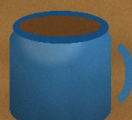
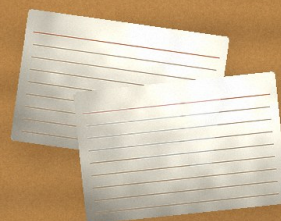
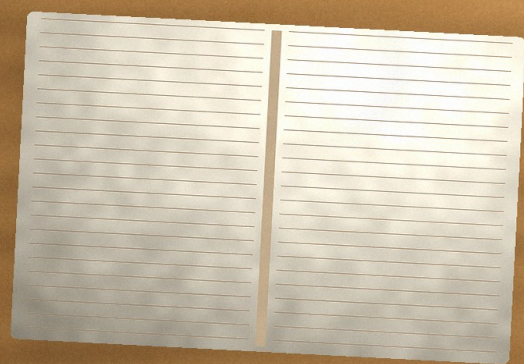


LANGUAGES FOR EMERGING ADULTS

Michael Gannotti



Languages for Emerging Adults

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A warm, practical guide for parents and students learning any world language, including American Sign Language, at ages 15 to 18: a Language Hour the teen runs, listening at real speed, words and patterns that stay, real reading and new scripts, speaking with people, writing that argues, safe ways out into the world, tools and AI under the terms, and credit a stranger can trust. Book 3 of the SMF WisdomForge Languages series. Illustrated edition, 22 October 2026. Notes run in one series at the back; the superscript numbers link to them. The images are original still lifes, with no people and no brands.

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Welcome

You do not need to speak the language to mentor a fifteen- to eighteen-year-old through a real year of it.

You need to protect the time, help find real people to talk with, ask good questions, keep the records honest, and stay out of the way at the right moments. Your teen does the listening, the reading, the talking, and the writing. More and more, your teen also does the planning.

That is what this book is for.

A Tuesday, for example

It is a quarter past nine in the morning. A sixteen-year-old sits at the end of the kitchen table with an index card, a pencil, a cheap pair of earbuds, and a notebook that has gone soft at the corners. On the card, in her own handwriting, is today's target: *I can retell a two-minute news story about the weather to someone who hasn't heard it.*

She has already listened to the story three times. The first time she caught the gist: a storm, a coast, some closed roads. The second time she caught the numbers. The third time she read along with the transcript and found the two words that had been slipping past her. Now she is walking slowly around the living room with the clip in her ears, repeating it half a beat behind the announcer, copying the rise and fall of the sentences before she worries about every word.

Her father is in the next room answering email. He took two years of the language in high school, a long time ago, and remembers almost none of it. At ten o'clock she comes in and says, in the language, more or less, "There is a big storm in the north. They closed the roads near the coast. Tomorrow it is going to be worse." He catches maybe a third of it. He asks, in English, "What's the part you're least sure you said right?" She thinks. "*Worse*. I think I used the wrong word." She goes and checks. She was right: she used the wrong word. She writes the right one in the notebook, along with one line: the date, fifty-five minutes, and *I can retell a short weather story without notes.*

That is most of the job. Nobody lectured. Nobody pretended to be fluent. A teenager set a target she could show, took in more of the language than she strictly needed, worked with it, used it with a real person (even a real person who mostly speaks English), checked it honestly, and wrote down what happened. Tomorrow she will do it again, a little differently. On Saturday she has twenty minutes on a video call with a tutor her parents vetted. In a month she will sit down with her father

for half an hour, play back the recording she made on the first day of the year, and hear for herself what has changed.

Why the teen runs the year

At eleven or twelve, most young people still need an adult to set up the day. By fifteen, most of them can set it up themselves, and they learn more when they do. A language at this age is not a school subject so much as a long project: hundreds of hours of listening and reading, a slow building of words and patterns that stay, and a growing number of real conversations with real people. A project that long only survives if the person doing it owns it.

So this book hands the plan to your teen. In the first chapter they record a baseline, write a one-page plan for the year, and decide (with you) how many hours they will put in each week and what proof they will collect. Every day they run what this book calls the Language Hour, five short steps they lead themselves. Once a month, they chair a half-hour meeting with you about what moved, what stalled, and what will change.

Your role changes from teacher to co-teacher and mentor. You will still do important things. You will make sure the hours happen. You will help find tutors, community classes, heritage speakers, programs, and volunteer work, and you will check that every one of them is safe. You will ask questions instead of correcting. You will notice when a week has gone sideways and help your teen cut it back to what matters. And you will keep (or help your teen keep) the records that turn a year of work into a credit on a transcript.

If you do speak the language, wonderful: you are also a conversation partner, and the book will show you how to give feedback that helps instead of feedback that stops the talking. If you don't, you are in good company, and nothing in this book depends on it.

The focus of the whole book

Everything here comes back to one line:

Take in more than you need; use it with real people; check it honestly; own the plan.

Take in more than you need. Languages grow mostly from understanding a great deal of them: listening and reading that is a little above what your teen could produce, every day, at real speed as soon as possible. Most of the Hour is spent here.

Use it with real people. A language is for talking with someone. At least once a week, your teen should use the language with a person: a tutor, a heritage speaker, a pen pal through a school program, a volunteer shift, a community class, a family friend. Chapter 7 covers how to find these people and how to keep it safe.

Check it honestly. Teenagers are hard on themselves and easy on themselves, sometimes on the same afternoon. The book uses dated recordings, short writing samples, and plain "I can" statements to keep everyone honest, and it saves real ratings for real tests.

Own the plan. The teen writes it, runs it, and revises it. You sign it as mentor.

What this book won't do

It won't promise fluency in weeks or months. Getting comfortable in a language takes a long runway, and the honest version of that runway is in Chapter 1. A good year is a real step, and the book will show you how to see it.

It won't let anyone award themselves a proficiency rating. Your teen will use the published "I can" statements to set targets and to make an honest guess about where they are, labeled as a guess. A rating comes from a rated test, and Chapter 9 explains which ones a homeschooler can actually sit.

It won't rank products or tell you which app to buy. Tools come and go. The book describes types of tools and how to use them well, and Chapter 8 sets the rules for AI.

It won't treat people as practice equipment. Heritage speakers, Deaf signers, immigrant families, and exchange hosts are people with their own lives. Your teen will meet them as a guest and a learner.

And it won't repeat the earlier books. If you used *Languages for Little Thinkers* or *Languages for Young Minds* with this child, you will recognize the family resemblance: a daily hour, a short talk, a few named activities. But everything here is built new for a teenager who is starting to run their own learning. If you are coming in fresh, you don't need either of those books. Start here.

How the book is laid out

The front matter is short. **How to Use This Book This Week** gets you started in the next seven days. **If You Only Remember Five Things** is one page you can tape to the refrigerator. **The Language Hour** describes the daily routine once, in full, so the chapters don't have to repeat it.

Then come ten chapters. The first sets goals, honest timelines, and the year plan. Chapters 2 through 6 work through the skills: listening at real speed, words and patterns that stay, reading (including new writing systems), speaking with people, and writing that connects and argues. Chapter 7 takes the language out of the house, with all the safety guidance in one place. Chapter 8 covers tools and AI. Chapter 9 turns the year into credit, a transcript line, and proof a college or employer can read. Chapter 10 helps you choose resources.

Each teaching chapter has the same eight sections, so you will always know where to look. There are parent sections that explain the idea in plain terms, a section written straight to your teen, a section for when things aren't working, and a short picture of what "done enough" looks like. Inside each chapter you'll find named activities called *try-its*, each with its time, materials, whether it needs a screen, and which step of the Hour it belongs to. Most need no screen at all. Each chapter also has moves for two age bands, **15–16** and **17–18**. Place your teen by what they can do and how independently they work, not by their birthday.

Examples rotate among Spanish, French, and Mandarin Chinese, because they cover a lot of families and three very different writing and sound systems. Where it matters, there are notes for Arabic,

Japanese, Korean, Russian, German, American Sign Language, and others. The methods work for any language your teen chooses.

The notes are at the back. The body of the book is for teaching; the back is where the sources live, so you can check anything you like.

One last thing before you start

Somewhere in the next few months, your teen will have a week when the language feels like it is going nowhere. That week is normal. Progress in a language is real but slow to see from the inside, which is exactly why the book asks for a baseline recording on day one. When that week comes, don't argue about it. Get out the recording, play it, and then play one from this week. Let your teen hear the difference.

Then go back to the Hour.

How to Use This Book This Week

You don't need to read the whole book before you start. You need about an hour this weekend and five ordinary days next week.

Before Monday: one sitting, about an hour

Sit down together. Read **If You Only Remember Five Things** aloud; it takes three minutes. Then read **The Language Hour** together, or let your teen read it while you read the Welcome. Agree on a time of day for the Hour and a place for it: a table, a chair, a corner that can be the same most days.

Gather the kit. It is small: a notebook that will become the log, a stack of index cards, a pencil, a phone or other recorder, earbuds, and access to a few things to listen to and read in the language. Chapter 10 helps you choose those; for this week, whatever your teen already has is fine.

Monday and Tuesday: the baseline

Don't start teaching yet. Start by finding out where your teen is.

Chapter 1 describes a short baseline: a two-minute recording with no preparation, a short reading with the unknown words marked, a ten-minute paragraph written without a dictionary, and a check against a published list of "I can" statements, marked *my guess*. Spread it over the first two Hours. Date everything and put it in a folder you won't lose. Do not listen back to the recording yet. You'll want it later, unheard and honest.

Place by the baseline, not by grade

The chapters offer moves for two bands, **15–16** and **17–18**. The ages are only labels. A seventeen-year-old who is just starting a new language with a new script belongs in the first band for that work. A fifteen-year-old who grew up hearing the language at their grandmother's table, or who has three solid years behind them, may be ready for most of the second. Look at what the baseline shows and at how independently your teen works, then pick. You can change your mind in a month.

The same goes for where to start in the chapters. A beginner leans hard on Chapters 2 and 3 (listening and words) and keeps Chapter 6's essay work light. A strong intermediate student may

spend more time in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Everyone uses Chapter 1 first and everyone uses the Hour every day.

Wednesday: the plan

With the baseline in hand, your teen writes a one-page plan for the year (Chapter 1 walks through it). It takes about forty minutes the first time. You read it, ask a few questions, and sign it as mentor. If the plan isn't finished by Wednesday, that is fine; finish it Thursday. The Hour can run while the plan is still a draft.

Thursday and Friday: the first real Hours

Your teen runs the Language Hour: Set the Target, Take It In, Work With It, Use It for Real, Check and Log. For these first days, keep it simple. One listening try-it from Chapter 2, one short retelling to you, one line in the log.

Schedule the first contact with a real person for next week: a tutor trial, a community class, a call with a relative who speaks the language, a visit to a heritage-language school's open day. Chapter 7 has the safety rules; read that section before the first booking.

If you have more than one teen

Siblings can share a table but not a plan. Each teen writes their own year plan and keeps their own log, even if they are learning the same language. They can share the input (one radio story, two listeners) and they make good partners for dictation and retelling. They should not grade each other. If one is far ahead, let the stronger one lead a try-it now and then; explaining a pattern is a fine way to learn it twice.

If the language is new to the whole family

Pick the language for a reason your teen cares about: a person they want to talk with, a place they want to go, a community nearby, a book or film they love. Chapter 1's *Why card* helps. If the language uses a new writing system, plan for the first weeks to include script work (Chapter 4) alongside listening. That is not a delay; it is the way in.

The banks are menus, not assignments

Each chapter offers named try-its drawn from a larger bank of activities. Nobody is meant to do all of them. Your teen chooses, usually one or two a day, matched to the day's target. When something works, repeat it. When something doesn't, drop it without guilt. A try-it that your teen does fifty times over a year is worth more than ten that were each done once.

Your job this week: mentor, not drill sergeant

You'll be tempted to quiz. Resist it. Your most useful moves this week are:

- **Protect the time.** The Hour happens even on busy days, if only in its short version.
- **Ask one good question.** The Language Hour gives a talk-box stem; use it at the end of the Hour.
- **Listen to the retelling.** You don't need to understand every word. Ask what the hardest part was.
- **Notice effort out loud.** "You listened to that clip four times before you gave up on the transcript. That's how it's done."
- **Keep the folder.** Recordings, writing samples, the plan, the log. You'll need them for the transcript (Chapter 9), and your teen will need them for the hard weeks.

After this week

From the second week on, the rhythm is simple: five Hours a week, one real-world contact, a line in the log every day, and one half-hour mentor meeting a month that your teen chairs. Read a chapter at a time, roughly in order, and pull try-its from it as you go. By the time you reach Chapter 9, you'll already have most of what you need for a transcript.

If You Only Remember Five Things

Tape this page to the refrigerator. When a week goes sideways, come back to it. Everything else in the book is detail hung on these five lines, and a year that keeps these five, even roughly, is a good year.

1. Take in more than you need.

Most of every Hour goes to listening and reading that your teen *mostly* understands, at real speed as soon as they can manage it. A language grows from the huge amount you understand, not the small amount you can already say. If time is short, cut anything else first. Never cut the input. A teen who listened for forty minutes and said almost nothing has still had a real day.

2. Use it with real people.

At least once a week, the language goes out of the house and meets a person: a tutor, a class, a relative, a heritage-language community, a volunteer shift, a pen pal through a vetted program. People are not practice equipment. Your teen goes as a guest and a learner, and you check that every arrangement is safe (Chapter 7). One honest twenty-minute conversation a week does more than a dozen extra flashcard sessions, because it shows your teen what the language is for.

3. Check it honestly.

Dated recordings, dated writing, and plain “I can” lines tell the truth about progress. A teen’s own sense of a level is a guess, and it gets labeled *my guess*. Real ratings come from rated tests (Chapter 9). Honest checking isn’t harsh; it’s how you get to hear, six months from now, exactly how far you’ve come. Keep the first recording unheard until the first mentor meeting; it is the most persuasive thing you will own.

4. Own the plan.

Your teen writes the year plan, chooses the try-its, sets each day’s target, and changes course when something isn’t working. You read the plan, ask questions, and sign it as mentor. A plan your teen

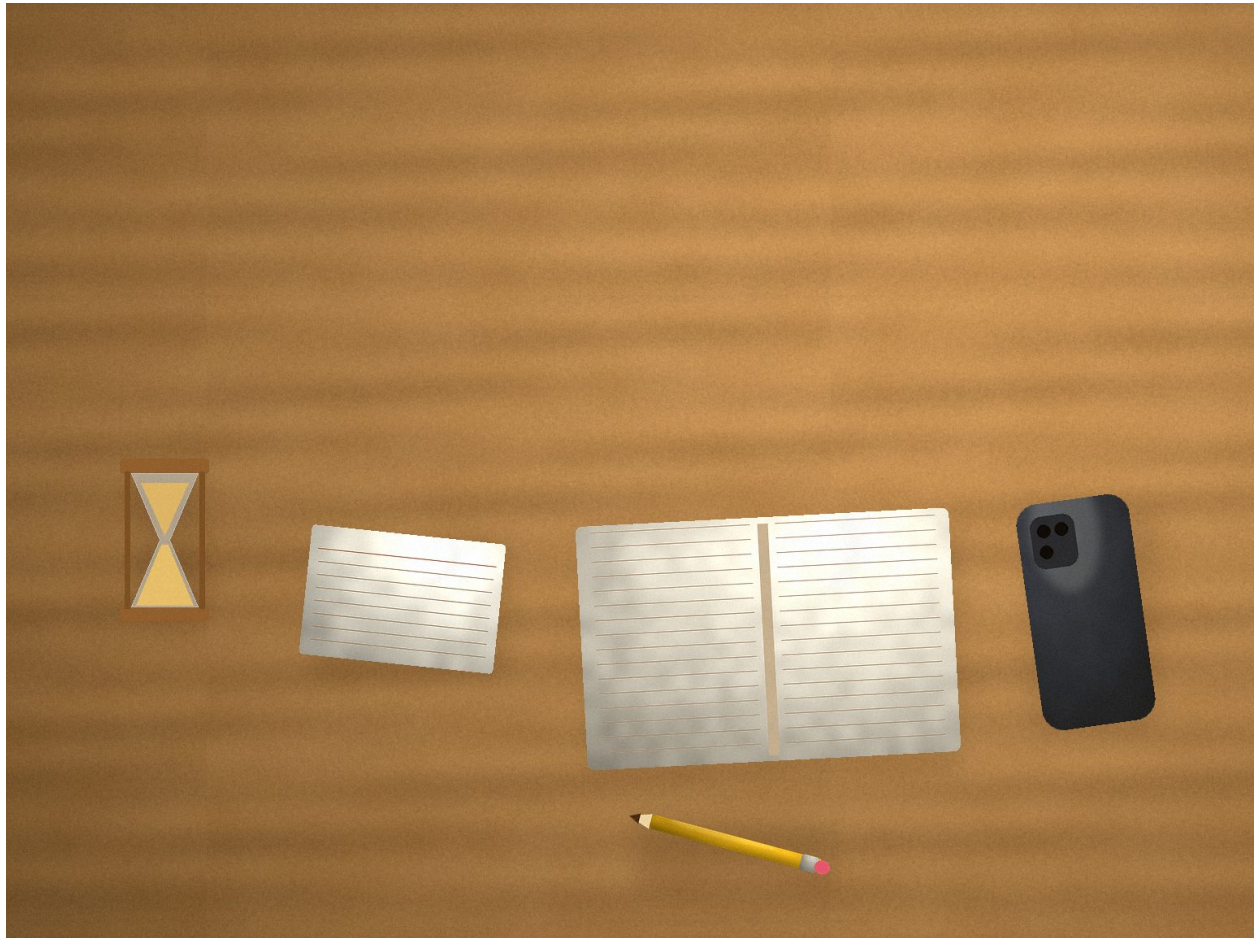
wrote is a plan your teen will keep. When it stops fitting, they revise it, in writing, and you both sign the new version.

5. The teen runs the Hour.

Five steps, about 45 to 60 minutes, five days a week: **Set the Target · Take It In · Work With It · Use It for Real · Check and Log.** Your teen leads every step. You protect the time, ask one good question at the end, and listen to the answer.

If you want it shorter still: *more in, real people, honest checks, their plan, their Hour.*

The Language Hour



The Language Hour is the daily routine at the center of this book. It has five steps, it takes about 45 to 60 minutes on a full day, and your teen runs it. This chapter describes it once, in full. Every later chapter fills the steps with new try-its but never changes the shape.

Set the Target · Take It In · Work With It · Use It for Real · Check and Log

Five full Hours a week across a 30-week school year come to about 150 hours, which is the amount HSLDA suggests logging for one high-school credit in a core subject, foreign language included.¹ Chapter 1 does the honest arithmetic about what 150 hours can and can't buy. Chapter 9 turns the hours into a transcript line. For now, the point is simpler: a short, steady daily practice, run by the

learner, adds up to something real.

The five steps

1. Set the Target (about 3–5 minutes)

Your teen writes today's target on an index card as an *I can* line with a verb they could show someone: *I can order a meal and ask about one ingredient. I can explain why I liked a film. I can follow a two-minute news story about sports.* The published "I can" statements that language teachers use are a good source of wording, and Chapter 1 shows how to use them to set targets without turning them into grades.²

A good target is small enough to reach today and specific enough to check tomorrow. "Get better at listening" is not a target. "I can catch the three main facts in a weather report" is.

Read the card aloud before starting. It takes ten seconds and it changes the Hour.

2. Take It In (about 15–25 minutes)

This is the biggest step and the one that is never cut. Your teen listens to or reads something in the language that they *mostly* understand, a little above what they could say themselves. It might be a podcast episode for learners, a graded reader, a news story read slowly, a song, a children's show, a chapter of a novel, a video from someone their age. As the year goes on, more and more of it should be at real speed and written for people who speak the language, not for learners.

Take in more than you need. The aim is not to master every word in the clip; it is to understand a lot of language, often. Repetition helps: the same clip three times, three clips on the same topic, the same chapter read twice. Chapter 2 is about listening and Chapter 4 about reading; both are full of ways to do this step well.

3. Work With It (about 10–15 minutes)

Now your teen does something active with what they took in. Pull a few useful sentences out of it. Write a dictation. Shadow a clip, repeating it half a beat behind the speaker. Practice one grammar pattern. Quiz yourself on yesterday's words from memory before looking at them. Draft a short message.

This is where explicit study lives, and teenagers are good at it: they can notice a pattern, name it, and practice it on purpose. Chapter 3 covers words and patterns; Chapters 5 and 6 cover speaking and writing.

One rule for this step: try to remember before you look. Pulling something out of memory, even when it's hard and even when you get it wrong, makes it stick far better than reading it again.³

4. Use It for Real (about 5–15 minutes)

The language goes to a person. On most days that person is you, or a sibling, or whoever is home: your teen retells what they heard, explains what they read, or asks a question and answers it. It doesn't matter if the listener understands every word. What matters is that your teen is trying to get meaning across to someone.

At least once a week, the person is someone who actually speaks the language: a tutor, a class, a relative, a community member, a pen pal through a vetted program, a volunteer partner. That contact may happen outside the Hour, on another day or at a different time. Chapter 5 covers speaking with people; Chapter 7 covers how to find them and keep it safe.

5. Check and Log (about 3–5 minutes)

Your teen ends by checking the target honestly (*yes, with help, or not yet*) and writing one line in the log:

Daily log line (2 min · log · no screen · Check and Log) Date, minutes, one thing I can do now. That's all. Over a year, these lines become the record of the course, the evidence for the transcript, and the best possible answer to "Am I getting anywhere?"

If something went wrong, note it in three or four words in the margin (*mixed up past tenses again*). That margin is where the next day's target often comes from.

Short day, full day, long day

Life is uneven. The Hour bends to fit it without losing its shape.

Short day (about 30 minutes). Set the Target in one line. Take It In for 15 minutes; this is the step you protect. Work With It for five, Use It for Real for five (a retelling at the dinner table counts), log it. A short day is a real day, and it goes in the log with its real minutes.

Full day (about 45–60 minutes). The standard shape described above. Most days should look like this.

Long day (about 90 minutes). Use the extra time for more input (a whole episode, a long chapter), a tutor session or class, a longer piece of writing, or a recording for the portfolio. Don't use it to cram flashcards. Long days are where projects happen.

The drop-one rule. When a week is overloaded, cut the extras. Never cut the Take It In step. Chapter 1 has more on keeping a plan alive through busy weeks.

On the hardest days, keep the Hour small and keep it going. Ten minutes of listening and one line in the log still count, and the habit of showing up is what carries the year.

The talk box

Every teaching chapter has a **talk box**: a short conversation your teen leads at the end of the Hour, with you or with a language partner. Each box has the same shape:

- **An opening line**, given in the target language with a pronunciation hint and an English gloss. Your teen says it (or reads it) first.
- **Three to five follow-up questions**, usually asked by you.
- **How long to wait** before you say anything after a question. Usually longer than feels comfortable.
- **What a silence usually means**. Most often, your teen is thinking. Sometimes they are tired, or embarrassed, or the question was too big. The box helps you tell which.

You don't need to speak the language for the talk box. If you don't, your teen opens in the language and the follow-ups can be in English. If you do, keep as much of it in the language as your teen can manage.

Here is the stem for the Hour itself, the question to close any day:

Talk box: the Hour stem

Opening line: "What's my target, what did I take in, and what will I check tomorrow?"

- Spanish: *¿Cuál es mi meta, qué escuché o leí hoy y qué voy a revisar mañana?*
- French: *Quel est mon objectif, qu'est-ce que j'ai écouté ou lu aujourd'hui, et qu'est-ce que je vérifie demain ?*
- Mandarin: 我的目标是什么? 我今天听了、读了什么? 明天我要检查什么? (Wǒ de mùbiāo shì shénme? Wǒ jīntiān tīng le, dú le shénme? Míngtiān wǒ yào jiǎnchá shénme?)

Follow-ups: Which part of today was the hardest? What did you hear or read that you didn't expect? Did you hit the target, or did it move?

Wait: a slow count of five after each question.

A silence usually means: they're deciding whether to be honest about a bad day. Make it easy: "Short days count."

The try-it

Every chapter's activities come in the same shape, so your teen can scan them quickly and choose:

Name (minutes · materials · screen or no screen · Hour step) The move, in two to five sentences.

Most try-its need no screen at all. Each chapter has at least one that takes the language out of the house. Here are the two that every Hour can use:

The one-line target (3 min · index card · no screen · Set the Target) Write today's target as an *I can* line with a verb you can show: *I can order, I can explain why, I can follow*. Read it aloud before you start. At the end of the Hour, turn the card over and write *yes, with help, or not yet*.

The five-step card (2 min · card taped to the table · no screen · Check and Log) Write the five steps down the side of a card and tape it where the Hour happens. Tick each step as you finish it. On a hard day, the card is the day's record; on a good day it takes two seconds.

Safety, in one paragraph

The language will take your teen online and out into the world, to tutors, apps, exchange programs, heritage communities, and volunteer work. All the specific safety guidance lives in one place, Chapter 7, so read it before the first booking or sign-up. The short version: you vet every person and program before your teen meets them; you know every platform's age rules and use the parent account where one is required; sessions with adults happen where others can see and hear, or are recorded where the platform allows; your teen never moves a conversation to a private channel with someone you haven't met; and if anyone online ever pressures your teen for images or money, your teen stops replying, keeps the evidence, and tells you right away, knowing they are not in trouble. Chapter 7 says exactly what to do next.

AI and other tools, in one box

AI in the Hour: the short rules

- **Try first, then ask.** Your teen makes their own attempt (listens, guesses, writes the sentence) before asking any tool.
- **A partner, not a writer.** AI can quiz, explain a pattern, generate practice, or play a conversation partner. It doesn't write anything your teen will hand in, sign, or record as their own.
- **Check what it says.** AI and machine translation make confident mistakes, especially with grammar explanations, cultural details, and less common languages. Check against a reliable source or a person.
- **Know the age rules and keep it private.** Many AI services set minimum ages or require a parent's permission for users under 18. Read the terms with your teen, and don't share personal details.
- **Keep a screen-off day.** One Hour a week runs entirely on paper and voices.

Chapter 8 has the full rules. Every other chapter's "Tools, including AI" section applies them in a move or two.

Where you fit in the Hour

Your teen runs the Hour, but you are not absent from it. A rough guide to where a parent-mentor belongs:

- **Set the Target:** glance at the card. If the target is vague, ask, "How would I know you'd done it?" and let your teen rewrite it.
- **Take It In:** stay out of it. Don't hover, don't ask how it's going. Input is quiet work.

- **Work With It:** available, not involved. If your teen asks for a dictation reader or a quiz partner, say yes. If they ask what a word means, ask what they think it means first.
- **Use It for Real:** be the audience. Listen to the retelling all the way through before you say anything, then ask one question about meaning, not form: “So why did they close the roads?”
- **Check and Log:** ask the talk-box question. Read the log line if your teen offers it. Don’t edit it.

If you speak the language, resist correcting every error during Use It for Real. When something matters, prompt instead of fixing: repeat the sentence up to the mistake and pause, or ask, “Past or present?” Teenagers who find the correction themselves keep it. Chapter 5 says more.

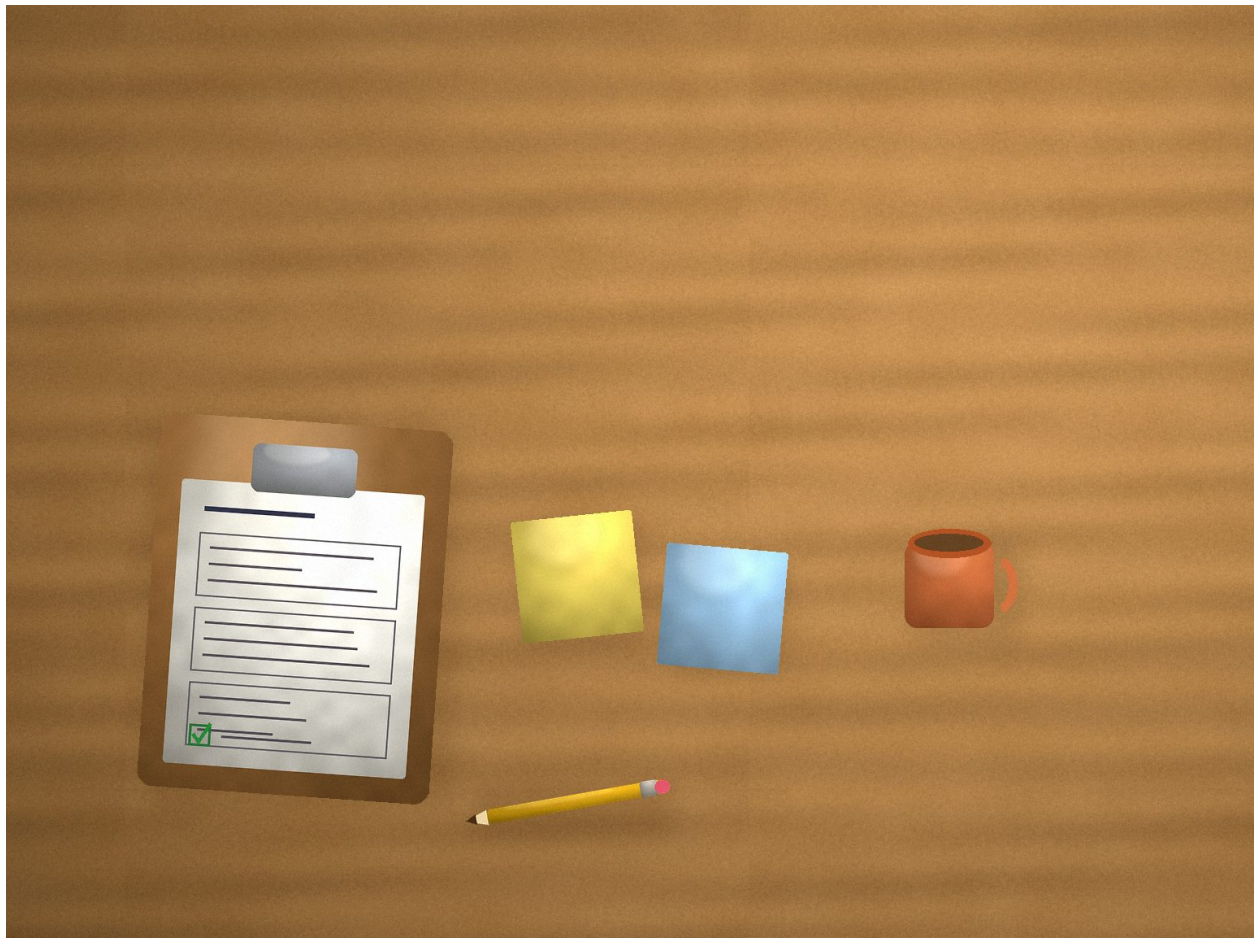
If the Hour stops happening for more than a few days, don’t scold. Ask what got in the way, and help your teen shrink the next week back to short days until the habit returns.

What a good Hour looks like

You will know the Hour is working when you hear more of the language in the house than you hear about it. When your teen sets the day’s target without being asked. When the log has lines in it on days you were busy. When a retelling makes you laugh, or makes you ask a real question back. And when, at the monthly mentor meeting, your teen plays the first recording, winces, and then grins.

Chapter 1 — Goals, honest timelines, and your own plan

Why this matters



Ask a fifteen-year-old how good they want to be at a language and you will usually get one of two answers. The first is “fluent,” said with a shrug, as if it were a place you arrive at on a particular date. The second is “I don’t know, good enough for the credit,” said in a tone that tells you the language is already a chore.

Neither answer is a plan. Both are perfectly reasonable things for a teenager to say when nobody has shown them what progress in a language actually looks like, how long it takes, or how to tell whether it's happening.

This chapter fixes that. It gives your teen four things they will use all year:

- **A ladder** to describe what people can do in a language, from a handful of memorized phrases to the kind of command a diplomat or a novelist needs. Your teen uses it to set targets, never to award themselves a rank.
- **An honest ruler** for how long languages take, so the plan is neither a fantasy nor a surrender.
- **A baseline**: a dated recording, reading, and writing sample from the first week, kept unheard and unread until the first mentor meeting.
- **A one-page year plan** that your teen writes and you sign.

The focus of the whole book is **take in more than you need; use it with real people; check it honestly; own the plan**. This chapter is where the last two clauses begin. Honest checking needs a starting point and a scale. Owning the plan needs a plan.

There is a quieter reason this matters, too. Teenagers who feel that a subject is happening *to* them tend to do the minimum. Teenagers who have set their own target, in their own words, against an honest timeline, tend to surprise everyone, themselves included. The goal of this chapter is to move the language from the first category to the second, in the first week.

Why the struggle is worth it. Writing a plan feels like homework before the homework. Recording a baseline is uncomfortable; nobody likes hearing themselves stumble. But a teen who has a dated first recording and a plan they wrote can answer the question every language learner eventually asks — *am I actually getting anywhere?* — with evidence instead of mood. That answer is what carries them through the long middle of the year.

For the parent: understand it yourself

You don't need to become a language-assessment expert. You need four ideas, and you need to understand them well enough to explain them at the kitchen table.

The ladder: what proficiency means

Language teachers in the United States describe ability with a scale published by ACTFL, the national organization for language educators. The current edition of its Proficiency Guidelines (2024) uses five major levels: **Novice**, **Intermediate**, **Advanced**, **Superior**, and **Distinguished**. The first three are each split into **Low**, **Mid**, and **High**.⁴

The levels describe what someone can *do* with the language, not how many years they've studied or which textbook they finished. In plain terms:

- **Novice** speakers work mostly with memorized words and phrases: greetings, lists, short set expressions. They can get across a few things about very familiar topics.

- **Intermediate** speakers can make their own sentences, ask and answer simple questions, and handle everyday situations, mostly in the present. This is the level of “I can get by.” It is a big, wide level, and most high-school learners spend a long time in it.
- **Advanced** speakers can narrate and describe in past, present, and future, talk in paragraphs rather than sentences, and handle a situation with a complication (the hotel lost the booking; the bus isn’t coming).
- **Superior** speakers can discuss abstract topics, support an opinion, and hypothesize, accurately and at length.
- **Distinguished** is the level of highly educated, highly skilled language use: tailoring language to any audience, with cultural and rhetorical sophistication.

You can see the shape: each step up is a step from words to sentences to paragraphs to extended argument, and from familiar topics to unfamiliar and abstract ones.

Two cautions. First, the levels are wide, and moving up one takes much longer at the top than at the bottom. Novice Low to Novice High can happen in a season. Intermediate Mid to Advanced Low can take years. Second, a level is a judgment made by a trained rater listening to (or reading) a real performance. Neither you nor your teen can award one. In this book, your teen will often make a *guess* about where they are, and that guess is always labeled *my guess*. Real ratings come from rated tests, which Chapter 9 covers.

