Connecting the Dots to Proficiency with an Assessment Template

Jessica Sertling Miller
University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

Abstract

Educators devote unquantifiable time and effort into designing and delivering linguistically and culturally relevant course content that aligns with outcomes mandated by various national, regional, and institutional sources. To that end, we also spend hours assessing and giving feedback. But when we see students look at their grade and promptly tuck their paper in their backpack, we may wonder if the amount of work invested in the assessment process is worth it. Feedback should be a bridge extending to the next proficiency level, not a door locking once one has passed it. Learners should revisit mistakes and learn from them under instructors’ guidance, not file the errors away and hope for a better result next time. One way to emphasize to language learners the importance of assessments and feedback in their path to proficiency is to connect the dots for them. They need to understand that assessments are learning tools, not grade generators. An all-in-one assessment template described in this article allows language teachers to draw more attention to the value of feedback while saving time in the grading process, thus ensuring that every minute invested in assessing learners’ progress contributes directly to learners’ growth. This adaptable, easy-to-use template explicitly ties together learning strategies, proficiency goals, course outcomes, scoring, self-assessments, student feedback, attendance, and course grade, turning complex information into a straightforward routine that becomes part of the learners’ toolkit at all stages of the curriculum. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this instrument positively impacts teaching and learning.

Keywords: assessment, feedback, proficiency, complexity
Introduction

Educators invest unquantifiable time and effort into designing and delivering linguistically and culturally relevant course content that aligns with outcomes mandated by various national, regional, and institutional sources. Behind the scenes, we try to make sense of the wonderful but overwhelming pedagogical tools at our disposal (e.g., proficiency guidelines, world-readiness standards, performance descriptors, Can-Do statements) while creating and curating material that will both engage our learners’ interest and effectively develop their language skills. To that end, we also spend hours assessing and giving feedback, encouraged by the image of a bulb going off in our students’ minds when they carefully consider our thoughtful comments on their work.

Most instructors are all too familiar with what usually happens next: students receive their work back, look at their grade, briefly scan the comments, and archive the paper in their bag. We may be discouraged and wonder if the amount of work invested in the assessment process is worth it. Yet we know there is value in our feedback as we continue to provide it. We see it as a bridge extending to the next proficiency level; students seem to view it as a door closing on a unit never to be visited again.

One way to reconcile those diverging views is to help students connect the dots: they need to understand that assessments are learning tools, not simple grade generators. However, such help should not add to instructors’ growing lists of duties or come at the expense of other important teaching responsibilities. One way to ensure that feedback goes directly toward learners’ growth while spending less time on grading is investing time upfront by creating an all-in-one assessment template. In this article, I share the document that I created to assess and provide feedback on any mode of communication (interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational), and that can be adapted by any language teacher who might find it useful. My template explicitly ties together learning strategies, proficiency goals, course outcomes, rubrics, self-assessments, student feedback, attendance, and course grade. I teach all levels of French at a four-year liberal arts university and use this 12-page document in all my courses, from Novice to Advanced levels, regardless of content.

This article does not present original research. But the document it describes was created by considering research and professional experience as guiding principles in the context of a 24-credit yearly teaching load added to other academic demands such as scholarly activities, service, and advising. Consequently, readers are invited to approach this piece with a practical perspective. However, a brief review of recent research may help contextualize the assessment template and support some choices I made when I designed it.

Background

Assessment is an effective teaching tool

Assessment and feedback have received researchers’ attention across disciplines. Some models might even be universally applicable. Brame and Biel
Connecting the Dots to Proficiency with an Assessment Template

(2015) reviewed multiple interdisciplinary studies showing that testing had a positive effect on recalling learned material, and that feedback enhanced the benefits of testing as a learning event. They summarized Butler and Roediger’s findings (2008) showing that feedback, and specifically delayed feedback (i.e., receiving answers after a whole task is completed, in contrast to immediate feedback when answers were given after each question), resulted in more correct answers a week after treatment. In their research, undergraduates who studied 12 historical passages were tested on their comprehension. Among the groups who received either no feedback, immediate feedback, or delayed feedback, the latter group had improved the most on a final test.

