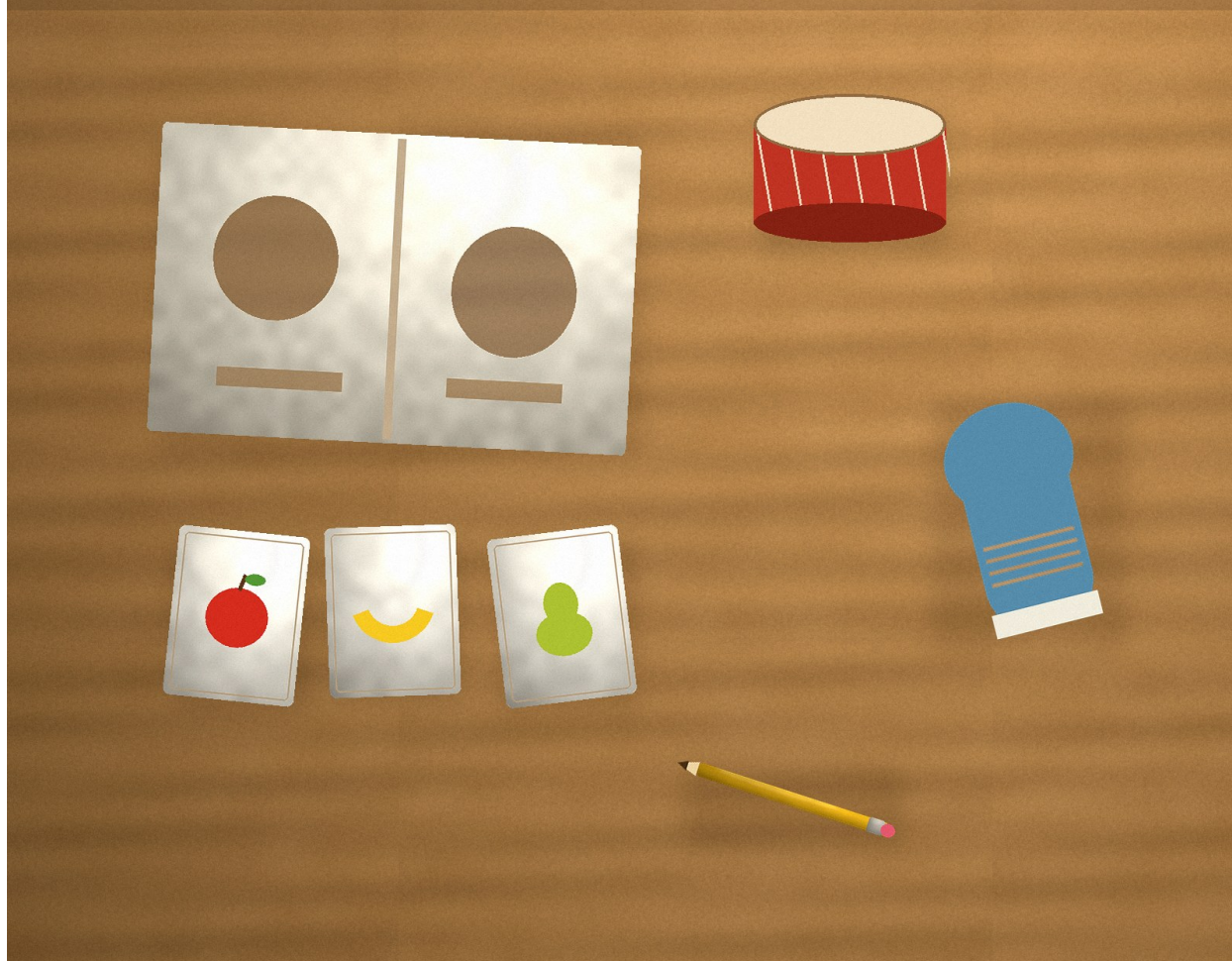


LANGUAGES FOR LITTLE THINKERS

Michael Gannotti



Languages for Little Thinkers

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A warm, practical guide for parents teaching any world language, including American Sign Language, to children ages 5 to 10: the daily Language Hour, listening and songs, action words, games and stories, first conversations, first reading and writing, family languages, tools and AI with the grown-up at the keyboard, and simple records. Book 1 of the SMF WisdomForge Languages series. Illustrated edition, 15 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

Picture a kitchen table on an ordinary Tuesday. This is an illustration, not a real family. A mother holds up one hand and says a single word in Spanish: *salta*.¹ Her six-year-old looks at her, looks at the hand, and waits. She says it again and jumps, a small, slightly silly jump that rattles the spoons. The boy grins and jumps too. *Salta*. Jump. Now she says it without jumping, and he jumps anyway, and then he laughs because he understood a word he didn't know a minute ago and his body proved it before his mouth had to.

Thirty seconds later they are both jumping, sitting, and touching their noses on command. The mother is not a Spanish speaker. She learned those four words the night before, checked them with a recording by a real speaker, and practiced them twice while the kettle boiled. She got one of them a little wrong at first, and her son, who had heard the word from a neighbor, fixed it for her. That was the best moment of the morning.

That small scene holds most of what this book will ask of you. Say something in the new language. Make the meaning obvious. Let your child show you with their body that they understood. Laugh. Do it again tomorrow.

Why this book exists

Families want their children to meet another language for all kinds of good reasons. A grandmother who prays in Tagalog. A neighbor who calls across the fence in Arabic. A church, mosque, temple, or synagogue where the songs are in another language. A child who saw a Korean picture book at the library and wanted to know what the letters said. A trip next year. A cousin who signs. Or just the plain joy of discovering that the world is bigger and louder and more musical than the language you grew up with.

Most parents who want this feel unsure where to begin. Many are learning the language too, or haven't started yet. Some grew up hearing a family language and lost most of it, and feel a little embarrassed to try again. Some speak it fluently and wonder why their children answer them in English. All of that is normal, and none of it stands in your way.

This book is built for you, whichever of those homes you have. It gives you a short daily habit, the **Language Hour**, and a set of games, songs, routines, and conversations that work in any language. It tells you honestly what to expect, so you can see progress when it comes. And it shows you how to bring real people into your child's language life, because people are where languages live.

What a good Hour looks like

A good Language Hour is short and lively, and on most days it lasts twenty to forty minutes, often less for the youngest children. It opens with the same hello song every day, so your child's ears know, "We're in the language now." Then comes listening with the body: your child hears commands and does them, points to pictures, acts out a song. Then a game, a story, or a bit of pretend that uses the week's words again and again. Then a small, pressure-free moment when your child tries something themselves: chooses between two things, gives you a command, names a picture. Then a goodbye ritual and one **carry phrase**, a few words the whole family uses during the rest of the day, at lunch or in the car. You write one line in a log, and you're done.

That's it. No worksheets for the five-year-old. No hour of grammar. Nothing your child has to perform for an audience. The Hour is described step by step in **The Language Hour**, just before Chapter 1.

You are in good company

You're one of a large and growing number of families who teach at home. About 3.4% of school-age children in the United States were homeschooled in the 2022–23 school year,² and many of those families add a language somewhere along the way. Some do it because it's in the family. Some do it because it's a door they never got to open themselves. All of them start the same way you're starting: one word, one song, one day at a time.

What this book won't do

It won't hand you a 180-day stack of worksheets. Young children learn languages by hearing, doing, and playing, and a worksheet does very little of any of those.

It won't teach you one particular language. It works with Spanish, French, Mandarin, Arabic, Korean, Hindi, Tagalog, Portuguese, Japanese, German, a heritage language from your own family, or American Sign Language. The examples move from language to language so you can see how each idea fits yours.

It won't sell you an app, and it won't tell you any app, chatbot, or "kids mode" is safe. The grown-up runs the tools in this book, and the tools are a small part of it.

It won't promise you fluency by a certain age, a perfect accent, or a child who is "smarter" because of a second language. Those promises are everywhere, and they make families feel behind before they've begun. What the research supports is gentler and more useful, and Chapter 1 explains it plainly.

What it will do

It will give you a daily Hour you can run tomorrow morning. It will give you 98 named activities, most of which need nothing but you, your child, and a few household objects. It will tell you what

a good first year looks like, so you can recognize success when you see it. It will show you how to find and include real speakers: grandparents, neighbors, librarians, community classes, Deaf adults if you're learning ASL, and carefully supervised tutors. It will help you keep simple records that a stranger could read. And in every chapter it will speak to your child too, in short sections you can read aloud.

The one sentence to keep

Everything in this book comes back to one line:

Understand first; then try it; play before print; a little every day.

Understand first means your child hears (or sees, in a signed language) much more than they're asked to say, and the meaning is always made obvious with objects, pictures, gestures, and actions. *Then try it* means speaking or signing is invited, warmly and without pressure, once the words are familiar. *Play before print* means songs, games, and pretend come before reading and writing, especially for the youngest children. *A little every day* means twenty minutes most days beats two hours on Saturday, because language grows with steady, repeated contact.

If you remember only that sentence, you'll make good choices even on days you don't open this book.

How it fits the bigger picture

This is the first of four books in the WisdomForge Languages series. When your child is ready for longer conversations, real reading, and more independence, *Languages for Young Minds* (ages 11–14) picks up where this one leaves off, with the same daily-habit spirit. If your family has met the Hour before, in *Art for Little Thinkers* or *Computing for Little Thinkers*, you'll recognize the shape.

Before you turn the page

You don't need to be good at languages to do this well. You need to show up, be playful, make meaning obvious, wait for your child, and bring in real people when you can. Your accent is fine. Your mistakes are fine; in fact, a child who corrects their parent is a child who is learning. Your child's silence is often thinking, and their mixing of two languages in one sentence is a sign the new one is growing.

So find a hello song. Learn four action words tonight. Tomorrow, say one of them and jump.

How to Use This Book This Week

You can start this week. You don't need to read the whole book first, buy anything, or speak the language yet. Here is your first week, then a short tour of the book.

Your first seven days

Day 1: read and choose. Read the Welcome and **The Language Hour**. If your family hasn't settled on a language, read the "Choosing your language" part of Chapter 1 and decide. Then find one live model: a grandparent, a neighbor, a librarian who runs a bilingual storytime, a community class, a Deaf-led ASL class, or a friend who speaks the language. If there's nobody yet, decide that you'll be **learning alongside** your child for now and look for a person over the coming weeks. Chapter 7 helps.

Day 2: gather a few things. You need very little:

- a hello song or rhyme in your language (from a speaker, a library CD or book, or a recording you've checked);
- six to twelve picture cards (drawn on index cards or cut from a magazine);
- a pad of sticky notes;
- a puppet or stuffed animal who "only speaks the new language";
- one picture book from the library, bilingual if you can find one.

Learn your hello song and four action words tonight. Say them aloud twice. That is your warm-up.

Days 3 to 7: run the Hour. Each day, about twenty minutes:

Day	The Hour	Carry phrase
3	HELLO-01 Hello Song · TPR-04 Freeze and Move · GAME-02 Memory Match (six cards) · TALK-01 Choice Questions · HELLO-04 Goodbye and Carry Phrase	hello / goodbye

Day	The Hour	Carry phrase
4	HELLO-01 · TPR-01 Simon Says in the Language · SONG-01 Action Song · TALK-01 · HELLO-04	please / thank you
5	HELLO-01 · LABEL-01 Label the House · LABEL-02 Find It Hunt · TALK-02 · HELLO-04	more, please
6	HELLO-01 · SONG-01 again · STORY-01 Picture Walk · TALK-07 · HELLO-04	again, please
7	HELLO-01 · TPR-05 Child Gives the Commands · PLAY-01 Café Pretend · AS-01 Point and Show · HELLO-04	all done

On the weekend, visit the library together (OUT-01 Library Language Shelf) and try one meal in the language (HELLO-05 Breakfast in the Language). If a day goes sideways, do a five-minute Hour: hello song, one action game, goodbye. It counts. The same names come back on purpose: the same song every day for a month is not boring to a six-year-old; it is the point.

How each chapter works

Chapters 1 through 8 are teaching chapters, each with the same eight headings in the same order:

- **Why this matters:** the reason, in a page.
- **For the parent: understand it yourself:** the idea explained for you, with one quoted line from the standards language teachers use, the wrong answers you should learn to hear, and a five-minute warm-up.
- **How to teach it this week:** exact words to say, how to help less as your child grows more sure, and a **talk box** of questions to ask.
- **Practice that actually builds learning:** the try-its.
- **For the student:** a short section for your child.
- **If it isn't clicking:** three common snags and the next move for each.
- **Tools, including AI:** a short note that points back to the Hour's AI box.
- **What “done enough” looks like:** a checklist and one short check.

Chapters 9 and 10 are reference chapters: records and resources.

The try-its

Every activity in this book has a code and a name, like **HELLO-01 Hello Song** or **EAR-03 Mouth Mirror**. The code names its family: HELLO for rituals, EAR for listening, TPR for action commands, TALK, FAM for family, OUT for outings, TECH for parent-run tools, AS for short checks, and a few more. There are 98 in all, and 89 of them need no device at all.³

Each try-it sits in a box headed **In-home** or **Out-of-home**, followed by the code and name. Inside, you'll find the time, the materials, a safety and privacy line, what makes it fun, the skill it builds, and **the crumb**: the small trace you can keep for your records, like a song title on the log or a dated tally. Then comes **How it goes**, followed by notes for each age band. When a card needs adjusting for a signed language, there's a line for that too.

The talk box

Each teaching chapter has a talk box: one opening question, a few follow-ups, and a reminder to **count to five in your head** before you help. Ask them after a game, in English or your family's main language.

Bands, and “ready 8”

The book speaks of two bands: **5–7** and **8–10**. Younger children get more movement, songs, pictures, and shorter blocks; older children get longer games, question words, and their first reading and writing in the new language.

Place your child by skill, not birthday. When a younger child is ready for an older move, you'll see a **Ready 8** line in the try-it box. Use it. When an older child is new to the language, start them with the 5–7 version of the game and let them move up quickly. They often do.

Reading the student sections

Each teaching chapter has a short section called **For the student**. At 5–7, read it aloud, stopping to do the tries together. At 8–10, hand it over: your child can read it alone or to a younger sibling.

What to keep this week

Two things:

1. **The Hour log**. One line a day: the date, how many minutes, the language, which step went best, the carry phrase, and who modeled the language (you, a speaker, or a recording). A notebook on the counter is perfect.
2. **One dated short check**. At the end of the week, try **AS-01 Point and Show**: your child points to pictures as you say ten known words. Write the date and the tally. That's the first page of your records.

Chapter 9 explains how these grow into a simple portfolio. Keep everything in **two places**: on paper or in a family drive, plus one backup.

If you have two children

Run one Hour with two jobs. The older child gives the commands in TPR games, holds the picture cards, and keeps the log. The younger child acts, points, and sings. Both say goodbye and both get the carry phrase. Both often learn more from each other than from you.

Special situations, briefly

- **You don't speak the language.** You're learning alongside. Learn tomorrow's words tonight, check them with a real speaker's recording, and say "Let's find out together" when you're stuck. Chapter 7 has more.
- **You speak a heritage language at home.** The Hour is a bonus. Daily life in your home language is the main course. Chapter 7 is written with you in mind.
- **You're learning ASL.** Listen and Do becomes Watch and Do. Look for Deaf-led classes and events. Photos of signing show hands only.
- **Your child has a speech, language, or hearing concern.** A second language doesn't cause it. Keep going, and ask your pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist, many of whom can work in more than one language.
- **Travel, a move, or a sick week.** Keep the hello and goodbye. One carry phrase a day is enough to hold the thread.

One last thing

You'll be tempted, some days, to skip the game and "just teach the words." Resist it. The game is how the words get taught. Run the Hour, write one line, and let the language come back tomorrow.

If You Only Remember Five Things

Some weeks you'll read every page. Some weeks you'll barely open the book. On the busy weeks, these five things will carry you.

1. Understand first; then try it; play before print; a little every day.

This is the whole method in one line. Your child takes in far more than they produce, for a long time, and that is how it should be. Make meaning obvious with objects, pictures, gestures, and actions, so understanding comes easily. Invite your child to try, but never demand it. Keep songs, games, and pretend ahead of reading and writing, especially at 5–7. And come back to the language most days, even for five minutes, because a little every day adds up in a way a big session once a week doesn't.

2. People are the main course; recordings are a second listen.

Children learn language from people who talk with them, respond to them, laugh at the same joke, and wait for an answer. Find at least one live person for your child's language life: a grandparent, a neighbor, a class, a Deaf adult, a storytime. A recording is a fine second listen after your child has met the words with a person. It isn't the teacher.

3. Count to five in your head after a question.

When you ask your child something, wait. Count to five silently before you help. Silence is often thinking, especially in a new language, where every answer takes a little longer to put together. If the silence goes on, help in this order: **ask** → **wait** → **hint** → **model** → **hand it back**. A gesture or a first sound is a hint. Saying the answer yourself and inviting an echo is a model. Giving your child a fresh chance on the next card is handing it back.

4. Mixing languages is normal. Recast warmly; keep playing.

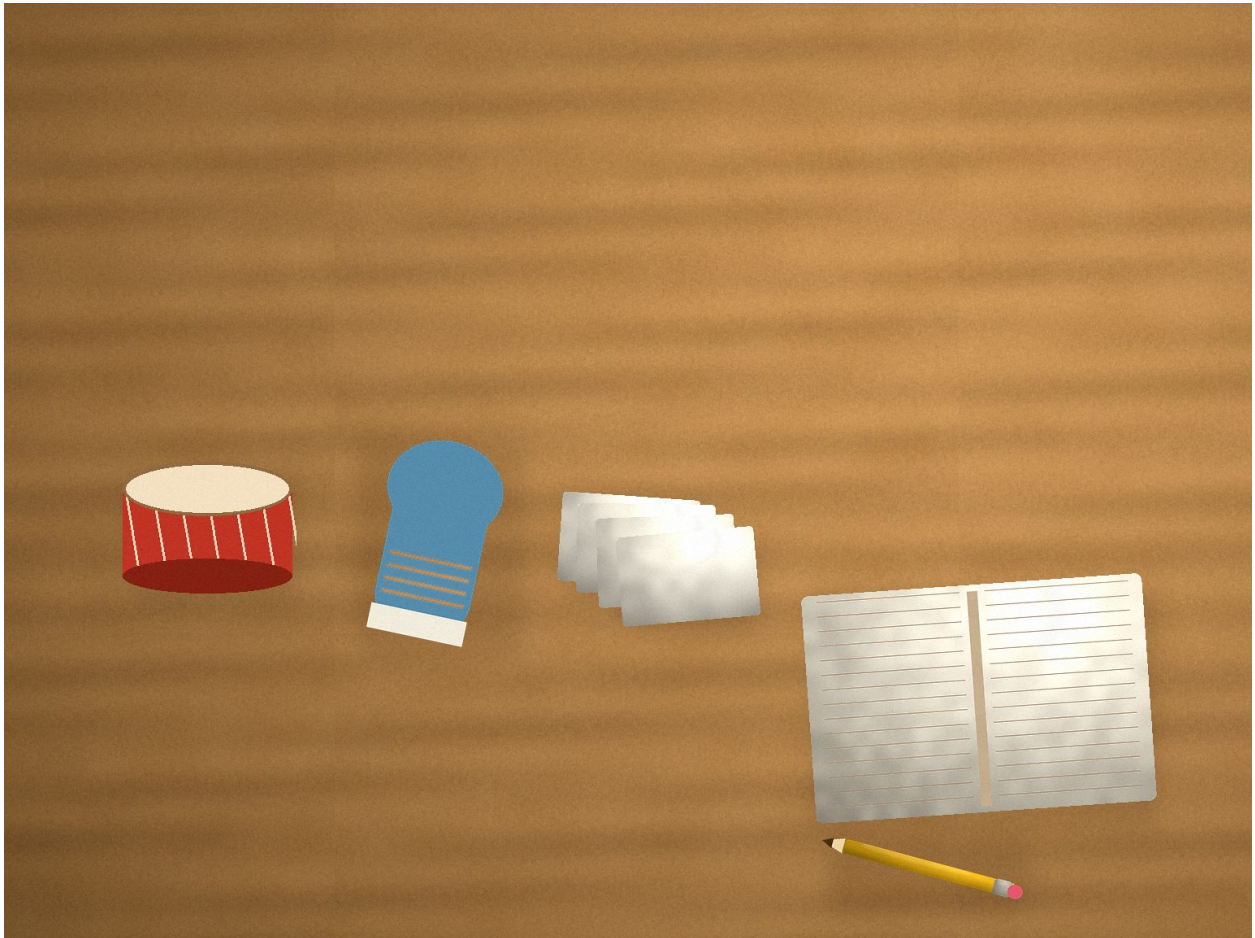
When your child drops an English word into a sentence in the new language, it's a sign of a gap, not confusion. Say the whole idea back in the new language, warmly, the way it should go, and carry on with the game. That's a **recast**: repeating your child's idea correctly without saying "wrong." Never stop a game to correct. A child who feels safe making mistakes keeps talking, and a child who keeps talking keeps learning.

5. The grown-up holds the accounts and drives the tools.

At 5–10, children don't use chatbots, AI voice chat, or AI toys. You hold every account and password. You're in the room for every live call. You check anything a tool produces before your child hears it, and you label it **made by a tool**, never your child's work. Your child's voice, face, and name stay off AI tools. If anything on a screen or call feels wrong: **Stop, tell, close.**

That's it. If you hold onto these five, every page in the book will make sense, and on the days you don't open it you'll still know what to do.

The Language Hour



The **Language Hour** is the daily habit at the heart of this book. “Hour” is the name of the habit, not the length on the clock. On most days it runs **20 to 40 minutes**. At 5–7, aim nearer 20 minutes, and feel free to split it into two blocks of about 10 minutes each, one in the morning and one after lunch. At 8–10, plan for 25 to 40 minutes. On a hard day, a five-minute Hour (a hello song, one game, a goodbye) still counts. The habit matters more than the length.

Every Hour follows the same five steps, in the same order, and it rests on one line:

Understand first; then try it; play before print; a little every day.

The five steps

Step	Minutes (5–7 / 8–10)	What happens	Cards to start with
Hello	2–3 / 3	The same greeting song or rhyme every day, names, and one feeling or weather word. The ritual says, “We’re in the language now.”	HELLO-01 Hello Song; HELLO-02 Name and Feeling Circle; HELLO-03 Weather Window
Listen and Do (Watch and Do for signed languages)	5–8 / 8–10	Your child takes in the language and shows understanding with the body: following commands, pointing, acting out a song. No speaking required.	TPR, EAR, and SONG cards
Play It Out	5–10 / 10–15	A game, story, or bit of pretend that uses this week’s words again and again.	GAME, STORY, PLAY, and LABEL cards
Your Turn	3–5 / 5–8	Your child tries: chooses between two things, gives a command, names a picture, asks a question. You ask, count to five in your head, then help.	TALK and AS cards
Goodbye and Carry	2 / 2–3	A goodbye ritual and one carry phrase the family uses for the rest of the day. Write one line in the log.	HELLO-04 Goodbye and Carry Phrase

Hello

Open the same way every day, for at least a month. A hello song or rhyme, sung or chanted, with waving and clapping. Then names: “Hello, [child’s name]!” Then one small check-in, a feeling or the weather: “How are you? Happy? Tired? Show me.” Make the feeling obvious with your face and hands, and let your child choose by pointing, making the face, or saying the word.

The Hello is short, but it does a lot of work. It tells your child’s ears to switch over. It gives a nervous child something they already know. And because it never changes, it’s the first thing in

the new language your child will be able to say along with you, often within a week or two.

If you can't find a hello song, chant a simple greeting in the new language to a tune your child already knows. In Spanish that might be *hola* ("hello"); in Mandarin, 你好 *nǐ hǎo* ("hello"); in Korean, 안녕하세요 *annyeonghaseyo* ("hello," polite).⁴ For ASL, use a signed greeting rhyme with a steady rhythm, learned from a Deaf signer or a checked course.

Listen and Do

This is where most of the learning happens, and it asks nothing of your child's mouth. You say something in the new language, you make it obvious, and your child does it. "[Jump]!" "[Sit down]!" "[Touch your nose]!" At first you do each action along with the word, twice. Then you say the word and let your child do it alone. That's TPR, Total Physical Response: listening to a command and doing it with your body.⁵

Listen and Do works because it proves understanding without pressure. A child who jumps when you say the word for "jump" has understood it. You can see it. They can feel it. Nobody had to be put on the spot.

Add one new command a day, and keep the old ones in play. Point to pictures ("Where's the [cat]?"). Act out a song. In a signed language, this step is **Watch and Do**: your child watches the sign and does the action.

Play It Out

Now the words get used, again and again, inside something fun. A memory game where every card turned over gets named. A picture walk through a library book. A café with a drawn menu and a stuffed-animal customer. A hunt for sticky-note labels around the house. The trick is repetition your child doesn't notice, because they're busy trying to win.

Give each game one "must say" phrase, the short phrase a player has to use to take a turn: "Do you have...?", "My turn," "Please." Put it on a picture card where everyone can see it. At 5–7, you'll say it most of the time, and your child will join in when ready. At 8–10, they'll say it themselves within a few rounds.

Your Turn

Here your child tries the language out loud (or in sign), with warm support. Start with choice questions, which are the easiest kind to answer: hold up two objects and ask, "[Apple] or [banana]?" Your child can point (understanding) or say the word (speaking). Both count.

Then wait. **Count to five in your head.** It will feel long. It's the right length. Silence after a question is often thinking, and a new language takes more time to think in. If your child still needs help after five, use the rescue order below. Then move on, warmly, whether the answer came or not.

As your child grows, Your Turn grows too: giving you commands, asking you a question, a two-line exchange you practice all week. The pattern stays the same. You ask, you wait, you help only as much as needed, and you hand the next turn back.

Goodbye and Carry

Close with a goodbye song or the same goodbye words every day. Then name today's **carry phrase**: a few words the whole family will use during the rest of the day. "More, please" at lunch. "Thank you" when someone passes the salt. "Let's go" at the door. "All done" after bath. Choose one your family can use at least three times before bed.⁶ Your child will catch you forgetting it, and that's half the fun.

Finish with the exit line, said in English or your family's language, at any age:

"Today I understood... I said (or signed)... Next time I want to..."

Then write one line in the log, and you're done.

Why five steps, in this order

The order follows how children take in a language. Understanding grows first and fastest, so the Hour starts with listening and doing. Showing understanding with the body is a low-pressure way to prove it, so Listen and Do comes before anyone is asked to speak. Words stick through repetition, and children will happily repeat inside a game when they'd balk at a drill, so Play It Out comes next. The child's own try comes after all that support, with time to think, which is why Your Turn is near the end and comes with a wait. And because the amount of language a child meets matters for how it grows,⁷ the carry phrase takes the language out of the Hour and into the rest of the day without adding a single minute of lesson time.

Which language when

During the Hour, use the new language for the songs, games, routines, and play. Use your family's main language for safety, for big feelings, and for a one-sentence explanation when one is truly needed. Then switch back.

The way to keep the new language in charge is to make meaning obvious without English: hold up the object, point to the picture, do the action, make the face. If your child looks lost, show more rather than translate more.

If you're learning alongside your child and you don't know a word, say so cheerfully. "Let's find out together." Look it up, check a recording by a real speaker, and carry on, or swap in a word you do know. Children don't need a perfect teacher. They need a willing one.

The rescue order

When your child is stuck, help in this order:

ask → **wait** → **hint** → **model** → **hand it back**.

- **Ask** the question once, clearly, with the objects or pictures in view.
- **Wait.** Count to five in your head.
- **Hint.** At 5–7, the best hint is usually a gesture (point to the red block) or the first sound of the word. At 8–10, it can be “It starts like...” or a choice between two words.
- **Model.** Say the answer yourself, warmly, and invite an echo: “[Red]! Can you say it with me?”
- **Hand it back.** Give your child a fresh chance on the next card, the next turn, or tomorrow. Don’t drill the same item until it comes out right.

The rescue order also tells you what *not* to do: jump straight to the answer, repeat the question louder, or keep asking until your child gives up. Each step gives just a little more help than the one before.

Mistakes, mixing, and the warm recast

Your child will make mistakes, mix English into sentences, and use one form of a word for everything. All of that is normal and healthy. When it happens in the flow of a game, use a **recast**: repeat your child’s idea back correctly, warmly, without saying “wrong.” If your child says, “I want the *rojo* one,” you can smile and say, “¿*El rojo*? The red one! Here you go,” and keep playing.⁸

For the week’s handful of target words, you can add a gentle prompt now and then: “How do we say it?” and a pause. But never stop a game to correct. A child who feels safe keeps trying, and trying is how the language grows.⁹

The Hour log

One line a day, on paper or in a family drive:

date · minutes · language · the step that went best · the carry phrase · who modeled (parent / speaker / recording)

That’s all. Over a year, this little log becomes the strongest record you have. It shows the habit, the hours, the songs, and the people. Chapter 9 explains how to turn it into a portfolio.

Bands

	5–7	8–10
Hour length	about 20 minutes, often 2 × 10	25–40 minutes

	5–7	8–10
Listen and Do	commands, songs, pointing	longer command chains, acting out stories
Your Turn	choice and yes/no questions, single words, chunks	question words, short exchanges, the child leads
Print	labels with pictures; reading only if your child asks or already reads English confidently	reading known words, copying labels, postcards, little books
Culture	songs, games, food, festivals	maps, folk tales, a simple project
Tools	none for the child; a parent-run second listen	parent-run checking games
Records	you keep the log	your child helps keep the log and picks portfolio items

A **chunk** is a phrase a child learns whole (“Can I have...?”, “all done”) before they can build it themselves. Chunks are real language, and at 5–7 they’re most of what your child will say.

Ready 8 marks a move from the 8–10 column that a younger child is ready for. Place by skill, not birthday.

When the Hour gets stuck

Your child won’t speak. That’s normal, and it often lasts a while. Many children go through a quiet stretch in a new language, understanding much more than they say. Keep Listen and Do rich, keep the games going, and count every pointing, acting, and choosing as a win. The short checks AS-01 Point and Show and AS-02 Do What I Say measure exactly this kind of understanding, and they’ll show you progress you might otherwise miss.

