

Book Review: Business French

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Recommended Citation

Vincent, A. S. (2025). Book Review: Business French. *Global Business Languages*, 25, 118-122.
Available at (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.4079/gbl.v25.9>

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REVIEW

Reisinger, D. S., Raycraft, M. B., & Dieu-Porter, N. (2021). *Affaires globales: S'engager dans la vie professionnelle en français, niveau avancé*. Georgetown University Press. 213 pp. ISBN 9781647120313.

The textbook *Affaires globales: S'engager dans la vie professionnelle en français* is designed for instruction in French for the Professions at the intermediate to advanced level. It includes seven units with abundant content for one to two semesters. The first three units cover general skills and knowledge relevant to everyday professional situations – the basics of oral and written communication (Unit 1), job searching (Unit 2), and working in francophone countries (Unit 3). These units also introduce intercultural awareness, concepts, and skills. Building on these first three units, the last four units address specific professional domains from an international and intercultural perspective – sales and marketing (Unit 4), global health (Unit 5), diplomacy (Unit 6), and sustainable entrepreneurship (Unit 7). One of the textbook's stated goals is to prepare students for the standardized business, international relations, and health exams of the *Diplôme de français professionnel* (DFP), an internationally recognized certification in languages for specific purposes developed by *Le Français des Affaires* (Center for Business French) of the Paris Île-de France Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI). The textbook facilitates curriculum expansion from the traditional "Business French" course to a broader range of professional perspectives. Having taught for two semesters with this textbook, I feel that it works best for upper-division (third or fourth year) college language courses. In particular, students who have already taken an intensive advanced grammar and composition course can assimilate business communication norms and genres into their existing language skills. Expanding the course to two semesters would allow for slower pacing with more time for developing students' language skills overall.

The textbook employs an "interdisciplinary and communicative" methodology (Reisinger et al., 2021, p. xix), placing the focus on authentic, realistic situations and tasks. Each unit adopts the same six-part organizational structure, beginning with three lessons called *points interculturels* (intercultural points); followed by a *cas d'entreprise* (business case); a *perspective professionnelle* (professional perspective), i.e., an example of a person whose work engages with the topic of the unit; and one step of the textbook's cumulative project, *lancer un start-up*, a simulated start-up launch. A set of "can-do statements" is provided for each unit, aligning its learning objectives with the 2017 National Council of State Supervisors for Languages-American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NCSSFL-ACTFL) Can-Do Statements, based on the ACTFL's World Readiness Standards. Each unit's objectives are therefore clearly identifiable as interpretative (via statements using stems such as "I can understand"), interpersonal ("I can participate"), presentational ("I can write" or "I can deliver a presentation"), or intercultural (for example, "I can respond to interview questions in a culturally appropriate manner"). These units incorporate numerous authentic documents, media, and text, including infographics, short videos, and audio clips, to complement each "intercultural point," as well as longer-form, journalistic business cases and interviews for the "professional perspectives" section. In sum, the textbook's organization and alignment with recognized standards is readily apparent.

Units are sequenced to progress from the ACTFL intermediate to advanced-low or -mid level (CEFR B2 to C1 levels). The earlier units include shorter, structured tasks, such as writing

e-mails to colleagues, answering interview questions, or writing and then verbally presenting a summary of a meeting to a supervisor. In later units, activities are longer and more communicatively challenging, such as making a short speech, negotiating a sale, or writing a report. Appendices supplement the text's instructions for key tasks. These appendices include lists of *actes de parole* (speech acts) categorized by situations (e.g., *participer à une reunion* (participating in a meeting) and subdivided by tasks (e.g., "ask for clarification"). For written presentational genres, the appendix also includes a brief definition, set of recommendations, and model of the genre's organizational structure. When first presenting these tasks and then providing feedback, I felt that this apparatus could be developed further, especially for the more challenging tasks such as the *synthèse* (synthesis) and *rapport* (report), so that students could better understand the objective and how to integrate the specific presentational content or their own ideas with the provided *actes de parole* (speech acts) and model organization. Reorganizing the appendices so that the speech acts are grouped with each task rather than separated would make this section more navigable. It would also be helpful to include authentic example texts for students to analyze.

The textbook content and activities are abundant and flexible, permitting them to be adapted to the class's interests and teaching mode. For example, the blog prompts could be used for other interpersonal interactions such as discussion forums. Activities and discussion questions can be divided up among class members to facilitate interaction. The authentic documents included are engaging and tackle topics that remain relevant for years after the textbook's publication. For example, Unit 6, on diplomacy, includes materials related to migration and refugee issues, and Unit 7 focuses on social enterprise and sustainability, both of which continue to relate to current events and call upon students to reflect on ethical aspects of business practices. The commitment to including documents from around the francophone world is also appreciated. Students can glean an understanding of ways of life in francophone countries beyond what is explicitly presented. For example, a video in Unit 4 about marketing strategies used by the two main yogurt companies in Cameroon provides a fascinating window into the retail environment and consumer habits in that country. Furthermore, the textbook's tasks place students in active, decision-making roles, allowing them to envision themselves as creative marketers or effective diplomats, among other roles. On the other hand, the inclusion of a text from 2013 on the role of *la graphologie*, or handwriting analysis, for recruitment in France, in the job search unit (Unit 3) gave me pause. While this practice was frequent in the past, a 2016 law limits its use and likens it to numerology and astrology, suggesting that this cultural particularity may no longer be relevant (Le Gall, 2024). The article does provide a critical perspective on this practice and points out that it is not considered scientifically valid, and the discussion prompt following it invites a comparison of different ways of evaluating candidates. All the same, had I taught this unit, I would have preferred to find a different authentic text to launch such a discussion.