The “I can” statements: targets, not grades

Alongside the scale, ACTFL and the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages publish the **NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements**: plain sentences like “I can ask and answer questions about my daily routine” or “I can tell a story about something that happened,” grouped by level and by mode of communication.⁵ They were written for learners to set goals and reflect on progress. They are a framework, not a curriculum and not a test.

That makes them perfect for this book. Your teen borrows the wording of a Can-Do statement to write a target, and comes back to it a month later to ask: can I do this now? They’re a shared vocabulary for “what’s next,” and they keep targets about doing things with the language rather than about covering pages.

Three ways of communicating

The same standards organize communication into three **modes**, and it helps to know their names because they show up in the Can-Do statements and in most tests:⁶

- **Interpretive**: understanding what you hear, read, or watch, when you can’t ask the speaker to slow down. (Chapters 2 and 4.)
- **Interpersonal**: two-way communication, spoken or written, where you can negotiate meaning: ask, clarify, try again. (Chapter 5, and some of 6.)
- **Presentational**: speaking or writing to an audience that can’t interrupt: a speech, an essay, a video. (Chapter 6, and some of 5.)

A balanced year touches all three every week. The Language Hour does that by design: Take It In is interpretive; Use It for Real is usually interpersonal; a recording or a written piece is presentational.

The honest ruler: how long languages take

Here is where many families get misled, usually by advertising. Nobody becomes fluent in a few weeks or a few months, and a plan built on that idea collapses by Thanksgiving.

The most useful honest ruler comes from the U.S. State Department's Foreign Service Institute, which trains American diplomats. FSI publishes how long its students typically need to reach professional working proficiency (a level well up the scale, where you can do your job in the language) in different languages, grouped into categories.⁷ Roughly:

- **Category I** (languages closely related to English, such as Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch): about 24 to 30 weeks of training, or 552 to 690 class hours.
- **Category II** (German is the familiar example): about 36 weeks, or 828 class hours.
- **Category III** (a large group with significant linguistic or cultural differences from English, such as Russian, Hindi, Hebrew, Greek, Turkish, and many others): about 44 weeks, or 1,012 class hours.
- **Category IV** (Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean): about 88 weeks, or 2,200 class hours.

Read those numbers with care. They describe adults who are already skilled language learners, studying full-time in very small classes, with hours of homework on top, aiming at a professional level most high-school students won't need for years. They are a ruler for comparing languages, not a promise, a deadline, or a forecast for a teenager.

What the ruler *is* good for is honesty about proportion. A Category IV language really does take something like three or four times longer than a Category I language for an English speaker to reach the same place. A teen choosing Japanese should know that and choose it anyway, gladly, for their own reasons, with a plan that expects a longer runway and celebrates smaller steps. A teen choosing Spanish should know that even the "easy" languages take hundreds and hundreds of hours.

The hours you actually have

Now set the ruler beside the year. As the Language Hour noted, HSLDA suggests logging at least 150 hours for one high-school credit in a core course, foreign language included: roughly five hours a week for 30 weeks.⁸ HSLDA is also clear that more hours don't earn more credit, and it suggests more weekly time for honors-level or AP-level work. (Chapter 9 handles credit in detail; this is just the arithmetic.)

So a full credit year is about 150 hours. Put that next to the FSI figures, and you can see why one year is a real step and not the finish line. Even in a Category I language, a 150-hour year is a fraction of a diplomat's classroom hours. Two, three, or four such years, with input outside the Hour and regular real-world use, add up to genuine ability. For a Category IV language, that same run of years is a strong foundation, not a destination.

This isn't discouraging. It's freeing. It means your teen doesn't have to be fluent by June; they have to be measurably further along than they were in September, with the recordings to prove it. It also explains why the book says *take in more than you need*: the Hour is the floor, and every podcast on a walk, every show watched in the language, every conversation outside the Hour lengthens the runway.

One more idea belongs here. ACTFL's guidance on language programs stresses that long, uninterrupted sequences matter more than the age at which someone starts.⁹ A teen who keeps going for four years, even at a modest pace, almost always ends up ahead of one who starts with a burst and stops. Plan for continuity first, intensity second.

Why the teen writes the plan

You could write the plan yourself. It would probably be tidier. But a plan the teen writes contains their reasons, their people, and their estimate of their own weeks, and that makes it a plan they'll defend when it gets hard. Your job is to read it, ask good questions, check the arithmetic, and sign as mentor. Once a month, at the mentor meeting, your teen chairs a review of it.

The plan is also the first page of the portfolio. Chapter 9 will ask for a course description, a log, and evidence. A teen who wrote a plan in September already has the bones of all three.

How to teach it this week

This chapter's week is the first week of the year. It runs alongside the first Hours, and by Friday your teen should have a dated baseline, a draft plan, and a week map.

Day one and two: the baseline

Spread the baseline over two Hours so it doesn't feel like an exam. Tell your teen plainly what it's for: "This is the 'before' picture. Nobody grades it. We'll look at it together in a month."

Two-minute baseline recording (10 min · phone recorder · screen · Check and Log) Talk for two minutes about your week, in the language, with no preparation and no notes. If you run out of words, say what you can, switch topics, keep going. Say the date at the start. Save the file somewhere safe. Do not listen back yet.

For a true beginner, two minutes may be mostly silence and a few words. That's fine; that is the baseline. Let them say the words they know, count to ten, name the people in the room. In six months, the contrast will be the best encouragement they'll ever get.

Baseline read (15 min · one printed short text · no screen · Take It In) Read a short text at your edge: a page of a graded reader, a short news item for learners, a children's story. Mark every word you would need to look up. Count the marks and write the number at the top with the date.

The count matters more than it seems. Research on vocabulary and reading suggests that comfortable, unassisted reading needs a reader to know nearly all of the running words on the page.¹⁰ If

your teen marked a dozen words in a short paragraph, that text is for intensive study, not for easy reading. Chapter 4 uses this count to choose reading material all year.

Baseline paragraph (15 min · paper, timer · no screen · Work With It) Write for ten minutes on a familiar topic (my family, my town, what I did last weekend) with no dictionary and no help. Date it and file it, unedited.

Can-Do self-check (15 min · printed Can-Do list · no screen · Check and Log) Print the Can-Do statements for the levels around where your teen probably is (for a beginner, the Novice levels; for a second- or third-year learner, Novice High through Intermediate). Mark each statement yes, *with help*, or *not yet*. At the top, write: *My guess, not a rating*.

That last line isn't a formality. It's the habit the whole book depends on. A teen who learns now that a guess is a guess will be honest about progress all year, and honest about it on a college application later.

Day three: the why and the runway

Before the plan comes the reason for it.

Why card (10 min · index card · no screen · Set the Target) Write three real reasons you want this language and one person you want to talk to in it. *Real* means the reasons you'd actually say to a friend, not the ones that sound good to adults. "I watch a lot of anime and I'm tired of subtitles" is a real reason. So is "My grandmother's sister doesn't speak English and I want to know her." Keep the card in the front of the log.

The person on the card matters most. Months from now, on a flat day, "I want to talk to Tía Rosa at the wedding" pulls harder than "I want to be Intermediate Mid."

Honest-runway sum (15 min · calculator, paper · no screen · Set the Target) Multiply your planned weekly hours by the number of weeks in your school year. Look up your language's FSI category. Then write one honest sentence that compares the two. Not a promise. Just a sentence that's true.

Some real examples of honest sentences:

- "I'll do about 150 hours this year. Spanish is Category I. That's a real step, and if I keep going for three years and talk to people a lot, I'll be able to get by on my own."
- "I'm planning about 200 hours of Korean. Category IV. This year is mostly Hangul, listening, and getting comfortable. I'm in this for a long time."

Watch for two dishonest sentences, both common. One is the inflated one ("I'll be fluent by summer"); the other is the defeated one ("I'll never be any good, so what's the point"). Both get the same response: "Is that true? Write the true one."

Days four and five: the plan and the week

The year plan on one page (40 min · one sheet · no screen · Set the Target) On a single sheet, your teen writes:

1. **The language and the why** (copy from the Why card).

2. **A target for the year**, in Can-Do language and with a sublevel as a *goal*: “By May I want my Can-Do check to look like solid Novice High, moving into Intermediate Low (my guess).” Or for a stronger student: “Intermediate Mid in speaking, and I’d like to sit a rated test in spring to find out.”
3. **Hours per week**, and which Hour steps get the most time. (Take It In always gets the most.)
4. **Real people**: who they will use the language with, and how often. At least weekly.
5. **Proof they’ll collect**: recordings each month, writing samples each term, the log, any test. Chapter 9 says what counts.
6. **A test, if any**: a rated proficiency test, AP, CLEP, or none this year. Chapter 9 explains the options; for now, “decide by January” is a fine entry.
7. **Signatures**: the teen as author, the parent as mentor, and the date.

You read it. You ask questions; you don’t rewrite. Good mentor questions: *How will you know you’re there? Which week of the year worries you? Who’s the real person in week two? What happens when you get sick for a week?* Then you sign.

The week map (15 min · planner · no screen · Set the Target) Place five Hours and one real-world contact in the coming week. Circle the hardest day, the one with the dentist, the shift at work, the late practice. Decide now what that day’s short Hour looks like.

The talk box

Talk box: chapter 1

Opening line: “What can I do this month that I couldn’t do last month — and how do I know?”

- Spanish: *¿Qué puedo hacer este mes que no podía hacer el mes pasado, y cómo lo sé?* (keh PWEH-doh ah-SEHR EHS-teh mehs keh noh poh-DEE-ah ah-SEHR ehl mehs pah-SAH-doh, ee KOH-moh loh SEH)
- French: *Qu’est-ce que je peux faire ce mois-ci que je ne pouvais pas faire le mois dernier, et comment je le sais ?*
- Mandarin: 这个月我能做什么上个月做不到的事? 我怎么知道? (Zhège yuè wǒ néng zuò shénme shàng ge yuè zuò bú dào de shì? Wǒ zěnmē zhīdào?)

Follow-ups: What’s the evidence: a recording, a page, a conversation? Which Can-Do line moved from “with help” to “yes”? What’s one line you thought would move and didn’t? What would you change in the plan because of that?

Wait: a slow count of five. Longer after the third question.

A silence usually means: they don’t have evidence handy, not that nothing changed. Offer the folder: “Want to play the first recording?”

In the first week there is no “last month” yet. Use the opening line anyway, as a promise: “In four weeks, I’ll ask you this, and we’ll have the recordings.”

Moves by band

15–16. Keep the plan short and concrete. Help more with the arithmetic and the week map; let them write the reasons and the target alone. Choose two or three proof items, not six. A target in Can-Do language is plenty; a sublevel goal is optional.

17–18. Expect the full plan with a sublevel goal, a test decision deadline, and a sentence about how this year fits with college, work, or travel plans. Let them draft the course description now (Chapter 9 shows the format); it will need only a light edit in May. Ask whether they want you at the monthly meeting as mentor, or whether a tutor or community teacher should join once a term.

Practice that actually builds learning

The baseline and plan happen once. The habits that keep them alive happen all year.

The monthly mentor meeting

Monthly mentor meeting (30 min · log, recordings · no screen · Check and Log) Once a month, your teen chairs a half-hour meeting with you. They bring the log, this month's recording, and the plan. The agenda is three questions: *What moved?* *What stalled?* *What changes?* You ask; you don't lecture.

A few practical details make the meeting work:

- **Put it on the calendar for the whole year now.** The first weekday of each month is easy to remember.
- **Hold it somewhere that isn't the Hour table.** A library study room, a café, a park bench, a walk. A change of place signals that this is a meeting between two people with a shared project, not a lesson. If there is a café, bakery, or market nearby where the language is spoken, go there; order in the language, then hold the meeting.
- **Start with the recordings.** First month: play the baseline, then this month's recording, back to back. Don't comment first. Let your teen speak first.
- **End with one change.** One. Written on the plan in pen, with the date.

Revising the plan

A plan that never changes is either perfect or ignored, and it isn't perfect. Expect revisions after the first month, at the end of each term, and whenever life changes: a new job, a sport season, a move, a family event. A revision is not a failure; it's the plan doing its job.

Drop-one rule (5 min · none · no screen · Set the Target) When a week is overloaded, cut the extras: the extra writing, the vocabulary set, the bonus project. Never cut the Take It In step. A week of short Hours that are mostly input keeps the language alive; a week of zero breaks the chain.

Using the Can-Do statements well

Some families make the Can-Do list into a checklist to finish. That turns a learning tool into busy-work. A better rhythm:

- At the start of each month, your teen picks **two or three statements** to aim at. These become the raw material for daily targets.
- During the month, daily targets borrow the verbs: *I can describe, I can ask about, I can tell a story about.*
- At the mentor meeting, they re-mark only those statements, with evidence: “Yes. Here’s the recording where I did it.”
- Every term, they re-mark the whole list for their level, labeled *my guess*. Keep every version.

Over a year, the stack of marked lists becomes one of the clearest records of progress you’ll have.

Keeping the honest ruler honest

Twice a year, redo the honest-runway sum with the real hours from the log instead of the planned ones. It’s often a useful shock. Many teens plan 150 hours and log 110. That’s not a disaster; it’s information. Either the plan changes, or the week does.

At the same time, add up the hours of input your teen did *outside* the Hour: shows, music with lyrics they followed, podcasts on walks, games played in the language. Most teens underestimate this. It counts for learning, even when it doesn’t count for credit, and it is exactly what *take in more than you need* means.

A worked example: one plan, start to finish

Here is how the first week looked for one family, so you can see the pieces fit. Maya is sixteen and has had one patchy year of French from an online course. Her reason is concrete: her cousin is marrying a man from Lyon next August, and she wants to talk with his grandmother at the reception without hiding behind her phone.

On day one she recorded her baseline: two minutes describing her week, a one-minute read-aloud of a learner news story, and a short written message to an imaginary pen pal. On day two she and her father listened back together. He doesn’t speak French, so he did what this chapter asks: he noticed out loud. “You started three sentences with *je suis* and then switched to English.” “You read the numbers slowly.” “The message has a lot of present tense.” Maya wrote those three observations at the top of her plan.

On day three she filled in her Why card (“Talk with Mamie Jeanne at the wedding for ten minutes about her life”) and did the arithmetic: five Hours a week, thirty-four weeks, a few long Saturdays, about 170 hours by August. French is Category I. Her honest sentence read: “By August I’ll have a solid year of work, enough to hold a slow, friendly conversation about family and food, not enough to follow a fast argument at the dinner table.” Her father underlined it. That sentence did more to calm her than any pep talk.

On days four and five she wrote three monthly targets as Can-Do style statements in her own words (“I can tell a short story about something that happened last weekend”), picked her first month’s topics (her family, her town, the wedding itself), and booked the first mentor meeting for the last Sunday of the month at the bakery near the library. The plan fit on one page, with her handwriting all over it.

Nothing about this plan is clever. What makes it work is that every line belongs to Maya, every number is honest, and there’s a date on the calendar when two people will sit down and look at the evidence.

For the student

This part is for you.

You’re old enough to run this. That’s the deal in this book: you write the plan, you run the Hour, you chair the monthly meeting. Your parent is your mentor, which means they’ll ask good questions, help you find people to talk to, make sure things are safe, and sign off on the record. They won’t drill you. If they start to, you can point them to this page.

Here’s what we’re asking of you this week.

Record the baseline and don’t listen to it. It will be awkward. Two minutes is long when you don’t have the words. Say what you can. Nobody is grading it. It’s the “before” picture, and in a few months it will be the most satisfying thing you own.

Be honest on the Can-Do list. Write *my guess* at the top. If you’re not sure whether it’s a yes, it’s *with help*. Nobody gets a better outcome from a flattering guess. You get a worse plan.

Write the real why. If the real reason is “I need two years for college applications,” write that, and then see whether there’s a second reason underneath it. There usually is: a show, a person, a place, a game, a kind of music, a job you’re curious about. Put the person you most want to talk to on the card.

Know the timeline and choose anyway. Languages take a long time. Hundreds of hours for the closest ones to English, thousands for the farthest. That’s not a reason to pick an “easy” language. It’s a reason to pick one you actually want, because you’ll be in it for a while. Your first year is a real step. It’s not supposed to be the whole staircase.

Make the plan yours. Write it the way you’d explain it to a friend. Put the hard week in it. Put the test decision in it, even if the decision is “not this year.” Then sign it.

Here’s a sample of what a good first-month target line sounds like:

By the first of next month I can introduce myself, my family, and what I do on weekends for one minute without notes, and I can follow most of a slow podcast episode for learners on a familiar topic.

And a sample week from a seventeen-year-old’s plan, two years into French:

Mon–Fri Hour at 8:30 before work shifts. Tue and Thu: news podcast + dictation. Mon, Wed, Fri: novel chapter + sentence mining. Saturday: 30 minutes with tutor (video, in the living room). Thursday is the hard day — closing shift — so Thursday is a short Hour: 20 minutes of podcast on the bus, 5 minutes of retelling at dinner, log.

That’s it. Short, specific, honest, yours.

One more thing. You’ll have weeks when it feels like nothing is happening. That’s normal for everyone who has ever learned a language. Progress is slow to see from inside. That’s what the recordings are for. When you hit that week, play the baseline. Then play last week’s. Then go back to the Hour.

If it isn’t clicking

“I don’t want to make a plan; I just want to start.” Fair. Start the Hour today with the one-line target and the daily log line, and finish the plan by the end of the week. The plan can be a draft for a month. What matters is that it exists, in their words, before the first mentor meeting.

The plan is wildly ambitious. Don’t argue. Ask, “Show me the week map for that.” Usually, a teen who plans 12 hours a week discovers on paper that it doesn’t fit, and revises without you saying a word. If it does fit, let them try for a month. The first mentor meeting will sort it out.

The plan is suspiciously small. Ask what the why card says. Then ask what the smallest plan would be that still gets them to the person on the card. If the honest answer is “I don’t care about this language,” that’s a real conversation to have now, not in March. Sometimes the right move is a different language.

They won’t record the baseline. Offer privacy: they can record alone, in another room, and you don’t have to be anywhere near. Offer brevity: one minute instead of two. Don’t skip it. A teen who refused the baseline in September always wishes they had one by spring.

They want to self-rate. “I’m basically Intermediate.” Agree to write it down, as *my guess*, with the date. Then point out that a real rating is available (Chapter 9) and ask whether they’d like to find out this year. Many teens take that offer.

You (the parent) feel unqualified. You’re not the language teacher; you’re the mentor. Your qualifications are that you can read a plan, ask a question, protect an hour, and keep a folder. If you speak the language too, good, but keep your mentor hat on at the meetings.

The language has a different writing system and the beginner baseline is nearly empty. Expected. For Arabic, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Hindi, and many others, the first weeks’ plan includes script work (Chapter 4) alongside listening. The baseline read can be a page of romanized text, a few known characters, or simply a listening task instead. Note what you did and keep it.

Heritage speakers. A teen who grew up hearing the language may understand far more than they can say or write, or may speak comfortably and not read at all. Their baseline will look uneven, and their plan should be uneven too: perhaps more reading and writing, fewer listening drills. Don’t

place them by their weakest skill alone. And honor what they bring; this is their family’s language, not a school subject they’re behind in.

The plan is beautiful and nobody looks at it. Tape it inside the folder cover, not in a drawer. Read the top line aloud at the start of each mentor meeting. A plan that’s seen once a month stays alive; a plan that’s filed dies quietly.

The teen compares themselves with a friend who “learned in a summer.” Gently ask what that friend can actually do, and for how long. Then play your teen’s own baseline next to last month’s recording. The only comparison that teaches anything is with yourself, last month.

Tools, including AI

Most of this chapter is paper on purpose. A plan written by hand, signed, and taped inside the log is harder to ignore than a file. Still, a few tools help, and Chapter 8 has the full rules.

- **A recorder.** A phone’s voice-memo app is enough. Name each file with the date and a word (*2026-10-baseline*). Back the files up somewhere you’ll still have in two years.
- **A shared calendar** for the mentor meetings and the weekly real-world contact.
- **AI as a question-asker, not a planner.** Once your teen has drafted the plan by hand, they can ask an AI tool to play the skeptical mentor: “Here’s my plan; ask me five hard questions about it.” They answer the questions on paper and revise the plan themselves. The AI doesn’t write the plan, and it doesn’t guess their level. (If they ask it to, treat the answer as a curiosity, not a rating.)
- **AI for timelines? No.** AI tools often repeat marketing claims about fast fluency. Use the FSI ruler and the logged hours instead.

What “done enough” looks like

By the end of the first week or two, you have:

- A dated **baseline** folder: one unheard recording, one marked reading with a word count, one unedited paragraph, one Can-Do list marked *my guess*.
- A **why card** with a real person on it.
- An **honest-runway sentence** that’s true.
- A **one-page year plan**, signed by your teen as author and by you as mentor.
- A **week map** with five Hours, one real-world contact, and a plan for the hardest day.
- **Mentor meetings** on the calendar for the year.

For a 15–16-year-old, “done enough” can be a plan in simple sentences and two proof items. **For a 17–18-year-old**, expect a sublevel goal (as a goal, not a rating), a test decision date, and a first draft of the course description.

That’s all. Not a perfect plan; a real one. Next, the Hour gets its first serious work: listening at real speed.

Chapter 2 — Listening at real speed

Why this matters



Every learner knows the moment. You’ve studied for a year. You can read a menu, write a paragraph, hold a slow conversation with a patient tutor. Then you hear two people who speak the language talking to each other at a bus stop, or you put on a show without subtitles, and it’s a wall of sound. You catch a word, maybe two. The rest goes by like weather.

That moment is the reason this chapter exists, and it’s the reason listening gets the biggest share of the Hour. Real speech is fast, joined-up, and full of shortcuts that never appear in a textbook.

Words run together. Sounds drop out. People interrupt, restart, laugh in the middle of sentences. A teen who has only ever listened to slow, careful learner audio has learned a language that almost nobody actually speaks.

The good news is that real-speed listening is a skill, and it's trainable. It grows from three things: a lot of listening that's mostly understood, repeated listening to the same material until it opens up, and active work that trains the ear to hear what's really there. None of this needs a fluent parent. Most of it needs earbuds, a notebook, and patience.

Listening is also where *take in more than you need* lives most of the time. One influential view of language learning holds that we acquire language mainly by understanding messages, by taking in language that is a little beyond what we can produce yet.¹¹ You don't have to sign on to every part of that theory to see the practical point: a learner who understands a great deal of the language, every day, has more raw material to build with than one who mostly drills. This book takes that as its working rule. Input first, and lots of it.

And there's a payoff beyond the language. Teenagers who learn to sit with a hard clip, to tolerate not understanding, to go back a third and fourth time and catch more each pass, are learning a kind of patience that helps everywhere.

Why the struggle is worth it. The first weeks of real-speed listening are humbling. Your teen will catch less than they expected and feel slower than they are. But the ear adapts. A clip that was noise in October is half-clear by December and mostly clear by spring, and the moment a teen first follows a joke in a show without subtitles is one they don't forget.

For the parent: understand it yourself

You don't need to understand the language to support listening. You need to understand what good listening practice looks like, so you can recognize it when it's happening and gently redirect when it isn't.

“Mostly understood” is the sweet spot

The single most useful idea for choosing listening material is this: it should be *mostly* understood. Not fully, because then nothing new is being learned. Not mostly baffling, because then the learner can't use context to work out the new parts, and gives up.

Research on vocabulary and comprehension supports a rule of thumb: understanding text and speech comfortably depends on already knowing the great majority of the words in it.¹² When too many words are unknown, comprehension falls apart, and so does the chance of picking up new words from context. The practical upshot is to choose listening that your teen can follow the gist of on the first pass and most of on the third.

That will usually mean starting below “real speed” and moving up. A sensible path for most teens:

1. **Learner audio:** slow, clear podcasts and graded listening made for learners.

2. **Adapted real material:** news read slowly for learners, children's and young-teen shows, interviews with subtitles in the language.
3. **Real-speed material for a familiar topic:** sports commentary for a sport they know, a cooking show for a dish they've made, news about events they've already read about in English.
4. **Real-speed material on anything:** shows, films, podcasts, radio, conversations.

Most teens will live in two of these at once: an easier one for volume and a harder one for stretch.

Narrow listening: the same topic, many times

Three different short clips on the *same* topic are far easier than three clips on different topics, because the vocabulary repeats. By the third, words that were noise in the first are familiar. This is called narrow listening, and it's one of the most efficient ways to train an ear. Pick a topic your teen cares about (a team, a band, a game, a news story), and gather several short pieces on it.

Repeated listening: the same clip, many times

Repetition feels like wasted time to teenagers, who want novelty. It isn't. Each pass through a clip, the brain has more attention free for details because the gist is already known. The three-pass listen in this chapter is built on that: gist, then details, then with the transcript, then once more without it. The last pass is the one your teen will remember, because it's the first time the whole clip makes sense at full speed.

Shadowing and dictation: training the ear actively

Two old techniques do something passive listening can't.

Shadowing means repeating a recording a half-beat behind the speaker, out loud, copying the rhythm and melody first and the words second. It forces the ear to catch every sound, because you can't repeat what you didn't hear. It also trains the mouth. Teens often find it silly for the first two days and indispensable by the second week.

Dictation means writing down exactly what was said. It's merciless and useful. A teen who thought they understood a sentence discovers, writing it down, that they missed the little words: the articles, the endings, the particles. Those little words carry grammar, and noticing them is how grammar gets learned.

Retrieval and checking

A listening session ends with checking, the last step of the Hour. Saying the gist aloud from memory, before looking at anything, is a form of retrieval practice, and retrieval makes memory stronger.¹³ Even a one-sentence summary in English is useful; a summary in the language is better.

If you don't speak the language

You can still be a real help with listening, in four ways.

First, **be the reader for dictation**. Read sentences from a transcript aloud, twice, at a natural pace. Your accent will be imperfect, and that's fine; your teen is training to catch words, and a slightly odd accent is a fair test.

Second, **be the audience for the gist**. Ask your teen to tell you, in English or in the language, what they heard. Ask a follow-up question about the content (*why did the coach get fired?*), not about the language. Real curiosity is the best motivator there is.

Third, **listen alongside, now and then**. Put on a show in the language with subtitles in English for you and in the language for your teen, and watch together. Ask them afterward what the subtitles got wrong or left out. Teens love catching the translator.

Fourth, **guard the volume**. You are the person most likely to notice that listening has quietly shrunk to five minutes a day. Say so, kindly, at the mentor meeting.

What your teen will find hard, by language

Every language has its own listening hurdles. A few to expect:

- **Spanish** is fast to an English ear, partly because syllables come at an even rhythm and words link together. Learners often say speakers “talk too fast”; the ear adjusts with time.
- **French** drops many written letters in speech and links words together in ways the spelling hides. Dictation is especially valuable.
- **Mandarin** uses tones that change meaning; early on, a learner can know a word and still not recognize it spoken in a different tone or at speed. Shadowing helps a great deal.
- **Japanese and Korean** have verb endings that carry a great deal of meaning at the very end of the sentence, so learners have to hold the sentence in mind until it finishes.
- **Arabic** has a standard written form and a range of spoken dialects that differ considerably. Decide early which spoken variety your teen is training their ear for, and choose listening to match.
- **ASL** is a visual language; “listening” becomes watching. The same principles apply: lots of mostly understood input, repeated viewing, and shadowing (copying the signer). Chapter 7 discusses learning ASL with and from the Deaf community.

These are general tendencies, not rules, and the final arbiter is always your teen's own ear and a speaker of the language.

How to teach it this week

This week, Take It In becomes mostly listening, and Work With It gets one active listening technique a day. Pick a topic for the week before Monday.

Set up: a week's topic and a small library

Ask your teen to choose a topic for the week that they genuinely care about. Then, together or alone, they gather:

- three or four short clips (2–5 minutes each) on that topic, at a level they can mostly follow;
- one longer or harder piece on the same topic for stretch;
- transcripts, if available, for at least one clip.

Public broadcasters in many countries offer news and learner material with transcripts. Spain's public broadcaster, RTVE, has a large free on-demand library; Germany's international broadcaster, DW, runs a learning site with graded material; France's TV5MONDE has a learning site built around short video clips.¹⁴ Chapter 10 has more on choosing sources. For this week, three good clips are enough.

The week at a glance

- **Monday:** narrow listening, clip one and two. Gist in English at the end.
- **Tuesday:** three-pass listen on one clip. Dictation strip on three sentences from it.
- **Wednesday:** shadowing walk on the same clip. Number and name drill with a partner.
- **Thursday:** narrow listening, clips three and four. Kitchen radio at dinner.
- **Friday:** stretch clip, three-pass. Retell the whole week's topic to a parent. Talk box.
- **Weekend:** live-speed table talk with a speaker of the language, if one is available, or a tutor session with ten minutes of "just talk, normal speed."

The try-its

Narrow listening (20 min · three clips on one topic · screen · Take It In) Listen to three short pieces on the same topic, one after another. Don't stop to look things up. Notice how much more of the third you understand than the first. The repeated words are doing the work.

Three-pass listen (20 min · one clip · screen · Take It In) Pass one: just the gist. What's it about, who's talking, what's the mood? Pass two: details. Names, numbers, what happened. Pass three: with the transcript, reading along, circling anything you didn't catch. Then a fourth pass without the transcript. That last pass is the reward; savor it.

Shadowing walk (15 min · earbuds · screen · Work With It) Pick a 30- to 60-second piece of the clip. Walk around (a room, a yard, a block) and repeat it half a beat behind the speaker, out loud, copying the rhythm and the melody before worrying about the words. Then do it again. By the fourth or fifth time, the words start to arrive. Mumbling is allowed at first.

Dictation strip (15 min · paper, a reader · no screen · Work With It) A parent or partner reads a sentence from the transcript twice at normal speed. The teen writes it. Do five sentences. Then compare with the transcript and circle every miss. The circles are the lesson: almost always the small words, the endings, the sounds that merge. A parent who doesn't speak the language can still read the sentences; an imperfect accent is fine for this, and teens often enjoy it.

Number and name drill (10 min · partner, list · no screen · Work With It) Numbers, dates, prices, times, phone numbers, and names are the hardest thing to catch at speed and the most useful in real life. A partner who knows the language (or a parent reading a prepared list) says them aloud quickly; the teen writes them down. Swap roles if both can.

Kitchen radio (20 min · radio or speaker · screen · Take It In) Real-speed news or talk radio in the language while cooking or cleaning up. The goal isn't to understand all of it. Catch three facts and say them, in the language or in English, to whoever is in the kitchen.

Gist-in-English check (5 min · none · no screen · Check and Log) After any listen, say in one English sentence what it was about. Then try the same sentence in the language. If you can't say the English sentence, the clip was too hard; choose an easier one tomorrow.

The talk box

Talk box: chapter 2

Opening line: “What did I actually catch at full speed — and what made the rest slip by?”

- Spanish: *¿Qué entendí de verdad a velocidad normal, y por qué se me escapó lo demás?* (keh ehn-tehn-DEE deh beh-DAHD ah beh-loh-see-DAHD nohr-MAHL, ee pohr KEH seh meh ehs-kah-POH loh deh-MAHS)
- French: *Qu'est-ce que j'ai vraiment compris à vitesse normale, et qu'est-ce qui m'a fait rater le reste ?*
- Mandarin: 正常语速下我真正听懂了什么？其他的为什么没听懂？ (Zhèngcháng yǔsù xià wǒ zhēnzhèng tīng dǒng le shénme? Qítā de wèishénme méi tīng dǒng?)

Follow-ups: Was it words you didn't know, or words you knew but didn't recognize? Which pass was the turning point? What would you choose for tomorrow — the same clip, or the next one? What's one sound you've started hearing that you didn't before?

Wait: a count of five, then a little longer. Teens often need to replay the clip in their head.

A silence usually means: they're not sure how to describe the problem. Offer the two options in the first follow-up; most teens can pick one.

Moves by band

15–16. Mostly learner and adapted material, with one real-speed stretch piece a week on a familiar topic. Lean on narrow listening and three-pass; keep shadowing clips short (30 seconds). Do dictation with a parent reading. Gist in English is fine; gist in the language is the stretch.

17–18. Real-speed material most days, including at least one source made for people who speak the language, not for learners: a podcast, a radio program, a show. Longer shadowing (one to two minutes). Dictation from audio, not from a parent reading. Summaries in the language, spoken and written. If they're preparing for a test with a listening section, Chapter 9 explains the formats.

Practice that actually builds learning

A week of listening try-its starts the habit. A year of them builds the ear. Here's how to keep it growing.

Volume, every day

Listening outside the Hour is where most of the volume comes from: on walks, during chores, in the car, while drawing or exercising. A teen who adds 20 or 30 minutes of mostly understood listening most days, outside the Hour, roughly doubles their input without adding a minute of formal study. That's *take in more than you need* in practice. Don't log these minutes for credit unless your plan and your state's rules say you can (Chapter 9); do encourage them.

Audiobooks are a good source of long, steady listening for stronger students. Free public-domain recordings exist in many languages, though the older texts can be heavy going; pair the audio with the printed book.¹⁵

Rotate topics, recycle clips

Change the week's topic every week or two, but don't throw clips away. Keep a folder of everything that worked. A clip from October, relistened in January, is a fine way to hear your own progress, and a fine Take It In on a short day.

Climb the ladder gradually

Every month or so, move one source up a rung: from learner podcast to adapted news, from adapted news to real news on a familiar topic, from that to real news on anything. If comprehension collapses, step back down for a week. The aim is always *mostly understood*.

Hear real people, not just recordings

Overheard log (5 min · notebook · no screen · Check and Log) Write one phrase you actually heard in real life today, in the language, and where you heard it: a store, a park, a game, a song on the radio, a relative on the phone. Some days there won't be one. Over a month, the log shows how much of the language is already around you.

Live-speed table talk (15 min · speaker of the language · no screen · Use It for Real) Ask a speaker of the language (a tutor, a relative, a friend of the family, a community member you've met through a class) to talk at normal speed for two minutes about their day. Listen without interrupting. Then retell it to them, and let them fix what you got wrong. Thank them. This is the try-it that takes listening out of the house, and it's the one that teaches the most.

A note on asking people: be a guest. Most speakers enjoy helping a teenager who is making a real effort, but they are doing you a favor. Keep it short, keep it in public or in a supervised setting, and don't treat anyone as practice equipment. Chapter 7 has the full safety guidance for meeting people.

Song gap-fill by ear (20 min · lyrics printed with gaps · screen · Work With It) Print the lyrics of a song your teen likes with every fifth or sixth word blanked out. Fill the gaps by ear. Then sing the chorus. Songs stretch vowels and bend rhythm, so they're not perfect listening practice, but they are memorable, and they're a way in for a teen who's flagging.

Feedback on listening

When your teen misses something, the best help is a nudge, not an answer. "Listen again from 'and then.'" "How many words do you hear in that bit?" "Is that past or present?" A learner who finds the missing word with a nudge keeps it; a learner who's simply told it often forgets it by tomorrow. Chapter 5 has more on this kind of prompting.

A month of listening, sketched

Families often ask what a month of this actually looks like. Here is one realistic sketch for a sixteen-year-old in her second year of French, with a full Hour five days a week and a little listening outside it.

Week 1: topic, a cycling race her family follows. Learner news item about the race (three-pass), two short real-speed race reports (narrow listening), shadowing 30 seconds of the commentator's finish-line call, a dictation strip of five sentences read by her mother from a transcript. Outside the Hour: the race highlights with French subtitles on Saturday. Log lines read like *I can follow who won and by how much*.

Week 2: topic, a new film she wants to see. Two interviews with the director and an actor (one with a transcript), a radio review at real speed, the trailer three times. She shadows a line from the trailer until she can say it with the actor's rhythm. On Friday she retells the plot setup to her father, who doesn't speak French and asks good questions in English.

Week 3: topic, school life in France, chosen because she has a pen pal through a vetted exchange program. Learner podcast episodes on school schedules, then a real-speed podcast by French teenagers about exams. The number and name drill gets a workout with times and class names. Her overheard log has two entries, both from a French family at the farmers' market.

Week 4: review and stretch. She goes back to the week 1 race report and is startled by how much clearer it is. She tries a news broadcast at full speed on anything and catches the topic of every story and the details of about half. At the mentor meeting, she plays the race clip and her retelling from week 1, then retells the same clip again. The difference is audible to both of them.

Nothing in that month is exotic. It's the same handful of try-its, pointed at things she cared about, repeated until they worked.

Different purposes, different listening

Not all listening is the same, and it helps to name the purposes so your teen can choose deliberately:

- **Listening for gist:** what's this about, roughly? Fast, forgiving, good for volume. Kitchen radio and narrow listening live here.

- **Listening for detail:** names, numbers, the exact time the train leaves. Slower and more effortful. The number and name drill trains this.
- **Listening for form:** exactly which words, endings, and sounds were said. Dictation and the transcript pass of the three-pass listen train this.
- **Listening to respond:** in a real conversation, where you also have to plan what to say next. Live-speed table talk and every tutor session train this; Chapter 5 takes it further.

A balanced week touches all four. A teen who only listens for gist will understand the outline of everything and the details of nothing; a teen who only does dictation will be accurate and slow. Ask at the end of the week, “Which kind of listening did you do most? Which did you skip?”

When the language has many accents

Every widely spoken language comes in many accents and varieties. Spanish in Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Madrid, and San Juan sounds different. French in Paris, Montreal, Dakar, and Brussels sounds different. Mandarin from Beijing and from Taipei differs in sounds and some vocabulary. Arabic, as noted above, varies even more.

Early on, it helps to concentrate on one or two varieties so the ear has a stable target, ideally the variety your teen is most likely to use with real people. Once listening is comfortable, branch out deliberately: a podcast from another region, a show from another country. Variety is not a problem to be avoided; it’s what the language actually is, and a teen who can follow several accents is far better prepared for the world than one who can follow only the voice on a learner podcast.

A worked example: one clip, three passes

Sam is fifteen and learning Spanish. His topic this week is a local football club, because he plays. His mother pulls a two-minute match report from a public broadcaster’s site.

On the first pass, Sam just listens, no pausing, and writes three words he caught and one sentence of gist in English: “Their team lost at home, and someone got a red card.” On the second pass he pauses at each sentence break and jots any phrase he can hear even if he can’t spell it: *tarjeta roja*, *en casa*, *el segundo tiempo*. On the third pass he opens the transcript, reads along, and circles the two places where his ear failed: a fast *se le escapó* and a player’s name he’d misheard as a word.

His mother doesn’t know Spanish, so her role is simple and useful. She asks, “What did you catch the first time that you didn’t expect to?” and “Which bit would you replay tomorrow?” Sam picks the thirty seconds around the red card for shadowing on Tuesday. By Thursday he can say the commentator’s line along with the recording, at speed, without the transcript.

That’s the whole method in miniature: gist first, detail second, the text last, and one small piece carried into the next day.

For the student

This chapter is about something that will feel bad before it feels good: listening to the language at the speed people actually speak it.

Here's what to expect. For the first couple of weeks, real-speed audio will feel too fast. You'll catch a few words and lose the rest. That's not a sign you're bad at this. It's a sign your ear hasn't had enough practice yet, and the only fix is the practice.

Some things that help:

Listen more than you think you need to. The Hour is the minimum. Put the language in your ears on walks, during chores, in the car. Shows you'd watch anyway, in the language. Music with the lyrics up. It all counts for your ear.

Listen to the same thing more than once. It feels repetitive. Do it anyway. The fourth time through a clip, you'll hear things you were sure weren't there the first time.

Pick things you actually care about. If you love a sport, listen to commentary. If you game, find streamers who play in the language. If you cook, find cooking shows. You'll put up with a lot more confusion for something you're interested in.

Shadow it. Yes, it's weird to walk around muttering half a beat behind a podcast. Do it for a week before you decide.

Write down what you hear. Dictation will show you exactly which little words you're missing. Those little words are usually where the grammar is.

Notice the turning points. At the end of the Hour, ask yourself what you caught that you didn't catch yesterday. Write it in the log. It's easy to forget progress you didn't write down.

Go easy on subtitles in English. Subtitles in the language are great, especially on a second viewing. English subtitles let you read instead of listen. Save them for things you're watching just for fun.

And when you get a chance to listen to a real person talk at normal speed, take it, even if you only catch half. Ask them to say it again. Tell them what you understood. Most people will be glad you tried.

If it isn't clicking

"I can't understand anything." The material is too hard. Step down a rung: a learner podcast instead of real news, a children's show instead of a drama. Mostly understood is the target. There's no prize for suffering through incomprehensible audio.

"It's boring." The material is too easy, or the topic is wrong. Let your teen choose a topic they love, even one you find dull. Then move the level up a notch.

They listen but don't remember any of it. Add the gist check at the end of every listen. Saying what it was about, from memory, is what turns listening into learning. If they still can't, the clip is too long; try two minutes instead of ten.

Shadowing feels ridiculous. It does at first. Let them shadow alone, with nobody around. Shorten the clip to 20 seconds. If after a week they still hate it, drop it and use dictation instead. It's a menu, not a requirement.

They only want to watch shows with English subtitles. That's entertainment, which is fine, but it isn't much listening practice. Offer a trade: shows with subtitles in the language count toward the week; shows with English subtitles don't. Or watch an episode in English first, then again in the language.

The family doesn't speak the language, so nobody can check dictation. Use transcripts. Most learner podcasts and many news sites publish them. If none exist for a clip, pick a different clip for dictation days.

Hearing loss or auditory processing differences. Talk with the professionals who know your teen. Transcripts, captions in the language, slower playback, and visual languages are all legitimate paths; ASL in particular is a full language with its own rich community (Chapter 7). Adapt the try-its; don't abandon the input.

They catch everything in learner audio and nothing in real speech. That's the gap between rungs two and three on the ladder. Bridge it with real-speed material on a topic they already know well in English, so context carries them through the speed. Sports, recipes, and news stories they've already read about are good bridges.

Listening has quietly disappeared from the Hour. It happens when writing or flashcards feel more productive. Look at the last two weeks of the log. If Take It In is mostly reading or missing, put listening back first in the Hour for a week, before anything else.

Heritage speakers. A teen who grew up with the language may understand casual home speech easily and struggle with news, formal speech, or other regional varieties. Point their listening at what's hard for them: formal registers, other accents, specialized topics. Don't make them sit through beginner audio.

Your teen says every clip is "either too easy or impossible." That usually means the clips jump levels. Find a middle step: the same story told twice, once in a learner version and once at real speed, or a familiar show rewatched with target-language subtitles before you remove them.

Tools, including AI

The rules for AI are in Chapter 8. For listening, two moves:

- **Slow it down, don't translate it.** Most audio players can slow playback slightly without changing pitch. That's a good bridge for a hard clip. Slow it for the second pass, then return to normal speed for the last pass.
- **Transcripts from AI, checked.** Automatic transcription and captions are useful but make mistakes, especially with names, accents, fast speech, and less common languages. Use them as a draft for the three-pass listen, and treat any line that looks odd as a question, not an answer. Try first: always listen at least once before looking at any transcript.

An AI conversation partner can also speak at a set speed and repeat itself patiently. That's useful for drilling numbers and names, but it is no substitute for real people talking to each other. Use it for practice; use humans for the real thing.

What “done enough” looks like

After a month of this chapter, you should see:

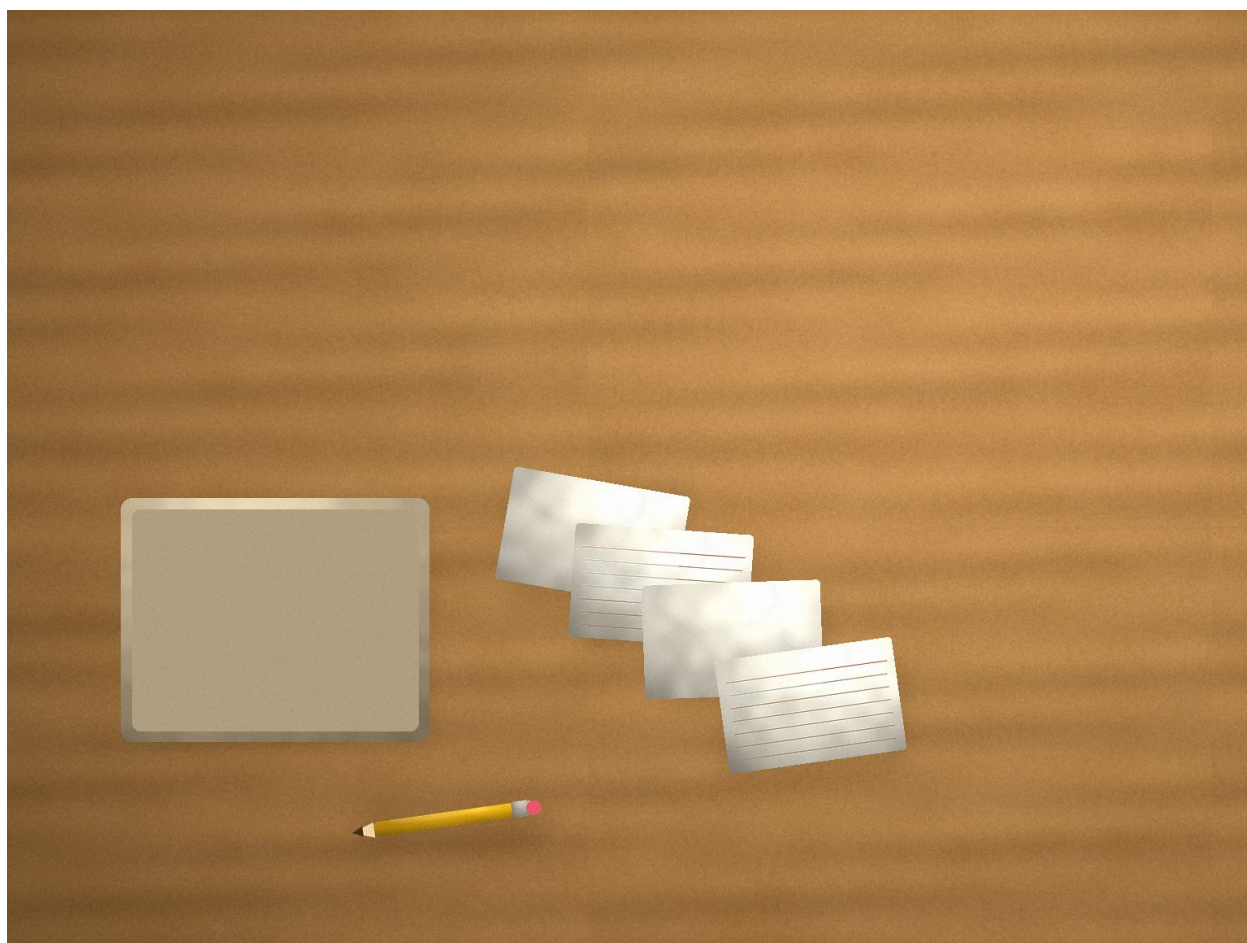
- A **listening library**: a folder of clips your teen has worked through, grouped by topic.
- Most days in the log show **at least 15–20 minutes of listening** in Take It In.
- A few **dictation sheets** with the misses circled, and the circles getting fewer, or moving from big words to small ones.
- At least one **live-speed retelling** with a real speaker.
- A few lines in the **overheard log**.
- One **real-speed source** your teen now follows mostly, that they couldn't follow at all a month ago.

For a 15–16-year-old, “done enough” is mostly learner and adapted material, steady daily listening, and gist checks in English moving toward gist in the language. **For a 17–18-year-old**, expect real-speed material most days, summaries in the language, and a regular source made for people who speak it.

Next, the words and patterns that the ear has started catching need to stay. That's Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 — Words and patterns that stay

Why this matters



Ask a teenager who has “taken” a language for two years how many words they know, and you’ll often get a shrug and a number. Ask them to use twenty of those words in a real conversation, tonight, with someone who doesn’t slow down, and the number shrinks fast. The gap between words *reviewed* and words *used* is the subject of this chapter.

Most students treat vocabulary as a pile to be memorized and grammar as a set of rules to be recited. Both habits make sense in a classroom with weekly quizzes. Neither one gets a word or a pattern

to stay. Words stay when they arrive inside a sentence the learner actually understood, come back at spaced intervals, get pulled out of memory rather than reread, and then get used for something real. Patterns stay when the learner notices them in real input, understands them on purpose, and gets enough practice that saying them stops taking effort. That's the whole recipe. The rest of this chapter is how to cook it at your kitchen table.

At fifteen to eighteen, your student has a real advantage here. Older learners lean on their ability to think about language: to see a pattern, name it, and test it.¹⁶ That isn't a consolation prize for missing some magic early window. It's a genuine strength, and this chapter uses it. A teen can understand *why* a Spanish verb changes, write the rule in their own words, and then go hunting for five real examples. A younger child mostly can't. Use the strength.

The other half of the advantage is the focus line. **Take in more than you need; use it with real people; check it honestly; own the plan.** In this chapter, "take in more than you need" means the words come *from* input (the listening of Chapter 2 and the reading of Chapter 4), not from a list someone else made. "Use it with real people" means a word counts when it has done a job in a real exchange. "Check it honestly" means pulling words out of memory, not glancing at them and nodding. "Own the plan" means your teen decides which words earn a card and which patterns get a week.

There's one more reason this chapter matters to a parent in particular. It contains the single most useful thing you can learn to do as a co-teacher, even if you don't speak a word of the language: **prompt, don't recast.** When your student makes a mistake, you don't hand them the right version. You signal that something's off, and you wait. We'll come to why.

What your student can try today: mine five sentences from something they listened to this week. What you can learn this week: the difference between correcting and prompting, and how to wait through a silence.

For the parent: understand it yourself

You don't need to know the language to run this chapter well. You need four ideas, each of which you can explain to your teen in a sentence.

Sentences beat single words. A word on its own is a fact. A word inside a sentence is a tool: it comes with its grammar, its usual neighbors, and a hint about when people say it. "Pedir" on a card means "to ask for." "Voy a pedir la cuenta" (*boy ah peh-DEER lah KWEN-tah*, "I'm going to ask for the check") tells you how the verb behaves, what it usually goes with, and where you'd hear it. When your student copies whole sentences they understood from today's input (this book calls that *sentence mining*), each card carries five lessons instead of one. Treat every target-language line in this chapter as an example to check with a fluent speaker or a reliable reference; that's good practice anyway.

Pull it out; don't just look at it. Rereading a list feels productive because the words look familiar. Familiar isn't the same as available. Trying to recall a word before looking (a practice test, even a two-minute one on a blank page) strengthens memory far more than another look.¹⁷ Learning researchers rate practice testing among the most useful study techniques they've examined, along-

side spreading practice out over time.¹⁸ The practical upshot: in your house, review starts with a blank page, not with the cards.

Space it out. The same total study time works better split across days than crammed into one. A gap long enough that the word has started to fade, but not so long that it's gone, makes the next recall do more work, and that work is what makes it stick.¹⁹ You don't need software to do this. A shoebox with five slots does it on paper; we'll build one below. Spaced-repetition apps automate the same idea with a scheduling formula.²⁰

Notice, understand, then practice until it's easy. Grammar for a teen has three stages. First they *notice* a pattern in real input: "Wait, why does French say *je ne sais pas* with two parts?" Then they *understand* it on purpose: a short explanation, a rule in their own words. Then they *practice* it until it no longer takes thought. Older learners do the middle step well, which is why this book doesn't pretend grammar can be skipped.¹⁶ What it can't be is the whole course. A rule the teen can recite but never uses is a fact about the language, not part of their language.

Prompt, don't recast

Here's the piece worth slowing down for. When a learner makes a mistake, the most natural thing a kind adult does is say it back correctly. The teen says, "Yo sabo," and you say, "Ah, yo sé." That's called a *recast*. It feels gentle. It's also the kind of correction learners most often fail to pick up on. In a well-known classroom study, recasts were the most common correction teachers used, and they led to the least learner repair. Moves that pushed learners to fix it themselves (asking for clarification, giving a small clue, repeating the error with a questioning tone, or simply prompting) led to far more self-correction.²¹

So in this house, the move is: signal, then wait. You might tap the table, raise an eyebrow, repeat "¿Yo sabo?" with a puzzled tilt, or say "Try that verb again." Then you stop talking. The silence that follows is your student searching their memory for the right form, and that search is the learning. If you fill the silence with the answer, you've taken the rep away from them.

You can do this without speaking the language. You don't need to know what the right form is. You need to know your teen's *own* most common errors, which they'll tell you (see the Error pattern hunt below), and to listen for those. "That's one of your three: try it again" is a perfectly good prompt from a parent who's never studied Spanish.

When should you just give the answer? When they've tried twice and are getting frustrated, when the error is about a word they've never met, or when you're in the middle of a real conversation with someone else and fluency matters more than accuracy. Prompting is for practice. In real life, keep the conversation moving.

What "knowing a word" means

A word your teen *recognizes* in reading is not yet a word they can *produce* in speech, and a word they can produce slowly isn't yet one they can use in real time. Those are three levels, and all three are honest progress. Encourage your student to stop asking "Do I know this word?" and start asking "What can I do with it?" Recognize it, produce it when prompted, use it unprompted with a

real person. The third level is the one that counts toward the focus line, and the Weekly word audit below is how they track it.

Chunks are words too

Fluent speakers don't build sentences word by word. They pull out prefabricated pieces: "I was wondering if," "on the other hand," "ça dépend" (*sah day-PAHN*, "it depends"), "我觉得" (*wǒ juéde*, "I think / I feel that"). These chunks are among the most useful things a teen can learn because each one buys fluency for free. A student with fifty solid chunks sounds and feels more capable than a student with five hundred isolated words. Treat a chunk as a single card.

How many words?

You'll see big numbers online. Be careful with them. The research on vocabulary size is about how much of a *text* a reader needs to understand to read comfortably without help, which turns out to be very nearly all of the running words, and that takes a large vocabulary.²² That's a good reason to read graded and adapted material first (Chapter 4) and to keep listening "mostly understood" (Chapter 2). It is *not* a promise that a certain number of words equals fluency. This book never makes that promise.

How to teach it this week

The shape of the week is simple: words come from input, go onto paper, come back on a schedule, get pulled out before they're looked at, and get used. One pattern gets the spotlight for the whole week. Your teen runs it inside their Language Hour; you check in, prompt, and listen.

Here are the core try-its. Each follows the house format from *The Language Hour*.

Sentence mining (15 minutes · notebook · no screen · Work With It). After today's input, copy three to five whole sentences you understood, not single words. Underline the one new word or chunk in each. Choose sentences you can imagine saying yourself; skip the ones you can't.²³

Recall before review (10 minutes · blank page · no screen · Check and Log). Before opening yesterday's cards, write every word or chunk from yesterday that you can remember, with a sentence if you can. Only then look. Circle what you missed; those go back to the front of the line.

Paper spaced-review box (15 minutes · index cards and a five-slot box · no screen · Check and Log). A shoebox with four cardboard dividers. New cards start in slot one. Each day, review slot one; every few days, the later slots. Get a card right and it moves forward a slot; miss it and it goes back to slot one. The box spaces the work for you.¹⁹

Pattern of the week (15 minutes · one card · no screen · Work With It). On Monday, pick one pattern: a verb tense, a word-order rule, a measure word, a particle. Find five real examples in this week's input and copy them onto the card. Then write five of your own. By Friday, use it out loud with a real person at least twice.¹⁶

Prompt-don't-recast (10 minutes · partner · no screen · Check and Log). A partner (parent, sibling, tutor) listens while the teen talks about their day. When they hear an error, they signal and wait instead of correcting. The teen repairs it. Swap roles on the parent's language if they're learning too.²¹

A sample week for 15–16

Monday. Pick a pattern of the week together, ideally one the teen noticed in Chapter 2's listening. Set up the five-slot box. Mine five sentences from whatever they listened to today.

Tuesday. Recall before review, then the box. Mine three more sentences. Ten minutes of Chunk wall: post ten useful chunks on sticky notes where the teen will see them (the bathroom mirror and the fridge are traditional).

Wednesday. Talk-it-out labels: five minutes of narrating what they're doing around the house, aloud, in the language. "Now I'm opening the fridge. There's no milk. Again." It's silly. It works. Then a Transform drill with you: you read a sentence from their card, they change it to past tense or to "we."

Thursday. Recall before review, the box, and a Ten-word story using this week's newest words. Read it to someone in the family.

Friday. Weekly word audit (below). Talk box. Mark which words were used for real this week.

A sample week for 17–18

Older students run the same moves with more independence and higher standards.

Monday. The teen chooses the pattern without help, writes a Grammar in a hand note (an explanation small enough to fit on a sticky note in their palm), and plans where they'll use it this week: a tutor session, a call with a relative, a message to a pen pal.

Tuesday–Thursday. Mining from authentic input (podcasts, articles, a show), ten new cards a day at most, recall before every review. Once a week, an Error pattern hunt across their last three pieces of writing or recordings.

Friday. Word audit, talk box, and a short conversation with a real speaker in which they aim to use five words from this week's cards and the week's pattern. They log what they managed.

A 17-year-old who's been studying a while can also start a Word family tree for a root that keeps turning up: one root branching into the verbs, nouns and adjectives they meet, so one word unlocks five.²²

The talk box

Run this on Friday, or after a conversation with a real speaker. The teen asks it of you or of their partner, and then answers it themselves.

Talk box: chapter 3

Opening line (Spanish): “¿Qué palabras usé de verdad esta semana, no solo en el repaso?” — *keh pah-LAH-brahs oo-SEH deh vehr-DAHD...* — “Which words did I use for real this week, not just review?” **French:** “Quels mots est-ce que j’ai vraiment utilisés cette semaine, pas seulement révisés ?” **Mandarin:** “这个星期我真正用了哪些词，而不只是复习？” (*Zhège xīngqī wǒ zhēnzhèng yòngle nǎxiē cí, ér bù zhǐshì fùxí?*) In any other language, the teen writes their own version and checks it with a fluent speaker.

Follow-ups (pick three to five): - Which word did you reach for and couldn’t find? - Which chunk came out without thinking? - Where did the pattern of the week show up in real life? - Which card in your box keeps going back to slot one? Why do you think that is? - Is there a word you’ve reviewed ten times but never used? Does it deserve its card?

How long to wait: a full ten seconds after each question. Count it in your head. **What a silence usually means:** they’re searching, not stuck. Words used for real are harder to remember than words reviewed, because they were used in passing. If nothing comes, ask about one specific moment: “When you talked to your aunt on Tuesday, what did you say first?”

Practice that actually builds learning

Here is the full menu for this chapter, drawn from the house bank. Your teen doesn’t do all of these. They pick, inside their own plan, and the menu changes as the year goes on. Every item is screen-free except one.

Words

Sentence mining (15 minutes · notebook · no screen · Work With It). Already described above; it’s the backbone. Three to five sentences a day is plenty. More cards than that, and review will eat the Hour.

Paper spaced-review box (15 minutes · index cards, five-slot box · no screen · Check and Log). The backbone’s partner. Keep the box somewhere visible. A box nobody sees is a box nobody opens.

Recall before review (10 minutes · blank page · no screen · Check and Log). Always first. It’s the cheapest, strongest habit in the chapter.¹⁷

Chunk wall (10 minutes · sticky notes · no screen · Work With It). Ten chunks on a wall or mirror. Replace three a week, retiring the ones the teen now says without thinking. A 15-year-old might start with greetings and fillers (“well,” “I mean,” “so”); a 17-year-old can move to argument chunks (“what worries me is,” “that said”).

Word family tree (15 minutes · paper · no screen · Work With It). Pick one root. Branch it into

the nouns, verbs and adjectives you actually meet. In Spanish, *escribir* (to write) leads to *escritor* (writer), *escritura* (writing), *escrito* (written). In Mandarin, the character 学 (*xué*, study) turns up in 学生 (*xuéshēng*, student), 学校 (*xuéxiào*, school), 大学 (*dàxué*, university). Only add branches you've seen in real input.

Talk-it-out labels (10 minutes · no materials · no screen · Use It for Real). Narrate your life aloud for five minutes in the language. While cooking is ideal; so is folding laundry. When you hit a word you don't have, say it in English and write it down later. That gap list is tomorrow's mining target.

Ten-word story (15 minutes · paper · no screen · Work With It). Use today's ten newest words in one short story, as silly as you like, and read it to someone. Silly is memorable. A story about a cat who orders the check at a restaurant will hold *pedir la cuenta* longer than a tidy sentence will.

Cognate trap list (10 minutes · notebook · no screen · Work With It). Log the false friends you trip over, each with a correct sentence. Spanish *embarazada* means pregnant, not embarrassed; French *librairie* is a bookshop, not a library. Every learner has a private list; a written one stops the same trip twice.

Digital deck, ten a day (10 minutes · spaced-repetition app · screen · Check and Log). If your teen prefers an app, fine, with two house rules: only sentences they mined themselves go in (no downloaded decks of ten thousand words), and new cards stay at ten a day. The scheduler handles spacing; your teen handles choosing.²⁰ Start on paper for the first month so they learn how the system works before handing it to software.

Weekly word audit (10 minutes · cards · no screen · Check and Log). Every Friday, go through the week's cards. Mark each card used for real (in a conversation, message or task with a real person) with a tally on the back. A card with three tallies retires to a "won" pile. That pile is one of the most motivating objects in the house. It's also portfolio evidence.

Patterns

Pattern of the week (15 minutes · card · no screen · Work With It). The weekly anchor. Five found, five made, two used for real.¹⁶

Transform drill (10 minutes · partner · no screen · Work With It). A partner reads a sentence; the teen changes it on the spot: past tense, negative, plural, "they" instead of "I." Quick, light, a little game-like. A parent who doesn't know the language can read sentences from the teen's own cards and listen for hesitation rather than correctness.

Error pattern hunt (15 minutes · last three pieces of writing or recordings · no screen · Check and Log). Look across the last three things you wrote or recorded. Find the mistake you make most. Write the rule in your own words on a card, with one wrong example and the fix. That card is now the thing your partner listens for.²¹

Grammar in a hand (10 minutes · sticky note · no screen · Work With It). Explain one pattern on a note small enough to hold in your palm. If it doesn't fit, you don't understand it yet, or you're explaining two patterns. Stick it inside the notebook cover.

Prompt-don't-recast (10 minutes · partner · no screen · Check and Log). The parent's signature move, practiced on purpose.²¹

Out of the house

At least once this week, words and patterns have to leave the kitchen. **Talk-it-out labels** can become a narrated grocery run, murmured, not performed. Better still, take the Friday target ("five words from this week's cards, plus the pattern") into a real conversation: a community class, a heritage-language church coffee hour, a relative on the phone, a tutor session booked by the parent. The safety rules for meeting people are in Chapter 7; follow them. Afterwards, the teen tallies which cards got used. A tally earned in public counts double in spirit, if not on the card.

How the bands differ

15–16: more structure, shorter sessions, chunks before rules, the parent sets the box schedule with the teen. Concrete, everyday vocabulary from their own life: school, food, friends, plans. One pattern a week, and it's fine for some weeks to repeat last week's.

17–18: the teen runs the box, chooses patterns, and mines from authentic material. Vocabulary moves toward opinion, argument and topics they'd discuss with an adult speaker: news, work, their own interests. They keep the error-pattern card current and hand it to every tutor or partner they meet, so feedback goes where it's needed.

A worked example: from one sentence to a lasting card

Here's how one mined sentence travels through a week. Lena, seventeen, is reading a short French article about city bike lanes. She stops at *Les cyclistes ont du mal à trouver une place pour se garer* (Cyclists have trouble finding a place to park).

She doesn't copy the whole paragraph. She copies that sentence onto a card, underlines the chunk *avoir du mal à* (to have trouble doing something), and writes the English on the back. That's the mining.

On Monday the card goes into slot one of her paper box. On Tuesday she tests herself: English side up, say the French aloud, flip, check. She gets the chunk but forgets *se garer*. Tally mark, card stays in slot one. On Wednesday she gets it, and it moves to slot two. Then she does the step that matters most: she uses the chunk in a sentence about her own life. *J'ai du mal à me lever le lundi* (I have trouble getting up on Mondays). That sentence goes into her weekly message to her tutor.

By the following Monday the card is in slot three, and the chunk has shown up in her own speech twice. She'll see the card less and less often, which is exactly the point: the spacing does the work, and her own sentences make it hers.

A worked example: the pattern of the week

For Mandarin learner Theo, sixteen, the pattern of the week is 比 (*bǐ*) comparisons: A 比 B + adjective. On Monday he collects three examples from his reading. On Tuesday he writes five

sentences about his own family (我哥哥比我高, *Wǒ gēge bǐ wǒ gāo*, “My older brother is taller than me”). On Wednesday his tutor asks him comparison questions and signals, rather than fixes, when he slips into English word order. By Friday he’s using it without stopping to think, and the pattern card retires to the review box.

For the student

This chapter is about getting words and grammar to stay. Here’s the short version.

Mine, don’t list. Copy whole sentences you understood from things you listened to or read. Not word lists. Not someone else’s deck. Your sentences, from your input. Three to five a day.

Recall first. Before you look at your cards, write down everything you remember from yesterday. It’ll feel worse than rereading. That’s the point. The struggle is what makes it stick.

Let the box do the scheduling. Right answers move forward; wrong answers go back to slot one. Don’t cheat the box. It only works if you’re honest with it.

One pattern a week. Find five real examples. Make five of your own. Use it twice with a real person by Friday.

Know your top three mistakes. Write them on a card. Give the card to whoever you practice with and ask them to signal, not fix, when they hear one. Then fix it yourself.

Count what you used, not what you reviewed. A word counts when it did a job in a real conversation or message. Three uses and it retires to the won pile. Watch the pile grow.

Some honest things to know. You’ll forget words you were sure you knew. Everyone does. Forgetting followed by recalling is exactly the cycle that builds memory, so a card going back to slot one isn’t failure. It’s the system working. You’ll also find that some words never stick no matter what. Ask yourself whether you’d ever actually use them. If not, retire the card without guilt. It’s your plan.

And one thing about grammar: understanding a rule isn’t the finish line. You’ll understand the subjunctive weeks before you say it without thinking. That’s normal. Keep using it badly until you use it well.

If it isn’t clicking

“I review every day and still forget everything.” Check the order. If review starts with looking at cards, flip it: blank page first, then cards. Check the number of new cards. More than ten a day and review grows faster than memory can keep up. Check where the words come from. Words from a list nobody chose are hard to hold; words from a sentence your teen understood and liked hold much better.

“The box takes the whole Hour.” Too many cards. Cut new cards in half for two weeks and retire anything with three tallies. Review should fit in 10 to 15 minutes of a full day.

“They know the rule but don’t use it.” That’s the normal middle stage. Move practice from explaining to doing: more Transform drills, more real-speed talk, and a Friday goal that requires the pattern (if the pattern is past tense, the Friday conversation is “tell your tutor about last weekend”).

“Every correction turns into an argument.” You may be recasting without noticing, and your teen hears it as a running critique. Agree on a signal together (a tap, a raised finger) and agree on which errors get signaled: only the three on the card. Everything else gets let go. Fewer, agreed corrections are both kinder and more effective.

“My teen freezes when I wait.” Shorten the wait at first (five seconds), and give a clue after it: “It’s the verb.” Then build back up to ten. Freezing usually means they believe you’re judging. Say out loud that the silence is theirs to use.

“We’re learning a language with a different script, and cards are hard.” Put the script on the card front, sound and meaning on the back, and pair script work with Chapter 4. Mine sentences in romanization only as a temporary bridge, and only if the language has a standard one (pinyin for Mandarin, for instance).

“It’s boring.” Some weeks it is. Change the input, not the method: mine from a song, a sports broadcast, a cooking video, a comic. The method stays the same while the material changes, and the material is what makes it boring or not.

“My student is a heritage speaker and already uses the words.” Then the job shifts. Heritage speakers often have strong everyday vocabulary and want formal, academic or written registers. Mine from news, essays and formal speech; focus patterns on the written forms they rarely hear at home. And never treat their family’s way of speaking as “wrong.” It’s a variety, not a mistake.

“My teen knows the words but can’t find them when speaking.” Recognition and recall are different skills. Flip the cards so the English side faces up, and add one move to every review: say a sentence of your own using the word. Recall is slower at first, then faster than anyone expects.

“We review, but new words never stick past a week.” Check the spacing. If every card comes up every day, the box is just a pile. Let cards that are going well wait longer. A little forgetting before each review is what makes the memory stronger.

Tools, including AI

Chapter 8 holds the house rules for tools and AI. Here they apply in two moves.

Try first, then ask. When your teen meets a word they don’t know, they guess from context and write down their guess before they look it up, whether in a dictionary, an app or an AI chat. The guess is the learning; the lookup is the check.

AI makes examples; the teen makes the sentences that matter. It’s reasonable to ask an AI tool for five more example sentences using a pattern, or to explain why a construction works. It isn’t reasonable to have it write the teen’s own sentences, the Ten-word story, or the error-pattern rule. And AI explanations of grammar are sometimes confidently wrong: anything surprising gets checked against a grammar reference or a fluent speaker, following Chapter 8’s verify rule.

If your teen uses a spaced-repetition app, follow its own instructions for scheduling rather than fiddling with settings.²⁰ And keep one paper box going even if most review moves to the screen. On screen-off day (Chapter 8), the box is what's left.

What “done enough” looks like

You'll know this chapter is working when, over a month:

- The teen mines sentences from their own input most days, without being reminded.
- Review starts with a blank page, every time.
- The box (paper or app) runs in about 10 to 15 minutes, and cards actually move.
- There's a pattern card for each week, with five found examples and five made ones.
- The teen can name their top three errors, and repairs them when signaled.
- The won pile, or the tally marks, grow every week, however slowly.
- On Friday, they can answer the talk-box question with specific words and specific moments.

For a **15–16-year-old**, a month of done enough looks like twenty or so cards with tally marks and four pattern cards they can explain. For a **17–18-year-old**, it looks like a box they run alone, a won pile of real-use words, an error card that changes as old mistakes fade, and at least one real conversation each week in which they deliberately used the week's pattern.

What it doesn't look like: a deck of thousands of downloaded cards reviewed faithfully and never used. That's a hobby, not a language. Bring the words out of the box and into the world, and the box starts to empty itself.

The week's log line, in the form Chapter 9 sets out: date, minutes, cards mined, pattern, one sentence about a word used for real. File it and move on to reading.

Chapter 4 — Reading for real, including new scripts

Why this matters



There's a moment most language learners remember. They're reading something in the language (a comic, a news story, a novel meant for teenagers) and they realize they've turned three pages without stopping. They didn't translate. They didn't look anything up. They just read, and the story happened in their head. That moment usually arrives later than people expect, and it arrives for one reason: the learner read a great deal of material they could mostly understand.

This chapter is about getting your teen to that moment, and then past it. Reading is the cheapest, quietest, most portable input there is. It needs no partner and no schedule. A library card, a pencil and twenty-five minutes are enough. It feeds every other chapter: the sentences your teen mines (Chapter 3) come from it, the vocabulary their speaking needs (Chapter 5) grows from it, and the models their writing imitates (Chapter 6) are found in it.

The obstacle is usually difficulty. A teen who has studied a language for a year or two is often handed authentic material (a newspaper, a classic novel) and told to read it with a dictionary. Every line has three unknown words. Reading becomes decoding. Decoding is exhausting, and exhausted teens stop. Comfortable reading needs the reader to know very nearly all the words on the page, far more than most people guess.²⁴ That's why this chapter climbs a ladder: **graded** → **adapted** → **authentic**. Books written for learners at a controlled level, then real texts simplified, then the real thing.

The other half of the chapter is about scripts. Many families choose a language that doesn't use the Latin alphabet: Arabic, Russian, Korean, Japanese, Mandarin, Hindi, Greek, Hebrew. For a teen, a new script can feel like a wall. It isn't. It's a project, with a known shape and a finish line (or, for Chinese characters and Japanese kanji, a long, steady road with plenty of rest stops). This chapter treats each kind of script differently, because they are different.

In focus-line terms, reading is the purest version of **take in more than you need**. A teen who reads widely meets every word many times in many sentences, in more contexts than any course can supply. **Use it with real people** shows up when they read aloud to someone, read the menu at a family restaurant, or explain an article to a relative. **Check it honestly** means a reading log with real pages and real minutes. **Own the plan** means the teen chooses what to read, inside a level that works.

What your student can try today: a 20-minute graded-reader sprint without stopping. What you can learn this week: how to tell, in one glance at a page, whether a book is the right level.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Extensive and intensive

There are two kinds of reading, and your teen needs both.

Extensive reading is a lot of easy reading, fast, for meaning and pleasure. No dictionary, or almost none. If a word stops them, they skip it and keep going. The goal is volume: pages, minutes, books finished. This is where fluency and automatic word recognition come from.

Intensive reading is a little hard reading, slowly, for study. One page, pencil in hand, every unknown word looked up, every odd construction noticed. This is where new patterns and precise vocabulary come from.

Most students do far too much of the second and almost none of the first. The house rule this book suggests: **extensive reading most days; one intensive page a week**. That ratio feels backward to people who learned languages through translation exercises. It works because volume is what builds the reading muscle, and volume only happens when reading is easy.

The one-glance level check

Here's a quick test you can do yourself, even without knowing the language. Ask your teen to read one page aloud or silently and tap the table at every word they don't know. If they tap more than about twice a line on average, the book is too hard for extensive reading. Drop a level. If they barely tap at all, it may be too easy for intensive work but perfect for extensive. That rough rule follows from the coverage research: comfortable reading needs very high word coverage.²⁴ Treat it as a rule of thumb, not a measurement.

The ladder

Graded readers are books written for learners, sorted into levels by vocabulary size and grammar. Many languages have series of them; your library or a language-teaching supplier can point you to them. They're the main fuel for extensive reading in the first years.

Adapted texts are real texts simplified: abridged classics, easy-news sites that rewrite the day's stories in simpler language, children's versions of famous stories. One well-known example, for Japanese, is an easy-news service from the national broadcaster that rewrites news for children and learners, with readings marked over the kanji.²⁵ Other languages have similar services from their public broadcasters; Chapter 10 points to types.

Authentic texts are written for native speakers: novels, newspapers, comics, forums, recipes, signs. Your teen reaches them gradually, with comics, young-adult fiction and familiar topics usually first. A public-domain library offers older classics free in many languages, which makes a good intensive-reading source for 17- and 18-year-olds once they've read the abridged version.²⁶

Scripts: what you're dealing with

You don't need to read the script. You need to know what kind of system it is, so you can judge how long it will take and support the right method. Here's a parent's map. The examples below show how each kind of system works.²⁷

Alphabets (Cyrillic for Russian, Greek, Hangul for Korean): each symbol stands roughly for a sound. A motivated teen can learn to *sound out* an alphabet in a week or two of daily practice. Reading quickly takes longer, but the wall comes down fast. Hangul in particular was designed to be learnable; its letters combine into syllable blocks, so *한* (*han*) is three letters (ㅎ h, ㅏ a, ㄴ n) stacked into one block.

Abjads (Arabic, Hebrew): mainly consonants are written; most short vowels are left out in everyday text, though learner materials often mark them. Arabic is written right to left, and most letters change shape depending on whether they come at the start, middle or end of a word, or stand alone. The letter ب (*b*), for instance, looks different in بيت (*bayt*, house) than in كتاب (*kitāb*, book). Expect the first weeks to be about learning letters in their joined forms, not alone.

Abugidas (Devanagari for Hindi, and many South and Southeast Asian scripts): each consonant carries a built-in vowel, and marks attached to it change that vowel. In Hindi, क is *ka*, की is *kī*, कु is *ku*. Once the logic clicks, it's very regular.

Japanese mixes systems: two syllabaries (hiragana and katakana, about 46 basic symbols each) plus kanji, characters borrowed from Chinese. The usual path is hiragana first (a few weeks), then katakana, then kanji steadily for years, reading easy texts with readings printed above the kanji in the meantime.

Chinese characters (hanzi, for Mandarin) are not a sound alphabet. Each character is a syllable with a meaning, often built from recurring components. There are thousands in regular use, so learning them is a long road, not a wall. Learners use pinyin (a standard romanization with tone marks) as scaffolding: 你好 is *nǐ hǎo*, “hello.” Characters are learned steadily, a few a day, always inside words and sentences.

The rule that holds across all of them: **learn the script by reading and writing real words, not by drilling symbols alone.** Five letters a day, written in words, beats fifty letters stared at on a chart.

Reading aloud and reading silently

Reading aloud is useful for pronunciation and for showing a listener what the teen can do, but it’s slower and splits attention between sound and meaning. Use it on purpose (Read aloud to a listener, below) rather than as the default. Most reading should be silent.

Your role

You’re the librarian and the log-keeper. You help find books at the right level, you keep the library trips happening, you notice when a book has gone stale and suggest dropping it, and you look at the reading log once a week. Permission to quit a book is a parent gift. A teen who can abandon a boring book without guilt reads far more than one who must finish everything.

How to teach it this week

Here’s the core set. Every one of these is screen-free except the easy-news option.

Graded-reader sprint (25 minutes · graded reader · no screen · Take It In). Read for twenty minutes without stopping. No dictionary. If a word blocks the meaning, guess and move on. If there are more than about two unknown words per line, drop a level next time.²⁴

One intensive page (25 minutes · one page and a pencil · no screen · Work With It). Once a week, one page, slowly. Underline every unknown word, look each one up, note anything odd about the grammar. Mine two or three sentences from it for the box (Chapter 3). The other days are extensive.

Library language shelf (30 minutes · library card · no screen · Take It In). An out-of-the-house trip. Find the shelf in the language (many public libraries have one, and some will request books from other branches). Borrow one book a little above the teen’s level and one comfortably below. The easy one gets read; the hard one is a reach.

Reading log line (3 minutes · log · no screen · Check and Log). After every reading session: title, pages, minutes, one sentence about what happened, written in the language if the teen can manage

it. These lines add up to the hours a transcript needs (Chapter 9).²⁸

Script in a week (20 minutes · chart and paper · no screen · Take It In). For an alphabetic script, learn five letters a day by writing short words that use them, not the letters on their own. By the end of the week, sound out a simple sign or label.²⁷

Sample week for 15–16

Monday. Library trip; choose two books. Twenty-minute sprint in the easier one. Log line. **Tuesday.** Sprint. Log line. If the language uses a new script, ten minutes of script work first. **Wednesday.** One intensive page with a parent nearby (you don't need to know the language; you're company and accountability). Mine three sentences. **Thursday.** Sprint, then Read aloud to a listener: one paragraph, then explain it in English or in the language. **Friday.** Sprint, log line, talk box.

Sample week for 17–18

Monday–Thursday. Twenty-five to thirty-five minutes of extensive reading daily, chosen by the teen, aimed at the top of their comfortable level; a young-adult novel or an adapted classic. One intensive page midweek, from an authentic source (an op-ed, a short story, a page from a public-domain classic after reading its abridged version). **Friday.** A Real-world text hunt: menus, labels, flyers or a community board in the language, out of the house. Talk box. A weekly summary in the log.

A 17- or 18-year-old preparing for an exam or a credit portfolio should keep a running book list with dates. Chapter 9 explains how it becomes part of a course description.

The talk box

Talk box: chapter 4

Opening line (Spanish): “¿Dónde me llevó el texto, y dónde tuve que parar a buscar?”

— “Where did the text carry me, and where did I have to stop and dig?” **French:**

“Où est-ce que le texte m’a porté, et où est-ce que j’ai dû m’arrêter pour creuser ?”

Mandarin: “哪里读得很顺, 哪里我得停下来查?” (*Nǎlǐ dú de hěn shùn, nǎlǐ wǒ děi tíng xiàlái chá?*) — loosely, “Where did it read smoothly, and where did I have to stop and look things up?” In other languages, the teen drafts their own version and checks it with a fluent speaker.

Follow-ups (pick three to five): - What’s happening in the story right now? Tell me in two sentences. - Was there a page where you forgot you were reading another language? - Which word kept showing up that you finally figured out from context? - Is this book still the right level, or is it time to move up or down? - Would you recommend it to someone at your level? Why?

How long to wait: ten seconds after each question. **What a silence usually means:** they’re switching from the language back to English to tell you, and that takes a mo-

ment. If the silence lasts and the summary is vague, the book may be too hard. Ask: “How many times a page did you stop?”

Practice that actually builds learning

The full menu. Thirteen try-its, twelve screen-free.²⁹

Reading

Graded-reader sprint (25 minutes · graded reader · no screen · Take It In). The daily engine.

One intensive page (25 minutes · one page, pencil · no screen · Work With It). The weekly microscope.

Library language shelf (30 minutes · library card · no screen · Take It In). The monthly supply run, and the chapter’s out-of-the-house anchor.

Public-domain classic, abridged first (25 minutes · printed text · no screen · Take It In). Read an abridged or adapted version of a classic first, so the story is known. Then read one page of the original and see how much more the original says. Free public-domain libraries make the originals easy to find and print.²⁶ Best for 17–18.

Easy news (15 minutes · an easy-news site · screen · Take It In). One easy-news story a day, then a two-line summary in the log. Easy-news services rewrite the day’s events in simpler language; the Japanese example adds readings over kanji.²⁵ Print the story if you want to keep screen time down.

Real-world text hunt (20 minutes · grocery store or community board · no screen · Use It for Real). Go where the language is written: an international grocery, a restaurant, a cultural center’s notice board, a place of worship’s bulletin. Read labels, menus and flyers. Photograph only with permission, and ask before photographing anything with people in it. Write down three things you understood and one you didn’t.

Read aloud to a listener (10 minutes · a listener · no screen · Use It for Real). Read one paragraph aloud to a family member, then explain what it said. The listener’s job is to ask one question about the content. A grandparent who speaks the language is ideal; a sibling who doesn’t is fine.

Reading log line (3 minutes · log · no screen · Check and Log). Every session, no exceptions.²⁸

Scripts

Script in a week (20 minutes · chart, paper · no screen · Take It In). For alphabets. Five letters a day, in real words. The teen makes their own reference chart as they go rather than copying a whole chart on day one.

Sound-to-shape cards (15 minutes · cards · no screen · Work With It). Front: the sound and an English-letter version of a word. Back: the word in the script. Go box-style (Chapter 3): right moves forward, wrong goes back. Then reverse the cards so the script is on the front.

Stroke-order slow copy (15 minutes · grid paper · no screen · Work With It). For Chinese characters, kanji and kana. Copy slowly, in the correct stroke order from a reliable chart, saying the reading aloud with each character. Stroke order isn't fussiness; it makes characters easier to recognize in handwriting and easier to remember. Five to ten a day is plenty; always inside words you're learning.

Right-to-left warm-up (10 minutes · lined paper · no screen · Work With It). For Arabic, Hebrew and other right-to-left scripts. Write a line of joined letters (one word, or the same letter in its different positions), right to left, then compare it to a printed model. Speed comes later; for now, the forms.

Sign-reading street walk (20 minutes · a neighborhood with signs · no screen · Use It for Real). If there's a neighborhood near you with shop signs in the script (a Koreatown, a Chinatown, an Arabic-language business street, a Russian deli), walk it with a notebook. Sound out every sign you can. Keep a list. Have a meal there afterwards if the budget allows; menus are excellent reading practice.

Script timelines, honestly

Here's roughly what to expect, as a planning guide rather than a promise. An alphabet such as Hangul, Cyrillic or Greek: sound-out reading within a couple of weeks of daily work, comfortable reading over the following months. An abjad such as Arabic: a few weeks to learn the letter forms, longer to read unvowelled text, since that depends on vocabulary. An abugida such as Devanagari: a few weeks for the system. Japanese kana: a few weeks each for hiragana and katakana. Chinese characters and kanji: years, steadily, a few at a time, with plenty of reading in learner materials that support them. The FSI category ruler in Chapter 1 reflects, partly, how much the script adds for English speakers; see the caveat there.

Building a reading year

It helps to see the year as a shape rather than a pile of books. Here's one way a teen might plan it, inside the one-page year plan from Chapter 1.

First quarter: volume and habit. Graded readers at a level where the tap test passes easily. The goal is the daily habit and a log that fills up. If there's a new script, this is when it gets learned, with script work as a warm-up before each sprint. By the end of the quarter, the teen should be finishing a graded reader every week or two.

Second quarter: step up one level. Move up a level in the graded series, and add one easy-news story a few times a week. Begin the weekly intensive page. Add one library trip a month to keep the supply fresh.

Third quarter: the first adapted or authentic book. Pick one book with real pull, perhaps an adapted classic, a young-adult novel, or a comic series the teen already knows in English. Read it as the stretch book while graded reading continues as the daily engine. Expect it to be slow. That's fine.

Fourth quarter: authentic on familiar ground. Articles, blogs and forums on topics the teen already knows well in English, where background knowledge carries them over gaps. A 17- or 18-year-old can now take an intensive page from an op-ed or an essay and mine it for their own argument writing in Chapter 6.

The plan bends. A teen who catches fire on a series should keep reading it even if the calendar says it's time to move on. A teen who stalls should drop back a level for a month without anyone calling it failure. The year plan is a map, not a contract, and the teen owns it.

Reading across the curriculum

One of the quiet strengths of a homeschool year is that the language doesn't have to stay in its own box. A teen studying world history can read a short account of an event in the language of the place where it happened. A teen who loves biology can find an easy science article. A teen who cooks can follow a recipe in the language, and eat the result. These cross-over readings count as reading practice, and they often stick better than readings chosen only for the language, because the content matters to the reader. Note them in the log the same way.

How the bands differ

15–16: graded readers almost exclusively; parent-led library trips; the log line kept simple; script work as a short daily warm-up. One intensive page a week is plenty, and it can be from the graded reader itself.

17–18: the climb toward authentic texts: adapted classics, then young-adult fiction, then articles and essays on topics they care about. The teen picks books themselves and keeps a dated reading list for the portfolio. Intensive pages come from authentic sources, and mined sentences feed directly into their writing (Chapter 6). If they're learning characters, they set their own pace and track characters known.

A worked example: an extensive-reading week

Jordan is sixteen, two years into Spanish, and says he "hates reading." His father suspects the problem is the books, not Jordan. They try the one-glance check together on the novel his last course assigned: Jordan taps the table eleven times on the first page. Far too hard for pleasure. On a graded reader at the next level down, he taps twice. That's the one.

The week runs like this. Monday through Thursday, twenty minutes of the graded reader, no dictionary, a log line after each session. On Wednesday, one intensive page: Jordan picks a paragraph he enjoyed, reads it slowly, looks up four words, and copies one sentence into his card box. On Friday he reads a short easy-news story and summarizes it in two lines of Spanish for his father, who reads the English summary Jordan writes beneath it.

At the end of the week Jordan has read about sixty pages, more Spanish than he read all last semester. He doesn't love reading yet. But he finished something, and he asked, without prompting, whether the series has a second book. That question is the sound of the level being right.

A worked example: a new script in a month

Priya, fifteen, is starting Hindi because of her grandmother. Her first month's reading plan is all script. Week one: five Devanagari consonants a day, each written inside a real word she can say aloud, with a few vowel marks introduced along the way. Week two: the rest of the common consonants and the vowel signs, reading two-syllable words on cards her aunt made. Week three: short signs, labels and a children's picture book read aloud with her aunt on a video call. Week four: her first graded reader with a romanization she checks less and less.

By the end of the month, she can sound out most words slowly. She can't read fast, and she doesn't understand most of what she sounds out yet. That's expected. The wall is down, and from here reading builds the vocabulary, and the vocabulary speeds up the reading.

Reading aloud together, even across languages

One of the warmest reading habits costs nothing: a weekly read-aloud swap. Your teen reads a page aloud in the language, slowly, and then tells you in English what happened. You read a page of an English book you're both enjoying. It sounds childish. It isn't. Reading aloud shows you, quickly, where decoding is still effortful; the English retelling shows you whether meaning came through; and the ritual itself says that reading is something this family does together. For a teen in a new script, reading aloud is also the fastest way for a fluent relative or tutor to catch sound-letter confusions before they set.

When the text is about something they love

Motivation is the hidden variable in reading. A teen who is bored by a graded reader about a lost suitcase may read a whole sports magazine in the language, or song lyrics, or a fan wiki about a game they play. Let interest pull. The one-glance check still applies: if the text is far too hard, look for an easier version of the same subject (a children's article on the same sport, a summary of the same game). The topic stays, the level drops, and the reading continues.

For the student

Reading is the easiest way to get a huge amount of the language into your head, and you can do it anywhere, alone.

Read easy, read a lot. Most of your reading should be easy enough that you barely stop. If you're tapping more than about twice a line, the book's too hard for daily reading. That's not a judgment on you. It's a mismatch. Drop a level and read more pages.

Once a week, go slow. One page, every word, pencil in hand. That's where you find the new grammar and the precise words.

Quit boring books. Seriously. You'll read more if you drop what doesn't hold you. Swap it for something on a topic you actually like: sports, fantasy, cooking, games, history, music.

Log every session. Title, pages, minutes, one sentence. It takes three minutes, and it turns into credit hours and proof of what you've done.

If there's a new script, learn it in real words. Don't stare at a chart. Write five real words a day using the new letters, and read them aloud. You'll be sounding out signs sooner than you think.

Read where the language lives. Menus, labels, shop signs, flyers. Real text in the real world. It's a strange thrill the first time you understand a sign nobody around you can read.

There will be a book you love that's slightly too hard. Read it anyway, as your one intensive book, and keep an easy one going alongside. The easy one builds the speed that eventually makes the hard one easy.

If it isn't clicking

"My teen hates reading in the language." Usually it's too hard. Check the level with the tap test. Go down a level even if it feels babyish; graded readers exist so the content can be grown-up while the language is simple. Also check the topic. A teen who loves soccer will read a sports report they'd never read as a novel.

"They read but can't tell me what happened." They're decoding, not reading. Drop a level, and ask for a one-sentence summary after every chapter instead of after every book.

"We can't find graded readers in our language." Try the library's interlibrary loan; children's books written for native speakers (picture books for beginners, then early chapter books); easy-news services; bilingual editions; comics. For less commonly taught languages, Chapter 10 points to organizations that keep resource lists.

"The script is taking forever." For alphabets, check the method: are they writing words, or staring at a chart? For characters, reset expectations. Characters are a long road, and progress is measured in months. Meanwhile, keep reading in learner materials with pinyin or kana support so reading volume doesn't stall waiting for the script.

"They look up every word." Ban the dictionary during the sprint. Allow one lookup per page, at the end, for the word that bugged them most. Extensive reading is a different skill from studying, and it only builds when they let some words go.

"They only want to read in English." Fair enough; reading in your strongest language is easy and satisfying. Use that: let them read the English version of a story first, then the target-language version. Familiar content lowers the load and lets them enjoy the language.

"My teen is a heritage speaker who speaks well but reads poorly." Very common, and very fixable. Their spoken vocabulary is a huge head start. Start with texts on everyday topics they already talk about, read aloud at first so they can hear the words they know, and build toward formal and written registers. Celebrate the speaking; build the reading on it.

"They read the words aloud perfectly but can't tell me what it meant." Decoding has outrun understanding, which is common with alphabets that are easy to sound out. Drop to an easier text,

and add a one-line gist after every page, in English if necessary. Meaning first; speed and polish later.

“Every book we buy ends up too hard.” Before you buy, ask for a sample page and run the one-glance check. Many libraries lend graded readers and easy-reader series; borrowing three and keeping the one that fits is cheaper than guessing.

“They only want to read in the app.” Screens are fine for easy news and short pieces. For long reading, a paper book with no notifications usually wins. Try one week of paper for the long reads and compare the log lines.

Tools, including AI

Chapter 8’s rules, applied in two moves.

Try first, then ask. During extensive reading, no tools. During intensive reading, the teen guesses from context and writes down the guess before checking with a dictionary or translation tool. An AI tool can explain a tricky construction, but the teen should be able to say in their own words what the sentence means before they ask.

Use tools that support reading, not replace it. A pop-up dictionary in an e-reader, readings shown over kanji, and audio that matches the text are all supportive. Pasting a whole page into a translator and reading the English is not reading practice; it’s reading English. AI-generated “graded” stories can be useful for extra volume, but they can contain unnatural or wrong language, so they don’t replace published graded readers and authentic texts, and anything odd gets checked.

What “done enough” looks like

Over a month, this chapter is working when:

- The teen reads in the language most days, mostly extensively, and the log shows it.
- They can summarize what they read in a sentence or two.
- They’ve visited the library language shelf or a real-world text source at least once.
- One intensive page a week produces a few mined sentences.
- If there’s a new script, they can sound out new words in it, or (for characters) the number they know is growing steadily.
- They’ve quit at least one book that wasn’t working, without guilt.

For a **15–16-year-old**, a done-enough month might be three graded readers finished, a log with twenty entries, and an alphabet they can sound out. For a **17–18-year-old**, it might be an adapted classic plus a young-adult novel or a run of articles, a dated book list for the portfolio, and an intensive page each week from authentic text.

What it doesn’t look like: one hard novel, a dictionary, and a lot of misery. Volume first. The hard books get easier because of the easy ones.

Chapter 5 — Speaking with people

Why this matters



Speaking is the skill most teenagers want and most fear. They want it because it's what "knowing a language" means to almost everyone: the ability to open your mouth and be understood. They fear it because it's public. A wrong word on a page can be erased. A wrong word in a conversation hangs in the air, and at fifteen or seventeen, being seen to struggle can feel worse than not trying at all.

This chapter takes both feelings seriously. It doesn't pretend speaking is easy, and it doesn't push a

teen into the deep end and call it courage. Instead it builds a staircase: **prepared** → **semi-prepared** → **spontaneous**. First your teen speaks from a script they wrote and rehearsed. Then from three keywords. Then with no notes, in real time, with a real person who isn't slowing down for them. Each step is small, and each one makes the next feel possible.

Underneath the staircase is a second skill that matters more than vocabulary: **repair**. Every speaker, including native speakers, gets stuck. The difference between a learner who freezes and a learner who keeps going is usually not how many words they know. It's whether they have a handful of phrases for the moment they get stuck: "Sorry, could you say that again?" "How do you say...?" "What I mean is..." A teen with a small repair kit can survive a conversation well beyond their level, and surviving those conversations is how their level rises.

This is the chapter where the focus line's second clause does the heavy lifting. **Use it with real people**. Speaking to a mirror is practice. Speaking to an app is practice. Speaking to a person who wants to understand you is the real thing, and it changes how everything else in the book feels. The words mined in Chapter 3 and the reading of Chapter 4 suddenly have a purpose. **Check it honestly** comes in through monthly recordings: the same prompt, recorded at the start of the year and every month after, so progress can be heard rather than guessed. **Own the plan** means your teen chooses their conversation goals and, as they get older, increasingly sets up their own (parent-approved) speaking opportunities.

What your student can try today: a prepared two-minute talk, rehearsed three times and recorded once. What you can learn this week: how to be a conversation partner who helps, even if you don't speak the language.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Why speaking lags

Almost every learner understands more than they can say. That's normal and healthy: input runs ahead, and output follows. A teen who reads comfortably but stumbles in conversation is not failing. They're in the usual order. What closes the gap is a lot of speaking practice at a level that's a little uncomfortable but not overwhelming, and plenty of real exchanges in which the point is to communicate, not to perform.

Speaking also uses a different part of the skill. Reading allows time. Conversation doesn't. A teen may "know" the past tense perfectly on paper and still reach for the present tense mid-sentence, because in real time, the brain grabs whatever's most automatic. That's why Chapter 3's practice-until-easy matters, and why speaking practice needs repetition, not just variety.

The staircase

Prepared speaking is a talk the teen writes, rehearses and delivers: a two-minute description of their week, a summary of a book, a short presentation. Preparation lets them use their best language and hear themselves succeed. It's where most teens should start every new topic.

Semi-prepared speaking uses a few notes: three keywords on a card, a topic they've thought about but not scripted. This is the bridge, and most of the growth happens here.

Spontaneous speaking is conversation: unplanned, two-way, real time. The goal here is not perfection. It's keeping the conversation going, getting the meaning across, and using repair when it breaks down.

A healthy week touches all three. A 15-year-old spends more time on the lower steps; a 17- or 18-year-old more on the top one.

The repair kit

Teach these before anything else. In Spanish, French and Mandarin, the core set looks like this:³⁰

Need	Spanish	French	Mandarin
Say that again, please	¿Puede repetir, por favor?	Vous pouvez répéter, s'il vous plaît ?	请再说一遍。(Qǐng zài shuō yí biàn.)
More slowly, please	Más despacio, por favor.	Plus lentement, s'il vous plaît.	请说慢一点。(Qǐng shuō màn yìdiǎn.)
How do you say...?	¿Cómo se dice...?	Comment dit-on... ?	怎么说? (...zěnmě shuō?)
What I mean is...	Lo que quiero decir es...	Ce que je veux dire, c'est...	我的意思是.....(Wǒ de yìsi shì...)
How do you spell / write that?	¿Cómo se escribe?	Ça s'écrit comment ?	怎么写? (Zěnmě xiě?)

For other languages, the teen builds the same table and has a fluent speaker check it. Five phrases, practiced until they come out without thinking, will do more for your teen's confidence than any other single thing in this chapter.

Your role when you don't speak the language

You can be a great speaking partner without speaking a word of the language. Here's how.

- **Be the audience.** A prepared talk needs someone to hear it. Listen, watch, and ask one question in English about the content afterwards.
- **Play the role straight.** In role-plays, you can be the waiter, the shopkeeper or the lost tourist. If you don't know the language, the teen gives you a card with your lines in English, and they speak their side in the language. You respond in English or with gestures. The rule: don't help. A waiter wouldn't.
- **Hold the timer and the recorder.** Monthly recordings need someone to press the button and keep the prompt the same each time.
- **Prompt, don't recast** (Chapter 3). You know your teen's top three errors from their card. Listen for those, signal, and wait.

- **Ask the question ladder.** You can ask follow-up questions in English, and your teen answers in the language. The questions push them further than they'd go on their own.

If you do speak the language, the same rules apply, with one addition: resist the urge to switch to English when it gets hard. The hard moment is where the learning happens.

Tutors

At some point, most families add a tutor: a fluent speaker, online or in person, for regular conversation. A tutor is the most efficient way to get real-time speaking practice when there's no speaker in the house. This book treats a tutor session as a tool, run by the teen, booked and supervised by the parent.

Two things to know. First, **platform age rules vary and change.** Some online tutoring platforms let minors use the service only through a parent's account, or only with parental involvement; their terms set the details.³¹ The parent books, the parent reads the current terms, and the parent knows who the tutor is. The full safety rules for tutors (house rules, where sessions happen, who's in the room) live in Chapter 7. Follow them.

Second, **tell the tutor how you want feedback.** Many tutors default to recasting, saying the right version back. Your teen can ask, in the language if possible, for the tutor to signal errors and let them fix them, especially the three on their error card.³² A good tutor will be glad of the guidance.

Accent

Your teen will have an accent. So does everyone. The goal is to be easily understood, not to be mistaken for a native speaker. Work on the sounds that cause misunderstanding (tones in Mandarin, for instance, or the difference between similar vowels), and let the rest come with time and listening. Never mock an accent, theirs or anyone else's. And if your teen is a heritage speaker whose family speaks a regional variety, that variety is a real way of speaking, not a mistake to fix.

How to teach it this week

Here's the core set.

Repair phrases kit (10 minutes · card · no screen · Work With It). Learn the five repair phrases above (or your language's version). Write them on a card the teen carries. Practice them until they come out without thinking: the parent mumbles a sentence, the teen asks them to repeat; the parent speaks fast, the teen asks them to slow down.

Prepared two-minute talk (20 minutes · note card · no screen · Work With It). Choose a topic. Write the talk, then cut it down to keywords. Rehearse three times aloud. Record once. Listen back, note one thing to improve, and file the recording.

Semi-prepared: three keywords (15 minutes · card · no screen · Work With It). Write three keywords on a card and talk for two minutes about the topic, using only those as notes. Then do it again, a little faster.

Question ladder (15 minutes · partner · no screen · Use It for Real). The partner asks a question; the teen answers. Then the partner asks five follow-up questions about that one answer before changing topic. This pushes the teen past their rehearsed opening lines into real conversation. Swap roles: the teen asks five follow-ups too.

Rerecord the baseline (10 minutes · recorder · screen · Check and Log). Once a month, record the teen answering the same prompt they answered in Chapter 1's baseline. Listen to them side by side. Note what's different. This is the most honest evidence of speaking progress the book offers, and it's portfolio gold.

Sample week for 15–16

Monday. Repair kit practice. Choose a prepared-talk topic: “my week,” “my favorite place,” “a food I love.” **Tuesday.** Write and rehearse the prepared talk. Record it. **Wednesday.** Role-play cards with the parent: ordering food, asking directions. Parent plays it straight. **Thursday.** Semi-prepared talk from three keywords; question ladder with the parent asking follow-ups in English. **Friday.** A conversation with a real speaker: a tutor, a relative, a community class. Talk box afterwards.

Sample week for 17–18

Monday. The teen sets the week's speaking goal (“hold a 10-minute conversation about a current event,” “explain my opinion on a school topic”). **Tuesday–Wednesday.** Semi-prepared talks on the goal topic; a debate on a small thing with a sibling or parent. **Thursday.** A tutor session with a target, the teen bringing their error card and asking for prompts, not recasts. **Friday.** A real conversation out of the house or by phone, plus the talk box.

And once a month, both bands rerecord the baseline.

The talk box

Talk box: chapter 5

Opening line (Spanish): “Cuando me trabé a mitad de frase, ¿qué hice después?” — “When I got stuck mid-sentence, what did I do next?” **French:** “Quand je suis resté bloqué au milieu d'une phrase, qu'est-ce que j'ai fait ensuite ?” **Mandarin:** “我说到一半卡住的时候，接下来做了什么？” (*Wǒ shuō dào yībàn kǎ zhù de shíhòu, jiēxiàlái zuòle shénme?*) In other languages, the teen writes their own version and checks it.

Follow-ups (pick three to five): - Which repair phrase did you use? Did it work? - Was there a moment you switched to English? What would have kept you in the language? - What did the other person do that helped you? - What's one thing you said that you were proud of? - Next time, what would you prepare differently?

How long to wait: ten seconds. Speaking is emotional; give it room. **What a silence usually means:** they're replaying an awkward moment. Don't rush past it. If they

want to talk about it, the awkward moment is the best lesson of the week. If not, ask about the proud moment first.

Practice that actually builds learning

The full menu, ten try-its, eight screen-free.³³

Prepared and semi-prepared

Prepared two-minute talk (20 minutes · note card · no screen · Work With It). Topics to try: describe your room; explain how to make something; tell the plot of a film; talk about someone you admire. For 17–18, raise the stakes: present an opinion with reasons.

Semi-prepared: three keywords (15 minutes · card · no screen · Work With It). The bridge. Try the same topic three days running with different keywords and notice how it gets easier.

Mirror monologue (10 minutes · mirror · no screen · Work With It). Explain a process to yourself aloud: how to cook pasta, how a game works, how to get to the library. The mirror keeps it honest; mumbling is harder when you can see yourself.

Repair phrases kit (10 minutes · card · no screen · Work With It). Practiced until automatic, then carried everywhere.

With a partner

Role-play cards (20 minutes · situation cards · no screen · Use It for Real). Write situations on cards: ordering, returning something, asking directions, apologizing, making a complaint. The partner plays it straight, without helping. Graduate to tricky versions: the shop's out of what you want; the train is cancelled.

Question ladder (15 minutes · partner · no screen · Use It for Real). Five follow-ups before changing topic. It feels long. That's the point.

Debate a small thing (20 minutes · partner · no screen · Use It for Real). Argue which breakfast is best, or whether cats beat dogs, with two reasons each. Then switch sides and argue the opposite. Low stakes, high practice. For 17–18, move to real (but friendly) topics they care about.

Phone call practice (10 minutes · phone and partner · no screen · Use It for Real). Phone calls are hard because there's no face to read. Practice with a family member in another room: book a table, ask about opening hours. Then, if it's appropriate and the parent agrees, make a real one, perhaps to a restaurant or shop that serves speakers of the language.

