

Let's Go to Costa Rica!

THEME:	CULTURAL CONTEXTS (TRAVEL)						
LANGUAGE:	ANY (SPANISH)						
STANDARDS:	COMMUNICATION	CULTURES	CONNECTIONS	COMPARISONS	COMMUNITIES		
	1.2	1.3	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1

Time Frame:

Three to five 50-minute class sessions

Materials Needed:

- Addresses of various tourist bureaus, travel agencies (provided)
- Maps, travel books, videos, slides, or pictures of Costa Rica
- Sample business letters in Spanish and English (see resources below)
- Postage, envelopes
- Peer review guidelines (provided)
- Rubric for assessment (provided)

Description of Task:

This activity is to be done approximately two months prior to a unit on travel in Costa Rica. The intention is for the students to get information about the country to plan a trip. The authentic materials they receive (brochures, pamphlets, maps, etc. in Spanish) can later be used during the unit.

Determining the task, audience, purpose for the writing:

Before writing, students need to understand the purpose for writing as well as the intended audience. Inform students that they'll be writing letters to request travel information about Costa Rica for a unit that will take place in several months. Their requests will hopefully lead to a plethora of authentic materials to be used in the unit.

Level:

Intermediate-Low

Purpose:

To request information in writing

Communicative

Function(s):

Directive: Requesting information in writing

Referential: Understanding messages

Language Structures:

Question formation, conditional and present tenses

Cultural Aspects:

Formal register, protocol for letter writing (format), basic geographical information

Modalities:

Writing

Reading

Listening

Speaking

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Expectations need to be made clear. It is important to note that students at this level should *not* be expected produce totally accurate letters. They should be expected to produce accurate language when related to the grammatical structures that are being emphasized (in this case the conditional and present tenses and question formation). Other phrases and sentences may not be grammatically accurate but must be comprehensible to the reader.

Pre-writing:

The purpose of the pre-writing stage is to prepare students for the writing task, to generate ideas, and to provide them with the language structures and vocabulary they will need to complete the task (e.g., Dvorak, 1986; Hewins, 1986). It is common for portions of the pre-writing activities to occur in English.

The teacher can begin by asking students what they know about Costa Rica and what they would like to know. This can be followed with a brief introduction to Costa Rica and its many sites by showing a video, slides, pictures, or having various books on Costa Rica available. Have students brainstorm ideas of what they want to learn about places to see in Costa Rica. The class can create a web of ideas and the vocabulary students will need can be introduced in the context of the creation of the web.

Have pairs or small groups of students examine sample business letters in English and Spanish, asking them to note similarities and differences. Students' attention should be drawn to a comparison between the English and Spanish letters to highlight the formal register found in both. The key phrases for greetings, closings, etc. in Spanish can be introduced. (For examples of letters in Spanish, see for example, Jackson, 1986).

A lesson for introducing and/or reviewing the language structures needed to complete the letters should take place. This should involve the conditional tense (including *me gustaría/nos gustaría*), present tense, and question formation.

Writing:

First draft. Assign pairs of students to work together. Provide them with an address of a travel agency, or tourist bureau (see list of addresses below). They teacher may wish to assign students to different regions of the country for requesting information so that a variety of materials is requested. Instruct students to compose a first draft (if possible, on the computer to facilitate later revision). Provide students with a copy of the rubric that will

be used to evaluate their writing (sample rubric provided). Their letters should:

- follow appropriate format based on samples (address, date, greeting, closing)
- provide an introduction and state the purpose of the letter (i.e., “we are students studying Spanish at X school and will be planning a trip to Costa Rica; we are requesting information...”)
- include request for information (brochures, pamphlets, maps, travel information, etc.); they should emphasize that they want the materials in Spanish (travel agencies may have a tendency to send materials in English to requests from the United States unless otherwise specified)
- provide address where the information should be sent
- include a note of thanks

Feedback on the first draft—Peer review. The feedback on the first draft should focus on the content and organization/format but may also include attention to grammatical structures being emphasized. If students have not had much previous experience with peer review, it is important for the teacher to discuss the process with the class, emphasizing the need for positive comments as well as constructive suggestions for improving the writing. Phrases for providing such feedback in the target language can be taught in the context of the peer review activity.

Pairs of students exchange their first drafts with another pair and complete a peer-review exercise in English (see peer review guide provided). Students should be encouraged to use the target language also.

The teacher should also examine the first drafts and provide feedback to the whole class instead of writing comments on individual letters. As the teacher is reading through the letters, s/he can keep track of common issues on an overhead transparency and use that to guide her/his discussion of feedback on the first draft. Such an approach saves time for the teacher and also focuses students’ attention on the feedback they are receiving from their peers. Depending upon how well students did on the first draft, the teacher may need to review the grammatical structures being emphasized and provide additional vocabulary.

Second draft. The student pairs revise their letters based on feedback from peers and the teacher. They are to submit the second draft along with their first draft and the feedback they received.

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[Note: For shorter writing tasks, such as this letter writing activity, a second draft may not be necessary. This stage can be skipped and students can compose the final draft based on feedback they received on the first draft.]

Feedback on the second draft. The teacher checks individual papers to see if comments on the first draft were addressed. The focus of feedback on the second draft is on language structures and other aspects needing attention (subject/verb agreement, number/gender agreement, etc.). The teacher should *not* correct the errors, but rather point out that certain errors should be corrected by the students.

Final draft. The students revise their letters for a final time, making sure that they incorporate the feedback they received and proofread for spelling and mechanical errors (accents, capitalization, etc.). Students submit their final drafts along with previous drafts and the feedback received.

Post-Writing:

Publication. This is a critical stage in the writing process. It involves sharing the writing with the intended audience. In this example, the final drafts of the letters should be sent to the tourist bureaus/travel agencies assigned to the students.

Assessment:

Assessment takes place throughout the various stages of the writing process as described above. Students' performance on the peer review can be assessed by collecting their responses on the peer review guidelines. The final drafts of the letters can be evaluated using a multitrait rubric (provided).

Extensions:

Suggestions for adapting the task for various levels:

For beginning levels: The teacher can provide students with sample phrases to “plug in” to the letter. A “class letter” can be composed and students can create a list of information they are requesting to attach to the letter. For very beginning levels, a simple, basic system requiring minimal response can be used for the peer review exercise. The following marking system was

developed by Carol Quest, a teacher in St. Paul, for use with very beginning levels of ESL students (Tedick & Klee, 1998).

- ! = This is surprising/interesting. (¡ Qué interesante!)
- = I like this. This is good. (Me gusta. Está bien.)
- + = I would like you to add more here (e.g., give an example). (Quiero saber más. ¿Puedes dar un ejemplo?)
- ? = I don't understand this. (No entiendo.)

For advanced levels: Individual letters can be assigned. The process can be shortened to just a first and final draft. The emphasis on letter format can be downplayed. All stages (pre-writing, peer review, etc.) can occur in the target language.

Other extensions:

- The teacher can pair beginning level (e.g., first year) and advanced level (e.g., 3rd year) students to have the more advanced students play the role of teacher and provide feedback on the various drafts.
- Small groups or students of pairs can be assigned to request different information from different agencies.

Cultural extensions:

- Students can explore more about the “culture” of tourism in Costa Rica.
- Students can write to different organizations to request information about the environmental challenges (e.g., deforestation) facing the country. Addresses of some of these organizations are provided below.
- After studying about environmental destruction in Costa Rica, students can write letters to governmental agencies and newspapers (like *La Nación*) expressing their views and calling for environmental protection. Addresses are provided below.

Resources and References:

Dvorak, T. (1986). Writing in the foreign language. In B. H. Wing (Ed.), *Northeast Conference Reports: Listening, reading, writing: Analysis and application* (pp. 145-167). Middlebury, VT: Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

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Hewins, C. P. (1986). Writing in a foreign language: Motivation and the process approach. *Foreign Language Annals*, 19, (3), 219-223.

Tedick, D. J., & Klee, C. A. (1998). Alternative assessment in the foreign language classroom. In G. S. Burkart (Ed.), *Modules for professional preparation of teaching assistants in foreign languages*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

A good resource for a variety of business letters in Spanish is:

Jackson, M. H. (1986). *Guide to Correspondence in Spanish*.

The following is a superb travel guide to Costa Rica:

Blake, B., & Becher, A. (2001). *The new key to Costa Rica* (15th ed.). Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press.

Addresses of tourist bureaus and travel agencies in Costa Rica where letters can be sent:

Costa Rican National Chamber of Tourism
Apdo. 777-1000
San José, CR
Phone: 506-234-6222
Website: <http://www.tourism.co.cr>

Costa Rica Expeditions
Apdo. 6941-1000
San José, CR
Phone: 506-257-0766
Website: <http://www.costaricaexpeditions.com>
[Natural history and adventure travel, especially in Monteverde, Tortuguero, and Corcovado; rafting]

Costa Rica Sun Tours
Apdo. 1195
1250 Escazú, CR
Phone: 506-255-3418
E-mail: suntours@sol.racsa.co.cr
[Specializing in Pavones and Arenal; bicycle tours of Orosi Valley]

Guanacaste Tours

Apdo. 55

5000 Liberia, CR

Phone: 506-393-8990

Website: <http://members.fcc.net/pertman>

[Visits to Arenal, Palo Verde, Santa Rosa, Tamarindo]

Horizontes Nature Tours

Apdo. 1780

1002 San José, CR

horizont@sol.racsa.co.cr

[Nature, cultural, and educational tours to all locations; hiking tours]

Jungle Trails

Apdo. 2413

1000 San José, CR

Phone: 506-255-3486

[Camping, hiking, birdwatching, and tree-planting trips, specializing in Volcán Barva]

Saragundi Specialty Tours

Apdo. 7126

1000 San José, CR

Phone: 506-255-0011

[Hiking, mountain biking, from light workouts to strenuous treks; they run a private bus service to popular destinations]

Senderos de Iberoamérica

Apdo. 675

2200 Coronado, San José, CR

Phone: 506-292-5003

[Birdwatchers' tours to Guayabo National Monument and Los Juncos Cloud Forest near San José]

Tikal Tours

Apdo. 6398

1000 San José, CR

Phone: 506-223-2811

[Tours to all locations]

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Organizations that are active in research, training, environmental education, and stewardship of the forest and wildlife reserves in La Selva, San Vito, Carara, and Monteverde:

Parque National Carara
Apdo. 469
1011 San José, CR

Tropical Science Center
Apdo. 8-3870
1000 San José, CR
Phone: 506-253-3267
Website: <http://www.cct.co.cr>

Organization for Tropical Studies
Apdo. 676, San Pedro
2050 San José, CR
Phone: 506-240-6696

Monteverde Conservation League
Apdo. 10581
1000 San José, CR
Phone: 506-645-5003
Website: <http://www.acmonteverde.com>

Other important addresses for sending letters regarding environmental issues:

Department of Responsible Tourism
Apdo. 1524-2050
San Pedro de Montes de Oca
San José, CR
Phone: 506-224-8910

La Nación
Apdo. 10138-1000
San José, CR

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Peer Review Guide for Feedback on the First Draft of the Letters

Reviewers: _____

Students whose letter was reviewed: _____

With your assigned partner, read the letter composed by your peers and respond to the following questions. Be sure to provide *positive* comments as well as helpful suggestions for improving the letter.

1. Does the format of the letter correspond to the samples? What components are missing or need revision?
2. Is all of the required content included? If not, what else needs to be included?
3. Are there any sentences that you are having difficulty understanding? Suggest ways to revise the sentences so that they are comprehensible.
4. Take notice of the use of the conditional and present tenses and questions. Are they formed correctly? Are subjects and verbs in agreement? If not, suggest ways to improve these grammatical elements.

Multitrait Rubric for “Let’s Go to Costa Rica!”

	Letter format	Content	Language Use
3	The letter includes all components and reflects the formal register.	All required contents are included.	Excellent control of language features; well-chosen vocabulary and consistently correct use of the conditional and present tenses as well as question formation.
2	The letter includes most components and reflects the formal register, but a few components may be missing or be somewhat incorrect.	Most required contents are included, but one piece is missing.	Adequate control of language features; appropriate vocabulary; meaning is communicated to the reader, but some incorrect use of the conditional and/or present tenses and question formation is apparent.
1	The letter is missing several key components or has many components presented incorrectly. Formal register is not reflected consistently.	More than one of the required contents are missing.	Weak control of language features; inappropriate or minimal vocabulary; errors in conditional and present tenses and question formation exist that make it difficult for the reader to understand.

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