

**Enhancing the Written Message Production Competence  
in Teaching Romanian to Foreign Students**

**Angela POPOVICI**

Dunarea de Jos University of Galati, Romania  
The Cross-Border Faculty ([Angela.Popovici@ugal.ro](mailto:Angela.Popovici@ugal.ro))

**Abstract**

The article addresses the importance of developing writing skills in Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL) classes, particularly among A2-level foreign students. Starting from the observation that foreign language teaching places communication at the center of instructional activities, the necessity of rebalancing the didactic focus towards effective support methods for coherent writing is argued. A gradual narrative method is proposed and described, centered on the step-by-step construction of a narrative text based on a personal experience. The method is structured into logical stages—generating the narrative idea, introducing descriptive details, using connectors, and final self-assessment—and is illustrated through a concrete example of classroom application. The conclusions highlight the benefits of the method in enhancing clarity, expressiveness, and autonomy in the writing process.

**Keywords:** written expression, Romanian as a foreign language, coherence, narrative method, language competencies

**Introduction**

In the current context of globalization and increased academic mobility, language learning is becoming a strategic objective in the formation of intercultural and academic competences of international students. The teaching of Romanian as a foreign language is part of this dynamic, multicultural and multilingual framework, and is increasingly in demand by Romanian higher education institutions.

The communicative paradigm has had a major influence on the didactic directions in RFL promoting the development of oral interaction competence, but, from the teaching experience, as well as in the opinion of the researchers Cuq, J.P., Gruca, I., the aspect of written expression becomes slightly neglected [4, pp. 178-183]. Although the focus on communication facilitates the rapid integration of students into conversational contexts, sometimes it often generates imbalances in the formation of a functional and complete linguistic competence. This aspect is all the more relevant in the case of foreign students who intend to follow university programs in Romanian, where clarity and coherence of the written expression are equally essential for academic success.

The production of written messages is therefore an important component of academic, professional and everyday communication. Clear, correct and expressive writing is not a prerequisite for active and responsible participation in society. According to the linguist Daniel Cassany, the development of writing competence involves not only knowledge of the language but also the formation of structural thinking, logical coherence and the ability to organise ideas [2, p.98].

Along these lines, the literature [7, p. 266] supports an integrated approach to the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), emphasising the importance of progressive and adaptable methods that support the development of functional writing (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). At the same time, in line with the principles of learner-centered learning, modern teaching methods need to take into account learners' proficiency levels, their interests and life experiences, and the context in which they are to use the language.

This paper aims to contribute to the improvement of the teaching of written expression in RFL by describing the narrative method, which is particularly applicable to learners at A2 level of language proficiency. This method aims at developing students' ability to produce coherent and expressive narrative texts, starting from personal experiences and guiding them step by step in a reflective and constructive writing process.

The importance of this methodological direction is also evident from the fact that, in many situations, foreign students are required to write various types of texts - from simple messages to research papers - whose quality is assessed according to the clarity, coherence and stylistic appropriateness of expression. In this respect, the RFL teacher has the responsibility to train and reinforce this competence by providing meaningful and motivating writing contexts in which the student feels supported and valued as a writer.

### **Research problem**

The development of written message production competence in teaching Romanian as a foreign language is an increasingly topical methodological challenge at the intersection between the educational needs of international students and the rapid transformations of the digital and academic environment. In the context of the predominant emphasis on oral interaction within the communicative paradigm, as well as the new challenges posed by the expansion of artificial intelligence-based tools, there is an urgent need to reassess the role of writing, or the production of original, coherent and expressive texts becomes a guarantee of authenticity and the development of critical thinking.

These premises lead to the formulation of the research problem: What are the optimal methodological conditions for the development of writing competence among foreign students, in the framework of RFL classes, in a personalized, functional and adapted to the current requirements of the academic environment and the digitalized society?

### **Research hypothesis**

The application of the narrative method, centered on personal experience and on the step-by-step progress of the text, contributes significantly to the development of coherent and expressive writing competence among foreign students studying Romanian.