The textbook includes a scaffolded start-up project composed of one task per unit, corresponding to concepts and skills developed in the unit. The project's steps are paced manageably for students to complete it in addition to other unit activities. Given the interest in business education and entrepreneurship on campuses today, most students will readily engage in this project, and my students were no exception. Students did react with initial skepticism or anxiety when I first presented some tasks, for example, the "interview a start-up" step, for which they conducted a small-group Zoom interview with a French-speaking entrepreneur. Once they were able to communicate successfully with enthusiastic, candid interviewees, they reported

feeling empowered. Instructors may be able to find ways to collaborate with a campus career center, alumni network, or entrepreneurship program to bring this project to life.

Instructors preparing their students for the standardized business, international relations, or health exams of the *Diplôme de français professionnel* at the B2 or C1 level will find that many activities fully or partially emulate exam questions. These exams certify a student's professional language competency at a specific Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level via an online written test and a verbal in-person role-play with an examiner. The textbook includes similar tasks to those found on these exams, including writing a basic cover letter or an e-mail for a job application (*DFP Affaires B2*) and verbally negotiating for field support (*DFP Relations internationales C1*). That said, some activities do not entirely correspond to the exam levels/tasks noted in the book's Instructor Guide nor precisely fit the exam format. In particular, Unit 5's focus on global health from the point of NGO activity, the pursuit of sustainability, and health tech doesn't fully correspond to the *DFP Santé*, which is primarily oriented around communication with patients and other medical professionals. For this reason, while the textbook equips students with skills that are essential for success on these exams, targeted preparation will require some adaptation of the textbook activities or use of other materials. My solution has been to conduct exam preparation sessions outside of class time, using materials provided by the CCI.

Additional resources provided with this textbook include an e-book, a course website, and an instructor resource document. I found the e-book cumbersome to use, due to the strict digital rights management protections imposed by the publisher. Specifically, no printing was allowed, so it was difficult to use excerpts from the e-book for assignments or projecting on a classroom screen. This is a technical complaint and something over which the authors have no control. The textbook website is limited to media needed for textbook activities, whether linked or embedded and hosted on YouTube, news websites, etc. The site is mostly a convenience to the instructor, as I directly linked media in the course's Learning Management System rather than having students use the website. An Instructor Guide document includes course pacing guides, assessment recommendations, additional resources, and expanded suggestions and instructions for in-class activities. All of these components are useful but not comprehensive, and while I borrowed from the guide, I often modified its suggestions. I chose a slower pace than recommended by the guides, dedicating seven 75-minute course periods to five of the seven units, having covered the job search (Unit 2) in the previous semester and selecting three of the four topical units based on student interests. There is no explicit grammar instruction in the textbook but the Instructor Guide suggests grammar topics to review alongside each unit and recommends film and TV series that can be used to supplement the materials in the textbook. The vast majority of these recommendations are French productions, but the authors provide at least one francophone title (from countries/regions including Belgium, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Quebec) per unit. The guide does not provide sample tests, quizzes, or other assessments, but as the authors suggest, activities and materials can be adapted for integrated performance assessments (IPAs) or other types of graded assignments.

Comparable textbooks on the North American market include *À la recherche d'un emploi* (Hubbell, 2017) and *Parlons affaires! Initiation au français économique et commercial, 3rd Edition* (Berg & McCoy, 2014). As their titles suggest, these books have different emphases from *Affaires globales*. *À la recherche* adopts a communicative approach to the job search in Europe or francophone North America, while *Parlons affaires!* focuses on interpretive activities, includes translation tasks, and covers business topics that *Affaires globales* does not, such as

banking, the stock market, and international trade and commerce. French publisher Clé International edits the series *Affaires.com* and *Vocabulaire progressif du français des affaires* (progressive vocabulary of Business French), which limit their diversity to the French or European context instead of covering the global scope of francophone countries. *Affaires globales* is positioned at a slightly more advanced language level than the above texts, which are situated at the intermediate level; it includes topics from a broader range of professional contexts and provides a more global perspective than these textbooks.

In sum, *Affaires globales* represents a welcome resource for an advanced course, thanks to its alignment with ACTFL standards and the CCI's DFP exams. The authors' commitment to authentic representations of the contemporary francophone world and its systematic organization make it easy to position within existing curricula. Some aspects of the textbook, such as its lack of assessment materials and broad range of topics, may make it a challenge for novice instructors to adopt. Despite these minor drawbacks, the textbook's scope and language level will challenge students and expand possibilities for instruction in French for Business and the Professions.

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