Tutor session with a goal (30 minutes · parent-booked tutor · screen · Use It for Real). The teen brings today's target and their error card and asks the tutor to prompt rather than recast.³² Parent books, parent supervises according to Chapter 7, and the parent reads the platform's current terms for minors.³¹

Checking

Rerecord the baseline (10 minutes · recorder · screen · Check and Log). Monthly. Same prompt. Side by side. These recordings are not a rating; they're evidence. No one awards themselves a level from them. Chapter 9 explains how they fit into a portfolio, and Chapter 1 explains why only outside tests give a level.

Out of the house

At least once a week, speaking leaves the house. Options, all with parent approval and Chapter 7's rules:

- A community class or conversation group, at a library, cultural center or community college.
- A heritage family or relative, by phone or in person, who's agreed to help.
- A restaurant or shop where the teen orders in the language (a small step, but a real one).
- Volunteering through an organization where the language is used, as Chapter 7 describes.

Remember: people who speak the language are people, not practice equipment. Your teen goes to connect, not to extract practice. Ask, listen, thank, and come back.

A speaking year

Like reading, speaking grows best with a shape across the year. Here's one that fits inside the year plan from Chapter 1.

First quarter: safety and the kit. Repair phrases, prepared talks, role-plays at home, and the first monthly re-recording. One short real conversation a week, arranged by the parent with someone kind and patient: a relative, a tutor, a community-class teacher. The goal is that speaking stops feeling like an exam.

Second quarter: the bridge. Mostly semi-prepared talks and question ladders. Tutor sessions, if the family uses them, settle into a rhythm with a target each time. The teen begins to notice their own repair moves working.

Third quarter: real conversation. More spontaneous talk, longer conversations, a debate or two. The teen tries one new speaking situation a month: a phone call, ordering at a restaurant, introducing themselves at a community event, asking a question at a cultural talk.

Fourth quarter: sustained talk on bigger topics. Ten-minute conversations about opinions, plans and the news. The year's final recording, played next to the first, becomes the centerpiece of the speaking section of the portfolio (Chapter 9).

A topic ladder

When a teen says "I don't know what to talk about," hand them the ladder. Each rung is harder than the last, because it moves from the concrete and personal toward the abstract and shared.

1. **Me, here, now:** my room, my day, my family, my food.

2. **Me, then and next:** last weekend, my childhood, next summer.
3. **How things work:** a recipe, a game's rules, the way to the library, how I fix my bike.
4. **Stories:** the plot of a film or book, something funny that happened, a family story.
5. **Comparisons:** city and country, two sports, school now and when my parent was young.
6. **Opinions with reasons:** what I think about a rule, a trend, a choice, and why.
7. **Problems and solutions:** something in my community that could be better and what might help.
8. **Hypotheticals:** what I'd do if I could live anywhere, if I were in charge, if I could change one thing.

A 15-year-old usually lives on rungs one through four, and dips into five and six with preparation. A 17- or 18-year-old should be reaching rungs six through eight regularly, because those are the topics adult speakers actually discuss, and the topics that proficiency tests ask about. The ladder also tells the teen which grammar they need next: past tenses for rung two, comparatives for rung five, conditionals for rung eight. Chapter 3's pattern of the week can follow the ladder.

Listening while speaking

Conversation is half listening. A teen who's busy planning their next sentence misses what the other person said, and then the conversation stalls. The question ladder trains the habit of listening for something to ask about. So does a small after-conversation note: "What did they tell me that I didn't know?" Ask it in the talk box. A teen who can answer has been listening, and the other person almost certainly felt listened to, which is why they'll be glad to talk again.

How the bands differ

15–16: more prepared talks and role-plays, repair kit first, the parent as main partner and audience, one real conversation a week arranged by the parent. Topics: everyday life, school, plans, likes.

17–18: more spontaneous conversation, debate and opinion, tutor sessions with self-set goals, the teen increasingly arranging (with parent approval) their own conversation partners. Topics move toward the abstract: news, ethics, future plans, their own interests in depth.

A worked example: climbing the staircase in one week

Here's what the staircase looks like for one topic over five days. Elena is fifteen, learning French, and the week's topic is "my weekend."

Monday, prepared. She writes a one-minute talk about last weekend: where she went, who was there, one funny thing that happened. She reads it aloud three times, then records it once without looking down more than twice. Her mother listens and asks one question in English: "What was the funny thing again?" Elena tells it again, in French, a little more freely.

Tuesday, prepared again. Same talk, but she changes three details to make it about a different weekend. This forces her to use the same patterns with new words, which is how a script starts loosening into real speech.

Wednesday, semi-prepared. No script. She writes three keywords on a card (*piscine, pluie, pizza*) and talks for ninety seconds about a weekend she makes up on the spot. She stumbles, uses *ce que je veux dire, c'est...* twice, and keeps going. Her mother keeps the timer and says nothing until the end.

Thursday, with a partner. Her tutor asks her about her weekend. Elena knew the question was coming, but not the follow-ups: Who did you go with? Was it cold? Do you go there often? She answers the first two easily and needs a repair phrase for the third.

Friday, spontaneous and out of the house. At a French bakery in town, she orders in French and asks the owner whether he's open on Sunday. The exchange takes forty seconds. It's the best forty seconds of her week, and she logs it with a star.

Nothing in that week is long. But Elena touched every step of the staircase, used her repair kit for real, and finished on a real person.

A worked example: a tutor session the teen runs

Marcus is seventeen and has a weekly Spanish tutor, booked through his father's account. Before each session he sends a three-line note: today's target ("tell a story in the past using the imperfect and preterite"), his three common errors from his card, and a request ("please signal and wait instead of correcting").

The session runs in three parts. Ten minutes of warm-up conversation about the week. Twenty minutes on the target: he tells a story, the tutor asks follow-ups, and when Marcus says *fui* where he needed *iba*, the tutor raises a finger and waits. Marcus fixes about half of them himself. Ten minutes at the end: the tutor writes five phrases from the session in the chat, and Marcus copies the best three onto cards.

His father's job is light but real: he sits in the next room during sessions, reads the messages, and asks Marcus each week, "What did you fix yourself today?" Over a term, that question changes how Marcus listens to his own speech.

Pronunciation that helps people understand

Most teens worry about their accent more than they need to. The goal is to be understood comfortably, not to pass for a native speaker. A few sounds matter more than the rest because they change meaning: the tones in Mandarin, the rolled and tapped *r* in Spanish, the nasal vowels in French. Pick the one or two that cause the most confusion in your teen's speech. Work on them for a few minutes a day by shadowing short clips (Chapter 2) and by recording the same short sentence a few times and comparing. Leave the rest for later. Comfort and clarity grow together, and a teen who is easy to understand gets more conversations, which improves everything else.

Phone calls and video calls

A phone call is the hardest everyday speaking task, because there's no face, no gesture and no pointing. That's exactly why it belongs near the top of the staircase for a seventeen- or eighteen-

year-old. Start with a call where the script is predictable: asking a shop's opening hours, confirming a reservation, calling a relative who already knows the teen is learning. Prepare the opening line and two repair phrases, put the card on the table, and make the call with a parent in the room. Video calls sit one step lower, since faces help. A teen who can handle a two-minute phone call in the language has crossed a real threshold, and it belongs in the log with a star.

Keep the call short, end it politely, and celebrate it afterwards. The second call is always easier than the first, and by the fifth, your teen will wonder why the first one felt so big. That growing ease is the clearest sign the staircase is working.

For the student

You'll understand more than you can say for a long time. That's normal. Here's how to close the gap.

Learn the five repair phrases first. Repeat, slow down, how do you say, what I mean is, how do you spell it. Carry them on a card. Use them shamelessly. Native speakers use them too.

Climb the stairs. Script it, then keywords, then nothing. Don't leap straight to spontaneous conversation and conclude you're bad at speaking. Build up.

Record yourself every month. Same prompt. It's going to feel awkward to listen to. Do it anyway. In three months you'll hear a difference, and that's worth more than anyone telling you you're improving.

Ask people about themselves. Five follow-up questions. People love talking about themselves, and you get to listen to real language while you think about your next sentence.

Mistakes are the price of the ticket. You'll make them. Everyone does. A conversation full of mistakes in which you got your meaning across is a win. A perfect sentence you never said is not.

Tell your tutor how to help you. Hand them your error card. Ask them to signal, not just correct. You'll fix more yourself and remember it better.

One last thing. If you're nervous before a real conversation, that's not a sign you're not ready. It's a sign it matters. Prepare one opening line, have your repair card in your pocket, and go.

If it isn't clicking

"My teen refuses to speak." Lower the stakes. Start with mirror monologues and recordings nobody else hears. Then prepared talks to one trusted person. Then role-plays with that person. Speaking anxiety is real and it eases with small, safe successes. Don't force a public conversation before the private steps feel safe.

"They speak, but only memorized phrases." That's the prepared step. Push gently to semi-prepared: three keywords, no script. Use the question ladder to push beyond the rehearsed opening.

“They switch to English the moment it gets hard.” Make a rule together: before switching, try two repair phrases. Often the repair phrase gets them through. If English is truly needed, allow one English word, then back to the language.

“Their grammar falls apart when they speak.” Normal. Real-time speech uses the most automatic forms. Keep up Chapter 3’s pattern practice, and pick one target pattern per conversation rather than trying to fix everything at once.

“We can’t find anyone to talk to.” Look wider: community colleges, cultural centers, places of worship, heritage-language schools, libraries, and parent-booked tutors. Chapter 7 covers how to find and vet people, and how to keep the teen safe while doing it.

“The tutor just chats and corrects everything.” Your teen sends a short note before the session, in the language if possible: today’s target, three errors to watch for, please signal rather than correct. If the tutor can’t adapt, find another.

“Their pronunciation is hard to understand.” Pick the one or two sounds that cause the most confusion and work on those with shadowing (Chapter 2). Don’t chase a perfect accent. Chase being understood.

“They’re fine with me but freeze with a stranger.” That’s the gap between rehearsal and real life, and the cure is small doses. Plan a forty-second real exchange (a purchase, a question about opening hours) with one prepared opening line. Celebrate the attempt, not the polish. Do it again next week.

“The monthly recording sounds the same as last month.” Compare with the baseline, not last month. Progress between two adjacent months is often too small to hear; across three or four months it usually isn’t. If even that sounds flat, look at the log: has there been enough real speaking, or mostly review?

“My teen talks a lot but avoids anything hard.” Point them at the next rung of the topic ladder. If they’re comfortable describing their day, the next step is telling a story in the past, then comparing, then giving an opinion with reasons. Comfort is good. Staying there all year isn’t.

“They want to practice only with an app’s voice feature.” It’s a fine rehearsal space, especially at odd hours. But set a ratio: for every few sessions with a tool, at least one conversation with a person. The person is where the surprises are, and handling surprises is the skill.

“My teen is a heritage speaker and talks easily, but in a home style.” That’s a real strength, not a problem. Add register work: a short formal presentation, a polite phone call to a business, an interview with an elder about their life. The goal is range, not replacing the home language.

Tools, including AI

Chapter 8 holds the rules. Two moves apply here.

Try first, then ask. Before asking a tool how to say something, the teen tries to say it with the words they have, including a repair phrase (“what I mean is...”). Then they check.

AI as a practice partner, not a script-writer. A voice-capable AI tool can serve as a patient role-play partner at midnight, which has real value. But it isn't a real person, and it doesn't replace the focus line's "use it with real people." It also shouldn't write the teen's prepared talks for them, and its corrections can be wrong. The age terms for AI services vary; the parent checks them per Chapter 8. Recordings stay in the family unless the teen and parent choose to share them.

What “done enough” looks like

Over a month, this chapter is working when:

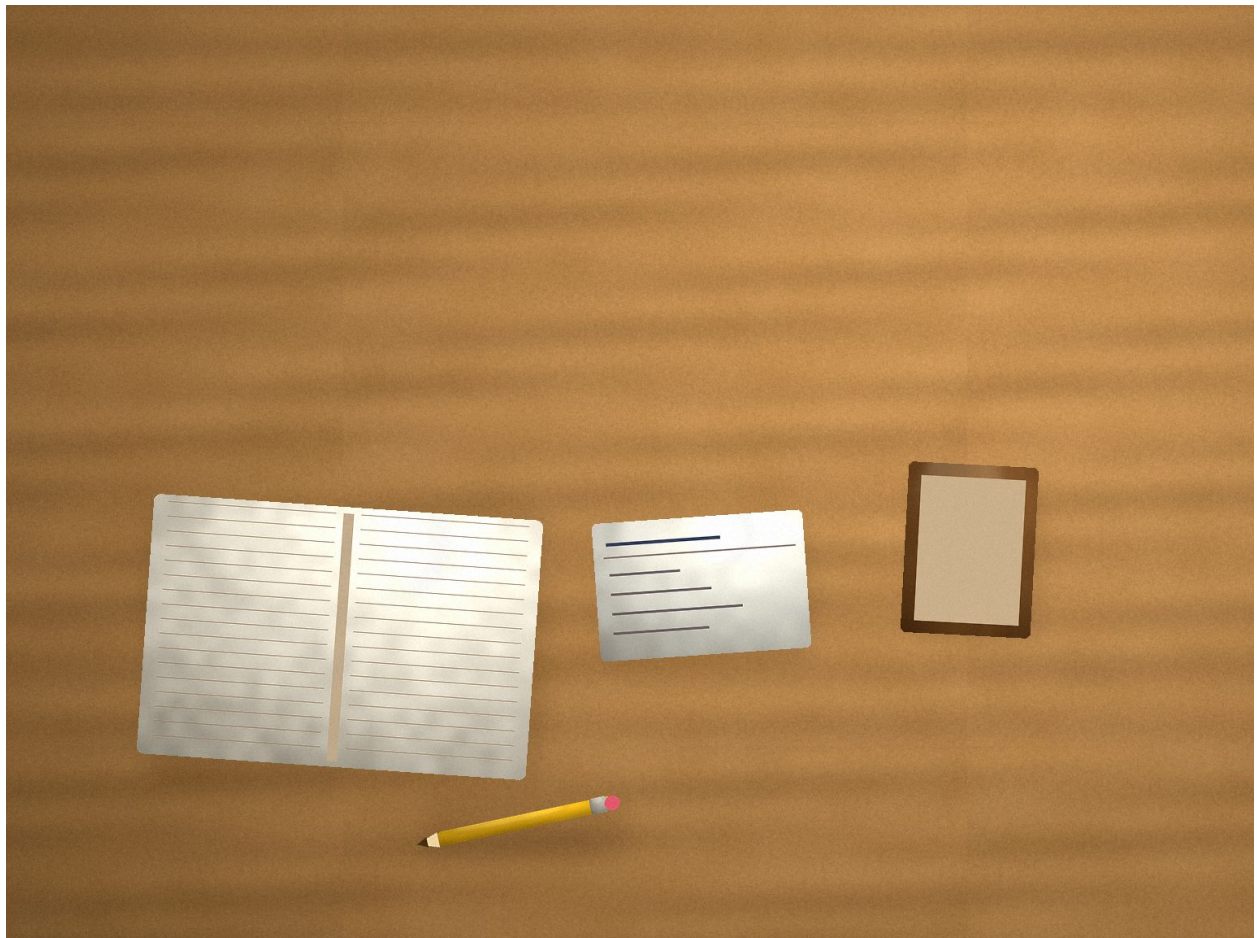
- The teen uses repair phrases without thinking.
- They've done prepared and semi-prepared talks, and at least a little spontaneous conversation, every week.
- There's a new monthly recording filed next to the baseline, and the difference is audible.
- They've had at least four real conversations with real people, in or out of the house.
- They can answer the talk-box question with a specific stuck moment and what they did about it.

For a **15–16-year-old**, a done-enough month might look like four prepared talks recorded, a repair kit they use automatically, and four short conversations with a parent-arranged partner. For a **17–18-year-old**, it might look like weekly tutor sessions with self-set goals, a debate or two, a real phone call, and a recording that shows them holding a conversation for several minutes on an abstract topic.

What it doesn't look like: a teen who has never spoken to a real person in the language after a year of study. Speaking is the skill that most needs other people. Make sure there are some.

Chapter 6 — Writing that connects and argues

Why this matters



A teenager who can write a clear message in another language to someone who reads it, understands it, and writes back has done something real. The language has left the notebook and gone out into the world, and come back with an answer. That's the heart of this chapter. Writing in a language is not, first of all, an exercise. It's a way to reach people.

It's also the skill that most clearly shows growth over the high-school years. A 15-year-old's first writing in a language tends to be short lists of simple sentences: I like, I have, I go. By 17 or 18, the same learner can be writing a paragraph that takes a position, gives reasons, answers an objection, and draws on what they read and heard. That arc (from **messages to real people**, to **opinion**, to **source-based argument**) is the spine of this chapter, and each step builds on the one before.

Writing has one great advantage over speaking: time. Your teen can stop, think, look back at a mined sentence, try a pattern of the week, cross out, and try again. That makes writing the place where new grammar and vocabulary first become the teen's own. Words reviewed in Chapter 3 get *used* here, often for the first time, and then they're ready for speech. Writing also leaves a record. Drafts kept and dated across a year are some of the most persuasive evidence a homeschool portfolio can hold (Chapter 9).

The focus line runs right through it. **Take in more than you need:** good writing grows from reading; the best models for your teen's sentences are sentences they've read. **Use it with real people:** messages, letters and posts go to real readers whenever possible, with the parent's OK. **Check it honestly:** drafts are kept, changes are listed, and timed writing with no tools shows what the teen can actually do. **Own the plan:** the teen chooses topics, readers and purposes.

There's also a skill in this chapter that no other chapter covers: **register**. The way you write to a friend is not the way you write to a teacher, a company or a government office. Every language marks that difference, some quite sharply. A teen who can switch registers on purpose is ready for the adult world in the language.

What your student can try today: a five-line message to a real person they know who reads the language. What you can learn this week: how to give feedback on writing you can't read.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Three kinds of writing

Messages to real people. Short, purposeful writing for a real reader: a note to a grandparent, a card to a pen pal, a thank-you to a tutor, a message to a community-class teacher. These come first because a real reader changes everything. The teen writes to be understood, not to show off grammar.

Opinion writing. A claim, reasons, an example, and an acknowledgment of the other side. It's the bridge between personal and academic writing, and it's the kind of writing that proficiency growth most needs, because it pushes the teen to connect sentences with "because," "although," "on the other hand."

Source-based argument. Writing that uses what the teen has read and heard (two short texts and a recording, say) to argue a position, citing each source. This is the kind of source-based task advanced language exams often ask for; Chapter 9 covers exams and their current formats.³⁴ Even for teens who never take such an exam, it's the most demanding and most useful kind of writing in the chapter, because it puts reading, listening and writing together.

Writing grows out of reading

The single best way to improve writing is to read a lot and borrow on purpose. When your teen mines sentences in Chapter 3, they're also collecting models: how speakers of the language start a letter, introduce a reason, disagree politely, close. A teen who writes "I think that" every time can find, in their reading, three other ways to say it. Encourage borrowing. Copying a structure and filling it with your own content is how every writer learns.

Drafts and the redraft

Real writers revise. Most students don't, because nobody asks them to and because revising feels like admitting the first try was bad. In this house, every piece of writing that matters gets at least two drafts, both kept. Between them, the teen lists three changes they made and why. That list does three jobs: it makes the teen look hard at their own work, it shows you (and later an evaluator) what they learned, and it builds the habit of seeing writing as something you work on, not something you produce once.

Feedback when you can't read the language

You can still help. Here's what you can do in English:

- **Ask what it says.** Have the teen tell you, in English, what the piece says. If the summary is vague, the writing probably is too.
- **Check the shape.** For an opinion paragraph: Is there a claim? Two reasons? An example? A "some say... but"? You can see structure even when you can't read the words, especially if the teen underlines each part.
- **Check the error card.** The teen's top three errors are on their card (Chapter 3). Ask them to check their draft for just those three, and to mark each fix.
- **Count the connectors.** Ask the teen to circle every word that links ideas: because, but, although, so, however. More circles, usually, means more mature writing.
- **Ask for the change list.** After a redraft, ask: "What three things did you change, and why?"

If you know someone who reads the language (a tutor, a relative, a community teacher), ask them to read one piece a month and mark only the three or four things that most get in the way of meaning. Not every error. Marks on every error flatten a teen's confidence and teach very little.

Feedback that teaches

The principle from Chapter 3 carries over. When someone who knows the language gives feedback, it's better to point toward an error than to rewrite it.³⁵ An underline with a small code ("verb," "gender," "word order") asks the teen to find the fix. A rewritten sentence hands it to them. Codes take a little longer for everyone, and they work better.

Register

Every language distinguishes formal and informal writing, but in different ways. Spanish and French have formal and informal “you” (usted/tú, vous/tu), and formal letters use set openings and closings. Mandarin uses polite forms such as 您 (*nín*), a respectful “you,” and formal writing tends toward more written-style vocabulary. Japanese and Korean mark politeness right in the verb endings. Your teen doesn’t need to master all of it at once. They need to know that register exists, choose it on purpose, and practice switching. Usage varies by region and setting, so ask a speaker from the community your teen is writing to.³⁶

Handwriting and timed writing

Most real-world writing is typed now, and that’s fine for drafts and messages. But a regular **handwritten, timed write** with no tools (no dictionary, no spell-checker, no translator, no AI) is the clearest single picture of what your teen can actually do on their own. Date it, file it, and don’t correct it. Its job is evidence, not practice. Over a year, a stack of these shows growth more honestly than anything else.

How to teach it this week

The core set:

Message to a real person (15 minutes · letter or card · no screen · Use It for Real). Write a short note to a pen pal, relative or speaker you know. Send it with the parent’s OK. The writing counts when it reaches a reader.

Journal, five lines (10 minutes · notebook · no screen · Work With It). Five lines a day about anything. Reread on Friday and underline one sentence you’re proud of and one you’d now write differently.

Opinion paragraph (25 minutes · paper · no screen · Work With It). A claim, two reasons, one example, and one “some say... but.” Underline each part.

Draft-feedback-redraft (20 minutes · drafts · no screen · Check and Log). Keep both drafts. List three changes and why. Staple them together and file them.

Handwritten timed write (20 minutes · timer · no screen · Check and Log). Fifteen minutes, no tools, dated. Into the portfolio, uncorrected.

Sample week for 15–16

Monday. Journal, five lines. Choose a real person to write to this week. **Tuesday.** Journal. Draft the message to a real person. **Wednesday.** Journal. Redraft the message, using the error card; parent OKs it; send. **Thursday.** Opinion paragraph on a light topic: best season, best meal, should homework exist. **Friday.** Reread the week’s journal. Talk box.

Once a month: a handwritten timed write.

Sample week for 17–18

Monday. Journal. Choose the week’s argument topic, ideally one drawn from this week’s reading and listening. **Tuesday.** Summary in thirty words of a text and of a recording on the topic. Email register switch: the same request to a friend and to an official. **Wednesday.** Source-based argument, first draft, about 45 minutes. **Thursday.** Redraft with change list, after feedback (parent’s shape check, plus a reader of the language if available). **Friday.** A message to a real person, perhaps a reply to a pen pal or a note to a tutor. Talk box.

Once a month: a handwritten timed write.

The talk box

Talk box: chapter 6

Opening line (Spanish): “¿A quién le escribía, y entendió lo que quise decir?” — “Who was I writing to, and did they understand what I meant?” **French:** “À qui est-ce que j’écrivais, et est-ce que cette personne a compris ce que je voulais dire ?” **Mandarin:** “我是写给谁的？他们明白我的意思了吗？” (*Wǒ shì xiě gěi shéi de? Tāmen míngbai wǒ de yìsi le ma?*) In other languages, the teen writes their own version and has it checked.

Follow-ups (pick three to five): - What did you most want them to understand? - Did they write back? What did they say? - What’s one sentence you borrowed the shape of from something you read? - Which of your three errors did you catch before sending? - If you wrote it again, what would you change?

How long to wait: ten seconds. **What a silence usually means:** for practice pieces with no real reader, the honest answer is “nobody,” and that’s worth noticing. Help your teen find a real reader for next week’s piece.

Practice that actually builds learning

The full menu, nine try-its, all screen-free.³⁷

Connecting

Message to a real person (15 minutes · letter or card · no screen · Use It for Real). Pen pals arranged through a school-partnership or exchange organization, relatives, a community-class teacher, a tutor. The parent approves the recipient and reads the message before it goes. Chapter 7’s safety rules apply to anyone the teen writes to outside the family; no private messaging with strangers met online.

Journal, five lines (10 minutes · notebook · no screen · Work With It). The low-stakes daily habit. No corrections. It’s where your teen tries new words and patterns in private.

Email register switch (15 minutes · paper · no screen · Work With It). Write the same request (to borrow a book, to change a meeting time, to ask for information) twice: once to a friend, once to an official or teacher. Compare the openings, the “you” forms, the closings, the length.

Arguing

Opinion paragraph (25 minutes · paper · no screen · Work With It). Claim, two reasons, one example, one “some say... but.” For 15–16, light topics; for 17–18, topics with real stakes.

Summary in thirty words (10 minutes · paper · no screen · Work With It). Summarize today’s input (a story, an article, a podcast segment) in exactly thirty words. Exactly. The constraint forces choices about what matters, which is the first skill of argument.

Source-based argument (45 minutes · two short texts and one recording · no screen · Work With It). Read two short texts and listen to one recording on a topic. Write an argument for a position, using all three sources and citing each (“According to the first article...”). This mirrors a task type on at least one AP world-language exam; formats are being revised, so check current requirements before using it as exam preparation (Chapter 9).³⁴ For 17–18.

Translate back (20 minutes · short text · no screen · Work With It). Translate a short passage from the language into English. Wait a day. Translate your English back into the language without looking. Compare with the original. The differences show exactly where your writing departs from how speakers write.

Checking

Draft-feedback-redraft (20 minutes · drafts · no screen · Check and Log). Both drafts kept, three changes listed.

Handwritten timed write (20 minutes · timer · no screen · Check and Log). Monthly, uncorrected, dated, filed. Use a similar prompt type each time so the stack shows growth.

Out of the house

At least once this week, writing should leave the house, physically or not:

- A card or letter mailed to a relative or pen pal.
- A short note left for a teacher at a community class or heritage-language school.
- A thank-you written to someone who helped, perhaps a librarian who found the language shelf, a shopkeeper, a volunteer coordinator.
- Volunteering through an organization where your teen writes something useful in the language, such as a sign or a short notice, checked by a fluent adult. (Chapter 7 covers how to volunteer through organizations safely.)

Building a writing portfolio as you go

Writing produces evidence naturally, if you keep it. Set up a folder now with four sections:

1. **Timed writes** — monthly, uncorrected, dated.
2. **Drafts with change lists** — the best two or three pieces each quarter.
3. **Real messages** — copies of messages sent and, with permission, replies received.
4. **Arguments** — for 17–18, each source-based argument with its sources listed.

At the end of the year, the folder tells a story. Chapter 9 explains how it supports a transcript and a course description, and how it fits with outside tests.

A writing year

First quarter: journal habit, messages to real people, register awareness. **Second quarter:** opinion paragraphs, redrafting with change lists. **Third quarter:** longer opinion pieces, summaries, translate-back. **Fourth quarter:** source-based arguments (17–18) or multi-paragraph opinion pieces (15–16), and the year’s final timed write next to the first.

How the bands differ

15–16: messages and journal first, opinion paragraphs on light topics, simple register switching (friend versus teacher). Feedback mostly on shape and the error card. Monthly timed writes.

17–18: opinion with real stakes, summaries, source-based arguments, translate-back, register in depth (formal letters and emails). Feedback from a reader of the language at least monthly. Writing directly tied to reading and listening: the week’s sources become the week’s argument.

A worked example: a message that gets an answer

Writing to a real person is where most teens should begin. Here’s how one week of connecting writing went for Ana, sixteen, learning Spanish.

On Monday she chose her reader: a pen pal her own age arranged through a supervised school-exchange program, with her mother copied on every message. Before writing, Ana answered three planning questions in English: Who is this person? What do I want them to know about me? What do I want to ask them?

On Tuesday she wrote a first draft, about eight sentences: her name, her town, her dog, her favorite subject, and two questions about her pen pal’s school. She wrote it without a translator, using her card box and a learner’s dictionary for two words.

On Wednesday her mother, who doesn’t read Spanish, did the parent’s part. She asked Ana to read the message aloud and translate it line by line into English. Two lines came out confused in English, which usually means they’re confused in Spanish too. Ana rewrote them.

On Thursday her tutor looked at the draft and marked three errors with a symbol, not a correction: a verb ending, a missing article, a word order slip. Ana found and fixed two herself; the third she asked about.

On Friday she sent it. Eight days later an answer came back, with a photo of a school courtyard and three questions for Ana. That reply did more for her writing than any worksheet, because suddenly

there was a reader on the other end who wanted to know more.

A worked example: from opinion to argument

By seventeen, a teen can move from “here is what I think” to “here is what I think, and here is why, and here is what the sources say.” Here is how that climb looked for Daniel, learning French, over three weeks.

Week one, opinion. Daniel wrote a short piece on whether his town should close its main street to cars on weekends. He gave his view and two reasons from his own experience. It was about 150 words, mostly present tense, and it was clearly his.

Week two, opinion with evidence. He read two short French news pieces about car-free zones in other towns and listened to one radio segment. He rewrote his piece, keeping his own opinion but adding one fact from each source and naming where it came from: “Selon le premier article...” (According to the first article...). The piece grew to about 250 words. More importantly, the reasons got stronger.

Week three, source-based argument. He took a timed forty-five minutes and wrote a fresh argument on a related question, using all three sources, with an introduction, two body paragraphs and a conclusion that answered the opposing view in one sentence. His mother read his English summary first, then asked, “Which source did you disagree with, and why?” He had an answer, which meant he’d actually read it.

The final version had errors. But it was organized, it used evidence, and it argued. That’s the target at this age, and it’s the kind of writing colleges and many exams look for.

Writing in a new script

For a teen learning a language with a different writing system, writing starts small and stays connected to reading. In the first months, writing means copying real words and short sentences by hand, then writing short messages with support (pinyin, kana, a romanization) that drops away over time. Typing helps sooner than you might think: on a phone or computer, a teen types the sounds and picks the right character or word from a list, which builds recognition fast. Handwriting still matters for memory, so keep a little every day. The same three kinds of writing apply, just at a smaller scale: a two-line message to a tutor in Mandarin or Arabic is real connecting writing, and it counts.

Keeping drafts honest

A writing folder full of perfect final drafts tells you less than you’d think. The useful evidence is the pair: first draft and final draft, side by side, with the changes visible. Ask your teen to keep both, date them, and mark in the margin which changes they found themselves and which came from feedback. Over a year that margin tells a clear story. Early on, most fixes come from the tutor or parent’s signals. Later, more and more come from the teen’s own rereading. That shift is the clearest sign of growth you’ll ever see on paper, and it belongs in the portfolio (Chapter 9).

What feedback to give, and how much

Feedback on writing works best when it is small and specific. Three marks on a draft get fixed; thirty marks get ignored. Choose by priority: first, anything that blocks meaning (a sentence a reader couldn't follow); then the teen's known repeat errors from their card; then this week's target pattern. Leave the rest for another day.

Mark, don't fix. A circle and a symbol (V for verb, A for agreement, WO for word order, ? for unclear meaning) tells the writer where to look and what kind of thing to look for. The teen does the fixing. If they can't find the fix after a real try, then a tutor or fluent reader explains. This is the same prompt-don't-recast habit from Chapter 3, applied to the page, and it builds the self-editing eye that every writer needs.

For a parent who can't read the language, the most useful feedback is about the reader: "I didn't understand what you meant in this line of your English version," "Your pen pal asked you a question last time and you didn't answer it," "This opinion piece has one reason; can you find a second?" Those comments are about communication, and communication is the point.

A month of writing, sketched

A healthy month for a sixteen-year-old might hold four messages to real readers, one opinion piece drafted and redrafted, ten minutes of handwriting most days, and one timed piece at the end of the month filed next to the baseline message from Chapter 1. For a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old, swap two of the messages for a source-based argument built over two weeks, and add one piece of formal writing, such as a polite email to an organization or a short cover letter for a volunteer role. Keep every first and final draft. By spring, the folder will show what words alone can't: a writer finding their voice in a second language.

For the student

Writing in another language gets easier when you remember it's for someone.

Write to real people. A short note that someone reads and answers beats a long essay nobody reads. Find a reader. Your parent OKs it, and then you send it.

Steal shapes. When you read something you like, borrow how it's built: how it starts, how it gives a reason, how it disagrees. Put your own content in that shape. Every writer learns this way.

Write five lines a day. No one corrects your journal. It's where you try new words and patterns without risk.

Draft twice. Keep both drafts. List three things you changed and why. It's the fastest way to get better, and it shows clearly what you've learned.

Know your register. A message to a friend and a message to a teacher are different. Choose on purpose.

Do the timed write honestly. No tools, fifteen minutes, dated. It's not a test. It's a snapshot. You'll want the early ones later, to see how far you came.

When you get to arguments, remember that the goal isn't to sound clever. It's to be clear: here's what I think, here's why, here's what the sources say, here's what someone who disagrees might say, and here's my answer. Clear beats fancy every time, in any language.

If it isn't clicking

"They write the same simple sentences every time." Give them shapes to borrow. Collect five connectors (because, although, however, so, on the other hand) on a card and ask for three in every piece. Mine sentences from reading specifically for writing models.

"They won't revise." Make the change list the assignment, not the second draft. "List three things you'd change and why" is less threatening than "rewrite it." Then the rewrite follows naturally.

"There's no one to write to." Look for pen-pal programs run by schools, exchange organizations or cultural institutions; relatives; a tutor; a community-class teacher. Writing a review of a book they read (to share with the family) also counts as writing for a reader.

"Every correction from the tutor covers the page in red." Ask the tutor to mark only the three or four errors that most get in the way of meaning, using codes rather than rewrites.³⁵ Everything else waits.

"They use a translator and pretend they didn't." Talk about it plainly rather than as a crime. Explain what the timed write is for, and why the journal and drafts need to be their own words. Then set it up so the tools are clearly allowed in some places (checking a word after trying it) and clearly not in others (the timed write, the journal). Chapter 8 has the full rules.

"Arguments feel too hard." Back up to the opinion paragraph and the thirty-word summary. Argument is those two skills put together. Practice each separately first.

"My heritage-speaker teen speaks fluently but writes poorly." Very common. They have the language; they need the written forms, spelling and formal register. Start with messages to family (where their natural voice fits), then move to formal writing with lots of reading models. Respect their spoken variety; add the written one alongside it.

"They write a sentence, then sit for ten minutes." Separate writing from fixing. Set a timer for ten minutes of drafting with one rule: no going back. Fixing comes later. Many perfectionist teens write more in one timed draft than in a week of careful sentences.