Your child answers in English. Recast the answer in the new language, smile, and carry on. “*Cat!*” “Yes, the [*cat*]! Good eyes.” Answering in English means your child understood the question, which is the first and biggest step.

You’re worried about your accent. Your accent is fine. Your child will hear many voices over the years: yours, a speaker’s, recordings, a class. Rotating models matters far more than any one person sounding perfect. Check tricky words with a recording by a real speaker before you teach them, and let your child hear people who grew up with the language as often as you can.

You don’t know a word. Look it up together, or swap the word for one you know. Some of the best Hours are the ones where the parent says, “I don’t know. Let’s find out.”

Boredom. Shorten the Hour. Change the game. Go outside: the OUT cards take the language to the park, the library, and the market. A bored child is usually telling you the game has run its course, not that the language has.

The language sounds “too hard.” It isn’t hard; it’s new. Tones, new sounds, and new writing systems each get specific help in Chapter 2 (sounds) and Chapter 6 (writing). Every language is learned by small children every day.

Siblings at different stages. One Hour, two jobs. The older child gives commands and holds the cards; the younger acts and points.

How much time is enough

ACTFL, the national association for language teachers, recommends that early language programs be continuous through the year, meet more than twice a week, and add up to at least 90 minutes a week.¹⁰ A daily Language Hour gives that and more.

Even so, language grows slowly, and honest expectations make the year happier. After a good first year of most-days Hours, many children understand far more than they can say. They sing songs, follow directions, use greetings and dozens of words and set phrases, and answer simple questions with a word or two. That’s success. It’s what good school programs expect for several years.¹¹

Family safety basics

These rules hold everywhere in the book. Chapters point back here.

- **The grown-up holds every account and password.** No accounts for children under 13 unless you set them up and manage them yourself.
- **Live lessons and video calls** happen on your account, with you in the room, on a device in a common room. No private messages between an adult and your child. First names only. No photos or personal details shared: no address, school, or schedule. Recording only if your family chooses it, and stored privately. Chapter 7 covers tutors and calls in detail.
- **Stop, tell, close.** If anything on a screen or call feels wrong, your child stops, tells a grown-up, and the grown-up closes it. Practice it once as a game so it’s familiar.
- **Photos and recordings of your child** stay off shared tools and AI tools. Keep them private, in **two places**: on paper or in a family drive, plus one backup. Crop photos to hands, pages, and objects; faces are optional and private.
- **Out of the home,** you’re present or nearby for classes and playdates. Ask before photographing at festivals or places of worship, and never photograph other people’s children.

A federal rule requires sites and apps aimed at children under 13 to get a parent’s permission before collecting personal information, and children’s photos, video, and voice recordings count. The rule’s latest update has been in full effect since spring 2026.¹² Even so, your family’s rules are the ones that keep your child safe.

A note on screen time

The American Academy of Pediatrics now emphasizes good content, using media together, protecting sleep and meals, and limits that fit each family, rather than one number for everyone.¹³ The

CDC’s tip for five-year-olds is no more than about an hour of screen time a day,¹⁴ and the World Health Organization gives no numeric limit for this age.¹⁵

The Language Hour is screen-light by design. Of the book’s 98 activities, 89 use no device at all, and the rest are short and run by you: playing a recording for a second listen, checking a word, or running a supervised call.

Tools and AI in the Language Hour

The grown-up is at the keyboard. At 5–10, children don’t use chatbots, AI voice chat, or AI companions and toys, kids mode or not. Most chatbots set their minimum age at 13, one major company sets it at 18, and one lets a parent turn on a supervised account for younger children.¹⁶ We still keep the Language Hour chatbot-free for this age, because children learn language from people, and because a chatbot can sound sure and be wrong. Check the current terms of any tool you use; they change.

Good grown-up uses: hearing a word before you teach it (a dictionary recording by a real speaker is best); drafting a tiny story or song verse with words your child knows, then checking it with a book or a speaker; getting ideas for a game; having a grammar point explained to you in English.

Every time: check it before your child hears it. Anything a tool made is **made by a tool**, never your child’s work. Label it on a Who Made This? card (TECH-06).

Never: upload your child’s voice, face, or name to an AI tool; let an app grade your young child’s pronunciation (speech recognition is less accurate with children’s voices);¹⁷ trust generated letters or characters without checking an official chart or a book.

One study, honestly placed: in a large experiment with high-school *math* students (not young children, not languages), Bastani and colleagues found that unrestricted AI help raised practice scores but students did worse on a later test without it.¹⁸ It’s a different age and subject; we mention it because it shows that help which does the work for you can feel like learning when it isn’t.

A note about shared computers: if your family uses Grok Bot, all of your bots share one computer. Keep photos, recordings, and documents about your children off it.

The Hour in different homes

If your family is learning a signed language. Every step works. Hello becomes a signed greeting rhyme with a steady rhythm. Listen and Do becomes Watch and Do: your child watches the sign and does the action. Play It Out uses the same games, with signs as the “must say.” Your Turn invites your child to sign back. Your child’s eyes do the work your ears would do in a spoken language, so sit face to face in good light, and keep your hands in your child’s view. Learn from Deaf adults wherever you can; a Deaf-led class or community event is the signed-language version of a grandparent in the kitchen. When you take photos of signing for your records, show hands only.

If you speak a heritage language at home. The Hour is a bonus, not the main course. Daily life in your home language (meals, bedtime, chores, stories, arguments about socks) is where your child's language really lives. Use the Hour to add what daily life might miss: songs, games, new topics, and, for older children, first reading in the home script. If your child answers you in English, that's very common. Keep speaking your language warmly, and look for other children who speak it too. Chapter 7 goes further.

If you're learning alongside. The Hour may be the most language you hear all day, too. Learn tomorrow's words tonight, check them with a real speaker's recording, and practice them twice. Then enjoy being a fellow learner. When your child corrects you, thank them in the new language.

On short days, sick days, and travel days. Keep the Hello and the Goodbye. Add one song or one game if you can. Choose a carry phrase anyway. A five-minute Hour keeps the thread unbroken, and an unbroken thread is what lets the language grow.

If your child has a speech, language, or hearing concern. Learning a second language doesn't cause speech or language problems, and children with these concerns can learn more than one language. Keep the Hour going, and talk with your pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist, many of whom can work in more than one language. Chapter 2 says more.¹⁹

Your first Hour, start to finish

Here is a complete first Hour for a 5–7 child, about 20 minutes, in English with [bracketed] spots for your language.

1. **Hello (3 minutes).** Sing your hello song twice, waving. "Hello, [name]!" Make a happy face and a sleepy face. "[Happy]? [Tired]?" Let your child point to one.
2. **Listen and Do (6 minutes).** "[Jump]!" (jump with them). "[Sit]!" (sit with them). Twice each, together. Then say each one alone and watch. Add "[stand up]" and "[clap]." Play Freeze and Move: music on, everyone moves; music off, "[Stop]!"
3. **Play It Out (6 minutes).** Six picture cards, face down, for Memory Match. Every card you turn, you name in the new language. Every card your child turns, you name too, and pause in case they want to say it first.
4. **Your Turn (3 minutes).** Hold up two cards. "[Cat] or [dog]?" Count to five in your head. Point, smile, and say it if needed. Next card, hand it back.
5. **Goodbye and Carry (2 minutes).** Goodbye song. "Today's carry phrase: [hello / goodbye]. Let's say it to Grandpa on the phone." Exit line together. One line in the log.

That's the whole Hour. Do it again tomorrow, with one new command and the same song.

Chapter 1

What Language Learning Looks Like at 5–10



Why this matters

Here is a picture. It is an illustration, not a real family.

A grandfather is visiting for the week. He grew up speaking Tagalog, and his eight-year-old granddaughter has been learning a little at home since spring. On his first morning he says something

to her over breakfast, quickly, the way he'd talk to anyone. She doesn't catch most of it. But she catches *salamat*, "thank you,"²⁰ because he says it when she hands him the rice. She hands him the fish sauce, too, before he asks, and he laughs and says it again. By Thursday she's saying it first. On Friday she sings him the hello song she learned in April, and he sings the second verse, one she's never heard, and she makes him sing it three more times.

Nobody in that kitchen is fluent in anything they weren't born to. Nobody is taking a test. And yet something important is happening: a child and her grandfather are reaching each other across a language, a few words at a time.

That's the reason to do this. A second language opens doors to people: grandparents and cousins, neighbors and friends, the stories and songs of a faith community, the shopkeeper at the market, the Deaf child at the park, the family on the other side of a trip. A child who has met another language knows, in their bones, that there are many ways to say hello, and that each of them belongs to somebody.

Anything else a language brings is a bonus. Your child may come to enjoy puzzles about words, or notice things about English they never noticed before, or grow up comfortable around people who don't sound like them. Those are lovely. But you don't need any of them to justify a daily song and a game. People are reason enough.

This chapter gives you the whole picture before you start. It explains how children actually take in a language, which is a little different from the popular story. It tells you what a good first year looks like, so you'll recognize success. It walks you through choosing a language, if you haven't already. And it gives you a first Hour you can run tomorrow.

For the parent: understand it yourself

How children take in a language

Watch a child meet a new language and you'll see the same pattern almost every time. **Understanding comes first, and it grows fastest.** Long before your child says much, they'll follow your commands, point to the right picture, laugh at the right moment in a story, and react when you use a word they know. Speaking comes later, and it comes in pieces.

The first pieces are usually **chunks**: phrases a child learns whole before they can build them. "Can I have...?" "All done." "Again, please." "Let's go." A six-year-old can use "Can I have...?" perfectly well without knowing which word means "can" and which means "have." That's not cheating. That's how speaking starts, in a first language and in a new one. Chunks are real language.

Then, slowly, single words get added to chunks ("Can I have [water]?"), and chunks start to come apart and recombine. Your child will make mistakes that show they're building: using one form of a verb for everything, putting English words into new-language sentences, using a word they know in a place where it doesn't quite fit. Those mistakes are signs of growth.

Here's an everyday picture. Think of how you learned your way around a new town. For weeks you could recognize the bakery, the library, and the park long before you could give anyone directions to them. Recognizing came first. Giving directions came later, and at first in pieces: "Turn at the

bakery. Then... it's near the park." Your child's new language works like that. They'll recognize much more than they can explain for a long time.

And a more precise picture: language teachers describe three ways people communicate. *Interpretive* means understanding what you hear, read, or see. *Interpersonal* means a conversation, back and forth. *Presentational* means telling or showing something to others without them talking back. In your child's first year, interpretive will run far ahead of the other two. That isn't a weakness. That's the foundation.

The correction to the popular story

You've probably heard the popular story about children and languages. It goes something like this: little children soak up languages without effort; there's a window that shuts early, so you'd better hurry; and a second language will make your child smarter. All three parts sound encouraging, and all three can quietly make parents anxious. The research tells a kinder and more useful story.

Children learn languages from people and from lots of understandable language, over years. They don't absorb a language from the air. They learn it when someone talks with them, about things they can see and do, again and again. That's why this book is built around daily contact, live people, and making meaning obvious.

Childhood is a long, generous window. One large online study of English grammar, with more than 669,000 participants, estimated that the ability to learn a new language's grammar stays strong until about 17.4 years of age.²¹ That study was about English learned online, by people who answered a quiz, so it isn't the last word on your child. But it means there's no slammed door at five or eight or ten. Your child has plenty of time.

Older children often move faster at first. A long project in Spanish and Catalan school classrooms found that children who started later, with a few hours a week of school instruction, often made faster early progress than those who started younger.²² Starting young has real advantages over many years, especially for sound and accent with lots of exposure,²³ but an eight-year-old beginner is not behind. They're just a different kind of beginner.

Any thinking bonus is a maybe, not a promise. You may have read that bilingual children have better attention or problem-solving. When researchers gathered many studies together and corrected for the tendency of exciting results to get published more often, the advantage was very small or disappeared, both in adults²⁴ and in children.²⁵ This is a useful study, not a promise that every home will see the same result. So this book won't sell you a smarter child. It will help you give your child a new way to reach people, which is better.

So: no sponge, no slammed door, no IQ promise. Just a little every day, with people, for a long time. That's something any family can do.

What doesn't happen: delay and confusion

Some parents worry that a second language will confuse a young child or slow down their English. The American Academy of Pediatrics is clear that learning more than one language does not cause

language delays or disorders, and that children can learn languages at any age.¹⁹ Mixing two languages in one sentence is normal; bilingual adults do it too.²⁶ Children in two-language homes may know fewer words in each language than a single-language child, but about the same number in total.⁷

If your child has a speech or language concern in their first language, a second language didn't cause it, and you don't need to drop the second language to help. Talk with your pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist. Chapter 2 says more.

If the language is already in your home

If you speak a heritage language, your child already has the biggest head start this book can describe: a person who loves them, talking with them every day. Everything in this chapter still applies, with one difference. In many heritage homes, the risk isn't that the new language won't grow; it's that the home language will shrink once English takes over the child's days outside the house. Researchers have documented this loss in children who started English-only programs early.²⁷ The answer isn't guilt or rigid rules. It's more home language, from more people, in more parts of the day: songs at bedtime, stories from grandparents, other children who speak it, and the Hour as a bonus on top. If your child mixes, slips into English, or speaks a family or regional variety that differs from the textbook, that's normal and worth honoring. Chapter 7 is written with your family in mind.

What a good first year looks like

Here's an honest picture of a good first year with a Language Hour most days. It's this book's expectation, drawn from how language teachers describe beginners and from what good school programs expect.¹¹

After about a year, many children:

- understand much more than they can say;
- sing several songs from memory, with the actions;
- follow everyday directions, including some with two steps;
- use greetings, polite words, and dozens of single words (colors, numbers, family, food, animals);
- use a handful of set phrases and chunks ("Can I have...?", "I don't know," "My turn");
- answer simple questions with a word or two, and sometimes ask one back.

Language teachers call this the **Novice** range: beginners who use words, lists, and memorized phrases. Novice-range for several years is exactly what good early programs expect. It isn't slow. It's success.

What you won't see in a year is a child chatting freely, telling long stories, or reading chapter books in the new language. Those come later, with years of steady contact. If anyone promises them in a year, they're selling something.

The map teachers use

Language teachers in the United States use a shared map called the World-Readiness Standards. One of its standards describes conversation this way: learners “interact and negotiate meaning in spoken, signed, or written conversations to share information, reactions, feelings, and opinions.”²⁸ Notice two words in that sentence. *Signed* means signed languages like ASL are full languages, inside the standards from the start. And *negotiate meaning* describes what you and your child will do every day: figure out what the other person means, with gestures, pictures, guesses, and laughter, until you both get it. That back-and-forth is how a conversation teaches.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

These are the mistakes you’ll hear most in the first months. Each one tells you something useful.

- **An English word inside a new-language sentence.** “*Quiero* the [ball].” This is a gap, not confusion. Your child knows what they want to say and grabbed the word they had. Recast: say the whole thing back in the new language, smile, and carry on.
- **Your child repeats your last word instead of answering.** You ask, “[Red or blue?]” and your child says, “[Blue],” which was simply the last thing they heard. They’re echoing to process. Offer the choice again with the objects in their hands, or give an answer frame: “It’s... [pause].”
- **Your child refuses to talk.** Understanding is still growing, and talking feels risky. Switch to Listen and Do for a while. Count pointing and acting as answers.
- **One form for everything.** “I go,” “he go,” “we go.” A chunk is doing a lot of work. That’s normal. Recast warmly; save any grammar talk for much later.
- **Two similar sounds mixed up.** Your child’s ears are still tuning to the new language. Chapter 2 has games for exactly this.

Your five-minute warm-up

Before your first Hour, learn your hello song and three commands in your language. Check them with a recording by a real speaker if you can. Then say them aloud twice, with the actions. That’s it. You’re ready.

How to teach it this week

The first Hour, with exact words

Your first Hour is mostly about two things: starting the ritual, and showing your child that they can understand the new language without knowing it yet. Keep it short, about 15 to 20 minutes at 5–7 and up to 25 at 8–10.

Hello. Sit together on the floor or at the table. “We’re going to play in [the new language] now.” Then switch. Sing your hello song, waving. Say “Hello, [name]!” and wave right at your child.

In French, that greeting might be *bonjour* (“hello, good morning”); in Arabic, *مرحبا marhaban* (“hello”).²⁹ Sing it again. Most children will wave back by the second time.

Listen and Do. “[Stand up]!” Stand up yourself. “[Sit down]!” Sit. Do each twice, together. Then say one without moving, and wait. When your child does it, beam. Add “[jump]” and “[clap].” Mix them up. Go faster. Go slower. Make it silly.

Play It Out. Bring out four picture cards of things your child loves: a dog, a ball, a banana, a car. Name each one twice as you lay it down. Then: “Where’s the [dog]?” Your child points. “Yes! The [dog]!” Hide one under a cup; your child guesses which. Name it as you lift the cup.

Your Turn. Hold up two cards. “[Dog] or [ball]?” Count to five in your head. If your child says it, celebrate. If they point, celebrate and say the word. If nothing comes, point to one and say it, then hand the next pair back.

Goodbye and Carry. Goodbye song or goodbye words. “Today’s carry phrase is hello. Let’s say it to everyone we see today.” Exit line together, in English: “Today I understood... I said... Next time I want to...” Write one line in the log.

The first month, week by week

You don’t need a curriculum for the first month. You need a song, a handful of commands, a few picture cards, and patience. Here’s a shape that works in any language.

Week 1: rituals and the body. The hello song, four commands, four picture cards, and the help words (TALK-08). The carry phrases are greetings and polite words: hello, goodbye, please, thank you. In Hindi, a greeting might be नमस्ते *namaste*; in Portuguese, “thank you” is *obrigado* (said by a man or boy) or *obrigada* (said by a woman or girl); in Korean, 감사합니다 *gamsahamnida* (“thank you,” polite).³⁰ Your child may say nothing all week. That’s fine.

Week 2: more of the same, plus one game. Keep every song and command from week 1. Add four more commands and a memory game with six cards. Start pausing before the last word of the hello song.

Week 3: a theme. Choose one small theme your child loves (animals, food, the park) and build the week’s cards, commands, and carry phrase around it. Try a Picture Walk through a library book on the theme.

Week 4: the first check. Run AS-01 Point and Show at the end of the week. You’ll probably be surprised by how many words your child knows. Write down the date and the tally, and show your child the number. Then celebrate with their favorite game.

By the end of the month, most children respond to the hello song, follow six or more commands, and have one or two words or chunks they say on their own. Some children have more, some less. All of it is a good start.

Your child's first try

The first try is usually a wave, a point, or a jump, and that's a real answer. The first words often come in the Hello or the carry phrase, because those are the most familiar. Don't push for them. They'll come.

How to help less over time

In the first week, you'll model nearly everything: do the action as you say it, name every card, sing every line. By the second or third week, start dropping the action and just saying the command. Pause before naming a card, in case your child wants to name it first. When your child sings along with the hello song, sing a little quieter. Each small step back makes room for your child to step forward.

When to stop talking

Here's a hard one: talk less than you think you should. Every explanation in English is a minute your child isn't hearing the new language. If your child is lost, show them, don't tell them. Hold up the object. Do the action. Point. And when you've asked a question, stop. Count to five in your head. Let the quiet do its work.

This gets easier with practice. In the first week, most parents notice how often they reach for English to fill a pause. That's normal. Try one small habit: keep a finger on the table while you wait, and lift it only after five. Your child will learn that the quiet belongs to them.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: "What did you understand — and how did you know?"

Follow-ups: 1. "Show me." (Your child acts out a word or points to the card.) 2. "What helped you — my hands, the picture, or the sound?" 3. "Which word do you want to know next?"

Wait: count to five in your head. This question asks your child to think about their own thinking, which is new for many young children. Give them time.

If it goes quiet: a stuck silence here usually means the question is too big. Make it smaller and concrete: hold up one card and ask, "This one. How did you know it was the [dog]?" Accept "the picture" or a shrug and a point as a full answer.

Choosing your language

If your family has already chosen, skip ahead. If not, here are the questions to ask, roughly in order of how much they matter.

1. **Is there a language in your family?** A heritage language is the strongest choice you have. It comes with people who love your child, songs and stories already in the family, and a reason to keep going for years. Even a language you only partly remember counts. A **heritage language** is a language from your family's background, spoken at home or by relatives.

2. **Who could your child actually talk with?** A language with real people nearby (neighbors, a community, a congregation, a library storytime, a local class) beats one with only recordings. Remember: people are the main course.
3. **What does your child care about?** A child who loves a particular country's animals, food, games, or stories has a built-in reason to learn.
4. **Are you willing to learn alongside?** You don't need to speak the language, but you do need to be willing to learn tomorrow's words tonight. Choose something you're glad to spend time with.
5. **Can you keep going for years?** Continuity matters more than any other choice. A language you can keep up through the elementary years, with more people and resources as your child grows, is worth more than a "better" language you drop after six months.

For families starting fresh, choose **one new language at a time**. Two at once is possible in homes where both are already spoken, but for most families one is plenty.

American Sign Language is a full language and an excellent choice. It has its own grammar and its own community, and the National Association of the Deaf describes it as a complete language.³¹ If you choose ASL, learn from Deaf adults wherever you can: Deaf-led classes, community events, and teachers who grew up signing.

No language is too hard for a child. Tones, new sounds, and new writing systems are just new, and children all over the world learn them every day. Choose the language that brings people into your child's life.

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — HELLO-01 Hello Song

- **Time:** 3 minutes, every Hour
- **Materials:** a hello song or rhyme in your language
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed; if you learn the song from a recording, play it yourself
- **The fun:** a song that belongs to your family, sung the same way every day, with waves and claps
- **The skill:** opening every Hour with the same greeting, so your child's ears switch to the new language
- **The crumb:** the song title on the log

How it goes. Use the same song every day for at least a month. If you can't find one, chant a simple greeting in the new language ("Hello, hello, how are you?") to a tune your child already knows. Sing it once with big waves. Sing it again and wave at each person by name. After a week or two, pause before the last word and let your child fill it in.

5–7: Clap and wave. Add one family member's name each day, including the stuffed animals. **8–10:** Your child adds a verse with a new name or a feeling word. By the second month, they can lead the song. **Signed languages:** Use a signed greeting rhyme with a steady rhythm, learned from a Deaf signer or a checked course. Sit face to face so your child can see your hands.

In-home — TALK-08 Help Words

- **Time:** 5 minutes, then all year
- **Materials:** three picture cards: a circle arrow (“again”), a turtle (“slower”), a question mark (“what does it mean?”)
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** your child gets to boss the grown-up around in the new language
- **The skill:** asking for help in the language: again, slower, what does that mean
- **The crumb:** the help phrases your child used, noted on the log

How it goes. Teach these in the very first week, so your child can steer. Put the three cards where your child can reach them. Say something fast; then tap the turtle and say “[Slower, please],” and say it slowly. Say a word; tap the circle and say “[Again, please],” and say it again. Then hand the cards over: whenever your child taps one, you have to do what it says. Soon they’ll start saying the phrase too. In Spanish, “again, please” is *otra vez, por favor*; in German, *noch einmal, bitte*; in Japanese, もう一度お願いします *mō ichido onegaishimasu*.³²

5–7: Tapping the card is a full answer. Use “again” and “slower” first. **8–10:** Add “What does [word] mean?” and “How do you say [word]?” Expect your child to use them in every Hour. **Ready 8:** A younger child who taps the cards easily can start saying “[Again, please]” out loud.

In-home — FAM-01 Learning Alongside

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** one new phrase, checked with a real speaker or a dictionary recording
- **Safety and privacy:** if you use a recording, you play it; your child’s voice stays off apps
- **The fun:** the grown-up gets it wrong on purpose, and the child gets to fix it
- **The skill:** a parent learning a phrase first and letting the child correct them
- **The crumb:** the phrase you both learned

How it goes. Learn one phrase ahead of time. In the Hour, say it carefully. Then say it badly on purpose once: the wrong word, a silly sound, the right word in the wrong place. Look puzzled. Let your child fix you. Then say it right, together, and use it during the day. This is the best way to show your child that making mistakes is part of learning, and that grown-ups learn too.

5–7: Make the mistake obvious and funny. A wrong animal sound works well. **8–10:** Make the mistake subtler, and ask your child how they knew it was wrong.

In-home — FAM-03 Language Map of Our Family

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** a large sheet of paper, colored pencils, family photos to look at (not to stick on)
- **Safety and privacy:** first names or family titles only (Grandma, Uncle); keep the map at home
- **The fun:** finding out who in your family speaks what, and where
- **The skill:** drawing who speaks what and where in the family
- **The crumb:** the map page, filed in the portfolio

How it goes. Draw your family as a tree, a house, or a ring of circles. For each person, add the languages they speak, understand, or used to speak, with a color for each language. Then add places: where they learned it, where they use it. Talk about the new language: who on the map speaks it, or who your family knows that does? Many families discover a great-grandparent's language, or a cousin who signs, or a neighbor who belongs on the map too.

8–10: This card is written for 8–10. Your child can interview relatives with two or three questions and add what they learn. **Ready 8:** A younger child can color the circles while you write the names, and point to “who speaks [the new language].”

Out-of-home — OUT-01 Library Language Shelf

- **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Materials:** your library card
- **Safety and privacy:** you stay with your child; if you sign up for programs, use your own contact details
- **The fun:** a treasure hunt for books in the new language
- **The skill:** finding the language shelf, a bilingual storytime, or language programs
- **The crumb:** a list of the books you borrowed

How it goes. Ask the librarian three questions: Where are your picture books in [the language]? Do you have bilingual storytimes or language clubs? What language-learning resources come with a library card? Many libraries offer more than you'd guess, including language apps you can use free with a card (check yours). Choose two or three picture books, ideally with lots of pictures and few words. At home, use them for a Picture Walk in the Hour.

5–7: Your child chooses one book by its cover. Pictures matter more than words. **8–10:** Your child asks the librarian one of the questions, and keeps the book list.

For the student

(Read this aloud at 5–7. At 8–10, read it together or let your child read it to you.)

You're starting a new language. A language is a way people talk to each other, and there are thousands of them. Some are spoken with voices. Some, like American Sign Language, are spoken with hands.

Here's how you'll learn yours. **First you listen** (or watch). Then you try. You don't have to say anything until you're ready. When you jump because you heard the word for “jump,” that means you understood. That counts!

Sometimes you'll put a word from English into a sentence in your new language. That's okay. Everybody who knows two languages does it sometimes. Your grown-up will say it back the new way, and you'll keep playing.

Try this: Say hello in your language. [Hello!] Wave while you say it.

Try this too: Learn the help words. If your grown-up talks too fast, tap the turtle card and say “[Slower, please].” If you want to hear it again, tap the circle and say “[Again, please].”

Show me: Show your grown-up how you say “[again, please].” Then make them say something again!

Fun challenge: Can you catch your grown-up making a mistake in the new language this week? When you do, fix it for them.

If it isn’t clicking

Too much English during the Hour. If you find yourself explaining, translating, and saying “That means...” a lot, the new language isn’t getting a chance. *Next move:* show instead of tell. Hold up objects, do actions, make faces. Save English for safety and big feelings. Choose words for this week that can be shown easily: actions, animals, foods, colors.

Too much talking by the grown-up. If your child’s eyes drift and their answers shrink, you may be filling every moment. *Next move:* after every question, count to five in your head. Cut the Hour down to the songs and one game for a few days. Hand your child the TALK-08 cards and let them stop you.

No people nearby for the language you chose. If the only voices your child hears are yours and recordings, the language can start to feel like a school subject rather than a way to reach people. *Next move:* look for one live model this month. Chapter 7 has ideas: library storytimes, community classes, heritage schools, festivals, neighbors, and supervised calls with relatives. If there truly is no one, it’s okay to reconsider the language choice while it’s early.

When to slow down: if your child seems anxious, hides, or says they hate the language, slow way down. Go back to songs and Listen and Do for a couple of weeks. Make it pure fun.

When to go ahead: if your child is singing along, following commands without your gestures, and asking for “one more game,” add a new set of words and try a two-step command.

When to find more help: if your child has trouble understanding or speaking in their first language, or you’re worried about their hearing, talk with your pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist. A second language didn’t cause the concern, and you don’t need to stop.

Tools, including AI

The Hour’s AI box covers tools for the whole book. For this chapter, one use matters most: before you teach a new word, hear it said by a real speaker, ideally in a dictionary recording. That’s card TECH-01 Parent Pronunciation Check, and Chapter 8 explains it. The grown-up runs the tool; your child hears you, and later a real speaker.

