

language, and they must be given the chance to use it. Exposure can be provided in distance learning up to a point, although it will often fail to take fully into account the interactive nature of communication. Distance learning therefore seems to lend itself best to certain types of language learning activities, such as reading, many writing and listening tasks, or focusing on vocabulary and grammar, much more easily than to speaking. However, and as we shall see, there are ways around some of these issues.

### The role of the teacher and teaching materials

So what is the teacher's role in distance learning? At one extreme, the learner is using self-study material and is effectively autonomous, so the teacher has very little to do. At the other extreme, however, our role is to provide the guidance and support necessary for successful learning. One way to do this is to develop written **wrap-around materials**, which are normally short written texts designed to provide the support normally provided by the teacher's F2F instructions. These can be fairly simple, as the following example illustrates:

This week's assignment involves writing a persuasive letter. Write an email to your boss, and ask him for a long weekend off next month (you need it because you have promised your son that you will take him to a concert).

You'll see that I've given you a few extra phrases which you might find useful. There are more available on page 37 of your coursebook, and I suggest that you also have a look at the example letters on page 56 if you have time.

Wrap-around materials are normally written in a conversational style, and often include anecdotes. Their role can be to provide motivation, point out options available to the learner, give guidance as to what is important and what is less important, and offer study skills tips. They may even be written in the learner's own language.

**Feedback** is an area which needs particularly close attention in the context of distance learning; after all, one of the key reasons for the teacher being involved at all is to provide the kind of specific and targeted response that it is difficult for self-study materials to offer. Sometimes the teacher will be able to meet the learner occasionally, or perhaps speak on the telephone. But often feedback will simply consist of written comments on a particular piece of work, or suggestions about what the learner might like to do next. Such written feedback needs to be personalized in some way, so that the learner is aware that the teacher is 'speaking' directly to him or her about particular issues which need to be addressed. The contact also needs to be regular, so as to maintain a productive and trusting relationship; even if the learner has done little or no work, the right comment from the teacher at the right time can help sustain or rekindle motivation and interest.

Although the principles of **designing courses** and writing materials for use in distance learning are the same as in F2F teaching, additional questions may need to be considered, such as: