



Step By Step French Overview & Introduction

INTRODUCTION: What to Expect from the Step By Step French Curriculum

So you want to learn to speak French. Perhaps you want to be able to converse with French-speaking members of your community. Or maybe you are planning a trip some day to a French-speaking country. You may have already had some experience with foreign languages, or maybe you haven't. Whatever the case, it's unlikely that you've studied a language as intensively as you will in this course. If you have any questions about these next few months, they probably fall into one of three categories: "What does this course have to offer me?," "What is it going to require of me?," and "How can I get the most out of it?"

What's in it for you?

There are more resources in this curriculum package than just a Basic language course (though that is in here too). Language, after all, reflects only one aspect of what people do as they live and work together. The purpose of these courses and resources are to prepare you for just that—living and working side by side with those whose languages and customs differ from your own. The course will teach you to speak and understand some of the language, but you'll also learn quite a bit about the people who use it—where they live, what they do, what they expect from one another, and what they will expect from you. If you know some of these things—if you have some idea of what people will

think of you and what they think is appropriate behavior in a variety of situations—then even a small amount of language skill can open your eyes and ears to what is going on around you, and you'll be able to participate more and more in the language as the weeks and months go by.

You'll find that your new language skill is made up of a number of parts, but that is basically a well-ordered piece of equipment. It will enable you to make sense of what people say to you and say things that make sense in return. Although the components are the same for everyone, people differ greatly in what parts they become familiar with first and in how they go about fitting the parts together. The purpose of this Introduction is to help you explore your own resources and style as you acquire new skills in French.

What do we ask of you?

In general, we expect you to

1. Work
 - with your *mind*, to build your own understanding of what you hear and see;
 - with your *mouth*, to participate in classroom activities;
 - with your *imagination*, to add color, detail, and life to the word-pictures presented in class so that you can relate them to your upcoming use of your newly acquired language skills.
2. Be patient
 - With this course (yes, it may seem a bit tedious at times);
 - with your teacher and your fellow students; and most of all,
 - with yourself.

How can you get the most out of this course?

Here are two tests.

First, suppose that you have just bought a new bicycle, which came unassembled in a box. Before opening this imaginary box, think of the different ways you could go about unpacking and assembling your new possession. You might unpack all the parts and lay them out on the floor in an arrangement that made sense to you. Or you might prefer to find the directions first and read through all of them carefully before doing anything further. Then again, you might get the greatest satisfaction from reading one direction at a time and executing that instruction before looking at the next one. Individuals vary in terms of which of these ways they see as most effective. Nevertheless, they tend to believe that most other people would approach the situation in the same way.

Second, imagine that someone is reading you a list of 10 or 20 isolated English words: *path*, *wall*, *moon*, *climb*, and so on. You are to listen and then to write down, in any order, as many of the words as you can remember. In what form would you remember the words? Some people recall the sound of the words as they are spoken. Others envision the words, even though they do not see them, in written form. Still others relate the words to visual images created as the list is read. Which of these methods of learning is most natural for you? No matter which method comes most easily for you, you should recognize that a large proportion of language learners would choose another method, yet there is no

apparent difference in effectiveness.

These are only two examples of the ways in which people differ with respect to how they learn. Such differences in learning styles are interesting enough, but it is even more surprising that most people are unaware of the existence of any learning style other than their own. Yet contrasts in learning style can lead to complications in any classroom. Authors of course materials and teachers may try to accommodate a variety of learning styles, but the differences will still be there.

This is where you must help—by being aware of how your students process new information. In that way, you can work to use your particular learning technique most successfully.

Every language student learns to remember new words. When you say that you have “learned” a word, you mean that you have formed a mental image of that word, and that this image is clear enough that you can produce the word quickly and correctly when you need it. The “image” itself consists of a combination of words, spellings, pictures, feelings, and other data. Individuals differ as to which components of the total images are clearest, most natural, or most reliable for them. Generally, however, the image that you carry away with you after your first exposure to a foreign word is incomplete. For example, you may be able to remember only how long the word was, or what the first letter was; or you may remember all the sounds but have them in the wrong order...

