to maximize the chances of balanced development of learning goals such as fluency, accuracy and complexity, which he sees in a state of mutual tension. A balance can be sought between tasks which are symmetrical and structured, and those which are more interpretive.

3.3   Retrospective Task Frameworks

In addition to the above criteria, a retrospective task framework was adopted which had as its governing principle the notion that if a student is to improve coherence and cohesion elements in their written work then a presentation element could assist in helping to raise awareness of these issues to the learner's level of consciousness. If an integrated skills approach of this sort could be adopted, perhaps more effective skill-building and language acquisition could occur.

In a 'retrospective' approach to task implementation students have the constraint that during the 'process' of writing their 'product' they are conscious of the fact that they will have to engage in subsequent public performance of the same task. This may, in turn, aid acquisition and support earlier findings of Skehan (1992 et al. in Willis) that learners, when faced with the need to interpret language and encode meaning for themselves, will "adopt new forms and will refashion their language system to meet the new demands placed upon it." Willis (5: handouts) adds that the

implication of this is that if we can "provide learners with a series of tasks which involve both the comprehension and the production of language with a focus on meaning, this will prompt language development."

White (1988: 81) claims that such a framework allows for more recycling of language and provides the syllabus designer an "opportunity to 'mix and match' elements in a variety of ways. This makes it possible to "fine-tune grammatical content and to change the focus as the students proceed through the syllabus." Only such repeated effort at comprehension will lead to recurrent deployment and gradual growth of internal linguistic competence. Rutherford (1987: 174) adds that another means of achieving cohesion in learner interlanguage is the reiteration of a lexical item. He states that the learner's "act of editing his meaningful written communication can be said to produce the 'comprehensible output' that directs his attention towards formal accuracy in writing." In addition, the concept of 'expanding rehearsal' (Schmitt and McCarthy 1997: 276) suggests that the learner "should revise new material soon after their initial meeting with it and should then recall it at gradually increasing levels." Learners can keep building off the initial key vocabulary and rhetorical devices they are introduced to by recycling this language from task to task. The objective is clear, fluid transitions between ideas and the sentences they figure in. This sort of communicative competence can be achieved through exposing learners to a series of activities which vary demands on them in a principled way.

4   Trial of the Materials

4.1   Implementation – Part 1

The overall approach to implementation of the unit of work consisted of two stages. The first stage provided learners with language relevant to their learning needs. This was presented in the form of structural elements (transitional language, key phrases, fixed expressions, rhetorical devices, etc.) either at the beginning of an exercise or randomly throughout the sample models (see Appendix A). These were optionally available to the students for use during the completion of the assigned tasks. With such structural elements present, some of the language needed to encode meaning was already available and assisted the learners with skill building for more complex tasks later in the unit. The second stage attempted to achieve a balanced approach to product and process considerations and represented a move from a structured lesson to a looser, more process-driven and skills based one. Here the students focused on conveying meaning rather than form through written language as they attempted to complete the set tasks.

Willis (1990) states that if we understand the word 'structure' to refer almost exclusively to clause or sentence structure we will have a limited view of the learning process. The objective of the opening timed exercises and tasks of the unit of work (see Appendix A: 1-3) was to have students both construct and deconstruct sentences on their own within the context of a larger stretch of language – in this case paragraphs. In exercise 1.2 students were asked to compose topic sentences for a provided set of

models. This was after having studied completed models of both topic/controlling idea type sentences as well as fully completed paragraphs. Students were working more or less in reverse, analyzing and deconstructing completed models and then working on additional models whose only missing feature was its topic sentence. In this way, they were being asked to meet the logical and contextual demands of the exercise through the use of their own existing vocabulary and notions of proper cohesion and coherence restraints.

A similar approach was taken in the construction of concluding sentence tasks where the only feature absent from a model paragraph was its concluding sentence which students were again asked to supply. It was at this point in the unit of work that the first structural elements in the form of key words and phrases were explicitly introduced. Students were given the option to utilize as many of these linguistic elements as they wished in order to complete the assigned exercises. Justification for introducing lexical structures and a wide variety of models into the unit is found in Willis (1990: 63), who outlines what he refers to as a 'variable competence methodology.' In order for learners to gain experience of language in use it is not enough for them simply to work with tasks themselves. Ideally they must be given exposure to language relevant to the task they have performed or are about to perform, and in particular "given the opportunity to see how competent speakers and writers use the target language to achieve similar outcomes."

In each of the exercises presented in Part 1 of the unit students were grouped into pairs and asked to negotiate with their partner to construct appropriate topic and

concluding sentences and complete the provided models. This extended into the 'Signal Words and Phrases' section (see Appendix A: 2.1) where, once again, exercises were timed and fluency considerations were to take precedence over a strict adherence to form and grammatical accuracy. Structural devices for assisting students to introduce or join their ideas in writing together were provided as an optional resource. Stainton (1997 in Carter: 85) refers to this kind of language as 'metadiscourse' and involves use by a writer of words and phrases such as 'to summarize', 'as we have seen', 'as a result', 'however', 'therefore', 'the main point is' and 'in the next section' which "establish a relationship with the reader by previewing, highlighting, evaluating and summarizing the rhetorical and organizational planes of the text." In addition, if the students were able to utilize language of their own which met their needs and approximated the target forms provided, then they were free to do so. The recycling of key vocabulary and phrases mentioned earlier as a constituent of a cyclical-type syllabus would include approximations of such key language.

