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**IMPLEMENTING PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT
IN SECOND-YEAR GERMAN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS**

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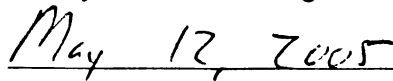
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**IMPLEMENTING PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT
IN SECOND-YEAR GERMAN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS**

By

Angelika Natascha Kraemer

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian and African Languages

2005

ABSTRACT

IMPLEMENTING PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN SECOND-YEAR GERMAN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

By

Angelika Natascha Kraemer

This study describes the design, implementation, and effectiveness of a portfolio that was used as an alternative assessment tool within the framework of a communicative second-year German language classroom at Michigan State University. The portfolio covered all four language skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and integrated skill competence in meaningful contexts, looked at students' work over time, and assessed it in accordance with transparent standards, making it a valid measure of assessment. Data were collected from eleven students over the course of one summer semester of approximately seven weeks. Data sources included student pre- and post-self-assessments and questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, and the portfolios. Students' perceptions of this alternative in assessment as a means of improving their overall German proficiency are reported and provide evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness. A general preference for portfolios over traditional assessment tools (i.e., written and oral exams) emerged.

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To my two families

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all those who supported me in completing this thesis.

I am very grateful to Charlene Polio, my advisor, who assisted me in all endeavors regarding this thesis and who provided invaluable comments and suggestions before, during, and after the data collection.

I would like to thank Tom Lovik and George Peters, who allowed me to redesign the German course and gave me all the necessary leeway in order to implement the portfolio as an assessment tool in the classroom.

I am greatly indebted to Dennie Hoopingarner. His technological assistance came to the rescue many times and he offered many helpful suggestions regarding the use of technology for assessment purposes.

A special thanks to all the students who participated in the study and who provided valuable feedback and insights. Without their cooperation, this entire thesis had not been possible.

Finally, I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues in the Department of Linguistics and German, Slavic, Asian and African Languages at Michigan State University in general, especially Kristin Graw, who not only discussed my thesis work with me but who were also there to help me through all sorts of difficulties.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the 1980s, criticisms regarding the standardized testing culture of the United States were strengthened by US students' poor performance in comparison with their international peers (Supovitz & Brennan, 1997). As David Kearns, chairman of Xerox Corporation, stated in 1988:

From a business perspective, the education system presents an alarming picture. It is one in which too little is expected of too many. ... [The system] is failing [students and dedicated teachers] because schools are organized to meet the challenges of the 19th--not the 21st--century. And until those challenges are updated in line with reality, the system will continue to fail. ... The task before us is the restructuring of our entire public education system. (p. 2)

One such attempt of restructuring the educational system was by reforming assessment practices. It has been pointed out repeatedly in the assessment literature that classroom evaluation greatly influences what teachers teach and what students learn. Not only has it an influence on what students perceive as important to learn and on their motivation, but it also "structures their approaches to timing and personal study, consolidates learning, and affects the development of enduring learning strategies and skills. It appears to be one of the most potent forces influencing education" (Crooks, 1988, as cited in Moss et al., 1992, p. 12). Therefore, it is crucial to assess the complete range of knowledge, interests, and skills that instruction claims to cover. This led to a movement away from traditional testing methods toward performance assessment. Proponents of this movement such as Gardner (1992), Resnick and Resnick (1992) and Wiggins (1989) claimed that new forms of assessment would lead to improved instruction and learning. Such new assessment methods could resolve the criticisms that were identified in the

existing testing culture: constraining effects on instruction, on the role of the teacher, and on students' learning (Ponte, 2000).

Resnick and Resnick (1992) defined performance assessment as “a form of assessment that uses direct judgments and evaluations of performances rather than indirect indicators of competence” (p. 61). By means of these performance assessment practices, they claim, the constraining effects of high-stakes standardized testing can be remedied and teaching and learning can be enhanced. For example, teachers are actively involved in the creation of grading rubrics and assessment tasks which enables them to better define their instructional goals (Darling-Hammond, 1994). Students are also actively involved in their own assessment which will most likely motivate them more and therefore lead to better learning (Frazier & Paulson, 1992; Valencia & Place, 1994). Garcia and Pearson (1994) added that students will be faced with complex tasks that require an integrated application of knowledge and strategy.

Brown and Hudson (1998) proposed a more differentiated, threefold categorization of assessment types. Rather than contrasting traditional assessments (which they categorized as “selected-response assessments,” including true-false, matching and multiple choice) with performance assessments, they included performance assessments along with fill-in and short-answer assessments in what they referred to as “constructed-response assessments.” They then distinguished “constructed-response assessments” from “personal-response assessments” which go beyond a mere construction of responses and that “allow students to communicate what they want to communicate” (p. 663). Such alternative assessment practices include portfolios, conferences, diaries, and self- and peer-assessments as well as checklists, journals, logs, video- and audiotapes, self-

evaluations, and teacher observations (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Huerta-Macías, 1995).

In their article, Brown and Hudson also offered a comprehensive overview of common characteristics of alternative assessment based on three research papers, listing twelve positive characteristics for alternative assessment which

- (1) require students to perform, create, produce, or do something;
- (2) use real-world contexts or simulations;
- (3) are nonintrusive in that they extend the day-to-day classroom activities;
- (4) allow students to be assessed on what they normally do in class every day;
- (5) use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities;
- (6) focus on processes as well as products;
- (7) tap into higher level thinking and problem-solving skills;
- (8) provide information about both the strengths and weaknesses of students;
- (9) are multiculturally sensitive when properly administered;
- (10) ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring, using human judgment;
- (11) encourage open disclosure of standards and rating criteria; and
- (12) call upon teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles.

These characteristics highlight improvements in the testing and learning processes, an enhanced role of the teacher, and the strengthening of students' learning, and thereby address exactly the criticism of the traditional testing culture mentioned above (i.e., constraining effects on instruction, on the role of the teacher, and on students' learning).

While this list appears appealing and convincing, alternative assessment is not without its problems. Just because this type of assessment *can* have the advantages listed above, it does not necessarily mean that it automatically *will* (Arter & Spandel, 1992).

Careful and well thought-out design, audience, purpose, and implementation are crucial elements for effective use of alternative assessment methods. Also, logistical issues involve an increased investment in time and resources, and interpretation involves the need to set clear and fair standards.

One of the most widely mentioned, but in empirical studies rarely addressed, objections to alternative assessment is in terms of validity, reliability, and objectivity (Banta, 2003; Brown & Hudson, 1998; Huerta-Macías, 1995). While Huerta-Macías suggests that the procedures inherent in alternative assessment (i.e., the actual performance of real-life tasks) are “in and of themselves valid” (p. 9) and accurately reflect the specific concept that is attempted to be measured, Brown and Hudson strongly object to that claim, stating that “the issues of reliability and validity must be dealt with for alternative assessment just as they are for any other type of assessment – in an open, honest, clear, demonstrable and convincing way” (p. 656). They continue that the strategies outlined by Huerta-Macías (i.e., credibility, auditability, multiple tasks, rater training, clear criteria, and triangulation) can improve reliability and validity, however, they caution that these strategies alone are not sufficient and that sound and transparent measures need to be designed that can be used to demonstrate reliability and validity of the assessment procedure involved. As Gitomer and Duschl (1995) put it, in order to be reliable and valid, assessment criteria must be public and explicit. Specifically, reliability issues in alternative assessment should (1) involve interrater reliability; (2) ensure objectivity; (3) prevent mechanical errors; (4) standardize rating and grading; and (5) ensure access to resources. Validity issues concern (1) demonstration of validity for

decision making purposes; (2) adequate exemplification of students' work; and (3) identification of intervening variables (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

The fact that human judgment is involved in alternative assessment subjects it to issues concerning objectivity. However, this human factor poses a big advantage over machine-scored ratings which restrict the diversity of available assessment formats. When determining the use and implementation of certain assessment types, Brown and Hudson (1998) pointed out that "all of the different types of tests are important to keep because all of them have distinct strengths and weaknesses" (p. 657). An exclusive reliance on one assessment method would render the overall assessment invalid. All researchers and teachers agree that multiple sources of information allow for better decision making when assessing students.

Portfolio assessment is one method of alternative assessment that has increasingly gained popularity in classrooms across the United States. In defining portfolios, Yancey (1996) identified five principles that offer a broad range of advantages over traditional testing methods:

- (1) A portfolio is a *collection* of a student's work.
- (2) It is created by a process of *selection*.
- (3) It includes the student's *reflection* on his or her learning.
- (4) It *communicates* something about the student, his or her values, and the context in which the portfolio was created.
- (5) It entails *evaluation* about the entries and the learning connected with them.

In addition, Yancey defined two additional key characteristics: "portfolios are developmental, and they are diverse" (p. 86). One further characteristic should be added:

Portfolios need to be purposeful (Arter & Spandel, 1992). By giving the students a more active role in their own assessment through these principles, they become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.

The complexity and heterogeneity of students' learning require not only diverse forms of students' work, but also multiple methods of assessment (Maki, 2004), and portfolios lend themselves to co-implementation with traditional standardized testing. Gathering multiple sources of student work and including contextualized real-life tasks make this type of assessment more authentic than traditional tests (Arter & Spandel, 1992; Cook-Benjamin, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Ancess, 1996). Authenticity refers to the fact that the portfolio will directly reflect what was done in the classroom and emphasized in the curriculum. Also, rather than being assessed on a scale that ranks and thus compares all students in a class, portfolios longitudinally assess the work of an individual student (Gitomer & Duschl, 1995) which renders assessment more authentic. Such criterion-referenced measures take performance abilities as well as complex cognitive tasks into account, which norm-referenced tests fail to measure (Darling-Hammond & Ancess, 1996).

Moss et al. (1992) identified another advantage of using portfolios over traditional tests for assessment purposes: "With standardized scores, consumers of the information must rely on expert assertions about the meaningfulness of the results because they do not have access to the evidence on which the conclusions were based" (p.14). With portfolios, all stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, teachers, administrators) can access samples of the students' work, making this type of assessment more transparent to outsiders.

Gitomer and Duschl (1995) listed three conditions that portfolio assessment must meet:

- (1) Portfolio assessment should attend to knowledge and skills that are deemed important within the discipline.
- (2) Portfolio assessment should contribute to instruction and learning.
- (3) Portfolio assessment should contribute to an accountability process within an educational system.

These three conditions all highlight the importance of anchoring instruction in a meaningful context.

A review of existing portfolio systems, rather than their theoretical underpinnings, reveals that the purposes and contents for portfolios vary broadly. Previous research has focused mainly on portfolio assessment in primary and secondary education, and in higher education most prominently on the field of English as a Second Language, as pointed out by Hamp-Lyons (1991). Commonly, in all these educational settings only one language skill (mainly writing) was under investigation (Valencia, 1990; Valencia & Calfee, 1991; Yancey, 1996). A few studies have been conducted that focused on science classrooms as well (Gitomer & Duschl, 1995; Koretz, Stecher, & Deibert, 1993; Spicuzza & Cunningham, 2003). Research on foreign language classroom assessment has been lagging behind other areas of instruction. Padilla et al. (1996) examined growth in foreign language proficiency (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Russian) in all four skills by investigating portfolios in elementary and high school programs. Four major findings resulted from their study: (1) It was possible to document growth in foreign language programs; (2) the more a teacher took purpose and audience into account, the more useful

the portfolio proved as alternative assessment; (3) the portfolio contents differed by instruction and grade level; and (4) objective measures of oral proficiency need to be implemented. Kevorkian (1997) offered a rationale for adopting portfolio assessment in the foreign language classroom and highlighted the characteristics of showing progress, educational benefits of full incorporation into instruction, students' active involvement, and enhanced relationships between teachers and students. While she herself was only involved in developing a portfolio assessment manual for the National Capital Language Resource Center, she reported on pilot test teachers' successful implementation of portfolios (Barnhardt & Kevorkian, 1999).

The most comprehensive study in a foreign language classroom was with Spanish at the high school level (Ponte, 2000). Ponte worked with a high school teacher on the implementation of a four-skill portfolio, however, discrepancies in the views of the teacher and the researcher led to a portfolio that emphasized reading and writing and allowed little room for listening and speaking. Nonetheless, her study reports that portfolio assessment enhanced instructional practices by raising the teacher's awareness of relevant assessment issues and also affected student learning in a positive way by giving the students an active role in their own assessment. Ponte, citing Linn, Baker, and Dunbar (1991), cautioned that "[t]he portfolio assessment literature is replete with assumptions and expectations about the nature and implications of portfolio assessment, but those assumptions and expectations are rarely theoretically grounded in empirical investigations of the situated practices of portfolio assessment in classrooms" (p. 6).

The goal of the present study is to offer a comprehensive account of the design, implementation, and effectiveness of a portfolio within the framework of a

communicative second-year German language classroom at an American four-year college, using a qualitative case study approach. No research has been conducted that has looked specifically at the inclusion of portfolios in the German-as-a-foreign-language classroom. In addition, no studies have investigated the simultaneous implementation of all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in a college-level foreign language course. The results of the study provide evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness. Portfolio assessment was incorporated fully into instruction, addressing how portfolios provide valid measures of assessment as they move away from the mere teaching of skills to an integrated communicative competence in context. The proposed model is applicable to any foreign or second language college-level course, and the insights into students' perceptions and progress will prove useful to language educators of all fields and levels as they provide important information on how instructional practices can be further improved.

The effectiveness of this type of assessment is based on the teacher's and the students' perceptions, which were gathered by means of several data sources. Darling-Hammond and Ancess (1996) stated that self-reflection and evaluation will enable teachers to evaluate their instruction critically and to use portfolio information to make sound instructional decisions. Similarly, students' self-reflection and evaluation will enable them to recognize their own progress and their strengths and weaknesses.

In qualitative research, hypotheses generally emerge from the data. The following hypotheses, which were informed by the above outlined portfolio and assessment literature, served as heuristics at the outset of the study. The advantages and disadvantages of alternative assessment in general and portfolio assessment in particular

(especially as outlined by Brown and Hudson [1998] and Padilla et al. [1996]) built the basis on which the following heuristics were developed:

The students will prefer portfolio assessment to traditional testing methods for the following reasons:

- (1) Portfolios do not simply test knowledge but rather highlight individual progress.
- (2) All four language skills are included in the portfolio assessment which will cater to different learner types and their learning style preferences.
- (3) The use of technology allows the students to complete assignments at their own pace.
- (4) The portfolio assignments will force students to review their own work which will raise their awareness of certain aspects (e.g., errors) pertaining to the skill in question.
- (5) By working closely with peers, the students will become aware of errors and will be able to correct them in the future.

The last hypothesis emerged from recent research in the field of second language writing that has advocated the implementation of peer review as an important aspect in assessing growth of students' writing skills. In their 1997 study, McGroarty and Zhu showed the positive effect group work, especially peer revision, had on students' writing and language acquisition in general, because students engaged in the negotiation of meaning which offered deeper insights into their own writing process. Similarly, Goldstein and Conrad (1990) found a positive relationship between negotiation and successful revision. Practicing peer review with the students prior to the first assignment

is an irreplaceable aspect of effective and useful peer review. Berg (1999) and Ferris (2003) stated that it is crucial to give the students precise guidelines and training for peer revision sessions to prove valuable. Research also promotes active teacher intervention during the writing process as an important tool for affecting students' writing (Hairston, 1984; Susser, 1994). This can be accomplished by monitoring students' activity and by providing suggestions during peer revision and, more importantly, by commenting extensively on students' drafts.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the context and the methodology of the present study. This includes a detailed description of the research paradigm and of the department, the course, and the participants of the study, which is followed by an outline of the data collection and analyses. Chapter 3 comprises the main part of this thesis, the implementation of the portfolio into the classroom practice. In Chapter 4, I will provide and discuss the results of the analyzed data according to the four language skills. Also, the students', the teacher's, and the supervising professor's perceptions and evaluations are reported, highlighting the effectiveness of portfolio assessment in this particular classroom. Chapter 5 concludes my research and summarizes limitations, implications, and future directions.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The primary criterion for designing a research study is the appropriateness of the methodology (Patton, 2002). For the present study, a qualitative research paradigm was selected. The case study guidelines put forth by TESOL formed the basis of the study design. Following these guidelines, the study seeks to identify important patterns and themes in the data and to explain the findings in a descriptive, interpretive, and inductive manner. The analytic process inherent in interpretive research involves repeated testing and revision of preliminary assertions against the entire body of data (Moss et al., 1992) until those assertions can account for all the data presented. This follows the tradition of case studies in the field of education where emphasis is placed on “issues such as learners’ and teachers’ identities, skill development and its consequences for learners, teachers’ professional development experiences, and the implementation of language policies” (“TESOL,” 2005). Providing sufficient detail and contextualization are crucial elements in qualitative research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). This chapter attempts to do that by describing the context and the methodology used for this study in detail.

Addressing the issues of validity and credibility of conclusions, the study design involved persistent observation over an extended period of time, triangulation across data sources, and the use of transparent analytic methods. These issues will be discussed in more detail in Sections 2.2 and 2.3. Due to the small sample size, generalizations or inferences can not and should not be drawn, but rather a model and principles are proposed that other researchers should consider when undertaking similar projects.

2.1 Setting up the Context

This section provides background information about the department and the course in which the study was conducted as well as the participants.

2.1.1 The Department

The German Department at Michigan State University (MSU) is home to one of the largest undergraduate German programs in the nation in terms of the ratio of undergraduate majors to tenure stream faculty.¹ It has more German majors than most of the premier German programs in the Big Ten; in the academic year 2003/04, 380 students were enrolled in first-year language classes and 273 students in second-year language classes (“MSU Schedule,” 2005) which represent steadily increasing numbers.²

The Department offers a “strong comprehensive undergraduate curriculum in German [that] focuses on language [sic] literature and culture” (“MSU German,” 2005). First- and second-year language classes follow an integrated communicative approach and focus on German language, civilization, and culture for beginning students and on the development of all language skills with an emphasis on speaking for intermediate-level students. These courses are usually taught by Teaching Assistants (TAs) who are graduate students in the program.

¹ Personal communication with Professor Thomas Lovik, coordinator of first- and second-year German language programs at MSU (3/10/05).

² This trend follows the national numbers. As Welles (2002) reports, enrollments in German at four-year colleges have steadily increased across the nation since 1998, with German being ranked third after Spanish and French.

Using portfolios as an assessment tool has never been part of any of the departmental language courses, but the program coordinators were open to and supportive of the idea and let the teacher, who is also the researcher³, design the course on her own.

2.1.2 The Course

Michigan State University follows a semester-based academic year with two semesters of approximately fifteen weeks each.⁴ The summer is divided into two sessions of approximately seven weeks each.⁵ German 201 (GRM 201) is the first half of a two-part intermediate second-year language course and is usually offered with five concurrent sessions in the fall semester, one session in the spring semester, and one session during the first half of the summer. Its content focuses on “[r]eading, viewing, and discussion of a broad range of cultural materials from the German-speaking world” (“GRM 201,” 2005), as stated in the online course description. The textbook used at MSU is Moeller, Liedhof, Adolph, and Mabee’s *Kaleidoskop* (2002) and GRM 201 covers chapters 1-5. As stated in the instructor’s introduction, this book

creates a learner-centered classroom with activities that lend themselves to cooperative learning. ... The objectives of the texts, vocabulary study, activities, and grammar presentations are (1) to increase students’ ability to function in German and (2) to increase students’ understanding and appreciation of German culture, opening up for them new avenues of thought, experiences, and views of life. (p. IAE 15)

The book emphasizes a four-skill development and contains many authentic texts, however, past teaching experiences showed that the texts included in the textbook are not

³ Implications of this constellation are discussed later in Section 5.1.

⁴ The fall semester runs from late August to mid-December, the spring semester begins in January and ends in early May.

⁵ The first session begins in mid-May and ends early in July, the second session runs from early July to late August.

sufficient for the students to complete the course with intermediate reading knowledge. This is mainly because the texts do not contain longer reading samples which the students are expected to read in higher-level classes. Therefore, GRM 201 also covers a short novel and other authentic texts in addition to the materials presented in the regular textbook. In the semester during which this study was conducted, *Elvis in Köln* (Felix & Theo, 1999) was read. The drawback of *Elvis in Köln* is that it is a short novel specifically designed for German-as-a-foreign-language classrooms and therefore it is not authentic material. The content of the short novel, however, presents a subject matter the students can easily relate to and find interesting and that is truly representative of German culture. This short novel has been used for a number of years in the department and has received positive feedback from both instructors and students.

The materials used in this course, including the portfolio, encompass three characteristics that are crucial for a communicative approach to foreign language teaching: The materials are authentic and address students' interests, they stress the use of learning strategies that are transferable to other learning areas, and they stimulate the use of the target language (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989; Nunan, 1991; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The present study was conducted during the first session of the summer semester 2004.⁶ The class met four times a week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday) from 10:20 a.m.-12:10 p.m. (including a 10 minute break half way through) for a total of six and a half weeks (May 17-July 1); the three final days were exam days. The course objectives as listed on the student syllabus were:

⁶ In the following, this session will be referred to as "semester," even though, strictly speaking, it was not a semester.

- (1) To improve your spoken and written communication in German.
- (2) To improve your reading and listening abilities by familiarizing you with a wide range of spoken and written text types, e.g. short stories, newspaper articles, interviews, webpages.
- (3) To expand your active and recognition vocabulary.
- (4) To develop increased understanding of the German-speaking cultures.

Course requirements included (1) regular attendance, class participation, and preparation of homework assignments; (2) completion of regular reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar assignments; (3) written unit tests, mid-semester and final oral exam, and portfolio; and (4) completion of four written assignments. The portfolio comprised 25% of the final grade. Four traditional paper-based tests were given throughout the course, one after each of the first four chapters, mainly testing textbook materials. These tests comprised 20% of the final grade. The students had to write four essays including drafts and peer review, which made up 10 % of their final grades. Attendance, homework, and the oral midterm counted for 10% respectively and the final oral exam comprised 15% of the students' grades.

Technology, especially the Internet, was an integral part of this course. The German Department at MSU owns 33 wireless iBook laptop computers⁷ which were used throughout this course. All four skills were practiced using the Internet in addition to regular exposure in the classroom. Most of the assignments were posted online, using MSU's ANGEL interface, and some of the assignments included active use of the Internet inside and outside of the classroom. Time spent on portfolio assignments that had to be completed online could be monitored by using ANGEL, which allowed the

⁷ These wireless laptops were obtained as part of an MSU grant project by two former Ph.D. students, Cate Brubaker and Elizabeth Priester, who studied the implementation of Internet technology in the second-year German language classroom. Their findings are unpublished to date.

teacher a deeper insight into the efficiency of the assignments and led to refinements in scope and difficulty of certain assignments.

2.1.3 The Participants

The Students. A total of eleven students participated in the study; these eleven students comprised the entire student body enrolled in the course. Eight of them were males and three of them were females. Two of the students did not complete the part of the pre-questionnaire regarding their personal information; therefore, the following summary contains only the information of nine of the students.

Despite the small number of students participating in the study, they represent a diverse group of students, including two sophomores, three juniors, and four seniors. The students' overall grade point averages (GPA) ranged from 2.0 to 4.0. Five students (56%) had a GPA of 3.4-4.0. This high number of excellent students might be attributable to the fact that summer German language courses at MSU are a condensed and more intensive version of the equivalent courses offered throughout regular semesters.⁸ These summer courses require a lot of focus, drive, and dedication as they cover the materials taught over the course of a regular semester (15 weeks, 50 minutes 4 times a week) in 6.5 weeks (100 minutes 4 times a week). The fact that so many excellent students were enrolled in the class might have attributed to the positive responses by the students and their willingness to participate in a rather work intensive portfolio assignment.

⁸ See also Section 2.1.2 above.

All nine students who completed the part on personal information on the pre-questionnaire had had previous German courses. Three of the students had had between two to four years of German during high school and eight of the students had taken GRM 101 and 102 at MSU. Other languages studied by the participants included French, Latin, Russian, and American Sign Language.

Five of the students had been to Germany before. One student had lived there for two years while he went to kindergarten, and the other four students visited family members or traveled for a length of four days to two weeks. One of these five students had also been to Austria while in Europe.

When asked about their rationale of taking GRM 201, nine students out of all eleven indicated that it was a degree requirement, but four of them also stated that personal motives had led them to enroll in this class. The following are excerpts of the students' pre-questionnaires⁹:

1. My sister studied German and after visiting her in Germany I have become interested in the language and culture. I would like to return to Germany for an extended period of time. (S4)
2. Like to have a semi-working knowledge of the larger world and other cultures. Also a useful skill or tool to travel and business. (S5)
3. I like speaking and being able to speak to people in languages other than English. (S9)
4. Also for personal interest of learning German. (S10)

The Teacher. Apart from the students, the teacher, who was also the researcher, played an instrumental role in this study.¹⁰ I attended a German university from which I obtained the equivalents to American B.A. degrees (*Zwischenprüfung*) in German and English language and literature studies. I also received additional certifications in

⁹ The students are indicated by the letter S for student and a number in parentheses. These numbers were assigned at random. This format will be used in the following to identify the students.

¹⁰ One of the major limitations of the study is that the teacher was also the researcher. See also Section 5.1.

German as a foreign language and in pedagogy. While attending the university, I worked as an assistant in the German as a foreign language department and mentored freshmen in the English department. Upon completion of the *Zwischenprüfungen*, I participated in a study abroad program with the German Department at Michigan State University, where I was a Teaching Assistant for one academic year. I decided to extend my stay for an additional semester and finish my German M.A. degree at MSU, while still teaching in the German language program. During that semester, I enrolled in the doctoral program in German at MSU. After completing the M.A. in German, I enrolled for a second M.A. in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

My interest in investigating portfolio assessment has been sparked by the coursework I completed within the M.A. TESOL Program. Based on my academic background as a researcher and teacher, researching classroom practices and improving assessment methods have always been areas of particular interest to me. In addition, I have always felt that students' views and perceptions of classroom practices and assessment methods are not adequately taken into account when designing courses, which led to the topic of the present study.

2.2 Data Collection

One aspect of a rigorous qualitative study is data triangulation (i.e., the collection of data from multiple sources and using multiple methods to ensure their validity). Therefore, I collected a variety of data from many different sources over the course of the semester. The data were collected in the following order:

- A self-assessment on language skills was given to all participants on the first day of class.
- A questionnaire with specific questions pertaining to portfolios was distributed during the first week.
- The supervising professor observed the class twice and provided feedback.
- A final self-assessment on language was given to all participants at the end of the semester.
- A questionnaire with specific questions pertaining to the portfolio experience was given to all participants at the end of the semester.
- The students were interviewed upon completion of the course; these interviews were tape-recorded.
- The actual portfolios were collected at the end of the course; the part of the portfolio that is most crucial for the data collection and analysis is the reflective essay in which the students had to include reasons for selecting certain pieces of their work, comments on the use of technology in the course, and their perceptions of their improvement.¹¹

The following subsections elaborate on what kinds of data were collected, when, and how.

2.2.1 Student Pre-Self-Assessment

On the first day of class, a self-assessment on language skills was given to all students (see Appendix A), in which they were asked to assess their behavior in previous German

¹¹ Chapter 3 will elaborate on all requirements for the portfolio.

courses taken. This self-assessment was informed by several online questionnaires¹² and contained mostly multiple choice items. It was adjusted to the purpose of the present study and consisted of three major sets of questions. The first set of questions (items 1-6) dealt with preparation for and behavior in class. The second set of questions (items 7-9) focused on the use of and exposure to the German language outside of class. The third set of items (10-13) addressed the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and was sub-divided into ranking them according to their perceived difficulty and into questions about learning strategies related to these four skills. This self-assessment was collected by the supervising professor and stored in her office until completion of the course to ensure that the teacher would not be influenced by the students' answers prior to submitting final grades.

2.2.2 Pre-Questionnaire

During the first week of instruction, a questionnaire with specific questions pertaining to portfolios was distributed (see Appendix B). The questions were a mixture of 7-point Likert Scale rankings¹³, open-ended questions, and multiple choice items and contained four major sets of questions. The first set (items 1-3) addressed existing knowledge about and previous exposure to portfolios as well as students' perception of traditional assessment methods. Set two (item 4) was pertaining to students' perceived proficiency in the four language skills. The third set (items 5-6) dealt with general questions on assessment methods and procedures. The final set of questions (items 7-12) concerned

¹² NCLRC (1997a) for question set 1; NCLRC (1997c) for item 11; Ministry of Education, Israel (1998) for item 12; and NCLRC (1997d) for item 13.

¹³ For all scales used, 1 represented the lower/negative end and 7 the higher/positive end, for example 1 = strongly dislike/not proficient/learned less and 7 = strongly like/very proficient/learned more.

personal information. The results of this last section were already reported in Section 2.1.3.

2.2.3 Classroom Observations

The supervising professor observed the class twice, once at the beginning of the course during week two (May 27) and once toward the end of the course during week six (June 22) and provided feedback on the class as a whole and the teacher's teaching style and methods.¹⁴ The written feedback contained space for the teacher to respond to questions or comments the professor had about the class. The objective behind these observations was to make the teacher aware of her teaching style and to offer her an outsider's perspective on how the students completed tasks relevant to the portfolio. This allowed the teacher to self-reflect on her teaching practices and the implementation of the portfolio assessment.

2.2.4 Student Post-Self-Assessment

This self-assessment on language was administered at the end of the semester and was identical to the pre-self-assessment (Appendix A) with the only difference that the students were asked to assess their behavior regarding GRM 201, the course they had just completed.

¹⁴ See Appendix C for the observation form.

2.2.5 Post-Questionnaire

All participants completed a questionnaire with specific items pertaining to the portfolio experience at the end of the semester (Appendix D). This questionnaire contained mainly 7-point Likert Scale rankings and a few open-ended questions and was divided into three major sets of questions. Set one (items 1-4) dealt with the portfolio experience in general and in particular in comparison with traditional testing methods. The second set (items 5-6) addressed two specific aspects of the portfolio assessment: students' active involvement in their own assessment and peer review. The final section (items 7-8) concerned students' perceived proficiency in the four language skills and asked for any additional thoughts or comments on assessment methods and procedures.

2.2.6 Interviews

On the last day of class, the students turned in their portfolios and were individually interviewed in English by the teacher for approximately ten minutes each.¹⁵ These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.¹⁶ The interview addressed most issues covered by the post-questionnaire and the reflective essay that had to be included as part of the portfolio, however, the teacher could elicit more explicit and detailed information from the students by broaching certain aspects again, especially when asking for specific reasons for why a certain answer had been given.

¹⁵ See Appendix E for an outline of the interview questions.

¹⁶ For a complete transcription of all interviews, contact the teacher.

2.2.7 The Portfolio

The students were made aware on the first day of class that they had to compile a portfolio for this course, which comprised 25% of their final grade. All assignments included in the portfolio were regular homework assignments, apart from the reflective essay, in which the students had to include reasons for selecting certain pieces of their work, comments on the use of technology in the course, and their perceptions of their improvement. The portfolios were collected on the last day of class. Chapter 3 will elaborate on all requirements for the portfolio and additional assignments that were not directly included in the portfolio but affected students' learning and progress. In addition, Chapter 3 will examine the design and implementation of portfolio assessment in a second-year German language classroom.

2.3 Data Analyses

The data analyses included evaluations of the self-assessments, the questionnaires and the classroom observations, detailed examination of all parts of the portfolios – particularly the reflective essay –, and transcriptions and analyses of the interviews. The self-assessments, questionnaires, interviews, and applicable aspects of the portfolio (i.e., the reflective essay) were compared within and between participants. The data were checked to confirm that the hypotheses given in Chapter 1 hold true and will be reported following a process from broad to more focused aspects within each skill. Specifically, I looked for similarities and differences in students' responses to the portfolio experience. Positive and negative reactions to portfolio assessment were considered, and I expected to find patterns or potential trends. The remainder of this thesis will show how students'

perceptions can be translated into more effective teaching practices (both instructional and assessment practices) in the future. Also, I hope to disprove some of the disadvantages of portfolio assessment mentioned in recent literature, in particular the issue of validity (Brown & Hudson, 1998) pointed out in Chapter 1. Another goal of my study is to demonstrate how portfolios can enhance student learning and how they are effective assessment measures not only relative to the impact they have on the students participating in this study but also more generally by comparing the implemented portfolio to the framework outlined in the portfolio literature.

CHAPTER 3

THE PORTFOLIO AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The portfolio and assessment literature shaped the course design and the portfolio implementation to a great extent. As pointed out in Chapter 1, one of the underlying characteristics of portfolios is that they include multiple and diverse forms of students' work which are taken at different stages during the semester to show students' progress and learning over time. As will be shown in this chapter, at least two assignments per skill (writing, reading, speaking, and listening) were included in the final portfolio. The characteristics of communicative language classrooms commonly mentioned in the literature (i.e., authentic and interesting materials, emphasis on learning strategies, and use of the target language)¹⁷ built the underlying tenet of the design of both the course and the portfolio.

It is of utmost importance for the students to be aware not only of the requirements and the design of the portfolio but also of its purpose for it to prove beneficial and to result in better learning. At the beginning of the course, the teacher provided a preliminary information sheet about the portfolio assessment (Appendix F). This sheet laid out the teacher's plan for eleven assignments that could be included in the final portfolio. Five of the assignments were predetermined by the teacher and covered speaking, listening, and a reflective essay; the remaining six assignments could be selected by the students out of a pool of similar assignments¹⁸ and covered writing, reading, grammar, and a unit test including corrections. Also, the teacher asked

¹⁷ For more detail, see Brinton, Snow, & Wesche (1989), Nunan (1991), and Richards & Rodgers (2001).

¹⁸ For example, the students had to write four essays throughout the course of the semester and they could choose the one they wanted to include in their portfolio.

specifically for students' input regarding the assignments to be included as well as the grading scales to be used to assess each item and their weighting. These aspects were discussed several times in class at different points throughout the course and the teacher also asked for feedback via email, but, unfortunately, the teacher received little feedback from the students regarding any of these issues. The only proposed change by the students was to drop assignment number 10, "One grammar summary including exercises," because the students felt that the homework schedule had not sufficiently addressed grammar summaries. Each student was in charge of only one grammar presentation and the resulting lack of choice for this portfolio piece was perceived as limiting the students in their ability to portray progress. As a result, the teacher dropped this assignment.

The weighting and grading criteria for each assignment were discussed with the students during class and the teacher drafted a preliminary document that contained the few suggestions the students had made¹⁹ as well as her own ideas, which were based on the National Standards for Foreign Language Education and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines.²⁰ Additional suggestions from the students were encouraged by the teacher, however, not received. The final outline of elements to be included in the portfolio, organized according to the four skills, as well as the weighting of the elements and the grading scales used to assess students' performance will be discussed in the following.²¹

¹⁹ These suggestions were mostly on holistic versus analytic grading scales. When asked for their preference, the students felt that an analytic grading would be preferable and fairer for speaking and writing assignments. Reading and listening assignments could be graded holistically.

²⁰ See Section 3.6.

²¹ See Appendix G for the final document that was distributed to the students.

For all four skills, there were additional assignments throughout the course that the students had to complete as part of their regular homework assignments, providing a wide variety of different tasks that would cater to all different types of learners. Even though these additional assignments developing all four skills were not explicitly part of the portfolio, they still had an impact on the students' progress and are therefore also explained in the following sections.

The final portfolio had to include ten assignments: Five elements predetermined by the teacher including two speaking and two listening assignments as well as a reflective essay on the portfolio experience, and five elements selected by the students covering two reading and two writing assignments as well as one unit test with detailed corrections.²² Apart from these ten elements, the grading of the portfolio also took the layout and the inclusion of all assignments into consideration. Appendix H is an abbreviated version of the assignment schedule the students received, highlighting the portfolio assignments.²³

3.1 Writing

Two of the assignments that could be selected by the students covered their writing skills. The students had to include one of three chat sessions containing corrections and one of four essays including all drafts and the peer review sheet. The students were encouraged to select one piece of their work from the beginning of the course and one piece from the end of the course to show their progress in writing.

²² It is overly simplistic to define each assignment as exclusively practicing one skill, but for reporting purposes it allows a coherent structure.

²³ All assignments out of the book have been deleted. The original assignment and homework schedule contained many reminders about each assignment, and all due dates and multiple reminders were also posted in the calendar on ANGEL. For the original assignment and homework schedule, contact the teacher.

For the chat sessions, students were required to either chat with their classmates by using a chat room the teacher had set up on ANGEL or by using a different engine such as AIM, or by chatting with anyone who speaks German such as friends, relatives, or even strangers. There was no pre-specified topic for the chat sessions because the teacher wanted to give the students the opportunity to engage in authentic communication; a pre-specified topic might have limited students' creativity and spontaneity. The chat log containing at least fifteen turns²⁴ by each participant had to be turned in²⁵ and was reviewed by the teacher. The teacher provided written feedback on the types of errors and the students had to correct them. A document explaining the abbreviations used by the teacher was posted online (Appendix I).

Throughout the course, the students had to write four essays on pre-specified topics. Each essay contained a different grammar focus that was covered in the book at the time. Table 1 presents an overview of the four essay topics, including their grammar foci.

Table 1
Essay Topics Overview

	Topic	Grammar Focus
1	"A weekend of your dreams"	verb forms
2	"Postcard from East Lansing"	past tense
3	"Vacation in Europe"	word order: time, manner, place
4	"Fairy Tale"	nominative and accusative cases choose a tense (remember to be consistent)

Note. This table presents the topics and the grammar foci of the four essays the students had to write over the course of the semester.

²⁴ A turn was defined as a complete sentence containing a noun and a verb.

²⁵ Or it was accessed by the teacher in case the students used the ANGEL chat room.

The students received the essay topics and some more detailed suggestions on what to include as part of their homework schedule on the first day of class. The topics were spelled out in German, additional information on formatting and length and the grammar foci were provided in English.²⁶

For all four essays, the students had to engage in peer review, the implementation of which has been advocated by recent research, as was pointed out in Chapter 1. Prior to the first essay assignment, the teacher practiced peer review by going over an example in class. The teacher created a document with common students' mistakes based on student essays from previous GRM 201 classes²⁷ and went through that essay while referring to a peer feedback form (Appendix K). The class was asked to analyze the example essay and to answer all questions on the peer feedback form. The peer review forms the students completed to give each other feedback on their four essays were modeled after the one used for practice in class and were adjusted according to the topic and the grammar focus of each assignment.²⁸

For each of the four essays, the teacher allotted time for peer review during class and encouraged the students to also meet outside of class to provide each other with more detailed feedback. Providing feedback to a peer, which could be monitored through the inclusion of the peer review form when turning in the final draft, and implementing the peer's suggestions in the final draft were part of each student's essay grade. The peer

²⁶ See Appendix J for the exact information given to the students.

²⁷ The examples included common mistakes such as capitalization, punctuation, subject verb agreement, tenses, modals, word order, relative clauses, use of articles, adjectives and prepositions, and case markings. The teacher also posted a document containing rules to most common mistakes on ANGEL and kept adding explanations to problems that were recurring in students' writing throughout the semester.

²⁸ For all peer review sheets, contact the teacher.

groups were assigned by the teacher.²⁹ By allowing the students to engage in peer review during class, the teacher could function as an additional source for help in case of problems and could monitor the students' activity. Research promotes active teacher intervention during the writing process as an important tool for affecting students' writing. Therefore, the teacher not only provided suggestions during the stage of peer review but also commented extensively on the first draft of essays 2-4 by using Word's comment function.³⁰ The same abbreviations as used for the chat logs were employed. Each final draft was commented on extensively by the teacher, providing specific information on each of the five assessment sections for writing.³¹

Other writing assignments not included in the portfolio were a short autobiography at the beginning of the term, a timed writing in week 5, and a never-ending story the entire class wrote together which was due during week 6. For the autobiography, the students were asked to write ten sentences about themselves. This helped the teacher in assessing each student's writing skills at the outset of the semester, which would serve as one indication against which individual progress could be measured.

The timed writing was completed in class and consisted of a picture story the students had to retell in writing. Chapter 4 in the textbook introduced the students to the popular German comic strips by Erich Ohser called "Vater und Sohn" [Father and Son]. One activity in the textbook had the students write out a story to such a comic strip. For the timed writing, the students had to log on to a webpage (Südverlag, "Vater und Sohn") which they could easily access through ANGEL, where they could choose one of four

²⁹ See Section 4.1 on the grouping of peers.

³⁰ Due to time constraints during the first week of the course, the teacher did not provide feedback on the draft of the first essay.

³¹ See Section 3.6 for detailed information on the rubrics.

different comic strips by Ohser. They were instructed to describe one story in as much detail as possible and to write at least one sentence per picture without using a dictionary.³² They were given ten minutes to complete this task and had to email their story to the teacher.

The third additional writing activity was a never-ending story. One topic of chapter 4 in the textbook is fairy tales and the students had to work together as a class to create their own fairy tale. The teacher linked a never-ending story template³³ to ANGEL and began the story with the words “Es war einmal vor langer langer Zeit...” [Once upon a time...]. The students were instructed to add at least six entries to the story, each entry had to consist of at least two complete sentences and they were not allowed to submit entries consecutively. This last aspect added to the interactive nature of the assignment and ensured that the students read what their peers wrote.

All writing assignments addressed different aspects of writing and catered to different types of learners and writers.

3.2 Reading

Apart from the two writing assignments that could be selected by the students, the students had a choice when including two of their works displaying their reading skills. One was a written summary of one of the nine chapters of the novel *Elvis in Köln* and the other one was one of five Internet worksheets. The grading of these assignments focused exclusively on the accuracy, synthesis, and comprehension of the information provided by the texts. Once again, the students were encouraged to select one piece of their work

³² The comic strips contained between four to six pictures each.

³³ The template is accessible free of charge at www.cgispy.com.

from the beginning of the course and one piece toward the end of the course to show their progress in reading comprehension.³⁴

Most of the novel *Elvis in Köln* was read in class. The teacher implemented different types of reading activities such as reading out loud, reading in small groups, reading with assigned roles, silent reading, reading for the main idea, or reading for details to cater to different learner types and to practice different reading skills. To ensure students' comprehension of the text and to give them the opportunity to practice their oral skills, the students had to present skits acting out the content of a chapter.³⁵ Content-based questions were also discussed in class, and the novel itself includes several activities the students had to complete. For the assignment that was to be included in the portfolio, the students were asked to select one of the written chapter summaries they had completed throughout the semester.

The topics for the Internet activities were selected to supplement the contents of each of the five textbook chapters that were covered and to provide authentic task-based reading opportunities the students could relate to and might encounter when abroad. For each Internet activity, the students had to complete a worksheet that contained all directions, questions, and tasks in German, as well as the link to the specific webpage. Also, each worksheet contained at least one question that went beyond the information found on each website, namely providing reasons for certain choices made. Table 2 provides an outline of the topics of the five Internet activities, including the tasks the students had to complete.³⁶

³⁴ It was, however, difficult to compare these two reading assignments that were rather different in format.

³⁵ These role plays were also practice for the final oral exam in which the students had to engage in a conversation on one of three pre-specified topics in pairs.

³⁶ See Appendix L for one of the worksheets (topic 3). For all worksheets, contact the teacher.

Table 2
Internet Activities Overview

	Topic	Tasks
1	Berlin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - select a tourist sight and describe it - provide information on location, admission, hours, historical importance - provide reasons for why (not) you would visit your sight
2	Movie Theater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - select a city, a theater, and a movie you don't know - provide information on the movie's content, actors, length, rating - select a day and a time - provide information on seating and pricing - provide reasons for all your choices
3	A Visit to Cologne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - select a beer garden and your order - provide information on hours, capacity, menu pricing - provide public transportation information on how to get there (connections, transfers, length, pricing) - select a club to go to afterwards - provide information on type of music, attractions, admission - provide reasons for all your choices
4	German Fairy Tales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - select a fairy tale you don't know - provide information on characters, content, motifs - select one of the illustrations for your fairy tale and describe it in detail - provide reasons for all your choices
5	German Hit Singles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide information on the number one hit (title, artist, previous ranking) - provide information on hits that had risen or fallen and on newcomers - provide information on the number of American and German titles - provide reasons for why (not) you would buy certain titles - submit your three top favorite titles online

Note. This table presents the topics and tasks of the five Internet activities the students had to complete over the course of the semester.

The students had to work with a partner to ensure they would discuss their decisions and create output in the target language. Each Internet link was spelled out on the worksheet as well as posted on ANGEL and the teacher navigated through each webpage first and modeled what the students had to do. The teacher emphasized the fact that it was not necessary for the students to understand every single word but to read for the ideas needed to complete the worksheet.

Other reading assignments that were not part of the portfolio included multiple activities from the textbook. Each chapter of the textbook features four to six authentic texts³⁷ including a plethora of text types such as autobiographies, cartoons, picture stories, interviews, poems, charts, scientific investigations, newspaper articles, and many others. The introduction of the student textbook explains the rationale behind using authentic texts and introduces students to reading strategies (activating existing knowledge, extensive and intensive reading). Each text is accompanied by pre- and post-reading activities, many of which were given as regular homework assignments or were completed in class. The post-reading activities that were assigned as homework included exercises where students had to synthesize the text, provide specific answers, correct statements, or match information. Some of the homework practiced both reading and writing in that it asked the students to think beyond the text and to write about their own opinion or experience.

A basic prerequisite for both reading and writing (and speaking and listening) is vast vocabulary knowledge, and the expansion of students' active and recognition vocabulary was also one of the course objectives. The textbook is interspersed with word lists and

³⁷ About half of the texts in each chapter are covered in class.

vocabulary exercises that offer ample practice opportunities in context. A few of these vocabulary exercises were also assigned as homework or completed in class.

3.3 Speaking

As was mentioned in Section 2.1, GRM 201 follows an integrated communicative approach and places heavy emphasis on spoken communication. Therefore, speaking assignments made up the largest portion of the portfolio, both in regards to number of assignments to be included and in their weight compared to the tasks covering the other skills. Two of the five predetermined assignments focused on speaking. One was a set of three picture description tasks and the other was an interview with a native speaker. Since these assignments were predetermined by the teacher, it was ensured that they represented different times throughout the semester, which hopefully also represented different developmental stages of the students, and they could easily be compared to reveal each student's progress.

The picture descriptions consisted of a total of three picture stories. Table 3 provides a brief overview of the three stories that were used for the purpose of the portfolio. These three picture stories were chosen because they are comparable in many aspects. All of them are appropriate for an intermediate-level German course. The black-and-white pictures contain many details which enables students of varying proficiency levels to focus on different aspects depending on their level. The topics of the picture stories describe scenarios that are very common and students should be able to use their existing vocabulary knowledge to describe each picture.³⁸

³⁸ See Appendix M for the scenarios described in each of the three picture stories.

Table 3
Picture Stories Overview

	Title	Source	Number of pictures
1	Ausflug [Trip]	<i>Composition Through Pictures</i> by J.B. Heaton	6
2	Einladung [Invitation]	<i>Around the World: Pictures for Practice, Book 2</i> by M. Fuchs, M. Fletcher, D. Birt	8
3	Joggen [Jogging]	<i>Around the World: Pictures for Practice, Book 2</i> by M. Fuchs, M. Fletcher, D. Birt	8

Note. This table presents information on the three picture stories used for one of the two predetermined speaking assignments. The titles in this table were the ones given by the teacher and not the original picture story titles.

The stories were slightly altered; since they were taken from non-German sources, they contained a few words in English. In the case of story 1, the English words were deleted before the story was posted as a JPG file on ANGEL. For the stories by Fuchs et al., the English words were digitally replaced by their German translation and then posted online.

For the assignment, the students were randomly put into three groups. Group 1 consisted of students 1, 4, 6, 8, and 9, group 2 consisted of students 2, 3, 5, and 7, and group 3 consisted of students 10 and 11.³⁹ Each group had access to one different story at a time. Table 4 describes the organization of this speaking assignment. As Table 4 shows, each group had access to the stories in a different order. The stories were posted on ANGEL for one week at a time and the students needed a password to log on to their story. They could download the story, print it out, or view it online.

³⁹ The reason for the unequal number in the groups lies in the fact that these groups were assigned prior to the first day of class and two students who had originally been enrolled dropped the course during week one.

Table 4
Picture Description Task Organization

Picture Story	Description 1 due May 27	Description 2 due June 17	Description 3 due June 25
1 (Trip)	Group 3	Group 1	Group 2
2 (Invitation)	Group 2	Group 3	Group 1
3 (Jogging)	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3

Note. This table presents information on the organization of the picture description task, including due dates and group distribution.

For the actual oral picture descriptions, the students used an online recording tool called *Audio Portfolios*.⁴⁰

Audio Portfolios is a tool that provides an environment for students to practice speaking. The program runs in a web browser window. Students log in to their own accounts and record themselves. When they are satisfied with their sound files, they “share” them with the instructor. Shared files are accessible to the instructor. All sound files are stored on the server, and are accessible only to the student and the instructor. (Language Learning Center, *FAQ*, 2004)

Before the students used this tool for the first time, the teacher reviewed the webpage in class and answered all questions. The students could complete the picture descriptions at their own pace outside of class. The only prerequisite for this assignment was a computer with an Internet connection and a microphone. For those students who did not have the necessary technological equipment at home, the language lab at MSU served as alternative. Some of the students used different voice recording programs and turned in their files on CD-Rom.