### **Methodology**

The research has an applied and exploratory character, being based on the observation and qualitative analysis of texts produced by foreign students (A2 level) in the framework of the RFL classes, after applying the narrative method. The activities were structured in didactic sequences, following the step-by-step development of the written content, and progress was assessed through self-assessment and guided revision.

### **Results**

The experimental basis of the investigation was a group of international students, originally from Ukraine, enrolled in the Preparatory Year for Romanian language learning at the University *Dunarea de Jos* of Galati, Romania. Following the analysis of the data collected during the didactic activities, it was found that a significant number of these students have difficulties in writing a personalized and coherent narrative text. This finding highlighted the need to apply a structured teaching method, developed within the framework of the present research, which implies following clear steps in the process of constructing a written message. The observance of these steps by the students facilitates the organization of ideas, the progressive development of written expression and the quality of the final product - a coherent, expressive narrative text, appropriate to the communicative context.

### **Theoretical foundations of the narrative method**

Narrative-based pedagogical method focuses on the use of personal stories, memories and own experiences in the learning process. It has its roots in narrative pedagogy, a theoretical concept advocated by psychologist Jerome Bruner [1, pp. 30-70], who considers narrative thinking essential for understanding the world. Bruner emphasizes that people construct their sense of reality through stories, and education should enhance this narrative capacity to facilitate learning.

Similarly, philosopher Paul Ricoeur [8, pp. 188-199] proposes the concept of narrative identity, arguing that human identity is formed and understood through narrative. According to Ricoeur, when we narrate our lives, we begin to better understand who we are and how we relate to others and the world around us. In this way, the self-narrative becomes a method by which each individual constructs his or her own meaning of existence.

Therefore, applying narrative pedagogy in Romanian language learning allows students to connect more deeply with the Romanian language, as they can relate the learning experience to their own personal experiences and realities. This type of learning increases internal motivation, and when you tell from your own experience, the process becomes more personal, but also more relevant. Thus learning becomes more fluent, personal vocabulary expands and confidence in using the language increases.

In addition, the narrative method supports authenticity and free expression, providing space for the integration of the Romanian language into the learner's personal identity. It contributes to the development of language skills through real and authentic contexts, making the learning process more effective and relevant for students.

### **Aspects of producing the written message**

Written communication is a fundamental dimension of our individual, social and cultural existence, a way of expressing and interpreting thoughts, feelings and facts about different contexts. The Dictionary of Linguistic Terms [5, p. 323], defines writing as "an additional means of communication of audible speech through graphic systems of signs, which allow speech to be fixed for its transmission at a distance, to preserve its masterpieces over time". The Explanatory Dictionary of the Roman Language characterizes the notion of 'writing' as 'the action of writing and its results' [ 6, p. 964]. According to DEX, to write means:

- to select, organize, develop ideas;
- to express ideas in appropriate language;
- to arrange ideas into logical/coherent sequences;
- to present ideas in a civilized form (layout, readability, spelling and punctuation).

In both definitions, two aspects of writing are reflected: as a productive type of speaking and as a result of this activity.

The Common European Framework of Reference defines writing as an activity in which the language user produces a written text [3, pp.150-160]. Therefore, students need to be trained in various writing activities in order to formulate and order their thoughts, ideas, producing their own communicative acts, with and without reference marks, by describing, presenting and appreciating facts, processes in society and nature.

Writing, as a special sign activity, for the first time became the object of research in the works of Vygotsky, L. S. [9, pp.131-148]. Analyzing how writing involves a double process of abstraction, both in relation to oral language and in the social-cultural context, the researcher concludes that written speech differs from oral speech and internal language in that it requires special training, because written language works in the conditions when the interlocutor is absent, more detailed realizes the content of communication, is produced by other reasons and possesses greater comprehension than oral speech.

Therefore, the production of the written message is an essential competence in the process of learning a foreign language, and in the context of teaching Romanian to foreign students, it becomes a significant indicator of linguistic and cognitive progress. Correct, coherent and personalized written expression reflects both the degree of mastery of grammatical and lexical rules and the ability to structure ideas, to narrate and to argue in a way adapted to the communicative situation.