In sections 2 and 3 of Part 1 learners are introduced to single and multi-paragraph exercises with the aim of providing opportunities to construct longer passages in English. This was seen as a way of providing students with practice in organizing their own written ideas into cohesive and coherent paragraphed units - a skill needed later for the completion of a formal business proposal. Once again, as with the earlier tasks, students were timed and asked to work as pairs on the sample models and then individually on the more personalized application activities. (see Appendix A: 2.1) They were later required to exchange their completed outlines for peer review and/or correction with another member of the class.

4.2   Implementation – Part 2

Section 3 of the unit of work corresponded with a break between classes 1 and 2. In class 1 students had been exposed to a fairly large repertoire of lexical words and phrases that they might now draw upon to complete tasks in class 2. More importantly, however, they had started to recognize what language structures and patterns seemed to lend cohesion and coherence to their written compositions. It was at this point that students were given the opportunity to construct a much longer piece of writing based on a business-related idea of their own.

The task began with a freewriting exercise in which students were introduced to a model resembling a semantic map (see Appendix A: 4.1). They were given the chance to brainstorm ideas related to a business theme of their choice. McCarthy (1990: 97) states that as a visual presentation, maps are a good way of ordering ideas and material along semantic lines. This ties in with the larger notion of semantic 'fields' (Aitchison 1994: 83) that represent the abstract notions of what the student may wish to put on paper and which, in turn, must be realized by lexical 'fields' which are the actual words the student will use to express their meaning. For instance, one student from the class decided that their small business proposal was to be a headhunting agency servicing hi-tech firms. They consulted the model that had been provided for their use (see Appendix A: 4.1) and proceeded to construct their own map using words and phrases such as 'bank loan,' 'office space,' and 'hiring staff'- all ideas he had brainstormed in an attempt to develop his idea of a small business further. The initial

part of the proposal task was done individually, but students were free to consult the teacher, their partner, or other classmates as to the viability of their business idea and ask for suggestions. Schmitt and McCarthy (1997: 249) claim that these kinds of activities are important in "integrating new words with old, promoting deep levels of encoding, and establishing concreteness." In addition, they say that there is evidence that combining this kind of semantic elaboration with the keyword approach builds memory traces, such as mental records of the experience and retrieval paths.

4.3   Implementation – Part 3

The final part of the unit was a chance for the students to present their business proposal in a post-task public performance. They also had the chance to listen to and evaluate their classmates' presentations (see Appendix C). Here they had the opportunity to utilize business-related vocabulary and expressions in a semi-formal presentation in front of a group – something that might be important for them in their own business situations. This is what Skehan (1994: 196) refers to as a 'retrospective' approach to task implementation. It was thought that tension between the writing task and the performance requirement would contribute to heightened awareness and, in turn, more focus on accuracy.

A homework assignment involving the composition of business correspondence documents (see Appendix B) required students to work on their writing between classes 1 and 2. Homework was then e-mailed directly to the teacher's office for assessment in an attempt to add more authenticity to the overall task. The

combination of in-class exercises/tasks and homework assignments was seen as a way of introducing more useful material into the unit of work, but also as a way of maintaining continuity between the break in classes. Finally, the 'Vocabulary & Sentences' worksheet (see Appendix D) was designed to recycle new language and hopefully aid in the acquisition of these items.

5   Comments on the Outcome of the Trial

5.1   Overall Targets

Willis (1990: 69) states "there is no way of knowing for sure what language items will be assimilated by the learners at a given stage of his or her language development." However, students' general satisfaction with the unit of work discussed above (from questionnaire results collected at the end of the trial) seemed to indicate that they had had opportunities to: 1) use language for real purposes as they exchanged ideas, 2) 'flex' their language to accommodate ideas beyond their current resources, 3) collect vocabulary items and phrases that might be useful to them in the future – particularly in their jobs, and, 4) organize new vocabulary and ideas cohesively/coherently within a meaningful topic-based content. From the results of the trial it became apparent that it is important to adjust selected tasks to meet the needs of a particular class. Within the context of this particular trial, attempts by the teacher to recycle language or make useful generalizations was important as was form-focused and message-focused practice during the production of the target language.

5.2   Tasks/Exercises

In Part 1 of the unit of work an emphasis was placed on vocabulary in context at the sentence level as it is used for written communication. Therefore, attention was directed at learners studying word pairs, collocations, idioms, and other forms of fixed expression commonly used in English in a business environment. Another important aspect was note-taking exercises. The students were asked to keep adding key words and phrases discussed in class to their 'Business Vocabulary & Sentences' worksheet (see Appendix D). As they progressed through Parts 2 and 3 of the unit they often successfully incorporated these new vocabulary into their own sentences. These were then available for later review and for use in their daily working environments. However, in certain cases discourse criteria - such as effective use of topic sentences, paragraph unity, transitions, cohesion and rhetorical conventions - were not always effectively adhered to by learners, even with writing models as a guide.

Some learners were able to effectively relate ideas in their writing and include personal experience, facts and opinions. However, others had difficulties in this respect that included problems involving a lack of background or a breakdown in related ideas. None of the student writing could be said to truly mis-communicate their intended message to the point where the reader was unable to infer the intended meaning. However, certain of the samples did contain features that contributed to a breakdown in morphology, forcing the reader to infer meaning as best they could. In the writing tasks under discussion, this was the result of a lack of background, inaccurate grammar or syntax, absence of essential rhetorical devices, and other factors.

5.3   Pair work/Peer Correction

Throughout many of the writing tasks students worked as pairs and were required to comment on what they considered difficulties in their partner's composition. Chaudron (1988: 134) comments on the nature of feedback and states that: "information available in feedback allows learners to confirm, disconfirm and possibly modify the hypothetical, "transitional" rules of their developing grammars." Features in the students' writing such as ineffective topic sentences, paragraph disunity, and problematic transitions all had negative effects on fluency and were often detected through peer correction exercises. In the case of poor transitions, some of the students' written compositions moved from one idea to the next using transitional words such as 'first' but reverted to others like 'so' to introduce the next point and never continued the anticipated 'first, second, third' sequence that should have developed. Such difficulties can be detected through pair/peer correction and can allow students to gain insight into their own approach to learning.

5.4   Presentations/Homework

Some of the learners written work and subsequent presentations demonstrated a lack of consistent focus or logical sequencing and transitions between ideas. In some cases learners produced documents that were too long or did not clearly specify action requests. In other cases they had to be read in their entirety for a reader to find the key points or assumed their reader could identify with what was being communicated.

Scholfield (in Schmitt and McCarthy 1997: 295) stresses the importance of 'noticing', or the conscious awareness of features of the language which have become salient due to intervention by the teacher or other students, which assists learners with such writing difficulties. Such noticing can also help to inform choices about what language is appropriate to the task and whether a sufficient variety of word choice has been included throughout a composition. In some of the students' writing inappropriate words confused meaning and hindered a reader's comprehension of the writer's message with a resulting breakdown in cohesion and coherence.

6   Content in Relation to Current Teaching Practices

6.1   Integrated Skills Approach

The unit of work designed for the class under discussion demanded high levels of communicative ability. Closed replication tasks were thought of as the best way to provide the necessary grounding in organization and layout the students would require to complete writing exercises assigned to them. Hedge (1988: 25) states that in such cases the teacher's role is essentially to provide an environment in which students will learn about writing, see models of good writing, get plenty of practice writing, and receive help during the writing process. She claims, however, that it is dangerous to focus a student's attention on only highly controlled writing exercises (whose primary aim is mastering form, rather than construction of meaning). In addition, Carter (1998: 212) warns that:

    although most language teachers prefer to present words for more advanced

learners in context, it has not been convincingly demonstrated that the information learners obtain from meeting words in a variety of contexts is more beneficial, either in terms of knowledge of forms or meanings of lexical items.

Planned activities structured by the teacher should always be regarded as an enabling device or support rather than as a rigid control. Therefore, some kind of middle ground, where both form and meaning are attended to, should be the objective for the teacher.

In order for a teacher to mediate effectively between the learner and the target language Bygate (1994: 243) states that there are four main areas where a teacher may intervene in task-based learning: pre-task preparation; task selection; manipulation of on-task conditions; and post-task follow-up. Retrospective approaches to task implementation and their concern with a post-task public performance seem to achieve a balance between form and function. From the first 'brainstorming' stage through to the final draft version a student's writing is influenced by the constraint that their work will be judged by others during presentation before an audience. As with the business proposal activity in **4.1**, there was attention to doing the task itself countered by a concern with accuracy and correctness because of the public performance to come. Skehan (1994: 197) states that:

in this way, a retrospective methodology for task-based learning achieves balance between the different forces within language development: it enables the acquisition of fluency, integration and synthesis without compromising the way in which restructuring may occur, and learners also attend to accuracy.

It is, above all, however, the 'rehearsal' aspect of such tasks that contributes to improved accuracy in the handling of target language form.

