

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Basic French FAQ's

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Answers

1. How does Basic French differ from Immersion?

There are two principal differences between Basic and Immersion French programs: the kind of exposure to French, and the amount of it.

In Immersion, instruction is mostly in French. Subject areas, like math, music, and science, are taught in French. The second language is the medium and not the object of instruction. Basic French curriculum, on the other hand, concentrates on speaking, listening, reading, and writing in French. It teaches these language skills through themes designed to spark student interest. The other difference between the programs is the duration and intensity of exposure to French. By the end of grade 8, the average early immersion student has had over 4000 hours of instruction in French. Late immersion students accumulate between 1200 and 200 hours in French. A typical immersion student also gains between 1000 and 1500 hours in French high school courses. In comparison, a student who studies Basic French from grade 4 to grade 12 is exposed to a maximum of about 1100 hours of French instruction.

2. Has Basic French changed since I went to school?

Yes, Basic French now aims to expose students to more spoken French; Basic French curricula now require students to use their linguistic and cultural knowledge to communicate in real-life situations. Newly- created teaching materials support the new curriculum, and most schools are now using these materials at all grade levels.

3. What should happen in a Basic French classroom?

Basic French should be much more than grammar drills and translation exercises.

Learning activities should balance listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the beginning, the curriculum emphasizes listening and speaking. Later, the emphasis on and reading and writing increases.

Students should actively participate in tasks and projects.

The curriculum should be based on fields of experience or “themes” that consider the learners’ life experiences, intellectual development, and interests. The curriculum should also integrate learning about Francophone culture, with an emphasis on French-speaking Canada, especially in the beginning. Teachers should encourage students to think about ethnic diversity and stereotypes. Programs should also include student reflection on their learning, self-and peer-evaluation, and strategies to enrich learning and communication.

4. What will my child be able to “do” in French?

You might ask yourself this when deciding on an FSL program, or you may wonder if your child is meeting the program’s objectives.

Many studies show that most Basic French students meet the objectives set for them. Speaking skills have sometimes been reported below expectations. Research also shows Basic French students generally have positive attitudes toward the French language, French-speaking people, and learning French. Current

research does not describe what students are able to do in French, because program objectives were not designed to describe student performance when this research was done. Now most provinces and territories in Canada have articulated these expectations for Basic French.

5. Why Basic French – why not another language?

Ideally, students would learn a variety of the languages alive in Canada's diverse communities. Sadly, language education is not valued as highly in Canada as it is in Europe, for example, where students commonly study three or four languages.

For many reasons, it makes most sense for French to be the second language taught in most Canadian schools:

- French is one of our official languages, spoken by approximately 9 million Canadians and more than 250 million people world-wide.
- Teacher-training programs are established for teachers of French, but for few other languages.
- There is an infrastructure for French: teacher organizations, parent support, and advocacy groups, for instance.
- Resources are readily available for Basic French programs.
- Federal funding enhances the program's potential.
- Many jobs in Canada require French-speaking skills.

6. How can I help my Basic French child?

Even if you don't speak French, or aren't confident in your rusty skills, you can help.

Try some of these ideas:

- Establish rapport with the Basic French teacher. Make an effort to talk with him or her at parent interviews.
- Ask your child what he or she enjoys about Basic French. Focus on the positive!
- Buy, rent, or borrow French books, magazines, videos, and software that interest your child.
- Watch French TV with your child. Remind yourself and your child that it is not crucial to understand every word.
- Tune the radio to a local French station, and let it play in the background at breakfast or in the evening.
- Take a French course to refresh your old skills or to start from scratch – if your child can do it, you can too!
- Encourage participation in French extracurricular activities: school clubs, public speaking, summer camps.
- Talk to adolescents about the careers opened up by knowing French
- Around grade 7 or 8, or when Basic French becomes optional, encourage your child to keep a positive attitude towards French class.
- Read to your child in English to help him or her develop a love of language.