Here, understanding differences in learning style is essential, for a word produced from an incomplete image is distorted and will need to be “corrected” by the teacher. For the correction to be effective, however, you need to take into account your own learning style. For example, some people work primarily with spellings, including their own mental spellings. When a person who learns this way is “corrected” by a teacher, he or she may simply repeat the word aloud. However, since this student remembers spellings (visual images) better than sounds (auditory images), oral repetition may well be a poor way to improve memory for the word. Instead, it might be more effective for such a person to look (either with the eyes or in the mind) at the previous incorrect image, translate the teacher's correction (either visually or mentally) into written form, and then change the image to reflect the correction. Similarly, a person who works best with the auditory component of the image may profit most from reading a written correction aloud.

The following is an important principle to remember when you study by yourself. Don't just repeat things aloud or copy them in writing. Instead, let each repetition be a little test, which you can verify or correct immediately by looking at the book or listening to the tape. Flashcards are a common way of doing this, but you can also cover sentences in the book, try to say them, and then uncover them to see for yourself what you did correctly and where you still need to work on your image of the sentence. You can do the same thing with a tape recorder by anticipating—that is, by stopping the machine before a sentence, trying to say the sentence, and then listening to what is said on the tape.

In class find times when you are able to try something out (perhaps only mentally) just before the instructor says it. Here again, you will be drawing on, filling out, and strengthening your personal stock of images. The more actively you participate in your own learning process, the faster and more comfortably you will progress.

In addition to learning to remember new words, language students also learn to use patterns. For example, the student of English learns that “The answer is right” is a statement and “Is the answer

right?” is a question; the student can then take the statement “the room is comfortable” and turn it into the question “Is the room comfortable?” by following the analogy of the first pair of sentences. That's what we mean by a “pattern”; it's a relationship among several pairs of items. Parrots and myna birds can learn words and even sentences, but they cannot learn to use it in patterns in order to make up new words or sentences. This ability to respond to and use both images and patterns is what makes language language.

People go about the learning process differently depending on their learning style. Some derive great benefit from frills in which the pattern comes up over and over again until they develop a “feel” for it. Others find that rules are the most efficient way for them to assimilate a new pattern and may be uncomfortable if no rules are given. Again, people whose minds work in one way find it hard to comprehend that others' minds work differently, but you need at least to be aware of your particular learning style. Only then can you monitor your learning and work out an effective pattern of study to use outside the classroom.

But enough of our introduction! Now it's time for you to listen to a little French—and soon you'll be speaking some too!

OVERVIEW OF THE BASIC French COURSE

The materials in this course have been developed to present French as a spoken language, and the skills of understanding and speaking are accordingly emphasized. The method of presentation may be new to students acquainted with more traditional methods of language teaching. In order to understand the materials, one must first understand the method upon which they are built.

How to Use these Lessons

The lessons in these courses were developed by the Foreign Service Institute for US Government workers, military & their families who did not speak French at all, but were being assigned to work in French speaking areas. They were originally designed to be taught as an intensive 10 week French language training, with from 6 to 8 hours of lessons per day.

Obviously, that intensive pace of study is not practical or workable for most students and homeschool families. The creators of these courses suggest that they be used at a more relaxed pace when deadlines are not an issue. Short daily or 3x a week lessons work very well, and students should be allowed to go through each lesson at their own pace.

Each lesson in Basic French has a PDF workbook and Audio Instruction, consisting of drill and review, which runs about ½ hour. In each lesson, the Audio Instructor who will introduce and repeat new words and phrases, which you repeat. The PDF workbook contains all the words introduced in each lesson,

and follows along exactly with the audio instruction. (You may wish to print out each PDF lesson as you come to it so your children have the text in front of them when following the audio instruction.)

The authors recommend that the student go through each individual lesson repeatedly (as many times as it takes) until the words and phrases in that lesson have been mastered. Only then would you proceed to the next lesson.

Do not push your students too hard. Students do not have to go through an entire lesson as given in the course in a single setting. You can break up each individual lesson into two or three 10 or 15 minute sessions if you wish. Students of different ages and ability will learn at different rates, so you will need to find the best length for lessons in your homeschool.

In a homeschool setting, you as the teacher should set a positive tone for the lessons. As much as possible, you should be engaged in learning along with your students. (For instance, you don't have to be constantly seated and at the table with your kids during this time, but can join in on responding to the audio and reviewing the material afterwards.)

There are many, many ways you can add more interest, fun and variety to these lessons to help engage and encourage your young learners. Please take time to read through the "Our Favorite French Learning Ideas for Homeschoolers" ebook which is included on this DVD and glean what tips and ideas would work best for your family.

