# Learning to communicate by writing: Analysis of Writing Teaching Activitiesin Portuguese as a Foreign Language for B1 Level

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the role of textbooks in the development of writing skills in Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) at the B1 level within the Portuguese educational context. While textbooks provide a structured framework for language acquisition, their effectiveness in fostering writing proficiency requires critical evaluation. This study addresses the research problem of how PFL textbooks promote effective writing competences among B1-level learners. The methodology includes a review of literature on textbook analysis and second language writing pedagogy, coupled with an analysis of commonly used PFL textbooks in Portugal. The analysis focuses on the types of writing activities, the integration of processual writing skills, and the alignment with B1-level competencies as defined by the Ministry of Education. Key findings reveal that while textbooks offer foundational support in language structures, they often need to be supplemented with creative and communicative writing tasks. Implications suggest that educators should adopt a flexible approach, adapting and complementing textbook content to cater to diverse learning needs and encourage critical thinking. This study contributes to a better understanding of how textbooks can be leveraged to enhance writing instruction in PFL contexts, ultimately improving learners' writing abilities.

**Keywords:** Portuguese as a Foreign Language, Textbooks, Writing Skills, Teaching Writing, B1 Level,

Communicative Competence.

## Introduction:

The development of writing skills in a foreign language is a multifaceted process, particularly at the B1 level of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFRL—Conselho da Europa, 2001; Council of Europe, 2020), where learners are expected to produce simple connected texts on topics that are familiar or of personal interest (Vacalares et al., 2023). This requires a nuanced pedagogical approach that moves beyond rote memorization and grammatical drills to foster communicative competence and creative expression (Dodds, 1997). The Portuguese as a Foreign Language context presents unique challenges and opportunities in this regard, influenced by factors such as the learners' linguistic backgrounds, cultural contexts, and specific learning objectives. This challenge is bigger when some schools can have more than 60 different nationalities learning Portuguese as a 'Portuguese as a non-native language'[1] (PNNL). Furthermore, the role of the teacher is critical in facilitating this process, requiring them to be adept at identifying and addressing individual learning needs, selecting appropriate teaching materials and methodologies, and providing constructive feedback that promotes learner autonomy and self-confidence (Hùng & Diem, 2020).

In this process, textbooks serve as a cornerstone resource for both students and teachers (Dwijayani & Musigrungsi, 2022). Textbooks are designed to equip learners with the essential knowledge, linguistic proficiency, and relevant information across diverse subject areas (Paudel & Khadka, 2019). They are primary teaching and learning materials and are systematically made by including all forms of language learning tasks. Textbooks not only provide a linguistic background but also hold a central role in constructing ideology and stereotypes in the social world (Siregar et al., 2021). The utilization of textbooks in the classroom is extensive, consuming a significant portion of instructional time, with estimates suggesting that students spend between 70% and 95% of their class time engaging with textbook materials (Rong et al., 2021). In many formal education settings around the world, governmental bodies feature textbooks as the source for lesson planning (Ibrahim, 2022). Therefore, the textbook serves as the core of the curriculum, influencing both the content and the methodology employed in language instruction (Knight, 2015).

## Literature Review

The process of teaching writing in a foreign language context necessitates a nuanced understanding of the learners' proficiency level and the implementation of pedagogical strategies that foster both linguistic accuracy and communicative competence (Gautam, 2019). In the realm of second language acquisition, writing is accepted as a pivotal skill, playing a crucial role in academic, professional, and personal communication (Alnasser, 2022). Writing serves as an alternative learning route and an efficient tool for diagnosis and evaluation (Ofek, 1991). Several factors can contribute to writing errors, especially in second language learning (Fatimah, 2019). A key component in teaching writing corresponds to the effectiveness of the writing instruction that involves a multifaceted approach that includes planning, drafting, revising, and self-regulation (Kristiana et al., 2021).