What “done enough” looks like

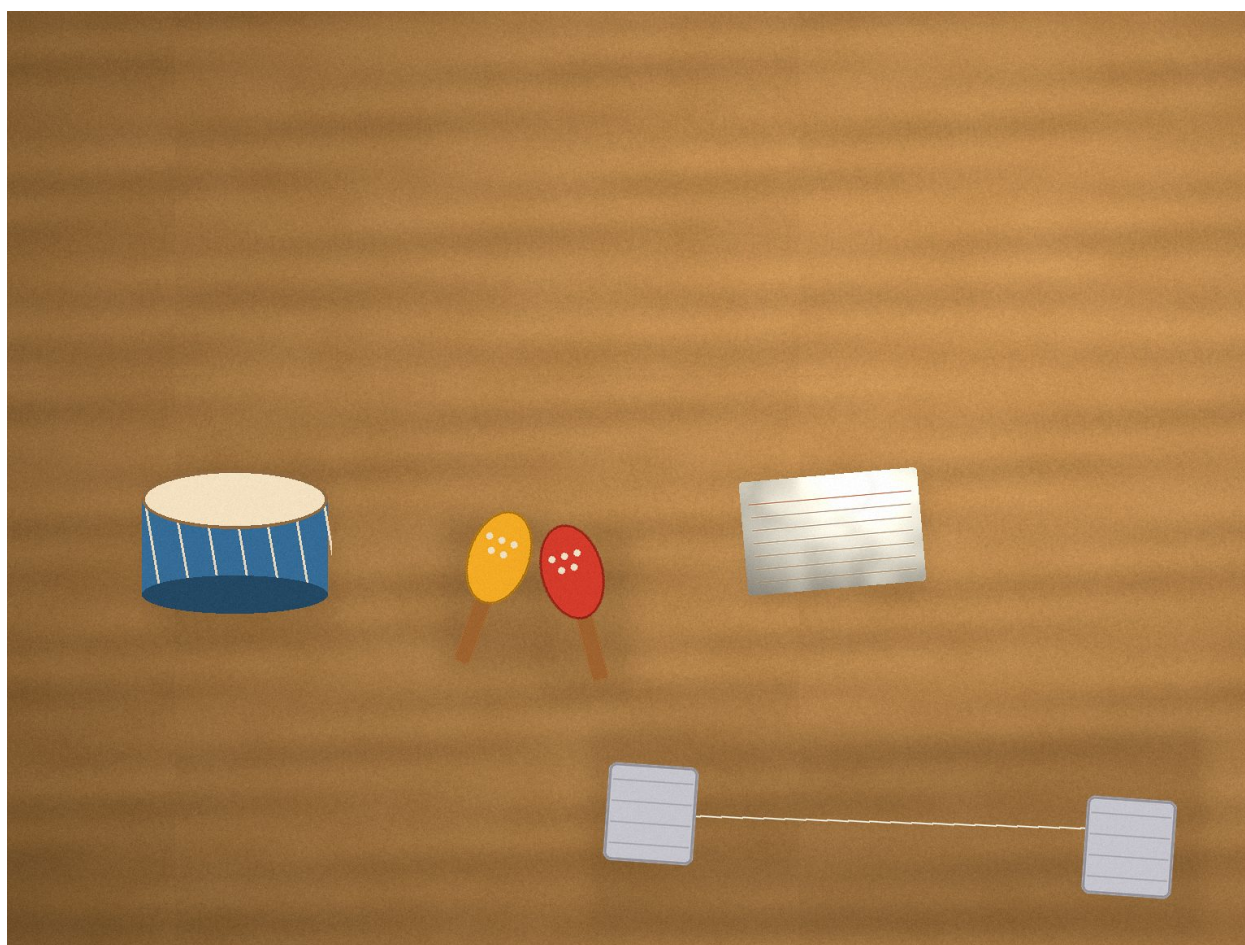
You’re ready to move on to Chapter 2 when:

- ☐ Your child responds to the hello ritual (waving, singing, or joining in).
- ☐ Your child follows three commands in the new language without your gestures.
- ☐ Your child uses at least one help word (spoken, signed, or a tapped card).
- ☐ You’ve chosen your language and found one live model, or decided to learn alongside while you look.
- ☐ You’ve written at least five lines in the Hour log.

Short check: AS-01 Point and Show. Lay out pictures of ten words your child has met. Say each word once, in any order; your child points to the picture. Mark each word *seen*, *growing*, or *not yet*. Write the date and the tally. Never timed, never graded. Do it again in a few weeks and compare.

Chapter 2

Ears First: Listening, Sounds, and Songs



Why this matters

Here is a picture. It is an illustration, not a real family.

A father and his seven-year-old are learning Spanish together. For two weeks the boy has been saying *pero* when he means *perro*. *Pero* means “but.” *Perro* means “dog.”³³ Every time he points

at the dog in the picture book and says “*pero*,” his father smiles and says “¡*Perro!* Yes, the dog,” rolling the r a little more each time. One afternoon they play a listening game: the father says one of the two words, and the boy holds up a card with a dog or a card with a big question mark. He gets the first two wrong. Then he gets five in a row right, and he looks up, surprised: “They sound *different*.” The next day, out of nowhere, he rolls his first r. It isn’t perfect. He’s thrilled anyway.

That’s this chapter in one scene. You can only say a sound you can hear. Before your child can make a new sound with their mouth, their ears have to notice it’s there. And once they notice, their mouth often follows on its own.

Songs carry all of this in one bright package. A song holds the sounds of a language, its rhythm, its melody, and whole phrases your child can sing long before they could build them. A child who knows ten songs in a language has heard hundreds of phrases, sung them back without fear, and stored them in a way that lasts. Songs are also where many children first discover that the new language is *theirs*: something they can do, with their whole body, that the rest of the world might not know.

There’s one more gift songs give, and it matters a great deal at this age: a song takes the pressure off. A child who would freeze if you asked, “How do you say ‘the little fish swims’?” will happily sing a whole verse about a little fish, actions and all, because singing doesn’t feel like being tested. Singing together also means nobody’s voice stands alone. Your child can join in quietly at first, mouth the words, come in loud on the chorus, and drop out again, all without anyone noticing a mistake. Many quiet children speak their first full phrases in a new language inside a song, weeks before they’d say them in a conversation. So sing even when you think nobody’s learning anything. Somebody is.

This chapter is about ears first: how listening to a new language works, why live voices matter most, how to help your child hear and make new sounds, and how to use songs as the backbone of the Hour.

For the parent: understand it yourself

How ears tune to a language

Babies are born able to tell apart a huge range of speech sounds, including sounds from languages their family doesn’t speak. Over the first year, their ears tune to the language around them. In a classic set of studies, English-learning babies could tell apart sound pairs from Hindi and from a First Nations language at six to eight months old. By ten to twelve months, most could no longer hear the difference, while babies growing up with those languages still could.³⁴ Their ears had specialized in the sounds that mattered at home.

That tuning is not a door closing. It’s what ears are supposed to do: focus on the sounds that carry meaning. And it can be re-tuned. An older child, or an adult, can learn to hear new sounds, but it takes lots of clear, repeated, meaningful listening. Your six-year-old won’t hear a new sound the first time, or the tenth. By the hundredth, in a song they love, they often will.

Why live voices matter most

In one well-known experiment, nine-month-old babies in an English-speaking setting spent twelve short sessions, about five hours in total, with a Mandarin speaker who played with them and read to them. Afterward, they could tell apart a pair of Mandarin sounds nearly as well as babies growing up with Mandarin. Other babies got the same Mandarin, from the same speakers, on video or audio recordings. The videos held their attention well. But those babies learned nothing about the Mandarin sounds at all.³⁵

Those were infants, in a lab, learning one pair of sounds, so the study doesn't tell us that a seven-year-old learns nothing from a recording. It does show something worth building on: a live person, who responds, looks at you, and shares attention on the same toy, teaches in a way a recording doesn't. That's why this book says **people are the main course; recordings are a second listen**. Sing the song yourself first, or learn it from a speaker. Then play the recording as a second listen, for fun, to hear another voice.

Using a recording well

Recordings still have a real place in your child's language life; it's just second place. Here's how to use them so they help.

1. **Live first.** Your child meets the song or word from you or a speaker, with actions and attention. Only then does the recording come out.
2. **Short.** One song, or a minute or two of a story. Then off.
3. **Together.** You listen with your child, sing along, do the actions, and talk about it afterward. A recording you share is very different from one playing in the background.
4. **A different voice.** The best reason for a recording is to hear someone other than you: a child singing, a grandmother telling a rhyme, a speaker from another region. Each new voice helps your child's ears learn what stays the same across speakers.
5. **You choose and you play.** The grown-up picks the recording, checks it, and runs the device. Your child doesn't need an account or a screen of their own for any of this.

Cards EAR-07 Second Listen and SONG-07 Recorded Sing-Along are built on these five points, and Chapter 8 returns to them.

New sounds, language by language

Every language has sounds that are new to English speakers. You don't need to know phonetics to help your child. You just need to notice where the new sounds are and give them extra listening time. Some examples:

- **The rolled or tapped r**, as in Spanish *perro* ("dog"), where a quick tap or a roll of the tongue changes the word.
- **Vowels English doesn't have.** French *tu* ("you") and *tout* ("all") differ only in the vowel, which is made with the lips rounded and the tongue forward in *tu*.³⁶
- **Vowel length.** In Japanese, おばさん *obasan* means "aunt" and おばあさん *obāsan* means "grandmother": the only difference is how long the vowel is held.³⁷

- **Tones.** In Mandarin, the pitch pattern of a syllable is part of the word. The same syllable *ma* means different things with different tones: 妈 *mā* (“mom”), 麻 *má* (“hemp”), 马 *mǎ* (“horse”), 骂 *mà* (“scold”).³⁸
- **Consonants English treats as one.** Korean has three related consonants where English hears roughly one: 달 *dal* (“moon”), 딸 *ttal* (“daughter”), and 탈 *tal* (“mask”).³⁹
- **Sounds made further back in the throat,** which you’ll find in Arabic, German, and other languages. Learn these from a speaker, and use [placeholders] until you’ve checked a word.
- **In signed languages,** the “sounds” are handshake, movement, and where the sign is made. Two signs can differ by just one of these, the way two spoken words can differ by one sound. A Deaf teacher can show your child pairs like this.

You don’t need to teach all of these. Notice the one or two that matter in your language, and come back to them in songs and games, again and again.

Choosing songs that teach

Not every song is a good teaching song. The best ones for this age share a few features, and once you know them you can judge any song in a minute or two.

- **Slow and clear.** You should be able to hear every word. If you can’t sing it at the speed of the recording, your child can’t either.
- **Repetition.** A chorus that comes back, a line that repeats, a pattern that builds (“one little..., two little...”). Repetition is how a song teaches without anyone noticing.
- **Words you can act out or point to.** Body parts, animals, actions, colors, numbers, food, weather. If you can show a word, your child can understand it without English.
- **Short.** Two or three verses at most for 5–7. A long song can wait.
- **From the culture, when you can.** A traditional children’s rhyme, clapping game, or counting chant from a place where the language is spoken carries the language’s own rhythm. Ask a speaker which songs they sang as children; that question alone often opens a door.

Translations of English songs are fine too, especially at the start, because your child already knows the tune and can concentrate on the words. But try to add songs from the language itself as soon as you can. They sound the way the language really sounds.

A good collection for the year might be: one hello song, one goodbye song, an action song, a counting rhyme (SONG-02 Counting Rhyme), a lullaby, a clapping game for 8–10 (SONG-05 Clapping Game), and a few that your child simply loves. Old songs never retire. Keep singing the first ones even as new ones arrive.

Songs in heritage and signed homes

If your family has a heritage language, you may already have a treasure chest of songs and not know it. Ask grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older cousins what they sang as children, at bedtime, at festivals, in the car, in the schoolyard. Some will remember only a line or two. Write those down too. A half-remembered lullaby from a great-grandmother is part of your child’s story, and singing it in the Hour tells your child the language belongs to them. Different relatives may sing the

same song with different words or a different accent. That's not a problem to fix; it's what living languages do. Honor each version.

If your family is learning ASL, songs become signed rhymes, chants, and stories with strong rhythm in the hands and body. Deaf communities have their own traditions of rhyme and play in sign, and Deaf storytellers and teachers are the best guides to them. Seek them out where you can, and use checked courses where you can't.

If you're learning alongside

You may worry that your own sounds aren't right. Some of them probably aren't, at first, and that's fine. Your child will hear other voices too: speakers, classes, recordings as a second listen. What matters is that your child hears the new language often, with meaning, from someone who's glad to be there. Check each song's hard sounds with a speaker's recording before you teach it, sing with confidence, and let your child's ears compare you with other voices. Many children end up with better sounds than their parents. Enjoy it when they do.

Rhythm and stress

Languages also differ in their rhythm. Some give each syllable about the same beat; others stretch some syllables and squeeze others. A child who claps the beat of a phrase, one clap per syllable, starts to feel that rhythm in their body. Clapping is one of the simplest, most effective listening games there is, and it works at any age.

The map teachers use

The World-Readiness Standards describe the listening side of language as interpretive communication: learners "understand, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed."⁴⁰ At 5–7, that mostly means *heard* (or *viewed*, in a signed language). Everything in this chapter is interpretive work: noticing sounds, following a song, picking out a word.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

- **Your child swaps a new sound for the nearest English sound.** Spanish *perro* comes out with an English r; French *tu* sounds like "too." This is completely normal: the ears are still tuning. *What to do:* model the word again, slowly, then at normal speed. Try EAR-03 Mouth Mirror. Praise the try, not the result.
- **Your child sings the tune with mumbled words.** The tune comes first. It's the scaffolding the words will hang on. *What to do:* slow down one line. Sing it, speak it, sing it again. Leave the rest mumbled for now.
- **Your child gets same-or-different right only by guessing.** The two words are too close for now. *What to do:* shorten to two words and pick a pair with a bigger difference. Move closer once your child gets them right most of the time.

- **Your child echoes the last word you said, whatever it was.** They're catching what they can. *What to do:* that's fine during songs. During games, give choices with objects so the answer isn't just the last sound heard.

Your five-minute warm-up

Find a recording of this week's song by a native speaker or a teacher who grew up with the language. Listen three times. On the third time, mark the line with the hardest sound. That's the line to slow down in the Hour.

How to teach it this week

Where listening fits in the Hour

This chapter lives mostly in **Listen and Do** (or **Watch and Do**) and in the Hello. Choose a **sound of the week**: one new sound that appears in this week's song and a few of this week's words. Then build listening games around it. Keep the whole week's sound work to five or ten minutes a day.

The exact words

Hello. Sing the hello song. Then: "This week, our song has a special sound. Listen." Sing the line with the sound, slowly, and touch your ear when the sound comes.

Listen and Do: EAR-01 Sound Detective. "Sound detective! When you hear the [r] sound, thumbs up." Say five words, some with the sound and some without. Your child shows a thumb for each word with the sound. Then swap: your child says words they know, and you're the detective. Get one wrong on purpose. Keep it a game, never a test.

Listen and Do: EAR-03 Mouth Mirror. Sit side by side in front of one hand mirror. "Watch my mouth: [perro]." Say it slowly; your child watches your lips and tongue. "Now yours." Both of you say it, looking in the mirror. Make it silly: a very slow version, a very fast one, a whisper, a lion version. For ASL, the mirror shows the handshape and where it's made.

Play It Out: a song. Sing this week's song with actions (SONG-01 Action Song). Sing it again. Pause before a word your child knows and let them fill it in.

Your Turn. "Your turn to sing a line." Count to five in your head. If nothing comes, sing the first word and stop. Then sing it together. Then hand it back next time.

Goodbye and Carry. "Today's carry phrase is a line from our song." Sing it in the car, at bath time, while setting the table.

A sound of the week, day by day

Here's how one week might go. The sound is the Spanish tapped r, as in *pero*, but the shape works for any sound in any language.

- **Monday:** Introduce the sound inside the song. Touch your ear each time it comes. No asking your child to say it.
- **Tuesday:** Sound Detective (EAR-01). Thumbs up when you hear it.
- **Wednesday:** Mouth Mirror (EAR-03). Look, try, laugh.
- **Thursday:** Same or Different? (EAR-02) with easy pairs, then one close pair.
- **Friday:** Sing the song with your child leading the line that has the sound. Celebrate any try.

Add **EAR-06 Rhythm Clap** any day: say a phrase from the song, then clap it, one clap per syllable. Your child claps it back. Then say a new phrase and let your child clap it alone. Clapping makes rhythm visible, and it works for every spoken language. For signed languages, tap the rhythm of a signed rhyme on the table.

At 5–7, the whole week’s sound work may take five minutes a day. At 8–10, it might take ten, and your child can keep a list of “sounds we’ve found” in the back of the log.

Your child’s first try

Your child’s first try at a new sound will probably be the nearest English sound. That’s a real try. Say “Good try!” and model it again, once. Don’t ask for a second attempt right away; let the song do the work. Over days and weeks, the sound will drift closer.

How to help less over time

At first, you sing every word and do every action. Then you drop out on the last word of each line, then the last phrase, then whole lines. When your child knows the song, let them lead it while you do the actions. For sounds, move from “watch my mouth” to “close your eyes and listen” to “tell me which one I said.” Each step asks a little more of the ears and a little less of the eyes.

When to stop talking

Explanations about tongues and lips don’t help most children under eight. Listening does. If you catch yourself explaining how to make a sound, stop and say the sound again, slowly and clearly, in a word your child knows. Then wait.

The same goes for correcting. If your child says a sound the English way, don’t stop the game to fix it. Say the word back the right way, warmly, as part of the play, and move on. Ears do the slow work of noticing, and they do it best when nobody is under pressure. Over weeks, you’ll hear the sound shift on its own.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: “What did you hear — and can your hands or voice show me?”

Follow-ups: 1. “Can you make the sound? Slowly first.” 2. “Was it the same as English, or different? Show me with a thumb.” 3. “Which part of the song is your favorite? Sing me that bit.”

Wait: count to five in your head. Your child may want to try the sound silently first, moving their mouth without a voice. Let them.

If it goes quiet: a stuck silence here usually means your child isn't sure what they heard, or doesn't want to make a sound that might be wrong. Make it physical: "Clap when you hear it," or "Thumbs up for the [dog] word." A hand answer is a full answer.

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — SONG-01 Action Song

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** a song with actions in your language, learned from a speaker, a book, or a recording you've checked
- **Safety and privacy:** if you use a recording, you play it; your child sings with you, not into an app
- **The fun:** singing and moving at the same time, getting faster and faster
- **The skill:** a song whose words are shown with actions
- **The crumb:** the song title on the log

How it goes. Choose a song where the words can be acted: body parts, animals, actions, counting. Learn it yourself first. Sing it slowly, doing a clear action for each important word. Sing it again. By the third time, your child will be doing the actions. Over the week, speed up, slow down, sing it in a whisper or a big voice. Keep old songs in rotation; old songs never retire.

5–7: Big actions, slow singing, and the same song all week. Your child may only do the actions at first. That's understanding. **8–10:** Your child can invent new actions for a verse, teach the song to a sibling, or draw one picture per line (SONG-06 Song Picture Book). **Signed languages:** Many songs and rhymes have signed versions, with the rhythm carried by the hands and the body. Learn them from a Deaf signer or a checked course.

In-home — EAR-02 Same or Different?

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** two cards, one marked "same" (two matching circles) and one marked "different" (a circle and a triangle)
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** a quick guessing game where the grown-up tries to trick you
- **The skill:** telling two close-sounding words apart
- **The crumb:** the pairs you tried, noted on the log

How it goes. Say two words. Your child holds up "same" or "different." Start with pairs that are very different ("[cat] ... [banana]") so your child learns the game. Then move closer: two words that differ by one sound, like Spanish *pero* and *perro*. In a tone language, use one syllable with two different tones. Keep the session short and quick. If your child is guessing, go back to easier pairs.

5–7: Use real words your child knows, with pictures, so “different” means “a different picture.” Stick to big differences for the first week. **8–10:** Use closer pairs, and let your child make up pairs to test you. **Signed languages:** Show two signs that differ in one handshape, movement, or location. Learn the pairs from a Deaf teacher or a checked course, and use [placeholders] until you have.

In-home — SONG-03 Swap-a-Word Song

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** a song your child already knows well; picture cards for swaps
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** silly songs, made sillier
- **The skill:** singing a known song with one new word swapped in
- **The crumb:** the swapped words, listed on the log

How it goes. Sing a song your child knows well. Then hold up a picture card and sing it again, swapping one word: the cat becomes a dog, the bus becomes a boat, “head” becomes “nose.” The tune and the rest of the words stay the same, so the new word stands out. Then let your child choose the next card and the next swap. Very quickly they’ll start swapping without the cards.

5–7: Swap animals and foods first. Funny swaps (a fish riding a bus) get the biggest laughs. **8–10:** Your child can write a new verse with three swaps and teach it to you. **Ready 8:** A younger child who swaps easily can try swapping two words in one line.

In-home — EAR-03 Mouth Mirror

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** one hand mirror big enough for two faces, or a bathroom mirror
- **Safety and privacy:** no photos or recordings needed; this is a live game
- **The fun:** making faces in the mirror, on purpose
- **The skill:** watching mouth shapes in a hand mirror for new sounds
- **The crumb:** the hard sound, noted on the log

How it goes. Sit side by side, faces in the mirror. Say this week’s hard sound slowly, in a word your child knows. Your child watches your lips and tongue, then tries it while watching their own. Compare. Try slow, fast, whisper, and loud. Stop after a few tries; the goal is noticing, not perfection.

5–7: Keep it to one sound and a lot of giggling. Exaggerate the shape of your mouth. **8–10:** Your child can notice what’s different from English: “My lips are round.” “My tongue is tapping.” **Signed languages:** The mirror shows the handshape, the movement, and where the sign is made. Check that your child’s hand matches the model.

Out-of-home — EAR-05 Listening Walk

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** comfortable shoes; picture cards for things you might hear (optional)

- **Safety and privacy:** stay together; no recordings of other people
- **The fun:** walking quietly and turning the neighborhood into a game
- **The skill:** walking quietly and naming what you hear in the language
- **The crumb:** the walk word list

How it goes. Walk around the block or through a park. Every minute or so, stop, close your eyes, and listen. What do you hear? A bird, a car, a dog, the wind, a door, a bell. Name it in the new language: “[Bird]!” Point. Keep walking. Back home, list the words you found together.

5–7: Say the word as you point. Your child can point and you name it, or your child can make the noise and you name it. **8–10:** Your child names what they hear first, and you add new words. Try a “sound bingo” card before you go. **Signed languages:** Make it a Looking Walk: stop, look, and sign what you see. Learn the signs first from a checked source.

Optional — SONG-04 Family Song from Home

If someone in your family or community knows a song in the language, ask them to teach it, in person or on a call you run. It might be a lullaby, a clapping rhyme, or a song from a festival. Write down who taught it (first name only) on the log. A song from a real person your child knows is worth ten from recordings. Chapter 7 says more about bringing family in.

For the student

(Read this aloud at 5–7. At 8–10, read it together or let your child read it to you.)

Your ears are learning new sounds. Some sounds in your new language aren’t in English at all! At first, they might sound the same as English sounds. That’s okay. Your ears are getting better every day.

Here’s how to help your ears. **Watch my mouth.** Listen. Try it slowly. Then try it fast.

Try this: Listen for this week’s special sound. When you hear it, give a thumbs up.

Try this too: Sing our song with all the actions. Then sing it again, faster!

Show me: Can you show your grown-up the hardest sound in our song? Make it slowly in the mirror.

One more thing: Everybody’s new sounds come out a little funny at first, even grown-ups’. That’s how learning sounds. Keep singing.

Fun challenge: On your next walk, stop and close your eyes. What do you hear? Can you say it in your new language?

If it isn’t clicking

Too many new sounds at once. If your child is frustrated or stops trying, they may be facing too much at once. *Next move:* pick just one sound for the week. Make everything else familiar. Come

back to the others later.

The songs are too fast. Many recorded children’s songs are quick, with lots of words. *Next move:* pick a slow song, or sing the fast one yourself, slowly. A song you sing beats a song you play. Use the recording only after your child knows the song well (EAR-07 Second Listen or SONG-07 Recorded Sing-Along).

A hearing or speech concern. If your child has trouble hearing, or trouble with speech sounds in their first language too, a second language didn’t cause it. Learning more than one language doesn’t cause language delays or disorders.¹⁹ *Next move:* keep going with the Hour, and ask your pediatrician about a hearing check or a speech-language pathologist, many of whom can work in more than one language.

When to slow down: if your child seems embarrassed by their sounds, pull back to songs and listening games. Praise effort, never accuracy.

When to go ahead: if your child hears the new sound easily in Same or Different?, move to closer pairs, or bring in a second sound.

When to find more help: a teacher or speaker who grew up with the language can show you and your child exactly how a sound is made. For signed languages, a Deaf teacher is the best help there is.

Tools, including AI

The Hour’s AI box covers the rules. For this chapter: recordings are a **second listen**, after your child has learned the song or word from you or a speaker. The grown-up chooses and plays them. Slow-playback settings are fine for you as you learn a song. No app grades your child’s pronunciation; apps often mishear children’s voices. If an app says your child is wrong, say, “Apps mishear children. Let’s ask a person.” Chapter 8 has more.

What “done enough” looks like

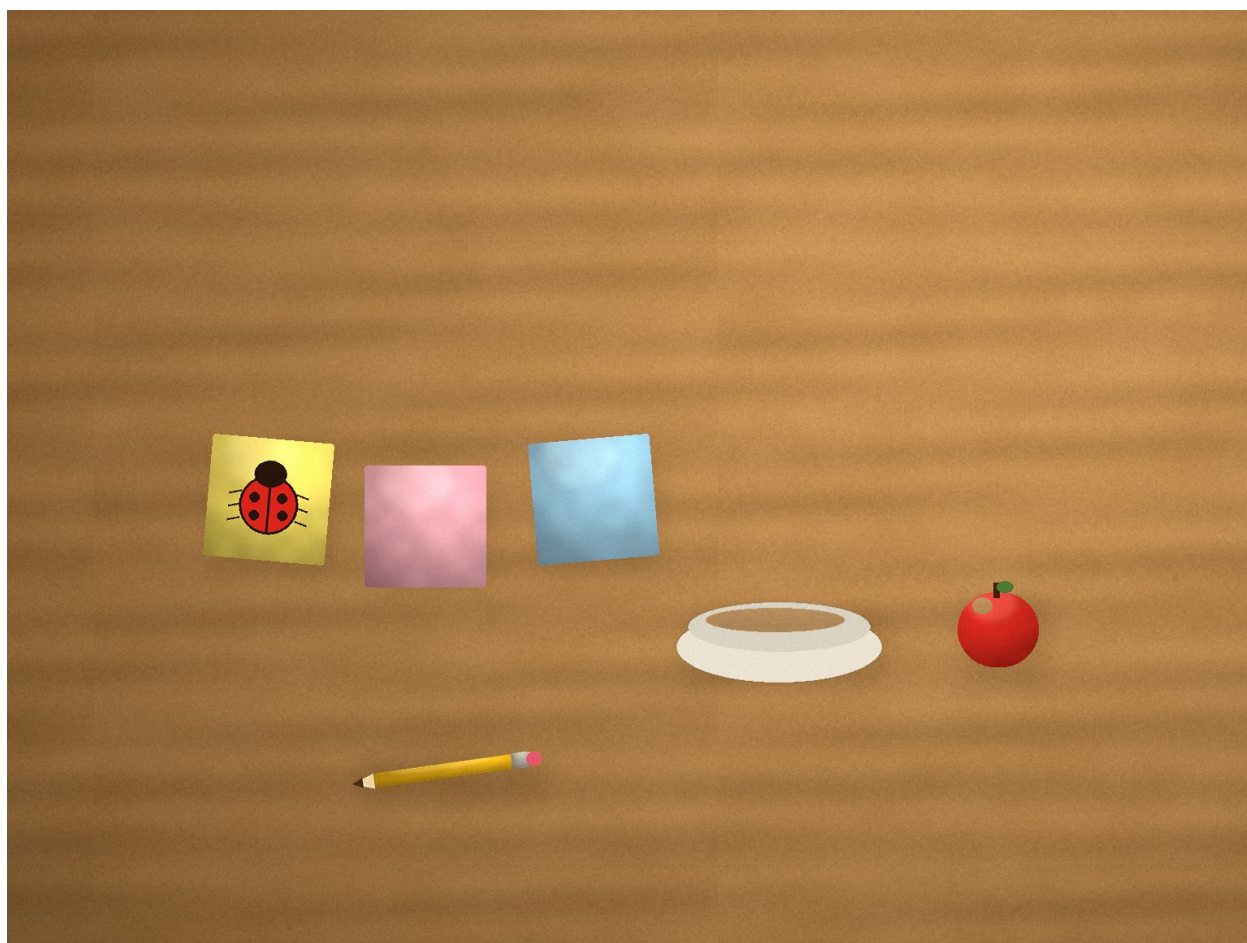
You’re ready to move on to Chapter 3 when:

- ☐ Your child sings at least two songs with the actions.
- ☐ Your child tells apart one pair of new sounds most of the time in Same or Different?
- ☐ Your child echoes short chunks from songs.
- ☐ You’ve chosen a sound of the week at least twice.
- ☐ You’ve used a recording only as a second listen.

Short check: AS-02 Do What I Say. Give five commands your child knows, without gestures. Your child does each one. Mark each command *seen*, *growing*, or *not yet*. Write the date and the tally. Never timed, never graded. It’s a listening check, so it belongs here as much as anywhere.

Chapter 3

Words You Can Do: Actions, Labels, and Daily Routines



Why this matters

You say one word in the new language, “[jump],” and nothing happens. You say it again and jump yourself. Your six-year-old grins and jumps too. The third time you say it, you keep your feet still, and your child jumps anyway.

That small moment is a child understanding a word with no English in between. They didn't repeat it or write it down, and nobody quizzed them. They heard it, knew it, and showed you with their whole body. That's what this chapter is built on.

Chapter 2 tuned the ears. This chapter gives those ears something to hold on to: words a child can *do*. Some are actions: jump, sit, stop, clap, touch your nose. Some are things: the door, the table, the cup, the shoe. Some are the small phrases that run a day: more, please; all done; time to get dressed; goodnight. When a word lives in the body and in the day, it sticks, and it keeps getting used.

Routines quietly do the heavy lifting. A twenty-minute Language Hour is a good start, but it's only twenty minutes. If breakfast in the new language takes another five, getting dressed three more, and bedtime three more, your child hears the language in many small, meaningful moments instead of one block. Each of those moments makes sense to the child, because they're in it. The cereal is right there. The sock really is going on the foot.

This chapter also fits the first half of the book's focus line: **Understand first; then try it; play before print; a little every day.** Actions let a child show understanding before they're ready to speak. Labels and routines supply the "a little every day." And because nothing here needs reading, it's just as good for a five-year-old who doesn't read yet as for a ten-year-old who does.

It works in every language. Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Tagalog, a grandmother's language you're learning back, or American Sign Language: in each one you can give a command and watch it happen. In ASL the command is signed, the child watches, and Listen and Do becomes Watch and Do.

This week, specifically. You can choose six commands and six household words, check how they sound (or look, if signed), and use them every day. Your child can follow those commands, find those things, and by Friday, boss you around with them. That last part is the fun one.

For the parent: understand it yourself

You don't need a degree in language teaching for this chapter. You need one idea with a name, one plain picture of how labels and routines work, and an ear for a few common wrong turns.

