

THREE FIFTEEN-MINUTE ACTIVITIES FOR BEGINNING FOREIGN-LANGUAGE STUDENTS: READING, WRITING, AND ARITHMETIC

Lyle R. Polly

I would like to share three classroom activities I have used successfully with my first-year French class. Because any teacher of a modern foreign language wishing to inject a little variety into some normally routine exercises can use these activities, I will give my examples in English.

The first activity deals with reading comprehension and is a simple variation of what my youngest daughter does in second grade: she reads written directions and follows them. From her finished product, usually a picture, the teacher can determine if she understood the verb, noun, preposition, etc., of the written sentence. This is what I do. I distribute a dittoed sheet on which I have drawn some familiar objects, e.g., a table, a dog, a chair, some windows, etc. Below I write sentences, in French, which test, for example, the student's comprehension of prepositions as well as recently studied nouns: 1. Draw a cat on (beside under, etc.) the table, 2. Put two boys in the chair, 3. Put the dog near the table, 4. Close the window far from the chair, etc. Correcting this type of exercise is even fun.

I have found that writing exercises frequently fall into two categories: 1. they are either slight variations of the introductory dialogues (the students, therefore, need only to substitute a word or verb form in the material at the beginning of the chapter), or 2. they demand grammatical skills not yet learned (very frustrating for both student and teacher). As a change of pace in writing exercises, usually toward the end of the second semester, I have used this activity. I distribute copies of a short narrative poem (so far I have used *Le Pelican of Desnos* and *Dejeuner du Matin* of Prevert) and ask one or two students to read it aloud. When I know the class understands any difficult vocabulary or grammatical constructions, I tell the class to rewrite the poem into prose. Because I have tried to select poems reflecting the poet's verbal sobriety, the students must generate some "filler;" the students identify and describe the couple in the Prevert poem and hint at their source of conflict; they tell why Captain Johnathan came to the Orient and how he came upon the first of a series of pelican eggs. The more imaginative the student is, the more developed the "poem-prose" is. Furthermore, this activity is just a refresh-

ing change from the regular classroom work, or it can be something different to do as homework.

My final activity deals with drilling numbers, a very difficult skill to master in a foreign language. When the class has succeeded in reaching the number one hundred, the students are pretty well burned out on math problems and How-many-books-are-in-the-library? questions. For added variety, therefore, I bring to class a handful of French centimes (here is an opportunity for culture with a small "c"), having the following denominations: 5, 10, 20, 50 (½ franc), and 100 (one franc). Spreading them out on my desk, I call a student to the front of the class and say: Count to one hundred by fives (tens, twenties); Do you have change for one franc?; A bottle of wine costs 8F50. I give you a 10 F bill. How much do you give me? I think that when dealing with tangible units such as coins, students are put in a much more meaningful context.

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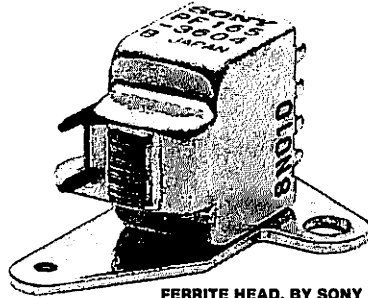


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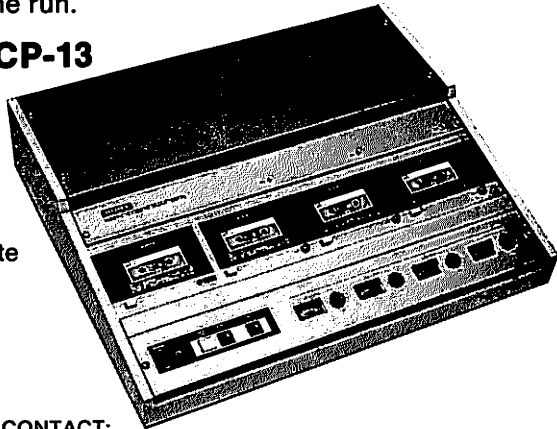
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