

Project-Based Learning in the Language Classroom: Assignments

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Below you will find two project assignments that I designed for the Spanish-language classroom, though they could be used for any target language. The first project, “The Mixxer +Podcast = Oral Presentation,” makes the final oral presentation for an advanced language class into something ongoing and interactive. Better suited for an upper-level content course, the second is a film project that I call “Los Premios Goya,” Spain’s version of the Oscars. Students apply the theoretical knowledge they learn about film analysis to become active and practical creators of short filmic rewrites.

I. The Mixxer + Podcast = Oral Presentation

Part I. The Mixxer

The Mixxer, an on-line language exchange, is an amazing opportunity to practice languages through Skype. First things first: create a Skype account at www.skype.com if you don’t already have one. Then, create a profile at <http://www.language-exchanges.org>. Upon creating a username, you can search for potential language partners who are native speakers of Spanish that want to improve their English. Write to a couple of people and see if they’d be interested in an exchange with you. A language exchange typically lasts 30 minutes, 15 of which you speak in Spanish (helping you improve your skills) and 15 of which you speak in English (thereby helping your partner improve his or her language skills).

Each of you will find a language partner with whom you will ideally chat about once a week. You might not be able to continue with the same partner, so feel free to send out several message requests. Alternately, you might find a conversation partner of Spanish-speaking origins on campus or in the local community.

You should complete your first date by Friday March 29.

Assignment:

1. Create a profile and find a virtual partner; alternately, your partner can be local and in-the-flesh . For past students, it has been easier to coordinate with partners in Latin America since the time difference is minimal.
2. Ask the partner for permission to record the audio of the conversation. Explain the podcast project detailed in Part II below.
3. Complete and record one 30-minute date by March 29th.
4. Immediately following the conversation(s), please write **½ page single-spaced response in English** that you then cut-and-paste into Discussion Board on myWPI. Things you can discuss:
 - a. How did it go?
 - b. Did you learn something new about your language partner’s culture?
 - c. What challenges did you face, both linguistically and technologically?

- d. Include whatever else strikes your fancy.
5. Read and comment on 1 or 2 of your classmates' responses.

Part II. Podcast

1. Students in Advanced II are required to complete an oral or video presentation. My sections will create a podcast instead.
2. First, you will ask permission of your language partner to record the date (audio will be just fine). We will receive training on Friday 3/15 on how to record with the iPod with microphone attachment. Please head to Anderson Lab B in the basement of Gordon instead of our regular classroom.
3. In teams of three or four, you will listen to your recordings. You'll identify a common cultural thread you'd like to research further. In the event that there isn't anything in common, you'll choose the topic that strikes all of you as particularly interesting. This will be the research topic for your podcast.
4. Let's say the teammates both had language partners who are big fans of soccer, for example Real Madrid for one and Boca for the other. That team would research soccer and specifically Real Madrid and Boca and create an oral report in the form of a podcast. Or, let's say one of you spoke to a Venezuelan friend on campus whose family had to endure protests and food shortages under the rule of Hugo Chávez. That might be your topic to research further through primary and secondary sources at the library and on-line.
5. You will intersperse components from your conversations as evidence. In this sense, your conversations are both generative and evidential: they generate the research topic and, at the same time, provide evidence that the cultural piece is actually of importance in Spanish-speaking cultures. *You might consider having multiple conversations to get different perspectives on a particular topic.*
6. You will email me your podcast and present it to your classmates on a designated date. I'll pass around a sign-up sheet in due order.

You will find a rubric on myWPI; below are general grading criteria and corresponding course objectives:

- background research on topic [culture, reading comprehension]
- integration of conversation into podcast [culture, listening comprehension]
- grammar [writing, speaking]
- pronunciation [speaking]
- length [3-5 minutes]

III. Presentation

On the designated date, your team will present the podcast to the class.

First, you will briefly set up the context for your classmates.
Second, we will listen to your podcast.



Third, you will reflect on the experience: *what did you get out of the project linguistically? Culturally? Was there any element that was particularly gratifying? Interesting? Challenging?*

Fourth, you can ask questions of or receive questions from your classmates.

