

## How Can Parents Help Their Child Improve and Succeed In Their Studies?

Elite College - Bradley Z. Zhao

Parents often turn to us for advice: "As parents, how can we help our kids learn and improve their grades?"

Specifically targeting the characteristics of language learning for second-generation immigrants, Elite College has gathered some tips which will be useful to students learning French, so that both students and parents can use them as reference. Overall, we want students to make more efforts outside of class, as this is necessary for their learning. We also want parents to devote more time and energy to supervise and encourage their kids.

### Tip #1: Support your child's learning, adhere to a productive methodology

I always emphasize that every student at Elite College has potential. However, some kids encounter problems in their learning, their results, their attitude and their habits at certain stages. How come? At the source, it is us, the parents, who need to change our methods. So we must talk about how, as parents, we can help our kids succeed – besides just sending them to a tutoring school.

Did you know? According to a study on 2000 high school students, adolescents believe that the main reasons for their success in learning lie in:

- receiving encouragement from parents
- preparing for exams thoroughly
- getting along with friends who like learning
- having clear learning goals and thinking about the future
- handing in homework on time
- being aware of learning outcomes
- going to classes on time
- making every effort to exploit their talents

Primary school students are similar to these high school students: they do not simply follow their parents' demands. Instead, they want to resist, which is a normal reaction. Although they often argue with them, kids still need their parents' help to succeed. This is why parents should seek to guide their kids to accomplish their learning tasks, from a role of support and encouragement.

How can you give support to your child? 1- Help to develop a study schedule. 2- Be on top of their attendance and homework. 3- Provide a productive learning environment. 4- Recommend learning strategies.

Following the right learning methods is critical for our kids' success. Students can be generally classified into categories as follows, according to the work they put into their studies:

- 1<sup>st</sup> type: take classes, but don't do homework
- 2<sup>nd</sup> type: take classes + do homework and review
- 3<sup>rd</sup> type: classes + homework and review + extracurricular reading
- 4<sup>th</sup> type: classes + homework and review + extracurricular reading + write reading summary
- 5<sup>th</sup> type: classes + homework and review + extracurricular reading + reading summary + preview the material

Looking at these student types, we find that the first types of students gain the least from our classes because they don't put in the work. If they could make the efforts to become the 4<sup>th</sup> (or even 5<sup>th</sup>) type, they could make significant progress in their next exam. Their learning habits will develop and they will become excellent students!

Homework: Firstly, homework could not be more important. Every class, our teachers explain the homework first, and then teach new knowledge. Doing homework consolidates the new knowledge, while not doing homework will leave the student with less than 25% of what they have learnt during the course. Another problem caused by some students not finishing their homework on time is that teachers will spend more time explaining them during class in order to make sure all students understand, which is not fair for the students who always finish their homework on time.

Vocabulary: For most students, the main reason for a lack of progress and success in their studies is their reading few or no books, resulting in deficiency in their vocabulary. We must guide kids who don't read much to develop a habit of reading. As for kids who like reading, we urge them to write reading summaries.

Conjugation: In addition, conjugations are also especially important to learn, due to their making up upwards of 50% of the content in French exams.

A parent's role: Parents are just as important as schools and teachers in their impact and influence on a child's learning, if not even more important! Some parents say "I don't know French, so I can't help my kids with French." This is not true, because parents don't need to be and aren't supposed to be teachers. In most cases, the parent's role is to guide, to supervise and to inspire the child, rather than to teach, to criticize or to reproach.

## **Tip #2: Compile the questions with errors in one file, to revise regularly**

Students cannot avoid making mistakes, and improvements are only possible when the errors are corrected. Therefore, it very important to compile these tough questions together in one file. The process of correction consists of redoing those questions and avoiding the errors. Meanwhile, the questions provide a solid basis for review and help students save time, so I hope our students can develop this good habit to compile this file.

### **How to compile the file with errored questions?**

1. The file: The questions with mistakes should be hand-copied to a new notebook by the students themselves. We do not suggest parents photocopy the questions for their kids, since the writing itself helps students understand and get a handle on the question type and intended test topics.

2. One file per subject: For each subject, there should be a specific notebook in which all the errored questions from exercises, homework and tests will be copied, analyzed and categorized for future revision.