7   Conclusion

Providing students with a framework to build on the skills they already have and progress to more complex communication levels was the overall aim of the unit of work the students engaged in. Relying on task-based, process-driven materials that could create a business-style environment helped achieve these ends. An additional goal for the unit was to give the students opportunities to use English they have been studying so that they can use it more naturally. This involved increasing the length and difficulty level of their written sentences and assisting them in encoding as much of their intended meaning into a message as possible. This also meant giving students the opportunity to practice their English in authentic business situations with an emphasis on the four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing, but especially writing within a business context. By simulating a variety of situations through the use of different task-related exercises students were able to utilize forms of the language they already knew and practice new forms introduced throughout the unit. Retrospective application activities, with their requirement that the target language be applied in a structured assignment and then rehearsed in public, may be one of the best ways to aid acquisition in a writing skills-based lesson. As the suggested teaching procedures outlined above illustrate, this is one way that a teacher can make their teaching of writing and target language forms communicative while still moving learners towards a desire for accuracy.

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Appendix A :

<u>Contents</u>

Business Writing Basics

Part 1:

Business Writing Proposal

Part 2:

Part 3:

Presentations

Homework Assignments p.41

1.1

The Parts of a Topic Sentence (10 mins)

Circle the topic and underline the controlling idea in each of the following sentences.

Example: **Microsoft Office 2000 software** is <u>easy to use</u>.

(Topic)   (Controlling Idea)

Practice Samples:

1. Japanese electronics have a world famous reputation.

2. The hi-tech industry is a major part of the U.S. economy.

3. Trade is an important activity between most nations.

4. Bananas are a major export for Brazil.

5. Technology shares are traded heavily on the stock market.

Remember:

A good topic sentence:

- Is a complete sentence with a subject, a verb, and a controlling idea.
- States clearly the main idea of the paragraph but does not include specific

details.

- Is usually the first sentence in the paragraph.

1.2

Position of Topic Sentences

Model 1

Trade

Trade between countries is important for many different reasons. One reason is that trade helps countries remain economically healthy. In order to compete in world markets they must stay financially strong. A second reason is friendly relations. Different countries need to maintain good relationships to participate in a global economy. Therefore, trade amongst countries is important for these and many other reasons.

Model 2

Stock Exchange

A stock exchange, where shares are bought and sold, is one measure of a country's economic status. These places are trading markets where people who represent companies and industry publicly buy and sell stocks and shares. They are very busy places with lots of noise and activity. A country's future economic strength is decided here. It is

therefore important to recognize the central need of a stock exchange in ensuring a country's overall financial health.

1.3

Writing Topic Sentences (20 mins)

Practice Exercises:

Write good topic sentences for the following paragraphs in the space provided. Include in your sentence both a topic and a controlling idea.

Paragraph 1:

_____.

For instance, the automotive, electronic and photographic industries are all well represented by Japanese companies. Famous product names such as Toyota, Sony and Nikon are known around the world. Furthermore, certain aspects of Japanese products such as compactness, fuel efficiency, and affordability have become the industry standard and forced other product makers to follow their lead. Therefore, we can truly see the influence of Japanese products around the world.

Paragraph 2:

_____

_____ .

 For example, a company may be divided into different sections, departments or divisions. Various managers are in charge of these different parts of the company. These companies can even be referred to as subsidiaries when they are under the central control of a larger organization. As you can see, companies can be multi-layered and quite complex.

1.4

The Concluding Sentence

A concluding sentence serves three purposes:

1. It signals the end of the paragraph.
2. It summarizes the main points of the paragraph.
3. It gives a final comment on your topic and leaves the reader with the most important ideas to think about.

You can start your concluding sentence with one of these key words:

(These are followed by a comma)

Finally,
In conclusion,
In summary,
Therefore,
Thus,
As a result,
Indeed,

(These are not followed by a comma)

We can see that…
It is clear that…

Remember:

 A good concluding sentence:

- Signals the end of the paragraph
- Summarizes the important points briefly or restates the topic sentence in different words

1.5

Writing Concluding Sentences (20 mins)

Model

Trade

Trade between countries is important for many different reasons. One reason is that trade helps countries remain economically healthy. In order to compete in world markets they must stay financially strong. A second reason is friendly relations. Different countries need to maintain good relationships to participate in a global economy. <u>Therefore, trade amongst countries is important for these and many other reasons.</u>

Practice Exercise:

There are many different sorts of businesses in the world but the retail sector represents one category. They are involved in selling directly to individual consumers of a product. Thus, businesses in this sector often consist

of privately run shops and outlets, or franchised chains such as convenience stores and restaurants._____

Practice Exercise:

When retailers want to stock their stores and businesses with the product they sell, they rely on a wholesaler to take care of their needs. This kind of company sells large quantities of merchandise to retail businesses. However, unlike the retailer, wholesalers are not in direct contact with the end-user of the products they sell._____

1.6

Signal Words & Phrases

Signal words are words such as **first, second, next, finally, therefore**, and **however**, or phrases such as **in conclusion**, **on the other hand**, and **as a result**. Other signal words are: (**similarly, furthermore, in addition**), an opposite idea (**on the other hand, however, in contrast**), an example, (**for example**), a result (**as a result**), or a conclusion (**in conclusion**).