Brame and Biel (2015) also cited psychology research, including Bjork and Bjork’s theory of disuse (1992) supporting the idea that overall memory is the product of storage strength plus retrieval strength, the latter improving the former. Various types of testing activate retrieval strength in ways that studying does not. At the end of their review, Brame and Biel argued that the benefits of testing could be extended to the classroom by offering more assessment opportunities covering smaller chunks of material, by having students regularly retrieve from memory what they’ve learned in class, and by drawing students’ attention to the benefits of frequent tests in all their forms. They emphasized the importance of “no- or low-stakes testing scenarios” (p. 10) to reduce anxiety, citing evidence from psychology (Pulfrey, Buchs, & Butera, 2011) showing that feedback may be more impactful when it is not tied to a grade. Brame and Biel concluded that testing tools should accompany other teaching practices, such as sharing learning objectives that are aligned with assessments and lessons. The assessment document described in this article serves as a template that ensures explicit alignment between evaluations and outcomes and direct connections to elements of language and culture leading to success. It also has the potential to stimulate retrieval and storage strengths through its frequent weekly use.

**Complexity theory**

Storage strength and retrieval strength (Bjork & Bjork, 1992) are needed for automaticity of lexical access. Applied to second language (L2) learning, this means that learners rely on their memory to be able to access L2 vocabulary as needed. Memory of L2 structures can be improved by reactivating and repeating authentic structures in meaning-oriented activities (Darcy, Park, & Yang, 2015; Trofimovich & Gatbonton, 2006). Larsen-Freeman and Tedick (2016) refer to the concept of “transfer-appropriate processing” (p. 1353) to explain that retrieval (i.e., remembering) is more effective when it is done under conditions that match those when learning occurred. That notion implies that in order for students to be successful communicators in authentic situations, they should learn languages in conditions that reproduce those situations as faithfully as possible, which is through meaningful communicative practice activities.

Larsen-Freeman and Tedick (2016) apply the Complexity Theory (CT) framework to language teaching and learning, which they describe as mutually interdependent systems nested in one another. The authors offer a conceptualization
The Power of Language, The Power of People: Celebrating 50 Years

of L2 instruction that abandons the “structure vs. vehicle” (i.e., focus on grammar vs. focus on meaning) dichotomy, to instead favor metacognitively-oriented instruction. Part of that approach gives “iteration” (i.e., repetition) an essential role (p. 1362): Larsen-Freeman and Tedick recommend having learners study the same material multiple times, giving them opportunities to build more complex structures with each iteration and to adapt the material to new contexts. Within the CT framework they furthermore address feedback. The authors differentiate positive evidence (correct use target forms) from negative evidence (incorrect use target forms), and suggest that both have value based on the data they reviewed. They state that “students’ errors are a natural part of their interlanguage, and their errors can be used to promote further learning” (p. 1357). The template proposed in this article strives to facilitate the evaluation of semi-authentic scenarios while inviting students to revisit feedback that includes positive and negative evidence.

**Feedback increases noticing**

L2 research findings support the significance of feedback. Adair-Hauck, Glisan, Koda, Swender, and Sandrock (2006) point out that “feedback should play a role in enabling students to improve their performance on future assessment tasks” (p. 362). In particular, they highlight the effectiveness of dynamic assessment, a practice that “focuses on interventions that facilitate improved learner performance” through descriptive feedback, and that “offers a potential seamless connection to instruction, since its role is to assist and improve learner performance as well as to strengthen instructional practices” (p. 363). Feedback helps advance learners’ awareness, an essential notion of L2 acquisition described as the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990). Language development occurs when learners notice mismatches between input and their own organization of the target language, since those mismatches confirm or disprove hypotheses they had formed (Gass, 1997). While teacher feedback helps accelerate noticing, students can be taught to notice mismatches on their own. Meritan (2017) showed evidence that self-evaluations may help raise learners’ phonological awareness. She discussed the possibility that completing self-assessments can also improve students’ confidence, thereby reducing anxiety. This is particularly relevant to speaking in an L2, which has been shown to be the most intimidating task for language learners (Baran-Łucarz, 2014). Feeling less inhibited to use the L2 would logically increase L2 usage, and increased L2 usage could lead to higher proficiency levels. That is why creating an assessment document that facilitates teacher feedback as well as self-evaluation felt important.