⁴⁰ This tool has been developed for the Language Learning Center at Michigan State University by Dennie Hoopingarner and is accessible at <http://distancelearning.llc.msu.edu/audioportfolio/>. It also supports video recording, however, for the purpose of this study, only the voice recording function was used.

The students were encouraged not to use dictionaries but rather rely on their existing vocabulary knowledge. Also, they were asked not to write out the story and read it. As pointed out in the above quote, the students had the opportunity to listen to their recordings and re-record their description as many times as they wished before they made certain files available to the instructor. *Audio Portfolios* identifies the date and time when a file has been posted, which allowed the instructor to monitor timely completion of each description.

The second speaking assignment that had to be included in the final portfolio was an interview with a native speaker on the topic “Education and Schooling in Germany.” Prior to the actual interview, the students had to generate questions which they had to email to the teacher for feedback. Also, they had to sign up for a 5 minute time slot for June 1, the day the interviews were conducted. Two male native speakers of German and one female near-native speaker of German volunteered as interviewees. They were asked to answer the students’ questions naturally as if talking to another native speaker, however, the teacher advised them to use more simple vocabulary rather than elaborate terms the students would not understand.⁴¹ Also, they were encouraged to engage the students in a conversation by asking them similar questions about the American educational system rather than only answering the posed questions. These interviews were video recorded and the digital files were only accessible to the teacher. To ensure that the students would not be distracted or flustered by the presence of the teacher, the teacher was absent during the recordings.

⁴¹ The two male speakers were not familiar with foreign language pedagogy and the teacher suspected their answers would be too complicated had she not asked them to keep in mind that the interviewers were language students.

The students had to submit a written summary including the questions they asked and the answers given by the interviewees. Therefore, they were allowed to take notes during the interview. In this respect, the assignment implemented speaking, listening and writing skills.⁴²

Other speaking tasks that were not part of the portfolio included daily activities the students engaged in during class, such as group discussions about texts, problem-solving partner activities, or mini-presentations. There was an oral midterm and an oral final exam. For the midterm exam, the students had to prepare a five minute presentation on a topic of their choice. The two prerequisites were that (1) the topic had to have something to do with the German language and/or culture and (2) the students could not read their presentation. They were allowed to use PowerPoint or bring in an index card with key words. The students had to sign up with a partner for a 15 minute time slot. Each student had five minutes to present, followed by a two-minute question session. The listening student was required to ask at least three questions pertinent to his or her partner's presentation and the teacher followed up with some questions of her own. The students had to submit a written summary on their partner's presentation.⁴³

The final oral exam followed the format outlined by the department. The students had to sign up with a partner for a 15 minute time slot and arrive at the classroom 15 minutes prior to that time. There are two parts to the final oral exam: The first part is a question-and-answer session. The students sit at desks across from each other. On each desk is a paper containing five questions in German. Student A has odd numbered questions, student B has even numbered questions. The students take turn asking each

⁴² See also Section 3.4.

⁴³ See also Section 3.4.

other the questions and giving answers. This part is modeled after the daily warm-up activity where the teacher starts out asking a student a question and after answering, that student has to ask another student a question etc.

The second part of the exam is a role-play. For this, the students come in 15 minutes ahead of time to prepare their scenarios. The students draw one of three scenarios which are all extensions of what has been covered throughout the semester. For this course, the three topics were (1) Vacation in Berlin, (2) East and West Germans, and (3) Families and Relationships. Each scenario gave suggestions on what the students could address in their role-play. Both exams were part of the regular course grade.

3.4 Listening

As was pointed out in the above section on speaking, several speaking and listening tasks were overlapping. There were two sets of listening assignments that had to be included in the final portfolio. The first of the two predetermined assignments consisted of the two written summaries of (1) the interview with a native speaker and (2) the presentation of the student's partner during the oral midterm exam. The second set of listening assignments included three listening comprehension worksheets that had to be completed at various times throughout the semester. The last one of these worksheets formed the final listening exam. Since these listening assignments were predetermined by the teacher, it was ensured that they represented different times throughout the semester, which hopefully also represented different developmental stages of the students, and could therefore be easily compared to reveal each student's progress.

Section 3.3 described the requirements for the first set of listening tasks, the written summaries of the interview and the midterm. Table 5 presents information on the listening comprehension worksheets, which comprised the second set of listening assignments.

Table 5
Listening Comprehension Worksheets

	Topic	Source	Questions types
Worksheet 1 due May 24	“Paradebeispiel” [Prime example]	<i>Die Zeit</i>	- short answer (6) - matching (1) - multiple choice (1)
Worksheet 2 due June 18	“TKKG: Die Wette” [TKKG: The bet]	<i>Europa</i>	- short answer (7) - multiple choice (4)
Worksheet 3 due June 29	Phone conversation “Haustierfindung” [Finding a pet]	<i>Kaleidoskop</i> <i>Die Zeit</i>	- multiple choice (3) - short answer (3) - short answer (5) - multiple choice (3) - ranking (1)

Note. This table presents information on the content and organization of the listening comprehension worksheets. The first column identifies when each worksheet was due, the second column lists the topics of each listening passage, column three identifies the source of the listening passage, and the fourth column provides information on question types. The numbers in parentheses refer to the number of items of each question type on each worksheet.

As was pointed out in Chapter 1, multiple sources of information and a combination of alternative and traditional assessment methods allow for better decision making. While some of the question types selected for the listening comprehension worksheets are not performance-based (i.e., multiple choice, matching, and ranking), these “selected-response assessments” are most appropriate for measuring receptive skills, according to Brown and Hudson (1998).

Two of the listening passages (“Paradebeispiel” and “Haustierfindung”) were taken from the webpage *Die Zeit*, the German equivalent to the *New York Times*. The webpage offered several of their articles in audio format, which made these listening passages authentic.⁴⁴ The selected files were taken from the category “Life” and were chosen because of their content. “Paradebeispiel” – a pun in German meaning both “prime example” and “example of a parade” – is a discussion about the various parades, particularly the Love Parade, in Berlin and is 4:15 minutes in length. The teacher assumed that this topic would raise students’ interest and would represent something they could relate to. The second passage, “Haustierfindung,” discussed various pets and their advantages and disadvantages and is 2:53 minutes in length.⁴⁵ The teacher thought that the students would be interested in this topic and the semantic field of animals was assumed to pose little problems. Both passages were articles that had originally been written for the printed version of the newspaper and were read by the same male speaker.

The listening passage for the second worksheet was also an authentic text. It consisted of the first 4:20 minutes of a popular teenage audiocassette produced by the company *Europa*. The audio-play series TKKG, an acronym for the four main characters, started in 1979 and features four teenage detectives; it is currently in its 144th episode. The episode selected for the portfolio was number 65, released in 1991, entitled “Sklaven für Wutawia” [Slaves for Wutawia]. This particular passage was selected because the teacher assumed that it would be interesting to the students to be exposed to a true German cultural artifact and because it was easy to identify all speakers without

⁴⁴ This service is no longer available.

⁴⁵ This file has been shortened from its original length of 4:10 minutes because the last third of the passage was extremely difficult and contained very complex sentences. Also it was part of the final exam and a second listening text was covered.

having listened to any of the previous episodes. The beginning of the episode talks about a bet two of the main characters are engaged in, hence the title of the worksheet. The three authentic listening passages increased slightly in difficulty.

The fourth listening passage listed in the table was the first part of the final listening exam and was taken from the test bank accompanying the textbook *Kaleidoskop*. It was a phone conversation specifically created for the purposes of the textbook and had “music” as its underlying topic.

Worksheets 1 and 2 were distributed in class a week before the assignment was due. On the same day, the audio file was posted on ANGEL and was available until the due date. Each worksheet contained an introductory paragraph in German, providing background information on the source and the context of the file. This was followed by detailed instructions which asked the students to listen to the file no more than four times and which reminded them to listen globally rather than trying to understand every single detail.⁴⁶ Each worksheet contained a list of new vocabulary items in order of appearance with their English translation. The questions also followed the chronological order of the listening passage.

Worksheet 3 was completed in class as the final listening comprehension exam. Unlike worksheets 1 and 2, it consisted of two sections, the first one of which was a phone conversation and the second of which was another authentic text taken from *Die Zeit*. The students were allowed to listen to the first passage twice and three times to the second passage. The second section was structured exactly like worksheets 1 and 2 (including background information, instructions, and a vocabulary list), the first section

⁴⁶ See Appendix N for worksheet 1. For all worksheets, contact the teacher.

consisted of a mixture of the materials taken from the instructor's resource manual accompanying the textbook.

The course did not include any additional listening comprehension tasks. The syllabus encouraged students to practice their listening skills on their own:

The tapes/CDs to accompany chapters 1-5 of *Kaleidoskop* are available for purchase at the Language Learning Center in Old Horticulture. You can also listen to the tapes in the lab. Although completion of the exercises in the lab manual (included in the Workbook) is not required, your listening comprehension will improve if you spend 20 minutes twice a week working with these exercises.

The teacher posted additional audio files from *Die Zeit* for the students to listen to on ANGEL as well as links to German live stream radio and TV stations and other audio files such as German fairy tales, for example, and highly encouraged the students to listen to as much authentic language as possible. Also, videotapes with German TV shows⁴⁷ were available to check out and during one half of a class session, the teacher showed a dubbed episode of *The Simpsons*.

3.5 Additional Elements

Two additional elements had to be included in the final portfolio neither of which was directly related to one of the four language skills. As part of the portfolio, the students had to write a reflective essay, including reasons for selecting certain pieces of their work, comments on the use of technology in the course, and their perceptions of their improvement. They also had to grade their portfolio and provide reasons for their assessment. This was the fifth element predetermined by the teacher and the only assignment that was submitted in English. The fifth element the students could select

⁴⁷ The contents of the videotapes truly represented the German TV program and included German news, daily and weekly series, game shows, cartoons, children's shows, dubbed American TV shows etc.

themselves was one of the unit tests, including detailed corrections focusing on grammatical competence. When grading the unit tests, the teacher had only marked errors but not corrected them, using the same abbreviations as she used for the writing assignments (Appendix I).

One further element that had a rather great impact on the final portfolio grade (40%) was the overall presentation and layout. This referred not only to the inclusion of all required assignments (which were worth 5% each), but also to formal aspects, such as title page, table of contents, clear and attractive arrangement of assignments, and a final self-assessment. The reason for attributing such a high percentage to presentation and layout was to serve as incentive for the students to diligently complete all assignments throughout the semester so that they could easily earn points for including them in their final portfolio. Precise guidelines and examples on what needed to be included, how, and in which order were provided (see Appendix G). A more detailed discussion of this element will follow in Section 3.6.7.

Apart from these additional elements that had to be included in the final portfolio, there were several other assignments that the students completed throughout the course of the semester, all related to grammar. The students had to read the grammar explanations in the textbook at home, and each student was in charge of presenting one grammar section in class. These presentations could be done in English, as the textbook provides all grammar rules in English. However, the students were instructed to create German example sentences of their own and to generate grammar activities for the entire class. In addition, many of the textbook's grammar activities were part of regular homework assignments.

3.6 Grading Scales

All portfolios were collected and graded based on grading scales that were developed together with the students and in accordance with the National Standards for Foreign Language Education and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the teacher highly encouraged students' input on assessment rubrics and weighting of individual portfolio assignments, however, only little feedback was received. The proposed grading rubrics and criteria were well accepted by the students and only in the post-questionnaires and the reflective essays some concerns about more active involvement arose.

Appendix G outlines the general assessment criteria for each of the portfolio assignments as well as their weighting and is partially reproduced in Table 6.

Table 6
Weighting of Portfolio Assignments

Speaking assignments	15%
Listening assignments	15%
Reflective essay	10%
Writing assignments	10%
Reading assignments	5%
Unit Test	5%
Layout/inclusion of all assignments	40%

Note. This table provides an overview of the weighting of the individual portfolio assignments according to skill and area.

Speaking and listening assignments were weighted at 15% each because (1) they comprised the biggest number of individual assignments and (2) GRM 201 places heavy emphasis on oral and aural skills. The reflective essay and the reading assignments were weighted with 10% each. The reflective essay is an essential part of any portfolio assessment, as pointed out by Yancey (1996). Much of class time was dedicated to peer

review and to improving writing skills, so the teacher thought it appropriate to allot 10% of the portfolio to writing assignments. Reading assignments and the corrections to the unit test were weighted with 5% each because they were comparatively small in scope and effort. The remaining 40% were based on overall presentation and layout.

The remainder of this section will elaborate on the assessment of each of these seven areas. All criteria were communicated to the students in form of a handout (Appendix G).

3.6.1 Speaking Assignments

All speaking assignments were assessed using the “Grading Scale for Speaking Assignments” (Appendix O) that was based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking and the National Standards for Foreign Language Education; they were remodeled to match the target group. This analytic grading rubric included five sections: (1) Content and Comprehension, (2) Pronunciation which referred to sounds, intonation, and stress, (3) Vocabulary, (4) Fluency which referred to the frequency and nature of pauses, and (5) Grammar which referred to basic structures and forms. Terms like *accurate* and *sophisticated* referred to the expected level of proficiency for second-year German language students rather than to native-like competency. The maximum number of points in each section was 20, 12 were needed to receive a passing grade. Section 1 accounted for 40% of each speaking assignment, the other four sections comprised 15% respectively. The teacher listened to each speaking assignment multiple times and took detailed notes on each of the five sections.

All speaking assignments (the three picture description tasks and the interview) were graded in accordance with the grading scale and comprised 5% of the total portfolio grade. The emphasis of the assessment of speaking assignments, another 10%, was on students' progress over the course of the semester. For this, the teacher compared the four speaking assignments of each student, looked at the development over time, and assessed progress holistically.

3.6.2 Listening Assignments

The listening assignments included three listening comprehension worksheets and two written summaries (one of the interview with a native speaker, the other one of the student's partner's midterm presentation). The summaries were assessed based on the accuracy of the answers. For the interview summaries, the teacher watched the video files multiple times and compared the students' written answers to the actual answers given by the native speakers. During the midterm presentations, the teacher took detailed notes on the content of each presentation as well as on the questions that were asked. These notes built the basis for assessing the accuracy of the midterm summaries. An additional aspect that was taken into consideration for the worksheets was the number of correct answers that was given. These two aspects, accuracy and number of correct answers, accounted for 10%. Another 5% counted towards progress over the course of the semester. To assess each student's development of listening skills, the teacher compared all four listening assignments holistically.

3.6.3 Reflective Essay

The reflective essay could be written in English and was assessed based on how well each of the required issues was addressed. The required issues were:

- (1) general perception of portfolio assessment, in particular in comparison with traditional assessment methods
- (2) specific reasons for the selection of the pieces that were not predetermined by the teacher; the students were alerted to the fact that it would not suffice to write that a certain piece of their work had been selected because it required the least amount of corrections
- (3) perception of peer review including comments on and reasons for its perceived usefulness or lack thereof
- (4) perception of personal improvement in general and in relation to the four language skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading); the students were also asked to comment on why they thought they improved in certain areas and not in others and what they felt attributed to their improvement.

The expected length of the reflective essay was between three to four double-spaced pages. This part comprised 10% of the overall portfolio grade.

3.6.4 Writing Assignments

As was mentioned in Section 3.1, the teacher provided feedback at various stages throughout the writing process of each of the four essays. Each final draft was commented on extensively by the teacher, providing specific information on each of the five assessment sections for writing that served as the basis for the assessment of each

essay. The teacher's comments were emailed as a word document to each student as well as attached in hard copy to the final draft that was returned. The feedback ended with explicit suggestions on the strengths and weaknesses of each essay and an overall grade.

Appendix P contains the "Grading Scale for Writing Assignments," which was set up similarly to the "Grading Scale for Speaking Assignments" in that the rubric contained five sections, in each of which the maximum number of points was 20. The writing grading scale was based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Writing and the National Standards for Foreign Language Education. Terms like *sophisticated*, *excellent*, and *adequate* referred to the expected level of proficiency for second-year German language students rather than to native-like competency. As was the case with the grading scale for speaking assignments, the analytic writing scale was set up to match the target group. It contained five sections according to which each essay was assessed: (1) Content, (2) Language Use, (3) Vocabulary, (4) Mechanics, and (5) Feedback. Sections 1 and 2 each accounted for 35% of the final grade of an essay, 10% were allotted to section 3, 5% counted toward section 4, and 15% toward section 5. The teacher read each essay at least three times: once holistically, once to mark errors, and once according to the analytical scale. The grades for each essay counted toward the overall final class grade.

For portfolio grading purposes, the teacher looked at the overall development of the essay the student had chosen to include by comparing the drafts and by taking the peer feedback form as well as the feedback she had provided herself into consideration. This holistic assessment accounted for 5% of the final portfolio grade. While each essay had been graded based on the analytic rubric during the semester, this final assessment took a global stance in that the teacher assessed the overall growth of the student in the area of

writing. The chat was graded based on the accuracy of the corrections and comprised 5% of the final portfolio grade.

3.6.5 Reading Assignments

The written summary of the *Elvis* chapter made up 2.5% of the final portfolio grade and was assessed holistically based on synthesis and accuracy of information. No points were deducted for grammar or spelling errors, unless they impeded comprehension. The students had to paraphrase the content of the chapter and were not allowed to simply quote passages of the novel. The Internet worksheet, worth 2.5%, was assessed based on comprehension and accuracy of the information presented in the reading materials.

For the reading assignments, progress was not directly taken into account because the two selected assignments were not necessarily chosen from different times in the semester and they were too different in format to allow for direct comparison. Also, the major focus of the class was on productive skills, so it did not seem justified to the teacher to assess progress in reading skills based on these two rather insignificant assignments.

3.6.6 Unit Test

The unit test was assessed based on the number and the quality and accuracy of corrections. The teacher had marked all errors using the abbreviations outlined in Appendix I, and the students had to provide the exact grammatical rule they had violated for each error as well as the correction of the error. This part comprised 5% of the final portfolio grade.

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3.6.7 Layout

The layout comprised 40% of the final portfolio grade. The term *layout* might be misleading, as the major part of this section was the inclusion of all required items (worth 5% each). The reason for attributing such a high percentage to this element was to serve as incentive for the students to diligently complete all assignments throughout the semester so that they could easily earn points for including them in their final portfolio. Table 7 provides an overview of all aspects that were considered part of the layout, including how they were weighted.

Table 7
Grading of Portfolio Layout

Inclusion of all required items	75%
Title page	5%
Table of contents	5%
Arrangement of assignments	5%
Reflection of learning/progress	10%

Note. This table provides an overview of the weighting of the individual aspects that contributed to the overall layout grade. The layout accounted for 40% of the final portfolio grade.

As can be seen in the table, each included assignment was worth 5%, which amounts to 75% in total. Apart from the number of assignments included, the layout was assessed on formal aspects, such as the title page, the table of contents, and the clear and attractive presentation and arrangement of assignments. 10% of the overall layout grade were based on how well the portfolio reflects learning and progress, which was assessed based on the selection of assignments that were included and on a final section called *Selbsteinschätzung* (self-assessment), in which the students had to grade their portfolios themselves and provide reasons for their assessment. This final section could be

completed in English, which was the main reason for why it was only weighted with 10%. Also, in assessing each skill, the teacher took progress into consideration, so it seemed justified to the teacher to attribute only 10% of the layout grade to the overall reflection of learning and progress as depicted in the portfolio and based on the students' self-assessment. This part of the grade is separate from the reflective essay, which was worth 10% of the overall portfolio grade and was not part of the layout.

The students received precise guidelines on what elements the title page had to contain, how the table of contents had to be arranged, and in which order the assignments had to be included. All of this had to be completed in German and models were provided.⁴⁸ Some of the assignments (the speaking assignments, for example) could not be included by the students because only the teacher had access to the files. The students were instructed to include these assignments in their table of content and create cover sheets for these assignments, the actual files were later added by the teacher.

This concludes the description of how a multi-skill portfolio was implemented as an additional assessment tool into a second-year college-level German language classroom. In Chapter 4, I will provide and discuss the results of the analyzed data according to the four language skills. Also, the supervising professor's, the students' and the teacher's perceptions and evaluations are reported, highlighting the effectiveness of portfolio assessment in this particular classroom. Chapter 5 concludes my research and summarizes limitations, implications, and future directions.

⁴⁸ See Appendix G.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the discussion of the collected data according to the four language skills, including the participants' perceptions and evaluations based on the self-assessments, questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, and the portfolios themselves. It is the goal of this chapter to highlight the effectiveness of portfolios as an additional alternative assessment tool in the areas of student learning and instructional practices. It will be shown how students' perceptions can be translated into more effective teaching practices (both instructional and assessment practices) and how portfolios can provide valid measures of assessment when they are fully incorporated into teaching, disproving one of the disadvantages of portfolio assessment mentioned in recent literature. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the five hypotheses stated at the outset of this thesis and the teacher's evaluation of the project.

As was mentioned in Section 2.3, the data analyses included evaluations of the self-assessments, the questionnaires and the classroom observations, detailed examination of all parts of the portfolios – particularly the reflective essay –, and transcriptions and analyses of the interviews. The self-assessments, questionnaires, interviews, and applicable aspects of the portfolio (i.e., the reflective essay) were compared within and between participants and the results are discussed in the following. Little emphasis will be placed on the students' pre- and post-self-assessments because the items on these self-assessments were not directly related to the effectiveness of the portfolio but rather

served a more general assessment of students' language and learning strategies use.⁴⁹

Also, basic self-assessments of the four language skills were included in the pre-and post-questionnaires and the results from the self-assessments yielded no new insights. When discussing the results according to the four language skills, aspects of self-assessment by different students will be briefly commented on, as they fit in with the skill under investigation.

Implementing a portfolio in a German language classroom has never been used as an assessment method at MSU. Therefore, it was expected that it would be new to the majority of the GRM 201 students. Seven of the eleven students indicated on the pre-questionnaire that they were not familiar with portfolios. Five students indicated that they had created a portfolio⁵⁰ before, all of them during high school. Of these five students, one student strongly disliked the previous portfolio experience, the other four ranked it on a 7-point Likert scale⁵¹ between 4 and 6 with an overall median of 5. The students commented on their previous portfolio experience as follows:

5. I never found out what the point was so it came off as a waste of time. (S1)
6. I liked having a log of my progress at the end of the class, but putting it together was tedious. (S4)
7. I liked looking back and seeing my old work and the progress I've made. (S6)
8. At the time [in high school] I did as little work as possible, but I still liked the portfolio better than a final exam because I had more control over my destiny. I disliked the list of items. I wish I could choose what to include in order to demonstrate my proficiency. (S7)
9. I liked that through portfolio work my writing improved, but disliked the rushed pace of creating one. (S8)

⁴⁹ One question on the pre- and post-self-assessments asked students to rank the four language skills according to their perceived difficulty. The results of these rankings will be discussed for all students.

⁵⁰ Three students specified that it was a writing portfolio.

⁵¹ For all scales used, 1 represented the lower/negative end and 7 the higher/positive end, for example 1 = strongly dislike/not proficient/learned less and 7 = strongly like/very proficient/learned more.

It is obvious from these comments that the students liked the opportunity to see their own progress over time.