How it works: listen, then do

TPR (Total Physical Response) means listening to a command and doing it with your body. The psychologist James Asher described it in the late 1960s: learners hear commands in the new language and respond with actions, and speaking comes later, once understanding is solid.⁵ It's still one of the easiest ways to start with young children, because it asks them to do what they already do all day: move, follow, play.

Why does it work so well at five to ten? First, the child can show understanding without speaking. A shy child, a child in a quiet stretch, or a child who doesn't feel ready to try new sounds can still take full part. Second, meaning is obvious. When you say "[sit]" and sit, nobody needs a translation.

Third, it's repetitive without being boring. Simon Says can use the same six words forty times in five minutes, and children ask to play again.

Hold one limit honestly: TPR is a strong, playful *starting* tool, not the whole method. Its research comes mostly from classrooms of older learners decades ago. In this book it opens the door, and games, stories, and conversation (Chapters 4 and 5) carry the child through.

Labels: real things first, pictures second, print third

A label is a word attached to the thing it names. For little children, the order matters:

- **Real objects first.** Touch the actual door, hold the actual cup, point to the actual window.
- **Pictures second.** Once the real thing has a word, a picture card can stand in for it in games.
- **Print third.** For readers, add the written word beside the picture. For children not yet reading English confidently, keep labels to a picture with the word for *you* to read. (Chapter 6 is where print gets its turn.)

Sticky-note labels around the house help you more than the child at first. They remind you to say the word every time you pass the cupboard. That's their real job.

Routines: the day as a language teacher

Pick one routine and run it in the new language. Breakfast is easiest because the words repeat every day and the objects are on the table: more, please, thank you, all done, water, bread, spoon. Getting dressed is another good one, with shoes, socks, coat, hat, and arms up. Bedtime is the gentlest, with goodnight, a lullaby, and "I love you."

Mostly use the new language during the routine. Switch to your family's main language for safety ("hot!"), for feelings that need words fast, and for a one-sentence explanation if your child is puzzled. That isn't failure. It keeps the routine warm and the child safe.

Themes: a map, not a schedule

Here are the themes that suit five- to ten-year-olds: greetings, family, body, colors, numbers, food, clothes, animals, weather, home, feelings, toys and play, and places. You don't need to march through them in order. Follow your child's interest. If they love animals, animals can carry a month. Circle back each term, and old words never retire; they just get used in new ways.

An everyday picture and a precise picture

The everyday picture.

Think about how a toddler learns "shoes." Nobody sits them down for a lesson. Someone says "shoes" every morning while holding the shoes, putting them on, and heading out the door. After enough mornings, "shoes!" means *we're going somewhere*, and the toddler runs to the door. The word picked up its meaning by living inside a routine.

You're doing the same thing on purpose, in a second language, with a child who's old enough to enjoy the game of it.

The precise picture. Here's what's actually happening, step by step, when TPR works:

1. **The child hears (or sees) a word while the meaning is visible.** You say "[door]" while touching the door. Sound and meaning arrive together.
2. **The child links them.** After several pairings, the sound alone calls up the meaning.
3. **The child shows the link with an action.** You say "[door]," and they run and touch it. That's understanding you can see.
4. **The link gets stronger with use.** Every time the word comes up in a real moment (you really do open the door), the link holds a little better.
5. **Speaking comes when it comes.** Often weeks later, the child says "[door]!" on their own, maybe while bossing you around. That's the "then try it" half.

Two things make this go faster. One is **amount**: how much a child hears a language matters. Research on bilingual toddlers found that growth in each language tracked how much of that language the child heard.⁷ Your Hour plus a few routines adds up. The other is **meaning**: a word heard while something real is happening sticks far better than a word on a list.

The map teachers use

Language teachers in the United States plan with a set of goals called the World-Readiness Standards. One of them describes exactly what TPR builds:

"Learners understand, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed on a variety of topics."⁴⁰

For a six-year-old, "understand what is heard" looks like jumping when you say jump. It's a real start, and it counts.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

These are the ordinary bumps of this stage. Each one tells you something.

- **The child does the action for the wrong command.** You say one word and they do the action for another. Usually the two words sound alike to young ears, or both are brand new. Contrast them on purpose: say the two words back to back, slowly, with exaggerated actions, then play a round with only those two.
- **The child waits to copy you.** They only move after you move. That usually means you're modeling too long. Model twice, then *say it and keep still*. Count to five in your head. If they still wait, give a tiny hint (a lean, a glance), not the full action.
- **The child knows the labels but never uses them.** They can touch the door when you say "[door]," but the word never shows up anywhere else. Move the word into a real need. The door stays closed until someone says "[door], please." The cup stays empty until someone says "[more]."
- **The child mixes English and the new language.** "Can I have [more] juice?" That's not confusion. It's a child using what they've got, and mixing is a normal part of learning more

than one language.¹⁹ Recast warmly (repeat it back in the new language, without saying “wrong”) and carry on.

- **The child says every word with English sounds.** Their ears are still tuning. Say it again slowly, then at normal speed, and praise the try. Chapter 2’s Mouth Mirror is the move if it lasts.

Your five-minute warm-up

Before your first Hour this week:

1. Choose **six commands**: for example jump, sit, stand up, stop, clap, and touch your nose.
2. Choose **six household words** your child can touch: door, table, window, chair, cup, bed.
3. Check how each one sounds with a person who speaks the language or a dictionary with recordings (or, for ASL, a sign dictionary with video). Say each one out loud three times.
4. Write them on a card for the fridge, your cheat sheet, not the child’s.
5. Pick the routine of the week: one meal or bedtime, not both.

If you’re learning alongside your child, that’s fine, and often delightful. “Let’s find out together” is a sentence a master teacher uses all the time.

How to teach it this week

Where it fits in the Hour

This chapter mostly lives in **Listen and Do** (Watch and Do for signed languages) and spills into **Play It Out**. Here’s a sample Hour for this week:

- **Hello** (2–3 minutes): your Hello song, plus HELLO-03 Weather Window if you like: look outside and name today’s weather.
- **Listen and Do** (5–8 minutes): TPR-01 Simon Says in the Language with this week’s six commands. Add one new command a day.
- **Play It Out** (5–10 minutes): LABEL-02 Find It Hunt with this week’s household words, or TPR-06 Colors on the Floor at 5–7.
- **Your Turn** (3–5 minutes): TPR-05 Child Gives the Commands, where your child is the boss.
- **Goodbye and Carry** (2 minutes): your Goodbye song and today’s carry phrase, picked so it can be used at least three times before bed: “[more, please]” for lunch, or “[all done].”

At 5–7, that’s about twenty minutes, often split into two tens. At 8–10, stretch Listen and Do with longer chains (TPR-03 Command Chain) and let the child run more of it.

Then the routine of the week happens outside the Hour, at its own time of day.

The exact words, through the five steps

Keep your new-language words short, and use the same ones every time. Fill the brackets with your checked words.

- **Hello:** “Hello, [child’s name]!” (*Your Hello song.*) “Look outside... [sun]? [rain]?” (*Point to the window.*)
- **Listen and Do:** “Listen... [jump]!” (*You jump.*) “[Jump]!” (*You jump again.*) “Your turn... [jump]!” (*You stay still. Count to five in your head.*) (*Child jumps.*) “Yes! [Jump]!”
- **Play It Out:** “Where is the [door]? Run!” (*Your child runs and touches it.*) “Yes, the [door]! Where is the [table]?”
- **Your Turn:** “Now you’re the boss. Tell me!” (*Your child says or signs a command; you do it, sometimes wrong on purpose.*)
- **Goodbye and Carry:** “[Goodbye] song. Today’s carry phrase: [more, please]. Let’s use it at lunch.”

Here’s one rotating checked example. In Spanish, a child asking for one more of something at breakfast can say *más* (Spanish, “more”),⁴¹ and the polite add-on is *por favor* (Spanish, “please”),⁴² so *más, por favor*. In ASL, MORE is one of the first signs many families learn; learn it from a sign dictionary or a Deaf teacher rather than from a description. Use whatever your language uses. These are only examples.

The same breakfast in six languages. A thank-you at the table works in any language, and seeing a few side by side shows how ordinary this is. In French it’s *merci* (French, “thank you”).⁴³ In Mandarin Chinese it’s 谢谢 *xièxiè* (Mandarin, “thank you”).⁴⁴ In Korean, a polite everyday form is 감사합니다 *gamsahamnida* (Korean, “thank you”).⁴⁵ In Arabic, شكر *shukran* (Arabic, “thank you”).⁴⁶ In Tagalog, *salamat* (Tagalog, “thank you”).²⁰ And if your child is asking for water, in Hindi that’s पानी *pānī* (Hindi, “water”).⁴⁷ You only need the one your family is learning. The point is that every one of these words is short, used every day, and easy to pair with a real cup, a real plate, and a real smile. That’s what makes a routine word stick.

Notice the scripts, too. Mandarin, Korean, Arabic, and Hindi each have their own writing system. None of that matters yet. This chapter lives in the ears and the body, so your child can learn 谢谢 or شكر perfectly well by hearing it a hundred times at breakfast. The writing can wait for Chapter 6.

During the routine, say what you’re doing as you do it, in short bursts. “[Shoes.] [Sock.] [Arms up!] [Coat.]” Leave long sentences for later. One or two words, again and again, with the object in hand, is plenty.

Your child’s first try

The first try is the body, not the mouth. Your child’s job this week is to *show* they understand: jump, touch, fetch, point. Saying the word back is welcome and never required. If your child does say it, wonderful. Say it back warmly and keep playing.

By midweek, turn the tables. TPR-05 Child Gives the Commands puts the child in charge, and many children who won’t “say a word” will happily shout “[sit]!” at a parent, because now it’s a game of power, not a test.

How to help less over time

Help fades in a predictable order.

1. **Day 1:** say the word and do the action, twice.
2. **Day 2:** say the word, do the action once, then say it alone.
3. **Day 3:** say it alone; if your child hesitates, give a hint (start the movement, glance at the door).
4. **Day 4 and on:** say it alone, mix the order, add one new word, and try a “trick” command now and then (say “[sit]” while you’re already sitting, to see who’s really listening).

When your child seems stuck, follow the rescue order: **ask** → **wait** → **hint** → **model** → **hand it back**. Give the command, count to five in your head, give a small hint, show the action, then give the same command again on the next round so they get the win.

When to stop talking

Once the game is going, your English explanations can mostly stop. A child following “[jump]” doesn’t need “Now we’re going to practice the word for jump.” Let the actions carry the meaning. Speak English (or your family’s main language) only for safety, for big feelings, or for one short sentence of setup (“I’ll say it, you do it!”).

Stop the whole thing while it’s still fun. Five lively minutes beats fifteen tired ones, and a child who wants one more round will come back tomorrow eager.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: “Show me — and then tell me (or sign it) if you want to.”

Follow-ups: 1. “Which one was tricky? Let’s do that one together.” 2. “Can you give *me* a command? I’ll try to do it right.” 3. “Where in our house can we use [door] today?”

Wait: count to five in your head after every question. A child showing you with their body may start moving before they’ve decided, so watch their hands and feet, not just their mouth.

If it goes quiet: at this stage, silence usually means “I know it but I don’t want to say it,” or “I’ve lost which word that was.” Offer the action instead: “Show me with your hands.” Or offer a choice: “Was it [jump] or [sit]?” Then do the action together. Skip “Say it!” altogether; “Show me the [door]... yes! [Door]!” gets you there with a smile.

Practice that actually builds learning

Short, playful, and often is the rule for every card below. Two or three rounds of a five-minute game on most days will do more than one long session on Saturday. Mix old words in with new ones; old words never retire.

In-home — TPR-01 Simon Says in the Language

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** none
- **Safety and privacy:** clear a little floor space; no jumping on furniture.
- **The fun:** the “trick” round, when you give a command without “Simon says” and see who moves.
- **The skill:** following one-step commands with the body.
- **The crumb:** a list of the commands your child understood, dated, for the log.

How it goes. Start with four commands. Say each one and do it, twice. Then play: say the command, and your child does it. Once those four are easy, add one new command a day. Keep the leader’s phrase (“Simon says”) in English if your language has no easy version, or replace it with the leader’s name in the new language. The point is the commands, not the frame. When your child is ready, play the trick round: give a command without the frame and see who notices.

5–7: four to six commands, one at a time, slowly, with lots of cheering. **8–10:** two-step commands (“[jump] and [sit]”), faster pace, and your child takes a turn as leader. **Ready 8:** a younger child who’s flying can try two steps once the six singles are easy. **Signed languages:** sign each command with a clear, steady rhythm; your child watches and does. Make the trick round visual (raise an eyebrow, add a pause).

In-home — LABEL-01 Label the House

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** ten sticky notes, a marker, crayons
- **Safety and privacy:** keep labels at a height your child can reach without climbing.
- **The fun:** a house that “speaks” the new language, and the moment your child catches *you* walking past a label without saying it.
- **The skill:** linking words to real things in daily life.
- **The crumb:** the list of ten labeled words, dated.

How it goes. Choose ten things you use every day: door, table, window, chair, bed, cup, refrigerator, lamp, sink, shoes. For pre-readers, draw a small picture on each sticky note so your child knows what it is; add the written word for yourself, small, in the corner. For readers, write the word larger beside the picture. Walk around together and stick them on. Every time anyone passes a label, they say it. Rotate the labels once a month. Old words go into a word box (LABEL-04 Word Wall Rotation) so they’re not lost.

5–7: picture labels, with the word for you to read; your child leads the label tour. **8–10:** your child helps write labels from a checked model (a dictionary or a speaker’s spelling), never guessed. **Ready 8:** a young reader who asks can add the word beside the picture.

In-home — HELLO-05 Breakfast in the Language

- **Time:** 10 minutes, during breakfast
- **Materials:** breakfast

- **Safety and privacy:** use English (or your family’s main language) right away for anything hot, sharp, or spilled.
- **The fun:** “[more]” works like magic. Say it, and the toast arrives.
- **The skill:** one meal routine done in the language: please, thank you, more, all done.
- **The crumb:** a note of the meal words used this week.

How it goes. Choose four phrases: please, thank you, more, all done. Use them every breakfast for a week, every time, yourself first. Hold the cup a moment before pouring and wait for “[more]” (count to five in your head; if nothing comes, say it yourself with a smile and pour). Thank your child in the new language when they pass something. Say “[all done]” when the plate is clear. At first, you’re doing nearly all the talking. By week two, you’ll hear “[more]” before you ask. In week three, add one food word your child loves.

5–7: four phrases only, and lots of repetition. **8–10:** add food names and a simple “[I want...]” chunk (a chunk is a phrase a child learns whole before they can build it themselves). **Signed languages:** the signs for more, please, thank you, and all done make a good breakfast set; learn each one from a sign dictionary or a Deaf teacher first.

In-home — TPR-05 Child Gives the Commands

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** none
- **Safety and privacy:** none beyond normal play; you get to decide whether “[jump]” happens on the bed (it doesn’t).
- **The fun:** the child is the boss, and the grown-up gets it wrong on purpose.
- **The skill:** switching roles, so the child produces the commands they understand.
- **The crumb:** a list of commands your child gave, dated.

How it goes. After a few days of Simon Says, swap roles: “Now you’re the boss. Tell me what to do!” Do whatever your child commands. Now and then, do the wrong action on purpose: sit when they say “[jump].” Let them correct you. Children love catching a grown-up’s mistake, and correcting you means they have to say the right word clearly. If your child freezes, whisper two choices: “[Jump] or [sit]?”

5–7: let your child use gestures as well as words; every command counts. **8–10:** your child gives two-step commands and keeps score of your mistakes. **Signed languages:** your child signs the commands; do the wrong action on purpose, and let them sign it again.

In-home — TPR-07 Kitchen Helper

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** a simple recipe your child can help with (a sandwich, fruit salad, mixing batter)
- **Safety and privacy:** grown-up handles knives and heat; safety words in your family’s main language, always.
- **The fun:** real food at the end.
- **The skill:** following cooking commands with real food.
- **The crumb:** a list of the recipe words used.

How it goes. Choose four commands that fit the recipe: wash, put, mix, and give me. Say them as you cook, with the action, the same way every time. “[Put] the banana in the bowl.” “[Mix].” “[Give me] the spoon.” Once your child is following them, let them tell you a step. This works best once a week, as a treat, after the routine of the week is steady.

5–7: two or three commands, with lots of pointing. **8–10:** four or five commands, plus the names of two foods.

Out-of-home — LABEL-05 Grocery Labels

- **Time:** 15 minutes, during a normal shopping trip
- **Materials:** your shopping list, written with three or four words in the new language
- **Safety and privacy:** your child stays with you in the store; no photos of other shoppers.
- **The fun:** a treasure hunt in an ordinary aisle.
- **The skill:** spotting and naming food words at the store or market.
- **The crumb:** the words spotted, noted on your phone or the list.

How it goes. Before you go, choose three or four foods your child already knows in the new language from breakfast or play: bread, water, apple, milk. At the store, your child is the finder. Say the word in the new language; your child hunts for it. If your community has a market or store where the language is spoken or printed, this is a lovely visit to make. Ask the staff only if your child is comfortable, and never push a child to speak to strangers. At 8–10, your child can look for the word printed on a package or a sign.

5–7: finding by picture and by ear only. **8–10:** finding by the printed word too, where the store has it.

For the student

(Read this aloud at 5–7. At 8–10, read it together or let your child read it to you.)

Some words you can *do*. When you hear “[jump],” you jump. When you hear “[sit],” you sit. You don’t have to say anything. Your body shows you understood.

Here’s the game. **I say it. You show it.** Then, when you’re ready, **you’re the boss.** You say the words, and your grown-up does them. Watch closely. Sometimes your grown-up might get it wrong on purpose. Can you catch the mistake?

Try this: Your grown-up will say three words in your language. Do each one as fast as you can. [Jump]! [Sit]! [Clap]!

Try this too: Now you say a word, and see if your grown-up does it right.

Show me: Walk around your home. Can you touch three things that have a label? Say the word, or point and show.

One more thing: If you’re not sure about a word, that’s okay. Watch, listen, and try again. Everybody learns these words a little at a time, even grown-ups.

Fun challenge: At breakfast tomorrow, try saying “[more]” in your language before your grown-up asks. See what happens!

If it isn’t clicking

The commands are too long. Your child freezes or does half of it. *Next move:* shorten everything. One word, not a sentence: “[jump],” not “[Can you jump for me now?]” Go back to four commands your child knows, and add one new word only when those four are easy. Use the rescue order: ask → wait → hint → model → hand it back.

The labels are never used. The sticky notes are up, but nobody says the words. *Next move:* the labels are a reminder for you, so use them every time you pass, and make one real moment depend on one word each day. The backyard door opens when someone says “[door].” Keep it playful, never a barrier when it matters.

The routine dropped off. Breakfast in the language lasted three days, then disappeared. *Next move:* shrink it. Pick one meal only, and only two phrases (more, all done). Tape them to the table if you need to. A tiny routine that happens every day beats a big one that happens once.

When to slow down: if your child seems anxious, cries, or says “I don’t want to,” stop the new-language part for the day and keep the play. Come back tomorrow with an easier game. Never force a child to perform.

When to go ahead: if your child follows all six commands and bosses you around easily, add new ones, try two- and three-step chains (TPR-03 Command Chain), and add a second routine.

When to find more help: if you’re unsure how words sound, find a speaker: a relative, a library storytime, a community class, a heritage school (Chapter 7). If your child isn’t following simple directions in *any* language, or you have concerns about hearing or speech, talk to your pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist. A second language doesn’t cause those concerns, and many speech-language pathologists work in more than one language.¹⁹

Tools, including AI

Nearly everything in this chapter needs no device. If you need to check a word, use a dictionary with recordings (or a sign dictionary with video) before you teach it, and then put the device away. People are still the main course; recordings are a second listen.

If you use an AI tool to suggest a list of household words or commands, the AI box in the Language Hour has the family’s rules. The grown-up runs it, and every word gets checked against a dictionary or a speaker before it goes on a sticky note. Anything the tool made is **made by a tool**, not your child’s work. Your child doesn’t use chatbots.

What “done enough” looks like

You’re ready to move on to Chapter 4 when, most days:

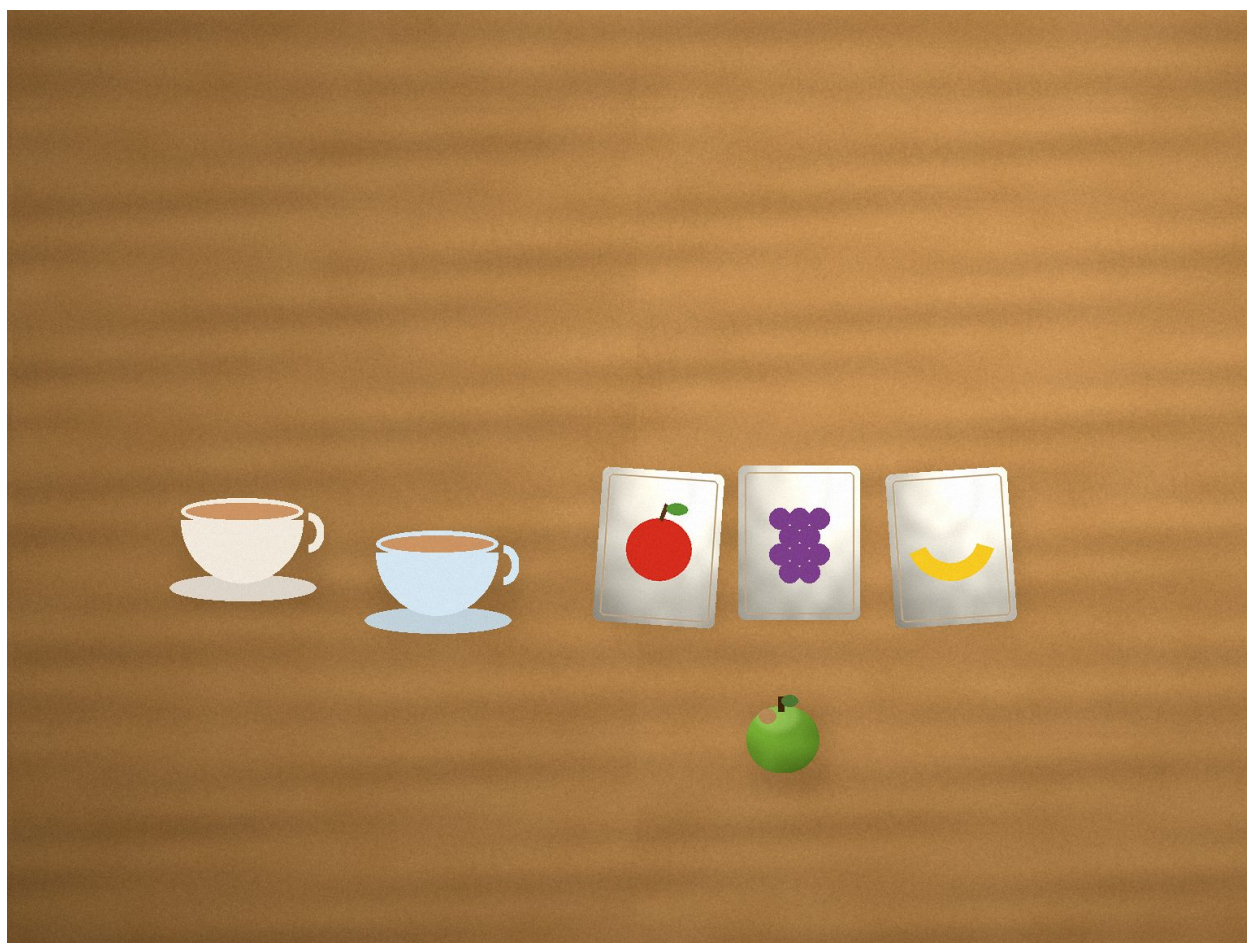
- ☐ Your child understands 15–20 commands and shows it with their body.
- ☐ Your child uses about ten household words in real requests (“[more],” “[door],” “[cup]”).
- ☐ One daily routine (a meal or bedtime) happens in the new language.
- ☐ Your child has given you commands as the boss.
- ☐ You have a dated list of commands and labels in the log.

These are rough markers, not a test. A child who understands lots and says little is doing exactly what children do at this stage.

Short check: AS-02 Do What I Say. Once every few weeks, give five commands your child knows, in a new order, without gestures. Your child does each one. Mark each command *seen*, *growing*, or *not yet*, and write the date and the tally. Never timed, never graded. Finish with the exit line: “Today I understood... I said (or signed)... Next time I want to...”

Chapter 4

Play It Out: Games, Stories, and Pretend



Why this matters

Here is a picture. It is an illustration, not a real family.

A seven-year-old and a parent sit on the living-room rug with a deck of homemade picture cards. The child fans them close to her chest, peeks, and asks, very seriously, “[Do you have a cat?]” The

parent sighs dramatically and hands one over. The child shrieks. Ten minutes later she has asked the same question nineteen times, in the new language, and she's begging for another round.

Nobody would sit through nineteen repetitions of a phrase on a worksheet. In a game, nineteen repetitions are just the game. That's the whole secret of this chapter: **play is the method, not the reward**. Games need the same words over and over. Stories give language a shape a child can predict and join. Pretend lets a child try being someone who speaks the language — a café owner, a doctor, a traveler — without any of the pressure of being themselves.

By now, your child has spent time with their ears (Chapter 2) and their body (Chapter 3). They understand a handful of words and commands, and they may have started saying a few. This chapter gives those words somewhere to go. A word that shows up in *Go Fish*, then in a story, then at the pretend café becomes a word your child owns.

Early-language programs in schools lean on exactly this kind of learning. One state guide for early world-language programs calls for “age-appropriate games and play-based activities,” and for children taking part in the same language consistently over time.⁴⁸ You can do that at home with a deck of cards, a library book, and a cardboard box. You don't need a curriculum to play.

This chapter works for any language, and for any parent. If you're learning alongside your child, games are the kindest place to do it. You can both read the “must say” phrase off a card, both forget it, and both laugh. If your family speaks the language at home, play is where your child's home language gets bigger and braver.

This week, specifically. You can learn five game phrases and make one deck of picture cards. Your child can play one game using a “must say” phrase, join the repeating line of one story, and serve you at a pretend café on Friday.

For the parent: understand it yourself

How it works: repetition without boredom

Every game in this chapter has the same hidden structure. There's a small set of words the game can't run without, and the game asks for them again and again. In *Go Fish*, the game can't run without “[Do you have...?]” and “[Go fish!]” In *Memory Match*, every card turned gets named. In *I Spy*, every guess is a color or a thing. The child isn't practicing words; they're trying to win. The practice comes free.

That's why a little structure helps. For each game, choose **one or two “must say” phrases** and put them on a picture card in the middle of the table. The rule of the game is that you have to use them. That turns “a game we play in English while you sprinkle in new words” into “a game that is played in the new language.” Everything else — the giggling, the arguing about whose turn it is, the “that's not fair” — can happen in whatever language comes out.

Choosing games that teach

Not every game is a good language game. The best ones share four things, and you can check any family favorite against them:

- **A small set of words, used over and over.** Go Fish uses one question and two answers. Monopoly uses a hundred words of English for every one you'd add. Start with games where the language is small and the repetition is huge.
- **Turns.** Turn-taking gives everyone a moment to speak and a moment to listen. It also gives you a natural place to say "[my turn]" and "your turn" a hundred times a week.
- **Something to look at.** Cards, pictures, objects, a board. The thing on the table makes the meaning obvious, so nobody needs a translation.
- **A short round.** Five minutes a round means you can stop while it's fun, or play again if it's going well.

Here are good starting games by band, all from the activity bank:

- **5–7:** GAME-01 I Spy (colors and things), GAME-05 What's Missing? (take one object off a tray and name it), GAME-06 Hot and Cold (finding a hidden toy by clue words), GAME-02 Memory Match.
- **8–10:** GAME-03 Go Fish with a bigger deck, GAME-04 Bingo, GAME-07 Twenty Questions Lite (yes/no questions to guess an animal), GAME-08 Board Game Swap (a family board game with the turn talk in the new language), and EAR-08 Whisper Line, passing a phrase along the family to see what arrives at the end.

A note for families learning alongside: games are where your own mistakes do the least harm and the most good. If you ask for "[the dog]" in Japanese and say いぬ *inu* (Japanese, "dog")⁴⁹ a little oddly, your child still gets the card, and you both get another chance in thirty seconds. Check the word before the game, play, and check again after. You're modeling exactly what you hope your child will do: try, listen, and try again.

Stories: shape and a line to join

Stories teach something games can't: language in order. First this, then that, then the end. A child who hears the same short story many times learns to predict it, and prediction is understanding.

Three moves make stories work at five to ten:

- **Picture walks before reading.** Turn the pages and name what you see before you read a single line (STORY-01 Picture Walk). The words in the book can wait. Your child learns the cast and the setting first.
- **Repeating lines.** Stories with a line that comes back again and again ("[Who's that knocking?]") give your child a way in. They can join the line long before they can tell the story.
- **Folk tales from places that speak the language.** These carry culture as well as words: the foods, animals, jokes, and lessons a community tells its children. Your library may have them in bilingual editions (STORY-05 Library Bilingual Book).

Pretend: scripts a child can grow

Pretend play is a ready-made conversation. A café has a menu, an order, and a thank-you. A shop has prices and a bag. A doctor's visit has "Where does it hurt?" and body words. A trip has a suitcase and a map. Each one is a little script your child can learn whole, then change. Today the café sells bread and water. Next week it sells bread, water, and a very strange soup.

Chunks do a lot of work here. A chunk is a phrase a child learns whole ("[I would like...]") before they can build it themselves. At this age, chunks are real language, not cheating. Pretend gives them a reason to be said.

A handful of pretend scenes can carry a whole year, each one growing as your child's words grow:

- **Café** (PLAY-01): food, please, thank you, numbers. Good from the first month.
- **Shop** (PLAY-02): buying and selling with play money; numbers get a real job.
- **Doctor visit** (PLAY-03, 5–7): body words from Chapter 3 and feeling words from the Hello circle. "[Where does it hurt?]" "[My nose!]"
- **Tea party** (PLAY-05, 5–7): polite words and the manners of a party, a natural place to meet the polite forms many languages use with guests and elders.
- **A trip** (PLAY-06, 8–10): packing a suitcase, reading a simple map, asking the way.