Method of Teaching

The method is known as GUIDED IMITATION. Its goal is to teach one to speak easily, fluently, with very little accent, and to do this without conscious effort, just as one speaks his own language without conscious effort.

There are two very important aspects of this method: First, learning a relatively small body of material so well that it requires very little effort to produce it. This is OVERLEARNING. If a student over-learns every dialog and drill as he goes through this book, he will almost certainly experience rapid progress in learning the language.

The second aspect is learning to authentically manipulate the sounds, sequences, and patterns of the language. The important implication here is the reality of both the model and the imitation. The model (in this case the audio recordings that accompany this course) must provide French as people really speak it in actual conversations, and the student must be helped to an accurate imitation. Above all, the normal tempo of pronunciation must be the classroom standard; **slowing down is, in this context, distortion.**

This course consists of 45 units, each of which requires approximately ten class and laboratory hours to master. The course is thus a 450 hours curriculum which may either be studied intensively over a period of about six months, or may be spread at the rate of a unit a week over a period of 45 weeks (three college semesters).

While this course was originally created for the use of American diplomats, workers and military, it is suitable for younger students as young as 8-10 up through adults, as long as the students are interested in learning the French language, and the teacher can enthusiastically engage younger students in the material. (See the “Our Favorite Homeschool Language Learning Ideas” ebook for many “real life” strategies, tips and suggestions to motivate and engage your students).

Pronunciation

The first two units are focused primarily on pronunciation problems. Drills on other aspects of the language are deliberately postponed because of the importance of developing good pronunciation habits from the very beginning of the course. Pronunciation is extremely important. It is the basis of all real fluency. A person is readily able to understand anything he can meaningfully say himself, if the correlation between the way he hears it and the way he says it is reasonably similar. The more similar, the greater the ease of comprehension.

The basis of the student's imitation in this course are the speakers in the audio lessons, whose pronunciation is the ultimate source of authority. The fundamental classroom procedure for learning new material throughout this course (except the reading materials) is repetition by the student in direct immediate imitation after the teacher on the audios. The imitative repetition may at first be done in chorus after the teacher, and subsequently by each individual, or it may be individualized from the start.

In either case the student should wait for the teacher's model. Imitating after another student too frequently results in compounding the errors of both. If a person is fortunate enough to begin studying a second language before the age of eight or ten, the powers of imitation are normally sufficient to ensure excellent results in pronunciation without resorting to technical explanations of what happens to various parts of the vocal apparatus. If occasionally an individual has managed to retain this gift that all of us had in childhood, so much the better, but most older students and adults need more specific guidance based on an awareness of the particular problems of producing particular sounds. The drills and explanations in the first two units are devoted to the specific problems an English speaker with his English habits of pronunciation will have in accurately imitating the sounds and sequences of sounds of French.

Aids to Listening

If speakers of English were not so highly literate, it might be possible to teach effectively without reference to any written symbolization, but most students are much more comfortable if some kind of representation of what they are imitating is also available for visual reference. There is, of course, a traditional writing system for French which is used in all parts of the French speaking world. It is a very adequate system for its purpose, which might be stated as providing visual cues for persons who already speak the language. For pedagogical purposes, a respelling, or phonetic representation of French is also provided as a means of reminding the student of important features of the pronunciation which the traditional spelling system does not provide, such as significant sound distinctions, word groupings, intonation patterns, etc.

The phonetic symbolization may at first look unfamiliar and somewhat foreboding, but this very

unfamiliarity is a healthy reminder that none of the English sounds (which are so easily associated with the familiar letters of the alphabet) are exact duplications of the French sounds to be mastered. This is also, of course, true in the respelling when familiar symbols are used: for instance, the appearance of the letter t does not mean the familiar English t-sound is indicated. The intonations are marked in the respelling by a system of dots and accents placed at relative heights over the vowels. The patterns recorded in this way are not necessarily the only possibilities in spoken French, but they are all normal patterns which have been thoroughly and widely tested.

The acquisition of a good pronunciation is first of all the result of careful listening and imitation plus whatever help can be obtained from initial pronunciation drills and description, and from the cues provided for continuing reference by the aids to listening. It is well to remember that a sizable investment in pronunciation practice early in the course will pay handsome dividends later; correct pronunciation safely relegated to habit leaves one's full attention available for other problems of learning the language.

