

LA DICTÉE: MODE D'EMPLOI (OR: "HOW TO TAKE A DICTATION")

You will be doing frequent dictations (*dictées*) during the course of the semester, both in class and in the lab, as well as on tests. The following are some tips for the in-class and test *dictées* in particular that will help you do better on them as well as improve your listening skills. These tips apply to most dictations done in class, but I may throw in some variety to keep you on your toes. Be sure to listen follow my in-class instructions for each *dictée*.

- ✓ *Dictées* focus on current vocabulary are grammar structures, so be sure to study vocabulary for each chapter on a regular basis. You can check out my tips for learning vocabulary [here](#).
- ✓ In-class *dictées* will most often be of sentences or paragraphs, but format can vary.
- ✓ For most *dictées*, I will read the text three times.
- ✓ The first time I read the text, I will read with no pauses, at a slow-normal pace. This is the time for you to get a general idea of the content and vocabulary. You are listening "for the gist," and also testing your aural (listening) comprehension skills.

DO NOT WRITE during this time*. Put your pen/pencil down and just listen. (If you start writing at this stage, you will become focused on individual words, and will miss rest of the text. You may also say to yourself: "\$#@(&!@!, I wish she'd slow down! I can't write this fast!!!" Save yourself some frustration—and me some evil thoughts directed my way--and just listen!) You may begin to write after I have finished reading the sentence or paragraph, to test your memory.

*This applies to the vast majority of *dictées*, but for some 'special' *dictées*, I may ask to you write from the get-go. Again, be sure to follow my in-class instructions!

- ✓ The second time I read the text, I will break up sentences into logical chunks (ie: noun groups—a noun with any articles, adjectives and prepositions that correspond to it) with a pause for writing between 'chunks'. (Much better, now, isn't it? ;-)) . Write what you hear. If you're not sure what you hear, write it down anyway, in parentheses (pe tee tami??), to indicate "well, it's not quite that! but I'm not sure what it is yet." You can check it during the final listening.
- ✓ The third and final reading is the time for you to check your version. I will again read at a slow-normal pace. This is when you can fill in any missing words and correct spelling, as well as figure out the what-in-the-world-it-was-you-wrote-down-as-some-combo-of-sounds-you-didn't-quite-understand-the-first-time-around segments. (After you have the whole context of the paragraph or sentence down, these hard-to-figure-out segments might become clearer).
- ✓ One important thing to always keep in mind is that dictations are logical texts based on vocabulary and structures that you should know (vocabulary from the current chapter as well as other vocabulary that should be familiar to you, and grammar we have studied). Some *dictées* may be a bit silly, but they should all be understandable texts. If yours isn't, check to see if perhaps you haven't confused some words that sound the same or similar, or simply made something up.

- ✓ Some common confusions:

et (“and”) vs est (“is”)

parler (infinitive) vs. parlez (*vous* form) vs. parlé (past participle)

de (sounds kind of like duh) vs. du (doesn’t sound like “duh”, and has the specific sound of the French “u”)

se (‘self’) vs ce (it/he/she)

- ✓ Also check to see that you haven’t confused some vowels, hearing one thing, and interpreting it as another.

Watch for:

“ou” (sounds like “ooo”) vs “u” (that specific sound again)

le/de/ce vs. les/des/ces (a common confusion for those who have studied Spanish!)

- ✓ Keep your *dictées* for future reference (as you should keep all your homework and class assignments until the semester is over and you have received your grades). Before an upcoming *dictée*, look over your past ones to see what errors keep coming up.

What does your “list of common confusions” look like? Do you often confuse “ie” and “ei”? Do you keep wanting to write “le” instead of “les” (yes, Spanish students, I’m talking to you! ;-)). To avoid making the same mistakes over and over, you must be aware of them, pay attention to them, and make an effort to avoid them.

- ✓ A *dictée* is a good activity to do outside of class as well, to work on vocabulary, spelling, and listening-comprehension skills. The French tutors in the lab are available for your benefit, and you could easily ask them to write out a few sentences, using the chapter vocabulary, then have them dictate them to you. Another option would be for you to write up some sentences of your own, have the tutor help you correct them, then have her/him read them back to you while you write them down. Working on *dictées* in groups or with a study buddy is yet a third option. (These activities can take very little time, but can be very beneficial, especially if done on a regular basis).