At the same time, the process of developing this competence involves overcoming specific difficulties, especially in the case of students whose mother tongue differs radically from Romanian in terms of grammatical structure, spelling or narrative logic. For this reason, coherent methodological interventions, such as the narrative method, contribute to the development of functional and authentic written expression, supporting students' academic and social integration.

### **Common difficulties in written expression of Ukrainian/Russian students at RFL**

The learning of Romanian as a foreign language by Ukrainian or Russian speakers poses a number of specific challenges, particularly in terms of written expression. Some examples of common difficulties, summarized in Table 1., are largely determined by the typological distance between the languages in question, Romanian belonging to the Romance family of languages, while Ukrainian and Russian are Slavic languages with significantly different morphological-syntactic and phonological structures.

One of the most frequent difficulties observed in teaching practice is the incorrect use of the definite article, which is absent in Ukrainian and expressed in Russian by other contextual means. Thus, students tend either to omit the article ( "Student merge la bibliotecă") or to use it redundantly ( "Studentul al merge").

Also, the declension of adjective with noun, in gender, number and case, frequently causes errors. This is due to differences in inflection systems between languages. For example, in Romanian we say "interesting book" (feminine, singular), but in Ukrainian the adjective appears in a different position and with different endings, which creates confusion in the correct ordering and marking of words in the sentence.

Another obstacle is the frequent misuse of reflexive verbs, due to semantic and structural differences. Students omit the reflexive pronoun, saying "am plimbat în parc" instead of "m-am plimbat în parc," or "se grăbește" becomes simply "grăbește." These errors indicate a

lack of assimilation of the reflexive paradigms in Romanian, which do not have a perfect counterpart in the native language.

As far as plural formation is concerned, many students state that they cannot identify a consistently applicable logical pattern, which highlights the perceived lack of predictability in Romanian morphological structures. Common examples include erroneous forms such as 'copiluri' instead of 'copii' or 'floarele' instead of 'flori'. In their perception, the Romanian plural should be "memorized, not learned logically".

Another key issue is orthography, where students have major difficulties in correctly representing specific Romanian sounds such as [ă], [î], [ș], [ț], which are absent or marked differently in the Slavic system. Thus, words such as "înțelege", "știre" or "pâine" are often written as "intelejere", "stire", "pane", phonetically transcribed or transliterated from the mother tongue.

Another frequently reported difficulty is that the learning of spelling and grammatical constructions is overly dependent on mechanical memory, to the detriment of systemic understanding. Written tasks thus become an exercise in 'reproduction' rather than in creative and conscious text construction. For example, students retain fixed phrases by repetition ("Mă numesc...", "Sunt din..."), but have difficulty developing their own ideas in writing or structuring a narrative text.

In conclusion, pedagogical interventions need to include clear, progressive methods centered on students' real needs. The narrative-gradual method, proposed by us and described in this paper, provides an effective framework for the development of written expression, precisely by focusing on the production of personalized, meaningful texts adapted to the linguistic level of the learners.

**Table 1. Common difficulties in written expression of foreign students**

Linguistic aspect	Observed difficulty	Incorrect example (produced by the student)	Correct form	Comparative explanation (ro vs. ua/ru)
Definite article	Omission or incorrect placement	<i>Student merge la universitate</i>	<i>Studentul merge la universitate</i>	Ukrainian and Russian do not use definite articles.
Adjective-noun declension	Incorrect declension in gender, number, case	<i>carte interesant</i>	<i>carte interesantă</i>	Declension in Romanian is complex, while Russian has different rules.
Plural formation	Lack of clear rules, irregular plural	<i>floarele, copiluri</i>	<i>florile, copii</i>	Plural formation in Romanian involves numerous phonetic and suffix changes.
Reflexive verbs	Omission/incorrect use of reflexive pronoun	<i>Se plimbă Maria</i> → <i>Plimbă Maria</i>	<i>Maria se plimbă</i>	Reflexive verbs are constructed differently or have no exact equivalents.
Spelling (diacritics)	Phonetic transcription or lack of diacritics	<i>pane, intelegere</i>	<i>pâine, înțelegere</i>	Russian/Ukrainian has no equivalent letters for ă, â, ș, ț, î.