Effective writing instruction at the B1 level in Portuguese as a foreign language should focus on consolidating foundational grammar and vocabulary while simultaneously encouraging creative expression and critical thinking (Carvalhais et al., 2021). The curriculum should integrate explicit grammar instruction with authentic writing tasks, ensuring that learners can apply their knowledge in meaningful contexts. The instructor should act as a facilitator, providing guidance and feedback while encouraging learners to take ownership of their learning. Explicit teaching of writing strategies can also improve writing skills. The writing activities must be relevant and engaging, aligning with the learners' interests and experiences. The teacher must also meet the needs of the learners to reach effective teaching of skills (Abbas & Fathira, 2022). Different writing activities, such as writing essays, reports, summaries, or reviews, can

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[1] The children of emigrants who attend school in Portugal have Portuguese classes separate from Portuguese children in the subject of 'Portuguese as a Non-Mother Tongue' until they reach B1 level.

improve writing skills.

The PNNL syllabus (based on the CEFRL from 2001) includes descriptors that are broad enough to foster written production skills in a variety of contexts and textual genres as we can state from **Table 1** which we expect to see reflected in the pedagogical options and writing activities in the textbooks.

**Table 1.** Writing competence descriptors to be achieved at the B1 level (Ministério da Educaão, 2018)

| PT version | | EN translation | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ORGANIZADOR<br><br>Domínio | AE: CONHECIMENTOS, CAPACIDADES E ATITUDES<br><br>Nível: B1<br><br>O aluno deve ficar capaz de: | ORGANIZER<br><br>Domain | AE: KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDES<br><br>Level: B1<br><br>The student should be able to: |
| Escrita | - produzir textos a partir de imagens e de sequências ouvidas ou lidas;<br><br>- elaborar e reelaborar sequências textuais sobre um mesmo tema a partir de pontos de vista distintos;<br><br>dominar técnicas de redação de sumários e relatórios; textos narrativos e descritivos;<br><br>- dominar os principais processos de composição discursiva: justificação, demonstração, exemplificação, generalização, especificação, classificação, inventariação;<br><br>- recorrer a verbos e expressões de cálculo, de fundamentação, de confrontação,de indicação de valores e de conclusão;<br><br>- dominar cadeias de referência pelo recurso a expressões referencialmente dependentes; | Writing | - produce texts based on images and sequences heard or read;<br><br>- elaborate and re-elaborate textual sequences on the same theme from different points of view;<br><br>- master techniques for writing summaries and reports; narrative and descriptive texts;<br><br>- master the main processes of discursive composition: justification, demonstration, exemplification, generalization, specification, classification, inventorying;<br><br>- use verbs and expressions of calculation, substantiation, confrontation, indication of values and conclusion;<br><br>- master chains of reference by using referentially dependent expressions;<br><br>- master mechanisms of temporal cohesion;<br><br>- catalogue information with documentation proreferences, ading sheets; bibliographical references; archiving different study materials); |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | - dominar mecanismos de coesão temporal;<br><br>- catalogar informação com procedimentos de documentação (fichas de leitura; referências bibliográficas; arquivamento de diferentes materiais de estudo); | | |

## Methodology

In prior researches we analyze A1/A2 level activities from Portuguese as second language textbooks (Guerra, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2022). This time, we were looking to see if there is a difference in the planning and treatment of activities in the B1 level textbooks and if they are in line with the government instructions in the programs. Given the wide variety of textbooks produced for this level, we opted to consult the list of textbooks selected by schools, published by the Ministry of Education[2], and thus took the two most chosen textbooks at national level:

Textbook [A]: Pinheiro, E., Hofman, I. S. & Melo, S. R. (2024). *Português ConVida*. Porto Editora (adopted in 381 schools, from 561 offering B1 level).
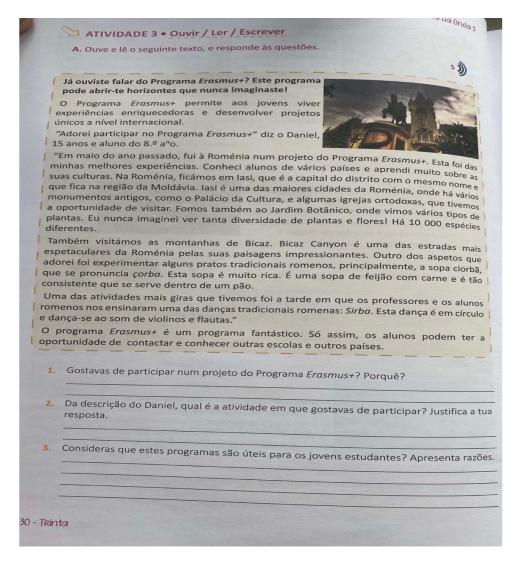
Textbook [B]: Ferreira, A. M. B. & Bayan, H. J. (2019). *Na crista da onda*. LIDEL (adopted in 73 scsectionfrom 561 offering B1 level).

The setoion of the writing tasks was similar with the previous studies. We have only picked activities whose aim is to develop writing skills (even though there may sometimes be some linguistic constraints, such as the use of a certain tense or degree of adjectives) and not activities in which writing is used to answer comprehension questions, fill in the blank (even if the instruction says 'write') or solve grammar exercises[3]. Textbook B has many multimodal sections (Listening/Reading/writing, for instance), but writing skills are only mentioned because they are needed to answer comprehension questions (*Cf*. **Illustration 1**).

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[2] Avalable at https://www.dge.mec.pt/adocao-2024-com-efeitos-em-20242025

[3] Cf. Guerra (2020) for more details and examples.

**Illustration 1.** Example of multimodal tasks that includes writing as an assessment of reading comprehension



## Results and Discussion

We found and counted the following writing tasks and genres per manual:

**Table 2.** Textual genres and number of writing tasks

| Textual genre | Textbook A | Textbook B |
|---|---:|---:|
| Description | 4 | 5 |
| Opinion text | 3 | 3 |
| Interview | 1 | — |
| Informative text | 1 | — |
| Explanatory text | 1 | — |
| News | 1 | — |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Narration | 2 | 2 |
| Advertisement (publicity) | 1 | — |
| E-mail | 1 | 2 |
| Dialogue | 1 | — |
| Tourist brochure | 1 | 1 |
| Synopsis | — | 1 |
| Free text | — | 1 |
| Commentary (of pictures) | — | 1 |
| Informal letter | — | 1 |
| Total | 17 | 17 |

There is an equal number of writing tasks between the two textbooks. A quick look at the textual genres reveals that they are in line with the descriptors of the writing syllabus (see **Table 1**). We can also point out that some of the textual genres have been worked on since the beginner levels, such as description, narration, correspondence, and advertisements (Guerra, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2022).

Although we can take a positive view of the textual variety and the number of writing activities in the two textbooks, we need to take a closer look at the writing iexampleson. Let's consider the following exemples from both:

Textbook A

(a) "Como se escrevem e enviam, hoje em dia, mensagens de amizade ou amor? Exemplifica." (p. 17)[4]

(b) "Com certeza já viveste momentos felizes com a tua família. Recorda um desses momentos e faz um relato (com 60 a 80 palavras). Não te esqueças de indicar: (i) de que momento se trata; (ii) com quem estavas; (iii) quando e onde ocorreu; (iv) as emoções que sentiste; (v) por que razão este episódio familiar te marcou; (vi) um título para o teu texto" (p. 29)[5]