GUIDELINES FOR PRESENTATIONS:

- You must inform me of your topic at least 1 class period prior to your presentation.
- You may select the form, content, and style of your presentation, but I will evaluate you based on the rubric, which will be available on myWPI.
- Practice the presentation, be professional. Please don't read.
- Maximum 15 minutes.
- Distribute handouts that include vocabulary and salient points. Your handout will be graded on grammatical accuracy and presentation. Please proofread.
- On the handout, include links/bibliography.

II. Los Premios Goya

Los Premios Goya are the Spanish movie awards akin to the American *Oscars*. We will end this course with our own los Goya 2016 on Wednesday December 14, for which we will have no red carpet but for which we will dress up and award prizes for *Mejor dirección*, *Mejor guión*, *Mejor actriz*, *Mejor actor*, and *Mejor película*. Guests will be invited to the screening.

You will encapsulate all that you've learned—about the importance of the image, about sequencing, about how images make meaning—by writing a script/storyboard and creating a short film (no more than 5 minutes) in your *Rueda de Prensa* groups. You will either rewrite or redirect *a short scene* from the movie your team selects at the beginning of the term. If you rewrite, you're aiming to modify the storyline to some sort of meaningful end, i.e. rewriting the history portrayed. In this case you'd be responsible for the screenplay. If, however, you redirect, you would alter the images in order to illustrate the ways in which words change meaning based on the corresponding images. Another option would be to do both, rewrite *and* redirect. Or you could recast a comedic scene through the lens of horror. You could even film the scene in the style of another director. The only requisite is that you submit something in writing with some sort of explanation of *why* and to *what end* you chose your route.

Through the process of writing, recording, and editing a film, you will ideally achieve more sophisticated analysis of the films that you view during the quarter and in the future. The project will consist of several components:

1. **Thursday 11/17 by 6:00 pm**: upload to Canvas a 1-page, double-spaced proposal for your scene rewrite/redirect. I will get comments to you by the end of the weekend. OJO: If your team is assigned one of the later films, you will definitely need to screen it prior to this date either by checking it out from the Reserve Desk, requesting it through Interlibrary Loan, or ordering it from Netflix. Those teams that have an earlier, already-screened film will likely want to view it again prior to submitting the proposal. You may also schedule an

appointment to speak to me in further detail if necessary.

Proposal guidelines:

- 1 sentence explaining the creative title of your production company
 - 1 paragraph explaining what scene you're rewriting/redirecting, from what movie, and why you've selected that particular scene
 - 1 *detailed* paragraph explaining how you plan to rewrite/redirect the scene
 - 2-3 sentences explaining, tentatively, how you plan to distribute the work both in terms of who's responsible and timeline
2. **Monday 11/21:** Adobe Premiere Editing Workshop with Jim Monaco
 3. Before **Tuesday 11/29:** Reserve a video camera at the ATC Main Office on Level 1 of Fuller Labs across from Perrault Lecture Hall in Room 117.
 4. **Wednesday 11/30:** bring to class either a draft screenplay with stage directions, costume ideas, and set location (**Spanish**, double-spaced, page length determined by each team) *or* a detailed storyboard with explanations (including costume ideas and set location), depending on what approach you've chosen. I will get comments/revisions to you in Thursday's class.
 5. **Saturday 12/3 by 12:00 pm:** upload to Canvas the final screenplay/storyboard
 6. **Monday 12/12 by 3:00 pm:** upload film with English subtitles
 7. **Wednesday 12/14 3:00-6:00:** ¡Los Premios Goya de WPI! With a reception to follow. We will publicize the event, and though the films are in Spanish, you will present them in English since we aim to attract folks outside of the Spanish division. Invite your friends, significant others, family members – the more the merrier!

Presentation guidelines:

- Fancy attire!
- Submit revised screenplay/storyboard with finalized costume and set location in hard copy.
- Introduction: 2.5 minutes in which you introduce your film as you see fit, taking care to address (at the very least) the following topics:
 - Introduce your production company.
 - What scene did you select and from what film?
 - What was the original scene? Why did you select that particular scene?
 - What do you aim for your viewer to take away from this rewrite?
- Film Screening: 4-5 minutes
- Explanation: 2.5 minutes in which you explain highlight what you changed and, most importantly, why did you make those revisions?
- Audience Questions/Comments: 2-5 minutes
- 7 teams, approximately = 105 minutes
- Voting for los *Goya* during reception with winners presented at the end
 - Best Cinematography
 - Best Screenplay
 - Best Actress
 - Best Actor
 - Best Picture