**Formative standards-based assessments create a feedback loop**

Adair-Hauck and Troyan (2013) describe a recent shift from a “compartmentalized approach to assessment and feedback” to an “ongoing, formative standards-based assessments” (p. 24) visible in the development and use of Integrated Performance Assessments (IPA). IPAs are standards-based tasks encompassing all modes of communications clustered around a cultural theme and often used as evaluation tools. The authors explain that IPAs, by linking
formative and summative assessments while including educative feedback, create a “feedback loop” (p. 24) able to raise learners’ awareness of strategies, assisted by the fact that descriptive feedback is built into the IPA prototype. Their findings indicated that a descriptive and co-constructed approach to assessment (i.e., in which learners and teachers discuss and reflect together on the assessed language performance) provides scaffolding allowing learners to reflect and identify strategies for improvement, unlike the types of assessment that generate “a numerical ‘snapshot’ of learning” (p. 37). Based on the cognitive, social, and linguistic benefits they observed, they encourage language educators to use this type of educative feedback. Although the assessment template described in this article is not a reproduction of their approach, it uses the principle of the feedback loop: instructors’ comments and students’ self-reflection should directly and noticeably lead to improvement. This feedback is easily tracked in writing and conveniently accessible in a single document.

Assessment template

The template described in this section is to be placed within the CT framework described earlier. It is meant to assemble complex interdependent aspects of L2 teaching and learning in ways that are meaningful to instructors and learners in both the short and long term. In other words, this document is a flexible management tool meant to promote learning because it facilitates the production of assessments and feedback as well as their interpretation and use. It is also adapted to the IPA prototypes, used either as a formative model in class or a summative evaluation tool.

Logistics

At the beginning of the term each student receives a packet including the syllabus (outcomes and policies), the course blueprint (schedule and assignments), and the assessment document (study tips, described below, scoring rationale, presented in Table 1 below, and evaluation grids, presented in Figures 1 and 2 below), putting into practice Brame and Biel’s (2015) recommendation to share learning objectives that are tied to assessments and lessons. They are each printed on different colored paper to increase their visibility and highlight their long-term importance, stapled, and hole-punched to make sure students find them easy to keep with their material. Students are responsible for having those documents in their possession every day. A copy is posted on the online learning management system, and scores earned through the semester are recorded there as well.

On Fridays during class, I evaluate all my students on that week’s outcome in one of the three modes of communication: this formative assessment is either a listening comprehension activity, a written assignment, or a short spontaneous group conversation on the week’s topic. Students receive help from peers as well as limited assistance from me. I collect the assessment documents to fill out the week’s evaluation grid. I write feedback and scores after the interpretive and presentational tasks, but for interpersonal tasks I take a few notes for each student during the group conversation, and complete the evaluation grid, if necessary,
after the assessment. Completing the week’s grid involves filling out simple tables with brief comments, and assigning a score based on the students’ performances. I make sure to include specific strategies for improvement in each mode of communication. It takes one to two minutes per student to score and give feedback using this template, and I typically have around 60 students each semester. I am therefore able to complete them by the end of the day on Fridays and return them to students by Monday morning so they can see my feedback building up and use it before the next evaluation.

