Teaching Composition in the College Level Foreign Language Class: Insights and Activities from Sociocultural Theory

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Abstract: The second language composition course at the college level presents a number of challenges to the instructor. A requirement for most major and minor language degrees, there are many factors that make the course difficult or burdensome to teach. It is precisely this course, however, that offers learners the opportunity to develop their linguistic and written competencies and the instructor the opportunity to create multiple situations of pedagogical value. This article will draw on several relevant and useful components of sociocultural theory in the organization of a second language composition course and the creation of activities designed to improve students' written skills in the second language.

Introduction
The college level second language composition class is for many instructors a challenging course to teach. Required in some form for almost all major and minor language programs, there are many factors that contribute to making it a difficult course for both instructors and learners. For some teachers, difficulty lies in focusing the course and choosing an appropriate text, as well as in dealing with the varied skill levels of the students. One of the greatest obstacles, for both instructor and learner, is the difficulty that most students have when trying to write coherent and concise compositions in the second language.

It is because of its problematic nature, however, that the composition class offers learners a valuable opportunity to develop their linguistic and written competencies, while challenging the instructor to create pedagogical situations and activities that enhance the students' development. Sociocultural theory in particular provides us with a theoretical framework for better understanding the learning process and for creating activities that help students work in and move through the stages of acquisition, in this case, as it relates to the development of their second language writing competence.

This article will draw on several relevant and useful components of sociocultural theory in the organization of a second language composition course and the creation of activities designed to improve students' written skills in the second language. Specifically, the concepts of activity, tool use, and the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) will be explored with the goals of (1) understanding the ways that students learn to write in a second language and (2) creating classroom practices and activities that facilitate students' on-going development and learning. Activities and materials from a third-year Spanish composition course will be used as examples of socioculturally informed practice.

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Organizational Issues in the Second Language Composition Course

As with many other courses beyond the intermediate level, a particular challenge to teaching second language composition stems from the variety of skill levels that can be found among students in a single class, or simply their lack of ability in the target language. In many language programs, it is believed that learners, having passed through more or less the same courses, should be homogenous with respect to their linguistic ability, or it is hoped that by this point in their studies the students will “know all the grammar.” More commonly, however, learners bring to the class a wide range of skills and experiences. It is important to understand that, after the relatively short period of time that most have been studying the foreign language, learners will still be inexpert. The goal of the composition course, however, is not to bring everyone to the same level, but to ensure that all progress in their development.

Determining the focus of a composition course can be difficult, since there are so many aspects of writing that might be considered. The study of writing includes different genres (e.g., essay, narration, etc.) and different levels of analysis (e.g., the phrase, the sentence, the paragraph, etc.) Many times the genre is determined by the textbook that has been chosen for the class. For example, a given book may have learners writing a different kind of text with every chapter, moving, as it were, from narration to description, to a review, to a newspaper article, and so on. The disadvantage of this type of instruction is that it may be understandably difficult for a student to improve in a text type when the genre being studied changes every two weeks. Furthermore, the pedagogical value of teaching learners to write something that might be of little utility or personal meaning — either in the native or foreign language — is unclear.

Another, perhaps more significant problem with this particular approach is the lack of concurrence between the text types covered in a composition course and the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. The ACTFL proficiency guidelines present a series of skill levels from Novice to Superior and relate each level to different linguistic abilities (ACTFL, 1986). Narration, for example, is an ability that corresponds to the Advanced level, whereas most students in a third-year undergraduate language class fall somewhere in the Intermediate range. This is not to say that narration should not be practiced in a composition class, only that we should expect that learners will narrate less precisely than they describe or perform other functions more appropriate to their skill level. Furthermore, to completely develop their Intermediate level skills, students should combine regular practice of Intermediate functions, interspersed with less frequent practice of skills from the next level.

A quick review of composition texts finds that most focus on higher-level linguistic contexts, such as the writing of paragraphs or the organization of entire compositions. Few focus on the construction of phrases and sentences apart from grammatical and orthographic concerns. In the absence of instruction, students often continue to produce phrases and sentences that lack color and detail, or the kind and amount of description that is critical to the Intermediate level.