Use of Signal Words

Go back to the Topic/Concluding sentence exercises in 1.1 –

1.5 and identify where signal words and phrases were used. How do they build fluency and coherence?

Which paragraph contains signal words and is easier to understand? Circle all of the signal words that you can find.

Note: Certain of the paragraphs are easier to understand because they contain signal words and phrases like:

However
Thus
By comparison
Although
Finally

2.1 Single Paragraph Compositions (40 mins)

- In a **simple listing paragraph**, the items are listed in any order.
- In an **order of importance paragraph**, the items are listed in order.

Read the paragraph below.

Three Important Departments in My Company

There are three important departments in my company. The most important is the Sales department. Without the Sales department the company would not exist since they are the people who create profit for the company. The second most important is the Human Resource

department. They are responsible for recruiting and hiring quality staff for the company and paying their salaries. The third most important department is Finance. It is the Finance department that manages the inflow and outflow of cash for the company. These are the three departments I think are the most important ones in my company.

2.2 Now, with your partner, **outline** the paragraph from **1.1**

Central Idea _____

Body

                      idea   what's important

Most important   _____ _____

                          _____

2nd most important _____ _____

                          _____

3rd most important _____ _____

                          _____

Conclusion _____

_____

2.3 Now, individually, or with your partner, **outline** your own paragraph on the **three most important departments** or **divisions** in your company.

Central Idea _____

Body

                idea   why it's important

Most important   _____ _____

                                    _____

2nd most important_____ _____

                                    _____

3rd most important _____   _____

                              _____

Conclusion   _____

2.4   Now write your composition. **First**, write the title. **Second**, write a sentence for the central idea. **Third**, write at least one sentence for each other idea. **Last**, write a sentence for your conclusion.

_____

_____
_____

_____
_____
_____

_____
_____

_____
_____

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_____

_____
_____

When you have finished your **outline** and **paragraph** exchange it with your partner so they can check it for organization, grammar and spelling.

2.5 Now, on your own, write a full outline on **one** of the following:

- **3 products/services/policies** offered by your company
- **3 new potential markets** for your company

Central Idea _____

Body

1st _____ _____

_____

2nd _____ _____

_____

3rd _____ _____

_____

Conclusion _____

2.6 Now, **write a paragraph** based on your outline in **2.5**

_____

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When you have finished, exchange your **outline** and **paragraph** with your partner so they can check it for organization, grammar and spelling.

3.1 Multi-paragraphCompositions (30 Mins)

3.2 FREE PRACTICE

Now, on your own, write a **multi-paragraph composition** expanding on what you wrote for your paragraph in exercises **2.5** and **2.6**. For a method of organization you may use either *simple listing* or *order of importance*.

First, outline your composition:

Introduction
   Central Idea   _____
   Other Information:

Body
   First Paragraph:
   Central idea   _____
   Other Information:

   Second Paragraph:

Central Idea   _____

Other Information:

Third Paragraph:

Central Idea   _____

Other Information:

Conclusion

  Central Idea   _____

When you have finished, exchange your **outline** with your partner and check each other's work for organization, grammar and spelling.

4.1

Planning Your Business Proposal (30 mins)

FREEWRITING

Step 1: Write the topic at the top of your paper.
Step 2: Write as much as you can about the topic until you run out of ideas.
Step 3: After you have run out of ideas, re-read your paper and circle the main idea(s) that you are interested in developing.
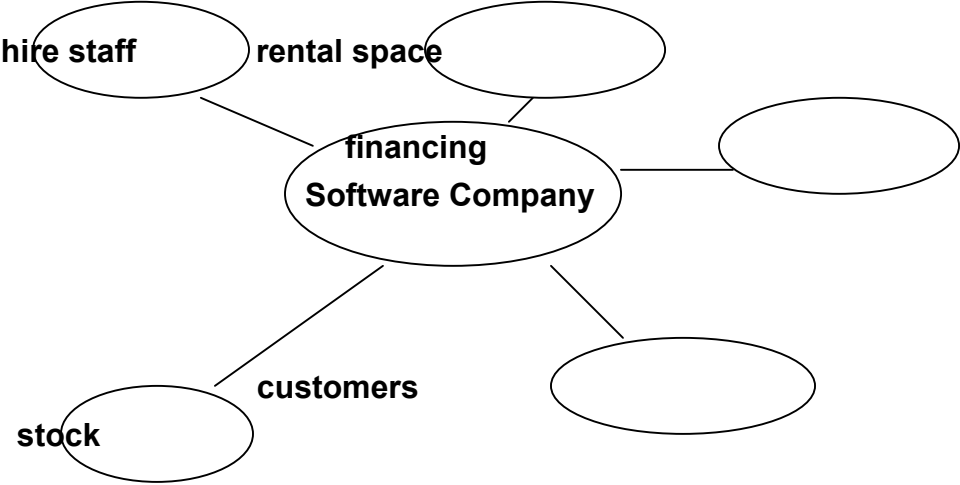**Step 4:** Take the main idea and freewrite again.

Freewriting Sample:

Topic: Proposal to Start a Small Business

hire staff   rental space

financing
Software Company

customers

stock

4.2   Work in **pairs or small groups**. Discuss the following questions:

Questions:

1. Have you ever thought about starting your own business?
2. What kind of business would you like to start?
3. What are the advantages/disadvantages of running a small business?
4. What do you need to do in order to set up your own business? What problems can you expect? **Make two lists** (see below). One example is given for each.

A: Setting Up
- come up with a good idea
-
-
-
-
-
-

B: Problems
- find cheap office space
-
-
-
-

When you have finished your **lists**, ask your partner for any more **ideas** or **suggestions**.

4.3   Writing Project Assignment:

Your written composition should focus on one of the following **themes**:

- **Proposal to Start Your Own Small Business (Start-up Strategy)**
- **Market Research Project (before launching a new product/service)**
- **Planning a new Advertising Campaign (for your company's services)**
- **Other?**

Use the space below to write down ideas about a **small business idea/ market research project/ ad campaign**, or **other** theme of your choice that you would like to propose.

FREEWRITING SPACE:

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

When you have finished, exchange your **proposal** with your partner and ask them to read it. Do they have any **suggestions**? Ask them for some.

5.1   **Business Proposal Outline** (45 mins)

Now it's your turn to design your own **business proposal/market research project/advertising campaign/other** and to construct an outline using your ideas:

Proposal Idea: _____

_____

Body: 1st Supporting Point:

_____

_____

2nd Supporting Point:

_____

3rd Supporting Point:

_____

_____

Conclusion: _____

_____

_____

Remember: **1. Discuss only one point in each paragraph.**

    2. All supporting sentences must directly support your business proposal idea.

    3. An outline is useful as a plan for a multi-paragraph composition. It organizes the ideas.

When you have completed your **proposal** exchange it with your partner and have them check it for organization, grammar, and spelling.

5.2   Drafting Your Business Proposal

    Step 1:   Multi-Paragraph Outline

    Step 2:   Writing a First Rough Draft

Your next step is to add more details to your proposal. Think of new points to help support your idea for a successful **small business/market research project/advertising campaign/other**. Look at the multi-paragraph sample below:

5.3   Sample:

         Title: Software Development Company

Introduction:

Central Idea: I believe opening a Software Development Company would be a success for a number of reasons. I will explain my staffing, financing, future expansion plans…

Paragraph 1

Central Idea: Reasons for a Software company

Supporting Ideas: 1. _____

                       2. _____

Paragraph 2

Central Idea: Financing & 3-Year Expansion Plan

Supporting Ideas: 1. _____

                    2. _____

Paragraph 3

Central Idea: <u>Staffing/Wages</u> _____

Supporting Ideas: 1. _____

                    2. _____

Conclusion: _____

5.4   Now it's your turn to draft your own **multi-paragraph outline**. Remember to include as many details as you can from your **freewriting** exercise.

Proposal Title: _____

Introduction:
Central Idea: _____
_____
_____

Paragraph 1:
Central Idea: _____

Supporting Ideas: 1.   _____
2.   _____

Paragraph 2:
Central Idea: _____

Supporting Ideas: 1.   _____
2.   _____

Paragraph 3:
Central Idea: _____

Supporting Ideas: 1.   _____
2.   _____

Conclusion: _____
_____

Remember: When you have finished, exchange your **draft** with your partner. Allow your partner to edit your writing and make suggestions for changes.

Presentations: The last **45 minutes** of class is reserved for student presentations (go to **Appendix C**).

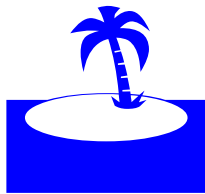# Letter, Fax & E-mail Homework Exercises

Important Note:

Choose any <u>2</u> of the following writing assignments and complete your own written document using the models as a guide. After you are finished, e-mail your completed assignments to the teacher for evaluation.

Assignment 1:   Faxing for Information

Look at the message below. Write a fax to a supplier requesting product information. Ask for specific information about delivery times and whether the requested items can be shipped to you.

Far East Trading Co., Ltd

34-2 Waterloo Road   **Tel. (82) 2-335-7987**
Kowloon, Hong Kong   **Fax.(82) 2-335-7988**

Fax Message
If you do not receive all pages, call or fax immediately

To: Northwestern Shipping   **Date:** May 17, 2001
        Export Department
        Banff, Canada

From: Pu Yin Fang
        Far East Trading Co., Ltd

Re: Product Request

Dear Sir or madam,

I would like some information about how soon we could receive a delivery
of 40 crates of smoked salmon which we have learned your company exports to specialty restaurants around the world. Distributors here in Hong Kong have been
requesting we import this item as there is a large demand from their customers.

If you are able to ship us the requested amount before the end of the month, it would be much appreciated. Please bill our account as per usual.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Pu Ying Fang
Pu Ying Fang

Assignment 2:   Sending an E-mail

Read Mike's e-mail to a vendor. Write an e-mail to one of your company's customers/clients, or suppliers and ask for a chance to meet them.

e-mail for: Sam Jones

received: Monday., May 28 10:03 a.m.
sender: Mike Morris
re: Meeting next month

Thank you for your recent fax. You will be happy to know that the products we've imported from your company are being well received by our customers.

I'll be in New York next month and would like a chance to meet with you. In particular, I'd like to discuss importing more of your high quality automobile parts.

I'll arrive in New York on April 12th and leave April 17th. Would it be possible for us to meet sometime during my stay? I look forward to hearing from you.
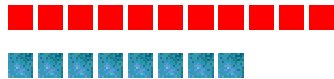
Sincerely,
Mike Morris
Mike Morris

Assignment 3:   Letters of Complaint

Read the letter of complaint below. Next, write a letter complaining about some electronic parts that your company ordered. You ordered 100 units but only 50 were sent. Follow the format in the sample letter to write your own.

Joseph Brown
5038 La Casa Road
Riverside, CA 90512

January 7, 2001

Senior Engineer
Standard Electric Co., Ltd
Boston, MA 80633

Dear Sir,

Our company made an order for six semi-conductor units last week and received them by courier this morning. Unfortunately, they had not been properly packaged and two of the units arrived with broken covers. This has caused us a lot of problems because we needed to install all six units to start our new production line. Now we'll have to wait for the replacements.

We feel we should receive a discount on the replacement units.

Please write or fax us as soon as possible and let us know when the new units can be sent.

Sincerely,

Joseph Brown

Joseph Brown

Assignment 4: Responding to Complaints

Read the letter below. Decide how you can respond to the complaint letter that you wrote for **Assignment 3.** Use the format in the following letter as a model.

<center>

⚡ **Standard Electric Co., Ltd** ⚡

Boston, MA 80633

</center>

Joe Brown   January 12, 2001
5038 La Casa Road
Riverside, CA 90512

Dear Mr. Brown,

We received your letter telling us of the problem with two of the semi-conductor units we shipped to you earlier this month. We are very sorry to hear that their covers had been damaged during transit. We can assure you that all six units were in perfect condition when they left our factory.

We are sorry for the problems it has caused you and have decided to offer a 20% discount on the replacement units, which we are shipping, express this afternoon. You should receive them no later than tomorrow morning.

Once again, please accept our apologies for the trouble this has caused you.

<div align="right">

Sincerely,

Donald Townsend

Donald Townsend
Senior Engineer

</div>

Assignment 5:　Memo Exercise

Read the sample memo below. Write a memo using a similar format outlining some change that will occur in your office. All company employees must be informed of the change by the fax you will send them. Remember to include as many details as you can about what they need to know.

▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ Memo ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪

To:　All company employees

From:　Steve Cooper

Date:　　May 4, 2001

Subject:　new office security system

Beginning next Monday (May 9th) all staff will be issued new security pass cards. You will need these in order to enter the building and access various offices on the different floors.

There will be a brief training session this Friday in the staff lunchroom. A representative from the security firm installing the new devices will explain the details of how to use the system and answer any questions you might have. All employees are requested to attend.

We would appreciate your co-operation and understanding in this matter.

Sincerely,
The Management
SKM Corporation

Assignment 6: Requesting Adjustment

The following letter outlines a request for adjustment on a charge made to a company's account. Write a similar letter asking one of your vendors to change the amount they billed you.

deltasys Electronics Ltd
Celeron Way, Chicago, IL
2746481

Ralph Richardson
APM Connector Co., Ltd
Cyber Boulevard,
Detroit, Michigan
8474658   12 November 2000

Dear Mr Richardson,

    This morning we received a box of connectors (serial #498568758) and an invoice totaling $7623.49. The number of items shipped was correct, however the amount payable is higher than what we had expected. Based on our own figures, the total charge should have been $7546.67.

    We would ask that you check your booking records again and determine where the mistake originated and reimburse our account (No. 89-358937-593) accordingly. Enclosed you will find a copy of the original invoice which you can use when consulting your records.
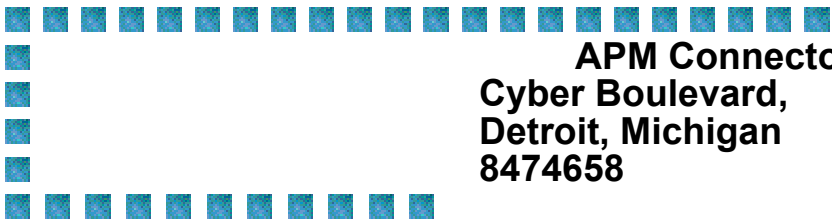
    We would appreciate a prompt resolution of this matter.

Sincerely,

William Bernstein
William Bernstein
Accounts Department
deltasys Electronics Ltd.