As the semester proceeds, the 12-page document becomes both a micro and macro progress tracker: it provides learners with snapshots of their skills at different points as well as a bigger picture of their proficiency level, helping them see growth toward the next level. The document, recapping outcomes and combining all my feedback on weekly assessments in all modes of communication, also becomes filled with concrete tips adapted to learners’ individual needs, all in one place, meant to be reviewed periodically by the learners and instructor. As a paper packet, quick notes can be added on it during class as I don’t have to carry an electronic device during interpersonal assessments. Handwritten feedback also brings a more personal and caring touch, in my opinion. Occasionally, some students forget to bring their document to class. I assess them with a blank sheet of paper, and they are responsible for copying the score and comments back to their document for next time. I don’t recall students ever losing their document, but should it happen their scores would be safe in the online learning management system. They would however lose my feedback, which would be detrimental to them.

In a way, this process adapts the feedback to the concept of iteration as described by Larsen-Freeman and Tedick (2016): feedback assembles little by little to provide an increasingly complex representation of growth. Learners are given frequent opportunities (Brame & Biel, 2015) to make changes based on positive and negative evidence (Larsen-Freeman & Tedick, 2016) as they are given class time to review past feedback and go over monthly progress reports. Those processes are important, and the assessment document makes sure that neither students nor teachers have the cumbersome task of keeping track of different exams, tests, rubrics, papers, etc., because all the feedback to all the assessments is in one place and printed on the same color paper. It is much easier for students to draw their own picture of growth. When students consult me for help outside of class, I can use that document to review their profile, check that they have followed my suggestions, and discuss what areas they still need to develop and how, thus making office hours more impactful, too. The assessment template ensures that learners will notice and use all the educators’ behind-the-scenes work as a learning tool toward proficiency.

**Study strategies**

The first page of the document is titled “Strategies to increase proficiency” to emphasize the fact that the document is to be used strategically. I offer a list of recommendations that may be new to novice language learners, or may seem obvious to experienced learners, but that nonetheless bear repeating:
a. Review material daily
b. Redo homework
c. Consult websites for extra exposure to French: tv5monde.com, rfi.fr
d. Attend Table Française (French conversation table) with French Club
e. Record yourself, listen, and self-evaluate
f. Be actively engaged in class
g. Watch movies and listen to the radio in French
h. Use resources: library, dictionaries, online sources, study group
i. Have a peer give you feedback
j. Ask questions in class

Calibrating expectations

Calibrating students’ expectations according to clear and explicit criteria seems primordial to avoid disappointment or frustration from teachers and learners. Yet that process can be overlooked. On page one of my document I include a description of attributes linked to my expectation benchmarks (see Table 1). Certain features such as being in class and completing the homework may seem so evident that they go without saying. But I have found that it is not the case: students may feel, for example, that doing some of the assignments and/or attending class most of the time is good enough to meet expectations, when in fact I have a different view. Establishing those benchmarks early on and having them in writing to review and refer to has drastically reduced the number of students requesting a change of grade at the end of the semester. One reason is that they are given this information explicitly, and another reason is that the language used places the responsibility of meeting expectations on them. It is imperative that students understand that grades are earned, not assigned. This document holds them accountable.

Table 1. Describing Expectations as They Relate to Grades

“Students who .... [insert study strategy] typically ... [insert level of expectations]”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exceeds expectations (A)</th>
<th>Meets expectations (B)</th>
<th>Approaches expectations (C)</th>
<th>Is far from expectations (D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attendance</strong></td>
<td>Attend every day</td>
<td>Attend every day</td>
<td>Attend most days</td>
<td>Rarely attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feedback</strong></td>
<td>Seek and use it</td>
<td>Use it</td>
<td>Sometimes use it</td>
<td>Rarely use it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assignments</strong></td>
<td>Do all in depth</td>
<td>Do all minimally</td>
<td>Do most</td>
<td>Do some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions</strong></td>
<td>Ask many relevant</td>
<td>Ask some</td>
<td>Rarely ask any</td>
<td>Ask almost none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Notes</strong></td>
<td>Take thorough</td>
<td>Take sufficient</td>
<td>Take incomplete</td>
<td>Take almost none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once behavioral expectations have been clarified, my scoring rationale is presented on page two of the assessment document. While the strategies shared above to calibrate expectations described the type of behaviors associated with overall course grades (i.e., if you want an A, you should consistently do this), the level descriptors (Table 2) link types of performances to my scoring rationale (i.e., if you do this on a test, you will likely earn this grade). Table 2 is based on the IPA rubrics developed by Adair-Hauck et al (2013).

### Table 2. Describing Performances as They Relate to Target Levels and Grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Above target (A)</th>
<th>On target (B)</th>
<th>Close to target (C)</th>
<th>Below target (D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Functions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently intelligible, personalized sentences on straightforward social situations</td>
<td>Some intelligible, personalized sentences with familiar memorized language relating to self</td>
<td>Mostly familiar memorized language</td>
<td>No real functional ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strings of short sentences</td>
<td>Strings of short sentences with memorized chunks</td>
<td>Words, phrases, chunks of languages and lists</td>
<td>Isolated words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehensibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understood by sympathetic natives, with repetition sometimes required</td>
<td>Understood, with occasional difficulty, by sympathetic natives, with repetition sometimes required</td>
<td>Understood by sympathetic natives, although often with difficulty</td>
<td>Understood only with repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most accurate in present tense. Great influence of native language</td>
<td>Most accurate with memorized language. Accuracy decreases when creating personalized meaning</td>
<td>Accuracy limited to memorized phrases, and decreases when trying to create sentences</td>
<td>Little accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication (interpersonal)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds to questions and asks a few. Restates when miscommunication happens</td>
<td>Responds to questions and asks a few formulaic questions. Repeats when miscommunication happens</td>
<td>Responds to a limited number of formulaic questions. Repeats or uses English when miscommunication happens</td>
<td>No conversational exchange</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The targeted outcomes are stated in the course syllabus and reprinted in the assessment document starting on page three, as introductions to weekly grids. Those grids constitute the essence of the assessment template. They begin with the unit’s theme, an overarching guiding (essential) question to focus discussions, and the Can-Do statement that serves as the weekly outcome. The grids include space to highlight the positives (e.g., clear pronunciation) and the negatives (e.g., conjugation mistakes) in a student’s performance, with additional room for concrete suggestions (e.g., review present tense endings). The scoring is meant to be holistic. It refers back to the aforementioned rationale, the guiding question being “did the student meet expectations for the week’s outcome at the target proficiency level?”.

Being trained to understand ACTFL’s proficiency guidelines is tremendously helpful to recognize more easily the functions associated with different levels. For example, if the target level is Intermediate Low, learners should demonstrate that they are able to consistently create with the language and go beyond memorized phrases, the latter being a function of a Novice speaker. Thus, if the week’s outcome is “I can make a reservation”, and the student shows that s/he can do this fairly easily with language s/he created, s/he will earn an A. If s/he can accomplish it with some effort, s/he will earn a B. If s/he can do it but with memorized phrases only or with my help, s/he will earn a C. That is a simplification, but a useful rule of thumb for educators still learning about proficiency rating.

Figures 1 and 2 on the next page are an example of a weekly grid for FREN 102 (Beginning French, second semester). The former is an empty grid, and the latter an example of how I would typically fill it. Three grids fit on one page, which corresponds to a complete module. I generally assess the interpretive mode of communication on week one of the module (as shown in Figures 1 and 2), the presentational mode on week two, and the interpersonal mode on week three. My feedback is in English for lower division classes and in the target language beyond that.

These tables are created small to minimize assessment time while maximizing impact on learners. For instance, the comment boxes are purposefully limited in size, forcing the instructor to go straight to the point that matters most. In my experience, learners are more likely to read such focused feedback. It will draw their attention on one key point each week rather than overwhelming them with
a scattered list of flaws. They are more likely to succeed in improving one specific area than if they were given a discouragingly long list of problems. In turn, they can thus more easily feel a sense of accomplishment as they concentrate on improving one area at a time, which may increase their motivation and confidence. Then, building block by building block, they acquire and strengthen the skills needed to increase their proficiency. In other words, they connect the dots: at any point they are able to view how far they’ve come, what they have accomplished, while at the same time looking ahead at what still remains to be done. Some students confided enjoying measuring what was done and what was left. Seeing at a glance a course broken down into manageable chunks can be empowering.