The paucity of detail in students’ writing may stem from their lack of interest in their own compositions. Unfortunately, the text may contribute to this disinterest by failing to provide appealing topics about which to write. The typical composition book is based on readings that reflect the various genres to be studied. The readings are followed by comprehension and discussion questions, which then serve as the thematic foundation for the students’ compositions. Many times, the topics of these selections are similar to those the learners have seen since the beginning of their second language studies: university life, Hispanics in the United States, French cuisine, and so on. It is not to say that these topics are not interesting, only that they may be overused or at least not always presented in such a way as to attract the learners’ attention. Perhaps the solution, albeit an onerous one, would be for the instructor to find reading selections that match the students’ interests. Another promising option would be to use learners’ experience outside of class, perhaps in a service learning context, rather than a written text, as the basis of discussion (Cedeño, 1999). By allowing students to express and relate their own experiences through writing, their compositions become more interesting to them and, importantly, acquire a real-life purpose.

Addressing the Difficulties of Writing in a Second Language

Of the aforementioned problems, some are more easily addressed than others. Perhaps the most troublesome aspect of the composition class is simply the difficulty that students have writing in the second language. In other words, for our English-speaking students, the process of writing in a second language is not the same or as easy as writing in their native language. This does not refer to the writing in their native language. This does not refer to the tendency of many learners to translate literally, but rather to the fact that even students who are highly proficient writers in English may have significant problems when writing in a foreign language. It is true that their linguistic limitations make the task more difficult. However, their successful transformation from native language writer to second language writer does not depend solely on grammatical competence, since the errors that one finds in students’ compositions are not limited to grammatical mistakes. To the contrary, their compositions many times lack logical structure, clarity, and a central theme or obvious
purpose — in addition to displaying various lexical and syntactic faults. Moreover, even the most prepared learners may produce compositions with few grammatical errors that are nonetheless incomprehensible due to unsound construction and organization of ideas.

It has been argued that written competency is distinct from linguistic knowledge (Scott, 1996). If this is the case, then the act of writing in both the first and second languages ought to be informed by the same extralinguistic knowledge as the composition process. Research has shown that learners who write well in English generally write better in the second language than do their counterparts of lesser competency. That is, as in reading, there is a certain reapplication of knowledge and ability to the second language context (Friedlander, 1990; Valdés et al., 1993). What has not been explained satisfactorily is why these learners are not able transfer this knowledge more completely and efficiently, and why it is difficult for second language teachers to assist students who are already proficient writers in English.

As instructors, we bear some of the responsibility. The marked emphasis on grammar in many composition classes may lead students to believe that it is the true focus of the course, and that they can succeed by simply writing without syntactic errors. The instructor's own grading scale, if it is heavily weighted towards grammar, may inadvertently advise students that other aspects of the composition, such as the organization or development of ideas, will not affect their grade to the same degree. Yet many learners do try their best to write coherent and cohesive texts and fall short of the mark. Thus, an instructor's emphasis on grammar alone cannot account for the logical mistakes found in students' compositions. In order to understand our learners' behavior and the problem of second language writing, as well as to begin to address these concerns in the classroom, we turn to sociocultural theory and the ideas of the Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky.

**Insights from Vygotsky and Sociocultural Theory**

Sociocultural theory is concerned with the way that the human mind functions and acquires concepts and ideas, all of which occurs in a social environment. Several concepts from the theory will prove useful in discussing writing in a second language. Specifically, we will refer to the concepts of activity, tool use, external tools, and the Zone of Proximal Development.

Activity refers to the way in which humans construct their world and mediate their actions, both physical and mental. Each realization of activity depends on important factors such as the context, the sociocultural history and intentions of the individuals included in the activity, and the materials and instruments that are used to carry out the activity. Instruments or tools can be psychological or physical and are a fundamental part of human functioning. We use tools to control our environment and mediate our activities. Tools connect us and at the same time distance us from the object we wish to control. Distance, whether symbolic, physical, or temporal, becomes a tool in its own right, and is fundamental to controlling a cognitive function that we have yet to master. The most powerful and intimate psychological tool is language, and it is precisely this tool that our students are attempting to control and use in their efforts at composition.

Sociocultural theory allows us to discard the notion that the writing process in one language could be identical in a second. Each involves a very different instrument and as result, they necessarily comprise two different activities (Leontiev, 1981). In fact, changing from one language to another presupposes a huge transformation of the writing activity, given the central role of language in all human activity. It is true that learning another language opens us up to new cognitive possibilities. However, until we reach a certain level of proficiency, a change in language or instrument presents a significant challenge to the realization of difficult cognitive activities such as writing a coherent and cohesive text.

The task of writing in a second language poses a number of cognitive difficulties to the learner. Whereas in the communicative classroom learners are encouraged to speak freely in spite of errors, the task of writing on paper, in black and white, imposes a more rigid standard of accuracy and precision. Moreover, the foreign instrument is often so unwieldy or difficult to manage that few college-level learners can use it with the same automaticity that they enjoy in their first language.

From the outset, then, writing in a second language consumes a great amount of cognitive effort. This leaves the writer with little mental energy to take advantage of other information (about, for example, the composition process), instruments (such as notes, outlines, and instructor comments), and processes or actions (such as planning and proofing). Many times learners are simply unable to use the resources at their grasp. For many, then, the task of writing in a second language implies functioning with few cognitive resources.

Sometimes instructors do not take into account the enormity of this situation and believe that students ought to write with the same ease they experience when writing in English. Frequently, instructors are heard to say “think in Spanish (or German, or French, etc.), don't think in English,” without realizing the near impossibility of this or the psychological barrier that is created by this statement. However, if we take as our starting point the cognitive reality of our learners, as just described, we open ourselves up
to other possibilities of helping students improve their writing skills in the second language and their overall linguistic competency.

If writing in a second language is to write with few cognitive resources, the instructor's goal becomes finding ways to give learners access to the means and tools that they will need to be successful in their writing activity. Again, we return to the ideas of Vygotsky to understand the process of learning. Specifically, we look toward the concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the use of external tools and resources. The ZPD is a way of characterizing the stages involved in the acquisition of higher mental processes, such as writing in a second language (Wertsch, 1985). Vygotsky (1978) argued that cognitive development occurs in two stages. A learned function occurs first between two or more people and then within a person. That is, a person is first able to carry out a task with the help of another person or other outside sources of assistance and later learns to carry out the task individually with little or no outside help.

Initially, a learner cannot function as an independent agent and needs the help of more capable persons to complete the activity. These persons provide direction in the task and may offer external tools and resources. In the case of second language writing, this may include a dictionary, an outline, strategies for brainstorming, an instructor's or classmate's comments, and so on. With this assistance and other outside resources, the learner is able to complete the task. It can be said that the learner is regulated or controlled by others in the activity.

In the next stage of acquisition, the learner is able to work independently, using the same guidance and external resources that were offered to him or her earlier. For example, the learner may speak out loud to himself or herself, giving suggestions as if he or she were the instructor, or prepare his or her own outline. Although the control may have passed from the helper to the learner, it cannot be said that the learner has completely developed the function or that the function has become automatic, because the learner is dependent on external means to complete the activity (Lantolf & Appel, 1994).

Control of the activity is represented in the third stage of acquisition where, as in the second, the student is able to complete the task without help from others (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). What distinguishes this stage from the previous one, however, is that at this point all the actions from the first two stages occur internally without the student being conscious of them. Thus, the function has been completely internalized or made automatic. It is no longer being developed; rather, it has been developed. The assistance of others is no longer required and may in fact disturb the process. This stage represents self-regulation in the task. Importantly, however, this final stage can only be made possible by extended practice in the first and second stages of acquisition.

According to sociocultural theory, teaching is the process of helping students to develop mental functions (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). That is, the instructor helps the learner pass through the ZPD and provides him or her with the means and resources necessary to complete the task. These same means and resources will be used independently by the student and later on internalized in the completed acquisition of the function.

