

*F Institut de Français*

**INTRODUCTION  
TO  
OUR “ TOTAL APPROACH “ PROGRAM**

# *IF* Institut de Français

## INTRODUCTION TO OUR "TOTAL APPROACH" PROGRAM

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#### **A - OUR PROGRAM : complete and diversified**

Our one and only objective is to have you speak French as fluently and correctly as possible at the end of your stay. Everything we do or ask you to do in our school is to achieve this objective and the only way to do it, in a short time, is through a complete and diversified program.

#### What is a complete program ?

In short, it is a program which not only offers classroom work (with audio-visual methods) but which also gives you the opportunity to use and apply in the real world, in natural situations, what you have learned in the classroom.

One of the biggest problems in learning a language is to be able to apply freely and naturally in the real world what has been learned systematically in the classroom. Classroom work is an indispensable element of learning but the classroom world remains an artificial and conventional world where one learns systematically by developing conditioned reflexes under the stimuli of a teaching apparatus (teacher, equipment, etc...). A code gets established between the teacher and yourself whereby you know the teacher's procedures, what he is going to do and also what he expects of you and in what form. It's as if you had a switch in your head, you turn it on to become a student as you enter the classroom. When you leave the classroom, you turn it off; you are yourself again, in the real world, tending to lose your acquired

reflexes. So that, no matter how well you do in the classroom, assuming you have a very good teacher, a very good method and you are an above average student, your biggest problem is going to be: to reuse freely, spontaneously, correctly, in a natural situation what you have learned in the classroom. This is why our program stresses so much the practice aspect and includes practice sessions of various sorts outside the classroom, throughout the day, to enable you to develop a true natural speaking ability.

### Why a diversified program ?

Another important key to learning is variety. To keep you continually interested, stimulated and never saturated by any one thing, the program leads you through a variety of activities throughout the day alternating between classroom work, practice sessions, language laboratory work, etc. Every element of the program has its place and function and is indispensable to the whole. The discussion-lunch, for instance, is the one hour of the day used for free practice during which time, with a teacher at each table, you will be able to speak freely in French (with no special rules), ask any question, say anything, and all the while be continually corrected by the teacher.

Thus, achieving the correct balance between systematic work and practice and using all possible approaches to learning a spoken language is the goal of our "Total Approach" to French.

## **B - THE ORIGIN OF THE AUDIO-VISUAL METHOD AND THE FUNDAMENTAL FRENCH VOCABULARY**

In the classroom, we use the authentic, orthodox, audio-visual method, scientifically called the structuro-global method, also called the St Cloud-Zagreb method because it is the result of 4 years of joint research work by the French Language Research Center of the Ecole Normale Supérieure de St Cloud, outside Paris, and the Institute of Phonetics of the University of Zagreb. This work, to develop an effective method to teach foreign adults to speak French, was requested and funded by the French Government because of the increasing number of scholarships given to foreign students and teachers and the increased activity in technical, commercial and cultural exchanges between France and foreign countries. Their first task was to determine what French would be taught and how. Would it be academic French (which is spoken by professors, scholars) ? tourist French (how to get along in a train station, at a hotel, etc.)? specialized French (business French, engineering French)? Not really, it was wisely decided to teach the French that everyone speaks, the French that is most commonly used in France. This of course had to be determined empirically, by placing microphones and tape recorders in stores, cafés, subway, offices around Paris, thus gathering a very large amount of raw data. When the data was analyzed, the result was a collection of 50.000 words. Using statistical techniques, a list of 1.500 words, arranged according to frequency of usage,

was produced, constituting what is now known as the Fundamental French Vocabulary. It is this vocabulary which is used in our audio-visual methods.

Let's look at this vocabulary, what do we notice ?

- 1 - *être* (to be)
- 2 - *avoir* (to have)
- 3 - *de* (of)
- 4 - *je* (I)
- 
- *faire* (to do, to make)
- 
- *aller* (to go)
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We notice that the most frequently used word is a verb (to be), that the next word is also a verb (to have), then come little words, then another verb. This means, of course, that the verb is the all-important element of French speech and you are going to have to concentrate on it.

What about the first noun of the list ? Where is it ? What rank does it hold ? Well, suprisingly enough the first noun is 82nd on the list. There are 81 words which are not nouns and are more frequently used than the first noun. This is a hint to you to avoid trying to gobble up nouns and to stop asking the question : "What's the name of this ?", "What do you call that?", since it is much more important to know how to ask the question : "What do you call that?" than knowing the answer. This is because the answer which is a noun can be found in any dictionary without the need to come to this school. However, what no book, no dictionary can teach you is how to say intelligibly and correctly in French: "What's the name of this?", "What do you call that?". For this you must come to a school like ours.

So remember, learn the verbs and always use a verb in your question or in your answer. The names of things (nouns) are not of great importance. It is the verb and the structures containing a verb which are the key elements of a language.

### **C - THE STRUCTURO-GLOBAL METHOD**

This method is based on the fact that life is perceived by our senses mostly through pictures and sound and that the oral language is the first and most basic communication instrument between human beings. It has further been proved that in

learning a language it is much easier and much more feasible to go from the oral language to the written than the other way around. It was therefore decided by the St-Cloud-Zagreb research group to use the oral language, conveyed by pictures and sound, as the basic instrument in teaching French. Whereas in the traditional method of teaching (the analytical approach), the language is broken down and dissected into its elements treating them as separate entities such as the conjugation of verbs, study of pronouns, articles, etc., in the structuro-global method, it is language structures which are taught, that is : groups of words, usually containing a verb with various little words around it, which go together. These structures are characteristic of a language and constitute entities in themselves to learn together with their sound, their rhythm, their intonation, the appropriate gestures and feeling, as a total, integrated speech stimulus. Hence the name "structuro-global" for this method.

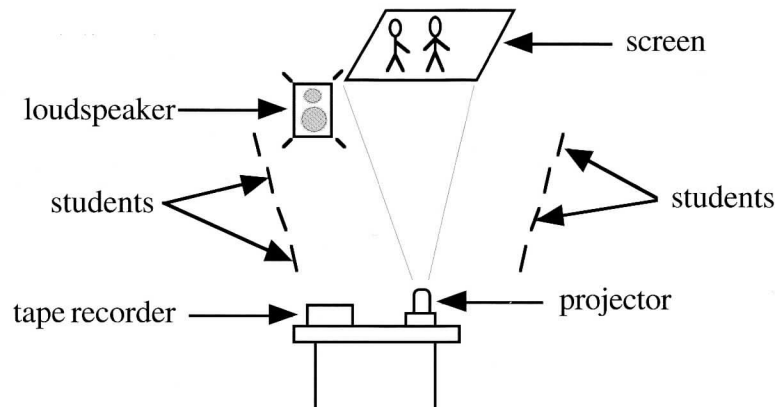
Examples of a structure in spoken English are : "What's that ?" "What's your name ?"; these are complete sound entities. A student learning English through a structuro-global method would be able to understand and say these structures correctly after the first lesson, while a student learning English through the traditional school method may still not be able to ask these simple questions after 5 or 6 years of English. This simple example gives an idea of the tremendous effectiveness of a structuro-global method.

The other idea behind the structuro-global method is that the more you involve your whole being in learning - not only with your mind but also with your senses - the better you will learn and the longer you will retain what you learn. You must therefore open yourself to French, absorb it, permeate your being as thoroughly as possible. Don't be afraid, for instance, to let your acting talent come out and try to imitate the French manner, gestures, intonations, etc.