Integrated performance assessments

As mentioned earlier, a different mode of communication is assessed every week so that over the course of three weeks (i.e., a complete module), learners have received a wide range of feedback. In order to get a more complete profile of their progress, I include summative Integrated Performance Assessments for midterm and final exams by delivering them over a week’s time (weeks 8 and 16). During these assessments, students can help each other, but I will not provide assistance other than clarifying instructions if the need arises. The scoring rationales and grids are identical to the weekly assessments so that students know exactly what to expect. In fact, I structure my instructional weeks as formative IPAs so that the midterm and final exams resemble class (see transfer-appropriate processing.
Connecting the Dots to Proficiency with an Assessment Template

in Larsen-Freeman & Tedick, 2016). From my point of view, midterm week is perhaps the most grading-intensive moment of the semester because I need to fill out three grids per student: one for the interpretive task (reading and listening comprehension) done on day one, a second for the interpersonal task (spontaneous conversation) done on day two, and a third for the presentational task (scripted assessment) done on day three. Despite this spike in grading time commitment, the work is significant and fruitful: alarms can be pulled and changes can be made if students are veering off track. All three midterm grids fit on the same page and are identical to other grids. It is easy to see which mode of communication needs more attention and what can be done to improve.

Progress reports

Every four weeks a progress report is included in which I tally proficiency points and attendance rate. Weeks 4 and 12 are devoted to review during which there is no assessment, freeing time in my schedule to write those reports. A few minutes of class time are used for students to consider this delayed feedback (see Butler & Roediger, 2008) and to reflect on their goals and strategies to reach them. Ideally, I would like scores to simply reflect proficiency. But external factors sometimes slow down the acquisition of L2, and students’ efforts need to be reflected in their grade to avoid discouragement. One way to reward hardworking students whose progress is slowed down by other factors has been to give an attendance bonus. In the monthly progress reports, I include an attendance rate calculated automatically by our institution’s learning management system. Rates above 90% (corresponding roughly to 3 absences in a semester) earn a bonus. Thus, if a student has earned a B- on weekly assessments and has attended class more than 90% of the time, B becomes their current course grade. If their attendance rate is below 90%, B- remains their current course grade.

In a suggestion box I can include a personal note remarking on improvements made as well as on recurring mistakes to fix in the short term, with practical suggestions. Finally, this is a good time to personally encourage students to pursue a French minor or major. Figures 3 and 4 show a progress report at week 4. I give students time in class to look at my comments and to complete their reflection. I review their answers on week 4 (see Figure 3, next page) to help them with strategies and planning, and to collect their feedback, to which I respond at our next class meeting. By giving serious consideration to their comments and suggestions for improvement in my teaching, I thereby model how to implement feedback myself.

Self-evaluations

In conjunction with monthly progress reports, students are asked to take time in class to review my feedback, self-evaluate, engage in a group discussion that will develop metacognition, and give me feedback on the course. Students have expressed appreciating that opportunity, and doing so allows me to bring clarification or change. The questions change slightly each month but are similar to this:
Week 4: Progress report and current course grade: A+

Progress toward proficiency goals based on past assessments: B

11 (A-); 12 (A) = Exceeds expectations
8 (B-); 9 (B); 10 (B+) = Meets expectations
5 (C-); 6 (C); 7 (C+) = Approaches expectations
2 (D-); 3 (D); 4 (D+) = Is far from expectations
0-1 (F) = Too much work missing

Attendance rate based on D2L data: 96%

Suggestions

Increasing your vocabulary will help you be more creative with the language. Be sure to systematically write down new words in a journal or on flashcards that you can include in your daily review.