Sociocultural theory allows for the possibility that a previously internalized function may become deautomatized, perhaps because of a change in the characteristics of the activity. The assistance of other persons or other external resources may be needed to complete the activity as the person travels backwards through the ZPD. This is precisely the stage where we find our composition students. It is true that many already know how to write well in English (although an increasing number cannot). Upon switching languages, however, the writing process is no longer automatic. For many, the new tool is so difficult to control that they are unable to write with ease and clarity. It may even seem that the second language is controlling the learner and not the reverse. The students' own compositions provide clear evidence of this. Although instructors may wish that students could write as clearly and as well as they do in English, the switch to the second language has complicated and deautomatized the writing process, virtually assuring that this cannot happen without further, socially constructed and mediated learning.

A Sociocultural Theory-Informed Composition Course

As instructors, what can we do to assist learners in developing their written competence in the second language? Based on the aforementioned insights from sociocultural theory, the answer — or at least part of it — seems straightforward: We should no longer expect them to write as they do in English, and, importantly, we can return with them to the Zone of Proximal Development. We can provide them with the time and the opportunity to work with the assistance of others, using self-assistance and external tools. By itself, this is a valid approach, because we allow students to escape from the control of the second language, complete the task, and participate in the activity of writing. According to sociocultural theory, this type of participation is as valuable as an activity in which one appears to be acting alone. Additionally, working in the ZPD implies that the instructor will provide the means and guidance that learners need to complete the activity and that they will later need to internalize to become self-regulated in the activity of writing in a second language.

For many learners, providing these means and direc-
tion will involve making the writing process more explicit or external. It is true that many students have unconscious or even conscious knowledge of the writing process and the characteristics of good writing. It is information that they may use unconscious when they write in English. However, this information is probably not within their reach when they write in a second language, and it is the role of the instructor to bring it out for their use. Thus, it becomes necessary to review with learners the actions that minimally make up the writing process, for example, planning, generation and organization of ideas, and review and revision. However, this information cannot be simply presented to learners as part of a lecture. The stages of good writing represent cognitive strategies that students must use externally and consciously in order to later internalize (or reinternalize) them. Thus, instructors must create situations in which learners are asked to realize these cognitive actions overtly during the process of writing a composition. One way of doing this in the classroom is to have structured activities corresponding to many of the actions that make up the activity of writing. A good process-oriented text will help the instructor by emphasizing these actions and providing additional external resources that may be used by the learners in the composition process.

Planning and Prewriting Activities

For the different prewriting activities, it is useful to have students work in groups with checklists. The checklists and other handouts take them step-by-step through the processes of generating and organizing ideas. Working and speaking with other learners obliges them to externalize the planning phase of the composition. One significant problem for second language writers, like developing first-language writers, is that of distinguishing between the process of planning and that of really writing the composition. Many times, our students hand in their outlines or drafts mistakenly believing that they are completed compositions. Often, they are not able to distance themselves sufficiently from these drafts to take notice of their shortcomings. Externalizing the different actions involved in writing provides some of that distance and may help learners recognize and realize the distinct actions of planning and writing.

Peer- and Self-Editing

Review and revision are important steps in the composition process because they give the author the opportunity to read his or her composition as a reader (and not as the writer) and to determine where and how it can be improved. Unfortunately, for second language learners, this is particularly difficult because they are still controlled by a language that they have not yet mastered and by the writing process, which has become difficult for them again. They often are not able to distance themselves sufficiently from the composition to read it objectively. Thus, it is the instructor's task to provide the students with the external means needed to distance them from their compositions so that they can revise them. In order to do this, we must make the process of revision an external one as well.

Peer-editing and guided self-editing are two strategies that may help facilitate the students' revising. Peer-editing involves having learners read and comment on the text of a fellow student. The composition, because it is not one's own, is naturally more distant. Thus, it provides the perfect opportunity for students to develop their own reviewing and revising skills. An added benefit is that it motivates learners to write a respectable first draft, since it will be seen by their classmates. Before beginning the peer-editing process for the first time, students are guided through a sample evaluation by the instructor, using a model composition and a worksheet with guiding questions regarding the composition's structure and clarity. The questions will guide the learners through the evaluation process and will assist them in a careful reading of the compositions (see Appendix A for a sample worksheet for peer-analysis). The answers to the questions become useful comments about the content and structure of the composition and, importantly, external resources that will assist the author in the writing process.

