

## The French Experiment: Step One, The Basics

### What is the French Experiment?

I'm a native English speaker. That means that, when I was a boy, the language I spoke to my family was English. Some people say that native speakers are better English teachers, because we have the 'feeling' for English. We can tell you when perfect grammar still sounds 'not right.' If your teacher is a native English teacher and tells you 'I wouldn't say that, I would say this. . .' He's talking about the feeling.

One weakness—or something that is difficult—for native speakers, though, is that we don't know what it is like to learn English as an adult. The experiences I had will not be the experiences you have. And when I tell you how to learn English, it's not how *I* learned English, it's how my students tell me works best for them.

So, because I want to be the best teacher I can be, I've made a decision: It's too late for me to learn English as an adult. All that's left now is for me to try and learn another language. I asked my wife where she would want to travel a lot, besides the United States, and she said France. This year I resolved to learn French in order to have the experience of learning a language as an adult.

### How is the Experiment Going?

This is the first time that I'm talking about the French experiment. And you can guess that I don't speak French like a Frenchman, yet! I'm using several different teach-yourself CDs and the Babbel.com website (which I recommend strongly!) and now I can tell you that I don't even think I have the most basic vocabulary. But, I have made a start, and I can tell you what's working for me.

### What Works?

Flashcards. I talked about them once, and I will talk about them again. But when I listen to the CDs, alone, I only learn about twenty percent of the words. When I make the flashcards—just *writing* on the cards—I learn about half of the words! So, with the vocabulary I learned from the CD, I know more than half of the vocabulary before I even start practicing with the cards!

Something else that has worked for me is podcasts. I don't know if you know a lot about them, but podcasts are another great way to get audio. I'm experimenting with two different podcasts in French and—because I don't have and don't want an iPod—I'm burning the podcasts to CDs to play in the car when I drive for work. So far, I have to say that it's a fun way to get extra listening practice in.

**Any Advice?**

Do you have any advice? How do you think I should start? What are the things you did at the beginning when you started learning English? How did you learn vocabulary in the beginning? Let me know what works best for you!