3. Full record of the errored questions: Mistakes from exercises, homework and tests must be all copied to the notebook. They must be written attentively, meanwhile the reasons for the mistakes should also be assessed and noted in the file. Reasons such as 'do not remember' or 'negligence' are not acceptable. In fact, negligence is a sign of miscomprehension of key points. After copying the question, the correct method with the detailed process will be written in a different color, then a personal reflection and summary. This is key to the process.

### **How to use the file?**

Correction is not simply copying the errored questions to the notebook. Students need to regularly redo the questions, verify and make sure to understand the questions, as this is the purpose of compiling the file.

1. Treat the errored questions as brand new questions: Copy the questions and redo them a few days later and verify the answers. If there are still mistakes, continue to rewrite, redo and verify until no mistakes are made.

2. Every time the file is accessed, the reasons for the errors should be re-read to compare differences in way of thinking. By doing so, students may figure out if they avoid the traps that got them before and prevent making the same mistakes again.

3. Regular review of the file: Timing matters a lot. Some students just review the questions two minutes after the analysis is made. Such practice is not recommended. The students still have a fresh impression right after the compilation of the file, so this too quick review will have no effect. The file should be reviewed regularly after three days to a week, until the students fully understand the questions and are assured of the method of resolution. A mark may be noted beside the question once the student believes that they fully understand the question, signifying the end of the redo and re-verify process.

4. The file should be reviewed before every test, which helps students clarify key points in solving questions and improves their confidence.

**TIP #3: Read a book every week, write a summary of the book**

The biggest challenge when learning French is vocabulary. It is not enough to study it in the classroom. A teacher at Elite College once said that many immigrants are too passive when studying French: they only listen to the lectures, but they do not make any effort outside of class. Students need motivation to learn on their own, to think of acquiring vocabulary as a positive accomplishment. The best way to improve vocabulary is by reading and by writing. Parents should encourage their kids to read books, on a regular basis, and to write a journal. But, there are different ways of reading a book. One way is by quickly flipping through the pages and enjoying the story, and the other is by paying attention to details like the grammar, the structure and the language itself in the book. Elite College pushes students to be able to do both.

To practice quick reading, the child needs to find books they find interesting and stimulating. There should be no more than about 20 new words on the first page. Thus it is not necessary to consult the dictionary. Instead, the student can use the context to interpret the meaning of vocabulary words. Quick reading is useful to be exposed to new words and to rapidly acquire vocabulary, but it is also essential to be able to do a more thorough reading of the book, to work on the basics of the language. A more detailed reading requires that, while following the story, the reader pays attention to the writing itself: word choice, style, grammar, etc. Taking notes while reading helps, as they can be collected and reviewed afterwards. This process may necessitate the guidance of a teacher. French classes at Elite College help students learn to read analytically and to take notes. Thus, students can experience more productive readings.

Some kids like to keep a journal, which is great, but it limits them to their own words, whereas writing a book summary allows them to use new vocabulary and to think about what they've read. Writing novel words and expressions daily will help kids remember them, improve their vocabulary, and as a result strengthen their reading and writing skills. With this in mind, Elite College asks its students to read a new book on their own every other week, and to write a summary on it. This process should be interesting and fun to the child. Parents should be patient at the beginning, and not push them and be critical of them, as long as the kids try and are perseverant. It is also not suggested to have a teacher correct all of the summaries. The student should feel at ease experimenting with the language, and the corrections may leave them discouraged. It is however a good idea to allow them to correct their own reports after some time, so that they can see their improvement and gain motivation. These habits will help nurture a positive studying attitude.

**TIP #4: Learn conjugations, study grammar**

French is a beautiful language with many precise rules. This makes it difficult to start learning. There are no short-cuts. But knowing the basic grammar and conjugations goes a long way to make learning French easier.

Conjugations are a fundamental aspect of French grammar, and one of the first steps to learning the language. They have to be memorized and remembered well. The primary tool for studying them is the "Bescherelle". All of the different conjugations must be known by heart.

In addition, any new concepts, like gender and number, must be mastered by studying and reviewing them over time and by using them as often as possible. French reading and writing classes teach the basic elements of comprehension and writing, as well as offering tips and exercises to study grammar.

Many parents believe that since their child is born here in Montreal, they will have no problems with French. There is no such guarantee. Many still find it more difficult than learning a mother tongue, as their exposure at home is limited. While they learn to speak and read French, it is often not at a sufficient level to use effectively, in situations such as a formal interview. We must focus more attention than Francophone families towards the study of French at primary and secondary levels.