The skills gained through peer-editing will ultimately assist students in editing their own compositions. Self-editing allows learners to review their compositions in a detailed manner, focusing on content and organization, in addition to grammar. Again, guiding questions are used, but this time the review process is divided into two parts (see Appendix B for a sample worksheet for self-analysis). The first reading is oriented to the structure and clarity of the composition. Students are asked to consider, for example, the appropriateness of the title, the strength of the conclusion, and the interest level of the composition. The second reading emphasizes the grammar of the text, and learners can be encouraged to verify, for example, subject–verb agreement, orthography, and the use of certain verbs. Central to the process is the students' summarizing on a separate sheet of paper the results of the two readings. This activity promotes responsibility on the part of the students, further externalizes the revision process, and focuses the students' attention on either the grammar or the substance of their compositions. Once they are externalized, learners become more conscious of and thus may be able to control these actions more easily.

It is important to require students to carry out the review and revision process at least one day after writing the composition, instead of immediately afterwards.
Learners may also want to take a break of several hours between the two separate readings. The temporal distance allows students to detach themselves further from the composition. Moreover, it helps to separate the actions of planning, writing, and revising into distinct processes.

**Putting It All Together**

The entire composition process can be carried out in the following way in the college classroom. After various classes in which learners have been given time to work with others in the generation and organization of ideas, they prepare their compositions at home or in the computer laboratory. Students are encouraged to compose at the computer, as opposed to merely type, as this allows them to take advantage of the potential for fluidity and on-the-spot revision that the computer (or word processor) permits. The learners, using guiding questions provided by the instructor or the textbook, engage in self-editing, first for content and structure, and then for grammar and other technical aspects of this preliminary composition. When the students come to class, they hand in copies of their composition to the instructor and a classmate. This preliminary composition is not considered a draft, and learners can be given a grade for it that will later figure into the final composition grade. This is done so that students are more likely to hand in something already thought through and well worked out.

The instructor and the peer-editors take the compositions home, where they prepare comments on the content and structure. The peer-editors are required to write up a typed review of the composition (this also promotes responsibility), following guidelines that they have been given. Additionally, the instructor may choose to point out (but not necessarily correct) any grammatical errors in the compositions. In the following class, the compositions are returned, and the students meet with their peer-editors to discuss the comments. The students will consider these comments and the suggestions of the instructor before revising the compositions. The two-part self-editing process is repeated once more before students hand in the final versions of their compositions to the instructor.

In order to promote good writing, it is advisable to grade students primarily on the content and structure of their compositions, along with their participation in the writing process (see Appendix C for a sample scoring rubric). It is important to take into account whether the composition is interesting, the argument follows a logical and clear structure, and the ideas have been sufficiently elaborated. Grammatical accuracy may figure into the grade, but like orthography and vocabulary use, should be of lesser importance. This is not to say that grammar is not relevant, only that a composition is not the best context in which to evaluate and emphasize grammatical competence. To motivate learners to write the best they can with respect to structure and content (and thus improve their overall written competency), they must absolutely believe that what they say matters more to their instructor than how they say it.

After receiving their graded compositions, students can be obliged to prepare a final debriefing of the assignment. In this activity, learners comment on the most positive aspects of their compositions and how they could be improved. They may be asked to compare their current works to previous compositions. They also analyze their grammatical errors, correcting those they can and indicating to the instructor those they cannot. Finally, they prepare a personal statement for addressing difficulties and improving their writing. Portfolios, which give the learner a chance to analyze his or her work from a longitudinal perspective, may be used to further develop the students’ reflective skills. Thus they can see how much they have improved and where they must continue to work.

It should be noted that in the composition class just described, all compositions are of the same genre: the expository text. This is so for two reasons. First, exposition is a text type that corresponds well to the Intermediate level proficiency of most composition students. Functions of the Intermediate level include description and enumeration of facts, all of which occur in expository texts. Second, having to repeat this text type affords the students continued and structured practice in a single task. This allows them to take advantage of what they learn through each composition — and apply it to the next one. For that reason, it is important to use a textbook that confines itself for the most part to this genre, such as Nance and Rivera’s *Aprendizaje* (1996) for Spanish.