Try to ask more spontaneous questions to increase the quality of conversations.

Figure 4. Example of a filled progress report on week 4.
• Look at the advice and descriptors on pages 1-2. Choose one strategy listed there that you think will help you reach your goals for this course. Explain why you chose it and how you will implement it.
• With one or two classmates, discuss what letter grades represent in this course.
• On an anonymous piece of paper, write one thing that is clear about the way this course works, and one thing that you still have a question about.

Final report

At the end of the term, I tally the scores of the 14 weekly assessments combined with attendance rates to generate a final course grade. I give that information to the students before their IPA on week 16. Only after their final three-part IPA is their final course grade determined. Whichever score is higher (either the sum of the weekly assessments or the final IPA) becomes the recorded course grade. This system has alleviated anxiety related to final performances and grades. By week 16 students have undoubtedly demonstrated progress; their effort has been translated into a grade that they have earned through hard work and that should not be diminished by a final performance. But if they push themselves for the last IPA their grade could increase, which is a good incentive to try harder. On the other hand, if circumstances made it difficult for students to produce consistent performances throughout the semester on weekly assessments, they have a chance to shine on the last assessment. No matter the situation, students understand that improvement can only happen by studying strategically, which includes taking my feedback into consideration as noted on the first page of the template. The final report on the last page of the template closes the loop. It is shown in Figure 5 on the next page.

Conclusion

Documenting strategies for success, outcomes, assessment tools, and feedback in the same place provides consistency. The described template helps plan instruction and chart learners’ progress. It also helps students see a clear direction on their path to higher proficiency. By the fourth week, most write that what is clear about the course (see Self-evaluations section) is the importance of being self-motivated to succeed. That indicates that they quickly understand that becoming an independent learner who takes responsibility for using resources at their disposal is crucial to learning. The fact that the assessment document is one of three essential packets delivered on the first day of classes, and that it is used regularly in class, underlines its pedagogical value to students. On top of that, the template prompts me to draw equal attention to what students can and cannot do, preventing feedback from being exclusively negative and making regular consultation less daunting. Finally, this template not only saves me much time each semester, it also ensures that my feedback will be read several times by learners so that my feedback is more likely to be heeded, as well as by me so that if patterns of errors emerge I can see them easily and intervene early. Thanks to this document that connects evaluation and feedback to learning, the impact of assessments in
The Power of Language, The Power of People: Celebrating 50 Years

Final report

Current course grade: ______

Progress toward proficiency goals based on past assessments: ______
40-41 (A); 42-44 (A) = Exceeds expectations
28-31 (B+); 32-35 (B); 36-39 (B+) = Meets expectations
17-20 (C-); 21-24 (C); 25-27 (C+) = Approaches expectations
6-8 (D-); 9-12 (D); 13-16 (D+) = Is far from expectations
0-5 (F) = Too much work missing

Attendance rate based on D2L data: ______
Level up + = 90%-100%
Should improve = 80-90%
Insufficient = Under 80%

Final exam: ______
11 (A); 12 (A) = Exceeds expectations
8 (B); 9 (B); 10 (B+) = Meets expectations
5 (C); 6 (C); 7 (C+) = Approaches expectations
2 (D-); 3 (D); 4 (D+) = Is far from expectations
0-1 (F) = Too much work missing

Figure 5. Example of a final report on the template’s last page.

my classes seems multiplied as this weekly process builds solid explicit bridges leading learners along the path to proficiency more smoothly. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students gain in learning and motivation: since implementing IPAs and using this template, more students meet the target outcomes, and more continue with French. This supports the Adair and Troyan’s (2013) hypothesis that IPA may have a positive impact on learners’ perceptions about language learning.

The assessment document can be downloaded in its entirety and for a variety of specific courses at https://people.uwec.edu/millerjs/. The template is in constant evolution as I update it each semester based on students’, colleagues’ suggestions, and research findings, therefore the version available online might differ slightly from the descriptions published here.
References