Assignment 7: Adjustment Letter

The following adjustment letter is a response to **Assignment 6**. Write a similar response from the vendor you corresponded with.

APM Connector Co, Ltd
Cyber Boulevard,
Detroit, Michigan
8474658

deltasys Electronics Co., Ltd   01 Dec 2000
Celeron Way, Chicago, IL
2746481

Dear Mr. Bernstein,

 With regards to your letter dated November 12th, you are indeed correct to claim that we over charged you a total of $76.82 on your last order. We have made the necessary adjustment to your account in accordance with your request and apologize for the error. We are currently having new accounting software installed in our computer system and have yet to work out all the bugs. This, or perhaps a keyboard error, was the source of the discrepancy.

 To guard against anything of this sort occurring again in the future, we have decided to hire an extra accounts payable staff member to handle our numerous clients.

 Once again, we would like to extend our deepest regrets for the error. We value you as a customer and hope that you will continue to do business with us in the future.

Most Sincerely,

Ralph Richardson

Ralph Richardson
Accounts Manager
APM Connector Co., Ltd

Assignment 8:   Requesting Information

Look at the fax below. A company is asking for information about the results of a market survey they recently had done for them. Write a similar fax, but ask about the results of a survey or opinion poll conducted for **your** company.

New Generation Computer Company

2001 Front Street, Toronto, Canada

Fax Message

To: Northern Demographics   **Date:** 10 May 1999
        Survey Division
        Montreal, Canada

From: Brian Thomas
        Senior Marketing Manager

Re: Market Survey Test Results

To Whom It May Concern,

I am very interested in finding out the results from the market survey you conducted last month. Has your company finished its analysis? We are very interested in marketing our new product as soon as possible, so we would like to have the survey results without delay. Please send us any additional information you may have by e-mail or fax.

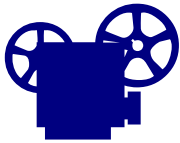I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Assignment 9:   Proposal Letter

The letter below is addressed to a vendor offering their services as a sales agent. Write a letter to one of your vendors offering to provide service as a sales agent for their products.

PROFESSIONAL OPTICS , LTD

6-23-15 Aoyama Dori
Tokyo, Japan 108-0056

Global Optical, Inc.
9233 Likelike Highway
Honolulu, Hawaii 98786

May 5, 2000

Dear Mr. Mitchell,

I recently had the opportunity to examine your company's products at an industry trade show. I was very impressed with the quality and workmanship that your products displayed.

Our company is a leading marketer of high quality cameras and other optical equipment and we would like the opportunity to discuss the possibility of selling your products at our retail outlets. I believe that the national exposure that your products will receive at our stores could be very profitable.

If you are free to meet during the week of September 23rd I would like to arrange a meeting with you. I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Yasunori Takahashi

Yasunori Takahashi
Marketing Dept.

Assignment 10: Responding to a Proposal

Below is an answer to the letter in **Assignment 9**. Write either a negative or positive response to the letter you wrote for **Assignment 9**. You will either accept or decline the offer.

Global Optical, Inc.

9233 Likelike Highway
Honolulu, HI 98786

Mr Yasunori Takahashi
Marketing Dept.
Professional Optics, Ltd
6-23-15 Aoyama Dori
Tokyo, Japan 108-0056   May 7, 2000

Dear Mr Takahashi,

Thank you for your generous offer to market our products in your retail stores across the country. The recent trade show you attended provided our merchandise some much needed exposure. We are certainly interested in working with retail chains such as yours that already have strategic sales locations and an established reputation in the business.

I would very much like to meet with your during the week of 23rd September. I would also like to offer to take you to one of our famous seafood steak restaurants so that you can enjoy some of our delicious local cuisine. We can discuss more of the business details at that time.

Sincerely,

Miyuki Johns

Miyuki Johns
Senior Sales Representative

Final Presentation & Evaluation

Presenters Name: _____ Your Name: _____

Introduction & Ending

Excellent   Okay   Weak

10 9 8   7   6   5   4   3   2   1

One Phrase: _____

Range of Vocabulary

Excellent   Okay   Weak

10 9 8 7 6 5   4   3   2   1

One Phrase: _____

Body (Transitions & Clarity)

Excellent   Okay   Weak

10 9 8   7   6   5   4   3 2   1

One Phrase: _____

Q-A Session

Excellent   Okay   Weak

10 9   8   7   6   5   4   3 2   1

One Phrase:_____

TOTAL POINTS _____

Business Vocabulary & Sentences Worksheet

Date _____ *Text* _____ *Pages*

Words (Write down 10 new or important vocabulary from today's lesson. After class, record the sentence you found them in. Try to use them in future lessons)

1. _____   6. _____

2. _____   7. _____

3. _____   8. _____

4. _____   9. _____

5. _____   10. _____

Sentences (At the end of class or for homework, write out three good sentences from the lesson. Go back and review them as often as you can)

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____