Syntactic constructions	Incorrect word order	<i>Merge student la curs</i>	<i>Studentul merge la curs</i>	Word order is freer in Russian.
Coherence of written discourse	Missing logical connection between ideas	<i>Am venit. Am mers. A fost bine.</i>	<i>Am venit în România și, pentru că era soare, am mers la plimbare.</i>	Connectors are rarely used naturally in the early stages.
Prepositions	Incorrect choice, influenced by L1	<i>Locuiesc pe Galați</i>	<i>Locuiesc în Galați</i>	Romanian prepositions have different spatial/temporal values.
Affective or stylistic vocabulary	Rigid, impersonal language, lacking details	<i>Ziua a fost bună</i>	<i>Ziua a fost frumoasă, senină și liniștită</i>	Lack of practice in emotional expression in writing.

### Description of the narrative-gradual method

Writing a narrative text involves much more than simply recounting events. The essence of this type of text is to convey a personal experience through expressive and engaging language. The author (the student), as narrator, relates events from a subjective perspective, often in the first person, to create a direct and authentic connection with the reader. Usually, a narrative text is structured in three parts: the introduction, which introduces the context and triggers the conflict; the table of contents, in which the events unfold; and the conclusion, in which the conflict is resolved and the author may offer a conclusion or reflection on what has happened.

In order to improve the quality of narrative texts written by students, we felt it necessary to extend this five-step structure. This makes the writing process clearer and more efficient. The role of the teacher is crucial in this endeavor, providing guidance by helping to develop a narrative plan and encouraging personal expression to help students create coherent and authentic narrative texts. In the following we propose to apply the method to the RFL lesson, proficiency level A2.

**Suggested topic:** *My first day in Romania.*

**Duration:** 90 minutes

**Type of text produced:** Narrative text with descriptive elements

**Overall aim:** To develop the ability to write a coherent and personal text using simple narrative language, basic connectors and descriptive elements.

**Specific objectives:**

- Correct use of past verb tenses (past perfect);
- Logical organization of ideas in a written text;
- To enrich the text with simple descriptive elements and connectors;
- Developing self-evaluation skills.

### Stage I - Memory activation and logical organization of narrative content

**Description:** Students start from a real, personal, affective and narrative experience. Through key questions such as "who?", "when?", "where?", "what happened?", "why?",

"how was it resolved?", "what is the moral?" - the reconstruction of facts is guided in a logical and sequential way.

**Activity:** Students may be given a worksheet with the following questions:

- When did you arrive in Romania?
- Where did you first arrive (city, airport, train station)?
- Who met you?
- What did you do that day?
- How did you feel?
- Did you have any surprises? What happened? Why?
- What is the conclusion/moral of the experience?

**Suggestions:** the students answer these questions in their notebooks, using simple sentences. They are reminded to use the correct form of verbs in the past tense.

## **Stage II - Enriching the text with basic expressive elements**

**Description:** At this stage, students add minimal descriptive information: proper names for characters, essential character or physical traits, basic emotional states.

**Activity:** The teacher asks them to:

- Name the person they interacted with most that day;
- write 1-2 physical or moral traits (e.g. "the lady was very kind", "she had long hair and spoke calmly").
- describe what emotions he/she felt (nervous, curious, excited).

**Practical suggestions:** if necessary, you can work with related vocabulary worksheets: "good - kind - generous" / "nervous - agitated - frowning" or on the blackboard "tall, smiling, tired, polite, warm, cheerful." Students rephrase their original text by adding these details.

## **Stage III - Contextual detailing: clothing, relationships, atmosphere**

**Description:** the text is augmented with visual and psychological descriptions: the characters' clothing, the way they interact, the atmosphere, the relationships between characters.

**Activity:** The teacher asks them to:

- What clothes were you or the person wearing?
- What was the temperature outside?
- What was the place like (crowded, beautiful, quiet)?

**Practical suggestions:** for inspiration, students can be given simple pictures (drawings, collages) to describe a character's clothing or based on what they see; describe the entourage. Students complete the text with the information requested.

## **Stage IV - Introducing pragmatic connectors and textual cohesion**

**Description:** In this phase, the focus is on the logical and grammatical flow of the text. Students are asked to reread the text and add connectors between ideas.

**Activity:** Students are given a list of simple connectors:

- Time: then, then after, morning, evening
- Cause: because, since, as, for the reason that...
- Opposition: but, nevertheless
- Conclusion: after, finally

**Practical suggestions:** If necessary, some rephrasing or 'fill in the blanks' exercises should be practised in advance. Students complete and rewrite the text.

### Stage V - Critical reading, rewriting and self-evaluation

**Description:** Students re-read the resulting text, compare it with the previous version and revise it according to the following 6 clear self-evaluation criteria:

**Activity:** Students are given a self-assessment sheet with 6 questions:

- Did I answer all the questions clearly?
- Did I use past tense verbs?
- Did I add characters with character traits?
- Did I describe clothing, atmosphere and place?
- Did I use connectors to link the sentences?
- Does the text have a conclusion/ moral and is it easy to follow?

Optional: 2-3 students read the text in front of the class.

### Example of a final mini-text (written by a student):

*Am ajuns în România pe 1 octombrie. Dimineața, când am coborât la stația din Galați, vremea era rece și ploua, iar eu aveam pe mine doar un pulover. M-a întâmpinat Maria, o studentă din anul II cu părul brunet. Mi-a zâmbit cald și mi-a explicat tot ce trebuia să știu despre studii. Eram foarte obosit din cauza drumului, dar cu Maria mă simțeam mai în siguranță. După aceea, am mers împreună cu autobuzul până la cămin. Pe drum, am observat că oamenii din jur erau prietenoși și deschiși, iar acest lucru m-a făcut să mă simt mai relaxat. Deși mă simțeam nesigur, fiindcă nu știam ce mă așteaptă, Maria m-a încurajat. În final, am ajuns la cămin și am înțeles că nu eram singur. Eram obosit, dar fericit. Morala: ajutorul prietenilor poate face o mare diferență într-o perioadă de schimbare.*

*I arrived in Romania on October 1st. In the morning, when I got off at the station in Galați, the weather was cold and rainy and I was wearing only a sweater. I was met by Maria, a second year student with brown hair. She smiled warmly and explained everything I needed to know about studying. I was very tired from the journey, but with Maria I felt safer. After that, we took the bus together to the dormitory. On the way, I noticed that the people around me were friendly and open and this made me feel more relaxed. Although I felt insecure because I didn't know what to expect, Maria encouraged me. Finally, I arrived at the Galați and realized that I was not alone. I was tired but happy. The moral: help from friends can make a big difference in a time of change.*

### Discussion

In the context of the changes brought about by the evolution of Artificial Intelligence, future discussions should focus on the impact of new technologies on the process of developing writing competence. An important point to be addressed would be to stimulate critical thinking in text production so that students can formulate their own informed opinions. It would also be essential to discuss the importance of authenticity in writing and how we can encourage students to create original texts that reflect their personal and cultural experiences and identity.

### Conclusions

The article explored the enhancement of written message production competence in the



context of teaching Romanian as a foreign language. The implementation of the method demonstrated that writing can be approached both as a final product and as a formative and reflective process, anchored in the learner's authentic experiences. The students' examples revealed significant improvements in text coherence, lexical diversity, and structural clarity. By organizing the writing into logical and controlled steps, the method enabled students to structure their ideas, gradually introduce descriptive elements, and use connectors to ensure textual coherence, fostering progress without pressure. Furthermore, the final self-assessment contributed to the development of self-regulation and the awareness of progress made throughout the learning process. The personalization of the topic positively impacted students' emotional engagement, autonomy development, and the formation of critical thinking regarding their own writing. The results of applying this method in RFL classes confirm its effectiveness in developing written expression that is clear, coherent, and adapted to the students' linguistic proficiency level.

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