"Everything they write sounds like translated English." That's normal at first, and reading is the cure. Before writing, have them read a short piece of the same kind (a real message, a real opinion column) and borrow three phrases from it. Writing grows out of reading; the borrowed phrases teach what the language sounds like.

"Nobody ever writes back." Pen-pal exchanges stall all the time. Keep two or three readers going at once (a tutor, a pen pal through a supervised program, a relative), and make sure each message ends with a real question. A message with a question is much more likely to get an answer.

“My teen’s writing is far ahead of their speaking, or far behind.” Both are common. Writing allows time, so a careful teen may write well and speak haltingly; a chatty teen may speak freely and write poorly. Use the stronger skill to help the weaker: write a talk before giving it, or say a message aloud before writing it.

“My teen copies sentences from what they read and calls it writing.” Borrowing is how writers learn, so don’t forbid it; shape it. Allow three borrowed phrases per piece, underlined, and require everything else to be the teen’s own. Over time the borrowed phrases become their own, and the underlining shows you which ones.

“Timed writing panics them.” Build up the clock slowly. Start with an untimed piece, then a generous limit, then a slightly tighter one, always on a familiar topic. Practice the plan, not just the writing: two minutes to jot three points before starting makes the rest of the time calmer and the piece clearer.

“Spelling and accents are all over the place.” Pick one thing at a time: this week, accents on past-tense verbs; next week, silent letters at word ends. A short self-check at the end of every draft, looking only for that one thing, fixes more than a wholesale correction ever does.

“They only want to write about one topic.” That’s a strength in disguise. Deep interest produces rich vocabulary. Use the topic to climb the kinds of writing: a message to a fellow fan, an opinion about the topic, then a source-based argument using articles about it. The topic stays; the writing grows.

“They won’t let anyone see a draft.” Start with a reader who isn’t you: a pen pal or tutor who only ever sees the final version. Meanwhile, keep first drafts private and compare them only with your teen’s own later version. Trust grows as the teen sees that drafts are for improving, not for judging.

“They write well but never finish anything.” Shrink the job. A finished four-sentence message beats an abandoned page. Set a clear finish line before starting (a word count, a reader, a send date), and let the send button be the reward. Finishing is a skill, and it grows with practice like any other.

Tools, including AI

Chapter 8 holds the rules; here they are in two moves.

Try first, then ask. The teen writes the draft on their own first. Then they may check a specific word or construction in a dictionary or reference, and note what they checked. Spell-checkers and grammar tools come in at the redraft stage, never at the first draft, and never for the timed write.

AI is a reader, not a writer. An AI tool can be asked “What’s unclear in this paragraph?” or “Is this the right register for a formal email?” Its answers are suggestions to verify, not truths. It must not write the teen’s drafts, journal, messages or arguments. Anything that goes into the portfolio is the teen’s own work, and the change list says honestly where help came from. That honesty is the “check it honestly” clause in action, and it protects the teen later when someone looks at their portfolio.

What “done enough” looks like

Over a month, this chapter is working when:

- The teen keeps a daily five-line journal, most days.
- At least one message went to a real person, and ideally came back with a reply.
- There’s at least one piece with two drafts and a change list.
- There’s a dated, uncorrected timed write in the folder.
- They can talk about register and show a friend version and a formal version of the same request.
- For 17–18, at least one source-based argument, citing its sources.

For a **15–16-year-old**, a done-enough month might be twenty journal entries, two real messages sent, two opinion paragraphs with redrafts, and one timed write. For a **17–18-year-old**, it might be a journal, two source-based arguments with change lists, a register-switch pair, a real exchange of messages with a speaker, and a timed write that’s visibly longer and more connected than the one from three months ago.

What it doesn’t look like: worksheets filled in and never read by anyone. Writing is for readers. Find your teen some, and the writing will grow to meet them.

Chapter 7 — Out in the world

Why this matters



There's a moment most language learners remember for years. It's the first time someone who actually lives in the language understands them, answers, and keeps talking, not because they're being kind to a student but because the conversation is worth having. A grandmother at the next table explains how she really makes the soup. A shopkeeper laughs at the right joke. A Deaf teen at a community event fingerspells a name back, slowly, and then signs something faster with a grin. Nothing in a workbook feels like that.

This chapter is about getting your teen to that moment on purpose, and then again and again, safely. It's the third clause of the focus line in action: *use it with real people*. Everything else in the Language Hour feeds this. Taking in more than you need builds the ear and the store of words. Working with it builds control. But a language lives between people, and a teen who only ever practices alone ends up with a language that works in their head and freezes at the counter.

At 15–18 this is also where your role shifts most. At younger ages you arranged every contact and stood beside it. Now your teen can set up much of it, lead it, and reflect on it. Your job is to be the mentor who builds the guardrails, knows who your teen is talking to, and then gets out of the way. That's a real change, and it's worth naming out loud with your teen: *you run the contacts, I run the safety frame, and we talk about both every week*.

This chapter covers the people your teen can meet (heritage speakers, community members, the Deaf community, tutors, exchange programs, volunteer settings), how to be a good guest in each, and the safety rules that make all of it possible. Those safety rules live here and nowhere else in the book. The Language Hour pointed you to this chapter for them, and every other chapter points back.

The aim isn't a teen who collects conversations like stamps. It's a teen who treats people as people, learns something about them, and comes home with a language that is a little more alive than it was in the morning.

Why the struggle is worth it. The first real conversations are awkward. Your teen will misunderstand, be misunderstood, freeze, and switch to English more than once. That discomfort is the sound of a language moving from the notebook into life. Every learner who ever became comfortable with real people went through exactly this, and the only way past it is through it, a little at a time, with good guardrails.

For the parent: understand it yourself

The everyday picture: a good guest. Think about how you behave when someone invites you into their home for a holiday meal you've never shared before. You arrive on time. You watch before you act. You try what's offered. You ask about the food because you want to know, not to make conversation. You thank people properly, and you don't treat your hosts as a museum exhibit. That's the posture for almost everything in this chapter. Your teen is a guest in other people's language, and guests are welcome back when they act like guests.

The precise picture: four kinds of real contact. It helps to sort real-world practice into four kinds, because each has its own rules.

1. **Community contact.** Heritage speakers, neighbors, shopkeepers, faith communities, cultural festivals, Deaf community events. Free, local and irreplaceable. The rule: ask, don't test; listen more than you perform.
2. **Arranged practice.** Paid tutors, conversation classes, partner programs. Structured and reliable. The rule: the parent books and supervises, under the platform's own terms.
3. **Programs.** Summer and year-long exchanges, scholarships, immersion camps, heritage schools. Big, life-shaping and often competitive. The rule: vet the organization before you

fall in love with the brochure.

4. **Service.** Volunteering through an organization: conversation tables, libraries, food banks, resettlement offices. The rule: always through an adult organization, never as a private arrangement with strangers.

Heritage speakers are people, not practice equipment. Many families have a grandparent, a neighbor or a friend whose first language is the one your teen is learning. These are some of the richest contacts there are. They're also the easiest to get wrong. A grandmother is not a quiz machine. Asking her to "say something in Spanish" or correcting her regional word because the textbook uses a different one turns a gift into a chore. The heritage language field has a clear message for learners and families: these languages carry family history and identity, and the people who speak them deserve respect for the language they actually speak.³⁸ Your teen asks about a recipe, a place, a song, a job. They listen. They thank people. The language practice happens inside a real conversation.

If your teen is a heritage speaker, the picture flips. They may understand a great deal and speak less, or speak fluently at home and freeze at reading. That's normal and nothing to be embarrassed about. Community-based heritage language schools exist in many cities for exactly this, and they're worth looking into.³⁹

ASL is a full language, and the Deaf community is a community. American Sign Language has its own grammar, its own humor, its own literature and its own culture. The National Association of the Deaf describes ASL as a complete language and encourages learners to study through classes and practice with Deaf and hard-of-hearing people who use it, ideally learning from Deaf instructors.⁴⁰ At Deaf events your teen is a guest. That means signing or writing rather than talking at people, introducing themselves honestly as a learner, learning how to get attention politely, and never treating Deaf people as free tutors. Many states and colleges recognize ASL for language credit; check yours before you plan around it (Chapter 9 covers credit).⁴¹

Tutors under the platform's terms, not around them. Online tutoring is one of the best ways for a teen to get regular, live speaking practice, and it's also the place families most often skip the fine print. Read the terms before your teen ever logs in. Two of the large marketplaces are clear about this:

- **italki** requires account holders to be 18 or older. A parent can use their own account to book lessons for a child, with the child's consent and the parent's supervision, and the parent handles scheduling and messages with the teacher.⁴²
- **Preply** is for users 18 and over; teens aged 13–17 may use it only with a parent or guardian supervising, and children under 13 aren't allowed.⁴³

Other platforms set their own rules, and they change. Before you use any tutoring site, class marketplace or partner-matching app, open its current terms and read the age section yourself. If you can't find a clear age rule, treat that as a no until you can.⁴⁴ The book's rule for open stranger-matching chat apps is simple: not without a setup you and your teen have agreed on together, in writing.

The house rules page. Whatever platform you use, the same rules keep live sessions safe. Write them on one sheet and put it where the Hour happens:

- The parent books every tutor and every session, from the parent's account.

- Sessions happen with the camera in a shared room, door open.
- Sessions are recorded only if everyone agrees.
- No moving to a private app, a personal number or a social account. Ever.
- No gifts, no money, no photos exchanged.
- If anything feels off, the session ends and we talk. Nobody gets in trouble for ending a session.

Most tutors are professionals who will find these rules entirely normal. The good ones will appreciate them.

Exchange programs: vet first. Study abroad is a big step and a wonderful one. A summer or year with a host family can move a teen further than two years at the kitchen table. But exchange organizations vary, and a glossy website tells you nothing about supervision. The Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET) publishes standards for youth exchange organizations and lists those that meet them, which makes it a sensible first checkpoint.⁴⁵ Questions to ask any program: Who runs it? Who supervises students day to day? How are host families screened? What is the emergency plan, and who answers the phone at 3 a.m.? What happens if a placement doesn't work?

Some of the strongest options are government-funded scholarships. The National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y), a U.S. Department of State program, offers merit-based scholarships for high-school students to study critical languages abroad, in summer and academic-year programs, with homestays. Applicants must be U.S. citizens, between 15 and 18 at the start of the program, and in high school or the homeschool equivalent; previous study of the language isn't required.⁴⁶ Deadlines fall early in the school year for the following summer, so check the current cycle in September.⁴⁷ Other programs worth a look include the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange for Germany, the Kennedy-Lugar YES Abroad program, Rotary Youth Exchange, and STARTALK summer programs in critical languages.⁴⁸

Service through organizations. Volunteering is one of the best ways for a teen to use a language for something that matters to someone else. Libraries and adult-education programs often run English conversation tables where a bilingual teen helps newcomers; food banks, resettlement offices and community centers sometimes need help too. Find these through an organization: a library, a faith community, a nonprofit, a volunteer-matching service.⁴⁹ The organization screens, supervises and sets the boundaries. Your teen never arranges a private one-to-one with a stranger they met through volunteering.

You are not the clinic's interpreter. This is a rule every bilingual family should know. Under federal rules for health programs that receive federal funding, the clinic must offer a qualified interpreter free of charge, must not require a patient to bring their own interpreter, and **must not rely on a minor child to interpret**, except as a temporary measure in an emergency involving an imminent threat to someone's safety or welfare when no qualified interpreter is immediately available.⁵⁰ The same rules say machine translation of critical text must be reviewed by a qualified human translator.⁵¹

Why does this matter for a language-learning teen? Because the more capable your teen becomes, the more likely someone will ask them to step in: a neighbor at a doctor's visit, a relative at the pharmacy, a stranger in a waiting room. Medical interpreting is a profession with training and

certification for good reason; one wrong word about a dose is not a vocabulary slip.⁵² Your teen can be kind and helpful and still say, “I’m not the interpreter. You have the right to a qualified one, free. Let’s ask for one.” That sentence is a gift to the family, not a refusal. If your teen is drawn to interpreting as a career, wonderful; the professional bodies describe the training and certification routes, and Chapter 10 points to them.

Online blackmail: calm, clear, rehearsed. Any teen who talks with people online needs one more piece of knowledge, and it belongs here in plain words. The FBI and NCMEC (the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children) both warn about a crime in which someone online, often pretending to be another teenager, pressures a young person into sending images and then threatens to share them unless they pay or send more. This happens to good, careful kids. It is never the young person’s fault.

If anyone online asks for images or threatens you

The FBI’s and NCMEC’s guidance point the same way.⁵³

- **Stop.** Don’t reply, don’t pay, don’t send anything more. Paying rarely ends it.
- **Block and report** the account on the platform.
- **Keep the evidence** that isn’t an image: usernames, profile links, the messages.
- **Tell a trusted adult right away.** You won’t be in trouble. You’ll be helped.
- **Report** to the FBI at tips.fbi.gov or 1-800-CALL-FBI, or to NCMEC’s CyberTipline at report.cybertip.org.⁵⁴
- **Get images taken down.** NCMEC’s free Take It Down service helps remove images of people under 18 from participating platforms.⁵⁵

Read the box with your teen once, calmly, when nothing is wrong. Put the report addresses on a card in the study. Then say the sentence that matters most: *If anything like this ever happens, come to me, and I promise the first thing I’ll do is help.*

The meet-in-public rule. If a language partner your teen met through a program, a class or a community group ever becomes someone they’d like to meet in person, the rule is simple. They meet in a public place, with an adult who knows where they are and who they’re with, and the first meeting includes a parent. Real friendships survive that rule easily. Anyone who objects to it has told you something useful.

How to teach it this week

Start this week with safety, then go out. Safety first isn’t because the world is scary; it’s because a teen who knows the rules can say yes to much more.

Day one: the house rules page. Sit down together and write it.

The house rules page (15 minutes · one sheet · no screen · Set the Target) You and your teen write the rules for live sessions on one page: the parent books tutors, the camera stays in a shared room, no private apps, no gifts, no photos. Your teen signs it, and so do you. Tape it near the Hour table. Revisit it when anything new starts.

Stop-block-tell drill (10 minutes · none · no screen · Set the Target) Rehearse, out loud, what your teen does if anyone online asks for images or threatens them. You play the stranger, briefly and without detail; your teen says, “I’m stopping, blocking and telling.” Then swap: your teen tells you the steps in order. It takes ten minutes and it’s the most important drill in the book.

Report paths card (5 minutes · index card · no screen · Set the Target) Write tips.fbi.gov, report.cybertip.org and Take It Down on a card. Keep it in the study, not hidden in a drawer.

Day two: the language-rights card. Your teen writes, in English and the target language, the sentence the family can say at a clinic.

Clinic language-rights card (10 minutes · index card · no screen · Set the Target) Write one sentence asking for a qualified interpreter, and one that says, “I’m not the interpreter.” Practice saying both. For example:

- **Spanish:** *Necesitamos un intérprete calificado, por favor.* (neh-seh-SEE-tah-mohs oon een-TEHR-preh-teh kah-lee-fee-KAH-doh) — “We need a qualified interpreter, please.”
- **French:** *Nous avons besoin d’un interprète qualifié, s’il vous plaît.* (noo-zah-VOHN buh-ZWAN dun an-tehr-PRET kah-lee-FYAY) — “We need a qualified interpreter, please.”
- **Mandarin:** 我们需要一位专业口译员。(Wǒmen xūyào yí wèi zhuānyè kǒuyìyuán.) — “We need a professional interpreter.” **Day three: the first real contact.** Pick one, matched to your town and your teen’s level.

Heritage interview (30 minutes · a list of questions, a recorder only with consent · no screen · Use It for Real) Your teen interviews a heritage speaker about a recipe, a place or a tradition. Questions are written in advance; most are open (“How did your family make it?”). Your teen asks, doesn’t test, and says thank you properly in the language. Recording only with clear permission, and only for your teen’s own study.

Shop in the language (20 minutes · a local shop · no screen · Use It for Real) At a market, bakery or restaurant where the language is spoken, your teen makes one purchase start to finish in the language. Prepare the three or four lines they’ll need. If the shopkeeper switches to English, your teen can say, warmly, that they’re learning and would like to try. If the shopkeeper prefers English, that’s their right; thank them and try again elsewhere.

Day four: plan a bigger step. Program deadlines come early.

Program application timeline (30 minutes · the family calendar · no screen · Set the Target) Your teen finds two or three programs that fit, checks the current deadlines on each official site, and puts every date on the family calendar: application open, essay drafts, recommendation requests, deadline. Essay drafts go on the calendar four weeks before the deadline.

Exchange vetting checklist (30 minutes · a checklist · no screen · Set the Target) For any program on the list, your teen answers: Who runs it? Who supervises students day to day? How are host families screened? What’s the emergency plan? Is the organization listed by CSIET? Gaps in the answers go to the program as questions.

Day five: log it.

Real-world log (5 minutes · the log · no screen · Check and Log) Who, where, how long, and

what your teen did in the language. One line per contact. This log is also evidence for credit later (Chapter 9).

Talk box: chapter 7

“Who did I talk with in the language this week, and what did I learn about them?”

- Spanish: *¿Con quién hablé en el idioma esta semana y qué aprendí de esa persona?*
- French: *Avec qui ai-je parlé dans la langue cette semaine, et qu'est-ce que j'ai appris sur cette personne ?*
- Mandarin: 这个星期我用这门语言跟谁聊过天? 我从他们身上了解到了什么? (Zhège xīngqī wǒ yòng zhè mén yǔyán gēn shéi liáo guo tiān? Wǒ cóng tāmen shēnshang liǎojiě dào le shénme?)

Follow-ups: - What's one thing they said that you'd never have learned from a book? - Where did you understand without translating in your head? - When did you switch to English, and why? - Was there anything that made you uncomfortable? (Ask this every week, lightly, so it's normal.) - Who would you like to talk with next?

Wait: a full ten seconds after each question. Teens often need a beat to decide whether you really want the answer.

A silence usually means: often that the contact was harder than they expected and they're deciding whether to admit it. Say, “The first ones are always awkward. What would make the next one easier?” Occasionally a silence means something felt wrong. If so, keep it low-key: “Anything about the session I should know?” and listen.

Moves by band

15–16. You arrange the first two or three contacts with your teen at your side, then hand over. Your teen prepares the lines and the questions; you're there for the logistics and the safety frame. Keep contacts short and specific: one interview, one purchase, one event. Tutoring happens from your account, with you nearby.

17–18. Your teen arranges contacts, writes the program applications and reports back. You still own the safety frame and still know who your teen is talking to. Tutoring may move to a more independent rhythm within the platform's terms, but the house rules stay. A 17- or 18-year-old might take on a regular volunteer role, apply for a summer program abroad, or lead a family visit to a heritage speaker. These are big, adult steps. Celebrate them.

Practice that actually builds learning

A single conversation is a story. A pattern of conversations is learning. What turns real contact into progress is preparation before, attention during and reflection after.

Before: prepare the language, not a script. Your teen writes the four or five lines they'll need and two or three questions they're genuinely curious about. They practice the lines out loud in the

Work With It step. They don't memorize a monologue; a script breaks the moment the other person says something unexpected, which is the whole point of talking to people.

During: listen for one thing. Your teen goes in with one listening target: a word they don't know yet, how this person says a familiar phrase, how they greet and say goodbye. They're not trying to catch everything. They're trying to catch something.

After: three lines in the log. What I said, what I heard, what I'll try next time. That's the Check and Log step for real-world contact.

Community event as a guest (60 minutes · parent along · no screen · Use It for Real) Attend a cultural festival, a public celebration or a service open to visitors. Your teen greets people, listens, and thanks people in the language. That's enough for a first event. Watch how people greet each other and copy it next time.

Deaf event etiquette rehearsal (20 minutes · a partner · no screen · Work With It) Before a Deaf community event, your teen practices introductions, fingerspelling their name, and getting attention politely: a wave in someone's line of sight, a light tap on the shoulder, or a flick of the lights in a room, as appropriate. They practice saying they're a learner. They practice what to do when they don't understand: ask the person to repeat or slow down, or write it down.

Conversation table volunteer (60 minutes · a library or adult organization · no screen · Use It for Real) Through a library or adult-education program, your teen helps at an English conversation table, using the target language when it helps a newcomer understand. This is real service. It also teaches your teen what it feels like to be patient with a learner, which makes them a better one.

Pen-pal through a school or program (20 minutes · a supervised program · no screen · Use It for Real) Exchange letters or messages through a vetted program only: a school partnership, a heritage school, an organization that supervises the exchange. Never an open pen-pal site.

Meet-in-public rule (5 minutes · none · no screen · Set the Target) Say the rule together, once: language partners met offline are met in public with an adult who knows. Add it to the house rules page.

Rotate across the four kinds of contact over a term. A term that has a few community conversations, a run of tutoring sessions, one volunteer role and one program application on the calendar is a rich term. Aim for at least one real contact every week. Some weeks it'll be a five-minute purchase. Some weeks it'll be an afternoon you both remember.

Out-of-the-house try-it this week: pick *Shop in the language* or *Community event as a guest*. Both are short, local and real.

A worked example: from first contact to a regular conversation

Here's what a careful first month of real-world contact looked like for one family. Noor is sixteen and learning Arabic. Her parents found a community center near them that runs a weekend family program.

In week one, Noor and her mother went together, introduced themselves to the coordinator, and asked whether there were volunteer roles for a teen learner. There were: helping set up the Saturday

children's reading hour. In week two, Noor helped set up and spoke only a few words, mostly greetings and thank-yous. In week three, one of the volunteers, a grandmother who ran the reading hour, asked Noor to read a short picture book aloud to two of the children. Noor stumbled through it, the children corrected her pronunciation with great enthusiasm, and everyone laughed. In week four, the grandmother told Noor a short story about the town she grew up in, slowly, and Noor followed most of it.

Notice the shape. Every contact was through an organization, in a public place, with a parent nearby at first. Noor was useful before she was fluent, which gave her a reason to be there. And the conversations grew out of the relationship, not the other way round.

For the student

This chapter is where your language stops being a subject and starts being a way to meet people. It's also where you take the lead.

You run the contacts. You choose who to talk with, prepare your lines, ask your questions and log what happened. Your parent runs the safety frame: they know who you're talking to, they book tutors from their account, and they keep the house rules. That's not about trust. It's how professionals handle live sessions with minors everywhere.

Be a good guest. Ask, don't test. Listen more than you perform. If someone's dialect or regional word isn't the one in your book, theirs is real and yours is a textbook; learn theirs. If someone would rather speak English with you, that's fine. Thank them and try again somewhere else.

The Deaf community is a community. If you're learning ASL, go to events as a guest. Introduce yourself as a learner, sign or write instead of talking at people, and don't ask Deaf people to be your free tutors. Learn from Deaf instructors whenever you can.

You are not the interpreter. If someone asks you to interpret at a doctor's office, a pharmacy or a hospital, you can say: "I'm not the interpreter, but you have the right to a qualified one, for free. Let's ask for one." That's the law in health programs that get federal funding, and it protects everyone, including you.

If anyone online asks you for images or threatens you: stop, don't pay, don't send anything, block and report, keep the messages, and tell a trusted adult right away. You will not be in trouble. The report addresses are on the card in the study.

Your three lines after every contact: what I said, what I heard, what I'll try next time.

Your targets this month, 15–16: three real contacts, one of them a heritage interview or a community event. One program you'd like to apply for someday, researched and on the calendar.

Your targets this month, 17–18: four real contacts, including at least one you arranged entirely yourself. One program application drafted or one regular volunteer role started.

If it isn't clicking

“I’m too nervous to talk to anyone.” Completely normal, and the cure is smaller steps, not bigger courage. Start with a purchase: four lines, one minute, done. Then a greeting at an event. Then a three-question interview with someone you already know. Each step makes the next one less frightening.

“There’s nobody around here who speaks it.” Look harder, then look wider. Libraries, colleges, faith communities and cultural associations often have speakers you’d never find otherwise. Heritage language schools and national organizations for less commonly taught languages can point to communities.⁵⁶ If your town truly has none, structured tutoring from a parent’s account and a vetted program become your real contact, and that’s fine.

“People keep switching to English.” That usually means they’re being kind, or they’re busy. Say early, warmly, that you’re learning and would love to try. Keep the exchange short so it doesn’t cost them time. If they still prefer English, thank them; their time is theirs.

“My heritage family corrects me constantly” (or “laughs at my accent”). That can sting. Often it comes from love and a bit of surprise. Tell them what helps you: “Could you say it the right way and let me repeat it?” works better than defending the mistake. And for parents: if relatives’ teasing is shutting your teen down, have a quiet word with them.

“The tutor feels off.” End the session and talk about it. Not every tutor fits. If something crossed a line (asking to move to a private app, personal questions, requests for photos), stop using that tutor, report it on the platform, and tell your teen clearly they did exactly the right thing.

“We applied and didn’t get in.” Competitive programs say no to excellent applicants every cycle. Ask whether feedback is available, keep the essays, and apply again or try a different program next year. The application itself was practice in writing for a real reader.

Tools, including AI

Tools help your teen prepare for real contact. They don’t replace it. Chapter 8 holds all the AI rules; here are the moves that belong to this chapter.

- **Rehearse with AI, then meet a human.** Your teen can ask a parent-agreed chatbot to play a shopkeeper or an interviewee so they can practice the lines. Then they go and have the real conversation. Try first, then ask: your teen writes their own lines before asking a tool to respond.
- **Calendar and reminders** keep program deadlines in view. One shared family calendar beats three apps.
- **Map and transit tools** help plan a trip to a festival or a market.
- **No chatbot gets personal details** about the people your teen meets: no names, no photos, no recordings of a heritage interview.
- **Machine translation never stands in for an interpreter** in any setting where a mistake matters. That’s the rule for clinics, and it’s a good rule everywhere.⁵¹

What “done enough” looks like

You don’t need a teen who chats with strangers effortlessly. You need a teen who has real contact on a regular rhythm, behaves as a good guest, and knows the safety rules well enough to use them without thinking.

Done enough at 15–16: - The house rules page is signed and on the wall. - Your teen can say the stop-block-tell steps from memory and knows where the report card is. - Your teen can say “I’m not the interpreter; let’s ask for a qualified one” in both languages. - At least one real contact a week, logged in three lines. - One heritage interview or community event this term. - One program researched and on the calendar.

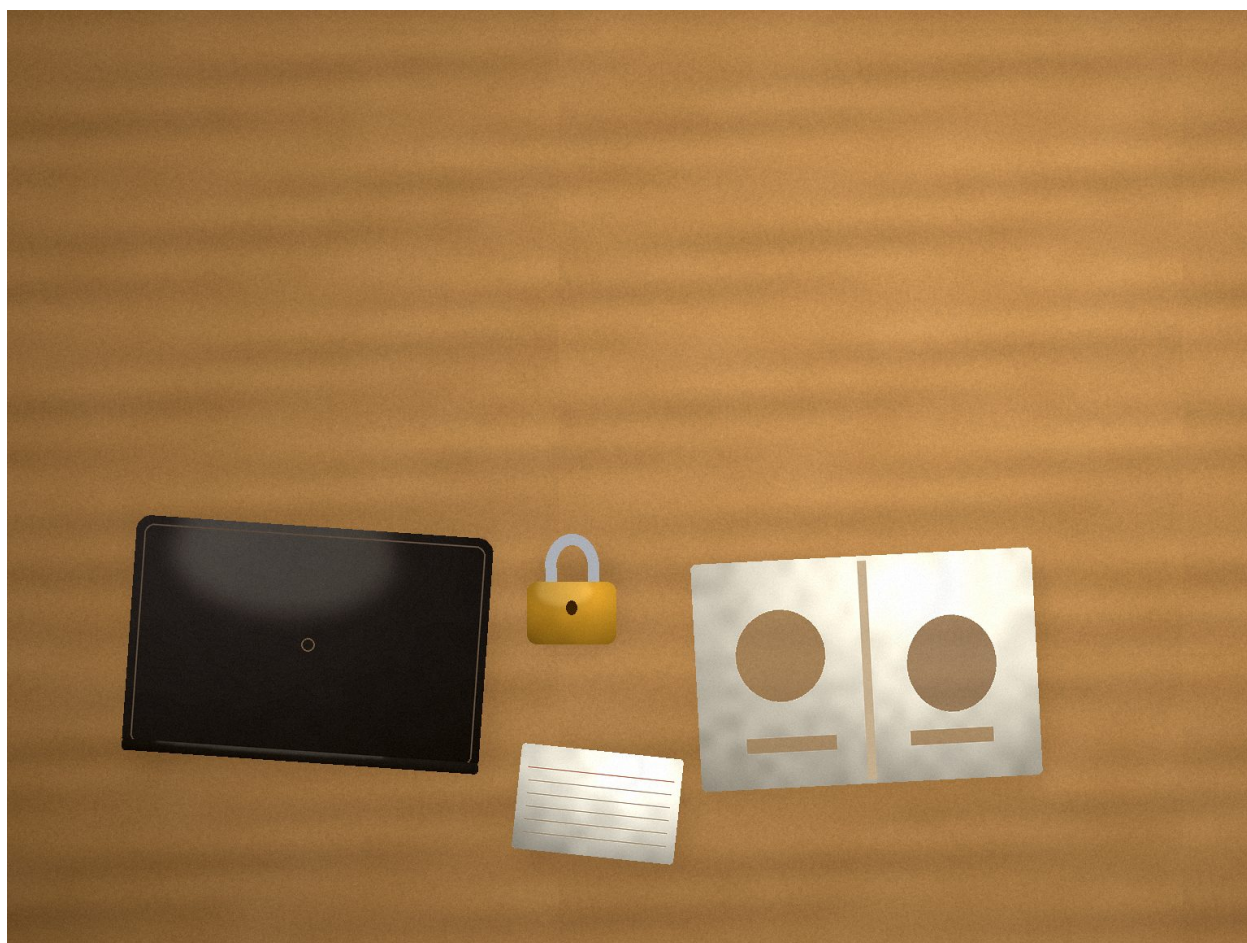
Done enough at 17–18: - Everything above, plus contacts your teen arranges and leads. - A regular contact (tutor, volunteer role, conversation partner through a program) running across the term. - One program application submitted, or a volunteer role sustained. - The real-world log is long enough to show a reader what your teen can actually do with people.

When your teen comes home from a contact and tells you something about the person, not just about their own grammar, the chapter has done its work.

Next, Chapter 8 turns to the tools your teen uses to prepare for all of this, and the rules that keep AI a partner rather than a stand-in.

Chapter 8 — Tools and AI

Why this matters



Your teen has more language tools within reach than any learner in history. A phone can play news from Madrid, Paris or Taipei at full speed. An app can schedule flashcards to the day. A speech tool can show which vowel drifted. A chatbot can play a waiter, a host mother or a job interviewer at two in the morning without getting tired. Used well, these tools can multiply what a Language Hour does.

Used badly, they can hollow it out. A teen who lets a translator write the message, lets a chatbot

answer the question before trying, and lets an app's streak stand in for progress can spend a whole year looking busy and end it unable to order lunch.

The difference isn't the tool. It's the order. The focus line puts it plainly: *take in more than you need; use it with real people; check it honestly; own the plan*. Tools can help with every clause. They can't do any of them for your teen. Taking in is your teen's ear doing the work. Using it with real people means real people. Checking honestly means your teen's own judgment, tested against humans and good sources, not an app's congratulations. Owning the plan means your teen decides which tools serve the plan, and drops the ones that don't.

This chapter holds all of the book's rules for AI and other tools. The Language Hour gave you the short version in its AI box; every other chapter's "Tools, including AI" section applies these rules in a move or two. Here's the full picture, and the habits that make tools a help rather than a crutch.

Why the struggle is worth it. Trying first is slower than asking a machine. Your teen will sit with a half-formed sentence, guess wrong, and feel the pull of the tab that would just give the answer. That pause is where the language is actually being built. A teen who learns to wait, try and then check will keep the language long after any particular app is gone.

For the parent: understand it yourself

The everyday picture: a calculator in math class. Most of us remember when calculators arrived. A good math teacher didn't ban them, and didn't hand them over on the first day either. Students learned to do the arithmetic, then used the calculator to go further and faster, and always checked whether the answer made sense. A student who reached for the calculator before understanding the problem got wrong answers with great confidence. Language tools work the same way. Try first. Then use the tool to go further. Then check.

The precise picture: what each kind of tool is good for. It helps to sort tools by job rather than by brand. Brands change every year; jobs don't.

- **Input tools:** streaming news, public broadcasters' learner pages, podcasts, audiobooks, graded readers, public-domain libraries. These are gold for *Take It In*. Many are free, and several public broadcasters run learner sites with simplified news and audio.⁵⁷
- **Memory tools:** spaced-repetition flashcard apps. Useful for keeping words your teen has met in real input. The best-known open tool's manual explains its scheduling clearly.⁵⁸ Chapter 3 recommends starting on paper; an app comes later, for scale.
- **Speech tools:** speech recognition and pronunciation feedback. Helpful as a hint about one sound. Not a grade, and not a substitute for a human ear.
- **Writing tools:** spellcheckers, dictionaries, conjugation tables, corpora of real sentences. Useful when your teen is checking their own work.
- **Machine translation:** fast, often good for getting the gist of something your teen can't read yet; dangerous when it replaces your teen's own sentences.
- **Chatbots:** large language models that can converse, explain, role-play and generate practice. Powerful, often fluent, and capable of being confidently wrong.

The five AI rules, in full. The Language Hour gave these in short form. Here's what each one

means in practice. Put them on the house rules page next to the safety rules from Chapter 7.

1. **Try first.** Your teen writes their answer, says their line or attempts the reading before asking any tool. The tool responds to your teen's work; it never replaces it.
2. **Partner, not writer.** A chatbot can be a conversation partner, a quiz maker or an explainer of a sentence your teen already read. It's never the only speaker your teen practices with, and it never writes anything graded or sent to a real person. That work is your teen's, word by word; a tool can point at a problem, and your teen writes the fix.
3. **Check what it says.** Chatbots make mistakes about grammar, culture and facts, and they make them fluently. They can even produce a list of sources that look real and don't exist. Anything that matters gets checked against a grammar book, a dictionary, a teacher or a speaker.
4. **Age rules and privacy.** Use every service under its own age terms, and you, the parent, know which tools are in use. No full names, addresses, school details, photos, voice recordings of other people or location go into a chatbot, and nothing about the people your teen meets in the world.
5. **Screen-off day.** One Hour a week runs with no screens at all, so the language lives somewhere besides a device.

Age terms are real. Many chatbot services set a minimum age, and some require parent or guardian permission for users under 18. Check the current terms of any service before your teen uses it, and use it under those terms: often that means a parent's account, a family plan, or explicit permission recorded in the setup.⁵⁹ If a tool's terms don't allow your teen's age, it's not a tool for this year.