The students' feelings about traditional testing methods (i.e., written and oral exams) ranged from 2 to 6 with a median of 4. When asked for their opinion about how fair and representative of their German skills such methods are, two of the students commented on the difficulty and pressure of oral exams (S1 and S4), while another student highlighted the fairness of oral exams:

10. Oral exams are entirely fair, written exams seem a bit beside the point – a language class should teach to read and write within context, not to fill in blanks. (S11)

Two other students (S2 and S9) felt that traditional testing methods are fair in most cases if they reveal a student's understanding of the subject matter. Other comments were more critical and included:

11. Not really [fair]. Tests traditionally do not really test complete knowledge unless they are written very well, and almost none are. Most tests are hit and miss, you know it or you don't and that is not a good way to test. (S3)
12. Traditional testing makes one conform to expectations of usage and so that has advantages, but a bit of freedom to explore and fail is good because you can learn a lot from your mistakes. So, overall, no, traditional methods do not fully assess my ability (I think). (S5)
13. I don't favor grading when such a large portion of the final grade is based on 1 or 2 tests, as opposed to considering the amount of progress made. Some people may test well with traditional exams, but for other typical testing doesn't show what they've learned at all. (S6)
14. I think these methods are fair assessments but don't often ingrain a language into students' heads – often what happens is students study for these tests (i.e. the specific info required) and then forget everything afterward. (S8)
15. Tests just test memorization of a previous chapter instead of general concepts most of the time. (S10)

Overall, the majority of the students seemed to be open and receptive to an alternative assessment tool. When asked about being actively involved in their own assessment, ten students answered that they would like to have some input regarding their assessment,

especially by having the opportunity to select which assignments to include because it ensures that students can showcase their best work and their personal progress over time. The students also mentioned that active involvement in their own assessment helps to identify and to achieve goals and gives them more control over things involving them. One of these ten students (S6) mentioned that simply being told what the expectations and requirements are is nice and one student also added a critical viewpoint:

16. I believe that an epidemic of lowered academic standards is spreading through the academy. Yes, I do believe in individual assessment practices, not comparative. So yes I would like to be involved but I hope my professor will demand great things as well. (S7)

Another student stated:

17. No, because I am lazy, I tend to dislike any sort of active assessment. But it wouldn't be *too* bad. (S11)

When asked for any additional comments on assessment methods and procedures, two of the students mentioned that since they had never compiled a portfolio before, they were not sure what to expect and what to do (S3 and S10). Student 4 was interested in seeing if and how the portfolio would affect the learning of German. Two other students mentioned their concerns about the amount of work and the desired/actual results as well as the benefit of peer work as opposed to corrections by the expert teacher (S5 and S8). Other comments highlighted the fact that all students are different and have their personal strengths and weaknesses, and that portfolio assessment will take this into consideration (S6 and S7).

Based on the information gathered from the students' pre-questionnaires, it seemed that most of them were interested in portfolios as an alternative assessment method in GRM 201 and that they saw certain benefits over traditional testing tools, such as being

measured based on their own progress and being actively involved in their own assessment by selecting pieces of their work.

In the following, results pertaining to the four language skills will be discussed which stem from all data sources (i.e., self-assessments, questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, portfolios⁵²). Students' overall comments regarding these areas will be provided, emphasizing the similarities and differences between ratings at the beginning and at the end of the semester.

4.1 Writing

Developing writing skills was an important aspect in this course and much time in and outside of class was spent on working on the essays. As was mentioned in Section 3.1, the students had to work in peer groups which were assigned by the teacher. For the first essay, the students were randomly grouped together because the teacher could not yet assess the students' writing abilities. For the other three essays, the teacher tried to match students with different proficiency levels, a strategy that is encouraged by research (Cohen, 2004⁵³; Hyland, 2003). This was complicated by the fact that not all students completed their drafts on time and therefore could not engage in peer review during class. Those students without drafts were grouped together during in-class peer review sessions and were asked to engage in pre-writing activities and idea generation. Toward the end of the semester, much of the peer revision was completed via email. This did not match

⁵² Student 7 did not turn in a portfolio and failed the class; the student did, however, participate in the interview. When asked why he did not turn in a portfolio, he said that it was mathematically impossible for him to receive a passing grade in this course even with a 4.0 on the portfolio, which would have been impossible because of the lack of completed assignments.

⁵³ Personal communication with Alissa Cohen, English Language Center faculty member at MSU (3/22/04).

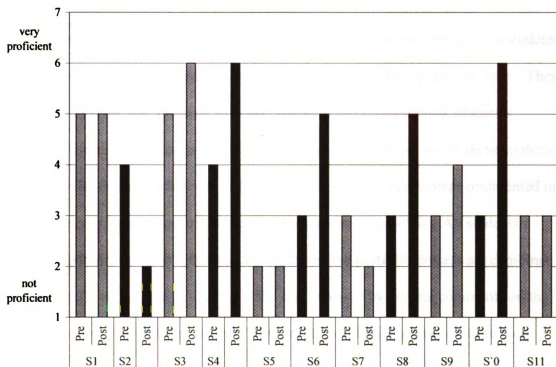
the intended purpose of orally discussing the drafts in German but still offered the students the opportunity to work together and to reflect on their own and other's writing.

Students' rating of the inclusions of peer review on a 7-point Likert scale ranged from 2 to 7 with a median of 5. Student 8 commented on the inclusion of peer review in the pre-questionnaire:

18. When engaging in portfolio writing, I think it's extremely important to have close student-teacher interaction. While peer review may be slightly helpful, chances are that my partner is no more proficient in German than I am. Also, peers will be unable to clearly explain the why's of sentence structure, etc. and what instances of certain grammatical rules apply where.

When asked to rate their proficiency in writing at the outset of the semester, students' ratings ranged from 2 to 5 on a 7-point Likert scale with a median of 3. This changed to a median of 5 at the end of the semester (range from 2 to 6). These results are shown in Figure 1. As the figure shows, at the end of the semester, the majority of students rated their writing skills higher than or equal to their ratings from the beginning. Two students rated their skills lower. Both of them only completed one of the assigned four essays and none of the three chats. A possible interpretation of this decline is that these two students were more critical and accurate in assessing their own skills at the end of the semester. This explanation seems to hold true for student 2, who had ranked writing as the second easiest skill in the pre-self-assessment and as the most difficult skill in the post-self-assessment. Student 7, on the other hand, ranked writing both times as the second most difficult skill. This is also the student who did not turn in a portfolio. During the interview, this student admitted to being an "unmotivated slacker" and to having underestimated the challenge of compiling a portfolio.

Figure 1
Participants' Rating of their Writing Skills



Note. This figure presents the participants' ratings of their overall writing skills at the beginning of the semester (pre) and at the end (post) based on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = not proficient and 7 = very proficient.

Two students commented specifically on writing assignments when asked about what they liked and did not like about the portfolio on the post-questionnaire:

19. Too many writing revision requirements. (S5)
20. I liked writing the essays. I have a visual memory so being able to picture a sentence in my head, it helps me in other ways (reading, verbal,...). (S9)

Comment 20 shows the necessity to implement different assignment types and tasks. The student population a teacher typically encounters in college-level language classes can be rather heterogeneous. By implementing different types of activities for all four language skills, the teacher can ensure to cater to different learner types and preferences.

The self-assessments included a section on the use of writing strategies. A comparison of the students' responses to the pre- and the post-self-assessment

questionnaires reveals a general trend of higher use of most writing strategies. In particular, those aspects that were specifically addressed in the peer review sheets⁵⁴ were rated higher in use at the end of the semester than at the beginning. Also, a few students indicated to use translating engines less and not to look up every unfamiliar word. These results may indicate that focusing students' attention on certain writing strategies throughout the course of a semester will result in an overall higher use of these strategies.

In the reflective essay that was included in the portfolio, each student commented on the included assignments and on the portfolio experience as a whole. All students' reflections pertaining to the four language skills and the portfolio process are combined in Appendix Q, which is organized by skills and followed by general comments on the portfolio process. Overall, the analysis of these essays yields similar results to those found in the self-assessments and questionnaires. Many students felt that their writing skills improved a lot, due to the plethora of writing assignments that had to be completed over the course of the semester. While the four essays posed a challenge for many students, they also felt that the constant process of engaging in and receiving feedback and revising their work helped them in becoming more proficient writers. Most of the students found the peer review to be helpful, especially because it allowed them to see common mistakes in the writings of their peers. Some of the most striking reflections about writing that were recurring in many of the essays were:

21. I felt that peer review was a very useful tool in correcting our essays because it gave you a chance to learn more of the language because you were assessing the knowledge that others had gained up [to] that point, which is usually very different from person to person. It also gave us a chance to compare what we were correcting and what you [addressing the teacher] were correcting so we could see if we were on the write [sic] track with our writing skills. (S1)

⁵⁴ Coherent structure, providing examples, using complex sentences, checking for grammatical points such as subject-verb-agreement or tense and case endings, and drafting and revising.

22. Reviewing others showed me common mistakes that other people make and creative things they do, such as alternate vocabulary and sentence structure. (S3)
23. I can see that peer review may improve our skills in German, but I also think it is difficult to receive useful feedback from a fellow student at the same level as myself. (S6)

During the interviews, the teacher had the opportunity to elicit more detailed responses by the students and ask them specific questions about aspects that she thought would not be addressed in sufficient detail in the other data sources. In general, all students reiterated their earlier comments and the majority of the students reported that their writing had improved and that they thought the peer review to be helpful as it allowed them to learn from other students' mistakes. Students 6, 8 and 9 made it very clear that they did not like the peer review sessions and thought them to be a waste of time. These students felt that their peers did not provide constructive feedback and that since the peers were not native speakers, all students would stagnate at their current proficiency level. Students 8 and 9 did acknowledge, however, that it was somewhat useful to read other essays and to learn from their peers' mistakes. Both these students also emphasized that their writing skills improved over the course of the semester, however, they attributed that to the multitude of writing assignments rather than to the portfolio per se. Additional positive comments that had not been mentioned before included that the peer review fostered students' critical thinking skills (S1) and team building (S5). Student 11 added that the teacher can only do so much in providing feedback, but since there are many students in a class, working with them can offer many additional opportunities for feedback.

While it appears that the students overall felt that the writing assignments helped improve their German skills, the implementation of four essays and multiple other written

assignments that called for extensive feedback and corrections was a burden for the teacher. As was pointed out in Section 3.1, the teacher provided feedback on the drafts of essays 2-4 and a detailed assessment of the final versions of all four essays based on the five sections spelled out in the grading scale for writing assignments.⁵⁵ Had the portfolio only focused on writing and had it not been implemented in a condensed summer semester, the amount of feedback provided by the teacher might have been less of a problem.

The supervising professor observed the class twice, once at the beginning of the course during week two (May 27) and once towards the end of the course during week six (June 22). These two dates were picked because portfolio-related assignments were covered in class.⁵⁶ As was mentioned in Section 2.2.3, the objective behind these observations was to make the teacher aware of and reflect on her teaching style and methods and to receive an outsider's perspective on how the students completed tasks relevant to the portfolio. The teacher's self-reflection led to differentiated instructional decisions which improved certain areas that had been pointed out by the supervising professor after the first observation (namely providing more listening and speaking opportunities for the students in the classroom and better use of the blackboard to highlight language features). During the second observation, the students engaged in peer review. The supervising professor provided suggestions on improving the peer feedback form and the peer review process as a whole. These comments would have been more useful at the beginning rather than toward the end of the semester but

⁵⁵ A sample of the feedback on a first and the assessment of a final draft as provided by the teacher is contained in Appendix R.

⁵⁶ See Appendix S for the in-class and homework schedule for the two observation dates and the immediate context (preceding days). Appendix H provides the schedule of all portfolio-related assignments over the course of the semester.

informed the teacher's instructional practices and classroom management nonetheless for future reference.

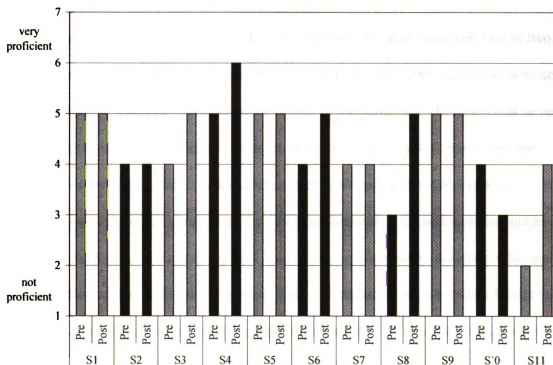
4.2 Reading

Reading was an important skill in this course. Many authentic texts were presented throughout the textbook and reading was almost always involved when any of the three other skills were practiced and used. The main reading focus for the portfolio was based on the novel *Elvis in Köln* and on the Internet activities that were completed during class. It is the teacher's belief that sound reading skills can enhance students' other language skills, in particular writing and speaking. Reading materials deepen students' vocabulary knowledge, which is the most crucial part when learning another language with the intention of being able to communicate. Despite this central role that reading plays within language learning, the weighting of the reading assignments in the portfolio was rather marginal. The teacher felt that more emphasis should be placed on productive skills, which are at the center of a communicative approach to language teaching.

The students were asked to rate their proficiency in reading on a 7-point Likert scale at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The results are illustrated in Figure 2. Overall, the students rated their reading proficiency at the outset of the semester with a median of 4 (range from 2 to 5). This changed to a median of 5 at the end of the semester (range from 3 to 6). As the figure shows, five students rated their reading skills in the post-questionnaire higher than or equal to their ratings in the pre-questionnaire respectively. Only one student (S10) rated reading skills lower on the post-questionnaire. This student had ranked reading as the least difficult skill in the pre-self-assessment and

as the most difficult skill in the post-self-assessment.⁵⁷ Student 10 said during the interview that his writing and speaking skills improved most throughout the course of the semester (as reflected in the self-assessments) and that based on his improvement, he felt that reading posed most problems at the end, mainly because he had spent more time in and outside of class on the other skills.

Figure 2
Participants' Rating of their Reading Skills



Note. This figure presents the participants' ratings of their overall reading skills at the beginning of the semester (pre) and at the end (post) based on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = not proficient and 7 = very proficient.

None of the students specifically commented on reading in their post-questionnaires.

Similar to the results of the use of writing strategies, a comparison of the students'

⁵⁷ The rankings of the four skills for student 10 from least to most difficult were as follows: Pre-self-assessment: reading, writing, listening, speaking. Post-self-assessment: writing, speaking, listening, reading.

responses to the pre- and post-self-assessment questionnaires reveals a general trend of higher use of most reading strategies, however, the results were less defined than was the case for writing strategies. Especially the reading strategies outlined in the textbook⁵⁸ were used more frequently by the students at the end of the semester. According to the self-assessments, the students used dictionaries less and relied more on the context of a text or on their classmates to figure out the meaning of a particular word or sentence. Student 11 was the only student whose reading strategies use had not changed for the better; on the contrary, he indicated that he employed most strategies less often at the end of the semester than he had in previous German courses. He was, however, one of two students who read German texts outside of class before the semester started and who kept reading additional materials throughout the course of the semester. He stated that he read complex and complicated philosophical texts in German, which might have been the reason for his lesser use of the particular strategies that were outlined in the self-assessment questionnaires. In general, he described himself in the self-assessments as an unprepared student who rarely completes homework assignments or practices what was studied in class at home. The other student who read authentic texts outside of class was student 10, who subscribed to a weekly German newsletter. Of the other nine students, only one (S5) indicated at the end of the semester that he had started reading authentic texts outside of class, mainly German websites.

Seven students commented on reading in their reflective essays. One student (S1) felt that his reading skills had not improved much because of the lack of new course material. The other six specifically mentioned that their reading improved, especially due to

⁵⁸ Pre-, during- and post-reading activities such as activating existing knowledge, extensive and intensive reading, and synthesizing information.

repeated practice, a better understanding of grammar, or a larger vocabulary. Some recurring reflections about reading were:

24. The thing I have the hardest time with is vocabulary. Just reading more and more helps me to put words into different contexts which allows me to remember them better. (S3)
25. The Internet activities were a very interesting and demanding assignment. I liked this assignment because it has real world application. (S4)
26. I could see improvement in my reading skills towards the end of class. I was not just reading word after word, but getting a better idea of when to change the inflection of my voice, thus developing a better understanding of the German language. (S6)

Only a few of the students' comments were directed at reading during the interviews. Student 1 lamented the fact that the reading assignments included in the portfolio did not show progress over time since they did not necessarily include pieces from the beginning and the end of the course. Student 4 had the same opinion and mentioned that there should have been more assignments on *Elvis* throughout the semester so that students could have had a larger pool to choose from. Student 8 felt that the *Elvis* summaries were not necessary, especially since they did not have to be revised.

In general, the majority of students felt that the portfolio did not help improve their reading skills as much as the other three skills. The students greatly enjoyed completing the Internet activities, especially because they allowed them to engage in real life tasks that were of interest to them. The novel *Elvis in Köln* should have been implemented in a more structured way by assigning more focused and varied tasks instead of only requiring chapter summaries.

On the day of the first classroom observation, the students had to read parts of two *Elvis* chapters in groups and present the content to the entire class as a role-play. Also, the students completed an Internet activity with a partner. Reading activities that were

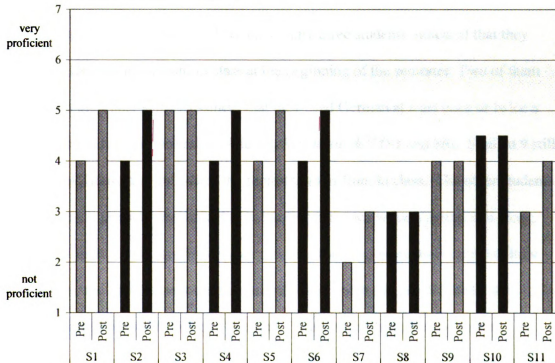
not directly related to the portfolio that day included a text from the textbook with related questions. The supervising professor pointed out that having students read aloud in class does not necessarily involve comprehension of what is read. The students could read silently in class or read the text in question as homework instead. On the next day of class, the teacher asked the students for their opinions on reading out loud. While most students admitted that they focused solely on pronunciation when asked to read out loud, they also said that being able to listen to others read and follow along in their textbook was helpful. Had it not been for the supervising professor's comment, the teacher would not have thought about this aspect of reading. The teacher adopted the supervising professor's suggestions for many reading assignments in class, however, sometimes let the students read out loud because of the students' comments and because calling on students at random ensures that students pay attention.

For the Internet activity, the supervising professor suggested pre-teaching vocabulary and keeping a list of vocabulary items on the black board, as they come up during a reading exercise. During the second observation, the supervising professor noted an increased use of the black board. In this class, another text out of the textbook was covered and the supervising professor suggested adding more variety to questions about the reading materials so that such activities would be less teacher-fronted. One possibility to remedy the predominance of the teacher would be to have the students take on the role of the teacher and lead discussions or ask the questions.

4.3 Speaking

In a communicative classroom, speaking should be one of the major foci and it should be one of the skills that a lot of time and practice are spent on. The reality of a heterogeneous classroom, however, makes it difficult to engage students in meaningful output and the need to assess students' performance in many different areas does not allow for a multitude of oral assignments. Despite this less than ideal situation of the foreign language classroom, the students rated their proficiency in speaking at the end of the semester with a median of 5 (range from 3 to 5) on a 7-point Likert scale which represents an improvement from the beginning median of 4 (range from 2 to 5).

Figure 3
Participants' Rating of their Speaking Skills



Note. This figure presents the participants' ratings of their overall speaking skills at the beginning of the semester (pre) and at the end (post) based on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = not proficient and 7 = very proficient.

Figure 3 shows that seven students rated their speaking skills higher at the end of the semester. The remaining four students did not perceive an improvement in their speaking skills, however, none of the students rated their speaking abilities lower at the end of the semester than at the beginning.

One student (S8) commented specifically on speaking and listening assignments on the post-questionnaire, indicating that they constituted the part of the portfolio that the student did not like because they did not reflect the student's best abilities. The rating of this student's four skills at the beginning and at the end of the semester confirm this perception (speaking did not improve at all, listening slightly, and writing and reading both equally). Results concerning the use of speaking strategies based on the self-assessments will be discussed in Section 4.4 since listening and speaking strategies were collapsed into one item on the self-assessment questionnaires. When asked about the amount of speaking German outside of class, only three students indicated that they rarely used German apart from in class at the beginning of the semester. Two of them indicated on their post-self-assessment that they used German at least once or twice a week, mainly to talk with friends and during *Kaffeestunde*⁵⁹ (S1 and S6). Student 9 still did not speak German at the end of the semester apart from in class. The other students indicated on the pre-self-assessment to speak German once/twice a month or a week, mainly with friends, during *Kaffeestunde* or to themselves for practice. Four of these students gave the same answer on the post-self-assessment (S2, S4, S7, S11), the remaining four spoke more German outside of class by the end of the semester.

⁵⁹ *Kaffeestunde* is a weekly conversation group offered by first- and second-year teachers. Interested students of various proficiency levels meet with the teachers and other native speakers once a week for 1.5 hours in the relaxed atmosphere of a coffee shop and chat in German, play German board games and read German magazines and newspapers. Students can make up missed homework by attending *Kaffeestunde*.

In the reflective essays, four students indicated that their speaking skills improved. Perceived reasons for this improvement included reading aloud in class and going to *Kaffeestunde*. Student 9 indicated that improving in speaking helps in all other areas. Student 3 also mentioned the importance of speaking practice. For this student, the picture description tasks were the most difficult assignments of the semester and he felt that more listening practice would have led to improved speaking skills. Student 8 had the same opinion, writing:

27. I feel that my speaking and listening competencies are stagnant due to the lack of focus this semester on these aspects of the language, save a few assignments.

Only one student (S7) commented extensively on speaking skills during the interview. He found the picture descriptions to be one of the best activities of the portfolio because they offered meaningful practice in speaking and “there was a lot of leeway, variables that were in the student’s control there. Using what vocabulary I felt comfortable using, I could tailor that assignment very well.” He also mentioned that role-plays are not meaningful and too forced and that students are nervous in front of their peers. Student 8 reiterated in the interview that speaking and listening should have been weighted less within the framework of this particular class because it was hard to show progress based on the speaking and listening assignments that had to be included.

From an educator’s point of view, the rankings from pre- to post-questionnaire are encouraging, particularly because this skill was the only one that no student perceived to have gotten worse in. These results might reflect that the instruction during the timeframe between the two questionnaires was generally supportive of improving speaking skills, which is a crucial aspect in communicative language teaching. Despite

these positive results, there is barely ever enough opportunity to practice speaking in a foreign language setting that would lead to fluent proficiency over the course of a few semesters, let alone a 7-week summer semester. Two of the students (S1 and S5) pointed out the importance and usefulness of *Kaffeestunde*, which might remedy this lack of speaking practice in the classroom. It is crucial to provide the students with possibilities outside the classroom to engage in meaningful conversation. Student 5 added a separate section to the portfolio, stating:

28. Kaffeestunde is such an important aspect of this course and of my German 201 experience. I believe that it helped me a great deal. The amount that I gained in morale and practice from going to Kaffeestunde is immeasurable. It put a cultural and social context behind learning German. Additionally, it provided much needed practice in speaking and listening. The native and fluent speakers were a very valuable resource to be exposed to and interact with.

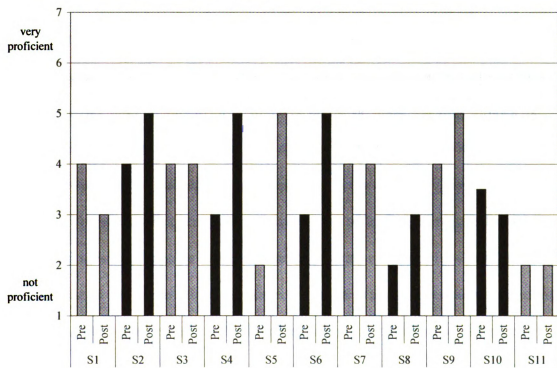
One of the supervising professor's comments about the first class observed specifically addressed the lack of speaking opportunities for the students. She suggested remodeling some of the activities to promote more communicative language use among the students. Another suggestion from the second observation concerned back-up speaking activities in case students are finished with an activity early. The supervising professor had observed that a few students started reading the newspaper once they were finished with an activity. Such down time could be bridged with small partner activities that would offer additional opportunities to engage in meaningful conversation.

4.4 Listening

As has been pointed out several times throughout this thesis and also by various students, speaking and listening are intrinsically linked skills. It has been mentioned in Section 3.4

that the course did not include any additional listening comprehension tasks apart from the ones included in the portfolio. While the syllabus strongly encouraged students to practice their listening skills on their own using the materials accompanying the textbook, the amount of listening practice in this course has been far from ideal. This is directly reflected in the students' rating on the questionnaires. Overall, the students rated their listening proficiency at the outset of the semester with a median of 3.5 (range from 2 to 4) on a 7-point Likert scale. This changed to a median of 4 at the end of the semester (range from 2 to 5) and constitutes the least amount of improvement in all four language skills. Figure 4 represents these results.

Figure 4
Participants' Rating of their Listening Skills



Note. This figure presents the participants' ratings of their overall listening skills at the beginning of the semester (pre) and at the end (post) based on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 = not proficient and 7 = very proficient.

Two students (S1 and S10) rated their listening skills lower on the post-questionnaire than on the pre-questionnaire and one student rated himself as equal (S11). Student 1 indicated in the reflective essay that listening was his weakest skill in German and that at the end of the semester, his listening capabilities were still “sub par.” Similarly, student 10 remarked in his essay that by the end of the semester he was still uncomfortable answering questions based on listening samples.

Only one student (S8) mentioned listening skills on the post-questionnaire, as has been pointed out in the above section on speaking. That student felt stagnant in both speaking and listening because of the lacking emphasis of these skills and voiced the same criticism in the reflective essay.

When asked about the amount of listening to German outside of the classroom (e.g., by watching German TV or movies or by listening to German music), seven students indicated on both self-assessment questionnaires that they do so rarely. Students 4, 7, and 11 did likewise at the beginning of the semester, but indicated to listen to German once or twice a month, mainly to German music online or when watching movies like *Run Lola Run*. Student 5 indicated on both self-assessments to listen to the CDs that accompany the textbook once or twice a week.

Table 8 presents the frequency of participants’ use of learning strategies for writing, reading, and speaking/listening at the beginning (pre) and at the end (post) of the semester. Based on the pre-self-assessments, the students generally employed speaking and listening strategies less frequently than they did reading and writing strategies. While the majority of the students *usually* or *almost always* used the latter two strategies, they also indicated to use speaking and listening strategies only *sometimes* or *usually*.

These results stay consistent in the post-self-assessments with a slightly higher use of strategies in writing and speaking/listening and a slightly lower use of reading strategies. This decline in reading strategies might be a direct reflection of the minor emphasis that was placed on reading in this course.

Table 8
Frequency of Participants' Use of Learning Strategies

	Almost always		Usually		Sometimes		Rarely	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Writing (12 items)	41 (41)	41 (41)	49 (49)	53 (53)	35 (35)	27 (27)	10 (10)	8 (8)
Reading (8 items)	24 (36)	30 (45)	41 (62)	34 (51)	20 (30)	20 (30)	3 (5)	4 (6)
Speaking & Listening (6 items)	15 (30)	20 (40)	24 (48)	29 (58)	23 (46)	15 (30)	4 (8)	2 (4)

Note. This table presents the frequency of participants' use of learning strategies in numbers as surveyed on the pre- and post-self-assessments. The column on the left identifies the skill area under investigation and includes the total number of question items per skill; the pre- and post-self-assessments included 12 question items on the use of writing strategies, 8 items on reading strategies, and 6 items on speaking and listening strategies. These total numbers of items listed are different from the actual number of items on the self-assessments. Certain items were not considered for this table because their use was discouraged by the teacher (items 10 and 14 on writing strategies, item 5 on reading strategies, and items 5 and 8 on speaking and listening strategies). The numbers in parentheses are recalculations of the raw numbers according to the lowest common denominator for the question item amount per skill area. These recalculations allow for easier comparison between skills.

Two students changed their use of certain speaking and listening strategies immensely: These strategies were asking for help with unknown words (S1) and circumlocution in German of words that the students do not have in their vocabulary (S6). Two other students (S2 and S3) identified in their reflective essays the listening assignments as most difficult mainly because of the rate at which the native speakers

talked and because of the lack of listening practice. On the other hand, three students commented on their improvement in listening:

- 29. In listening, I had improved more than I hoped. It is becoming significantly easier for me to understand tapes of German speakers for class assignments. (S4)
- 30. The biggest gain I have made is in my listening skills. I feel much more confident about my ability to understand the general theme of things that are being spoken about, and also that the speed of the conversation does not bother or impede my understanding like it did seven weeks ago. ... My listening skills are 100% better. (S5)
- 31. I was surprised at my listening comprehension skills; I thought them to be much worse than what they actually are. (S6)

Unfortunately, none of these three students provided specific reasons for why their listening skills improved.

In the interviews, the students reiterated their opinions voiced in the questionnaires and the reflective essays. In general, the students realized that the most efficient way to improve all four skills is to actively practice them as often as possible. Many students identified listening as the area that was most difficult for them and, rightly so, criticized the limited amount spent on listening comprehension in class. Had listening been more emphasized in class, it might have not only resulted in students' higher overall listening comprehension skills at the end of the semester, but also very likely in even higher improvements in speaking.

After the first classroom observation, the supervising professor pointed out the extensive use of English and that the students did not have much opportunity to listen to German. Based on those comments, the teacher changed some of her instructional habits to implement the supervising professor's criticisms. After the second observation, the supervising professor remarked that more German was used by both teacher and students

which offered more opportunities for the students to practice their listening comprehension.

When looking at the students' language skill ratings at the beginning and at the end of the semester, it is very encouraging to see an increase in all four language skills. This increase could be attributable to many factors, but since there was treatment in all skills between the pre- and post-questionnaire, the teacher concludes that the instruction did indeed have a positive effect on students' skills. These ratings are a direct reflection of the areas of emphasis throughout the course. Most time was spent on writing activities and subsequently, the median for this skill jumped from 3 to 5. Only little time was spent on listening comprehension, and the median for this skill only improved from 3.5 to 4. Another possible reason for the lower ratings for listening might be attributable to the difficulty of the authentic listening samples. From some of the students' comments it can be concluded that the listening comprehension assignments were well beyond the students' abilities.

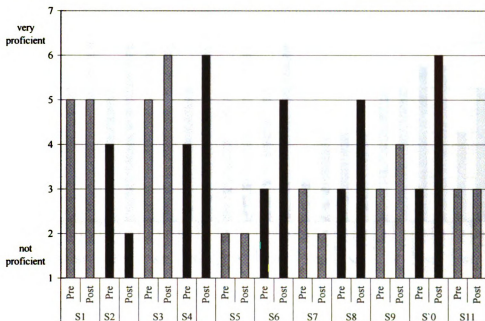
For easier reference and comparison, Figures 1-4 are reprinted in Figure 5. There is no general visible trend of productive over receptive language skills or vice versa. When looking at individual rather than collective progress, it is interesting to note that the students who received the highest grades in this class generally also rated all four skills high (S1, S3, S4, S8, S9).⁶⁰ Comparably, the students who did not receive passing grades generally rated their four language skills lower overall (S7, S11).⁶¹ These results suggest

⁶⁰ S3 and S9, while both having received the same final grade (3.5), rated themselves diametrical in regards to receptive and productive skills. S3 rated himself higher on both productive skills, S9 rated himself higher on both receptive skills.

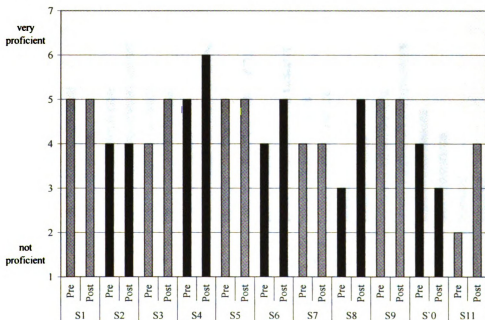
⁶¹ Interestingly enough, S7 rated himself lower on both productive skills than on the receptive ones while S11 rated himself higher on both productive skills (with the exception of the post-reading rating).

Figure 5
Summary of Participants' Language Skills Ratings

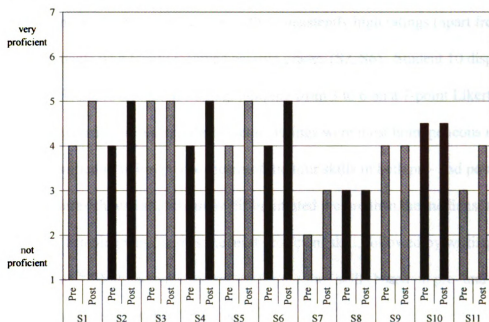
Writing



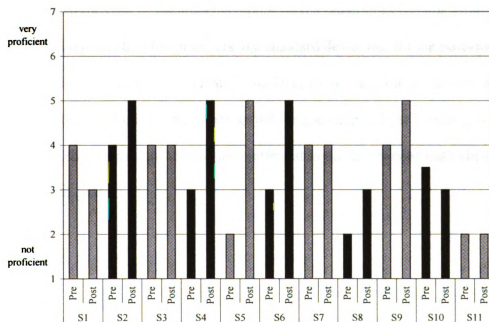
Reading



Speaking



Listening



Note. This figure represents the participants' ratings for all four language skills. The figures are reprints of the ones presented earlier and are grouped together to allow easier comparison.

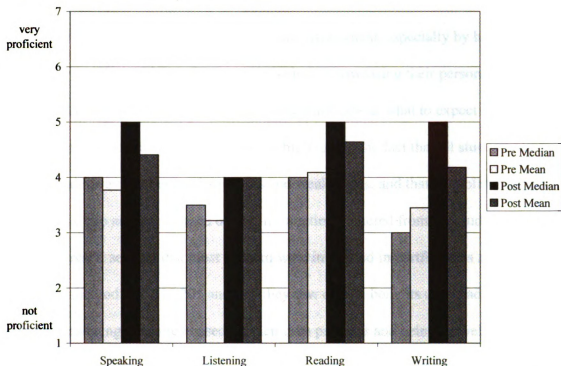
that the students were well aware of their abilities in German. An interesting aspect that remains unexplainable to the teacher is the consistently high ratings (apart from writing) of two students who barely received passing grades (S2, S6). Student 10 displayed the most drastic improvement in writing, jumping from 3 to 6 on a 7-point Likert scale.

It is interesting to see that the students' ratings were most homogeneous in speaking and most varied in writing. The means of the four skills in both pre- and post-questionnaires show a slightly more differentiated picture than the medians, and based on the means listening was rated as the least proficient skill, followed by writing, speaking and reading.⁶² Both medians and means for the four skills based on pre- and post-questionnaires are illustrated in Figure 6.

The standard deviations for the pre-questionnaires are 0.82 for speaking, 0.88 for listening, 0.94 for reading, and 0.93 for writing. These low numbers indicate that at the beginning of the course, the students represented a rather homogenous group of learners. While still representing low numbers, the standard deviations for the post-questionnaires are more varied, which implies that the students show greater heterogeneity at the end of the class than they did at the beginning (0.8 for speaking, 1.1 for listening, 0.81 for reading, 1.66 for writing). This is also reflected in the diversity of individual progress and of final grades.

⁶² This corresponds with the students' ranking of the four skills on the pre- and post-self-assessments.

Figure 6
Language Skills Medians and Means



Note. This figure represents the medians and means of the four language skills based on participants' ratings on the pre- and post-questionnaires. For each skill, the first two columns represent the median and mean based on the pre-questionnaires respectively, columns three and four represent median and mean based on the post-questionnaires respectively.

4.5 Evaluation of the Portfolio Process

This section summarizes the participants' perception of the portfolio process based on the post-questionnaires, the reflective essays, and the interviews. The results will be checked against the hypotheses that guided this thesis and the teacher's evaluation of the portfolio process and its effectiveness conclude the section.

Results from the pre-questionnaire pertaining to the portfolio process were discussed in the introductory section of Chapter 4. To summarize the results, the students' feelings about traditional testing methods and whether or not they were fair and representative assessment tools were mixed. Overall, however, the majority of the students seemed to

be open and receptive to alternative assessment tools. When asked about being actively involved in their own assessment, the overwhelming majority answered that they would like to have some input in and control over their assessment, especially by having the opportunity to select which assignments to include, showcasing their personal progress over time. Additional comments included uncertainty about what to expect and concerns about the amount of work. Other comments highlighted the fact that all students are different and have their personal strengths and weaknesses, and that portfolio assessment will take this into account. Based on the information gathered from the students' pre-questionnaires, it seemed that most of them were interested in portfolios as an alternative assessment method in GRM 201 and that they saw certain benefits over traditional testing tools, such as being measured based on their own progress and being actively involved in their own assessment by selecting pieces of their work.

The post-questionnaire included similar questions as the pre-questionnaire, but rather than asking for students' general perceptions, these questions were specifically addressing the portfolio experience in GRM 201. The students' overall portfolio experience in terms of like/dislike ranged from 1 to 7, encompassing the entire scale, with a median of 5. Student 7 was at the low end of the scale, student 10 at the high end. Six students mentioned the ability to see their own progress as their favorite part of the portfolio experience, another three identified the option of reviewing and correcting assignments. One student mentioned the ability to choose pieces to be included as his favorite part. When asked about what they did not like about the portfolio, three students mentioned "nothing really" and another student wrote that it was overall definitely better

than a final. Two students disliked the diligence and effort required by this form of assessment and one student wrote:

32. I think the portfolio could be improved by it being a requirement to turn in stuff from different times of the semester. (S4)

In designing this portfolio, the teacher did pay attention to exactly this aspect and made sure that all four skills would be represented through pieces of work from different times. The student's comment points to a problem in communication. The teacher should have repeated the method and purpose of this alternative assessment tool more often than she did to ensure that the students understand what they are doing, why, and how they are being assessed. This aspect will be elaborated on later in this section.

In the pre-questionnaires, the students' feelings about traditional testing methods were neutral (median of 4 on a 7-point Likert scale with a range from 2 to 6). This changed over the course of the semester and the students indicated a slightly more negative stance, represented by a median of 3 and a range from 1 to 5. Student 6 strongly disliked traditional testing methods and thought the portfolio to be a fairer and more representative method of assessment because it takes the individual's learning skills and pace into account.⁶³ Overall, ten of the eleven students identified portfolio assessment as more fair and representative of their skills. Apart from student 6, four other students mentioned that the individualization of portfolios adds to their fairness, three students referred to the longitudinal aspect that takes progress into account, and two other students mentioned their active role in assessment and the required organizational skills that would transfer to other areas. Student 11 cautioned that when comparing portfolios with

⁶³ It is interesting to note that this student received a low passing grade both on the portfolio and in the course (1.5 respectively) but still preferred portfolio assessment over traditional testing methods..

traditional testing methods, “Fair doesn’t apply. One tests overall, the other tests bit by bit.”⁶⁴

A second question asked the students to compare how the portfolio influenced their learning experience as opposed to traditional testing methods. Answers to this question ranged from 3 to 7 with a median of 5. This represents a very positive picture of portfolios as effective tools for learning. It appears that portfolio assessment fosters more learning than traditional testing methods do. Similarly, the students reported that the inclusion of portfolio assessment influenced their attitude toward the course in general (median of 5, range from 3 to 6). Feeling positive about assessment methods that are used in a certain course adds to the overall positive classroom atmosphere which in turn will – and did – support learning.

Another question asked the students particularly about their feelings toward active involvement in their own assessment through the development of grading scales and the selections of assignments to be included in the portfolio. Three students indicated that they strongly liked this aspect. In general, the answers ranged from 3 to 7 with a median of 5 and an even higher mean of 5.45. It seems paradoxical that the students like and want to be involved in their own assessment, however, when the teacher had asked for input on grading scales, weighting of items, or any other aspects related to the portfolio implementation, practically no opinions were voiced. Only retrospectively in the reflective essays did some students mention that they would have liked to be more involved in their assessment. As was the case with pointing out the method and purpose

⁶⁴ It is unclear from the student’s comment which assessment methods he refers to. The item on the questionnaire mentioned portfolio assessment first and traditional testing second, so maybe the student’s response followed this order (portfolios test overall, traditional methods test bit by bit).

of the portfolio, the teacher should have encouraged the students even more to provide their input on assessment issues.

For the past three questions that were discussed (influence, attitude, and involvement in assessment), the lowest ratings came from students 7 and 11 who described themselves as lazy and who did not do well in this class, as pointed out above. Their overall poor performance is reflected in these lower ratings.

Students' additional comments on assessment methods and procedures and suggestions for improving portfolio assessment included:

- 33. Make purpose clearer to students. (S1)
- 34. The main part of the portfolio seemed to be fixing mistakes in past assignments and reviewing a semester of work. That was excellent. However, for a pure portfolio, where a thesis is not being done, I would get rid of all the reflecting about the portfolio. That was annoying, or would have been if it was not needed for further work. (S3)
- 35. I thought having to explain why something was wrong and what it should be was very helpful. (S4)
- 36. Have students correct more – it fosters more learning. (S8)
- 37. I learned a lot more this time taking this class and the portfolio helped a lot. Thanks. (S10)

Comment 34 is yet another example for the fact that it is extremely important to continuously remind the students of the purpose of a portfolio (as pointed out by student 1 in comment 33). Despite having discussed and explained each element to be included in the final portfolio and the rationale behind it in much detail, the students seemed to have developed their own ideas about portfolio assessment, which did not always match the teacher's perception that stemmed from the portfolio literature.⁶⁵

Based on the results from the post-questionnaire, the students' overall portfolio experience can, however, be interpreted not only as positive but more importantly as

⁶⁵ The reflection is a crucial part of any portfolio assessment, as was pointed out in the review of the portfolio literature in Chapter 1.

conducive to learning, which is one of the underlying assumptions this thesis is trying to prove.

All of the students' essay comments pertaining to the portfolio process are compiled at the end of Appendix Q. In general, these comments comprise a more elaborate version of the opinions voiced in the post-questionnaires. A few shall serve as examples here and were selected either because (1) they are supportive of the hypotheses that guided this research project or (2) they added new reasons for why portfolio assessment was preferable over traditional testing methods or (3) they raised criticisms that need to be addressed in the future.⁶⁶ It should be mentioned at this point that every student whose reflective essay followed the specified format⁶⁷ highlighted at least two of the five hypotheses as helpful⁶⁸ and eight of the nine students who included a proper reflective essay in their portfolio specifically stated that these aspects led them to prefer portfolio assessment in this class.

38. The human factor becomes real issue with this sort of assessment. But I think that the obvious advantage of being able to adjust the weight of certain assignments based on the ability of the class, or even certain students, is overwhelming. Another positive of the portfolio assessment is the fact that we are being graded on how much we have improved over the course of the session, rather than how much we knew coming into the class. This makes grading much fairer in my opinion. The use of portfolio assessment is a great tool to employ for grading in foreign language classes. (S1)
39. It was good to go back through all my assignments and look them over. By doing corrections I was able to see many errors that I often make, and now by recognizing them I should be able to stray away from them. The portfolio was a helpful assignment. (S3)
40. The most useful aspect of portfolio assessment is to create an awareness of where you are in the learning process, recognize the areas that I need to gain a better grasp of, and identify some techniques that I can strengthen in order to

⁶⁶ The comments presented here are cut together from the reflective essays based on content.

⁶⁷ Student 7 did not turn in a portfolio at all and the reflective essay of student 11 did not follow the specified format and therefore did not contain any comments on the portfolio process.

⁶⁸ The one mentioned most often was the ability to see individual progress, followed by the ability to review.

drastically improve my German skills. People learn at different rates, and the portfolio system allows each student to build their skills without being penalized for poor timing. (S5)

41. I believe that [portfolio development] affords students a fairer evaluation of their foreign language abilities by visualizing their progress. For this particular portfolio, though, I felt that much of the learning that generally comprises this type of assignment was absent due to the lack of re-editing requirements. I believe that much more learning could have been fostered had students been forced to correct the mistakes in *all* of their non-spoken assignments. Editing and correcting is one method through which I found myself greatly improving my German competency. I feel that in a class designed like German 201, where reading and writing are focused on much more than speaking and listening, the percentage value of these required speaking/listening pieces was far too high. (S8)
42. Working on and seeing the progress I've made this semester has made me more confident in my work. (S10)

The quality of the reflective essays was surprising. The students put much effort into addressing the issues that were of particular interest to the teacher. Their comments show that they are well aware of the positive and the more problematic aspects of portfolio assessment. As was mentioned before, a few students (particularly S3 and S8) seemed to have strong beliefs about this type of alternative assessment, which did not coincide with the general perceptions presented in the portfolio literature. While it might have been beneficial for the students to correct their mistakes on all non-spoken assignments, as suggested by student 8, this simply would not have been feasible within the framework of the course.⁶⁹ The students had to review and revise multiple assignments and most of the other students found that to be helpful. Students 8 and 9 described portfolios as collections of students' best works, an aspect that does not necessarily apply to foreign language portfolios when its main objective is to show growth. As was pointed out in the guidelines for compiling the portfolio, the teacher strongly dissuaded from simply

⁶⁹ It seems like student 8 has strong beliefs based on the writing portfolios that she had compiled in previous English classes.

selecting best works that required the least amount of corrections but rather encouraged students to select pieces that would show their progress over time.

Another criticism student 8 stated again in the reflective essay was the inappropriate weighting of speaking and listening assignments. The teacher had provided as a rationale that four speaking and five listening assignments accounted for 15% of the final portfolio grade respectively, while only two writing and two reading assignments accounted for 10% and 5% respectively. This weighting still seems fair to the teacher and none of the other students raised this issue. One other criticism that did surface in one of the reflective essays was “the human factor” in grading. While none of the students mentioned reliability issues that are connected to the fact that the teacher was the sole grader⁷⁰, it was interesting to read that one student did think about this aspect.

The interviews did not reveal many additional insights that the post-questionnaires or the reflective essays had not already discussed. It might have been more useful to conduct the interviews after reading the reflective essays so that the teacher could have specifically addressed any remaining issues. Several students emphasized that they were not clear on how the portfolio would be graded and how it was integrated in the course. To remedy that problem, student 4 suggested having students turn in the portfolio at several points throughout the semester so that they can receive feedback on what they have compiled so far. This would also help them better understand what the portfolio is about and how it works. Student 1 said that one positive aspect of the portfolio was to present himself from his best side by putting his strong point out front and hiding weaker ones. Student 2 made a related comment, saying that students’ attitudes toward a course

⁷⁰ Maybe the students are used to being evaluated by whoever teaches the class and therefore did not consider this issue further.

that implements a portfolio might be influenced in such a way that the students deliberately perform below their abilities in the beginning so that they have more room for improvement. Student 3 added that he did not necessarily learn more because of the portfolio but that what he learned will “stick longer.” Several students (S1, S2, S5, S8) mentioned that the revisions of the exams led to the largest amount of improvement, which is the ultimate goal of any learning. There was a consensus among all students that the selection process of works to be included was easy. Also, all students agreed that portfolio assessment works great for multi-faceted foreign language classes but probably less so for sciences.

The main assumption that guided this thesis was that the students would prefer portfolio assessment to traditional testing methods for five reasons, which served as hypotheses:

- (1) Portfolios do not simply test knowledge but rather highlight individual progress.
- (2) All four language skills are included in the portfolio assessment which will cater to different learner types and their learning style preferences.
- (3) The use of technology allows the students to complete assignments at their own pace.
- (4) The portfolio assignments will force students to review their own work which will raise their awareness of certain aspects (e.g., errors) pertaining to the skill in question.
- (5) By working closely with peers, the students will become aware of errors and will be able to correct them in the future.

The data presented in this chapter provide strong support for hypotheses 1, 4 and 5 and partial support for hypotheses 2 and 3. It was surprising that in none of the data sources the students mentioned the use of technology despite the rather large role it played in this course. The only comment that indirectly addressed this aspect was the positive mention of the Internet activities that were meaningful because they were task-based and provided authentic contextual information. Maybe the use of technology is already seen as a basic requirement even in language classes. The data do reveal instances of students' referring to being able to pace themselves, however, none of these comments were in the context of the use of technology. As for hypothesis 2, only few students directly addressed this issue in any of their reflections. However, the mere fact that the students rated different language skills as improved at the end of the semester can serve as strong indication for the underlying concurrence of this hypothesis.

Based on the data, it seems appropriate to rephrase several of the hypotheses to better reflect the students' actual perceptions. Also, additional aspects surfaced in the data that seemed to have had an impact on students' perceived usefulness and effectiveness of portfolio assessment. The following statements are the result of a combination of the initial hypotheses and students' actual comments. These statements are ranked according to the frequency of occurrence in the data. It is assumed that the most frequent comments are the strongest indicators for the effectiveness of portfolios, which is why they appear first.

The students will prefer portfolios to traditional testing methods as a more effective assessment tool for the following reasons:

- (1) Portfolios do not simply test discrete knowledge but rather highlight *progress* over time and allow the students to recognize *areas of weakness* as well as *improvement*.
- (2) Portfolios take each *individual* student in a class into account and cater to their heterogeneous needs, offering more opportunities to succeed.
- (3) Portfolios allow students to work at their own *pace*.
- (4) Portfolios grant students an *active role* in their own assessment.
- (5) Portfolio assignments force students to *review, revise, and reflect* on their own work which will raise their *awareness of errors* which in turn will help them correct and/or *avoid* errors in the future.
- (6) *Peer review* raises students' awareness of common errors and fosters team work.
- (7) Portfolios help identify *learning techniques* that can strengthen each of the four *language skills*.
- (8) Portfolios foster *organizational and critical thinking skills*.
- (9) Portfolios build *confidence*.

Several evaluative remarks have already been made at various points throughout this chapter. I would like to add a few final remarks about my own evaluation of the portfolio process. The presented portfolio implementation had its drawbacks but it is a first attempt at implementing portfolios in second-year German language courses at college levels. In general, I am very pleased with the implementation and the results of this project. The portfolio process was a useful professional development experience for me as it offered valuable insights into course development and student learning and assessment. These insights had a positive impact on my instructional practices because

they were directly and continuously transferred and applied, which resulted in a classroom that was more conducive to learning.

Based on the students' comments and my own reflections, a few practical aspects would have made this portfolio experience even more effective:

- It is of utmost importance to remind students over and over again of the method, purpose, and grading criteria of a portfolio. Only once students truly understand the meaning behind such an assessment tool can they take advantage of all aspects to the fullest extent possible.
- The portfolio should have been collected at various points throughout the semester to better monitor students' progress and to provide students with feedback.
- The assignments to be included for each skill should be of a similar format to allow for direct comparison. Also, they should be taken from different times throughout the semester to reflect students' progress.
- A reflective essay on the portfolio process half way through the semester might offer students and teachers insights into the experience. Students' suggestions could be immediately implemented into the teaching practice and enhance learning.
- The final interviews should have been conducted after the reflective essays were read. That would have allowed for asking specific questions to aspects that had not been sufficiently addressed.

The portfolio was fully incorporated into instruction and it was a flexible assessment tool that took the students', the teacher's and the supervising professor's suggestions into

account throughout the semester and strived toward the best possible methods of teaching and assessing. The aspects of integration, information of participants and instruction based on participants' perceptions make the present portfolio a valid measure of assessment. The portfolio assignments integrated skill competence in context and moved away from testing discrete knowledge. Inherent aspects of this and any portfolio that claims to be valid are the assessment of students' work over time, in meaningful context, and in accordance with standards of expectations of what constitutes good, relevant, and authentic work. The grading scales used for this portfolio reflected standards of expectations that were informed not only by the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the National Standards, but also by the teacher's personal perceptions based on previous language teaching experiences with similar groups of students. These standards for assessment also make the expectations and purpose of the portfolio transparent to outsiders. Based on the students' perceptions and their actual improvements in the four language skills, this portfolio did indeed measure progress over time and, in my opinion, it did so effectively and in a way that allowed the students to learn and retain more than traditional testing tools would have.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 concludes my research and summarizes limitations, implications, and future directions.

5.1 Limitations

There were several limitations in regards to the present study, the most pertinent ones being (1) that the researcher was also the teacher, (2) the small scale of the study in both number of participants and duration, and (3) issues in design.

The major drawback of this study was the fact that the researcher also taught the class and in addition was the sole rater of the students' portfolios. This last aspect raises issues of reliability, which are, however, inherent to most language classes where only the teacher assesses his or her students. In general, human judgment is prone to be subjective, which is a major disadvantage. Using human raters for assessment purposes, particularly for high-stakes situations, adds an external factor to take into account when looking at issues of reliability. However, using human raters carries a big advantage over machine-scored ratings which restrict the diversity of available assessment formats.

While the present study employed only the teacher/researcher as rater⁷¹, there was no inter-rater reliability to be reported and it remains unclear if the assessment was reliable.

One way in which this portfolio assessment tried to account for reliable measures was by

⁷¹ This was due to the rather pragmatic reason that during the summer semester no other qualified teachers were on campus who could have served as additional raters.

using specific rubrics for grading the assignments that were transparent and that had been successfully used by many teachers.

Apart from reliability issues, the constellation of teacher and researcher being one and the same person placed further limitations on the study. There was only one point of view and, apart from the comments following the two classroom observations, there were no intervening factors that might have encouraged ongoing critical reflection about instructional practices. The portfolio literature strongly suggests to design and to implement portfolios with a team of interested teachers and/or researchers. This would allow for stimulating conversations about purpose, content, and format of the portfolio. However, while being in the teacher role, I had ample background knowledge about portfolio related issues which might have not been the case, had I chosen to implement a portfolio in a class I did not teach myself. I believe that this aspect greatly enhanced the portfolio experience as I was flexible and knowledgeable enough to adjust to any arising problems.

The second major limitation was the small scale of the study in both number of participants and duration. Reporting descriptive statistical results of 11 participants does not allow for generalizations. Also, many variables were not accounted for and could have (and probably did) influence the portfolio process. As I just pointed out, the fact that I as a teacher had certain views about portfolios based on the literature I had read influenced the design of the course. A teacher's enthusiasm about any aspects related to the classroom or the lack thereof can carry over to the students. Since I was very excited about this project, I might have positively influenced the students, who otherwise would have rated the experience more negatively.

Fitting a four-skill portfolio into a seven-week course was overly ambitious, especially since it was the first time that such a project had been undertaken in this particular course. It was incredibly time consuming and cumbersome to create meaningful contextualized assignments and to grade all of them. The portfolio was no less demanding for the students. For a first-time portfolio, it might have made more sense to focus on one or two skills. Another drawback of the short time span was that there was an inherent limit on the progress the students can make. During a regular semester, the assignment schedule would have been less crammed and the students could have focused more on individual assignments which would have probably led to more active engagement with the materials. Nonetheless, I was very pleased with the performance of the students in class and I believe that overall the implementation was a good first try.

The third major limitation concerned issues in design. As was pointed out at the end of Chapter 4, a few practical aspects would have made this portfolio experience even more effective. Apart from the ones mentioned above, certain technology problems arose over the course of the semester. I had assumed that all students would have access to the Internet at home, which was not the case since many students lived somewhere else for the summer than where they live during regular semesters. Not all students had access to high-speed Internet, which was a prerequisite to complete many of the portfolio assignments.

Another major problem in design was the lack of an entry and exit exam to assess the students' beginning and final levels. Simply asking students to rate their own skills might not reveal their true proficiency levels, as was discussed in regards to students 2

and 6. Also, the effectiveness of the portfolio as assessment tool in comparison to alternative testing methods could have been better evaluated, had there been a control group. This was, however, impossible during the summer.

Despite these limitations, I still feel that this portfolio implementation was a success and was well received by the students. Their reflections consistently addressed their preference of this assessment over traditional tests, due to the advantages outlined at the end of Chapter 4. By making the portfolio one of many assessment tools in this course, I ensured to cater to all different learner types, and the course design offered ample opportunities for all students to succeed. I would implement portfolio assessment again in a German as a foreign language course, however, I would take the aforementioned limitations and practical aspects into account and make the proposed changes to the existing design.

5.2 Implications

Simply setting up portfolios will not necessarily improve teaching and learning, what ultimately makes the difference is what teachers and students do with portfolios and the ways in which they use the information in portfolios to think about teaching and learning. (Valencia & Place, 1994, p. 666)

This quote by Valencia and Place points to the importance of integrating portfolios in instructional practices and of continuously reflecting on the experience. It is necessary that all participants understand the rationale behind the purpose and the structure of such an assignment. Results based on self-reflection will only prove beneficial if they are implemented into the process. The results from this thesis can inform similar projects in the future. The portfolio design presented here is transferable to any foreign or second language setting and portfolios in general can be implemented in most subject areas.

Being able to monitor one's own progress and improvement over time usually fosters a student's confidence which in turn might boost motivation. This alternative assessment tool not only improves student learning, it can also enhance the quality of instructional practices through constant reflection, as was shown in this study, and provide valid and reliable measures of assessment.

As was pointed out earlier, the complexity and heterogeneity of students' learning require not only diverse forms of students' work, but also multiple methods of assessment, and portfolios lend themselves to co-implementation with traditional standardized testing. This study does not suggest eliminating traditional testing methods entirely because different testing tools can be used to assess different aspects of learning. The goals and purposes of assessment should dictate which tool should be used. Portfolios are a more authentic assessment method than traditional tests because they resemble features of language use and are contextualized. Assignments such as the interview, the peer review where students had to engage in negotiation of meaning, or the Internet activities all represent authentic, communicative, and performance-based tasks that a traditional paper-based test could not assess. It is crucial to make materials relevant to students because that will enhance the probability that students become interested and get involved in the task at hand.

Some of the revised hypotheses at the end of Section 4.5 concern general skills and strategies that are transferable to other contexts. In this respect, a portfolio can equip students with crucial concepts such as critical awareness, organizational skills, autonomy, and the ability to collaborate and self-reflect.

Students have rather strong opinions about testing methods, as can be seen from the data presented in this study. Usually, students' opinions and preferences about classroom practices are barely considered when instructional decisions are made. However, being open to their suggestions and taking them into account can impact teaching practices in a positive way. It makes assessments more purposeful in the eyes of the students and by knowing that a teacher cares about and values a student's opinion, not only the classroom atmosphere and the rapport between teacher and students might be enhanced but also student learning. Even though designing and implementing a portfolio is time consuming, it is a worth-while effort.

5.3 Future Directions

Some suggestions for future research include the remedy of the identified limitations of this study. Conducting a study that uses a control group will allow for a comparison of student performance based on inclusion/exclusion of a portfolio. This will provide better insights into the effects of portfolios on student learning. Also, issues of reliability should be addressed by using multiple trained raters.

A longitudinal study would offer insights into long term retention of the aspects specifically addressed in a portfolio. In such a study, different variables should be controlled for to get a better grasp of what really influences student learning. It would be interesting to see if and how teaching effectiveness and student learning are affected when a portfolio implements only one or two language skills. Conducting research with different populations and levels will offer insights into the generalizability of findings across groups.

All these suggestions will help educators better understand student learning. One of the goals of a teacher is to provide effective language instruction that is contextualized and meaningful. Portfolios seem to be a step into the right direction.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Student Pre-Self-Assessment

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Please take a couple of minutes to complete the following statements. The self-assessment will help you later when reflecting on your portfolio experience.

Please answer the following questions, thinking about any **previous German courses** (either at MSU, during high school or elsewhere) you have taken.

1. I complete my homework before class.

☐ Almost always ☐ Usually ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

2. I am prepared for class. (I bring my books and practice what we are studying.)

☐ Almost always ☐ Usually ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

3. I pay attention in class.

☐ Almost always ☐ Usually ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

4. I am an active participant in class discussions.

☐ Almost always ☐ Usually ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

5. I am an active participant in group work with classmates.

☐ Almost always ☐ Usually ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

6. I ask questions when I do not understand.

☐ Almost always ☐ Usually ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely

7. a. I speak German outside of class.

☐ Every Day ☐ Once/twice a week ☐ Once/twice a month ☐ Rarely

b. If yes (every day, once/twice a week, once/twice a month), on what occasion and with whom?

8. a. I read German newspapers, magazines, or books.

☐ Every Day ☐ Once/twice a week ☐ Once/twice a month ☐ Rarely

b. If yes, please specify what you read and where you obtain the reading.

9. a. I watch German TV/movies and/or listen to German music.

☐ Every Day ☐ Once/twice a week ☐ Once/twice a month ☐ Rarely

b. If yes, please specify what you view/listen to and where.

10. Rank the following skills according to their difficulty (1 = least difficult for me, 4 = most difficult for me)

____ Speaking
____ Listening
____ Reading
____ Writing

11. Speaking and Listening Strategies:

	Almost always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
Before I start speaking, I brainstorm words and phrases I can use when talking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think about what information is most important to the listener so I can focus on it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I don't know how to say something, I try to explain it with words I know in German.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I don't know how to say something, I ask a more proficient speaker or look up the word later.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I switch back to English.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I work with classmates to practice speaking and listening German.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I don't understand something, I ask the speaker about it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I don't understand something, I pretend I understood (e.g., by nodding).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Reading Strategies:

	Almost always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
I think about what I already know about the topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I make predictions and read to find out if I was right.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I reread sentences before and after a word I don't know.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I guess meanings of words I don't know from the context.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I look up every unfamiliar word in a dictionary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am able to find specific information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I look for the main idea.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I ask another student for help.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I discuss what I read with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. Writing Strategies:

	Almost always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
I think about what I already know about the topic and make a list of ideas, words, and phrases I might use.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I organize my thoughts and ideas so that I can focus on one central idea.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I make sure the writing has a definite beginning, middle, and end.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I try to make my writing interesting, e.g., by adding examples.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I write a first draft and then reread and revise it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I check to make sure that my writing makes sense.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I make sure the sentences relate to each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use familiar language structures so I know I am writing correctly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I don't know a word, I use a word or phrase I know.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I look up every unfamiliar word in a dictionary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I check my spelling and punctuation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I check my use of verb tenses and agreement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I ask another student for help.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I use a translating engine.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX B: Pre-Questionnaire

PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE

Please take a couple of minutes to answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. If you need more space than provided, feel free to use the back of the questionnaire. The questionnaire will remain confidential. Thank you for your cooperation.

- 1. Are you familiar with portfolios?**

☐ Yes☐ No

- 2. a. Have you ever created a portfolio in the course of your academic career?**

☐ Yes☐ No

- b. If yes, when and where (e.g., elementary school, high school, college, university, etc.)?**

- c. On a scale of 1-7 (1 = strongly dislike, 7 = strongly like), how would you rate your previous portfolio experience?

strongly dislike 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 strongly like

- d. What did you like/dislike about it?**

3. a. On a scale of 1-7 (1 = strongly dislike, 7 = strongly like), how do you feel about traditional testing methods (i.e., written and oral exams)?

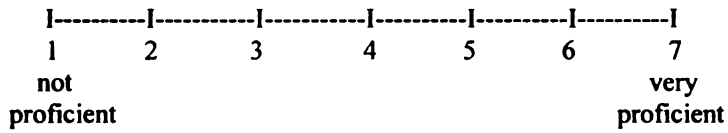
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

strongly dislike strongly like

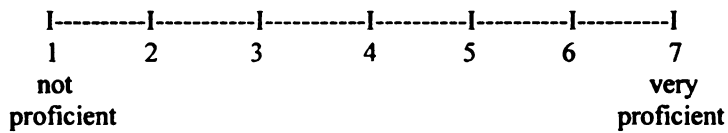
- b. Do you think traditional testing (i.e., written and oral exams) is a fair method of assessment and representative of your different German skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing)? Please explain.

4. On a scale of 1-7 (1 = not proficient, 7 = very proficient), how would you rate your overall proficiency in German in the following skills:

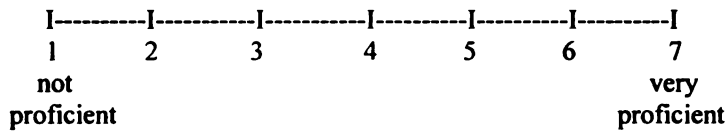
a. Speaking



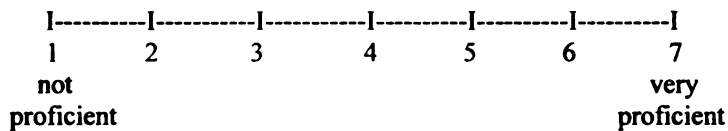
b. Listening



c. Reading



d. Writing



5. Would you like to be actively included in your own assessment, for example through the development of grading scales and by deciding which assignments should be included in your portfolio? Why/Why not?

6. Please add any additional thoughts or comments on assessment methods and procedures.

7. a. What is your rationale for taking this course?

☐ Requirement ☐ Other

- b. If other, please specify.

Personal Information:

8. What is your gender?

☐ Male ☐ Female

9. What is your class level?

☐ Freshman ☐ Sophomore ☐ Junior ☐ Senior ☐ Graduate or other

10. What is your overall GPA?

☐ 1.9 or less ☐ 2.0-2.2 ☐ 2.3-2.7 ☐ 2.8-3.3 ☐ 3.4-4.0

11. Please specify how many semesters/years of foreign language education you have had, including which foreign language(s) and what level (e.g., beginner, intermediate, advanced).

12. Have you ever traveled to or lived in a German-speaking country? If yes, where, when, and for how long?

Thank you very much!

APPENDIX C: Observation Form

Time	Activities Observed	Comments / Suggestions	Questions for teacher	Teacher's answers to question or responses to comments

Overall comments by supervising professor:

Response by teacher:

APPENDIX D: Post-Questionnaire

POST-QUESTIONNAIRE

Please take a couple of minutes to answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. If you need more space than provided, feel free to use the back of the questionnaire. The questionnaire will remain confidential. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. a. On a scale of 1-7 (1 = strongly dislike, 7 = strongly like), how would you rate your portfolio experience this semester?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
strongly strongly
dislike like

- b. Which specific part of the portfolio did you like best? Why?

- c. What did you not like about the portfolio? Why?

2. a. On a scale of 1-7 (1 = strongly dislike, 7 = strongly like), how do you feel about traditional testing methods (i.e., written and oral exams)?

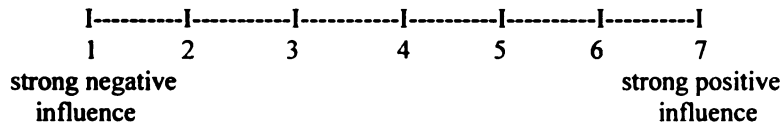
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
strongly strongly
dislike like

- b. Do you think that portfolio assessment is a fairer method of assessment and more representative of your different German skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing) than traditional testing? Please explain.

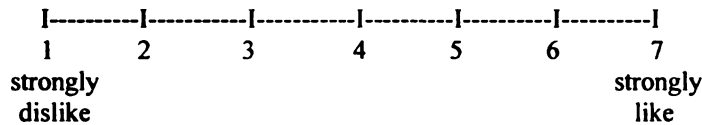
3. On a scale of 1-7 (1 = learned less, 7 = learned more), how did the portfolio influence your learning experience when compared to traditional testing?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
learned learned
less more

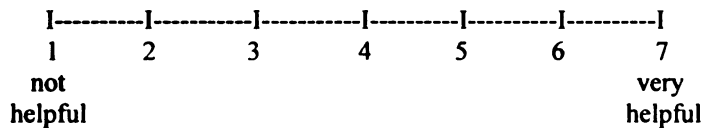
4. On a scale of 1-7 (1 = strong negative influence, 7 = strong positive influence), how much did the inclusion of portfolio assessment change your attitude towards this course?



5. On a scale of 1-7 (1 = strongly dislike, 7 = strongly like), how do you feel about your active involvement in your assessment (development of grading scales, selections of assignments to be included in your portfolio)?

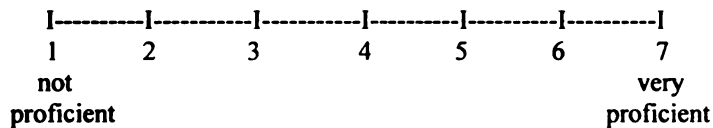


6. On a scale of 1-7 (1 = not helpful, 7 = very helpful), how do you feel about the inclusion of peer review as a method of feedback?

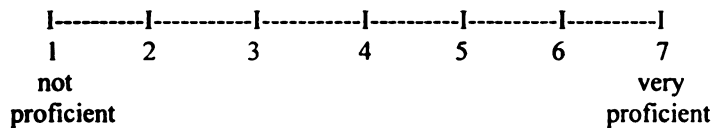


7. On a scale of 1-7 (1 = not proficient, 7 = very proficient), how would you rate your overall proficiency in German in the following skills:

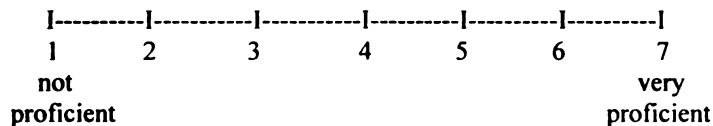
a. Speaking



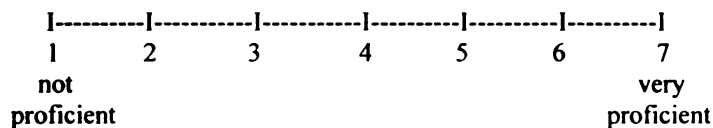
b. Listening



c. Reading



d. Writing



8. Please add any additional thoughts or comments on assessment methods and procedures and suggestions for improving portfolio assessment.

Thank you very much!

APPENDIX E: Interview Outline

- 1. Please comment on your portfolio experience this semester.**
- 2. Have you ever completed a portfolio for another class?
If yes, what class was it, what did you have to include, and how satisfied were you with this form of assessment?**
- 3. How did you like the portfolio assessment in GRM 201?**
- 4. Were there any parts of the portfolio you liked/didn't like working on?
Any parts you found not useful or unnecessary about the portfolio?**
- 5. Which parts of the portfolio were easy to do? Which ones were difficult? Why?**
- 6. Was it difficult to select certain pieces of your work for your Portfolio? Why or why not? What were some of the things you considered when you chose certain pieces to be included (e.g., topic, number of revisions, grade)?**
- 7. Did you feel that by working on a portfolio you were more responsible of your own work?**
- 8. Did the portfolio help you in being more organized this semester?**
- 9. Did you find working with your peers helpful (both while working on the portfolio and during the review at the end)? Why or why not?
Did you think revising your work individually and with peers was beneficial?**
- 10. Did you like being actively involved in your own assessment (developing grading scales, selecting assignments to include in the portfolio)?**
- 11. Do you think a grade based on a portfolio is fairer and reflects your work and achievements better than traditional testing methods (written tests and essays)?**
- 12. Did completing a portfolio influence your learning experience in a positive or negative way? Did you learn more/less? Please explain.**
- 13. Did the portfolio influence your attitude towards the course in a positive or negative way?**
- 14. Did the portfolio help you to identify areas of your own strengths and weaknesses in German (speaking, listening, reading, writing)? Did it influence any of these skills in a positive or negative way?**
- 15. Overall, do you think you learned more because of the portfolio? In which areas?**
- 16. Would you prefer to receive grades based on portfolios for your other classes? Which ones? Why?**
- 17. What, if anything, would you want to change or add to the portfolio process to make it more effective?**

APPENDIX F: Preliminary Information Sheet about the Portfolio Assessment

GRM 201

INTERMEDIATE GERMAN I

Summer 2004

INFORMATION SHEET PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

As part of this course, you will compile a portfolio. The portfolio will comprise 25% of your final grade. There are eleven assignments you have to include in your portfolio, some of which are predetermined by the instructor, some of which you can select. Most of the assignments are regular homework assignments. These eleven assignments cover all four skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing).

Predetermined:

- (1) Picture descriptions (Speaking)**
- (2) Interview (Speaking and Listening)**
- (3) Listening comprehension summary based on your notes from the midterm (Listening)**
- (4) Listening comprehension worksheets (Listening)**
- (5) Reflective essay in English on the portfolio assessment, including your perception of peer review, reasons for selection of certain pieces of your work, perception of improvement**

Selected by you:

- (6) One chat session including corrections (Writing)**
- (7) One of your essays, including all drafts (Writing)**
- (8) One written summary on an "Elvis" topic (Reading)**
- (9) One Internet worksheet (Reading)**
- (10) One grammar summary including exercises**
- (11) One Unit Test with detailed corrections**

We will discuss in class how each individual part should be evaluated and weighed, and we will come up with a specific grading scale for the portfolio. Your suggestions are welcome.

APPENDIX G: Final Information Sheet about the Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio Assessment

The portfolio needs to contain the following assignments:

Predetermined:

- (1) Three picture descriptions (Speaking)
- (2) Interview with a native speaker (Speaking and Listening)
- (3) Listening comprehension summary based on your notes from the interview and the midterm (Listening)
- (4) Three listening comprehension worksheets (Listening)
- (5) Reflective essay in English on the portfolio assessment, including your perception of peer review, reasons for selection of certain pieces of your work, comments on the use of technology in the course, perception of improvement

Selected by you:

- (6) One chat session including corrections (Writing)
- (7) One of your essays, including all drafts and the peer review sheet (Writing)
- (8) One written summary on an “Elvis” topic (Reading)
- (9) One Internet worksheet (Reading)
- (10) One Unit Test with detailed corrections

Speaking assignments	15%
Listening assignments	15%
Reflective essay	10%
Writing assignments	10%
Reading assignments	5%
Unit Test	5%
Layout/inclusion of all assignments	40%

The **speaking assignments** will be assessed using the Grading Scale for Speaking Assignments (5%). The emphasis will be on the student’s progress over the course of the semester (10%).

The **listening assignments** will be assessed based on the number (for the worksheets) and accuracy (for worksheets and summaries) of the answers (10%). The progress over the course of the semester will be taken into consideration (5%).

The **reflective essay** will be assessed based on how well the required issues are addressed. The required issues are: general perception of portfolio assessment (as opposed to traditional assessment), reasons for selection of certain pieces of your work (the ones not predetermined except 8; it is not sufficient to write that a certain piece required the least amount of corrections ☺), perception of peer review (useful, why/why not), perception of own improvement (in which areas (speaking, listening, writing, reading), why/why not). Three to four pages (double-spaced) will be average.

The **writing assignments** will be assessed based on your corrections (chat, 5%) and your progress (essay, 5%). The corrections can be written onto the chat or on a separate piece of paper. The essays will be assessed using the Grading Scale for Writing Assignments.

The **reading assignments** will be assessed based on the synthesis and accuracy (Elvis, 2.5%) and comprehension and accuracy (Internet, 2.5%) of information.

The **Unit Test** will be assessed based on the number and quality/accuracy of corrections. The corrections can be written onto the test or on a separate piece of paper.

The **layout** will be assessed based on the number of assignments included and formal aspects, such as title page, table of contents, and arrangement of assignments (clearly and attractively presented).

The 40% will be divided as follows:

Inclusion of all required items	75% (each assignment is worth 5 %)
Title page	5%
Table of contents	5%
Arrangement of assignments	5%
Reflection of learning/progress	10%

The **title page** will need to contain the following information:

Name

Kursinformationen

Datum

Titel

The **table of contents** will directly follow the title page and should be arranged by skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing). Assignments 1, 2, and 3 will be added by the instructor. They do, however, need to be mentioned in the table of contents (it might be a good idea to put listening and speaking at the end of the portfolio). The reflective essay should come first and should be page number 3. For all consecutive assignments, add a page with the chapter title (e.g., Test, Schreiben, etc) before adding the actual assignments. When adding assignments, you don't have to include these pages in your page count (e.g., title page "Test" can be 4, followed by the test including revisions, followed by title page "Schreiben" which would be page number 5).

Conclude your portfolio with a self-assessment (*Selbsteinschätzung*): What grade do you think you should get and why? This can be done in English.

Additional comments are optional.

Sample table of contents (*Inhaltsverzeichnis*):

1. Reflektiver Aufsatz.....	3
2. Test.....	4
3. Schreiben.....	5
a. Chat.....	
b. Aufsatz.....	
4. Lesen.....	
a. Elvis.....	
b. Internet.....	
5. Hören.....	
a. Hörverständnis Arbeitsblätter.....	
b. Zusammenfassung Interview.....	
c. Zusammenfassung Midterm.....	
6. Sprechen.....	
a. Bildbeschreibungen.....	
b. Interview.....	
7. Selbsteinschätzung.....	
8. Kommentare.....	

APPENDIX H: Portfolio Assignment Schedule

GRM 201 Assignment Schedule

Week 1: May 17-21

Freizeit

	in class	homework for next class
Mo 5/17	- course introduction - assign and explain Aufsatz 1 (draft due on Thursday, final on Monday)	
Tu 5/18	- ANGEL: Berlin	- draft Aufsatz 1 due (bring 2 copies to class)
Th 5/20	- introduction "Elvis" - discuss portfolio assessment and peer review - Aufsatz 1 peer review	
Fr 5/21	- finish peer review - Elvis chapters 1-3 - discuss listening comprehension	- Elvis summary 1-3 - listening comprehension worksheet 1 - Aufsatz 1 (also turn in draft)

Week 2: May 24-28

Kommunikation

	in class	homework for next class
Mo 5/24	- Elvis skits 2, 3 - Internet activity Berlin - explain comment function for Aufsatz - review for Test 1	- review for Test 1 - outline interview questions
Tu 5/25	TEST 1 - explain Chat	- picture description 1 due
Th 5/27	- Elvis chapters 4-5 - Internet activity Kino	- Chat 1 due
Fr 5/28	class cancelled	- email Aufsatz 2 draft to instructor and peer by Sunday, noon

Week 3: May 31-June 4

	in class	homework for next class
Mo 5/31	MEMORIAL DAY no class ☺	
Tu 6/1	- Aufsatz 2 peer review - interview	- Elvis summary 4-5
Th 6/3	- review for Test 2	- review for Test 2
Fr 6/4	TEST 2 - Elvis chapters 6-7	- Aufsatz 2 (also turn in drafts)

Week 4: June 7-11
Deutschland im 21. Jahrhundert

in class		homework for next class
Mo 6/7	- Elvis skits	- interview summary due - review for midterm
Tu 6/8	ORAL MIDTERM	- email Aufsatz 3 draft to instructor and peer by Wednesday, 6 p.m. (bring in 2 copies) - Elvis summary 6-7
Th 6/10	- Aufsatz 3 peer review	
Fr 6/11	- review for Test 3 - Elvis chapters 8-9 - Internet activity Köln	- review for Test 3 - Chat 2 due

Week 5: June 14-18
Familie

in class		homework for next class
Mo 6/14	TEST 3 - Elvis	- Elvis summary chapters 7-9 - oral midterm written summary due
Tu 6/15	- Elvis skits - Aufsatz 3 peer review	- picture description 2 due - Aufsatz 3 (also turn in drafts)
Th 6/17	- Elvis	- listening comprehension worksheet 2
Fr 6/18	- review for Test 4 - e-card "Familie" (timed writing) - Internet activity Märchen - Elvis - start writing Aufsatz 4	- review for Test 4

Week 6: June 21-25
Musik

in class		homework for next class
Mo 6/21	TEST 4	- email Aufsatz 4 draft to instructor by Tuesday, 10 a.m. and bring 1 copy to class - Never ending story due
Tu 6/22	- Aufsatz 4 peer review	- Chat 3 due
Th 6/24		- picture description 3 due
Fr 6/25	- review for final and portfolio - Internet activity Musik	- Aufsatz 4 (also turn in drafts) - review for the Final Exam

Week 7: June 28-July 1

in class		homework for next class
Mo 6/28	class cancelled	work on your portfolio
Tu 6/29	LISTENING AND ORAL FINAL	
Th 7/1	portfolio interviews PORTFOLIO IS DUE BY NOON	

APPENDIX I: Explanation of Abbreviations used by the Teacher to Correct Assignments

Erklärungen für die Tests

Abkürzung	Bedeutung
art	article
case	you need a different case
conj	conjugate the verb
end	ending
German	translate the word into German
noun	capitalize nouns
prep	preposition
pron	pronoun
sp	spelling
SVA	subject verb agreement
verb	you need a different verb or conjugate the verb
WO	word order
word	word missing or you need a different word
x	something is missing here
? or crossed out	redo completely

APPENDIX J: Essay Topics

Aufsatz 1 Thema: „Ein Traumwochenende“

Sie haben ein Wochenende frei und Geld ist kein Problem. Sie können machen, was Sie wollen. Die einzigen Regeln (rules) sind: 1) Sie dürfen nicht länger als acht Stunden pro Nacht schlafen; 2) Sie dürfen nicht fernsehen. Machen Sie Pläne für ein Traumwochenende.

Keep in mind:

- please type essays double-spaced in 12 point font
- include a title (in German – not just “Aufsatz 1”)
- length: 200-250 words (please include a word count)
- use and underline 3 vocabulary words from this chapter
- grammar focus: verb forms

Aufsatz 2 Thema: „Postkarte aus East Lansing“

Sie hatten Besuch von einem Freund/einer Freundin und Sie haben ihm/ihr Ihre Stadt (East Lansing) gezeigt. Nun ist er/sie wieder weg. Schreiben Sie eine Postkarte an Ihre Eltern und beschreiben Sie, was Sie gesehen und gemacht haben.

Keep in mind:

- please type essays double-spaced in 12 point font
- include a title (in German – not just “Aufsatz 2”)
- length: 200-250 words (please include a word count)
- use and underline 3 vocabulary words from this chapter
- grammar focus: past tense

Aufsatz 3 Thema: „Urlaub in Europa“

Stellen Sie sich vor, Sie sind für 3 Wochen in Europa. Welche Länder besuchen Sie? In welcher Reihenfolge? Welche Sehenswürdigkeiten sehen Sie sich an? Mit welchen Verkehrsmitteln reisen Sie? Beschreiben Sie, wie Sie die 3 Wochen verbringen. Verbinden Sie die Sätze mit Adverbien wie **daher, dann, erst, später, zuerst** und mit Konjunktionen wie **aber, als, bevor, da, damit, dass, denn, nachdem, obgleich, sobald, während, weil und wenn**.

Keep in mind:

- please type essays double-spaced in 12 point font
- include a title (in German – not just “Aufsatz 3”)
- length: 250-300 words (please include a word count)
- use and underline 3 vocabulary words from this chapter
- grammar focus: word order: time, manner, place

Aufsatz 4 Thema: „Märchen“

Schreiben Sie ein neues Märchen. Die Märchenmotive auf Seite 101 können Ihnen dabei helfen. Seien Sie kreativ! Wenn Sie wollen, können Sie auch Illustrationen zu Ihrem Märchen machen.

Keep in mind:

- please type essays double-spaced in 12 point font
- include a title (in German – not just “Aufsatz 4”)
- length: 300-350 words (please include a word count)
- use and underline 3 vocabulary words from this chapter
- grammar focus: nominative and accusative cases
- you can choose a tense (remember to be consistent)

APPENDIX K: Peer Feedback Form

Peer Feedback Form

Feedback Geber (dein Name): _____

Autor des Aufsatzes (Name des Partners): _____

Datum: _____

Lies den Aufsatz deines Partners und beantworte die folgenden Fragen. Konzentriere dich auf die Hauptideen und NICHT die Grammatik, außer die Grammatik macht es schwer, den Aufsatz zu verstehen.

1. Hat der Aufsatz einen spezifischen Titel? Was ist der Titel?
2. Behandelt der Aufsatz das Thema? _____ Wenn nicht, spezifiziere wo.
3. Hat der Aufsatz eine Einleitung, einen Hauptteil und ein Ende? Spezifiziere diese Elemente.
4. Ist der Aufbau des Aufsatzes logisch? Erkläre warum/warum nicht.
5. Ist der Aufsatz interessant zu lesen? _____ Warum/warum nicht? Wenn nicht, hast du Ideen für den Autor, wie er/sie den Aufsatz interessanter gestalten könnte?
6. In welche Hauptideen ist der Aufsatz geteilt? Überschneiden sich diese Ideen? Wenn ja, erkläre warum.
7. Verwendet der Autor Beispiele?
8. Sind irgendwelche Sätze konfus oder unklar? Wenn ja, erkläre warum.
9. Verwendet der Autor Haupt- und Nebensätze? Gib Beispiele.
10. Sind irgendwelche Wörter oder Ideen unklar?
11. Verwendet der Autor verschiedene Vokabeln oder wiederholt er/sie sich oft?
12. Sind alle Substantive groß geschrieben?
13. Verwendet der Autor Konjunktionen und Überleitungsworte? Gib Beispiele.
14. Hat jeder Satz ein Verb?
15. Verwendet der Autor die richtigen Verbformen? Gib Beispiele wenn nicht.
16. Hast du andere Kommentare, Fragen oder Vorschläge die deinem Partner beim Revidieren des Aufsatzes helfen?

APPENDIX L: Internet Activity

Name: _____

Ein Besuch in Köln

Internetaktivität

Bitte öffnen Sie die Seite <http://www.koeln.de>. Klicken Sie links auf „Guide“ und dann auf „Gastronomie“. Klicken Sie dann auf „Biergärten in Köln“.

Sie treffen Helmut, Bea und Alfred in Köln und möchten zusammen am Samstag (12.Juni) in einen Biergarten zum Abendessen gehen. Diskutieren Sie mit Ihrem Partner **auf Deutsch** in welchen Biergarten in der **Stadtmitte** Sie gehen wollen. Beantworten Sie die folgenden Fragen.

1. Name des Partners: _____
2. In welchen Biergarten in der Stadtmitte gehen Sie?

3. Warum haben Sie diesen Biergarten gewählt?

4. Wann ist der Biergarten geöffnet und welches Publikum finden Sie dort? Wie viele Leute können in diesen Biergarten gehen?

5. Was essen und trinken Sie, Ihr Partner und Helmut, Bea und Alfred und wie teuer wird Ihre Rechnung?

6. Sie wollen am Samstag (12.06.2004) um 18 Uhr mit dem Bus vom Dom zum Biergarten fahren. Welche Busverbindungen gibt es? Wie lange dauert die Fahrt, wie oft müssen Sie umsteigen und welche Preisstufe ist die Fahrt?

7. Nach dem Abendessen wollen Sie in einen Club in Köln gehen. Klicken Sie links auf „Kultur und Szene“. Klicken Sie unten rechts auf der Seite auf „Clubs“. In welchen Club gehen Sie?

8. Warum haben Sie diesen Club gewählt?

9. Wann öffnet der Club und was wird geboten (*what is offered*)? Welche Musik wird gespielt? Welche Attraktionen gibt es? Wie teuer ist der Eintritt?

APPENDIX M: Picture Description Tasks

Story 1 tells the story of two children, who are preparing a picnic basket in the kitchen. While their mother shows them a map, the puppy hops into the basket. The children leave and as they sit down on top of a hill to eat their sandwiches, the puppy jumps out of the empty basket.

Story 2 tells the story of a dinner party. Two men are talking on the phone and one invites the other to dinner. The hosts prepare the meal, fish, and while setting the table, the cat is hiding underneath the table. The hosts get dressed and the guests arrive. In the dining room, they notice that the fish is gone. The man rushes to a pizza delivery and the two couples enjoy their dinner while the cat is licking its paws.

Story 3 tells the story of a man who looks at his rather big belly in a mirror. He is studying a book on how to get in shape by jogging. While running outside, people laugh at him, he trips over a dog leash, falls and hurts his knee and is bitten by the dog. On his way home it starts to rain and by the time he is back home, he is completely soaked and hurt and the book is in the trash.

APPENDIX N: Listening Comprehension Worksheet

Hörverständnis 1 – „Paradebeispiel“

Dieser Text ist aus der deutschen Zeitung „Die Zeit“ (äquivalent zu „New York Times“). Harald Martenstein spricht über aktuelle Themen.

Höre den Text einmal an. Dann lies die Aufgaben. Höre den Text noch mal an und beantworte die Fragen. Bitte höre den Text nicht mehr als vier (4) Mal an.

Es ist nicht so wichtig, dass du *alles* perfekt verstehst. Die Hauptideen sind wichtig!

Hier sind einige wichtige Vokabeln aus dem Text in chronologischer Reihenfolge (von links nach rechts):

verlaufen - to go; to proceed	Umzug - parade; procession
Geschlechtsverkehr ausüben - to have sex	Wehret den Anfängen! - Resist the beginnings!
Faschismuserwarnung - warning about fascism	durch und durch - thoroughly
ekelig - disgusting	Verharmlosung - belittlement
vorwerfen - to accuse of	Ausläufer - descendant
Hippie Bewegung - hippie movement	Beweis - proof
Schmetterling - butterfly	Motte - moth
Fruchtfliege - gnats	scherzen - to joke about
schweigend - silent	ernst nehmen - to take seriously
die dunkelsten Kapitel - the darkest chapter	ohrfeigen - to slap someone in the face
übel - bad	beschimpfen - to insult
mit den Achseln zucken - to shrug	zwinkern - to wink
Lokal - restaurant	Kellner - waiter
absagen - to call off	auskommen - to manage; to get by
die Zinnen - battlements	lobpreisen - to praise

1. Was ist das Thema des Artikels?

2. Was ist das Datum der Ausgabe?

3. Was passiert in diesen Monaten?

- | | |
|--------------|---------------------------|
| a. Februar | 1. Christopher Street Day |
| b. Mai | 2. Marathon |
| c. Juni | 3. Halbmarathon |
| d. Juli | 4. Karnevalsumzug |
| e. September | 5. Love Parade |
| | 6. Karneval der Kulturen |

4. Wo schaut sich Harald Martenstein die Paraden an?

5. Warum nimmt er sein Kind nicht mehr mit? (Was gefällt ihm nicht an der Parade?)

6. Wie beschreibt Harald Martenstein die Parade? Schreibe mindestens fünf (5) Adjektive auf.

7. Wann wird Kritik in Deutschland ernst genommen?

- a. Wenn man Leute ohrfeigt.
- b. Wenn man Scherze macht.
- c. Wenn man von Nazis spricht.
- d. Wenn man zu viel trinkt.

8. Wohin soll die Parade nach der Meinung von Harald Martenstein gehen?

APPENDIX O: Grading Scale for Speaking Assignments

40%	Content/ Comprehension	15%	Pronunciation (sounds, intonation, stress)	15%	Vocabulary	15%	Fluency (frequency and nature of pauses)	15%	Grammar (basic structures and forms)
20	Covers all requirements No irrelevant information Logical development Substantive and detailed (many examples) Interesting Responds always appropriately	20	Accurate pronunciation of most words Almost no detectable English accent Accurate intonation and stress No major errors that interfere with comprehension	20	Accurate usage Sophisticated vocabulary Excellent choice of words with no errors Excellent range of vocabulary No English terms	20	Slight hesitation Self-correction/rephrasing Mostly natural pauses Excellent connection between sentences	20	No major errors in word order No major errors in morphology (SVA and tenses) Sentence variety including complex structures Inclusion of transition words and conjunctions No major errors that interfere with comprehension
17	Covers most requirements Almost always on topic Almost no irrelevant information Logical development Fairly substantive and detailed (some examples) Somewhat interesting Responds mostly appropriately	17	Mostly accurate pronunciation of most words Slightly detectable English accent Somewhat accurate intonation and stress Occasional errors that interfere with comprehension	17	Mostly accurate usage Somewhat sophisticated vocabulary Good choice of words with some errors that don't obscure meaning Adequate range of vocabulary but some repetition Barely any English terms	17	More frequent and inappropriate pauses No significant breakdown of speech/communication Some self-correction/rephrasing Good connections between sentences	17	Occasional errors in word order Occasional errors in morphology Sentence variety including some complex structures Some use of transition words and conjunctions Occasional errors that interfere with comprehension
15	Covers some requirements Some irrelevant information Some development Not much substance or detail (few examples) Somewhat uninteresting Responds often inappropriately	15	Frequent pronunciation errors Detectable English accent Frequent errors in intonation and stress Some errors that interfere with comprehension	15	Frequent errors Unsophisticated vocabulary Limited word choice with some errors obscuring meaning Repetitive choice of words Some English terms	15	Many pauses No effective communication Use of English interferes Barely any self-correction/rephrasing Some disjointed connections between sentences	15	Errors in word order Errors in morphology Little sentence variety with minimal use of complex structures Little use of transition words and conjunctions Some errors that interfere with comprehension
13	Covers almost none of the requirements Substantial amount of irrelevant information No development No substance or details (no examples) Completely uninteresting Responds mostly inappropriately	13	Substantial pronunciation errors Strong English accent Substantial errors in intonation and stress Frequent errors that interfere with comprehension	13	Substantial errors Very simple vocabulary Severe errors in word choice that often obscure meaning No variety in word choice Many English terms	13	Lengthy pauses Complete speech/communication breakdown Use of English interferes significantly No self-correction/rephrasing Disjointed connections between sentences	13	Serious errors in word order Serious errors in morphology No sentence variety with no complex structures No use of transition words and conjunctions Frequent errors that interfere with comprehension
0		0		0		0		0	

APPENDIX P: Grading Scale for Writing Assignments

35%	Content	35%	Language Use	10%	Vocabulary	5%	Mechanics	15%	Feedback
20	No irrelevant information Logical development Substantive and detailed (many examples) Interesting	20	Excellent use of transition words and conjunctions Excellent connections between sentences No major errors in word order Frequent use of complex structures Excellent sentence variety	20	Sophisticated vocabulary Excellent choice of words with no errors Excellent range of vocabulary Inclusion of required vocabulary No English terms	20	Appropriate layout No spelling errors No punctuation errors No capitalization errors Minimum word count	20	Implementation of all suggestions by the teacher Evidence of implementation of peer feedback Excellent and adequate provision of peer feedback
17		17	No major errors in morphology (SVA and tenses) No errors that interfere with comprehension	17		17		17	
16	Almost no irrelevant information Logical development Fairly substantive and detailed (some examples) Somewhat interesting	16	Good use of transition words and conjunctions Good connections between sentences Occasional errors in word order Frequent use of complex structures Good sentence variety	16	Somewhat sophisticated vocabulary Good choice of words with some errors that don't obscure meaning Adequate range of vocabulary but some repetition Inclusion of required vocabulary Barely any English terms	16	Appropriate layout No more than a few spelling errors in less frequent vocabulary No more than a few punctuation errors No more than a few capitalization errors Slightly below minimum word count (10%)	16	Implementation of most suggestions by the teacher Evidence of implementation of peer feedback Good and adequate provision of peer feedback
15		15	Occasional errors in morphology Almost no errors that interfere with comprehension	15		15		15	
14	Some irrelevant information Some development Not much substance or detail (few examples) Somewhat uninteresting	14	Occasional use of transition words and conjunctions Some disjointed connections between sentences Errors in word order Minimal use of complex structures Little sentence variety	14	Unsophisticated vocabulary Limited word choice with some errors obscuring meaning Repetitive choice of words Inclusion of some of the required vocabulary Some English terms	14	Mostly appropriate layout Some spelling errors in less and more frequent vocabulary Some punctuation errors Some capitalization errors Below minimum word count (25%)	14	Implementation of some suggestions by the teacher Some evidence of implementation of peer feedback Few and some inadequate provisions of peer feedback
13		13	Errors in morphology Some errors that interfere with comprehension	13		13		13	
12	Substantial amount of irrelevant information No development No substance or details (no examples) Completely uninteresting	12	No use of transition words and conjunctions Disjointed connections between sentences Serious errors in word order Almost no attempt at complex structures No sentence variety Serious errors in morphology Frequent errors that interfere with comprehension	12	Very simple vocabulary Severe errors in word choice that often obscure meaning No variety in word choice No inclusion of required vocabulary Many English terms	12	No attempt to arrange essay appropriately Several spelling errors even in frequent vocabulary Many punctuation errors Many capitalization errors Far below minimum word count (40%)	12	No implementation of suggestions by the teacher No evidence of implementation of peer feedback No provision of peer feedback
0		0		0		0		0	

APPENDIX Q: Students' Responses from the Reflective Essays

This appendix contains students' comments taken from the reflective essays, organized by language skill and by general comments on the portfolio process. They are direct quotes from the students' portfolios; everything was retained exactly as presented in the reflective essay but grouped together by area. Not all students commented on all areas. Student 7 did not turn in a portfolio.

Writing

Student 1: I feel I received great feedback from [my peer] when she corrected my essay. Not only did she fill out the feedback sheet but she made numerous and detailed corrections on the essay as well. I felt that peer review was a very useful tool in correcting our essays because it gave you a chance to learn more of the language because you were assessing the knowledge that others had gained up [to] that point, which is usually very different from person to person. It also gave us a chance to compare what we were correcting and what you [addressing the teacher] were correcting so we could see if we were on the write [sic] track with our writing skills. My writing has improved a bit due to the weekly essays, which I feel were very useful.

Student 2: The Aufsatz assignments I found to be very difficult.

Student 3: Peer review was helpful. My partners gave excellent feedback and their input on the Aufsätzen gave me a broader knowledge of writing. They were able to point out common mistakes that I made and express an alternate point of view on how to fix those mistakes. In some cases, they even told me how they overcame similar problems, and that allowed me insight to fix the complications I have myself. Reviewing others Aufsätzen was also helpful. Reviewing others showed me common mistakes that other people make and creative things they do, such as alternate vocabulary and sentence structure. ... Something that was more fun than about all other things in this class was the chats. It is comprised of a wide range of topics and shows how broad my skills are thanks to this class. I made a lot of progress due to the Aufsätzen. I had never written that much, but nothing helps more than just working on it and practicing. The Aufsätzen were the most helpful part of the class.

Student 4: I enjoyed the peer review. By reading the work of others, it allows you to be able to check if you are on track with the progress of the rest of the class and in the process you can learn from their errors and pick up some tips for writing in German. While the worksheets to go along were a nuisance at times, I feel they are necessary to keep the reader on track. ... Through the Aufsatz I have improved my writing abilities. At first I would think of a sentence in English and then struggle to translate it to German. Now, I write everything out in German and I am constantly spending less time looking up the correct words.

Student 5: My perception of the peer review is that I got more out of reviewing other's essays than I did out of having my essay reviewed by my peers. Feedback from the instructor was more useful. I got quite a bit out of giving reviews to others. It provided me with useful examples of how others write and use German to express their ideas. I could see in classmates' writing structures what things and ideas I might want to try using. Reviewing and editing classmates' essays also motivated me to think about grammar and broadened my vocabulary in new and interesting ways. ... Some of my efforts [in writing] failed at first, but I usually learned from my mistakes and am progressing in my abilities. ... Writing in German is still a challenge, but I can produce more sentences with fewer mistakes and with more variety than I thought was possible at the beginning of the course. ... The chat corrections seemed very redundant. Overkill.

Student 6: I would much prefer editing or corrections from the instructor. I can see that peer review may improve our skills in German, but I also think it is difficult to receive useful feedback from a fellow student at the same level as myself.

Student 8: Editing and correcting is one method through which I found myself greatly improving my German competency and I believe the portfolio would have been a more effective assignment had

students been required to do so more. ... I also found it oftentimes difficult to work with peers on essay review. I believe that it was, in general, more of a hassle than anything else. There was little valuable feedback to be given. Peer are often no more competent in a language than you are and are not able to identify complex grammar and vocabulary mistakes. The only positive aspect of peer review that I can find is that it does in fact force students to read and decipher German. ... My writing and reading abilities are much higher due to a better understanding of grammar and a larger vocabulary.

Student 9: The peer review, in my opinion, was relatively unhelpful (I guess it depends on who replies too). I corrected all the mistakes [in my chat and test] and most importantly understood them. They say you learn from your mistakes...I agree.

Student 10: I felt that I have most improved on my writing ability. I feel that the peer feedback and feedback from the instructor is the basis, especially with writing assignments, of understand ones mistakes, and being able to catch what you might not while reading over your own draft. I found that I received a much higher mark if I had better feedback from my peers instead of correcting it by myself.

Student 11: Doubtlessly, some of the credit for my improvement [in writing] is due to my peer's review of my work. Although the formal review of my peers seemed less helpful than the review given by my instructor, I wish I had taken more advantage of it.

Reading

Student 1: My reading has not improved much, mostly because of the lack of new material covered, such as grammar.

Student 3: The thing I have the hardest time with is vocabulary. Just reading more and more helps me to put words into different contexts which allows me to remember them better. ... Elvis was fun to read. As with the Aufsätzen, the best way to learn a skill is just by practicing it. My reading skills have vastly improved thanks to Elvis. I was introduced to many different styles in the text and I was able to implement them into my writing. [The Internet activities] just added to the amount of practice I was able to have reading. But one more aspect of the Internet activities was to learn some more about German culture.

Student 4: The Internet activities were a very interesting and demanding assignment. I liked this assignment because it has real world application. ... My reading has improved as well. I have learned the skill of relaxing and just understanding the main idea instead of worrying over what every single word means. I now read straight through the first time and the go back to clarify sentences and words I did [not] understand. I am no longer overwhelmed about reading selections in German as I was before the class started.

Student 5: My reading skills improved.

Student 6: I could see improvement in my reading skills towards the end of class. I was not just reading word after word, but getting a better idea of when to change the inflection of my voice, thus developing a better understanding of the German language.

Student 8: My writing and reading abilities are much higher due to a better understanding of grammar and a larger vocabulary.

Student 9: Since I have a visual memory, reading really helped me.

Speaking

Student 1: I guess I feel I have improved in speaking quite a bit because we spoke mostly in German during class and in Kaffeestunden.

Student 3: Speaking practice is very important. The picture descriptions were the most difficult assignments of the semester. Had we had more listening practice we would have been able to speak better.

Student 4: When reading over the chat to make my corrections, I realized that I could actually talk about relevant stuff in German. ... Reading aloud in class was definitely positive because it allowed for the speaker to practice pronouncing familiar and unfamiliar words in the presence of someone who knows how to correctly pronounce them. I was confident going into my final oral examination.

Student 5: My speaking skills improved. Even when I am unsure about content (which is less and less with every day), the words are fun to say. ... My speaking skills are 100% better.

Student 8: I feel that my speaking and listening competencies are stagnant due to the lack of focus this semester on these aspects of the language, save a few assignments.

Student 9: My speaking ability seems much better and that helps me in all other areas.

Student 10: I personally feel that my speaking abilities have improved ten-fold since I began this class. I feel more confident with the language and am able to come up with words instantly, or at least better than before. I feel I've improved more in this subject than in listening or reading.

Listening

Student 1: I myself am terrible at listening to German. ... My listening has improved a bit but I feel it is still sub par.

Student 2: The listening comprehension I also found very difficult since the speakers, being native, spoke very quickly and for me at least sounded like the mumbled.

Student 3: All the listening assignments were hard. I am not used to hearing native speakers talk. ... Overall there was not enough listening practice. ... I did improve here as well, but I did not get as much practice here as in other areas.

Student 4: In listening, I had improved more than I hoped. It is becoming significantly easier for me to understand tapes of German speakers for class assignments.

Student 5: The biggest gain I have made is in my listening skills. I feel much more confident about my ability to understand the general theme of things that are being spoken about, and also that the speed of the conversation does not bother or impede my understanding like it did seven weeks ago. ... My listening skills are 100% better.

Student 6: I was surprised at my listening comprehension skills; I thought them to be much worse than what they actually are.

Student 8: I feel that my speaking and listening competencies are stagnant due to the lack of focus this semester on these aspects of the language, save a few assignments.

Student 10: I'm still uncomfortable answering questions based on listening to a sample or being in conversation.

Portfolio Process

Student 1: A more useful grading tool than the traditional assessment of exam and homework grades. The fact that the instructor can see the differences in each student's learning ability and tailor a grading scale to them makes a lot of sense, although it is not at all practical and leaves itself wide open to criticism. The human factor becomes real issue with this sort of assessment. But I think that the obvious advantage of being able to adjust the weight of certain assignments based on the ability of the class, or even certain students, is overwhelming. ... Another positive of the portfolio assessment is the fact that we are being graded on how much we have improved over the course of the session, rather than how much we knew coming into the class. ... Portfolios level the playing field considerably and make it so that one student's ability is not arbitrarily compared to another's, regardless of ability. This makes grading much fairer in my opinion. ... [The exam included in the portfolio] was a good indication of how much I had learned in class, but it was also a good indicator of how much more I had to learn. Now that [several of my stupid mistakes] have been brought to my attention I am hopefully less likely to make errors like that in the future. ... Unfortunately, I feel that I did not improve much over the past seven weeks, due to the content we covered, not because of instruction. ... The use of portfolio assessment is a great tool to employ for grading in foreign language classes.

Student 2: Going over the mistakes I made [in the exams] and correcting them helped a great deal since I saw the little stupid errors I made that were totally avoidable. ... [The teacher] made the class fun and interesting my not becoming overly arrogant with the material, looking down on the class for not meeting some higher level of expectation. This made the class experience more rewarding since one felt comfortable to make a mistake and hence learn from it in a kind manner rather out of fear from receiving insults.

Student 3: This is the first portfolio that I have done. It was good to go back through all my assignments and look them over. ... The corrections at the start of the semester were difficult, but now after I have put in this work, corrections are much easier and I am creating these works much faster. ... Overall it was helpful to review the assignments I did over the course of the semester. Also by doing these corrections I was able to see many errors that I often make, and now by recognizing them I should be able to stray away from them. The portfolio was a helpful assignment.

Student 4: While selecting different works and finding the predetermined ones, I took the time to look over everything I have done this semester. The amount of work I have done is amazing and I am pleased by the progress. Another, unexpected, aspect of the portfolio is that I actually took the time to look back over things I did not understand that first time around. ... Throughout working on the portfolio I have learned from many of my mistakes. I have also taken the time to look up why I did something incorrect and learn how to do it right for future reference.

Student 5: Assembling a portfolio provides a useful structure within which one can begin to process and track the kinds of development that an individual has made in an area. This is a very useful process for the study of language, and is even more so for the study of a second language such as German. The portfolio does many things, but the most useful aspect of portfolio assessment is to create an awareness of where you are in the learning process. By assembling this portfolio, I was able to see step by step the areas that I made progress in. I was able to take pride in a few of the things that I can do with more proficiency, recognize the areas that I need to gain a better grasp of, and identify some techniques that I can strengthen in order to drastically improve my German skills. One of the shortcomings of the traditional assessment process is that the student rarely gets the opportunity to demonstrate fully the progress they are making. A traditional exam assessment approach places a large emphasis on timing. The traditional approach does not adequately show improvement over time. With a portfolio assessment process, the student can keep working on the skill sets until they get them right and this makes the learning process a continuous process that produces better results in the long run. This is an advantage to the portfolio system. It allows students to take a few risks, fail, try again, and improve. With the portfolio assessment I felt that I was building my skill one piece at a time. People learn at different rates, and the portfolio system allows each student to build their skills without being penalized for poor timing. I know from my own experiences with this class and this portfolio, that I gained much more from methodically

correcting myself in a continuous way, than I did from the hurried pace set by the exam schedule. Other advantages of the portfolio approach include developing organizational skills, building thematic relationships, and broadening topical exposures. The things that are appealing about the traditional method of assessment (an exam based model) are that it takes less work to quantify (a benefit for the instructor) and that the judgment of the results are immediate (less work for the student). The portfolio process helped build my confidence and through repetition, strengthened my basic skills in writing, reading, and comprehension of written material (reading) and oral material (listening). ... I selected the pieces I did to correct the mistakes that I made and have the opportunity to try again. In order to demonstrate that I can do some of the exercises better than I did the first time. This orientation to any given project is useful. It is a continuous improvement approach, and one that is enhanced by the portfolio assessment model. The second reason is to show any improvement made over the course of seven weeks. By comparing the original draft or assignment with any corrected version, I can see areas that need further study and also by comparing the corrected version with the original, I can see (sometimes) the degree of improvement in that area.. An example of one portfolio piece that really helped me practice and learn to develop my German skills is the correction of the exam. ... I am glad that I put the effort in [the portfolio assignment] because I have noticed improvement in my listening, reading, and speaking skills.

Student 6: The portfolio assignment is a great way to document each individual's own progression as opposed to creating one standard, ole-fashioned way of grading, which is not in tune with the individual. While it is difficult to meet the different learning needs of every one person, putting together a portfolio takes into account the individual's own learning pace and learning styles by comparing their own work with their own, not grading it against other people's. ... Since I kept [my assignments] I was able to compare my work from early in the class all the way through the end, which was nice.

Student 8: I found that through portfolio development my understanding, fluency, and competence of German have greatly improved. Portfolio assessments give students an opportunity to showcase their best work. I believe that it affords students a fairer evaluation of their foreign language abilities by visualizing their progress. For this particular portfolio, though, I felt that much of the learning that generally comprises this type of assignment was absent due to the lack of re-editing requirements. I believe that much more learning could have been fostered had students been forced to correct the mistakes in *all* of their non-spoken assignments. Editing and correcting is one method through which I found myself greatly improving my German competency. While I felt comfortable with the pieces I was allowed to choose, I was not confident in the quality of the predetermined assignments, especially in the case of the speaking assignments. Predetermined requirements force students to include work that does not necessarily illustrate their best abilities. I feel that in a class designed like German 201, where reading and writing are focused on much more than speaking and listening, the percentage value of these required speaking/listening pieces was far too high.

Student 9: In some ways I have my doubts about this method and on the other hand I have faith that it works. The fact that a portfolio would allow students to select the very best of their works and submit them at their final, might not reflect on how they did over the course of their whole semester [because] in reality it is only a collection of their best works. For instance the portfolio might not calculate how much the student participated during class or whether or not he/she understood everything. By showing a student's best capabilities in a way still remains fair, since the teacher still has the ability to compare and contrast every student in class. A portfolio is in some ways similar to a standard test system, in that it can compare the strengths and weaknesses of students.

Student 10: Working on and seeing the progress I've made this semester has made me more confident in my work. [The portfolio] enables the instructor to test on something other than a particular memorization criteria. ... Overall, I enjoyed creating a portfolio. It helped me with my German confidence for the most part. It also helped me look at what progress I actually did make in the class besides just memorizing each chapter.

APPENDIX R: Sample Teacher Feedback and Assessment of an Essay

First Draft including Teacher's Feedback and Comments

Aufsatz 2: Wir machte ein Picknick
Thema: Postkarte aus East Lansing
2004-05-30

Comment: SVA

Hallo Eltern,

Letze Woche hatte Monika besuchten. Ich habe ihr Ihre Stadt gezeigt.
Ich fragte Monika was sie mochte gemacht. Sie sagt dass zum Grand
Ledge Sandstein Leiste liessen wir fahren.
Da der „Ledges“ könnten wir Wandern und ein Picknick machen.
Fuhren wir da. Das Sonne scheinte und das Wetter war sehr schön.
Gingen wir weiter der Weg. Monika brachste sich die Kamera und
wollte das malerisch Gestein fotografierten.
Wir sprachen, lachten, und reichte die Blumen an.
Es war sehr schön.

Bis später

Sehr gut. Du hast alle wichtigen Elemente in der Postkarte. Deine Struktur ist gut.

Kannst du bitte etwas mehr schreiben? Zwischen 200-250 Wörter? Schreibe mehr über Sehenswürdigkeiten die du und Monika besucht haben oder andere Attraktionen. Was habt ihr beim Picknick gegessen? Was habt ihr in Grand Ledge gesehen?

Die Satzstruktur im Deutschen ist: Subjekt + Verb + Objekt, z.B. Wir gingen weiter.

Comment: sp

Comment: missing pronoun

Comment: verb form

Comment:

you showed her her city?

Comment: WO and sp and verb form

Comment: verb form

Comment: wrong verb

Comment: WO

Comment: missing prep

Comment: WO

Comment: art

Comment: WO

Comment: case

Comment: verb form

Comment: bringen is not reflexive

Comment: end

Comment: verb form

Comment: sp

Comment: case

Comment: WO

Final Draft

Aufsatz 2: Wir machte ein Picknick
Thema: Postkarte aus East Lansing
WC: 129

Hallo Eltern,

Letze Woche hatte Monika besuchten. Ich habe ihr Ihre Stadt gezeigt. Ich fragte Monika was sie mochte gemacht. Sie sagt dass zum Grand Ledge Sandstein Leiste liessen wir fahren.

Da der „Ledges“ könnten wir Wandern und ein Picknick machen. Fuhren wir da. Das Sonne scheinte und das Wetter war sehr schön.

Gingen wir weiter der Weg. Biem Fluss sind wir gewandert. über der Weg ist eine Brücke für einem Zug. An dieser Tag hatte drei Zug queren. Monika hat sich die Kamera mitgebracht und wollte das malerisch Gestein fotografierten. Es hat sie mehr als fünfzig Fotos gemacht! Ich habe nicht so viel gemacht, aber ich habe eins oder drei um Monika genommen.

Wir sprachen, lachten, und reichte die Blumen an.

Es war sehr schön.

Bis später

Assessment

Aufsatz 2

“Postkarte aus East Lansing”

Content:

Your essay contains no irrelevant information and is developed in a logical way. It is interesting to read but you could have included some more details.

18/20

Language Use:

Your essay flows nicely and the coherence between the sentences is good. You barely used any transition words or conjunctions though. It would add to your sentence variety to use these words, and it would also make the essay more interesting to read. You used many very short sentences this time. Make them a little more complex by combining them with conjunctions.

There are occasional errors in word order. Make sure that the conjugated verb always is in second place, e.g. *Wir gingen* weiter. In a subordinate clause, the modal verb will always be last, e.g. *Ich fragte sie, was sie machen möchte*.

Make sure all verbs agree with the subject in case, number, and gender. Also, remember to put the direct object in the accusative case and watch for case after prepositions (dative vs. accusative).

Sometimes, you are inconsistent in the use of tenses. You switch between the various past tense forms and you also had some present tense forms. Make sure to stick to one.

There are no errors that interfere with comprehension.

15/20

Vocabulary:

Your choice and range of words are good with very few errors. You don't repeatedly use the same words and there are no English terms. Sometimes, you use inappropriate words, e.g., *Ich habe ein Foto von Monika genommen* (I took a picture of Monika); it should be *Ich habe ein Foto von Monika gemacht*.

You included and marked the required words of the chapter.

17/20

Mechanics:

Your layout is appropriate. Please indent paragraphs. There are no punctuation or capitalization errors but some spelling errors. If you can find a German spell checker online it would get rid of these errors. The length of your essay is below the minimum word count.

17/20

Feedback:

I was unable to assess how you provided feedback and implemented your peer's feedback since you didn't give or receive feedback. I will not take off points for this on this essay (that's why the feedback is worth 5%; I added 5% to Language Use and 5% to Vocabulary). You added a few more details in your final essay but you didn't implement any of my other suggestions, thus there was not much of a change from first to final draft.

5/20

Grade:

Content	35%	18	31.5%	
Language Use	40%	15	30%	
Vocabulary	15%	17	12.75%	79.75%
Mechanics	5%	17	4.25%	
Feedback	5%	5	1.25%	

APPENDIX S: Class and Homework Schedule for Days of Classroom Observations

Week 2: May 24-28

Kommunikation

	in class	homework for next class
Tu 5/25	TEST 1 - Einstieg in das Thema (32) - Gedankenaustausch (32-33) - Vor dem Lesen (35) - Wortkasten (38) - "Ständig unter Strom" (36) - explain Chat	- picture description 1 due - Aktivität E (37) - read Grammatik 1-8 (258-264) - Aktivität B, C (260, 262) - read Vermischtes (40) - read Vor dem Lesen (41) - read "Gewalt im Fernsehen" (40) - read Wortschatzübungen (43)
Th 5/27	- grammar presentation - Elvis chapters 4-5 - discuss "Gewalt im Fernsehen" (4) - Aktivität I-L (42-43) - Internet activity Kino	- Chat 1 due - Aktivität M, O (44) - read "Barbara Honigmann" (47-48) - Zum Thema (48) - read Grammatik 9-16 (264-270) - Aktivität G, I (266, 268)

Week 6: June 21-25

Musik

	in class	homework for next class
Mo 6/21	TEST 4	- email Aufsatz 4 draft to instructor by Tuesday, 10 a.m. and bring 1 copy to class - Never ending story due - read "Einstieg in das Thema" (108) and summarize
Tu 6/22	- discuss "Einstieg in das Thema" (108) - Gedankenaustausch (109) - Wortschatzübungen (118) - "Clara Schumann" (110-111) - Zum Text A, B (111-112) - Aufsatz 4 peer review	- Aktivität H, J (119) - read Vermischtes (112) - read Grammatik 1-9 (304-306) - Aktivität A, C (306-307) - read "Vor dem Lesen" (112) - Chat 3 due

APPENDIX T: Sample Assessment of a Portfolio

SPEAKING

15% (5% grade, 10% progress) 87.8% (grade: 87.5, progress: 88%)

Picture Descriptions: 85%

PD1 "Einladung":

You included many details in your picture description. Most of the words were pronounced accurately. The only word that you didn't pronounce correctly was *Information*. There is no sch-sound in this word, the -tion at the end is pronounced more like -tsion. Also, keep in mind that German doesn't have a silent -e (*die Krawatte*). Your pronunciation is very good. Your stress and intonation were accurate and there were no major errors that interfered with comprehension. Your description flowed nicely and there wasn't much hesitation.

Your use of words was also accurate and the choice and range of words was good. You didn't use any English (besides saying that you couldn't remember certain words).

Your grammar was good and most of your endings were accurate. Great job! You need to pay attention to verb conjugation (e.g., *er trage* should be *er trägt* or *er schriebe* should be *er schreibt*). Also, pay attention to prepositions. At 8 o'clock translates to *um 8 Uhr*.

You only described picture 1. That was rather confusing. Also, you said once *Herr Schmidt ruft Frau Meyer an*. I assume that was a slip of tongue since you referred to Herr Meyer later as *Herr Meyer*. ☺
16/20

PD2 "Joggen":

This description flowed nicely but once again, you didn't describe all pictures. It seems as if you described picture 1, followed by 3, followed by 2. The vocabulary you used was good. You didn't use any English terms.

Make sure that every noun is preceded by an article and that the article agrees with the noun in case, gender, and number. Also, pay attention to case following prepositions. Your subject-verb-agreement was good.

You used many times the word *so* at the beginning of sentences. That's very English. In German, you would use *also* instead.

Unfortunately, the recording stopped in the middle of a sentence.

17/20

PD 3" Ausflug":

This description was very detailed and the vocabulary you used was great. It was very creative to implement direct speech. You didn't use many English terms. *Sandwiches* is OK to use in German. The German expression would be *belegte Brote*. The German words for butter, jam, and knife are *die Butter*, *die Marmelade*, and *das Messer*. Also, once you corrected yourself when you used English. Very good. Why do you always only describe the first picture though?

In this description, you corrected your grammar. Very good. You seem to be more aware of grammar now. You had some repetitive agreement errors (*die Kinder* is plural). Make sure to put the direct object of a sentence in the accusative case. Also, you had some verb conjugation errors.

18/20

Interview with native speaker: 90%

You covered all the requirements and your interview flowed nicely. You added a nice introduction and end to the interview. You hesitated when reading your questions and there is a detectable English accent in your pronunciation (e.g., von, unterschiedlich, Prozent) but you tried to correct yourself/repeated the word in question when mispronouncing something. Sehr gut! Apart from the hesitation, your intonation and stress were accurate.

There were no errors that interfered with comprehension and you asked the native speaker to repeat what he had said when you didn't understand something.

You were able to make general statements (e.g., about the native speaker's ability to speak English) and you were able to repeat a question when the native speaker asked you to. You reacted to all his statements in German. Sehr gut.

Your range and choice of words was accurate. Also, you went beyond the mere asking of your five questions; you asked additional extended questions to clarify a point, however, sometimes with errors in word order and some hesitation. You were able to converse with him. Sehr gut!
You had some problems with word order and word endings (cases).

Progress: 88%

You improved steadily from picture description one to description three. You had fewer problems with fluency and grammar and your range of vocabulary expanded. You were able to correct your own errors towards the end, which shows your awareness of grammar.

In general, your speaking skills are good. Your pronunciation is very good, just keep working on expanding your vocabulary and pay attention to case endings and verb conjugations.

LISTENING

15% (10% grade, 5% progress) **80.7%** (grade: 77%, progress: **88%**)

Interview summary: 70%

Your interview summary contains the general information the native speaker talked about. There are some important details he stated repeatedly that you didn't include. Also, the native speaker never mentioned some of the answers you provided (e.g., answers to questions 1, 4 and 5 are only partially correct) and you didn't answer question 2 at all. You turned it in really late which is why I can't give you full credit for it. You caught some of the native speaker's jokes and you were able to repeat to the questions he asked you, which is an indicator for good comprehension skills.

Midterm summary: 100%

You wrote a detailed summary of your peer's topic and your answers to your three questions are accurate. Great job!

Listening comprehension worksheets:

You had **60%** of all answers correct.

Make sure to read the questions. Sometimes, there were two parts to a question and you only answered the first one and sometimes I asked for a certain number of things (e.g., worksheet 2, question 1, name of the friend) and you wrote down more or less than asked for.

Progress: 88%

You improved from the first to the third listening comprehension worksheet by 25%. That's very good.

You got a 81% on the listening final. Maybe you tried too hard on the other two assignments. Listening to a text too many times may sometimes not be the best thing.

In general, your listening skills improved this semester. Towards the end, you were able to catch more details.

REFLECTIVE ESSAY

10% **100%**

You addressed all required issues sufficiently with detailed explanations. It was very interesting to read and your comments will help me in the future to improve portfolio assessment. Great job!

WRITING

10% (5% chat corrections, 5% essay progress) **85%**

Chat: 80%

The way you corrected the chat was confusing. It is difficult for me to see what you corrected and what you didn't, since you didn't mark the corrections in your final version.

You corrected most of the errors I marked on the first two pages of your chat. However, some of your corrections were incorrect and you didn't state the rule for why something was wrong.

Essay: 90%

You improved a lot from your first draft to your final draft but you barely included the feedback I gave you on the draft you turned in. You implemented your peer's suggestions and you found many errors yourself. Your final draft would have been even better, had you included my feedback.

READING

5% (synthesis and accuracy: 2.5% Elvis, 2.5% Internet) **95.5%**

Elvis: 95%

Your summary is short but precise. It contains the most important information from the chapter.

Internet: 96%

You seemed to have no problems with understanding the information on the webpage and extracting the information you needed to complete the assignment. Your answers contain the most important details and are mostly accurate.

UNIT TEST

5% (corrections) **95%**

You corrected most errors and your explanations were great. In III.A, you mixed *halten* and *leisten*. The first means "to consider" (Many East Germans consider it to be the most important goal to create jobs.) and the second means "to afford" (People with little money can't afford many consumer goods.). In III.C, you didn't correct all your errors. The ones you corrected were wrong. 2 should be *mein Statistikkurs* since it is the subject of the subordinate clause and therefore needs to be the nominative, 4 is incorrect since the conjugated verb following a subordinate conjunction (*weil*) goes last. In IV.C2, *Familie* is singular so the verb form needs to be in the singular, too. D2 is the same error as in III.C. The conjugated verb moves to the end in a dependent clause when the conjunction is subordinating. The correct answer for D3 is *um* "in order to." E3 is *als* because two actions took place at the same time in the past. The separation of Germany was not an habitual event. You didn't make corrections on section V.

LAYOUT

40%

Inclusion of all assignments	75%	75%	
Title page	5%	5%	
Table of contents	5%	5%	
Arrangement of assignments (some chapter title pages are missing)	5%	5%	100%
Reflection of learning/progress	10%	10%	

GRADE

Speaking (15%)	87.8%	1317	
Listening (15%)	80.7%	1210.5	
Essay (10%)	100%	1000	
Writing (10%)	85%	850	93.3%
Reading (5%)	95.5%	477.5	
Unit Test (5%)	95%	475	
Layout (40%)	100%	4000	

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