Further, you must not fall prey to one or the other of these extreme attitudes : the analytical attitude or the passive attitude. With the analytical attitude, the person learns exclusively with the rational, analytical side of his mind and reacts to a French lesson thus : What is that little word ? Why is it there ? Why is it the word order the way it is ? Why couldn't you say it more logically like that ? etc. This is obviously a narrow, restricted approach which excludes so many other factors that progress tends to be limited, short-lived, and in the end unsatisfying. At the other extreme, with the passive attitude, the person thinks : "I'm in immersion now; I'm a sponge; all I have to do is open my pores and this French is bound to go in. It's floating around me everywhere, I'll just absorb it by being in it". This attitude completely excludes any mental effort, reflection, or analytical process ; it can only lead to failure. The ideal attitude of course is the correct balance between these two extremes : a reciprocal action between the mind and the senses : your mind with its analytical function working fully to guide and control your sense perceptions and your senses in turn stimulating and guiding your mental effort.

## D - THE AUDIO-VISUAL METHODOLOGY

First what does an audio-visual classroom look like ?



There is a screen on which a series of fixed pictures is projected from a film strip projector. A tape recorder and a loudspeaker provide the sound. The pictures on the screen depict scenes with French characters (a family, friends, a couple, etc.) going through everyday situations, using the fundamental French vocabulary. For every picture, you hear a line of the dialogue spoken by one of the characters. Each successive lesson presents a new situation using new language elements taken from 3 major categories : vocabulary, phonetic, structural (or grammatical), in ever increasing complexity with each lesson.

The methodology (the way the method is used by the teacher) has its logic and is quite scientific in its approach. It goes through a series of distinct phases in a logical order which corresponds to the natural order of the mind's learning process. These phases must be gone through precisely and rigorously, both by the teacher and the student, to achieve the best results ; they are :

1. Presentation
2. Explanation
3. Repetition and Memorization
4. Exploitation : Working and Transposition

### 1. PRESENTATION

The teacher projects the film strip, one picture after the other while you hear the dialogue. With each picture, you hear one line of dialogue. The picture is meant to be the visual expression of the line. It helps you understand the line and it helps you remember it. All you do is look and listen, try to understand the dialogue and try to remember it. At the end of the film and tape, the teacher goes back to the beginning and goes through the presentation a second time, in the same way.

## 2. EXPLANATION

This is the most critical phase with respect to your making good progress. Now that you've heard this apparent gibberish, you must be able to understand it before you can be expected to repeat it or to use it. The teacher starts again at the beginning of the lesson, projects one picture at a time, stays with it, makes sure you hear the phrase, repeats it himself or herself and then proceeds to explain it, very simply and directly (in French) - sometimes with a gesture (opening a door, giving you a book, taking a pencil, sitting down, putting on a hat, etc.) - while you are trying to understand the phrase.

Now, understanding a phrase (or a sentence) really covers two aspects. It means understanding the meaning, but it also means, and this is indispensable, understanding the structural content of the sentence, what it's made up of : where and what the verb is, in which tense (present, past or future), which person : 1st (I), 2nd (you) or 3rd(he/she/it), what are the little words around the verb, etc. This aspect is essential to being able to speak correctly, since, in speaking, one not only uses groups of words but one also needs to choose particular words, to make up a structure, a complete sentence. The teacher thus explains both aspects of the sentence : meaning and structural content, and asks check questions to make sure you understand what you should. The teacher may also directly ask you if you understand (in French "*vous comprenez ?*"). Don't try to answer hesitatingly : "*un peu* (a little)" or "*comme ci comme ça*". You either understand or you don't and if you don't (even partially) don't be afraid to say so. You must learn here the magic phrase which you should use when in trouble, the "open, Sesame" to the French language and that is : "*JE NE COMPRENDS PAS*". Never be afraid or too shy to use this phrase.

Note : Depending on the class or level, the teacher may do less explaining and ask the students themselves to explain, correcting when need be and recapitulating for everyone at the end of an explanation.

## 3. REPETITION AND MEMORIZATION

Now that you understand the dialogue lines, you can be made to repeat them. The teacher goes back to the beginning of the film and tape, projects the first picture, makes you hear the corresponding phrase several times, repeats it himself or herself and makes you repeat it, correcting your pronunciation when necessary. In this phase, you may be asked to repeat a line 3 or 4 times until it is satisfactorily pronounced. Related to this, you must always bear in mind that we are not particularly finicky or perfectionnists as regards pronunciation. We know that we cannot hope to have most of you speak with an excellent French accent at the end of your stay (you would have to live in France for several years to achieve this) and since we are limited in time (4 weeks), we must establish priorities and stress differently various aspects of the language in the order of their importance.

The criterion we use for pronunciation is the following : as long as you can pronounce French intelligibly, clearly, and unambiguously so that there is no doubt, no confusion, no hesitation about what you mean, we accept that pronunciation. But we may ask you to repeat the sentence several times until we obtain this acceptable level. In this matter, you must be patient and particularly humble when the teacher tries to correct you. Remember, you may not be able to hear, and therefore reproduce, all the French sounds. Our ear is a sound filter which has been developed and shaped over the years by our mother tongue. During your stay here, your ear, as a filter, is going to be modified, enlarged, tuned, to accept and be more sensitive to French sounds, particularly those which you may not hear very well now. Therefore, remain humble when the teacher corrects you, even though you may think you have said it correctly. Remember, you hear what you say with your own imperfect ear for French while the teacher hears it with his trained French ear. He is only trying to have your pronunciation reach the reasonable level of acceptability mentioned above.

Now that you are able to pronounce the lesson's phrases, the next logical step is to memorize them. The teacher goes back to the beginning of the lesson, projects the pictures one at a time with no sound and, for each picture, asks you to say the corresponding phrase. Your answer has to be, of course, the exact phrase of the lesson. Then, to complete the memorization effort, the teacher cuts off the pictures and the sound and asks you to be a character of the lesson; the mother for instance, another student is the father, another the son. Now, without any support or help (no pictures, no sound), you must go through the sketch of the lesson with the other students, saying the lines with gestures and with as much feeling as possible.

Note : In the beginner levels, there is, additionally, a preliminary repetition phase which comes before the presentation. In this phase, the teacher makes you hear the phrases through the loudspeaker only, without pictures. You must try, without understanding the phrases, to repeat them as correctly as possible after the loudspeaker.

This preliminary repetition is meant to exercise the beginner' ear, to make it accustomed to French sounds, and to develop its sensitivity to and its range in French.

#### 4. EXPLOITATION : working and transposition

Now that you understand, can pronounce and have memorized the phrases of the lesson, you must be able to work with and apply the structures you have just learned. There are two parts to this phase : a) the working part and b) the transposition part.



a) Working

The structures or sentences you have learned up to this phase are in a specific form: a specific verb, tense (past, present, future, etc.) a specific person, 1st, 2nd or 3rd, singular or plural (ex : I or we or he or they, etc.). You must now be able to re-use these structures in all possible grammatical variations, compatible, of course, with your level : other tenses, other persons (which may include the use of words like my, our, his, your, etc.), direct speech (“Give me your notebook”), indirect speech (“I’m telling him to give me his notebook”). To achieve this, the teacher, working from the pictures, asks you various questions or has the students ask each other questions about the picture, or the characters, sometimes with a student being one of the characters.

b) Transposition

Now that you are able to use correctly all possible grammatical variations, you are now ready to use the structures freely for yourself to tell about yourself or to express yourself on a subject. The teacher will now turn off the pictures and, leaving the situation of the lesson, will ask you (or have you ask each other) questions about yourself, your personal life, at home, in your work, in Villefranche, at the Institut, etc., the final objective being the free and natural use of the learned structures. For this part of the phase, the teacher will take you out of the classroom into the living room, for a change of setting, to more natural surroundings in order to effect this gradual transition from the classroom world to the real world which must remain our and your paramount objective.

**Note :** In order to insure good progress, it is essential that you read and study this introduction and the basic rules again from time to time, especially during the first week, and once a week after that.