Machine translation and ownership. A teen who runs a paragraph through a translator and hands it in hasn't written in the language. Teachers and readers often notice; machine-translated writing tends to be too polished in some places and strangely wrong in others, with vocabulary far above the student's spoken level. But the stronger reason isn't getting caught. It's that the paragraph isn't your teen's, so it builds nothing. The machine got the practice.

There's a useful way to use translation, though: as an autopsy, after the fact. Your teen writes a paragraph, then runs it through a translator in the other direction, or translates the English version and compares. The differences become a lesson: here's where my sentence and the machine's diverge, here's why mine says what I meant, here's a word I didn't know.

Detectors don't settle anything either. If you're tempted to check your teen's work with an "AI detector," know that these tools are unreliable, and they're especially prone to wrongly flagging the writing of people working in a second language. The better check is the one teachers have always used: ask your teen to talk you through the paragraph, explain a word choice, or rewrite a sentence on the spot.

Speech feedback is a hint, not a grade. Pronunciation apps can help a teen notice a sound, and that's genuinely useful. But the app is listening for its model of the sound, which may not match the region your teen is learning, and it can't tell whether a listener understood. Use it to find one thing to work on. Confirm with a human.

Privacy is part of the plan. Language apps collect voice recordings, writing samples and usage data. Before any new app, your teen checks three things: what it collects, who can hear or read

recordings, and whether you can delete them. If the answers are unclear, choose something else.⁶⁰

Screens can crowd out the language. A day of apps can feel like a lot of language work and contain very little of it. Notifications, streak pressure and endless scrolling eat attention. This book's default is screen-light: paper first for memory work, books and people for input when possible, and one Hour a week with no screens at all.

Five habits that quietly undo the Hour. Most tool problems aren't dramatic. They're small habits that pile up. Watch for these, and name them kindly when you see them.

1. **The streak trap.** An app rewards your teen for opening it every day. Your teen opens it for two minutes to protect the streak, and the streak becomes the goal. The cure is to judge tools by the Can-Do targets from Chapter 1, not by the app's own scoreboard.
2. **Subtitles in English, always.** Watching a drama with English subtitles is pleasant, and it's mostly reading English. Move to target-language subtitles, then none, as Chapter 2 describes. English subtitles are fine for a first viewing of something hard; they're not a permanent setting.
3. **The dictionary reflex.** Looking up every unknown word breaks the flow of reading and listening. For extensive reading and listening, your teen keeps going and guesses from context; dictionary work belongs to the intensive passes.
4. **The tab that never closes.** A translator open in another window during writing practice is an invitation. Close it. Open it afterward, for the autopsy.
5. **The tool shopping spree.** New apps feel like progress. Usually they're a way of not doing the work. One tool per job is plenty; the monthly audit keeps the list short.

What tools can't do. It's worth saying plainly, because marketing says otherwise. No app can give your teen a conversation with someone who has their own life and opinions. No chatbot can stand in for the grandmother who tells your teen how the soup is really made, or the shopkeeper who laughs at a joke. No speech score can tell your teen whether a listener understood. And no streak is evidence for credit. Chapter 7 and Chapter 9 cover the things only people and honest records can give.

When a tool is the right call. None of this means your teen should feel guilty about technology. There are times a tool is plainly the best choice: a learner of a language with no local community, where a tutor booked from a parent's account is the only live speaking practice available; a teen learning a new script, where an app that drills stroke order or letter shapes saves weeks; a teen with a learning difference, where text-to-speech, adjustable playback speed or larger text makes input possible at all. Use tools generously for jobs like these. The rules are about order and ownership, not abstinence.

How to teach it this week

Day one: the tool audit. Start with what's already in use.

Tool audit (15 minutes · a list · no screen · Check and Log) Your teen lists every tool they used for the language in the last month: apps, sites, channels, chatbots, dictionaries. Next to each: keep,

change or drop. “Keep” needs a reason tied to the plan (“I use it for listening at real speed”). Most teens drop at least one thing. That’s a win.

Privacy check (10 minutes · the app’s settings and policy · no screen · Set the Target) For each tool on the keep list: what does it collect, who sees recordings, can you delete them? Your teen writes the answers in one line each. You both decide whether anything changes.

Day two: try first, then ask.

Try-first-then-ask (15 minutes · a parent-agreed chatbot · screen · Work With It) Your teen writes their answer to a prompt first: three sentences introducing themselves to a host family, say. Only then do they ask a chatbot to play the host family and reply. The teen answers again, in their own words. The chatbot’s role is the other side of the conversation, never the teen’s side.

Day three: check the machine.

AI claim check (15 minutes · a chatbot and a reference grammar · screen · Check and Log) Your teen asks a chatbot three grammar questions they half know the answer to. Then they check each answer in a grammar book, a trusted reference site or with a speaker. They note which answers were right, which were partly right and which were wrong. This takes fifteen minutes and teaches more about AI than a lecture.

Day four: the translation autopsy.

Machine-translation autopsy (15 minutes · a translation tool · screen · Check and Log) Your teen writes a short paragraph in the target language. Then they translate the English version by machine and compare. They list what changed and why their own version says what they meant. New words go into the notebook; their paragraph stays theirs.

Day five: screen off.

Screen-off day (45 minutes · books, people, paper · no screen · Take It In) One full Hour with no screens: a graded reader or a real book, a paper flashcard set, a conversation, a radio if you have one. Many teens find it’s the most focused Hour of the week.

Pronunciation hint, not grade (10 minutes · a speech app · screen · Work With It) Your teen records a short passage into a speech tool and looks for one sound that keeps tripping. They work on that sound for a few days, then check it with a human: a tutor, a speaker, or you comparing against a native recording.

Talk box: chapter 8

“What did I try before I asked a tool — and what did the tool get wrong?”

- Spanish: *¿Qué intenté antes de preguntarle a una herramienta, y en qué se equivocó la herramienta?*
- French: *Qu’est-ce que j’ai essayé avant de demander à un outil, et sur quoi l’outil s’est-il trompé ?*
- Mandarin: 我问工具之前自己先试了什么？工具又错在哪里？ (Wǒ wèn gōngjù zhīqián zìjǐ xiān shì le shénme? Gōngjù yòu cuò zài nǎlǐ?)

Follow-ups: - Which tool saved you real time this week? - Which one felt like work but wasn't? - Did you catch the tool being wrong? How did you know? - Is there anything you'd like to stop using? - What would you try without a screen next week?

Wait: eight to ten seconds. Teens can feel defensive about tools; give them room.

A silence usually means: often that the honest answer is “I asked the tool first.” That's fine to hear. Say, “Let's try it the other way round this week and see what happens,” and leave it there.

Moves by band

15–16. You set up the tools together, from family accounts where the terms call for it. Chatbot use is limited to named jobs: role-play partner after the teen tries, quiz maker, explainer of a sentence already read. You see the tool list and the privacy notes. The weekly screen-off Hour is fixed on the calendar.

17–18. Your teen manages the tool list, runs the monthly audit and explains their choices to you at the mentor meeting. They may use more advanced tools: corpora of real sentences, subtitle-mining for vocabulary, chatbots as debate partners for argument practice. The rules don't loosen. Graded work and messages to real people stay entirely theirs, and claims still get checked.

Practice that actually builds learning

Tools build learning when they put more real language in front of your teen and get them doing more of the thinking. They undermine it when they do the thinking.

Input: more, faster, real. The biggest gift of technology to a language learner is input. Public broadcasters' learner pages and simplified news let your teen read and hear current events at a manageable level; full-speed news and drama come later.⁵⁷ Public-domain audiobooks and texts give endless free reading and listening.¹⁵ A teen who spends twenty minutes a day on input they mostly understand is building the language. Chapter 2 covers how to choose input; this chapter's point is that tools make it abundant.

Memory: schedule the review, not the learning. A spaced-repetition app is a scheduler. It decides *when* your teen sees a card again. It doesn't decide what's worth learning. The cards should come from real input (sentences your teen met and understood), not downloaded decks of ten thousand words. Paper first, then an app if the deck grows past what a shoebox can handle.

Speaking: rehearsal, then people. A chatbot can be a patient rehearsal partner for a conversation your teen will have with a real person tomorrow. That's its best speaking use. It can't replace the real conversation, because it never misunderstands you in the ways humans do, never has its own story to tell, and never needs you to repair a breakdown. Chapter 5's repair phrases are for humans.

Writing: tools as editors, not authors. Spellcheck and a dictionary are fine. A conjugation table is fine. A chatbot pointing at a sentence and saying “check the verb tense here” is fine if your teen does the fixing. A chatbot rewriting the paragraph is not fine.

Checking: always against a human or a source. Every tool answer is a hypothesis. Your teen confirms it against a reference or a speaker. Over time, your teen learns which tools tend to be right about what, which is itself a skill.

A sample week with tools in their place: - Monday: input from a learner news site; paper flashcards from the weekend's reading. - Tuesday: try-first role-play with a chatbot before Wednesday's tutor session. - Wednesday: tutor session (Chapter 7 house rules). - Thursday: AI claim check on one grammar point; a short paragraph written by hand. - Friday: screen-off Hour.

Matching tools to the Hour steps. If you're unsure whether a tool belongs, ask which Hour step it serves.

- **Set the Target:** a calendar, the year plan, the Can-Do list. Paper works best.
- **Take It In:** learner news, podcasts, audiobooks, streaming with target-language subtitles, public-domain books. This is where screens earn their keep.
- **Work With It:** paper flashcards first; a spaced-repetition app for scale; a grammar reference; a chatbot as role-play partner after your teen has tried.
- **Use It for Real:** people. A tutor booked from a parent's account counts. A chatbot doesn't.
- **Check and Log:** the log sheet, the recordings, the mistake ledger. A speech tool can help find a sound; a human confirms.

A tool that doesn't clearly serve a step is probably taking time from one.

Using a chatbot well: four good prompts. When your teen does use a chatbot, a good prompt makes the difference between a crutch and a partner. Each of these assumes your teen has already tried.

1. "I'm practicing ordering at a café in [language] at a beginner level. Play the server. Use short sentences. Don't correct me during the conversation; at the end, list my three most important mistakes."
2. "Here's a paragraph I wrote. Don't rewrite it. Point to the two sentences that are hardest to understand and tell me why."
3. "Give me five questions in [language] about this article I just read, at an intermediate level. Don't give the answers."
4. "I'm going to argue that school should start later. Argue the other side in [language], one point at a time, and wait for my reply after each."

Notice what each prompt does: it keeps your teen in the driver's seat, limits the tool to one job, and leaves the writing and speaking to your teen. The claim check still applies to anything the chatbot says about grammar or culture.

A note for parents who don't speak the language. You don't need to judge the chatbot's grammar yourself. You need to see the order (did your teen try first?), the check (did your teen confirm the claim somewhere else?), and the ownership (is the paragraph in your teen's own voice and at their level?). Ask your teen to read you their paragraph and explain one word choice. That tells you most of what you need to know.

Out-of-the-house try-it this week: take the *Screen-off day* outside. A library, a park bench with a graded reader, or a walk with an audiobook downloaded in advance and the phone in airplane

mode.

A one-page family tool agreement. Many families find it helps to put the tool rules on the same page as the safety rules from Chapter 7. Keep it short enough to read in a minute:

- The tools we use, and the job each one does.
- Which accounts are the parent’s, which are family accounts, and which (if any) are the teen’s own under the service’s terms.
- The five AI rules.
- The screen-off Hour, and which day it falls on.
- What happens when a tool breaks a rule: we stop using it, talk about it, and pick something else. Nobody’s in trouble for raising a concern.

Review it at the monthly mentor meeting from Chapter 1. Tools change quickly; the agreement should keep up.

How the rules grow with your teen. At 15, the agreement is mostly yours, and your teen follows it. By 17 or 18, your teen should be writing most of it and explaining it to you. That’s the point: a teen who leaves home with a habit of choosing tools on purpose, checking what tools say and keeping their own words their own has a skill that will serve them in college, at work and in every language they ever pick up. The rules don’t loosen as your teen gets older; your teen takes them over.

A worked example: try first, then ask

Here’s the habit in action. Felix, seventeen, is writing a message in Spanish to his tutor and wants to say “I’ve been meaning to ask you something.”

Try first. He writes what he can: *Quiero preguntarte algo*. (I want to ask you something.) It’s correct, but it isn’t quite what he meant.

Ask. He asks a translation tool for “I’ve been meaning to ask you something” and gets a version with a construction he hasn’t seen. He doesn’t paste it in. Instead he asks a dictionary or a chatbot: is this natural, and when do people use it?

Check. He searches for the phrase in real Spanish text, finds it in a few places, and notices it sounds a little formal for a message to his tutor. He decides on a simpler line he understands fully, then adds the new construction to his card box to practice.

Log. In the Check and Log step, he writes one line: “Tool gave me a new phrase; I checked it; I used a simpler one this time.” That line is evidence that the teen, not the tool, made the decision.

A worked example: catching a tool’s mistake

Ruby, sixteen, asked a chatbot to explain when to use *ser* and *estar* in Spanish. The explanation was mostly fine, but one example used *ser* where a sentence about location clearly needed *estar*. Ruby noticed only because Chapter 3’s pattern card on *estar* was fresh in her mind. She checked her grammar reference, confirmed the mistake, and brought it to the talk box: “Here’s what the tool got wrong.” Her mother asked how she’d caught it, and Ruby said, “Because I’d practiced it.”

That is the best answer there is. Tools get things wrong; the teen who has done the work first is the one who notices.

For the student

Tools can make you a much faster learner. They can also make you look busy while you learn nothing. Here's how to stay on the right side.

Try first. Write your sentence, say your line, read the paragraph before you ask any tool. Your attempt is where the learning happens. The tool's answer is useful only after you've tried.

Partner, not writer. Use a chatbot as a partner: someone to role-play with, quiz you, or explain a sentence you already read. Never let it write your messages, your essays or anything graded.

Check what it says. Chatbots are often wrong and always sound sure. Check grammar in a reference. Check culture with a person. Never trust a source a chatbot gives you without opening it.

Your words are yours. Anything you hand in or send to a real person is written by you. A tool can point at a problem. You fix it.

Age rules and privacy. Use each tool under its own age terms. Don't put your name, address, school, photos or location into any chatbot. Don't put anything about other people in either.

Tell your parent what you use. Not because you're being watched. Because they're your mentor, and because many tools have age rules.

Screen-off day. One Hour a week with no screens. Try it. You may be surprised how much you get done.

What a good tool week looks like for you. Monday, you listen to a learner news story twice and pull three sentences onto paper cards. Tuesday, you write your half of a conversation for Wednesday's tutor, then ask a chatbot to play the tutor so you can rehearse. Wednesday, the real session. Thursday, you ask a chatbot one grammar question that came up and check the answer in your reference. Friday, no screens: a reader, your cards and a walk with a downloaded podcast. Every tool had a job, and every job served your plan.

Your targets this month, 15–16: one tool audit, one AI claim check, four screen-off Hours, and every chatbot use in the try-first order.

Your targets this month, 17–18: the same, plus one translation autopsy on your own writing and a short note to your parent explaining which tools you're keeping and why.

If it isn't clicking

"The app says I'm doing great, but I can't talk." Apps measure what apps can measure: taps, streaks, cards reviewed. They can't measure whether you can handle a real conversation. Use the

Can-Do targets from Chapter 1 and the monthly recording from Chapter 5 to check honestly. If the app isn't moving those, change how you use it or drop it.

“I keep asking the chatbot first.” Make it physical. Write your answer on paper before you open the screen. Or keep the chatbot for the second half of the Hour only.

“The chatbot said something different from my book.” Good: now you have a question worth asking. Check a second reference or ask a speaker. Sometimes the book is simplifying; sometimes the chatbot is wrong; sometimes both are right for different regions.

“I used a translator for an assignment.” Say so, then rewrite it in your own words, at your own level. That's the fix. Parents: treat this as a teachable moment, not a crime. The point is ownership.

“Screens are taking over the Hour.” Go back to basics for a week: paper, books, people. Then add one tool at a time, each with a job.

“I learn better with apps than with books.” Some teens do. If an app genuinely moves your Can-Do targets and your monthly recordings, keep it. Just keep the screen-off Hour and the real-world contacts too, so the app isn't the only place your language lives.

“My parent doesn't trust anything I do with AI.” Show your work. Keep your first attempt, the chatbot's reply and your revision together for a week. That record answers the question better than any argument.

“I'm not sure an app is safe.” Run the privacy check. If the answers are unclear, choose another tool. There are always alternatives.

“My teen says the tool is always right.” Run a small experiment together. Ask two different tools the same tricky question, or ask the same tool twice in different words, and compare. When the answers differ, it's clear neither can be trusted blindly, and the lesson sticks better than a lecture.

“The app streak is the only thing getting done.” Keep the app if your teen likes it, but move it outside the Hour, as a bonus. The Hour belongs to listening, reading, speaking and writing with real material.

“We can't tell which tools are worth paying for.” Start free, and judge any tool by the Hour: does it help your teen take in real language, work with it, use it with people, or check it honestly? If not, it's entertainment, which is fine, but it isn't the Hour.

Tools, including AI

This chapter is the tools chapter, so here's the short version to post on the wall:

- **Try first.**
- **Partner, not writer.** Anything graded or sent to a real person is yours, word by word.
- **Check what it says** against a human or a source.
- **Age rules and privacy.** Use each service under its own terms; no private information in; your parent knows what's in use.
- **Screen-off day.** One Hour every week.

Every other chapter applies these rules in a move or two. When in doubt, come back to this list.

What “done enough” looks like

You don’t need a teen who avoids technology, or one who uses every new app. You need a teen who uses tools on purpose, in the right order, and can tell you why.

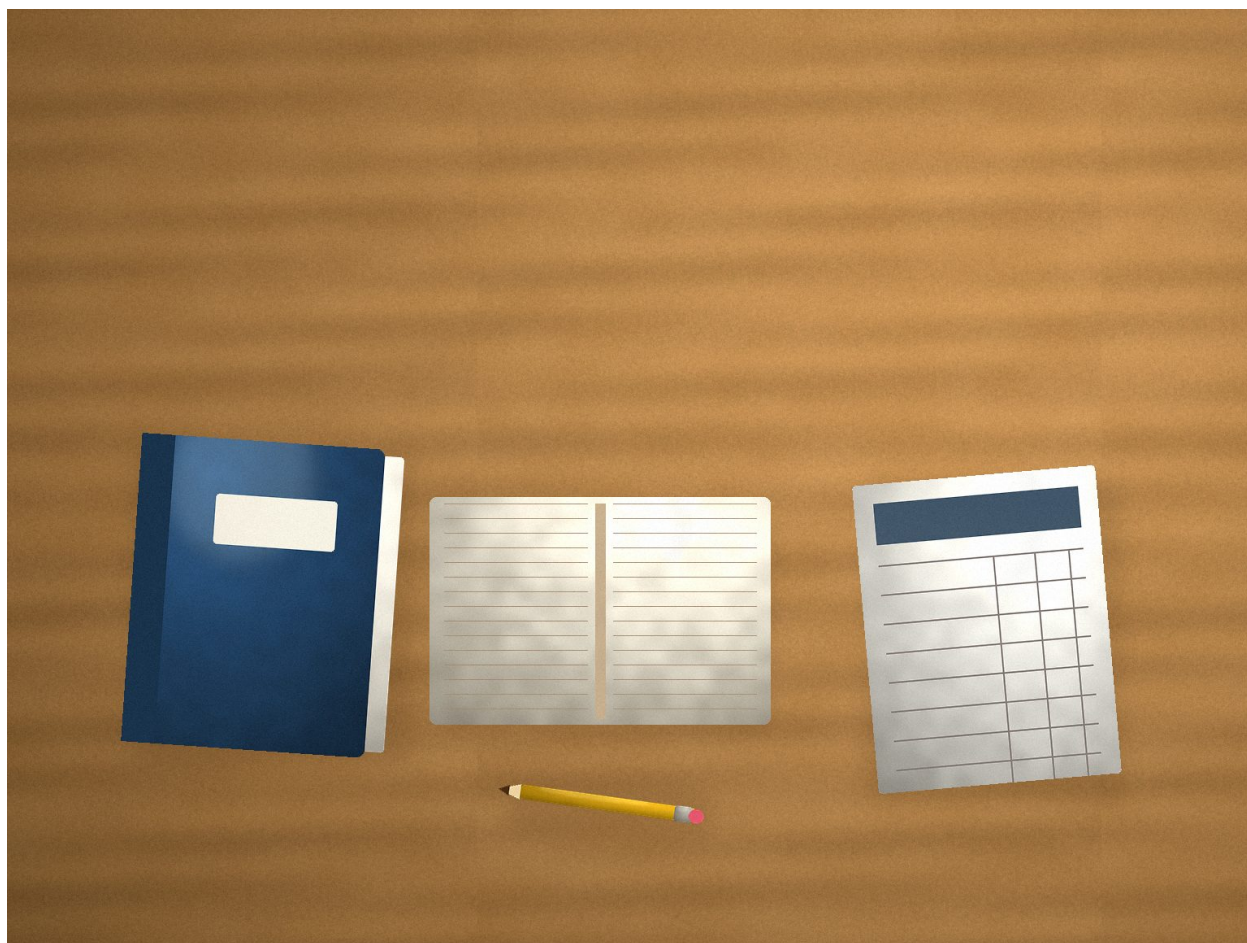
Done enough at 15–16: - The five AI rules are on the house rules page. - A tool list exists, with a keep, change or drop next to each tool and a privacy note on each kept tool. - Your teen can describe one time a chatbot was wrong and how they found out. - Every chatbot use this month followed try first, then ask. - One screen-off Hour every week.

Done enough at 17–18: - Everything above, plus your teen runs the monthly tool audit. - Your teen has done a translation autopsy on their own writing and can explain the differences. - Graded work and messages to real people are visibly their own: drafts kept, level consistent with their speaking. - Your teen can explain, in a minute or two, which tools serve their plan and why.

When your teen catches a tool being wrong and says so without being asked, they’ve learned the most important thing this chapter can teach.

Next, Chapter 9 turns all the evidence your teen has been building into credit, a transcript line and proof a stranger can trust.

Chapter 9 — Credit, transcript and proof



Somewhere in the high-school years, a language stops being only something your teen does and becomes something your teen has to show. A college admissions reader, a scholarship committee, a community college, an employer or a state board will want to know: how much, at what level, and how do you know? This chapter is about answering those questions honestly and well.

The good news is that the Language Hour has been building the answer all along. Every daily log line, every monthly recording, every real-world contact is evidence. This chapter shows you how to turn that evidence into credit on a transcript, how outside tests and awards fit in, and how to assemble a portfolio that lets a stranger see what your teen can actually do.

All the credit and test facts in the book live here. Chapter 1 gave the hours arithmetic; this chapter gives the rest. Rules change, so check each official page in the season you use it.

The fourth clause: own the plan, own the proof

The focus line ends with *own the plan*. By 17 or 18, your teen should be able to explain their own transcript line: what the course was, what they did, how many hours, and what proves it. That's not paperwork for its own sake. It's the teen taking ownership of their education in a way that colleges and employers recognize instantly.

Your role is to be the school of record. In most states, a homeschool parent issues the transcript and writes the course descriptions. Your teen gathers and organizes the evidence; you make the final call on credit and grades, and you sign.

Credit by hours

The simplest, most widely used measure is time. HSLDA's guidance for homeschool families counts a core course, including a foreign language, as 1.0 credit at about 150 logged hours of work; extra hours don't add extra credit.⁶¹ The Language Hour, at roughly 45–60 minutes, five days a week, for about 30 weeks, lands right around 150 hours a year.

Hours log (3 minutes · a log sheet · no screen · Check and Log) Every day: the date, the minutes, and which Hour steps happened. At the end of each month, your teen totals the minutes and notes the running total toward 150. Real-world contact from Chapter 7 counts when it's genuine language work.

Hours are necessary, but they aren't the whole story. A course titled "Spanish II" should match the work of a second-year course. That's where evidence comes in.

Naming the course honestly

Course titles on a homeschool transcript should mean what they say. "Spanish I," "Spanish II" and "Spanish III" are clear, conventional and widely understood, but they're only honest if the work matches the level. The surest match comes from three things together: a year's logged hours, Can-Do evidence that shows what your teen can do (Chapter 1), and, where possible, an outside measure such as a test score.

If your teen came in with heritage skills, or moved faster than a year per level, it's fine to say so. A course description can explain that a student placed into a level by assessment rather than by a previous course. What you shouldn't do is name a course after this book or invent a level the evidence doesn't support.

Writing the course description

A course description is one short paragraph that tells a reader what the course was. Colleges that see homeschool transcripts read these, and the Common App gives homeschool families room to describe courses.⁶²

Course description draft (30 minutes · computer or paper · no screen · Check and Log) One paragraph, five parts: goals (in Can-Do terms), materials and resources, hours, evidence kept, and how you assessed. Your teen drafts it; you revise and approve it.

A sample shape:

Spanish III (1.0 credit). A teen-run daily course of about 150 hours focused on interpersonal speaking, listening at real speed, extended reading and source-based writing. Materials included graded and authentic readers, public-broadcaster news and podcasts, a weekly online tutor booked by the parent, and community conversation. Goals were set with NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements. Evidence includes dated recordings each term, timed writing samples with drafts, a reading log, a real-world contact log and [outside score, if any]. Assessment combined monthly mentor reviews, a rubric for speaking and writing, and [test name].

Change the bracketed parts to match what actually happened. Never claim an outside score your teen doesn't have.

Outside measures: which one, and when

An outside measure is evidence from someone other than you. It isn't required for a homeschool transcript, but it makes your credit much easier for strangers to trust, and some opportunities (the Seal of Biliteracy, some placement and credit policies) depend on one.

Test-choice table (30 minutes · paper · no screen · Set the Target) Your teen makes a table: for their language, which of AP, AAPPL, CLEP and dual enrollment are available, what each costs, when each happens, and what it would prove. Then you choose together. Most families pick one, sometimes two.

AP exams. Homeschooled students can take AP exams by arranging to test at a school that offers them. Parents can't order exams directly; your teen needs a school's AP coordinator to order the exam and give a seat. An AP course isn't required to take the exam.⁶³ Ordering deadlines fall in the fall for May exams, with late additions at the school's discretion, so contact coordinators early.⁶⁴ The College Board revised six AP world language and culture courses and exams (Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Spanish) for the 2026–27 school year, aligning their frameworks and adding a course project built on target-language sources; check the course page for your teen's language for current exam details before planning.⁶⁵ Not every language has an AP exam; check the current list.⁶⁶

AP coordinator call script (15 minutes · phone · no screen · Use It for Real) By September, your teen calls a local school's AP coordinator. Script: who they are, which exam, that they're home-

schooled, and whether the school can order an exam for an outside student. Your teen makes the call. It's a real conversation with real stakes, and the practice is worth as much as the seat.

AAPPL. The ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages is a proficiency test for grades 5–12, in four components: interpersonal listening and speaking, interpretive listening, interpretive reading and presentational writing. Components can be ordered separately and taken on different days, and there is an option for at-home proctoring by a parent or guardian.⁶⁷ Results are reported against ACTFL proficiency levels, which makes AAPPL useful evidence for course levels and, where accepted, for Seal of Biliteracy criteria. Other recognized proficiency tests include the ACTFL OPI and Avant STAMP 4S.⁶⁸

CLEP. CLEP exams let a student earn college credit by exam. There's one exam per language covering the first two college levels, in French, German and Spanish (plus Spanish with Writing). The American Council on Education recommends 6 semester hours at a score of 50 and 9 semester hours at the higher Level 2 score (59 for French, 60 for German, 63 for Spanish); Spanish with Writing at the Level 2 score of 65 earns a recommendation of 12 hours.⁶⁹ Each college sets its own CLEP policy, so check before counting on it.

Dual enrollment. A college language course taken in high school is often the cleanest proof of upper-level work. HSLDA's guidance counts a one-semester college course of 3–5 credits as 1.0 high-school credit.⁶¹ Community-college sequences (101, 102, 201) map neatly onto high-school levels, and a college transcript is evidence any reader trusts.

The Seal of Biliteracy: find your route

The Seal of Biliteracy is an award recognizing students who have reached proficiency in two or more languages by high-school graduation. Most states have one.⁷⁰ It's a lovely goal for a teen, and it can carry practical weight; in Illinois, for example, the state's public universities accept the Seal as equivalent to two years of high-school language study for admission.⁷¹

Here's the catch for homeschoolers: the Seal is a school award. States set the criteria, but a school district or school usually awards it. Illinois is explicit: the Seal is awarded by a school district or nonpublic school, and students can't participate individually apart from their schools.⁷¹ That means a homeschooled teen often can't simply earn the Seal on their own, however strong their Spanish.

So the job is to find your route. Depending on your state, routes may include:

- **Your local school district.** Some districts allow homeschooled students to take the qualifying assessments and receive the Seal. Ask the district's world languages or assessment office.
- **A registered nonpublic school.** If your state treats your homeschool as a private school, or your family enrolls through an umbrella or cover school, that school may be able to award it under state rules.
- **A state rule that allows it.** A few states address homeschoolers directly. Check your state education agency's Seal page.

- **A state equivalent.** Texas, for example, has a “performance acknowledgment” in bilingualism and biliteracy that appears on the transcript, earned through measures such as an AP score of 3 or higher, an IB higher-level score of 4 or higher, or a national proficiency assessment at Intermediate High or above.⁷²
- **The evidence without the award.** If no route exists, your teen can still meet the criteria (often Intermediate High or above on a recognized test, plus English requirements) and put the score on the transcript. The proficiency is real even when the Seal isn’t available. **Seal route check** (30 minutes · your state education agency’s Seal page · no screen · Set the Target) Your teen finds your state’s Seal page and answers three questions: Can a homeschooled student receive it? Through whom? Which tests and scores count? If the page doesn’t say, your teen writes a short, polite email to the state or district contact asking. You read it before it goes.

Plan the Seal early. Criteria usually include a proficiency score in the second language and meeting English requirements, and the awarding school may have its own timeline. Start asking in the fall of the junior year at the latest.

The portfolio: evidence a stranger can trust

A portfolio is where all the evidence lives in one place. It doesn’t need to be fancy. A folder, physical or digital, organized by term, is plenty.

Portfolio of five (30 minutes a term · a folder · no screen · Check and Log) Each term, five items: one dated recording, one timed writing sample, one source-based essay with its drafts, the reading and listening log, and the real-world log. Label everything with the date and level.

Over a year, add:

- **The hours log**, totaled.
- **Course descriptions** and the reading list.
- **Can-Do evidence:** the targets your teen set and what they did to meet them. If your teen records a Can-Do self-check, label it plainly as a self-check; it’s a reflection, never a rating. Ratings come from tests and trained raters.
- **Outside scores:** AP, AAPPL, CLEP, college transcripts.
- **Program records:** exchange certificates, volunteer hours letters from organizations.

Before/after pair (15 minutes · two recordings · screen · Check and Log) Play the month-one recording and the month-six recording back to back. Your teen writes, in a few sentences, what changed: speed, range, accuracy, confidence. This pair is the single most persuasive item in the portfolio. Readers can hear the progress.

Mistake ledger (5 minutes · notebook · no screen · Check and Log) Your teen keeps their top five recurring errors. When an error stays fixed for a month, they strike it and add the next one. Over a year, the ledger tells the story of how your teen checked honestly.

Term letter to self (20 minutes · paper · no screen · Check and Log) At the end of each term, your teen writes a short letter in the target language: what I can do now, what’s still hard, what’s next.

Keep the letters. In senior year, they're a remarkable record.

Grades: what the letter means

A homeschool transcript usually shows a grade for each course. For a language course, the grade should reflect what your teen did against the goals you set, not how hard they tried in a vague sense, and not a comparison with native speakers.

A simple, defensible approach combines three things:

- **Consistency** (about a third): the hours log, the daily Hour, the real-world contacts. Did your teen do the work steadily?
- **Performance** (about a third): the speaking and writing samples, judged with a short rubric. Can your teen do the Can-Do targets for the course?
- **Growth** (about a third): the before/after pair, the mistake ledger, the term letters. Did your teen move?

Write the weighting in the course description so a reader understands it. If you include an outside score, mention it separately rather than folding it into the grade.

Keep the rubric short. Four rows (comprehensibility, range, accuracy, task completion), four levels each, is plenty. Use the same rubric all year so the samples can be compared. Your teen scores their own work first, then you score it, and you talk about the difference. That conversation is where honest checking becomes a habit.

Records to keep, and for how long

Keep the transcript, course descriptions, reading lists, outside scores and a selection of portfolio items permanently, or at least until your teen has finished college. Admissions offices, scholarship programs and occasionally employers can ask for them years later. Daily logs can be summarized by month once a year is over; keep the summaries. A scanned copy in a second place costs nothing and saves a great deal of worry.

If your teen moves between homeschool, a school and a college program during high school, bring the portfolio to every transition. A school deciding where to place your teen, or a college deciding whether to accept a credit, will take a dated recording and a course description far more seriously than a verbal account.

When your teen's language is a heritage language

Many teens come to high school already speaking a language at home. Their transcript should reflect what they can actually do, not pretend they started from zero. A few practical points:

- **Place by evidence.** An outside test such as AAPPL or a college placement exam can show where your teen really is. A heritage speaker may test high in listening and speaking and lower in reading and writing; that's normal, and the course can focus on the gaps.

- **Name the course honestly.** “Spanish for Heritage Speakers” or “Spanish IV” with a description that explains the placement are both clear.
- **Count the hours that count.** Daily conversation at home is a gift, but credit hours come from structured work toward course goals: reading, writing, formal registers, literature.
- **The Seal may be within reach sooner.** Heritage speakers often meet proficiency criteria earlier than other learners; start the Seal route check early.

College admissions and athletics

Colleges vary widely in how much language they want to see. Some selective schools expect several years; many accept two; some require none. Check each college’s page. Two examples of clear published rules:

- The University of California system requires two years of the same language other than English (or the equivalent of the second level of high-school instruction) and recommends a third year.⁷³
- For NCAA Division I eligibility, a world language can count as an additional core course but isn’t required.⁷⁴

Common App lets homeschoolers describe their courses and attach materials; the course descriptions and portfolio from this chapter are exactly what’s needed.⁶²

A year at a glance

15–16: - Hours log every day; monthly totals. - Portfolio of five each term. - Course description drafted in the fall, finished in the spring. - Test-choice table made; one outside measure chosen for the following year.

17–18: - Everything above, run by your teen. - AP coordinator call by September if AP is the plan. - Seal route check by the fall of junior year. - One outside measure taken: AP, AAPPL, CLEP or a dual-enrollment course. - Before/after pair and term letters assembled for applications.

A worked example: one credit, documented

Here’s how one family put a year of Spanish on the transcript. Carlos was sixteen; his mother, Elena, was the homeschool teacher of record.

Hours. Carlos kept the Language Hour log all year: date, minutes, step, one line of what he did. By May it showed a little over 160 hours, plus about 30 hours of outside contact (tutor sessions, a volunteer shift at a community food bank, a weekend at his aunt’s house where only Spanish was spoken). Elena counted the logged hours toward the credit and noted the outside contact in the course description.

Course description. Elena wrote a half-page: course title (Spanish 2), the materials, the methods (daily listening and reading, weekly tutor conversation, monthly recordings, writing to a pen pal),

how it was evaluated (recordings compared with the baseline, a writing portfolio, an outside test score), and the credit awarded (1.0).

Outside measure. In spring, Carlos took a proficiency test through a local school that offered it. His result went on the transcript next to the course and into the portfolio.

Portfolio. One binder: the year plan, the baseline and three later recordings (listed with dates and links to the files), six pieces of writing with first and final drafts, the reading log summary, and a one-page reflection Carlos wrote in Spanish with an English version.

Transcript line. *Spanish 2 · 1.0 credit · grade: A · outside measure: proficiency test score listed.* Carlos could explain every word of that line in a minute, which is the real test.

None of this required anything exotic. It required a log kept honestly, a folder kept tidy, and one afternoon in May to put it together.

If it isn't clicking

“We kept no log for the first months.” Don't invent one. Start logging today, and for the earlier months write an honest summary from what you have: the calendar, recordings, tutor invoices, the books on the shelf. Note on the course description that the early hours are estimated. Honesty here protects the whole transcript.

“No local school will give us an AP seat.” Widen the search: neighboring districts, private schools, and testing sites further away. Start in late summer and keep a list of who you called and when. If no seat is available this year, other outside measures (a proficiency test, a CLEP exam for college credit where accepted, a dual-enrollment course) can do much of the same work.

“We don't know what grade to give.” Base it on the evidence you set out at the start: recordings, writing, the outside measure, and how fully the plan was carried out. Write down how you decided. A grade with a short written rationale is much easier for a reader to trust than a grade with none.

“My teen thinks the portfolio is busywork.” Show them what it's for: a stranger, such as an admissions reader, an employer or a scholarship committee, flipping through it in five minutes. Then let your teen choose what goes in. Ownership turns busywork into a showcase.

“We started late, in the junior or senior year.” You can still document real work. Begin the log now, take a baseline, and aim for one outside measure by spring. A single well-documented credit is worth more than several vague ones.

“Our state's rules are unclear.” Write down what you found, where, and when, and ask the state or district contact in writing. Keep the reply in the records folder.

What “done enough” looks like

Done enough at 15–16: a running hours log, a portfolio with five items per term, a draft course description, and a decision about which outside measure fits.

Done enough at 17–18: a transcript line your teen can explain in a minute, a course description you’ve signed, at least one outside measure where one is available, a clear answer about the Seal route in your state, and a portfolio a stranger could leaf through and understand.

Why the struggle is worth it. Logging minutes, labeling recordings and writing course descriptions can feel like paperwork that has nothing to do with speaking a language. It isn’t. Each record is a small act of honest checking, and together they let your teen see their own progress in a way memory never can. The teen who keeps them is the teen who can say, with evidence, exactly how far they’ve come.

When your teen can sit across from an admissions reader or an interviewer and say, calmly, “Here’s what I can do in the language, and here’s how you can see it,” this chapter has done its job.

Next, Chapter 10 maps the resources that keep the Hour supplied: free first, chosen for fit.

Chapter 10 — Resources



This last chapter is a map, not a shopping list. It won't tell you which app is best or which textbook to buy, because the honest answer is that it depends: on the language, your teen's level, your budget, your town and the hours you have. What it will do is show you the kinds of resources that serve a teen-run Language Hour, how to choose among them, and where to look first.

Two principles run through it. **Fit, not rank:** a resource is good if it fits your teen's level, your time, your budget and your plan, and if it puts your teen in touch with real language and real people. **Free first:** libraries, public media, community and people come before anything you pay for. Many families get through a full year spending very little.

How to choose: the fit check

Fit-not-rank check (15 minutes · a list · no screen · Set the Target) For every resource you're considering, your teen writes four things: the level it suits, what it costs, how much time it takes, and whether it connects to real people or real language. Leave out the word "best." A resource that scores well on all four for *your* teen is the right one.

A few questions help:

- **Is it mostly understood?** Input should be a little above your teen's level, not far above. Chapter 2 explains why.
- **Does it fit an Hour step?** Every resource should have a job: Take It In, Work With It, Use It for Real or Check and Log.
- **Will your teen actually use it?** The best resource on paper is worthless if it sits on the shelf.
- **Does it respect your teen's privacy and the platform's age rules?** Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 have the checks.

Free first: the resource map

Free-first resource map (20 minutes · paper · no screen · Set the Target) Your teen draws four boxes: library, public media, community, people. They fill each with what's available for their language before listing anything paid. Most teens are surprised how full the boxes get.

The library

Public libraries are the most underused language resource in the country. Look for:

- **Graded readers and children's books** in the target language. Picture books and early chapter books are excellent input for beginners, and no teen should be embarrassed to read them.
- **Novels, comics and magazines** in the language, for intermediate and advanced readers.
- **Audiobooks** and language courses, often through the library's digital lending service.
- **Conversation groups** and English-language tables where your teen can volunteer (Chapter 7).
- **Interlibrary loan** for anything the branch doesn't have.

Ask a librarian. Many will order materials in a language if they know someone will use them.

Public-domain and public media

- **Public-domain texts and audiobooks.** Project Gutenberg offers free texts in many languages, and LibriVox offers free volunteer-read audiobooks of public-domain works, including many in languages other than English.⁷⁵ Older literature can be hard going, but for advanced readers these are a treasure.
- **Public broadcasters' learner sites.** Several national broadcasters run sites for learners, with simplified news, audio and video. Examples include learner pages from German, Spanish,

Japanese and French public media.⁷⁶ Full-speed news and drama from the same broadcasters come next.

- **Podcasts and radio.** For almost any widely spoken language, there are podcasts made for learners and podcasts made for native speakers. Your teen needs some of both.

Community

- **Heritage language schools.** Weekend and after-school programs run by communities, often for children and teens of that heritage but sometimes open to others.⁷⁷
- **Cultural associations and faith communities.** Festivals, classes, events.
- **Colleges and universities.** Public lectures, film series, language clubs, conversation tables, and sometimes classes open to high-school students.
- **The Deaf community** for ASL learners: events, classes taught by Deaf instructors, and community organizations.⁷⁸

People

- **Heritage speakers** in your family or neighborhood (ask, don't test).
- **Shopkeepers and restaurant staff** where the language is spoken.
- **Volunteer roles** through organizations.⁷⁹
- **Other learners.** A study partner at a similar level can be a great motivator.

Resources by language family

Some languages have shelves of materials; others have very little in English. Here's what to expect, broadly, and where to look.

- **Spanish and French.** Abundant: graded readers at every level, huge amounts of public media, many tutors, and AP and CLEP exams. The challenge is choosing, not finding. Use the fit check ruthlessly.
- **German, Italian, Portuguese.** Plenty of learner materials and public media; fewer local communities in some areas. A tutor booked from a parent's account and public broadcasters' learner sites carry a lot of the load.
- **Mandarin, Japanese, Korean.** Strong learner media and growing graded-reader series; a new script means extra time for reading (Chapter 4). Heritage schools are common in many cities.
- **Arabic, Russian, and other critical languages.** Good university-produced materials exist, and scholarship programs such as NSLI-Y focus here (Chapter 7). Decide early which variety of Arabic your teen is learning; materials differ.
- **ASL.** Learn from Deaf instructors and in the Deaf community whenever possible. Video is essential, since ASL is a visual language; a book alone can't carry it.
- **Less commonly taught languages.** Materials can be thin. University programs, community organizations and the national council for less commonly taught languages are the best starting points, and a tutor may be essential.⁸⁰

Building a home language corner

A small, visible place for the language helps more than you'd expect. It doesn't need to be a room. A shelf and a wall will do.

- **The shelf:** two or three readers at the right level, one reference grammar, one dictionary, the log folder and the portfolio.
- **The wall:** the year plan, the house rules page from Chapter 7, the tool agreement from Chapter 8, this month's Can-Do targets, and the report paths card.
- **The box:** paper flashcards, sorted by when they're due.
- **The audio:** a speaker or headphones and a short playlist of what your teen is listening to this week.

Rotate the readers every few weeks so the shelf stays alive. Ask your teen to choose what goes up on the wall; they're running the Hour, and the corner should look like theirs.

Budgeting for a year

Families often ask what a year of languages costs. The honest answer ranges from almost nothing to a lot. A sample way to think about it:

- **Free tier:** library, public media, public-domain books, community events, volunteer roles, paper flashcards. Enough for a full year at many levels.
- **Modest tier:** add one reference grammar, a dictionary, a few readers, and occasional tutoring sessions. Most families land here.
- **Full tier:** add weekly tutoring, a structured course, an outside test and perhaps a summer program. Look for scholarships before paying full price for any program.

Whatever tier you choose, spend on people before things. A month of tutoring usually does more than a shelf of new books, and a community event often does more than either.

Paid options, when they're worth it

After the free boxes are full, paid resources can fill specific gaps.

- **Tutors.** A regular tutor gives your teen live speaking practice that's hard to find otherwise. Book from a parent's account under the platform's terms, with the house rules from Chapter 7.
- **Structured courses.** Online or local classes, especially for less commonly taught languages where self-study materials are thin.
- **Textbooks and grammar references.** One solid reference grammar and a good dictionary go a long way. Choose ones with clear explanations and real examples.
- **Tests.** AP, AAPPL and CLEP cost money but can earn credit or recognition (Chapter 9).
- **Programs.** Summer immersion, exchanges and camps. Some of the best are scholarship-funded; check those first (Chapter 7).

Resources by type and job

Here's a quick table matching types of resources to Hour steps. Brands change every year; types don't.

Type	Best Hour step	Notes
Graded readers	Take It In	Mostly understood; read a lot
Authentic novels, news	Take It In	For intermediate and up
Learner podcasts	Take It In	Real speed comes next
Native-speaker podcasts, TV	Take It In	Narrow and repeat (Chapter 2)
Paper flashcards	Work With It	From real input
Spaced-repetition app	Work With It	When the deck outgrows a box
Reference grammar	Work With It, Check and Log	Checking, not reading cover to cover
Dictionary	Work With It	One good one
Tutor	Use It for Real	Parent books; house rules
Community events	Use It for Real	Be a good guest
Chatbot	Work With It	Try first, then ask (Chapter 8)
Proficiency test	Check and Log	Outside measure (Chapter 9)
Log sheet, folder	Check and Log	Your portfolio

Standards and guides for the parent-mentor

If you want to understand the frameworks behind the book's targets, these are the primary documents. You don't need to read them all; skim the one that answers your question.

- **ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines** describe what speakers, listeners, readers and writers can do at each level.⁸¹
- **NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements** turn those levels into practical "I can" targets, the basis for Chapter 1's goals.⁸²
- **World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages** set out the five goal areas (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities).⁸³
- **ACTFL Performance Descriptors** describe performance in classroom-style tasks.⁸⁴
- **The Center for Applied Linguistics** and the **National Heritage Language Resource Center** offer research and resources on language education and heritage learners.⁸⁵
- **The National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages** is a starting point for languages with fewer published materials.⁸⁰
- **HSLDA** has practical guidance on high-school language credit for homeschool families.⁸⁶

If your teen is drawn to languages as a career

Some teens finish this book and want more: a language major, interpreting, translation, teaching, international work. A few starting points:

- **Interpreting and translation** are professions with training and certification. Healthcare interpreter certification bodies and the national judiciary interpreters' association describe the paths.⁸⁷ Most require adult training; your teen can start exploring now.
- **Teaching** languages, from heritage schools to universities.
- **Programs** such as NSLI-Y can open doors to critical-language study and careers (Chapter 7).
- **International education** organizations publish information on study abroad and international careers.⁸⁸

Encourage curiosity. A teen who's run their own Language Hour for a year or two has already shown the habits these careers need.

Younger siblings and the wider ladder

One sibling-title pointer (5 minutes · none · no screen · Set the Target) If a younger sibling is learning a language too, this book has two companions in the WisdomForge Languages ladder: *Languages for Little Thinkers* for ages 5–10 and *Languages for Young Minds* for ages 11–14. For a broader view of language teaching at home, *Teaching World Languages* covers the subject as a whole. And when your teen grows up (or if you'd like to pick up a language yourself), *Languages Refresh for Adults* continues the ladder.

A household where an older teen runs their own Hour and a younger sibling has theirs is a household where languages are simply part of life. The older one often becomes the younger one's best model, and sometimes their best audience.

A worked example: building a shelf on a small budget

Here's how one family set up a year's resources for Mandarin almost entirely free. Their son, Leo, was fifteen.

They started at the public library, which lent them three graded readers at different levels; the one-glance check picked the middle one. The library's online catalog also offered free access to a language course and a set of digital magazines. From a public broadcaster's learner site they found short news pieces with audio and transcripts, enough for a daily listening block. For speaking, they joined a weekend program at a local cultural center, where a volunteer ran conversation tables for teens. The only purchases were a paper dictionary, a pack of index cards for the card box, and a monthly tutor session booked through Leo's mother's account.

At the end of the year, Leo's shelf held eleven finished graded readers (borrowed and returned), a full card box, a stack of handwritten character practice, and a folder of recordings. The total spent was modest. What made it work was the fit: each resource matched a step of the Hour and a level Leo could actually use.

If it isn't clicking

“We have too many resources and use none of them.” Put most of them away. Keep one listening source, one reader at the right level, one way to speak with a person, and the card box. Add something back only when your teen asks for it.

“Our language has very few learner materials.” Lean on people more than products: heritage speakers, community organizations, and tutors. Use children's books written for native speakers as early readers, and record a fluent speaker reading them aloud so your teen has listening material to match.

“My teen keeps switching resources every week.” Novelty feels like progress. Agree on a trial period of a month for anything new, then decide with the log in hand. Steady use of a plain resource beats constant switching between shiny ones.

“We can't find anything at our teen's level.” Go down a level and widen the topic; easy and interesting beats hard and dutiful.

A closing word

You started this book with a teen and a language. If you've worked through it, you now have a teen who sets their own targets, takes in more than they need, works with what they've heard and read, uses it with real people, checks it honestly, and owns the plan. That last part matters most. Resources will change. Apps will come and go. Programs will open and close. But a teen who knows how to run their own learning can pick up the next resource, and the next language, for the rest of their life.

Why the struggle is worth it. Choosing resources by fit instead of by rank takes more thought than buying whatever a list calls best. Your teen has to know their level, their time and their goals well enough to judge. That's the same judgment that runs the whole Hour, and building it here means your teen will never depend on someone else's list to keep learning.

Keep the Hour going. Keep the log. Keep meeting people. And every so often, play that month-one recording again and listen to how far your teen has come.

When you need the daily shape again, go back to the Language Hour at the front of the book and start the next week from Set the Target.

A Note on Sources

Studies, standards, government pages and company terms named in the chapters are listed in Notes, in one series at the back, so the teaching pages can keep a plain, practical voice. When the same source comes up in several chapters, it has one note, and every mark that cites it carries that note's number.

Much of the research on language learning studies school classrooms, laboratories or college students rather than teens learning at home with a parent-mentor; the book borrows carefully and treats it as guidance. Professional guidance from ACTFL, HSLDA, the College Board and state education agencies is cited as guidance, not as measured outcomes. Program rules, test formats and company terms for tutoring platforms, chat apps and AI tools change often; the notes give the date each was read, and families should check the current version before relying on it.

The example lines in Spanish, French and Mandarin are everyday forms offered as models; for anything your teen will use often, ask a fluent speaker. The five-step Language Hour, the try-its, the age bands, the family safety rules and the records plan are this book's own teaching design, not research findings, and the families in the worked examples are illustrations, not real people. Nothing here is legal or medical advice. Access date for web sources: 22 October 2026, unless a note says otherwise.

Notes

1. HSLDA, “3 Ways to Determine My Teen’s High School Course Credit,” <https://hsllda.org/post/3-ways-to-determine-my-teens-high-school-course-credit> (accessed 22 October 2026). HSLDA suggests logging at least 150 hours for one credit in a core course; this is a recommendation, not a law, and states and colleges vary.
2. NCSSFL and ACTFL, *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements* (©2026), introduction and overview, <https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/Professional-Learning/Can-Do-Intro-Overview.pdf> (accessed 22 October 2026). The statements are a self-assessment framework for setting goals, not a curriculum and not a rating.
3. Henry L. Roediger III and Jeffrey D. Karpicke, “Test-Enhanced Learning: Taking Memory Tests Improves Long-Term Retention,” *Psychological Science* 17, no. 3 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01693.x>; John Dunlosky et al., “Improving Students’ Learning With Effective Learning Techniques,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 14, no. 1 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100612453266> (accessed 22 October 2026).
4. ACTFL, *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024* (4th ed.), overview, <https://www.actfl.org/proficiency-guidelines-overview> (accessed 22 October 2026). The level descriptions in this chapter are the book’s plain-language summaries.
5. NCSSFL and ACTFL, *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements* (©2026), introduction and overview, <https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/Professional-Learning/Can-Do-Intro-Overview.pdf> (accessed 22 October 2026). The example statements in this chapter are paraphrased illustrations, not quotations.
6. ACTFL, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, summary, <https://actfl.org/uploads/files/general/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf>, and landing page, <https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/world-readiness-standards-for-learning-languages> (accessed 22 October 2026).
7. U.S. Department of State, Foreign Service Institute, “Foreign Language Training,” <https://www.state.gov/national-foreign-affairs-training-center/foreign-language-training> (accessed 22 October 2026). Figures are FSI’s estimates for adult diplomats in intensive full-time training aiming at professional working proficiency.
8. HSLDA, “3 Ways to Determine My Teen’s High School Course Credit,” <https://hsllda.org/post/3-ways-to-determine-my-teens-high-school-course-credit> (accessed 22 October 2026). A recommendation, not law; state and college rules vary (see Chapter 9).

9. ACTFL, “Articulated Sequences in Language Learning,” <https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/guiding-principles-for-language-learning/articulated-sequences-in-language-learning> (accessed 22 October 2026).
10. I. S. P. Nation, “How Large a Vocabulary Is Needed for Reading and Listening?” *Canadian Modern Language Review* 63, no. 1 (2006), <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/resources/paul-nations-resources/paul-nations-publications/publications/documents/2006-How-large-a-vocab.pdf> (accessed 22 October 2026).
11. Stephen D. Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982), http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/books/principles_and_practice.pdf (accessed 22 October 2026). Presented here as one influential view, not settled science.
12. I. S. P. Nation, “How Large a Vocabulary Is Needed for Reading and Listening?” *Canadian Modern Language Review* 63, no. 1 (2006), <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/resources/paul-nations-resources/paul-nations-publications/publications/documents/2006-How-large-a-vocab.pdf> (accessed 22 October 2026). The body gives no percentage; Nation’s figures concern text coverage and are not a promise about how many words a learner needs.
13. Roediger and Karpicke, “Test-Enhanced Learning” (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01693.x>; Dunlosky et al., “Improving Students’ Learning With Effective Learning Techniques” (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100612453266> (accessed 22 October 2026).
14. RTVE Play, <https://www.rtve.es/play/>; DW Learn German, <https://learngerman.dw.com/>; TV5MONDE, Apprendre le français, <https://apprendre.tv5monde.com/> (all accessed 22 October 2026). Named as examples of types (public-broadcaster libraries and learner sites), not as rankings.
15. LibriVox, <https://librivox.org/>; Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
16. Robert M. DeKeyser, “The Robustness of Critical Period Effects in Second Language Acquisition,” *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 22, no. 4 (2000), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100004022> (accessed 22 October 2026). Older learners who did well relied on verbal analytical ability, which is why this book uses explicit pattern study with teens. The book makes no claim about a fixed “critical period” cutoff.
17. Henry L. Roediger III and Jeffrey D. Karpicke, “Test-Enhanced Learning: Taking Memory Tests Improves Long-Term Retention,” *Psychological Science* 17, no. 3 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01693.x> (accessed 22 October 2026).
18. John Dunlosky, Katherine A. Rawson, Elizabeth J. Marsh, Mitchell J. Nathan and Daniel T. Willingham, “Improving Students’ Learning with Effective Learning Techniques,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 14, no. 1 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100612453266> (accessed 22 October 2026). Practice testing and distributed practice were rated high utility.
19. Nicholas J. Cepeda, Harold Pashler, Edward Vul, John T. Wixted and Doug Rohrer, “Distributed Practice in Verbal Recall Tasks: A Review and Quantitative Synthesis,” *Psychological Bulletin* 132, no. 3 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.132.3.354> (accessed 22 October 2026). The five-slot box is a paper version of the Leitner method.

20. *Anki Manual*, <https://docs.ankiweb.net/> (accessed 22 October 2026), on spaced-repetition scheduling. Named as an example of the tool type, not a recommendation over others.

21. Roy Lyster and Leila Ranta, “Corrective Feedback and Learner Uptake: Negotiation of Form in Communicative Classrooms,” *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 19, no. 1 (1997), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263197001034> (accessed 22 October 2026). Recasts were the most frequent feedback type and led to the least uptake; elicitation, clarification requests, metalinguistic clues and repetition led to more student-generated repair. Classroom study of young learners; used here as the basis for a practical feedback habit.

22. I. S. P. Nation, “How Large a Vocabulary Is Needed for Reading and Listening?” *Canadian Modern Language Review* 63, no. 1 (2006), author PDF, <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/resources/paul-nations-resources/paul-nations-publications/publications/documents/2006-How-large-a-vocab.pdf> (accessed 22 October 2026). The figures concern text coverage, not a word count that guarantees fluency.

23. The try-its in this chapter come from the house teaching bank: WORD-01 to WORD-10 and PAT-01 to PAT-05. Bank codes appear here rather than in the body so the teaching pages stay readable.

24. I. S. P. Nation, “How Large a Vocabulary Is Needed for Reading and Listening?” *Canadian Modern Language Review* 63, no. 1 (2006), author PDF, <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/resources/paul-nations-resources/paul-nations-publications/publications/documents/2006-How-large-a-vocab.pdf> (accessed 22 October 2026). Unassisted comprehension of authentic text needs very high known-word coverage (around 98 percent). The “about two unknown words per line” tap test is this book’s rule of thumb derived from that, not a figure from the paper.

25. NHK, *NEWS WEB EASY*, <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/easy/> (accessed 22 October 2026). Named as an example of the easy-news type.

26. Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026). Public-domain status varies by country; check the terms for where you live.

27. In the examples, the Hangul block 한 combines ㅎ (h), ㅏ (a) and ㄴ (n); the Arabic letter ب (b) takes its initial form in بيت (bayt) and its medial form in كتاب (kitāb); Devanagari क (ka) becomes की (kī) and कु (ku) with vowel marks; 你好 (nǐ hǎo) is written in pinyin with tone marks. A learner’s script workbook or a fluent speaker is the best guide to full charts and handwriting.

28. HSLDA, “3 Ways to Determine My Teen’s High School Course Credit,” <https://hsllda.org/post/3-ways-to-determine-my-teens-high-school-course-credit> (accessed 22 October 2026). Logged hours support the hours-based credit method described in Chapter 9.

29. The try-its in this chapter come from the house teaching bank: READ-01 to READ-08 and SCRIPT-01 to SCRIPT-05. Bank codes appear here rather than in the body so the teaching pages stay readable.

30. The repair-phrase table gives common, polite everyday forms in Spanish, French and Mandarin. Spanish ¿Puede repetir? uses the polite *usted*; with friends, ¿Puedes repetir? is the informal form. For other languages, build the same table with a fluent speaker.

31. Preply, “Terms of Service” (PDF, updated 25 November 2025), https://termsofuse.preply.com/terms_of_use/en_TermsOfService.pdf; italki, “For parents: kids learning on italki,” <https://support.italki.com/hc/en-us/articles/6732554220825>; italki, “Terms of Service,” <https://www.italki.com/en/tos> (accessed 22 October 2026). Platforms are named as examples of the type, not recommendations; terms for minors change, so read the current version before booking.
32. Roy Lyster and Leila Ranta, “Corrective Feedback and Learner Uptake,” *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 19, no. 1 (1997), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263197001034> (accessed 22 October 2026). The same study is cited in Chapter 3.
33. The try-its in this chapter come from the house teaching bank: SPEAK-01 to SPEAK-10. SPEAK-03 uses the baseline prompt from START-01 in Chapter 1. Bank codes appear here rather than in the body so the teaching pages stay readable.
34. College Board, “AP Spanish Language and Culture,” AP Central, <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-spanish-language-and-culture>; College Board, “AP World Language and Culture Revisions (effective 2026–27),” <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-world-languages-revisions> (accessed 22 October 2026). The College Board revised six AP world language and culture courses and exams for the 2026–27 school year; current details are in Chapter 9.
35. Roy Lyster and Leila Ranta, “Corrective Feedback and Learner Uptake,” *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 19, no. 1 (1997), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263197001034> (accessed 22 October 2026). The study concerns oral classroom feedback; this book applies its prompt-over-recast principle to written feedback as a teaching habit, not as a finding about writing.
36. Register differs by region and setting. In Spanish, *usted* is the safe choice with adults you don’t know, though usage varies across countries; in French, *vous* is expected with strangers and in formal letters; in Mandarin, 您 (*nín*) is a respectful “you” used with elders and in polite service settings. A fluent speaker from the community your teen writes to is the best guide.
37. The try-its in this chapter come from the house teaching bank: WRITE-01 to WRITE-09. Bank codes appear here rather than in the body so the teaching pages stay readable.
38. National Heritage Language Resource Center (UCLA). Resources and research on heritage language learners, their families and communities. <https://nhlrc.ucla.edu/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
39. Coalition of Community-Based Heritage Language Schools. Directory and resources for community-based heritage language schools. <https://www.heritagelanguageschools.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
40. National Association of the Deaf, “Learning American Sign Language,” and “Position Statement on American Sign Language.” Recommends learning through classes and practice with Deaf and hard-of-hearing ASL users, ideally with Deaf instructors. <https://nad.org/knowledge-hub/american-sign-language/learning-american-sign-language/> and <https://nad.org/knowledge-hub/position-statements/position-statement-on-american-sign-language/> (accessed 22 October 2026).

41. National Association of the Deaf, “American Sign Language.” Background on ASL as a language; credit policies vary by state and college and are covered in Chapter 9. <https://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
42. italki, Terms of Service, and “For parents: your guide to kids learning on italki.” Account holders must be 18 or older; a parent may use their own account for a child with consent and supervision. <https://www.italki.com/en/tos> (accessed 22 October 2026).
43. Preply, Terms of Service (PDF, updated 25 November 2025). Users 18 and over; ages 13–17 only with parent or guardian supervision; under 13 not permitted. https://termsofuse.preply.com/terms_of_use/en_TermsOfService.pdf (accessed 22 October 2026).
44. Outschool, Terms of Service, is one example of a platform with its own terms; families should read the current age section of any platform directly. <https://outschool.com/terms> (accessed 22 October 2026). No age rule is stated in the body.
45. Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET). Standards for international youth exchange and a list of organizations that meet them. <https://www.csiet.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
46. National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y), “Eligibility Requirements,” “Summer Abroad” and “Academic Year Abroad.” U.S. citizens aged 15–18 at program start, in grades 9–12 or the homeschool equivalent, with a GPA of 2.5 or higher; prior language study not required. <https://www.nsliforyouth.org/how-to-apply/eligibility-requirements/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
47. NSLI-Y, “Dates and Deadlines.” For the 2027–28 cycle the application deadline was 12 November 2026, 4 p.m. Eastern, with recommendations due 19 November 2026. Dates change each cycle. <https://www.nsliforyouth.org/how-to-apply/dates-and-deadlines/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
48. Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange, <https://www.usagermanyscholarship.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026); Kennedy-Lugar YES Abroad, <https://www.yesabroad.org/>; Rotary International, “Youth Exchanges,” <https://www.rotary.org/en/our-programs/youth-exchanges>; STARTALK, <https://startalk.umd.edu/public/>. Program details change from year to year; check each official site for the current cycle.
49. VolunteerMatch. A service connecting volunteers with organizations. <https://www.volunteermatch.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
50. 45 C.F.R. § 92.201, “Meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency,” § 92.201(e)(1) and (e)(3). Covered entities must not require an individual to provide their own interpreter and must not rely on a minor child to interpret, except in an emergency involving an imminent threat to safety or welfare when no qualified interpreter is immediately available. <https://www.ecfr.gov/api/renderer/v1/content/enhanced/current/title-45?part=92§ion=92.201> (accessed 22 October 2026).
51. 45 C.F.R. § 92.201(c)(3). Machine translation of critical text must be reviewed by a qualified human translator. Same source as note 13.
52. Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI), <https://cchicertification.org/>; National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters, <https://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters>

.org/ (accessed 22 October 2026).

53. Federal Bureau of Investigation, “The Financially Motivated Sextortion Threat,” <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/the-financially-motivated-sextortion-threat>; NCMEC NetSmartz, “Sextortion,” <https://www.ncmec.org/netsmartz/topics/sextortion> (both accessed 22 October 2026). The box summarizes where the two point the same way; it does not quote either.

54. NCMEC, CyberTipline, <https://report.cybertip.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026). FBI tips: tips.fbi.gov, 1-800-CALL-FBI.

55. NCMEC, Take It Down, <https://takeitdown.ncmec.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).

56. National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL), <https://www.ncolctl.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).

57. Public broadcasters’ learner sites, for example DW Learn German, <https://learngerman.dw.com/>; RTVE Play, <https://www.rtve.es/play/>; NHK News Web Easy, <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/easy/>; TV5MONDE Apprendre le français, <https://apprendre.tv5monde.com/> (accessed 22 October 2026). Named as examples of a type, not a ranking.

58. Anki Manual. Describes spaced-repetition scheduling and card review. <https://docs.ankiweb.net/> (accessed 22 October 2026).

59. OpenAI, Terms of Use, as one example of a chatbot service that sets a minimum age and asks for parental permission for users under 18. <https://openai.com/policies/terms-of-use/>

60. Duolingo, Terms, as an example of the data and account terms families should read before using an app. <https://www.duolingo.com/terms> (accessed 22 October 2026).

61. HSLDA, “3 Ways to Determine My Teen’s High School Course Credit.” About 150 hours of work for a 1.0-credit core course, including foreign language; additional hours don’t add credit; a one-semester college course of 3–5 credits counts as 1.0 high-school credit. <https://hsllda.org/post/3-ways-to-determine-my-teens-high-school-course-credit> (accessed 22 October 2026).

62. Common App. Homeschool applicants can describe courses and submit supporting materials. <https://www.commonapp.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).

63. College Board, “I’m homeschooled — how can I take an AP Exam?” and “Can I take the AP Exam if I haven’t taken an AP course?” <https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/help-center/can-i-take-ap-exam-if-i-havent-taken-ap-course> (accessed 22 October 2026).

64. College Board, AP Central, “Ordering AP Exams for students who don’t attend your school.” The page gave a mid-November ordering deadline (13 November) for the 2026–27 year; late additions at the school’s discretion. <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/exam-administration-ordering-scores/ordering-fees/ordering-exam-materials/special-ordering-circumstances/home-schooled-student> (accessed 22 October 2026).

65. College Board, “AP World Language and Culture Revisions (effective 2026–27)”; course pages for AP Spanish Language and Culture, AP Spanish Literature and Culture, and AP Chinese Language and Culture (accessed 22 October 2026).

66. College Board, “AP Courses and Exams,” AP Central (accessed 22 October 2026).

67. Language Testing International, “AAPPL Test FAQs,” <https://www.languagetesting.com/aappl-faqs>; ACTFL, “AAPPL,” <https://www.actfl.org/assessments/k-12-assessments/aappl> (accessed 22 October 2026).
68. ACTFL, Oral Proficiency Interview (via Language Testing International); Avant Assessment, STAMP 4S (accessed 22 October 2026).
69. College Board, “What Your CLEP Score Means” (ACE credit recommendations), <https://clep.collegeboard.org/clep/pdf/what-your-score-means.pdf>; CLEP French Language, German Language, Spanish with Writing exam pages (accessed 22 October 2026).
70. The Seal of Biliteracy, “State Laws,” and *The Seal of Biliteracy 2024 National Report for the 2022–2023 School Year*, <https://sealofbiliteracy.org/doc/2024-National-Seal-of-Biliteracy-Report-Final.pdf> (accessed 22 October 2026).
71. Illinois State Board of Education, *State Seal of Biliteracy FAQ* (November 2025). Awarded by school districts or nonpublic schools; students cannot participate individually apart from their schools; Illinois public universities accept the Seal as equivalent to two years of high-school foreign language for admission. <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/SY26-SOBL-FAQ.pdf> (accessed 22 October 2026).
72. 19 Tex. Admin. Code § 74.14, “Performance Acknowledgments.” <https://www.law.cornell.edu/regulations/texas/19-Tex-Admin-Code-SS-74-14> (accessed 22 October 2026).
73. University of California, “Subject requirement (A-G),” area E, Language other than English. <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/admission-requirements/first-year-requirements/subject-requirement-a-g.html> (accessed 22 October 2026).
74. NCAA, “Division I Initial Eligibility Requirements.” <https://www.ncaa.org/eligibility-center/initial-eligibility-requirements/division-i/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
75. Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/>; LibriVox, <https://librivox.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
76. DW Learn German, <https://learngerman.dw.com/>; RTVE Play, <https://www.rtve.es/play/>; NHK News Web Easy, <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/easy/>; TV5MONDE Apprendre le français, <https://apprendre.tv5monde.com/> (accessed 22 October 2026). Examples of a type, not a ranking.
77. Coalition of Community-Based Heritage Language Schools, <https://www.heritagelanguageschools.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
78. National Association of the Deaf, “Learning American Sign Language” (accessed 22 October 2026).
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80. National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages, <https://www.ncolctl.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
81. ACTFL, *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024*, 4th ed. (accessed 22 October 2026).

82. NCSSFL-ACTFL, *Can-Do Statements* ©2026, introduction and overview (accessed 22 October 2026).
83. ACTFL, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, <https://www.actfl.org/> (accessed 22 October 2026).
84. ACTFL, *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners*, 2012 ed. (accessed 22 October 2026).
85. Center for Applied Linguistics, <https://www.cal.org/>; National Heritage Language Resource Center (UCLA) (accessed 22 October 2026).
86. HSLDA, “Foreign language in high school,” and “3 Ways to Determine My Teen’s High School Course Credit” (accessed 22 October 2026).
87. Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters; National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters; National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) (accessed 22 October 2026).
88. NAFSA: Association of International Educators (accessed 22 October 2026).