Every unit (after the first two) is organized in the same way: part one is the basic dialog with a few pertinent notes; part two is grammar drills and discussion; part three is a set of recombination narratives and dialogues; part four, beginning in Unit 16, is readings.

Basic Dialogs

The basic dialogs are the core of each unit. These dialogs are recreations of the real situations a student is most likely to encounter, and the vocabulary and sentences are those he is most likely to need.

In the first part of the book new vocabulary is introduced mainly in the basic dialogs. Occasionally, in the illustrations of grammar points, new words are introduced in order to fill out patterns needed to do the exercises. New words are always clearly indicated by placing them on a line themselves, indented between the lines that are complete sentences. Since each new word is introduced in this fashion only once, the student should take pains to be sure he learns each word as it is presented. Careful pains have been taken to see that each word introduced will reappear many times later in the course, to help the student assimilate each word in a variety of contexts.

The student should very carefully learn both the literal meanings of each individual word or phrase that is given on an indented line and the meaning that appears in the full sentences. It should not be cause for concern if the meaning in context is strikingly different from the literal meaning. In the construction of each dialog, the French was written first, and the corresponding English is its closest equivalent and not a literal translation. It is therefore not at all surprising if the French does not seem to 'follow' the English.

The student should learn the basic dialogs by heart. If they are committed perfectly to rote memory, the drills will go easily and rapidly. Roughly half of the estimated ten hours that are spent in class on each unit should normally be devoted to the basic dialogs.

Drills and Grammar

Each unit can in some ways be likened to a musical theme with variations. The basic dialogs are the theme, and the drills provide the variations. Patterns of the structure of the language which have been learned in the basic sentences are expanded and manipulated in the drills.

There are four kinds of drills in each unit (three before Unit 6). Of these, two are designed to systematically vary selected basic sentences within the structure and vocabulary the student has already learned. Two are oriented toward the structure of the language to provide a systematic coverage of all important patterns.

All of these drills are planned to be easily and rapidly answered. They can be done orally and with only the teacher's book open. The method of conducting the drill is clearly shown by the format of the text, and all answers are available for the teacher's convenience and for the student to refer to when studying outside of class.

If a drill is found to be hard, the difficulty probably reflects inadequacy in the mastery of the dialog and earlier drills. The drills are not problems to be worked out like mathematics, and the ability to do them, not to figure them, is indicated by the nature of the course. There are no tricks in them, and they are not intended as tests.

Pattern drills are presented in a format which provides both practice and explanation. First appears a presentation of the pattern to be drilled, then various kinds of drills, and finally a more detailed discussion of the pattern.

The presentation consists of a listing of basic sentences (and a few new sentences when necessary) which illustrate the grammar point to be drilled. Then there is an extrapolation which shows the relationships involved in the pattern in a two-dimensional chart, which is further explained by a short note or two. This presentation should provide sufficient clues to enable the student to understand and use the pattern correctly in the drills that follow.

These drills are mainly exercises making substitutions, responses, and translations, highlighting the grammar points covered. They are devised for oral answers to oral stimuli.

After the drills there is a more detailed discussion of the pattern drilled. These descriptions are written in a condensed and a bit technical manner. While an effort was made to keep these discussions clear and readable, it has to be recognized that a description of a language is a technical subject, and simplification can only be attained by sacrificing accuracy or at a cost of a great many more words than space allows. The student who works through these discussions by a careful reading will find that he is acquiring a set of analytical tools that will be useful throughout the remainder of his career of interest in language.

The student may notice slight differences in the respelling used in the aids to listening and in the grammar charts and discussions. The respelling useful as a guide to pronunciation for an English speaking student, records more details than a respelling to be used in grammar discussions where comparisons are made between French forms, not between English and French pronunciation.

Conversation

The conversation section of each unit is designed to help bridge the gap between the more or less mechanical stimulus-response activity of the drills and the skill of free conversation which is the ultimate aim of the course. These recombination monologues and dialogs extend the abilities of the student into ever more natural situations. The narrative is an anecdote type description of an event or situation which is then recast as a directed dialog in which the teacher acts as a prompter for students who take the parts as the actors. The prompter gradually withdraws his help so that in the end the conversation is carried on freely.