(c) "No teu caderno, escreve um texto de 100 a 120 palavras, onde dês a tua opinião sobre a melhor forma de comprar roupa e acessórios. (i) indicar as vantagens e inconvenientes de cada opção; (ii) mencionar aquela que tu mais utilizas e justifica."[6] (p. 57)
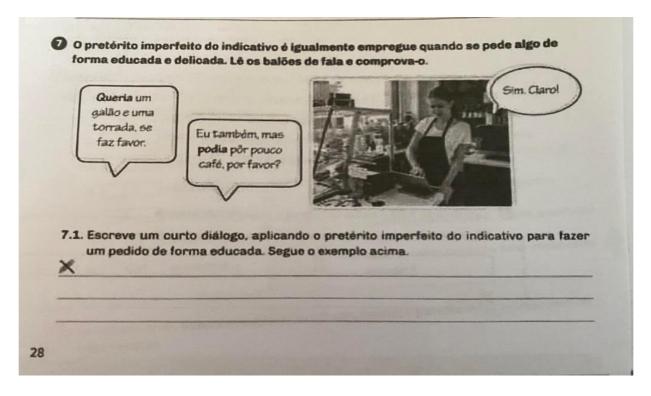
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[4] "How are messages of friendship or love written and sent today? Give an example."

[5] "I'm sure you've had happy times with your family. Recall one of those moments and write a story (60 to 80 words). Don't forget to indicate (i) what moment it was; (ii) who you were with; (iii) when and where it happened; (iv) the emotions you felt; (v) why this family episode marked you; (vi) a title for your text."

[6] "In your notebook, write a text of 100 to 120 words in which you give your opinion on the best way to buy clothes and accessories. (i) indicate the advantages and disadvantages of each option; (ii) mention the one you use the most and justify it."

**Illustration 2. Example of writing task from textbook B**



Textbook B

(d). A. Observa a estrutura da carta que o Tiago escreveu.

Esta carta é uma carta informal porque é dirigida aos seus amigos.

| Estrutura da carta | |
|---|---|
| **Local e data** | |
| **Fórmula de saudação:** | Olá! <br><br> Olá John! / Olá Inês! <br><br> Querida amiga, / Querido amigo, <br><br> Querido Mamadou, / Querida Li, |
| **Corpo da carta** | |
| **Fórmula de despedida:** | Um abraço <br><br> Muitos beijinhos <br><br> Beijinhos |

B. onde gostavas de passar as próximas férias?
Escreve uma carta a um amigo. Refere: local;

atividades; alojamento; etc.[7] (pp. 34-35)

(e). "A. Escreve a sinopse de um filme que viste recentemente."[8] (p. 88)

(f) "A. Todos nós em algum momento da nossa vida, nos sentimos heróis/heroínas ou porque conseguimos ajudar alguém ou porque conseguimos tirar uma nota espetacular na disciplina de que menos gostamos. Relata-nos a situação. Não te esqueças de usar o discurso indireto."[9] (p. 120) – This task includes a structure proposal for narration.

(g) "C. Pensa agora num objeto e descreve-o à turma. Os teus colegas tentam adivinhar o que é."[10] (p. 138)

As we can see, the instructions are sparse, not promoting the writing process: to plan, write, revise. They often resort to reproducing structures, as in **Illustration 2**, in order to promote knowledge and training of certain speech acts or grammar content (imperfect tense for courtesy, in this case). They also are not included in a communicative context, as if written situations are not to share (formal or informally) something with someone. As a result, there is still a gap between research findings and the pedagogical practices implemented in textbooks by their authors. Methodological choices that are reflected in the different levels of learning Portuguese as a Foreign Language. In a way, it seems that the authors of the textbooks also base the writing tasks on the students' knowledge of their own mother tongue, as if the textual genres, their structures and uses were the same in all language and cultural contexts.

Textbook A includes a section at the end entitled 'Aprende conTextos'[11] in which it provides a model and a few notes on the structure and content of each part of some of the textual genres present in the writing tasks:

informal letter and postcard, interview, debate, description, news and opinion text. We only found reference to this information for the interview, news and informal letter tasks; textual genres that are the subject of just one activity. It is therefore expected that the teacher will make this connection between the activities and textual models and structures, explaining them and, why not, exemplifying them with other texts in the manual to help the students in their learning activities. Textbook B has three writing tasks accompanied by information on the structure and some speech acts (*Cf.* example (d), above) and other three has some content suggestions to help students' production. Unlike manual A, the fact that this information is included in the writing activity itself could encourage greater use of it. However, in the particular case of example (d), the teacher's explanations will be crucial to clarify the meaning and content of the 'Body of the letter' and the punctuation for the farewell formulas.