The process of writing each composition, then, can be characterized by an organized structure, the assistance of others, and the use of external means to facilitate writing in a second language. The external resources that are provided to the students include their classmates, brainstorming sessions, worksheets, questions, and instructions that guide the learners through the composition process, as well as the students’ own reflections on their compositions.

This writing process stands out because of the long period of time over which it transpires. Indeed, time is perhaps one of the most important resources that we can offer our students. Carrying out all the actions necessary for writing a composition requires time. It is especially needed for planning, writing and revising, as well as for resting in between these difficult actions. Time can provide learners with some much-needed distance from their compositions as they begin to develop their own self-editing skills. Thus, it may be beneficial to assign fewer compositions over a semester and allow several weeks for all the steps involved in the writing of each one.
Additional Writing Practice

The previously mentioned activities are directed primarily at improving students’ abilities to develop cohesive and concise expository texts. It is also practical to allow students to practice other text types, such as narration or review, in contextualized or personalized in-class activities. This permits learners to experiment with the text types of the higher ACTFL levels to which they aspire. Additionally, time may be spent on other specific linguistic contexts, such as the elaboration of a noun phrase or the use of adverbs. In this way, students begin to develop their descriptive and expressive abilities. In class, then, learners carry out other tasks that serve to improve various aspects of their written competence. Students should be obliged to write something everyday, be it individually or in a group, a list of words or a paragraph or two. Vygotsky (1978) argued that people learn by doing, and thus it is important to give learners many opportunities to do and learn in their writing.

In order to promote the eventual automatization of writing in a second language, albeit in limited contexts, learners can be required to write unplanned compositions. These are short compositions written in class on known themes without prior preparation. This may seem to contradict what has been proposed for the stages of acquisition, since it has been assumed that learners for the most part are not capable of automatic writing in the second language. However, in order for students to arrive at a state of automatization, they must be given the opportunity to do so. Because they are faced with a time limit, students are forced to internalize the actions associated with writing. Also, unplanned compositions may have positive affective value, serving to remove some of learners’ fear about writing in a second language and to lead them to discover that they are in fact able to write spontaneously. The compositions also give the instructor a look at how well students are able to apply what has been learned to other writing situations (Nance & Rivera, 1996).

Review of Grammar

Finally, because grammar ultimately plays a role in learners’ acquisition of a second language, it may be important to review certain grammar topics or lexical problems in the composition class. However, such review must be done without expecting that learners will immediately apply explicit knowledge of grammar to their compositions, although they should be able to do so in limited contexts. It may be useful, then, to include a reference grammar — such as Dozier and Iguina’s Manual de Gramática (1998) for Spanish — as a supplementary textbook for the course. Using such a book as a supplement and not a primary text reinforces the idea that grammar is not the central concern of the class. Additionally, students can be directed individually to different grammatical or lexical topics, based on their analysis of errors in their compositions.

Conclusion

Since implementing ideas and activities based on sociocultural theory in my Spanish composition classes, I have come to several conclusions, albeit in an anecdotal manner. I have seen, for example, that making the composition process explicit and providing external resources does assist learners in their writing. When learners follow assigned steps, they produce compositions that are clearer and more organized. Some learners begin to need less and less outside help, which in sociocultural theory would mean the development and learning of a cognitive function.

Sociocultural theory, then, offers a different and useful perspective on second language writing. It provides us with a theoretical framework through which we can begin to understand the cognitive difficulties that writing in a second language presents to our learners. Sociocultural theory also gives us a way of understanding the learning process and how to help learners not only write but also develop written competence.

Sociocultural theory helps instructors see that we cannot expect that our learners will write in the second language with the same clarity or precision with which they write in English. This is because writing in the second language obliges them to use a tool that they have not yet mastered (or, rather, that controls them), in an automatized manner. Simply put, our students cannot skip the stages of acquisition.

In sociocultural theory, teaching is the process of collaborating with students in the execution of incipient mental functions (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). Thus, it is our responsibility as teachers of composition to assist learners while they are passing through the stages of acquisition. We can do this by offering our learners a host of external resources that facilitate their writing in the second language. The external means and resources are a fundamental part of learning. Initially, they are used externally to carry out the activity and later they are internalized in the automatization of the function or activity. If we deny our learners these important resources, we are in effect making the task of learning to write in a second language more difficult, if not impossible.

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References


Appendix A

Worksheet for Peer-Analysis

Your analysis should be one page long. You will need to hand in two copies, one for the writer and one for the instructor. You should clearly indicate at the top of the page the following information: your name, the name of the writer, the title of the composition, and the question being addressed.

Begin your analysis with a general paragraph stating the topic of the composition, its strong points, and any areas that need improvement. Remember to keep your language positive. This paragraph can only be written after you have answered the following questions:

(These questions should be answered and included in your peer analysis.)

1. What is the topic and purpose of this composition? Is it clear? Would you have known what the writer was talking about if you had not known what the question was?
2. Does this composition seem to be well organized? Does it have a clear beginning and end?
3. Is there logic to the argument? Is it well supported with examples or pertinent details? On the other hand, are there irrelevant details?
4. Is this composition interesting? If not, what might the author add to make it more interesting?
5. Are there areas that needed more information?
6. Is the title appropriate to the composition?
7. What are the strong points to this composition?
8. Make one or two concrete suggestions for improvement:

See the attachment for a sample composition and sample peer analysis.
Appendix B

Worksheet for Self-Analysis

There are three sections to this assignment. In the first, you will assess the structural and logical characteristics of your composition. In the second, you will reflect on the grammatical accuracy of the composition. In the third, you will summarize the results of the your analysis.

It is important for you to read the composition carefully and thoroughly in order to answer the following questions. Thus, you should begin the analysis at least 24 hours after having finished writing the composition. Additionally, you should take a break of at least 2 hours between the first two sections of this assignment.

After you have completed this assignment, you should make whatever corrections you feel are necessary to your composition. You will hand in your summary to the instructor along with your preliminary composition. (Remember also that you will hand in a copy of the preliminary composition to a classmate.)

I. Content analysis
   1. What is the topic or purpose of your composition? Is it stated clearly in the first paragraph?
   2. Does this composition seem to be well organized? Does it have a clear beginning and end?
   3. Have you included enough details to support your argument? Any details you would leave out?
   4. Do you think you would find this composition interesting as a reader?
   5. Does the title reflect the content of the composition?
   6. What do you like best about this composition?

II. Form analysis
   1. Carefully check the gender and number of all nouns used in the composition. Make sure they agree with their articles and adjectives.
   2. Carefully identify all verbs and their corresponding subjects in the composition. Make sure they agree in number and person.
   3. If you have used *ser* or *estar*, double check to make sure you are using them correctly.
   4. If you have used the past tense, make sure you have correctly distinguished between the imperfect and preterite.
   5. If there is any vocabulary you are unsure of, try to verify your usage using two different sources (for example, a Spanish only dictionary, your instructor.)

III. Summary
Briefly summarize (1-2 paragraphs) any changes you made to the composition based on the questions in I and II. Hand in this typed summary to your instructor.
Appendix C

Scoring Rubric for Composition

Paper addresses the major areas of the task
- Answers questions proposed in assignment
- Includes all necessary information
- Participates in planning activities and peer reviews
- Completes components on time

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Comments for improvement:

- Accurate and appropriate, minor errors
- Usually accurate, occasional inaccuracies
- Not extensive enough, frequent inaccuracies, may use English
- Inadequate for the task, inaccurate

Grammar

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Comments for improvement:

- May contain some minor errors that do not interfere with comprehensibility
- Some minor errors that may interfere with comprehensibility, some control of major patterns
- Many errors that interfere with comprehensibility, little control of major patterns
- Almost all grammatical patterns incorrect

Message/ Content

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Comments for improvement:

- Relevant, informative; adequate level of creativity and detail; well-organized, well written, logical
- Generally informative, may lack some creativity and detail
- Incomplete; lacks important information and creativity; poorly developed, lacks coherence
- Not informative; provides little or no information, lacking key components, organized incoherently

Drafts and outline

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Completes drafts/outlines and makes appropriate revisions

Overall Assessment

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Comments: