

Title: Discourse Management to Raise Students to the Advanced Threshold: Scaffolding Group Writing Activities and Interconnected Reading, Writing and Speaking
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Abstract:

Raising students to the Advanced threshold is as much a matter of discourse management, as it is of significant vocabulary acquisition. According to the ACTFL proficiency guidelines, Intermediate Mid speakers “are able to express personal meaning by creating with the language, in part by combining and recombining known elements and conversational input to produce responses typically consisting of sentences and strings of sentences.” “When called on to perform functions or handle topics at the Advanced level [narrate and describe in all major time frames using connected discourse of paragraph length], they [Intermediate Mid Speakers] provide some information but have difficulty linking ideas, manipulating time and aspect, and using communicative strategies, such as circumlocution.” Overcoming such obstacles demands both a significant increase in vocabulary and significant practice in fluently producing high frequency vocabulary, forms, and syntactical structures that are common to narration and detailed description and would allow the Intermediate Mid speaker to learn to fluently “link ideas” and “manipulate time and aspect.” Vocabulary acquisition alone will not achieve this result. This presentation will demonstrate how scaffolding group writing assignments can initially support students in building foundational narration skills and in integrating description into narration. Interconnected reading and writing activities promote vocabulary acquisition that is authentic and beyond the individual word-level, and presentational speaking, used as the summative assessment, develops fluency of expression and encodes new vocabulary in long-term memory. Specific strategies for applying these principles through specific class activities and homework assignments, as well as supportive feedback and assessment methods will be shared. Students who successfully progress through a program of study structured around these principles have routinely developed Advanced level discourse features and scored at the IH level on the OPI section of the Prototype AP® Russian Language Exam at the end of a four-year high school Russian program.