It can be said that the textbooks analyzed at B1 level have a more methodological eclectic view of teaching and learning writing skills. They include behaviorist principles, typical of the audio-oral style of the 50s/60s, along with some principles from communicative approaches and later (particularly the presence of textual structures associated with speech acts). However, the main concern remains the product through which the teacher assesses the learner's learning.

On the other hand, it can be said that the presence of summary tables of the basic structure of a textual genre and/or speech acts to facilitate writing, refers to the continuation of the simple reproduction of structures to be repeated to exhaustion and finally memorized. Writing is thus, in some activities, a kind of filling in of blanks in which the suggested speech acts and the lexical and grammatical structures to be learned at that

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[7] Look at the structure of the letter James wrote.
This is an informal letter because it's addressed to his friends.
Structure of the letter |Place and date |Greeting formula: Hello! / Hello John! / Hello Ines! / Dear friend, / Dear Mamadou, / Dear Li | Body of the letter |Farewell formula: A hug / Lots of kisses / Kisses

B. Where would you like to spend your next vacation? Write a letter to a friend. Give details: location; activities; accommodation; etc.

[8] "A. Write the synopsis of a movie you've seen recently."

[9] A. At some point in our lives, we've all felt like heroes or heroines, either because we managed to help someone or because we got a spectacular grade in the subject we liked the least. Tell us about it. Don't forget to use indirect speech.

[10] C. Now think of an object and describe it to the class. Your classmates will try to guess what it is.

[11] Learn with texts.

moment by the learner must be combined.

The text (read aloud to peers and/or privately by the teacher) is the product through which the teacher, the ultimate audience of the written production, will verify these learnings. The final textual product is therefore more important than the process of textual construction.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching writing activities in a Portuguese as a Foreign Language context for the B1 level requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that considers the learners' proficiency level, learning styles, and cultural background. By implementing effective pedagogical strategies, integrating technology, and creating a supportive learning environment, instructors can empower learners to develop the writing skills they need to succeed in their academic, professional, and personal lives. The ultimate goal is to cultivate confident and competent writers who can effectively communicate their ideas and perspectives in Portuguese.

Effective writing instruction involves a multifaceted approach that includes planning, drafting, revising, and self-regulation (Wang & Bakken, 2004). In contrast to the writing activities analyzed at levels A1 and A2 (Guerra, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2022), at level B1 the authors nevertheless tried to reduce the learners' cognitive effort by providing information on text structure and content in some tasks. In fact, the ability to write effectively is crucial in second language acquisition because good writing requires text with the complexity of syntax and morphology, a wide range of vocabulary, and a good command over conventional forms and over the means of signaling the relation of the texts (Hellystia, 2019). Furthermore, achieve the B1 level in Portuguese schools means to regroup with the rest of the peers in Portuguese classes as a mother tongue. So the students must be fully prepared to continue the study of Portuguese language like any other Portuguese student.

Nevertheless, the writing tasks, even though they include a more eclectic vision of learning this skill, are still structured to emphasize the final product and not the various components of the writing process, allowing the student to transfer later the learnings to other communicative situations. The ultimate aim of learning a foreign language should be to enable the learner to communicate in a variety of situations and not just those in which they have repeated structures and speech acts to exhaustion in order to facilitate memorization. Oral and written communication in real life is dynamic, anchored in a wide variety of communication contexts and with a wide variety of constraints.

Finally, we think it would be relevant to check the treatment of writing in the teaching of other foreign language(s) in the Portuguese school system to see if the methodological principles are common to the teaching of French, English or Spanish, for example.

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