You don't need props beyond what's in the house. A cardboard box is a shop counter; a toy phone is the booking line. Let your child design the scene. Children often add the funniest, most memorable lines themselves.

Recasts: correcting without stopping the game

A recast means repeating your child's idea back correctly, warmly, without saying "wrong." Your child says "[cat red]" in French while holding up a card; you say, "Yes! *Un chat rouge* (French, 'a red cat')!"⁵⁰ and keep playing. You've given them the correct form, and the game never paused.

Researchers who studied teacher feedback in primary French-immersion classrooms found recasts were the most common move teachers made. Gentle prompts (inviting the student to fix it themselves) led to more students correcting their own words.⁵¹ That was classroom immersion with older children than some of yours, so take it as good practice, not a home guarantee. In this book it adds up to a simple rule:

- **Recast warmly, in the flow, most of the time.**
- **Use a gentle prompt only for this week's target words** ("Hmm, [*do you have*]...?" with a hopeful look).
- **Never stop the game for a correction.**

An everyday picture and a precise picture

The everyday picture. Think of how children learn a playground game. Nobody explains "tag" with a rulebook. They watch, they join, they get it slightly wrong, someone shouts the rule, and by the third round they're shouting the rule at the new kid. Games are passed on by playing them.

The precise picture. Here's what happens in a well-built language game:

1. **The game sets a need.** You can't get the card unless you ask for it.
2. **The "must say" phrase meets the need.** It's on a picture card, and you say it first.
3. **The child tries it.** Clumsily, maybe half in English.
4. **The adult recasts and responds.** "[Do you have a dog?] Yes! Here's the dog."
5. **The phrase gets used again in thirty seconds.** And again. And again, while the child is thinking about winning, not about grammar.

By the end of the week the phrase has been heard and said dozens of times, in a real exchange, with a real reason. That's how a chunk moves from the card to the child.

The map teachers use

The World-Readiness Standards include a goal for presenting — telling, explaining, and storytelling to an audience:

"Learners present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and adapting to various audiences of listeners, readers, or viewers."⁵²

At five to ten, "narrate" might be retelling the three bears with a sock puppet. "Adapting to various audiences" might be telling it again, louder, for Grandpa. Both count.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

- **The child plays the whole game in English.** The game doesn't need the new language yet. Give it one "must say" phrase per turn, on a picture card, and use it yourself every turn, first.
- **The child only listens during stories.** That's fine; understanding comes first. Add a repeating line and pause before it, so joining in is easy and optional.
- **The child invents words.** Sometimes a made-up word is a guess at a pattern, which is a smart thing to do. Praise the guess ("Good thinking!") and recast with the real word.
- **The child corrects you, loudly.** Wonderful. Thank them in the new language. If you're learning alongside, this will happen often, and it's one of the best signs there is.
- **The game falls apart in arguments.** The game is probably too complex. Drop to a simpler one (I Spy, What's Missing?) and come back later.

Your five-minute warm-up

1. Learn **five game phrases**: your turn, my turn, I win, again, and "Do you have...?" Check them with a speaker or a dictionary with recordings (or a sign dictionary with video for ASL).
2. Make **one deck** of picture cards: six pairs of things your child already knows (animals work well). Draw them, or cut pictures from a catalog.
3. Choose **one short story** with a repeating line, from the library or one you know by heart.
4. Write the five game phrases on a card for yourself.

How to teach it this week

Where it fits in the Hour

This chapter fills **Play It Out**, the middle of the Hour, and gives **Your Turn** something to do. A sample week:

- **Monday–Tuesday:** Hello; a Listen and Do warm-up with Chapter 3’s commands; Go Fish for Play It Out; Your Turn is asking for three cards without help; Goodbye and Carry.
- **Wednesday–Thursday:** the same shape, with STORY-02 Repeat-Line Story as Play It Out. Read the story twice; the second time, your child joins the line.
- **Friday:** pretend day (a suggestion, not a rule). Set up PLAY-01 Café Pretend and play for fifteen minutes.

A game a week, a story a week, and pretend on Fridays is a rhythm many families like. Keep the old games around; your child’s favorites can come back any day. Old songs never retire, and neither do old games.

The exact words, through the five steps

Fill the brackets with your checked words.

- **Hello:** your Hello song, then “[Today we’re playing a game!]”
- **Listen and Do:** a quick round of commands from Chapter 3, ending with “[Sit!]” at the table.
- **Play It Out:** “[My turn.] [Do you have a cat?]” (*The phrase card is on the table; you point to it.*) “[Your turn!]” (*Count to five in your head.*) If your child says it, cheer and hand over the card. If your child points at the phrase card instead, say it together.
- **Your Turn:** “[Again?]” (*Let your child decide whether to play another round — and make them say it.*)
- **Goodbye and Carry:** your Goodbye song; today’s carry phrase: “[my turn].” Use it at dinner, on the stairs, at bath time.

Here’s one rotating checked example. In Spanish, the card might show a cat and the word *gato* (Spanish, “cat”);⁵³ in Korean, 고양이 *goyangi* (Korean, “cat”);⁵⁴ in Arabic, قطة *qiṭṭa* (Arabic, “cat”).⁵⁵ Use your language. The structure is the same everywhere.

Your child’s first try

The first try is asking for a card. That’s it. One phrase, one card, one win. If your child says only the noun (“[cat?]”), that’s a real try; recast it into the whole phrase as you hand the card over (“[Do you have a cat?] Yes!”). The whole phrase will come.

For stories, the first try is joining the repeating line, even with a whisper or just the last word.

How to help less over time

1. **First game:** you say every “must say” phrase first, then your child echoes.
2. **Second or third game:** you point to the phrase card; your child says it.
3. **Later that week:** the card stays on the table, but you don’t point. Count to five in your head.
4. **Next week:** the card goes away. If your child gets stuck, use the rescue order: **ask** → **wait** → **hint** → **model** → **hand it back**. Wait, give the first sound or a glance at where the card was, model the phrase, then make sure the next turn gives them a fresh chance.

With stories, help fades by pausing: read the repeating line together the first time, then pause before it and let your child fill it in, then let them lead it.

When to stop talking

Once the game is running, stop explaining it. Let the cards, the phrase card, and your gestures carry the rules. Switch to English (or your family’s main language) only to settle a real dispute, comfort a sore loser, or explain a new rule in one sentence. Then go straight back to the game, in the new language, as if nothing happened.

During stories, stop talking about the story. Read it, act it, pause for the line. Questions about the story can come at the end, in the talk box, and only one or two.

End while your child still wants more. “[Again!]” tomorrow is better than tears today.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: “Whose turn is it — and what do you need to say to play?”

Follow-ups: 1. “What’s the magic phrase for this game? Can you say it before I do?” 2. “What happened first in the story? What happened at the end?” 3. “If we play café again, what should we sell?”

Wait: count to five in your head. Children in the middle of a game often answer with their hands first: pointing at a card, picking up a puppet. Let that count as the start of an answer.

If it goes quiet: a stuck silence here usually means the game moved too fast, or the question took your child out of the fun. Go back into the game: hold up the phrase card, or take a turn yourself and say the phrase slowly. Questions can wait until the game is over.

Practice that actually builds learning

Pick one game, one story, and one pretend scene for the week. Play each more than once. Repetition is what makes a game teach.

In-home — GAME-03 Go Fish

- **Time:** 15 minutes

- **Materials:** a homemade deck of picture-card pairs (six pairs for 5–7, twelve for 8–10); a phrase card with “[Do you have...?]” and “[Go fish!]”
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed; keep small cards away from toddlers.
- **The fun:** asking, waiting, and the drama of “[Go fish!]”
- **The skill:** asking “Do you have...?” with picture cards.
- **The crumb:** a tally of questions your child asked in one game.

How it goes. Deal four cards each (five at 8–10); the rest go in a pile in the middle. On your turn, ask the other player for a card you need: “[Do you have a dog?]” If they have it, they hand it over. If not, they say “[Go fish!]” and you draw. Pairs go face up on the table, and you name them as you lay them down. The phrase card sits in the middle where both of you can see it. Play the first game slowly, saying everything yourself first. By the third game, let your child lead.

5–7: six pairs, all animals or all foods your child knows; pointing at the card plus the noun is a full try. **8–10:** twelve pairs, mixed themes; add “[Yes, here you are]” and “[No, go fish]” as answers. **Ready 8:** a younger child who’s flying can add the answer phrases. **Signed languages:** sign the question and the answers; keep the cards in a holder so hands are free.

In-home — STORY-02 Repeat-Line Story

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a short picture book with a repeating line, in the new language or bilingual; or a simple story you tell from memory
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed.
- **The fun:** the line coming back, and your child getting there first.
- **The skill:** joining a story’s repeating line.
- **The crumb:** the repeated line, written in the log.

How it goes. Choose a story where one line repeats — a question a character keeps asking, a sound an animal keeps making, a chant. Do a picture walk first (STORY-01 Picture Walk): name what’s on each page. Then read or tell it, saying the repeating line with a big gesture every time. The second time through, pause just before the line and look at your child. They may join in with a whisper, a gesture, or the whole line. Read the same story every day for a week. By Friday, your child may be “reading” the line aloud with you.

5–7: one story, many days; act the line with your whole body. **8–10:** your child takes the narrator’s part for one page, or invents a new page where the line returns. **Signed languages:** choose or tell a story with a repeating signed line; signed storytelling by Deaf storytellers, live or recorded, is a wonderful model.

In-home — PLAY-01 Café Pretend

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** a drawn paper menu of five foods; play food or real snacks; plates; a “cash register” box and play money
- **Safety and privacy:** real snacks only with your usual food rules (allergies, choking-size pieces).

- **The fun:** being the boss of a café, and taking money from a grown-up.
- **The skill:** ordering and serving at a pretend café.
- **The crumb:** the menu, with the food words, in the portfolio.

How it goes. Make the menu together: five foods your child already knows from breakfast, drawn with the word beside each for readers. One person is the server, the other the customer. The customer orders (“[I would like bread, please]”), the server serves, the customer says “[thank you],” and money changes hands with numbers your child knows. Swap roles every few minutes. In Portuguese, the bread on the menu might be *pão* (Portuguese, “bread”);⁵⁶ in German, a polite thank-you at the till is *danke* (German, “thank you”).⁵⁷

5–7: three foods; pointing at the menu plus “[please]” is a full order. **8–10:** five foods, prices, and a little chat (“[How are you?]”); your child writes the menu from a checked model.

In-home — STORY-04 Story Sequencing Cards

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** four pictures from a story your child knows well (drawn, photocopied, or cut from a magazine)
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed.
- **The fun:** a story puzzle that only works if you remember the story.
- **The skill:** ordering four pictures and telling first, then, last.
- **The crumb:** a photo of the card order (no faces), dated.

How it goes. After a week with a story, draw or copy four key moments onto cards. Mix them up. Your child puts them in order, and you name each one together, using “[first],” “[then],” and “[at the end].” Then your child tells the story from the cards — in the new language, in English, or both mixed. Recast the new-language parts warmly. Mixing is normal here; this is a big job.

5–7: three cards; you do most of the telling, and your child points and joins. **8–10:** four cards; your child tells it, then makes one card of their own for a new ending.

Out-of-home — STORY-05 Library Bilingual Book

- **Time:** 15 minutes at the library, plus reading at home
- **Materials:** a library card
- **Safety and privacy:** your child stays with you; first names only if talking with library staff.
- **The fun:** choosing a book for yourself.
- **The skill:** borrowing and sharing a bilingual or new-language picture book.
- **The crumb:** the book title on the reading list.

How it goes. Ask the children’s librarian for picture books in your language or bilingual books, and ask about storytimes in the language too. Let your child choose one book from what’s offered, judging by the pictures. At home, do a picture walk before reading. If the book is bilingual, read the new-language side first, then the English, then the new language again. Keep it on the shelf for the whole loan period, and reread it.

5–7: picture books with few words; you read, your child names pictures. **8–10:** your child picks two books and decides which to read first; they might read a known line aloud.

Out-of-home — GAME-09 Traditional Game (optional)

- **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Materials:** whatever the game needs (often nothing, or a ball or chalk)
- **Safety and privacy:** play at a park, festival, or community event with a parent present; ask before photographing anyone, and no photos of other children.
- **The fun:** a real game that real children play.
- **The skill:** a children’s game played in a country or community that uses the language.
- **The crumb:** the game’s name and where it comes from.

How it goes. Ask a speaker, a heritage school, or a librarian about a children’s game played where the language is spoken — a chasing game, a hand game, a circle game. Learn it the way playground games are learned: by playing. Keep the game’s own words in the language, even if everything else is in English at first. If you meet other families at a community event, this is a lovely way to play together without pressure on anyone’s child to “perform.”

5–7: simple chasing or circle games. **8–10:** games with a chant or a counting rhyme; your child learns the chant.

For the student

(Read this aloud at 5–7. At 8–10, read it together or let your child read it to you.)

When we play, the language is the rule of the game.

Every game has magic words. In Go Fish, the magic words are “[Do you have...?]” You can’t get a card unless you say them! In our café, the magic word is “[please].” No “please,” no bread.

Stories have magic words too. Some stories say the same line again and again. When you hear it coming, you can say it too.

Try this: Play Go Fish with your grown-up. Ask for a card with the magic words. [Do you have a cat?]

Try this too: Listen to our story. When the line comes back, say it with your grown-up, or do the action.

Show me: Put four story pictures in order. Show me what happened first, and what happened at the end.

One more thing: If you forget the magic words, look at the card on the table. That’s what it’s there for. Grown-ups forget too.

Fun challenge: Open a café! Make a menu with three foods. Can you get your grown-up to say “[please]” before you serve them?

If it isn't clicking

The game is too complex. The rules need so much English that the new language disappears. *Next move:* pick a simpler game (I Spy, What's Missing?, Memory Match), with one “must say” phrase. Build up again from there.

Too many new words. Your child is drowning in new cards and can't play. *Next move:* cap the new words at six. Every card in the deck should be a word your child already understands. Games are for using words, not for meeting them.

The story is too long. Your child drifts off halfway through. *Next move:* one page, many times. A two-minute story read every day for a week teaches more than a long book read once. Pick stories with repeating lines.

When to slow down: if your child gets upset when they lose, or freezes when it's their turn to speak, play cooperative versions (you both try to find all the pairs together) and let pointing count as a turn.

When to go ahead: if your child plays Go Fish without the phrase card and joins every repeating line, add answer phrases, a bigger deck, a new pretend scene, or a game with longer turns (GAME-08 Board Game Swap).

When to find more help: a speaker, a library storytime in the language, or a playdate with a child who speaks it (Chapter 7) can add new games and new voices. A heritage school or community group may teach traditional games you won't find in a book.

Tools, including AI

Everything in this chapter works with no device. The Hour's AI box has the family's rules for tools. If you use one to suggest a game variation or to draft a tiny story from words your child knows, the grown-up runs it, checks every word with a dictionary or a speaker, and labels the result **made by a tool**. A generated story is never your child's work, and generated pictures don't go in the portfolio as theirs. Real books from the library, and stories told by real people, are better. People are the main course; recordings are a second listen.

What “done enough” looks like

You're ready to move on to Chapter 5 when, most days:

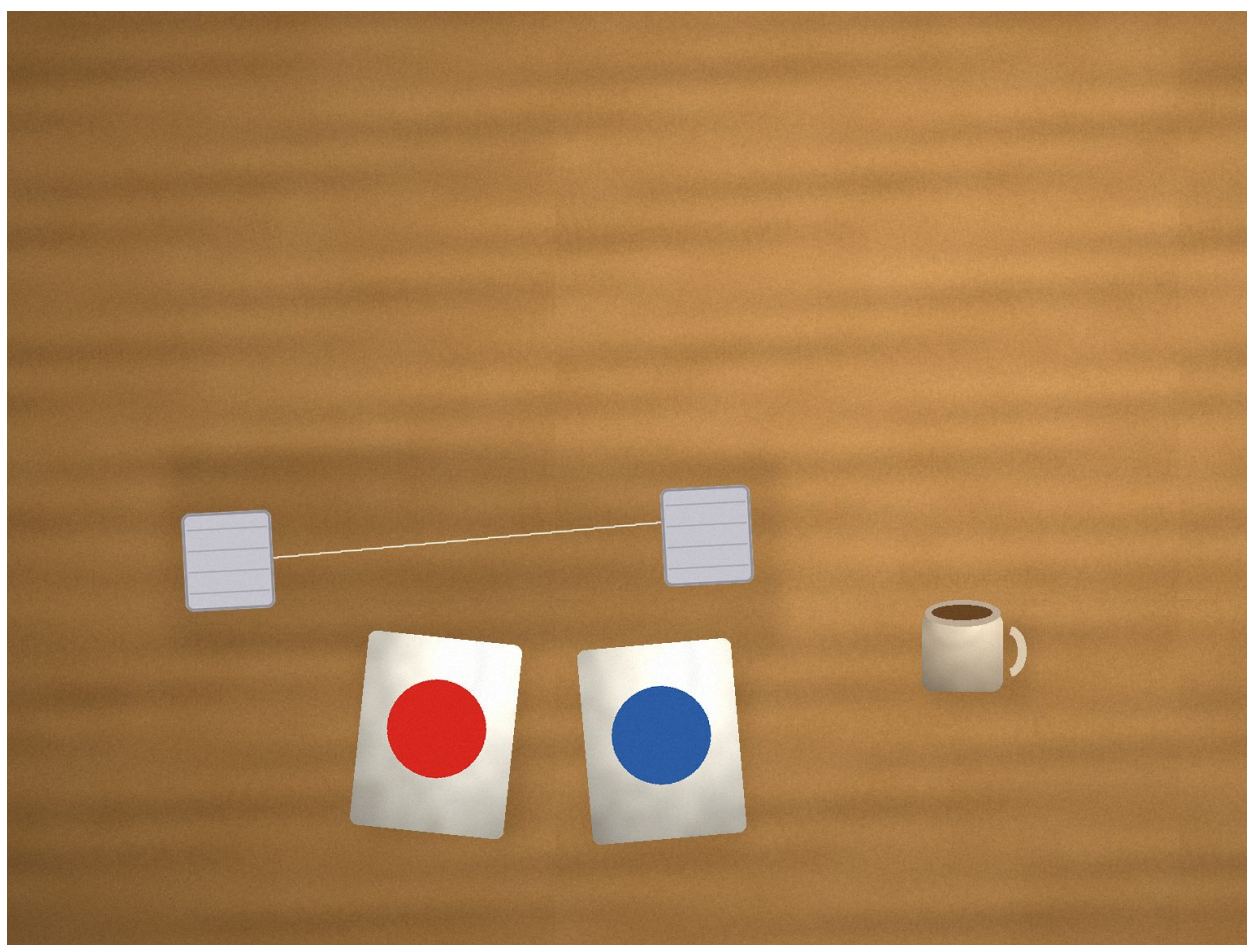
- ☐ Your child plays two games using the “must say” phrases.
- ☐ Your child joins a story's repeating line.
- ☐ Your child plays one pretend scene with a few prompts from you.
- ☐ Your child can put story pictures in order and tell first, then, and last, in any mix of languages.
- ☐ The log shows a game, a story, and a pretend scene this week.

Short check: AS-03 Say It Back Check. Once every few weeks, show your child five picture cards from games they know, one at a time, and ask them to name each one, or ask three simple

questions about a story they know well. No hints for the first try. Mark each *seen*, *growing*, or *not yet*, and write the date and the tally. Never timed, never graded. Finish with the exit line: “Today I understood... I said (or signed)... Next time I want to...”

Chapter 5

First Conversations: Questions, Answers, and Waiting



Why this matters

Here is a picture. It is an illustration, not a real family.

An eight-year-old is helping set the table. Without thinking, her father asks in the new language, “[Red or blue?]” and holds up two cups. She points at the blue one. Then she says the word —

“[blue]” — and takes it. A small thing. And then, a moment later, she holds up a fork and asks him, in the new language, “[This one?]”

That’s a conversation. Someone asked, someone answered, someone understood, and then the child asked one back. It lasted four seconds, and it was real, because nobody was practicing. They were setting a table.

Everything in the book so far has been leading here. Chapter 2 tuned the ears. Chapter 3 put words in the body and the day. Chapter 4 gave the words games to live in. This chapter is about the moment a language becomes *yours*: when you use it to talk with someone, and they understand you.

Conversations at five to ten are small. That’s not a problem to fix; it’s what beginning looks like. A child at this stage answers a choice question with one word, asks for help with a memorized phrase, and holds a short, simple exchange about something familiar: the weather, a pet, what they want for snack. Those small exchanges are the seeds of everything else.

It helps to know what you’re *not* aiming for this year. You’re not aiming for long sentences, perfect grammar, or a child who chats easily with strangers. You’re aiming for a child who isn’t afraid to answer, who knows how to ask for help, and who has felt, a few times, the little thrill of being understood in a new language. That thrill is what brings them back tomorrow.

Two habits matter more than anything else in this chapter, and they’re both the grown-up’s job. The first is **asking questions your child can answer**: starting low on a ladder of questions and climbing slowly. The second is **waiting**. Most adults wait about a second before they jump in to help. Young language learners need much longer. In this book, the habit has a simple name: **count to five in your head**.

This week, specifically. You can write a two-line daily talk on a card and ask choice questions all day long. Your child can answer “this or that?” with a word, ask for help with “[again, please],” and by Friday, ask *you* a question back.

For the parent: understand it yourself

How it works: the ladder of questions

Some questions are easy to answer in a new language, and some are very hard. Picture them as a ladder.

1. **Yes/no questions.** “[Is it a cat?]” Your child can nod, shake their head, or say one tiny word. Understanding the question is the whole job.
2. **Choice questions.** “[Red or blue?]” The answer is right there in the question. Your child just picks one and says it, or points.
3. **One-word questions.** “[What’s this?]” Now your child has to find the word themselves. The object is in front of them, so the meaning is clear.
4. **Open questions.** “[What happened?]” “[Why?]” These need several words, in order, built on the spot. They’re hard even for children who’ve been learning for years.

Start low. Most of your questions in the first year should be on the bottom two rungs, with the third rung growing as words pile up. Climb one rung only when the lower one is easy. When your child gets stuck, step down a rung, not up.

Waiting: count to five in your head

Wait time is the pause after a question before anyone helps. Studies of high-school language classrooms found teachers waited only around two seconds after asking a question before speaking again.⁵⁸ That's not long enough for a teenager to find a word in a new language, let alone a six-year-old.

So here's the house habit: after you ask, **count to five in your head**. Don't repeat the question. Don't give the answer. Look friendly and wait. Then, if nothing comes, use the rescue order: **ask** → **wait** → **hint** → **model** → **hand it back**. A hint is small: point at the right cup, give the first sound. A model is the whole answer, said warmly. Handing it back means giving your child another chance soon, with the same question or a very similar one, so they get the win.

Five seconds feels long the first few times. It gets easier. And you'll be amazed how often the answer arrives at second four.

Negotiating meaning: the power phrases

Conversations aren't only questions and answers. Real conversations are full of repair: "What?" "Say that again." "Slower, please." "What does that mean?" Research on conversations between fluent speakers and learners found that this kind of back-and-forth — working out meaning together — is a big part of what makes language understandable to a learner.⁵⁹

That gives you three power phrases to teach in week one (TALK-08 Help Words):

- "[Again, please.]"
- "[Slower, please.]"
- "[What does ____ mean?]"

With these, your child can steer any conversation, even with a speaker who talks too fast. They're also real sentences in the new language, said for a real reason. A child who says "[Again, please]" is *using* the language, not failing at it. Model them yourself, often, especially if you're learning alongside: when a speaker talks too fast for you, say it, and let your child see you do it.

When your child answers in English

This will happen a lot, and it's good news. A child who answers your new-language question in English understood the question. Understanding comes first; saying comes next. So treat an English answer as half a win, and help with the other half.

The move is a warm recast with a choice. Your child says "Blue!" in English. You say, "[Blue!]" in the new language, smiling, and hand over the cup. Next time, you hold up the cups a moment longer and wait. Don't refuse the cup until they say it in the new language. That turns a conversation into a test, and children notice.

Mixing inside one sentence (“Can I have the [blue] one?”) is normal for any child learning more than one language. It’s a child using every word they have. Recast the whole sentence in the new language and carry on.

Your child’s questions

Answering is half a conversation. Asking is the other half, and it’s usually slower to arrive. Many children answer happily for months before they ask a single question in the new language. You can make room for it:

- **Swap roles in games.** In Go Fish and Twenty Questions Lite, the child *has* to ask.
- **Leave a gap.** After your child answers, raise your eyebrows and wait, as if to say “your turn.” Some children will ask “[And you?]” with no other prompt.
- **Teach one question chunk at a time.** “[What’s this?]” first, then “[Where is...?],” then “[Do you want...?]” At 8–10, TALK-03 Question Words Hunt adds who, what, and where in a real exchange.
- **Answer your child’s question for real.** If they ask “[What’s this?]” about something you don’t know the word for, say “[I don’t know!] Let’s find out together.” Then look it up, together, and use it.

The first question your child asks you in the new language is worth a note in the log. It’s a milestone.

Chunks are real language

A chunk is a phrase a child learns whole (“[Can I have...?],” “[I don’t know],” “[My name is...]”) before they can build it themselves. ACTFL’s descriptions of beginning learners, the Novice range, describe exactly this: speakers who rely on memorized words, lists, and phrases.⁶⁰ That’s not a shortcut or a cheat. It’s how beginners talk, in every language. Chunks get the child into conversations now, and over time they come apart into pieces the child can recombine.

Conversations with more than one person

A conversation with a parent is a good start. A conversation with someone else is where a language starts to feel real. Some easy ways to widen the circle:

- **Siblings.** An older child can ask the choice questions and keep the tally; a younger one answers. In the Name and Feeling Circle (HELLO-02), everyone at the table greets everyone else. The older child often gets better at asking than anyone.
- **Relatives who speak the language.** A grandparent, an aunt, or a family friend can do the Daily Two-Line Talk on a visit or a parent-run call. Give them the card ahead of time, so they know what your child can do and can start on the right rung.
- **Heritage homes.** If the language is your family’s home language, your child may understand far more than they say, and may answer relatives in English. That’s very common. Keep speaking the home language warmly; don’t stop because they answer in English. Choice questions help here too, because the answer is right in the question. Peers who speak the

language — cousins, a playgroup, a heritage school — often do more than any grown-up to get a child talking (Chapter 7).

- **Puppets and toys.** A puppet who speaks only the new language can ask questions a shy child will answer, because answering a puppet doesn't feel like being watched.

Whoever is asking, the same habits apply: start low on the ladder, count to five in your head, and respond to the meaning. A conversation that ends with a child getting what they asked for is the best kind.

Performance and proficiency

Language teachers draw a useful line. **Performance** is what a learner can do with something practiced: a rehearsed exchange, a song, a role-play they've done ten times. **Proficiency** is what a learner can do with no rehearsal, in a new moment.⁶⁰ Both matter. Your Daily Two-Line Talk is performance, and it's valuable. The goal underneath it is the little unrehearsed exchange: your child answering a question they didn't expect, about something familiar, in the new language. That's what the short check at the end of this chapter (AS-04 Little Conversation) looks for.

An everyday picture and a precise picture

The everyday picture. Think of a toddler on the phone with a grandparent. The grandparent does almost all the work: "Are you having lunch? Is it yummy? Yes? Is it pasta?" The toddler says "Yes!" and "Pasta!" and hands the phone back. Nobody thinks the toddler failed. The grandparent made the questions easy and waited, and a conversation happened.

The precise picture. In a good first conversation:

1. **The adult picks a rung.** A choice question, about something in view.
2. **The adult asks once, then waits.** Count to five in your head.
3. **The child answers** — by pointing, a word, or a chunk.
4. **The adult recasts and responds to the meaning.** "[Blue!] Here's the blue cup." The reply is about the cup, not about the grammar.
5. **The adult leaves a gap for a question back.** A raised eyebrow, a held-up object. Over weeks, the child starts filling that gap.

The map teachers use

The World-Readiness Standards describe conversation like this:

"Learners interact and negotiate meaning in spoken, signed, or written conversations to share information, reactions, feelings, and opinions."²⁸

"Negotiate meaning" is exactly what "[Again, please]" does. And notice "spoken, signed": a conversation in ASL counts just as fully.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

- **The child answers every question with “yes.”** Usually the question wasn’t understood. Drop to a choice question with objects in view: “[Apple or banana?]”
- **The child answers in English.** That’s understanding, which is the first half. Recast and offer the words: if you’re learning Spanish, “¿Rojo o azul?” (Spanish, “Red or blue?”)⁶¹ — and let them choose in the new language.
- **The child freezes.** Too long a wait without a hint, or too high a rung. Use the rescue order, and step down a rung next time.
- **The child copies the question back.** You ask “[Is it a cat?]” and they say “[Is it a cat].” That’s processing. Offer the answer frame: “[It’s a...]” and let them finish.
- **The child uses one form for everything.** A chunk is working hard. Recast warmly; no grammar lessons at 5–7.

Your five-minute warm-up

1. Write this week’s **two-line talk** on a card (TALK-06 Daily Two-Line Talk). Week one might be: “[Hello! How are you?]” — “[Good!]”
2. Learn the **three power phrases**: again, please; slower, please; what does ____ mean?
3. Choose **five things in the house** for choice questions: two cups, two snacks, two shirts.
4. Check pronunciation with a speaker or a dictionary with recordings (or a sign dictionary with video).
5. Practice counting to five in your head while looking pleasant. Really. Try it in a mirror.

How to teach it this week

Where it fits in the Hour

This chapter lives in **Your Turn**, the step built for the child to speak, and it starts at **Hello**, where the Daily Two-Line Talk happens. It also spills out of the Hour into the whole day. Choice questions can happen at every meal, every getting-dressed, every trip to the park.

A sample Hour:

- **Hello:** your Hello song, then the Daily Two-Line Talk (TALK-06), with HELLO-02 Name and Feeling Circle if you have more than one child.
- **Listen and Do:** a quick round of commands, ending with a power phrase: say a command very fast, and wait for “[Slower, please!]”
- **Play It Out:** a game with questions built in: GAME-03 Go Fish, or GAME-07 Twenty Questions Lite at 8–10.
- **Your Turn:** TALK-01 Choice Questions, with real objects, for three to five minutes.
- **Goodbye and Carry:** today’s carry phrase, “[Again, please],” for use all afternoon.

The exact words, through the five steps

- **Hello:** “[Hello! How are you?]” (*Count to five in your head.*) Your child: “[Good!]” You: “[Good!]”
- **Listen and Do:** (*Very fast*) “[Jumpsitclap!]” (*Wait, grinning.*) Your child: “[Slower, please!]” You: “[Okay!] [Jump.] [Sit.] [Clap.]”
- **Play It Out:** “[Do you have a dog?]” — “[Go fish!]”
- **Your Turn:** (*Holding two snacks.*) “[Apple or cracker?]” (*Count to five in your head.*) If nothing: point to one (hint). If still nothing: “[Apple?]” (model). Then on the next pair, ask again (hand it back).
- **Goodbye and Carry:** “[Goodbye!] Today’s carry phrase is [again, please].”

Here’s one rotating checked example of the bottom rung. Yes and no in a few languages: in German, *ja* (German, “yes”) and *nein* (German, “no”);⁶² in Korean, 네 *ne* (Korean, “yes”) and 아니요 *aniyo* (Korean, “no”);⁶³ in Tagalog, *oo* (Tagalog, “yes”) and *hindi* (Tagalog, “no”).⁶⁴ And for Hello itself, in Hindi, नमस्ते *namaste* (Hindi, “hello”),⁶⁵ and in Arabic, مرحبا *marḥaban* (Arabic, “hello”).⁶⁶ Use your language, with the forms your speaker or teacher uses.

Your child’s first try

The first try is answering a choice question. Pointing counts; that’s understanding. Saying the word counts more; that’s trying. Either way, respond to the meaning: hand over the blue cup.

The second try, by midweek, is a power phrase. Say something deliberately too fast and wait for “[Again, please].” When it comes, cheer, and say it again slowly. Your child just used the language to make the world do something.

How to help less over time

1. **Week one:** you say both lines of the two-line talk, and your child echoes. Choice questions come with objects in hand.
2. **Week two:** your child says their line alone. You add one new line. Choice questions are sometimes about pictures instead of objects.
3. **Week three:** your child starts the talk. You answer. Questions climb to “[What’s this?]” for things your child knows well.
4. **Later:** the card for the two-line talk goes away, and it grows a line a week. By the end of a term, it might be six lines long.

At every stage, when your child is stuck: **ask** → **wait** → **hint** → **model** → **hand it back**.

Questions all day: a sample day

The Hour is where conversation is practiced. The day is where it grows. Here’s what a day of small questions can look like, all on the bottom two rungs:

- **Breakfast:** “[Milk or water?]” “[More?]”
- **Getting dressed:** “[This shirt or that shirt?]” “[Is it cold?]”

- **Leaving the house:** “[Shoes?]” — “[Yes!]”
- **At the park:** “[Slide or swings?]”
- **Snack:** “[Apple or cracker?]”
- **Bath:** “[Is the water hot?]” — “[No!]”
- **Bedtime:** “[One book or two?]”

Each one takes a few seconds. Together they add up to dozens of real exchanges a day, every one with a real answer and a real result. Pick three to start, and add more as they become habit. In a home where the language is spoken by a relative, ask that relative to use the same small questions too; more people asking means more practice, and more voices for your child’s ears.

When to stop talking

This is the chapter where stopping talking matters most. After you ask, stop. Count to five in your head. If you’re tempted to rephrase, don’t — repeat the same question once, slowly, or give a hint. Two questions in a row, worded differently, make the job harder, not easier.

And when your child does answer, respond briefly. A short “[Yes! Blue!]” and a hand-over is better than a long speech of praise in English that breaks the spell.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: “What’s your answer — and can you ask me one back?”

Follow-ups: 1. “Which question was easiest? Ask me that one.” 2. “What could you say if you didn’t understand me?” 3. “What do you want to be able to ask Grandma (or a friend) in the new language?”

Wait: count to five in your head. In this chapter, waiting *is* the lesson. If you get to five, give a hint, not the answer.

If it goes quiet: a stuck silence here usually means the question was a rung too high, or your child is afraid of getting it wrong. Step down a rung: turn “[What’s this?]” into “[Is it a cat or a dog?]” Or offer the power phrase: “You can say ‘[again, please]’!” A child who uses a power phrase has answered.

Practice that actually builds learning

These cards are short on purpose. Conversation practice works best in small doses, many times a day.

In-home — TALK-01 Choice Questions

- **Time:** 5 minutes, plus moments all day
- **Materials:** pairs of real objects (cups, snacks, socks, toys)
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed.

- **The fun:** getting what you chose.
- **The skill:** answering “This or that?” with one word.
- **The crumb:** a tally of choices answered in the new language, dated.

How it goes. Hold up two objects your child knows the words for. Ask “[Apple or banana?]” once. Count to five in your head. Your child can point (that’s understanding) or say the word (that’s speaking). Both count. Give them what they chose. Do this at the table, while dressing, at the park. By the end of the week, try it without the objects in your hands: “[Park or library?]”

5–7: objects always in view; pointing is a full answer. **8–10:** add a third option, or ask about things not in the room. **Signed languages:** hold the objects apart so your child can point or sign; sign the question clearly with your hands free between.

In-home — TALK-08 Help Words

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** none
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed.
- **The fun:** making the grown-up slow down, repeat, and explain.
- **The skill:** asking for help in the language: again, slower, what does that mean.
- **The crumb:** a list of help phrases your child used this week.

How it goes. Teach the three power phrases in week one, one a day. Then set traps. Say a command too fast, mumble a word, use a word your child doesn’t know. Wait for the power phrase. When it comes, do exactly what was asked, with exaggerated delight: say it again, slowly, or explain with a picture or gesture. In French, a quick “again!” might be *encore !* (French, “again”);⁶⁷ your speaker or textbook will give you the polite full form.

5–7: start with “[again, please]” only, and practice it with a puppet that talks too fast. **8–10:** all three phrases, used with a visiting speaker or on a parent-run call. **Signed languages:** the same three phrases work in ASL; learn them from a Deaf teacher or a sign dictionary.

In-home — TALK-06 Daily Two-Line Talk

- **Time:** 5 minutes, at Hello
- **Materials:** an index card with the week’s lines (for you)
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed.
- **The fun:** a secret greeting the family shares.
- **The skill:** the same short exchange each day, slowly growing.
- **The crumb:** the exchange, written by the adult in the log each week.

How it goes. Week one: “[Hello! How are you?]” — “[Good!]” Say it every day at Hello. Once your child says their line without help, add one line. Week two might add “[And you?]” — “[Good, thanks!]” Week three: “[What’s the weather?]” — “[Sunny!]” Keep the old lines; just add on. By the end of a term, you may have a six-line exchange your child can do with anyone who speaks the language.

5–7: add a line every two weeks if that’s easier. **8–10:** your child writes the next line with you, from a checked model. **Ready 8:** a young child who’s ready can start the exchange.

In-home — TALK-04 All About Me Card

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a card, crayons
- **Safety and privacy:** first name only on the card; no address, school name, or photo.
- **The fun:** a card all about you.
- **The skill:** name, age, favorite, family — said, not read.
- **The crumb:** the card, first name only, in the portfolio.

How it goes. Draw a card together with four boxes: name, age, favorite (food, animal, or color), and family. In each box, your child draws a picture. Then practice the chunks: “[My name is...],” “[I am ... years old],” “[I like...],” “[I have a brother].” Your child says them while pointing at the pictures, not reading words. Later, the card comes out for any new speaker your child meets.

5–7: name and age only, at first. **8–10:** all four boxes, plus one question back: “[And you?]”

In-home — PLAY-04 Phone Call Pretend

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** two toy phones (or bananas, which are very funny phones)
- **Safety and privacy:** pretend only; no real calls.
- **The fun:** calling someone in another room.
- **The skill:** greeting, asking, and goodbye on a toy phone.
- **The crumb:** the call script, written in the log.

How it goes. Go into different rooms, or sit back to back. “Ring ring!” Your child answers. You say “[Hello!]” They say “[Hello!]” You ask one or two choice questions. Then “[Goodbye!]” Swap who calls. Phone calls are a great practice because there’s no pointing: your child has to listen and say. Keep the calls very short at first.

5–7: greeting, one question, goodbye. **8–10:** add a reason for calling: ordering a pizza, inviting a friend to play. **Signed languages:** use “video call” pretend, sitting face to face behind a picture frame or an empty box.

Out-of-home — OUT-06 Playdate with a Speaker

- **Time:** 45 minutes
- **Materials:** a few games your child already plays in the new language
- **Safety and privacy:** parents present; at a home or a park; first names only; follow Family safety basics.
- **The fun:** a new friend.
- **The skill:** supervised play with a child who speaks the language.
- **The crumb:** the games played, noted in the log.

How it goes. If you know a family who speaks the language, arrange a playdate. Agree with the other parents ahead of time that part of the playdate will be “language time” — maybe a round of Go Fish or a ball game with the counting in the language — and the rest is just play, in any language. There should be no pressure on the visiting child to teach, and no pressure on your child to perform. Afterward, ask your child one question: “[What did your friend say?]”

5–7: keep it short and active; ball games and chasing games are perfect. **8–10:** a board game your child knows well, with the turn talk in the language.

For the student

(Read this aloud at 5–7. At 8–10, read it together or let your child read it to you.)

You can say a lot with a little. If you get stuck, say “[again, please]” — that’s a real sentence too.

A conversation is when someone asks, and you answer, and they understand. You can answer with one word. You can answer by pointing. You can even ask them a question back.

Try this: Your grown-up holds up two things. “[This or that?]” Pick one and say its name in your language.

Try this too: Your grown-up will say something very fast. Say “[Slower, please!]” and see what happens.

Show me: Show your grown-up your All About Me card. Say what’s in each box: your name, your age, something you like.

One more thing: It’s okay to take your time. Your grown-up will wait. Good talkers wait too.

Fun challenge: Ask your grown-up a question in your language today. Can you surprise them?

If it isn’t clicking

The questions are too open. You ask “[What did you do today?]” and get silence. *Next move:* step down the ladder. Turn it into a choice: “[Park or library?]” Most first-year questions should be yes/no, choice, or “[What’s this?]” about something in view.

Not enough waiting. Your child starts to answer just as you jump in. *Next move:* count to five in your head, every time. Put a sticky note on the fridge that says “5” if it helps. Try asking, then looking at the object rather than your child, which takes off the pressure.

No one to talk to except you. Your child does the two-line talk with you but freezes with anyone else. *Next move:* that’s normal at first. Add one new person, gently: a relative on a parent-run call, a library storytime, a playdate (Chapter 7). Start with the two-line talk, which your child already knows.

When to slow down: if your child seems anxious about speaking, go back to pointing and doing for a week. Keep asking choice questions, and accept every pointed answer. Silence is often thinking, and never force a child to perform.

When to go ahead: if your child answers choice questions easily and has asked you one back, climb to “[What’s this?]” and “[Where is...?]” At 8–10, try TALK-03 Question Words Hunt.

When to find more help: a speaker, a class, or a tutor (on the parent’s account, with the parent in the room; see Chapter 7) can give your child new people to talk with. If you’re worried about your child’s speech in any language, talk to your pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist.

Tools, including AI

Conversation is the chapter where tools help least. A child’s first conversations should be with people. The Hour’s AI box has the rules: your child doesn’t talk to chatbots, and no tool listens to your child’s voice. If you use a tool yourself to check how a question is phrased, check it again with a dictionary or a speaker before you teach it. People are the main course; recordings are a second listen.

What “done enough” looks like

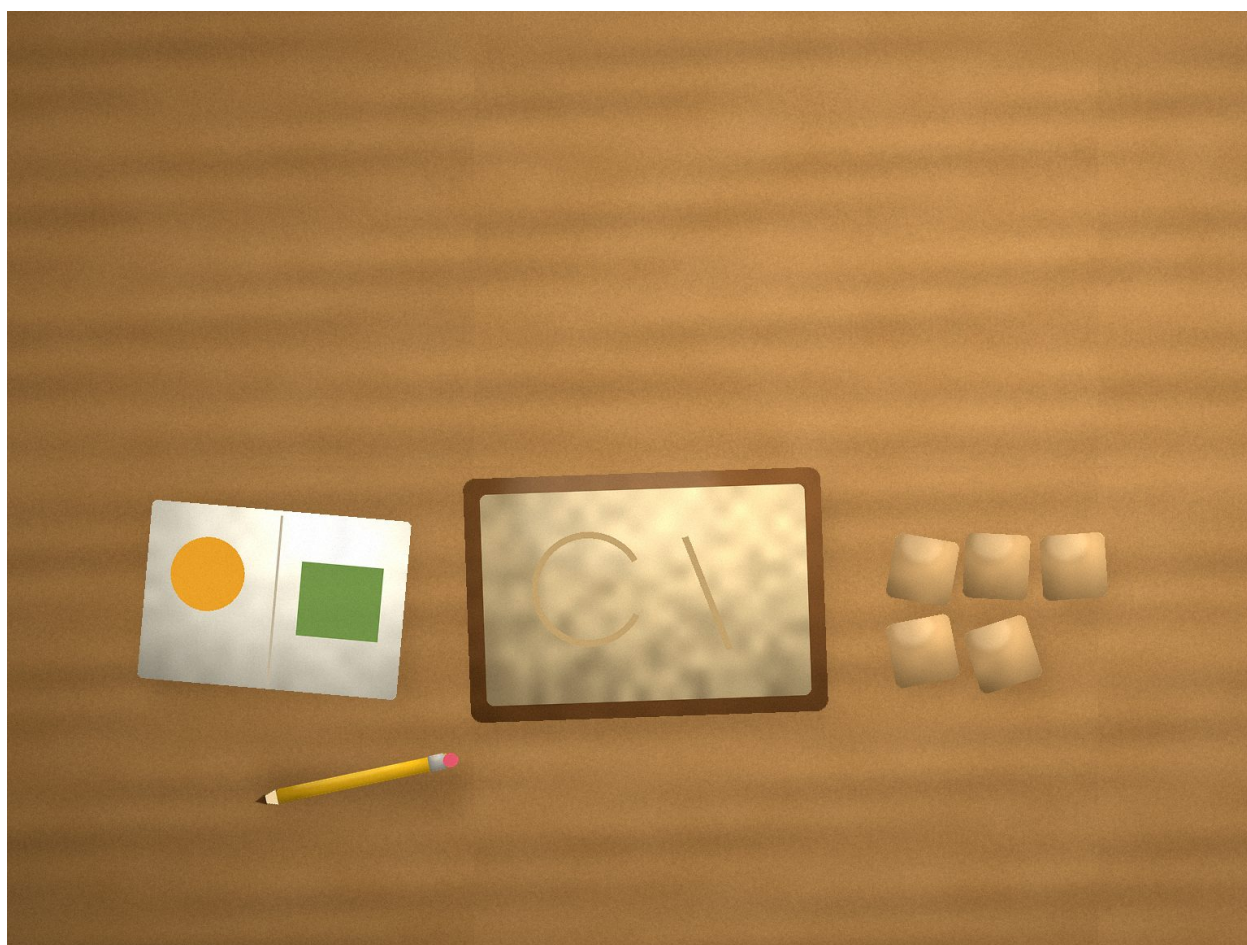
You’re ready to move on when, most days:

- ☐ Your child answers yes/no and choice questions in the new language (or by pointing and then saying).
- ☐ Your child uses at least one power phrase (“[again, please]”) without being reminded.
- ☐ Your child asks you one question.
- ☐ The Daily Two-Line Talk has grown to three or four lines.
- ☐ Your child holds a three-turn exchange on a familiar topic.

Short check: AS-04 Little Conversation. Once every few weeks, start a short, unrehearsed exchange on something familiar — the weather, a pet, a snack — without warning and without the card. Aim for three turns each. Mark it *seen*, *growing*, or *not yet*, and write one line about what happened, with the date. Never timed, never graded. Finish with the exit line: “Today I understood... I said (or signed)... Next time I want to...”

Chapter 6

Reading and Writing, When It's Time



Why this matters

Here is a picture. It is an illustration, not a real family.

A nine-year-old has been playing Go Fish in the new language for months. One afternoon, his mother lays out word cards next to the picture cards he knows so well. He stares at one, sounds it

out slowly, and then his face changes. “Oh! That says [cat]!” He already knew the word. Now he knows what it *looks* like. He reads the next five cards in a minute, and then asks for more.

That’s what print should feel like at this age: not a wall of strange marks to decode, but a delightful discovery that the words you already know can be written down. Print lets a child keep words, read a story on their own, and write a postcard to a grandparent who’ll treasure it. It’s a real step, and an exciting one.

It’s also a step that goes best *after* the words live in the ears and the mouth. That’s the third part of the book’s focus line: **Understand first; then try it; play before print; a little every day.** A child who reads a word they already understand gets meaning from the page right away. A child asked to read words they’ve never heard is decoding sounds with nothing to attach them to. One feels like magic. The other feels like work.

So this chapter is about timing as much as teaching. When is it time? What does print look like in your language, which may use the same letters as English, new letters, a script that runs right to left, characters, or (for ASL) no everyday written form at all? And how do you start, gently, so that reading and writing add to the joy rather than replace it?

There’s no deadline here. A child who starts reading in the new language at ten has lost nothing. A five-year-old who’s still learning to read English can keep enjoying songs, games, and stories by ear for as long as that takes, with picture labels on the fridge for company.

If you’re learning alongside, print can be a relief for you as well. Seeing a word written down often helps an adult learner remember it. That’s fine: use the written forms for your own notes and cheat sheets as much as you like. Just let your child meet each word by ear first, and let the page come to them a little later, as a happy surprise rather than a starting point.

This week, specifically. If your child is ready, you can make a set of word cards for words they already know and play a matching game with them. If they’re not ready yet, you can move their picture labels one small step toward print, and wait happily.

For the parent: understand it yourself

How it works: read what you can already say

The rule of this chapter fits in a sentence: **read what you can already say.** Reading in the new language starts with words your child already knows by ear — the commands from Chapter 3, the game cards from Chapter 4, the two-line talk from Chapter 5. When your child sees the printed word for something they know, the page connects to meaning straight away.

That’s why the first reading card in the bank is PRINT-02 Read What You Can Say. You match printed word cards to the picture cards your child already plays with. Then you play games with the word cards: Memory Match with words on one side and pictures on the other, Go Fish where you ask for the word you’re holding, a treasure hunt where the clue is a word card.

When to start

Here's the house default:

- **At 5–7, and for any child still learning to read English:** keep new-language print to **labels with pictures**. The picture carries the meaning; the word sits beside it, mostly for you. If your child asks about the letters, answer happily. Don't push.
- **When your child reads English confidently** (often somewhere around seven or eight, and every child is different), start gently with print in the new language, using only known words. That's the ready 8 move.
- **In a heritage family whose home script is part of daily life** — letters from relatives, signs in the family's shop, a religious text read aloud at home — a child may be curious much earlier. Follow that curiosity gently. The script is already part of their world.

Starting later is never a mistake. The words your child knows by ear are waiting for them, and they'll be easier to read for being well known.

The writing systems, as a family map

Languages are written in very different ways. You don't need to master all of these, only to know roughly where your language sits. This map is a set of examples, not instruction in any one language.

- **Alphabets close to English, with some new marks.** Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Italian, Tagalog, and many others use the Latin letters English uses, plus accents and a few extra marks. Spanish has ñ, as in *niño* (Spanish, “child”).⁶⁸ French has ç, as in *garçon* (French, “boy”).⁶⁹ German has umlauts, as in *Tür* (German, “door”).⁷⁰ The marks matter: they change the sound, and sometimes the meaning.
- **Alphabets with new letters.** Greek and Russian (Cyrillic) use letters that partly overlap with English but often stand for different sounds. Korean Hangul is an alphabet whose letters are grouped into syllable blocks: in 물 *mul* (Korean, “water”),⁷¹ three letters stack into one block.
- **Scripts read right to left, often without short vowels.** Arabic and Hebrew run right to left, and everyday writing often leaves out short vowels, which the reader supplies from knowing the word. In Arabic, باب *bāb* (Arabic, “door”)⁷² is read starting from the right. Letters also change shape depending on where they sit in a word. This is one more reason to read only known words at first: a child who knows the word can supply what the page leaves out.
- **Syllabaries.** In Japanese kana, each symbol stands for a syllable: ねこ *neko* (Japanese, “cat”)⁷³ is two symbols, *ne* and *ko*.
- **Characters.** Chinese characters (and Japanese kanji, which come from them) mostly stand for words or meaningful parts of words, not single sounds. Learners usually use a sound guide alongside; for Mandarin, that's pinyin. 猫 *māo* (Mandarin, “cat”)⁷⁴ is one character, and the mark over the *a* in the pinyin shows the tone.
- **Signed languages.** ASL and other signed languages have no everyday written form. Print for an ASL learner means English words, the manual alphabet for fingerspelling, and drawings or photos of signs from a sign dictionary. Reading in ASL, at this age, looks like reading picture-and-gloss cards and fingerspelling names and short words.

Wherever your language sits, the same rule holds: start with known words, and add new marks or letters a few at a time.

Copy from checked models only

Every letter, mark, or character your child copies should come from a **checked model**: a textbook page, a children's picture dictionary, a teacher's sheet, an official chart, or a speaker who writes the language. This matters more than it seems. A wrong accent, a mirrored Hangul letter, a Chinese character with a stroke missing — these are easy to make by guessing and hard to unlearn. Characters and accented letters produced by a computer tool can be wrong too, so a tool's output is never a model until a person or a book has checked it.

If you're learning alongside, you're copying from the same models your child is. That's fine. "Let's look it up" is the right answer to almost every "How do you write...?"

Print in heritage homes

If your family speaks the language at home, print can be a lovely bridge. Your child may already know hundreds of words by ear, which is exactly the head start this chapter asks for. Reading the home language opens up letters from grandparents, the family's recipes, songs written down, and the signs and books of a whole community.

A few things help. Honor the way your family speaks. Reading brings in the standard written forms, and those can differ from the way relatives talk at the table. Neither is better; they're both real. When a printed word looks different from the family word, say so cheerfully: "This is how the book writes it, and this is how Grandma says it." Ask relatives to write short notes or labels by hand. A card in a grandparent's handwriting is a model, a treasure, and a reason to read, all at once. A heritage school or community class (Chapter 7) is often the best place to learn a script well, especially one very different from English.

Sound and spelling

Some languages spell words very close to how they sound. Spanish and Italian are famous for it: once you know the letters, you can usually read a new word aloud. Others are less regular. French has many silent letters, and English, as your child may have noticed, is full of surprises. At 8–10, PRINT-08 Sound-Spelling Pairs is a little game of matching sounds to the way your language writes them: in Spanish, the ñ sound; in French, the way certain letter groups make one sound. Keep it a game, and keep it to known words.

An everyday picture and a precise picture

The everyday picture. Think of how a child learns to read their own name. They hear it a thousand times before they ever see it. Then one day they see it on a birthday card, on a cubby, on a drawing, and they *know* it's theirs. Nobody had to teach them to decode it; they matched a shape to a word they already owned. That's the feeling you're after with every new-language word.

The precise picture. When reading a known word goes well:

1. **The word is already known by ear.** Your child has heard and used it many times.
2. **The word appears beside its picture.** The match is made with meaning attached.
3. **The child sees the word without the picture** and supplies the sound and meaning from memory.
4. **The child notices the parts** — a letter that's the same as English, a new mark, a character's shape.
5. **The child uses the word** in a game, a label, a postcard.

New words come into print only after they've come in through the ears.

The map teachers use

The World-Readiness Standards include a goal about comparing languages:

“Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.”⁷⁵

At this age, that sounds like a child noticing, “This one goes the other way!” or “That letter has a hat!” Those observations are the beginnings of understanding how languages work. Welcome every one.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

- **The child reads the new word with English sounds.** Print came before the sound was secure. Go back to the spoken word: say it, then show the card, then say it together. Match print to the known spoken word first.
- **The child mirror-writes a new script.** Reversed letters are normal at this age in any script. Trace from a checked model (PRINT-04 Script Tracing) and keep sessions short.
- **The child guesses whole words from the first letter.** They see the first letter and shout the first word that starts with it. Cover the word and uncover it slowly, from the start of the word, so they look at more of it.
- **The child leaves off accents or marks.** Point to the mark in the model and say what it does to the sound. Keep it light; marks come with practice.
- **The child is frustrated by copying.** Too much copying, too soon. Shorten it to one or two words, and make the copying for a reason: a label, a card for Grandma.

Your five-minute warm-up

1. Learn to say **the alphabet or the first ten symbols** of your language's writing system (or, for ASL, the manual alphabet for your child's first name), and check them with a recording or a speaker.
2. Find **one checked model**: a children's picture dictionary from the library, a textbook page, or an official chart.
3. Make **ten word cards** for words your child already knows well, copied carefully from the model.

4. Decide whether this is a print week or a not-yet week. Both are fine.

How to teach it this week

Where it fits in the Hour

Print fits mainly into **Play It Out**, as a game, and occasionally into **Your Turn**, when your child reads or writes something themselves. It shouldn't take over the Hour. A good rule of thumb: once print begins, PRINT-02 Read What You Can Say happens every week, for a few minutes, and the rest of the Hour stays songs, games, and talk.

A sample week for a child who's ready:

- **Monday:** Play It Out is Memory Match with word cards and picture cards.
- **Tuesday:** Play It Out is a Find It Hunt with word cards instead of spoken words.
- **Wednesday:** Your Turn is PRINT-05 Fingerspell Your Name, or writing your name in the language's alphabet.
- **Thursday:** PRINT-04 Script Tracing, five minutes only, from a checked model.
- **Friday:** read a very easy book together after hearing it (PRINT-07 Read-Along Book), or add a word to the picture dictionary (LABEL-03).

Labels around the house move one step: from picture-only to picture-plus-word.

Moving labels toward print, step by step

The labels from Chapter 3 make an easy bridge into reading, whatever your child's age:

1. **Picture only.** A drawing on the sticky note; the word is for you, small, in the corner.
2. **Picture and word.** The word gets bigger and sits right beside the picture. You point to it as you say it.
3. **Word, picture underneath.** Fold the bottom of the note up so the picture is hidden. Your child reads the word, then lifts the flap to check.
4. **Word only.** For a few well-known labels, the picture goes. Your child reads them as they pass.

Move one or two labels a step at a time, never the whole house at once. A child who's not reading English yet can stay at step one or two for as long as they like.

The exact words, through the five steps

- **Hello:** your Hello song, then the two-line talk, with the lines on a card your child can see.
- **Listen and Do:** commands as usual, then hold up a word card instead of saying the command: "[Jump]!" written. Your child reads it and does it.
- **Play It Out:** "[What does this say?]" (*Point to a word card. Count to five in your head.*) If stuck, hint: show the picture card. Model: say it together. Hand it back: another card, very soon.
- **Your Turn:** "[Can you write your name?]" or "[Which card is the cat?]"

- **Goodbye and Carry:** your Goodbye song; today's carry phrase is a word your child can find written somewhere in the house today.

Your child's first try

The first try is reading a word they already know, matched to its picture. One word. One match. Celebrate it.

At 5–7, if your child isn't reading English confidently yet, the first try might be finding a picture label on the fridge and "reading" it from the picture. That counts as a beginning.

How to help less over time

1. **First week:** word cards always sit beside their picture cards. Your child matches.
2. **Second week:** word cards appear alone. If your child is stuck, show the picture.
3. **Third week:** word cards appear in games without pictures. Your child reads, and you check.
4. **Later:** your child copies words from the cards onto labels (PRINT-03 Label Writing), then writes a few from memory, then writes a three-line postcard with a model (PRINT-06 Postcard Home).

At every step, when your child is stuck: **ask** → **wait** → **hint** → **model** → **hand it back**.

When to stop talking

Explaining spelling rules to a seven-year-old in English is a long way from playing a game in the new language. Keep explanations to one sentence: "This mark makes it go up." Then let your child look, play, and read. If you find yourself giving a lecture about the alphabet, stop, and play Memory Match instead.

Stop the print part of the Hour while your child still wants more. Five minutes of happy reading is a great session.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: "What does this say — and how did you work it out?"

Follow-ups: 1. "Which part of the word helped you? Show me." 2. "Is anything in this word different from English?" 3. "What word do you want to learn to write next?"

Wait: count to five in your head. Reading takes time, and a child working out a word may move their lips silently. Let them finish before you help.

If it goes quiet: a stuck silence here usually means the word isn't known well enough by ear, or the script is still too new. Show the picture. Say the word together. If it happens with several words, go back to playing those words by ear for a week before trying print again.

Practice that actually builds learning

Keep print practice short and playful, and always built on words your child knows by ear.

In-home — PRINT-02 Read What You Can Say

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** picture cards your child knows; matching word cards copied from a checked model
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed.
- **The fun:** discovering you can read words in a new language.
- **The skill:** matching printed words to words already known by ear.
- **The crumb:** a list of words matched, dated.

How it goes. Lay out four picture cards. Say each one together. Then show a word card and ask, “[What does this say?]” Your child matches it to its picture. Do all four. Then mix them up and play again. Once matching is easy, play Memory Match with word cards and picture cards together, or a Find It Hunt where you hold up a word card and your child runs to the object.

5–7: if your child is reading English confidently, four words at a time; otherwise, picture labels only. **8–10:** eight to twelve words; your child reads them aloud and uses them in a game. **Ready 8:** a younger confident reader can play with four to six words.

In-home — PRINT-04 Script Tracing

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a tracing sheet made from a checked model (a textbook page, a teacher’s sheet, or an official chart); a pencil; tracing paper if you have it
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed.
- **The fun:** making marks that look like the real thing.
- **The skill:** tracing a new alphabet, characters, or syllable blocks from a checked model.
- **The crumb:** the tracing sheet, dated, in the portfolio.

How it goes. Choose two or three letters, symbols, or characters from words your child already knows. Trace them from the model, slowly, following the order and direction the model shows. Then copy them next to the model. Then, another day, try writing them from memory and check against the model. Short sessions, a few times a week, work far better than one long one. Keep every model sheet; a tool-made sheet doesn’t count as a model until a book or a person has checked it.

5–7: tracing only, two symbols, as a drawing game. **8–10:** trace, then copy, then write from memory; build up to a short known word. **Signed languages:** trace the shapes of fingerspelled letters from a sign dictionary’s drawings; for ASL, this is a drawing exercise, since the language itself has no everyday written form.

In-home — PRINT-05 Fingerspell Your Name

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** a chart of the language's alphabet or the manual alphabet, from a checked source
- **Safety and privacy:** first names only.
- **The fun:** your own name in a new way.
- **The skill:** spelling your name in the language's alphabet or a signed alphabet.
- **The crumb:** a note of the name practiced.

How it goes. For a spoken language with its own script, write your child's name the way speakers would — ask a speaker or a teacher how, since names can be written in more than one way. Your child copies it and decorates it. For ASL, learn the fingerspelled letters of your child's first name from a sign dictionary, and practice together until it's smooth. Then spell family members' names, the pet's name, and a favorite food.

5–7: just the first name, a few times a week. **8–10:** family names and three short words.

In-home — STORY-07 Make a Mini-Book

- **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Materials:** one sheet of paper folded into a four-page booklet; crayons; a checked model for any words
- **Safety and privacy:** first names only in the book.
- **The fun:** making your own book.
- **The skill:** folding and writing a four-page story.
- **The crumb:** the mini-book, in the portfolio.

How it goes. Fold a sheet into four pages. Your child draws a short story — four pictures, one per page, like the story cards in Chapter 4. Under each picture, they write one word or a short chunk in the new language, copied from a checked model or from their word cards. Read it together, then read it to someone else. This is an 8–10 card; a younger child who's ready can make one with picture labels only.

8–10: one word or a short phrase per page; your child reads it aloud. **Ready 8:** a younger child draws the pages and copies one word per page.

In-home — PRINT-06 Postcard Home

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** a postcard or a folded card; colored pencils; a checked model for the words
- **Safety and privacy:** send only to people your family knows; first names only; no home address on anything shared beyond the envelope.
- **The fun:** real mail, to a real person, in the new language.
- **The skill:** writing a three-line postcard to a relative or pen friend.
- **The crumb:** a copy or photo of the postcard (no faces) in the portfolio.

How it goes. Choose someone who'll be delighted: a grandparent, an aunt, a family friend who speaks the language. Together, write three short lines from a model: a greeting ("Hello,

Grandma!]), one thing about your child (“[I like cats.]”), and a goodbye (“[Love, Sam]”). Your child copies the lines, draws a picture on the front, and mails it. When an answer comes, read it together. It may be the most motivating thing your child reads all year.

8–10: three lines, copied from a model, with one line your child chooses. **Ready 8:** a younger reader copies a greeting and signs their name.

Out-of-home — OUT-04 Signs Around Town

- **Time:** 20 minutes, during an outing
- **Materials:** a notebook or the back of a shopping list
- **Safety and privacy:** stay together; write the signs down rather than photographing people; no photos of other children.
- **The fun:** finding your language out in the world.
- **The skill:** spotting public signs in the language.
- **The crumb:** a list of signs found (no photos of people).

How it goes. Many towns have signs in more than one language: in a library, at a market, on a restaurant’s menu, at a community center, on food packages. Go looking. When your child finds one, they read any word they know and copy one new word into the notebook. Check new words with a dictionary or a speaker at home before adding them to the card deck. At 8–10, try PRINT-01 Letter or Symbol Detective along the way: spot letters, marks, or characters that differ from English.

5–7: finding the script, and reading by picture. **8–10:** reading known words and copying one new word.

For the student

(Read this aloud at 5–7. At 8–10, read it together or let your child read it to you.)

Reading a new language is like a secret code — but you already know the words. You’re just learning how they look.

Some languages use letters like English. Some have new marks on top of the letters. Some go from right to left. Some use characters, where one shape can be a whole word. And sign languages don’t have their own everyday writing at all. Isn’t that interesting?

Try this: Your grown-up will show you a word card. It’s a word you already know! Can you find its picture?

Try this too: Trace a letter or symbol from your language. Go slowly, the way the model shows.

Show me: Show your grown-up your name, written or fingerspelled in your language.

One more thing: If a word looks hard, say it out loud first. Then look at it again. Knowing the word helps you read it.

Fun challenge: Next time you're out, look for a sign in your language. Can you read one word? Write it down and bring it home.

If it isn't clicking

Print started before the words were known by ear. Your child stares at word cards and can't connect them to anything. *Next move:* go back to the spoken words for a week or two, with games from Chapters 3 and 4, and bring back only the words your child knows best.

Too much copying. Your child groans at writing time. *Next move:* cut copying to one or two words, and always for a reason: a label, a postcard, a mini-book. Try PRINT-05 Fingerspell Your Name or PRINT-01 Letter or Symbol Detective for a change.

English reading is still shaky. Your child is working hard to read English and the new script is one thing too many. *Next move:* wait. That's fine. Keep picture labels and keep playing by ear. The new script will be there when your child is ready.

When to slow down: if your child seems frustrated or ashamed, drop print for a few weeks and keep the Hour full of songs, games, and talk.

When to go ahead: if your child reads all the known word cards and wants more, add new words (heard first, then read), try PRINT-07 Read-Along Book, and write a three-line postcard home (PRINT-06).

When to find more help: for a script very different from English, a teacher, a heritage school, or a speaker who writes the language can show stroke order and letter shapes far better than a book. A Deaf teacher is the best guide for fingerspelling.

Tools, including AI

The Hour's AI box has the rules. For print, one point matters most: characters, accented letters, and scripts produced by a computer tool can be wrong, so anything a tool makes is **made by a tool** and checked against a book, an official chart, or a speaker before your child copies it. A tool-made worksheet is never a model until it's been checked, and your child's own writing is always their own. Recordings can help you check how a word sounds before you read it together, as a second listen.

What “done enough” looks like

For children at 8–10, or younger children who are ready readers:

- ☐ Your child reads 20–30 known words in the new language.
- ☐ Your child writes a few labels from a model.
- ☐ Your child writes a three-line postcard with a model (PRINT-06).
- ☐ Your child can say one way the new language's writing differs from English.

For children still learning to read English:

- ☐ Picture labels are up, and your child “reads” them from the pictures.
- ☐ Your child has noticed the new script and talked about it.
- ☐ Songs, games, and talk are going strong. That’s done enough.

Short check: AS-01 Point and Show. Once every few weeks, lay out ten picture cards for known words and hold up ten matching word cards, one at a time. Your child points to the matching picture. (For a child not yet reading, say the words instead.) Mark each *seen*, *growing*, or *not yet*, and write the date and the tally. Never timed, never graded. Finish with the exit line: “Today I understood... I said (or signed)... Next time I want to...”

Chapter 7

Your Family's Languages: Learning Alongside, Heritage Homes, and the World Outside Your Door



Why this matters

Languages live in people. A word on a card is a start. The same word said by a grandmother at the stove, a librarian at storytime, or a new friend on a playground is a living thing, and your child can

feel the difference. The more people your child hears and talks with, the more real the language becomes, and the more reasons your child finds to keep going.

This chapter is about those people. Some families reading it are learning a language none of the grown-ups grew up with. Some families already speak two or three languages at home and want to keep one of them strong. Many are somewhere in between: a grandfather who spoke it as a boy, a parent who studied it years ago, a neighbor who would be glad to help. Wherever your family stands, the work of this chapter is the same. Find the people. Make it easy and safe to spend time with them. Let your child discover that the new language is a way into someone's world.

You are not alone in this. More than 20% of children in the United States use a language besides spoken English at home.¹⁹ That means the language your family is learning, or keeping, is probably spoken somewhere near you, by someone who would be pleased to hear a child try it.

Here is a picture. It is an illustration, not a real family. Imagine a family where the mother is learning Tagalog alongside her seven-year-old because the child's grandparents speak it. Most days, the Language Hour is the two of them at the kitchen table with a song and a picture book. Once a week, the grandmother joins by a parent-run video call, and the child says *salamat* (Tagalog, "thank you")²⁰ when the grandmother sings. That small word, said to that one person, does more for the child's sense of the language than a week of cards. Every piece of it is within reach for most homes.

This chapter also holds the book's fullest guidance on online tutors and video calls. Live people on a screen can be wonderful for a language. They also call for clear family rules. You'll find those rules here, written so you can set them up once and stop worrying about them.

For the parent: understand it yourself

The plain picture

Think of a language the way you'd think of a garden. You can plant seeds at home, water them a little every day, and see real growth. But a garden also needs weather: sun, rain, the wider world. People are the weather. Your daily Language Hour plants and waters. Relatives, speakers in your community, a class, a friend's family: they bring the sun.

Here is the more precise picture. Children build a language from what they hear and understand, and they keep a language when they have real reasons and real people to use it with. Researchers who study bilingual children find that growth in each language tracks how much of that language a child hears.⁷ Chances to use the language with other people, including other children, help a family keep a home language going.²⁶ And a strict household rule, such as "one parent, one language," turns out to be neither necessary nor sufficient by itself; what matters more is how much the language is actually used at home.⁷⁶ The lesson for any family is generous: more of the language, from more people, in more of daily life.

The ACTFL World-Readiness Standards name this goal directly. Learners "use the language both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized

world.”⁷⁷ For a homeschool, “the classroom” is your kitchen table. “Beyond” is the library, the market, the festival, the family call.

Three family stories

Read the one that sounds like your home first, then skim the others. Most families find a little of themselves in more than one.

Learning alongside

Here is a picture. It is an illustration, not a real family. Imagine a father who chose French with his eight-year-old because the child loved a picture book set in Paris. The father took two years of French in high school and remembers almost nothing. He worried that he’d teach his daughter mistakes.

Here is what learning alongside looks like for him, and what it can look like for you.

Be the lead learner, not the expert. You are showing your child how a person learns. You try, you check, you laugh, you try again. “Let’s find out together” is one of the best sentences in this book.

Let your child correct you. The FAM-01 Learning Alongside card below turns this into a game. You learn a phrase first. Once, on purpose, you say it a little wrong. Your child catches it and fixes it. Then both of you use it all day. Children love catching grown-ups. They also remember what they correct.

Check before you teach. Before you bring a new word to the Hour, play a recording of a human speaker saying it, from a dictionary or a teacher’s audio. Chapter 8 walks through the TECH-01 Parent Pronunciation Check. It takes five minutes and saves a month of practicing something odd.

Bring in models. You are one voice. Your child needs several. A neighbor who speaks the language, a library storytime, a class, a relative on a call, and recordings as a second listen. When your child hears *merci* (French, “thank you”)⁴³ from you, from a song, and from a librarian, the word stops belonging to any one accent and starts belonging to the language.

Your accent is fine. It won’t be perfect, and it doesn’t need to be. Children hear many voices and sort them out. What matters more is that your child hears speakers of the language often, and that the Hour feels safe enough to try.

Many parents are learning too. That is not a weakness in the plan. It is the plan working: a grown-up who keeps learning in front of a child is teaching something larger than vocabulary.

Heritage and bilingual homes

A heritage language is a language from the family’s background, spoken at home or by relatives. Here is a picture. It is an illustration, not a real family. Imagine a family where both parents grew up speaking Korean, the children understand it well, and lately the six-year-old answers every Korean question in English. The parents feel a pang each time. They wonder whether they waited too long, or spoke too much English, or whether they should insist.

If this is your home, start here: your family is already doing something valuable, and the home language can stay strong.

English will come. Children growing up in the United States are surrounded by English. Keeping the home language strong won't hold your child back in English. Children who learn two languages are not confused or delayed by them, and mixing two languages in one sentence is normal.¹⁹

The home language needs protecting. Research on young children who entered English-only settings early found many families losing the home language as English took over.²⁷ The fix is not pressure. It's more: more people, more fun, more daily life in the home language.

More people beats a stricter rule. You don't need a perfect system. If one parent speaks Korean and one speaks English, wonderful. If both parents mix, also fine. What helps most is more of the home language from more people, including other children.^{26,5}

Honor how your family talks. The way your grandmother says it is real language. Regional ways of speaking, family words, and mixing are part of your child's inheritance. Standard forms come along naturally with reading, books, and school-style lessons later. There's no need to rank the way your family speaks against any other way.

Grandparents are teachers. An elder who calls your child by a family name, sings an old song, or explains a family object is giving your child something no class can. *Halmeoni* (할머니, Korean, "grandmother")⁷⁸ telling a story is a lesson. The FAM-02 Grandparent Interview, FAM-04 Heritage Object Story, and SONG-04 Family Song from Home cards all build on this.

The Hour is a bonus. In a heritage home, daily life in the home language is the main course. The Language Hour adds play, songs, and later print. If the Hour gets squeezed out on a busy day but dinner was in Korean, the language still had a good day.

The world outside your door

Here is a picture. It is an illustration, not a real family. Imagine a family learning Arabic in a town where they don't yet know any Arabic speakers. They start at the library. The librarian finds two bilingual picture books and mentions a community center that runs a weekend class. At a spring festival, the family hears music and tries one phrase at a food stall: *shukran* (شكراً, Arabic, "thank you").⁴⁶ The man behind the table smiles and answers. The seven-year-old talks about it for a week.

Here are places most communities offer, in rough order of ease:

- **Your public library.** Bilingual storytimes, world-language picture books, and often language programs included with a library card. Many libraries license a language-learning app that's free with a card; ask at your branch.⁷⁹ Chapter 10 has more.
- **Festivals and celebrations.** Cultural festivals, parades, and community celebrations are often open to visitors and full of music, food, and greetings.
- **Restaurants and markets.** A greeting and one polite request, said by a child, is usually received warmly.
- **Places of worship and cultural centers.** Many welcome visitors to events, concerts, and classes. Ask first, follow their customs, and go as a guest.

- **Heritage-language schools.** Many communities run weekend programs for children. Some welcome learners from outside the heritage community; ask.
- **Co-ops and homeschool groups.** A language circle with two or three families can share a speaker, a class, or a monthly game day.
- **Deaf events and ASL classes.** If your family is learning American Sign Language, look for classes taught by Deaf instructors and for community events that welcome learners. ASL is a full language with its own culture, and learning from Deaf adults is the best path.⁸⁰
- **Playdates with speakers.** A friend's family who speaks the language can be the warmest model of all (OUT-06, Chapter 5).

You don't need all of these. One reliable contact a month is a strong start.

Online tutors and video calls

Live people on a screen can bring a language into homes far from any speaker. A grandparent across the country, a cousin overseas, a tutor who speaks the language natively: these can be real gifts. Because the child is young and the screen opens a door into your home, this is also the one place in the chapter where the rules come first.

Platform rules differ, and they change. Some tutoring platforms ask a parent to create and manage the child's account and recommend that a grown-up stay close during lessons. Others don't allow children under 13 at all.⁸¹ Check the current terms of any platform before you sign up, and look again from time to time.

The family default for ages 5–10. The family rule for this book is simple and the same for every family:

- **The parent's account.** You create it, you hold the password, you book and pay.
- **The parent in the room for every live session.** Not nearby. In the room, for the whole session, at every age from 5 to 10.
- **The device in a common room.** The kitchen table or the living room, never a bedroom.
- **No private chat.** Messages go to and from your account only. The tutor and child don't trade messages, links, or contact details.
- **First names only.** No last names, no school names, no addresses, no schedules, no photos of the child or the house sent to anyone.
- **Recording only by your choice.** If you want a recording, you make it, and you keep it privately in two places. It never goes on a shared computer or into an AI tool.
- **Stop, tell, close.** If anything feels off, your child stops, tells you, and you close the call. You can end any call at any moment, for any reason, without explaining.

These are the Family safety basics from the Language Hour, applied to live calls. A good tutor welcomes a parent in the room and is glad to hear the family's rules ahead of time. If a tutor seems uneasy about a parent being present, that is your answer, and you can kindly move on.

Family calls get the same frame, lighter. A call with Grandma or a known family friend still runs on your account, on a device in a common room, with you close by. You don't need to treat Grandma like a stranger. You just keep the call where you can hear it and help.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

These are things children say about the people side of a language. None of them is a problem. Each is a doorway.

1. **“Grandma talks too fast.”** She probably does, for a beginner. Teach your child the Help Words from Chapter 5: “Again, please,” “Slower, please,” and “What does ____ mean?” in your language. Then tell Grandma about them, so she’s ready. A child who can steer a conversation stops being afraid of it.
2. **“Why do I have to speak it? Everybody speaks English.”** This is a values question, not a vocabulary question. Skip the lecture. Talk about people: “Your grandfather dreams in this language. When you speak it, you’re talking to the part of him that grew up far away.” Or, for a new language: “There are kids your age who play in this language. Wouldn’t it be fun to say hello?”
3. **Your child answers a heritage-language speaker in English.** This is very common. Keep speaking the home language warmly. Don’t force a reply in it, and don’t stop the conversation to demand one. Understanding is real progress; speaking often follows when the pressure is low and the reasons are high.
4. **“I’m shy. You say it.”** Fair. Let your child watch you say it first. Next time, prepare one phrase together, practice it at home, and let your child decide when to use it.
5. **“That lady said it differently.”** Wonderful noticing. Many languages have more than one way to say a thing, across regions and families. “She says it her way. Grandma says it her way. Both are real.”

A 5-minute parent warm-up

Take a scrap of paper and list three people or places where your child could hear the language this month. A relative, a library program, a restaurant, a festival listing, a friend. Circle the easiest one. Put it on the calendar. That’s the warm-up.

How to teach it this week

The session shape inside the Hour

The people in this chapter mostly arrive outside the Hour or at its edges. You don’t need a new routine. You need two small habits:

- **One family or friend call a week,** parent-run, about ten to fifteen minutes. The child brings one thing to say: a greeting, a song, a carry phrase.
- **One community contact a month.** A storytime, a festival, a class, a market visit, a playdate.

Inside the Hour itself, use Hello and Your Turn to prepare for those moments. On call day, Hello can be “Who are we calling today?” and Your Turn can be practicing the one thing your child will say.

Exact words to say

Before a call or outing, try this:

“Today we’re going to see [person or place]. They speak [your language]. What would you like to say to them? Let’s practice it three times.”

Rotate the example. One week it might be *gracias* (Spanish, “thank you”),⁸² the next *xièxie* (谢谢, Mandarin Chinese, “thank you”),⁴⁴ the next a greeting your family uses.

After the call or outing:

“What did you hear? Did you understand anything? What did you say? Next time, what do you want to say?”

That last line is the exit line from the Hour in a new setting: “Today I understood... I said (or signed)... Next time I want to...”

First try for the child

The first try is small. Your child says one word or phrase to one person. A greeting at the start of a call. *Thank you* at a market stall. A wave and a signed hello at a Deaf community event, learned from the class teacher first. If the moment passes and your child doesn’t say it, that’s fine. Your child heard you say it, saw the person respond, and learned that the phrase works.

How to fade help

- **Week 1:** You say the phrase; your child echoes it.
- **Week 2:** Your child says it with you.
- **Week 3:** Your child says it alone; you stand close.
- **Later:** Your child chooses what to say.

At each step, if your child freezes, use the rescue order: **ask** → **wait** → **hint** → **model** → **hand it back**. Ask the question. Count to five in your head. Give the first sound as a hint. Say the whole phrase. Then hand it back: “Your turn.”

When to stop talking

When your child is talking with someone else, step back. You don’t need to translate, correct, or narrate. If a grandparent and grandchild are laughing over a word, your job is done. Stay in the room, enjoy it, and keep quiet.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: “Who speaks this language — and what would you like to say to them?”

Follow-ups: 1. “Where could we hear it this month?” 2. “What’s one thing you’d like to tell [Grandpa / the storytime reader / your friend]?” 3. “What would you do if they talked too fast?”

Wait: count to five in your head. Your child may be picturing the person. Let them.

If it goes quiet: A stuck silence here usually means your child can't picture a real person yet, or feels shy about one. Make it concrete: show a photo of the relative, or name the storytime. Offer two choices: "Would you like to say hello or thank you?" Then let it rest. You can come back to the question tomorrow.

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — FAM-01 Learning Alongside

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a phrase you've checked with a human recording or a speaker
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed at home; this is a family game
- **The fun:** catching the grown-up in a mistake
- **The skill:** the parent learns a phrase first and lets the child correct them
- **The crumb:** the phrase both learned, written on the Hour log

How it goes. Learn one useful phrase before the Hour. Check it with a recording of a human speaker. In the Hour, say it correctly twice. Then, once, say it a little wrong on purpose: a wrong word, a silly sound, the wrong order. Look puzzled. Wait for your child to catch it. When they do, thank them and say it right together. Then both of you use the phrase as many times as you can before bed.

5–7: Make the mistake big and funny. "Thank you, banana!" Your child gets to be the teacher.

8–10: Make the mistake smaller, a sound or a word ending. Your child explains the fix. **Ready 8:** A younger child who catches small mistakes easily can try the 8–10 version.

In-home — FAM-02 Grandparent Interview

- **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Materials:** three prepared questions; paper or a family book; a phone or computer for a call if needed
- **Safety and privacy:** in person, or a parent-run call on your account in a common room; first names only in the family book
- **The fun:** hearing a story no one else knows
- **The skill:** asking an elder three questions, in person or on a parent-run call
- **The crumb:** the answers, written with first names only

How it goes. With your child, choose three questions. Keep them simple and warm: "What did you play when you were little?" "What was your favorite food?" "What song did your mother sing?" Ask the speaker ahead of time whether they'd enjoy this. Practice the questions in your language if you can, or in English with one word in the new language. During the interview, your child asks; the elder answers; you help write down a few words. Afterward, write the answers in a family book. Add a drawing.

5–7: One question in the new language, two in English. Your child draws the answer. **8–10:** All three questions in the new language if possible. Your child writes one line from each answer. **Signed languages:** If a Deaf family member or friend joins, follow their lead on how they'd like to be recorded in the book. Use a video call only on your account, with you in the room.

In-home — FAM-05 Family Recipe

- **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Materials:** a simple family or cultural recipe; ingredients; a recipe card
- **Safety and privacy:** kitchen safety as usual; the grown-up handles knives and heat
- **The fun:** you eat the lesson
- **The skill:** cooking a family or cultural recipe in the language
- **The crumb:** a recipe card with the food words your child used

How it goes. Pick something easy: a snack, a drink, a simple bread, a family favorite. Before you cook, choose five words to use the whole time: the main ingredients, and actions like *stir*, *pour*, *more*. Cook together. Say each word every time you use it. Your child hands you the ingredient you name. At the end, make a recipe card with pictures and the words.

5–7: Pictures on the card; your child names the foods out loud. **8–10:** Words on the card if your child is reading in the new language; your child gives you the cooking commands. **Ready 8:** A younger child who loves giving commands can lead the stirring and pouring.

In-home — FAM-04 Heritage Object Story

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** one family object: a cup, a scarf, a photo, a tool, a toy
- **Safety and privacy:** keep any photo of the object cropped to the object
- **The fun:** a treasure with a story
- **The skill:** talking about a family object in the home language
- **The crumb:** the object's name and three words about it

How it goes. Bring out one object with a family story. Name it in the home language. Tell the story in a few sentences. Say three words about the object: its color, who owned it, where it came from. Ask your child to hold it and say one of the words back. If a grandparent knows the story better, this is a perfect call topic.

5–7: One word, held and said back. **8–10:** Three words and one sentence: "This is Grandma's cup."

In-home — TECH-05 Tutor Session, Parent in the Room

- **Time:** 25 minutes
- **Materials:** a device in a common room; a tutor you've chosen and spoken with first
- **Safety and privacy:** parent's account; parent in the room for the whole session; no private chat; first names only; no photos or personal details; recording only by your choice and kept privately; Stop, tell, close

- **The fun:** a new voice who speaks the language well
- **The skill:** a live lesson on the parent's account with the parent present
- **The crumb:** session notes in the Hour log

How it goes. Before the first lesson, talk with the tutor yourself. Share the family rules: you'll be in the room; messages come to you; first names only; no photos. Ask the tutor to keep lessons playful: songs, pictures, commands, a puppet. Set up the device in the kitchen or living room. Sit where you can see the screen and your child. During the lesson, stay quiet and present. Afterward, write two lines in the Hour log: what the tutor did, and one word or phrase your child used.

5–7: Keep sessions short; fifteen minutes may be plenty. A tutor who uses props and movement is a good fit. **8–10:** Up to twenty-five minutes. Your child can prepare one question for the tutor. **Signed languages:** Look for Deaf tutors where you can. The same rules apply, and good lighting matters more.

Out-of-home — OUT-02 Cultural Festival Visit

- **Time:** 60 minutes
- **Materials:** a festival listing; a small notebook
- **Safety and privacy:** parent present; ask before photographing people or performances; no photos of other children
- **The fun:** music, food, and color
- **The skill:** attending a festival, parade, or community celebration
- **The crumb:** three things your child noticed

How it goes. Find a festival or community celebration connected to your language. Before you go, practice one greeting and *thank you*. At the festival, listen for the language. Point out words you know. Let your child try one phrase with a vendor or performer if they want to. Afterward, write or draw three things your child noticed.

5–7: Three drawings. One phrase heard. **8–10:** Three written notes. One phrase said.

Out-of-home — OUT-07 Community Class or Storytime

- **Time:** 45 minutes
- **Materials:** a library, community, or heritage-school class listing
- **Safety and privacy:** parent present or nearby as the setting requires; follow the program's rules
- **The fun:** other children learning too
- **The skill:** a library, community, or heritage-school class, parent present or nearby
- **The crumb:** the class name on the log

How it goes. Look for a bilingual storytime at your library, a weekend heritage class, or a community class for children. Visit once before committing. Afterward, bring one song or phrase from the class into your Hour that week. If the class has a song, it becomes your Hello or Goodbye song for a while.

5–7: A storytime is often a perfect first class: short, musical, and gentle. **8–10:** A weekly class can give your child peers in the language, which is one of the strongest reasons to keep going.

For the student

(Read aloud at 5–7. At 8–10, your child can read it or share it with you.)

Lots of people speak this language. When you talk with them, you're part of their world, and they're part of yours.

Some of those people might be in your family. Some might be at the library, at a festival, or in a class. Some might be friends you haven't met yet.

Here is a word to try: [*thank you* in your language]. Say it to someone today.

Try this: Say [*hello* in your language] to someone in your family.

Try this too: Practice one thing you would like to say to [a grandparent, a friend, or a teacher].

Show me: Who do you know who speaks this language? Show me with your fingers how many people you can think of. (If someone talks too fast, you can say [*again, please*]. That's what good language learners do.)

Fun challenge: Find one place this month where you can hear the language. A song, a store, a story, a call. Tell me what you heard.

If it isn't clicking

We don't know anyone who speaks it yet. Recordings and songs can carry you for a while, but the people haven't arrived. *Next move:* start with the library. Ask the librarian about books, storytimes, and programs in the language, then look for one festival, class, or cultural center within reach. People are the main course; recordings are a second listen. If no speakers are close, a parent-run family call or a carefully chosen tutor, under the rules above, can fill the gap.

My child is shy with speakers. Many children need to watch a few friendly exchanges before they try. *Next move:* let your child watch first. Prepare one phrase at home as a game and let your child decide when to say it. A wave or a smile counts. Never push a child to perform for an audience.

Our heritage language is fading. Your child understands but answers in English, or understands less than before. *Next move:* add more people (a grandparent call, a cousin, a heritage class, a playdate) and more fun (songs, cooking, games). Ease off correction. Keep speaking the home language yourself, warmly, even when the answers come in English.

When to slow down. Your child seems anxious before calls or outings. Try shorter calls, fewer outings, and more watching.

When to go ahead. Your child asks to call someone or wants to go back to a class. Add a second weekly contact.

When to find more help. You have concerns about your child’s speech, language, or hearing in any language. A second language doesn’t cause these concerns.¹⁹ Ask your pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist, ideally one who can work with more than one language.

Tools, including AI

The tools that matter most in this chapter are the phone and the computer you use for calls. Use them on your account, in a common room, with the Family safety basics from the Language Hour. For AI tools, follow the AI box in the Language Hour. Chapter 8 covers apps, recordings, and AI in full.

One reminder belongs here: never upload your child’s voice, face, or name to an AI tool, including recordings from a family call or tutor session.

What “done enough” looks like

This term, your family has:

- ☐ At least one live model of the language besides the parent: a relative, a speaker friend, a class, a storytime, or a tutor
- ☐ At least one community outing connected to the language
- ☐ A weekly family or friend call, or another regular way to hear a speaker
- ☐ For heritage families: the home language used every day
- ☐ For calls and tutors: the family rules set up and followed

Short check: AS-04 Little Conversation. After a few weeks of calls or outings, try a short, unrehearsed exchange on a familiar topic: who you saw, what you ate, what you heard. Mark it seen, growing, or not yet, with a one-line note and the date. Never timed, never graded. File it with the others for Chapter 9.

Chapter 8

Tools and AI, with the Grown-Up at the Keyboard



Why this matters

Good tools can help a busy parent. A dictionary recording can tell you how a word sounds before you teach it. A recording of a song can give your child a second listen after you've sung it together. A translation tool or an AI program can help you draft a tiny story with words your child already knows, so you have something fresh to read aloud on a Thursday when you're tired.

Tools can also be wrong, sometimes in ways that sound perfectly confident. And none of them is a person to talk with. A language is a way of being with people, and a five-year-old learns it best from people who look at them, wait for them, and laugh with them.

This chapter helps you use tools the way a good carpenter uses a level: often, gladly, and always with your own eyes on the work. The grown-up holds the accounts and drives the tools. Anything a tool produced is labeled made by a tool. And your child learns, in kid-sized words, what these tools are and how to check them.

The Language Hour's AI box already holds the family's short rules for AI. This chapter doesn't change them. It explains the reasons behind them, adds the practical habits that make them easy, and gives your child a few games for thinking about tools. When this chapter and the AI box seem to overlap, the AI box is the family rule, and this chapter is the explanation.

Here is a picture. It is an illustration, not a real family. Imagine a mother teaching her nine-year-old Spanish. On Sunday night she asks an AI tool to draft a six-sentence story about a cat, using only words her son knows. Before Monday's Hour she reads it with a Spanish-speaking neighbor, who fixes two words and laughs at one odd phrase. On Monday the boy hears the story, illustrates it, and they fill out a small card together: "A tool made: the first draft. I did: the pictures and the reading. A person checked it: Ana." The story goes in the portfolio with its card. Nothing about it is hidden, and nothing about it pretends to be the boy's writing.

For the parent: understand it yourself

The plain picture

Think of a language tool as a very fast, very well-read helper who has never met your family and sometimes makes things up. It can save you time. It can't know your child, your relatives, or the way your grandmother says a word. And it can't tell when it's wrong.

The precise picture

Apps and recordings are a second listen, not the teacher. In a well-known study, infants who spent short sessions with a live speaker of a new language kept learning its sounds, while infants who saw the same material on video or heard it as audio did not.³⁵ That study was about infants, and your child is older, but the lesson travels well: people are the main course; recordings are a second listen. Use a recording after the live version, not instead of it.

What AI is, in kid terms. An AI language tool is a computer program that learned from a huge number of examples and guesses which words should come next. It's often right. It can also sound sure and be wrong. It doesn't know things the way a person does; it predicts. That's the sentence to give your child, and it's the sentence to keep in your own head.

Where tools make mistakes with languages. Machine translation and generated text make errors, and some kinds of errors show up again and again:

- **Politeness and respect.** Many languages have different words for talking to a friend, a child, and an elder. A tool may choose the wrong one.
- **Tone and feeling.** A tool may turn a warm phrase into a stiff one, or a gentle request into a command.
- **Gender and agreement.** In languages where words change for gender or number, a tool may mix them.
- **Family and regional ways of speaking.** A tool usually leans toward the most common written form. It may not know how your family, or your community, actually says something.
- **Scripts.** A tool can produce characters or letters that look right to a beginner and aren't.

None of this means you should avoid tools. It means you check before your child hears it.

Speech tools and young voices. Programs that listen to speech and score it are noticeably less accurate with children's voices than with adults'.¹⁷ So don't let an app grade a young child's pronunciation. If the app says "try again" when your child said it well, the app may simply have misheard. Your ears, and a speaker's, are better judges.

Learning apps with child accounts. Some learning apps let children under 13 have a limited child account, linked to a parent's email address.⁸³ If you use one, you set it up, you hold the password, and you sit nearby. Keep sessions short, and put them after the Hour or skip them entirely. An app streak is not a measure of learning, and it isn't a record for your portfolio. Chapter 9 explains what is.

Pictures and writing made by tools. Image tools can make a picture of almost anything in seconds. They're tempting for picture cards. Two cautions. First, if a picture includes writing in your language, especially in a script you can't read yet, don't trust it; image tools often produce letters and characters that look right and aren't. Second, a tool-made picture is never your child's drawing. If you use one for a card, label it, and let your child's own drawings be the ones that go in the portfolio as theirs. Most families find hand-drawn cards, magazine cutouts, and real objects work at least as well, and they cost nothing but a pencil.

Your child watching you use a tool. Children learn a great deal from watching how you treat a tool. When you say "Let me check that," when you frown at an odd answer, when you ask a speaker instead of trusting the screen, your child is learning how a careful person uses a machine. That lesson will matter long after this book.

The rules you already have. The Language Hour's AI box holds the family's AI rules, including the age terms for AI tools and the plain-language privacy rule. Turn back to it when you're setting up a tool. Two lines from it are worth carrying in your pocket: there are no chatbots for children at 5–10 in this book, whatever a company offers; and you never upload your child's voice, face, or name to an AI tool.

Accounts and terms change. Companies update their rules. Whenever you start using a tool, check the current terms. If something has changed, the family rule in the AI box still holds.

The standard

The ACTFL World-Readiness Standards ask learners to “investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.”⁷⁵ That’s exactly what your child does when they catch a machine getting a word wrong. Checking a tool turns into a lesson about how languages work: that some languages have a polite *you* and a friendly *you*, that some use characters instead of letters, that a word-for-word swap often sounds strange.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

These are ideas children have about computers and AI. Each one is a chance for a short, friendly conversation.

1. **“The computer knows every language perfectly.”** It guesses, and it’s often a good guesser, but it makes mistakes. Play TECH-03 *Is the Machine Right?* and let your child find one.
2. **“It talked like a person, so it’s my friend.”** It’s a program, not a person. It doesn’t know you or care about you the way your friends and family do. People are the best language teachers, and the best friends.
3. **“The app said I’m wrong.”** The app may have misheard. Apps that listen are often worse at hearing children than grown-ups. Ask a person, or ask yourself: “Did I say it the way Grandma does?”
4. **“If the computer wrote it, it’s true.”** A tool made it, and anything a tool made can be checked. Who could we ask?
5. **“Can I make the computer do my homework?”** Anything a tool made is made by a tool. It’s not your work. You can use it to help practice, and we always say so.

A 5-minute parent warm-up

Pick a word you’ve taught recently. Look it up in a printed dictionary or a dictionary site with human recordings. Listen twice. Then, if you use a translation tool, type the word in and compare. Did the tool agree? Did it offer a different form? Notice how it felt to check. That small habit, used every time, is the whole safety system for accuracy.

How to teach it this week

The session shape inside the Hour

Tools mostly live outside the Hour, in your preparation. Inside the Hour, use them sparingly:

- **Before the Hour:** check new words with a human recording (TECH-01). If you’ve drafted a story with a tool, check it with a speaker or dictionary (TECH-02).
- **During the Hour:** most days, no screen at all. On a song day, a recording can come after you’ve sung it live, as a second listen (SONG-07, Chapter 2).
- **After the Hour:** if your family uses a learning app, a short parent-run session can happen here, or not at all.

- **Once a week (8–10):** play TECH-03 Is the Machine Right? with you at the keyboard.

Exact words to say

When a tool shows up, say this:

“This was made by a tool. Tools can be helpful, and they can be wrong. Let’s check it with [a book / a speaker / Grandma].”

When your child asks to use the tablet for the language:

“People first. We’ll do the Hour together, and then, if there’s time, [five minutes of the app / one song recording], with me right here.”

When your child asks whether a tool is right:

“Good question. Who made this — a person or a tool? How could we check it?”

Rotate a checked example as you practice. One week the word might be *gracias* (Spanish, “thank you”);⁸² another, *merci* (French, “thank you”);⁴³ another, *salamat* (Tagalog, “thank you”).²⁰ Check each with a human recording before you use it.

First try for the child

Make the first try very small: your child holds up a card that says “made by a tool” whenever something on the table was produced by a tool. A printed picture? Card up. A drawing your child made? Card down. A recording of a song? Card up, and then ask who sang it. That’s the whole idea of the Who Made This? card, in a game.

How to fade help

- **Week 1:** You label everything a tool made and say it aloud.
- **Week 2:** Your child points to things and asks, “Person or tool?”
- **Week 3 (8–10):** Your child fills in the Who Made This? card with your help.
- **Later:** Your child reminds *you* to label things.

When to stop talking

When your child is comparing a tool’s answer with a book, or with a speaker, step back. Let them find the difference. If they can’t, use the rescue order: ask → wait → hint → model → hand it back.

Keep the screen part short, too. A minute of listening or comparing is usually enough; then close the device and go back to people, games, and voices. The tool did its small job. Thank it, close it, and let the Hour carry on without it.

Writing your family's tools rule

“Done enough” for this chapter asks for a tools rule written down. Here is a starting draft. Change any line to fit your home, then post it on the fridge or inside the cover of your Hour log.

Our family's language tools rule 1. People first. The Language Hour is mostly screen-free. 2. A grown-up holds every account and password. 3. A grown-up drives the tools. Children don't use chatbots. 4. Recordings come after we've sung or said it live, as a second listen. 5. We check before we teach: a book, a dictionary recording, or a speaker. 6. Anything a tool made is labeled made by a tool. 7. We never put a child's voice, face, or name into an AI tool. 8. If anything on a screen feels wrong: Stop, tell, close.

Read it with your child once. At 5–7, read lines 1, 6, and 8 and skip the rest; those are the ones a young child can carry. At 8–10, read all of it, and let your child suggest one line of their own. A rule your child helped write is a rule your child remembers.

Choosing a recording

Because recordings are a second listen, it's worth choosing them with a little care. A good recording for a five- to ten-year-old usually has these things:

- **Human voices.** Singers or speakers of the language, not a computer voice, wherever you can find them.
- **A clear, unhurried pace.** Children's songs and picture-book read-alouds are often perfect.
- **Short length.** Two or three minutes is plenty for one listen.
- **No autoplay into something else.** Download it, add it to a playlist you control, or play it from a disc. The moment a recording ends and a new, unchosen video starts, the tool is now choosing for you.
- **Something you've already done live.** The recording should feel like meeting a friend again, not meeting a stranger.

Your library is a good first stop. Many libraries offer music collections, read-aloud audio, and language programs with a card, and a librarian can point you to recordings in your language. If you're learning a heritage language, the best recording may be one you make yourself: Grandma singing the family song, kept privately on your own device. That kind of recording is a treasure. Just keep it off shared computers and out of AI tools.

When a tool helps you, not your child

Some of the most useful tools in this book are ones your child never sees. A parent who's learning alongside can use a dictionary with recordings, a beginner's course for adults, or a library language program to stay one step ahead. Ten minutes on Sunday evening, checking the words for the week, is time well spent. You come to the Hour more confident, and your child gets a grown-up who has already practiced.

If you use an AI tool to help you plan (to brainstorm a list of food words, suggest a game, or draft a short story), treat its output the way you'd treat a note from a stranger: possibly helpful, not yet

trusted. Check every word in your language before your child hears it. Keep the planning on your account. Nothing your child made, said, or looks like goes in.

Two children, one keyboard

If you're teaching two children, tools can turn into a negotiation. A simple pattern helps: the older child is the checker, the younger child is the card-holder. In TECH-03, the older child compares the machine's answer with the book; the younger child holds up "made by a tool" when the screen is on. Both have a job, and the grown-up still drives.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: "Who made this — a person or a tool — and how could we check it?"

Follow-ups: 1. "What would a person do differently?" 2. "Where could we look to find out if it's right?" 3. (8–10) "What did the tool get wrong, or what sounded strange?"

Wait: count to five in your head. Your child may be looking at the picture or the words again. That's checking. Let it happen.

If it goes quiet: A stuck silence here usually means the question feels too big. Make it smaller: hold up two things, one your child drew and one a tool made, and ask, "Which one did you make?" Then build back up to "How could we check?"

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — TECH-01 Parent Pronunciation Check

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** a dictionary or teaching recording made by a human speaker
- **Safety and privacy:** parent's device and account; nothing about your child is entered or recorded
- **The fun:** for the parent, the small relief of getting it right before the Hour
- **The skill:** the parent replays a dictionary or speaker recording to check a word before teaching it
- **The crumb:** the word checked, noted on the Hour log

How it goes. Before the Hour, pick the one or two new words for the day. Look each one up in a dictionary with human recordings, or in your course's audio. Listen twice. Say it along with the recording. If a speaker you know is available, ask them. A computer voice reading the word is better than nothing, but a human recording is better. Then teach it.

5–7: Your child doesn't see this card. It's yours. **8–10:** Once in a while, let your child listen with you. "Let's check how she says it." **Signed languages:** Check signs with a video by a Deaf signer or your class teacher, not a still drawing alone. Handshape, movement, and location all matter.

In-home — TECH-02 Grown-Up Story Draft

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a list of words your child already knows; an AI or writing tool on your account; a speaker or dictionary to check
- **Safety and privacy:** parent's account only; no names, photos, voices, or details about your child go into the tool; the child doesn't use the tool
- **The fun:** a fresh story full of words your child can understand
- **The skill:** the parent uses an AI tool to draft a tiny story with known words, then checks it with a speaker or dictionary
- **The crumb:** the story, labeled made by a tool

How it goes. Write down ten to fifteen words your child knows. Ask the tool for a very short story (five or six sentences) using only those words, about a pet, a snack, or the weather. Read it carefully. Check every sentence with a dictionary, a textbook, or a speaker. Fix anything odd. Print it or copy it out. At the top, write: "Made by a tool, checked by [name]." Read it to your child in the Hour. Your child can illustrate it.

5–7: Read it aloud with lots of pointing. Your child draws one picture. **8–10:** Your child reads the known words and makes a cover. Fill out a Who Made This? card together. **Signed languages:** Tools can't produce signed stories reliably. Draft in English, then ask your teacher or a Deaf signer for help, or use stories your class provides.

In-home — TECH-03 Is the Machine Right?

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a translation tool on your device; a picture book, dictionary, or speaker
- **Safety and privacy:** the parent types; nothing about your child is entered
- **The fun:** catching a computer in a mistake
- **The skill:** comparing a machine translation with a book or a speaker and finding the mistake
- **The crumb:** the mistake found, written on a card

How it goes. This is for 8–10, with you at the keyboard. Choose a sentence your child knows well in the new language, from a book or a song. Type the English version into a translation tool. Read the tool's answer aloud. Then compare it with the book or ask a speaker. Is it the same? Is a word different? Does it sound too stiff, too bossy, or just odd? Your child's job is to find one difference and decide which version a person would say. Write it on a card.

8–10: The child compares and explains. **Ready 8:** A younger child who reads known words easily can try with a very short sentence. **5–7:** Skip this one, or turn it into "person or tool?" with the made-by-a-tool card.

In-home — TECH-06 Who Made This? Card

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** index cards
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed

- **The fun:** being the detective
- **The skill:** labeling anything a tool made, and what the child did
- **The crumb:** the card, filed with the work

How it goes. Make a stack of cards with three lines:

A tool made: **I did:** A person checked it: ____

Whenever a tool helped make something (a story draft, a printed picture, a recording), fill out a card and clip it to the work. Your child says or writes what they did. You write who checked it. The card goes into the portfolio with the work. Chapter 9 explains why this matters.

5–7: You write; your child tells you what to put on the “I did” line. **8–10:** Your child fills in the card.

In-home — SONG-07 Recorded Sing-Along

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a recording of a song you’ve already learned live, chosen by you
- **Safety and privacy:** parent chooses and plays it; no autoplay into the next video
- **The fun:** singing with a whole chorus
- **The skill:** singing with a parent-chosen recording after learning the song live
- **The crumb:** the recording’s name on the log

How it goes. You met this card in Chapter 2. Here it’s a reminder of the right order: live first, recording second. Choose a song your child already knows from your Hour. Play a recording by native speakers. Sing along. Notice together anything the singers do differently. Then turn it off and sing it once more, just the two of you.

5–7: Add motions. Stop the recording when the song ends. **8–10:** Your child listens for one word the singers say differently. **Signed languages:** Choose a signed song performance by Deaf signers where available; watch, then sign along.

Out-of-home — OUT-01 Library Language Shelf

- **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Materials:** a library card
- **Safety and privacy:** parent present
- **The fun:** a librarian’s pick
- **The skill:** finding the language shelf, a bilingual storytime, or language programs
- **The crumb:** the book list

How it goes. You may have met this card in the Language Hour and Chapter 7. Here’s the twist for this chapter: ask the librarian to recommend one picture book in your language. At home, if you use an app, compare: what did the librarian pick, and what did the app suggest? Talk about it. “A person who knows children picked this. A tool picked that. Which do you like better?” There’s no wrong answer. The point is noticing that a person chose one and a tool chose the other.

5–7: Just the librarian’s pick. Read it together. **8–10:** Compare the two picks and talk about why each was chosen.

For the student

Read aloud at 5–7. At 8–10, your child can read it or share it with you.

A tool can be helpful, and it can be wrong. People are the best language teachers. If a tool made it, we say so.

A computer that talks or writes is a program. It learned from lots and lots of examples, and it guesses what words come next. Sometimes it guesses right. Sometimes it doesn’t.

Try this: Hold up your “made by a tool” card when you see something a tool made. Put it down for something a person made.

Try this too: Say [*thank you* in your language] the way your grown-up says it, and then the way a recording says it. Are they the same?

Show me: Point to something you made today. Point to something a tool made. How can you tell?

Fun challenge (8–10): Help your grown-up catch the computer making a mistake. When you find one, write it on a card. You’re the checker.

If it isn’t clicking

The screen is taking over the Hour. Your child keeps asking for the tablet, or the Hour has drifted into watching. *Next move:* go back to the five no-device steps: Hello, Listen and Do, Play It Out, Your Turn, Goodbye and Carry. Put the device away during the Hour for two weeks. If you use a recording, play it once, as a second listen, and turn it off.

My child wants the app instead of playing. Apps are designed to be pleasant to come back to. That’s not a failing in your child. *Next move:* app after the Hour, short, parent-run, or not at all. Keep the Hour more fun than the app: games, puppets, food, movement. If the app still wins every argument, take a break from it.

I’m not sure what’s accurate. A tool gave you one answer, a website another, and you don’t know which to trust. *Next move:* ask a speaker. Use a printed dictionary or your course’s audio. When in doubt, teach the word you’re sure of and save the uncertain one for after you’ve checked.

When to slow down. Tools are causing more arguments than help. Drop them for a while; the whole activity bank works without them.

When to go ahead. Your child is checking tools with confidence. At 8–10, add TECH-03 once a week and let your child keep the “mistakes found” cards.

When to find more help. You’ve found a tool or account your child can reach without you, or something on a screen upset your child. Use Stop, tell, close, change the passwords, and revisit

the Family safety basics in the Language Hour. If you're unsure how to lock down a device, ask someone you trust who knows it well.

Tools, including AI

This whole chapter is about tools. The family rules live in the Language Hour's AI box; turn back to it when you set up anything new, and check the current terms of any tool you use.

What “done enough” looks like

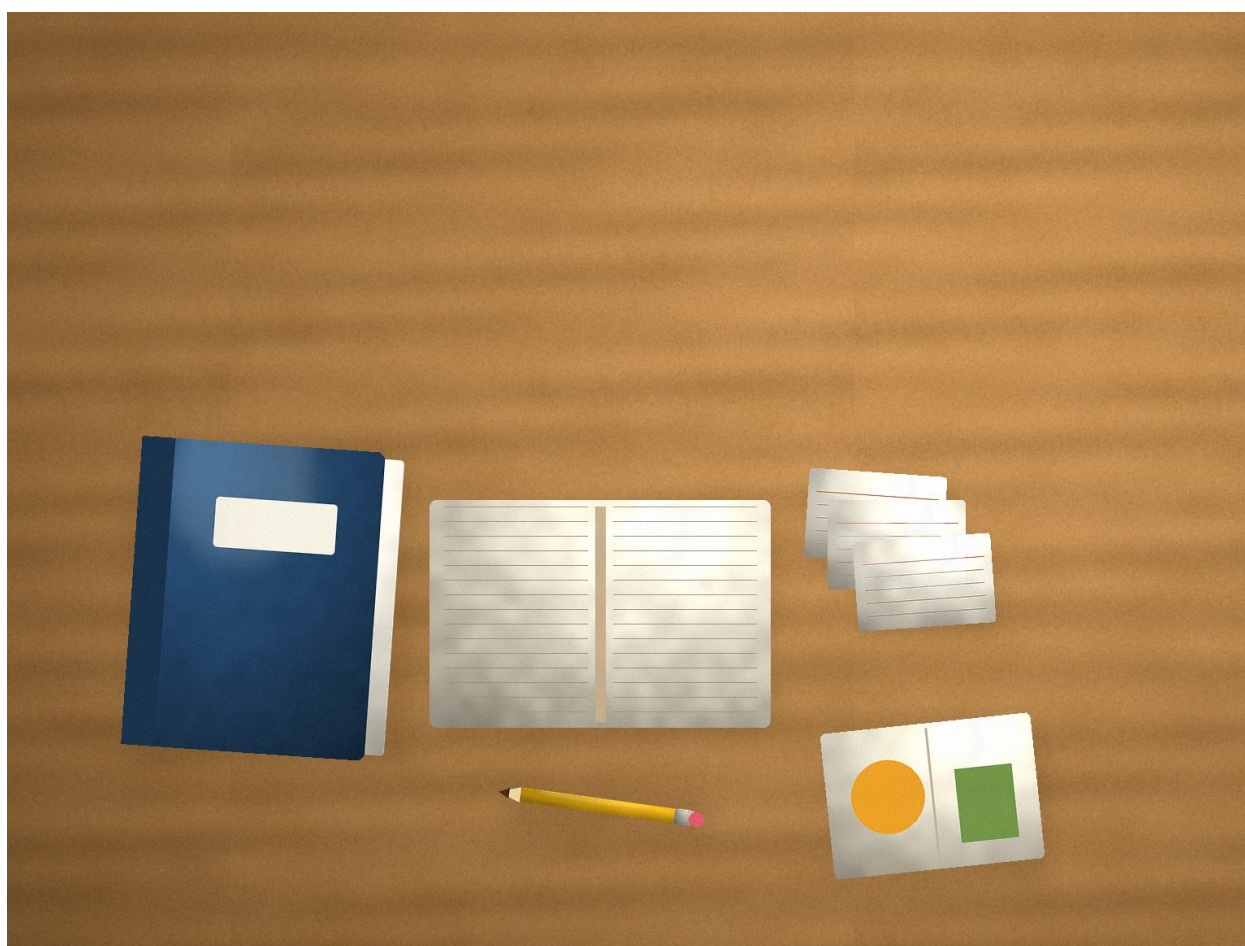
This term, your family has:

- ☐ A tools rule written down, posted where the family can see it
- ☐ The child can say what “made by a tool” means
- ☐ Nothing generated is in the portfolio as the child's work
- ☐ Any tool-made item in the portfolio has a Who Made This? card
- ☐ Recordings used after live practice, as a second listen

Short check: AS-05 Recording Snapshot. Once this term, make a short recording of your child saying or signing their best phrases. Keep it privately, in two places, never on a shared computer or in an AI tool. Mark it seen, growing, or not yet, with the date. Never timed, never graded. Chapter 9 explains where it goes.

Chapter 9

Records



Records are the quiet half of teaching. The Language Hour is where the language happens. The record is where you, months later, can look back and see it. This chapter shows you how to keep a language record for a child aged 5 to 10 that's light enough to keep up, honest enough to trust, and clear enough that a stranger could read it.

You won't need a gradebook. You won't need tests. You'll need a folder, a log, a handful of short checks, and a few minutes a week.

Why keep records

To see growth you'd otherwise miss. Language grows slowly and then suddenly. A child who has understood far more than they've said for three months will one day answer a question you didn't expect them to understand. When you look back at your log and your dated check cards, you'll see the long, patient climb that led there. That view is encouraging on hard weeks.

To show it to anyone who asks. A relative, a co-op leader, a future teacher, or your state's home-school office may one day want to know what your child studied. A simple, plain record answers them in a minute.

To plan the next step. The record tells you what your child is ready for: more songs, first reading, a class, a heritage-school program, or simply more of what's working.

What your state requires. Requirements for homeschool subjects and records vary from state to state, and most don't require a world language at these ages. Check your own state's current homeschool rules. This chapter describes good practice; it isn't legal advice.

You're also in good company. In a 2016 national survey, 32% of homeschooled students were taught a foreign language, in the survey's words, that year.⁸⁴ Many families are keeping records like these.

What goes in the portfolio

A portfolio is simply a folder, a box, or a binder where the best evidence lives. Keep it in two places if anything is digital, for example a paper folder plus a backup on your own family drive. Here's what belongs inside.

The Hour log. One line per day: the date, minutes, language, the best step of the day, the carry phrase, and who the model was (you, a relative, a recording, a class). It takes thirty seconds. Over a year, it's the backbone of the record.

Illustration of a log line: 14 Oct · 25 min · Spanish · Play It Out (café game) · carry phrase "more, please" · model: Grandpa on a call

Dated short checks (AS cards). The six short checks, gathered below. Each is a small card with a date and seen / growing / not yet.

A song list. Every song your child knows in the language, with the date it was learned. Old songs never retire; they stay on the list.

A word box count. If you use the LABEL-04 Word Wall Rotation card from Chapter 3, old words go into a box each week. Once a month, count them and write the number in the log. It's a lovely, concrete picture of growth.

Drawings and mini-books. Picture cards your child made, mini-books, a family recipe card (FAM-05), the grandparent interview book (FAM-02).

A short private recording each term (AS-05). Your child saying or signing their best phrases.

Kept privately, in two places, never on a shared computer and never in an AI tool. You don't need to send it anywhere. It's for your family and, perhaps one day, your child.

Postcards and outing notes. The three things your child noticed at a festival (OUT-02), the class name (OUT-07), the book list from the library (OUT-01).

Who Made This? cards. Anything a tool helped produce, such as a tool-drafted story, gets its card clipped on: "A tool made... I did... A person checked it..." (TECH-06, Chapter 8). Anything a tool made is labeled made by a tool. That's the line that keeps the portfolio honest.

A year summary in plain words. At the end of the year, write a short paragraph: what your child can understand, say (or sign), and do. Examples are below.

What doesn't go in: app streak screenshots as evidence of learning, completion pages presented as credits, or anything a tool generated presented as your child's work. A program's completion page can go in as an artifact ("finished the spring unit") if you like, but it isn't a grade or a credit.

The check set

You've met these short checks at the end of each chapter. Here they are together. Each takes about five minutes. Do one every few weeks, not all at once. Date the card. Mark seen, growing, or not yet. Never timed, never graded.

AS-01 Point and Show

Lay out pictures for ten words your child knows. Say a word; your child points. This checks understanding, which is the first and biggest part of a young child's language. **Mark:** seen (points to most without help), growing (some), not yet (few).

AS-02 Do What I Say

Give five commands your child knows, such as *stand up*, *touch your nose*, or *bring me the ball*, without any gestures. **Mark:** seen, growing, or not yet. For signed languages, sign the commands with no extra pointing.

AS-03 Say It Back Check

Show five pictures and ask your child to name them, or ask three simple questions they know ("What's your name?" "What color is this?"). No hints for the first try. **Mark:** seen, growing, or not yet.

AS-04 Little Conversation

A short, unrehearsed exchange on a familiar topic: breakfast, the weather, a pet, a call with Grandma. You're listening for whether your child can take a turn without a script. **Mark:** seen, growing, or not yet, plus a one-line note.

AS-05 Recording Snapshot

Once a term, a short recording of your child’s best phrases or signs. Kept privately in two places. **Mark:** the date; seen / growing / not yet is optional here. The recording is the evidence.

AS-06 Portfolio Pick

Your child picks one item from the portfolio and says what it shows they can do. **Mark:** write down the pick and your child’s sentence.

You can ask it this way:

Opening: “Which one should go in the file — and what does it show you can do?”

Wait: count to five in your head. Then accept whatever they choose. The sentence matters more than the item.

A simple check grid

Once a term, gather the cards into a one-page grid. One row per goal, one column per term:

Goal	Fall	Winter	Spring
Understands known words (AS-01)	growing	seen	seen
Follows directions (AS-02)	growing	growing	seen
Names things (AS-03)	not yet	growing	growing
Asks and answers (AS-03 / AS-04)	not yet	growing	growing
Little conversation (AS-04)	not yet	not yet	growing
(8–10) Reads known words (Chapter 6)	—	not yet	growing

This grid is an illustration, not a real child’s record.

Notice the pattern: understanding moves first, speaking follows, conversation comes last. That’s the normal shape of a young child’s language. A row of “not yet” in the speaking lines in the fall is not a worry. It’s the beginning.

What progress looks like on paper

For a child aged 5 to 10, a year of steady Language Hours usually looks like this: understands much more than they say; knows a handful of songs; follows everyday directions; uses greetings, set phrases, and single words; answers simple questions with a word or a short phrase; and, for some 8–10s, reads words they already know by ear. That’s the book’s expectation for a first year, drawn from the way language programs describe young beginners.

ACTFL, the national organization for language teachers, calls this range **Novice**: learners who use words, lists, and memorized (“formulaic”) phrases.⁶⁰ Novice is not a weak word. For a young child,

years in the Novice range is success. It means your child has a real, growing language they can use in familiar moments.

Two cautions for the paper record:

- **Don't assign levels yourself.** Words like “Novice Mid” or “Intermediate Low” come from formal assessments. In a home record, describe what your child does instead. “Answers simple questions about food and family” says more than a label you can't back up.
- **Don't add test scores.** There aren't any for this, and the book doesn't use them.

If you'd like a map of what comes next, the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements describe, in “I can” sentences, what learners do at each stage.⁸⁵ Use them as a map, not a checklist; Chapter 10 has the details.

Hours

Minutes add up. Ten minutes a day, most days, is more than an hour a week; twenty-five minutes most days is two to three hours. The Hour log shows that continuity better than any summary.

Once a term, add up the minutes and write the total at the bottom of the log page. If you're asked how much time your child spent on the language, you'll have the answer, honestly and without guessing. Count outings, family calls, and classes too; mark them so a reader can see the difference (“45 min, library storytime”).

Short days count. Sick days with a five-minute Hello and Goodbye count. A heritage family's daily life in the home language counts, though you don't need to log every dinner. A line such as “Spanish used at home daily” covers it.

Making the hours easy to count

A few small habits keep the total honest without turning it into homework for you. Write the minutes the same day, while you still remember; a guess made a month later is usually too high or too low. Round to the nearest five minutes and don't worry about precision beyond that. Use one mark for time with a live model, such as a speaker, a class, or a call, so you can see at a glance how much of the language came from people. If two children shared an Hour, write the minutes once and both names beside them.

At the end of the term, a quick tally on the back page is enough: total minutes, how many days had any language at all, and how many of those had a live model. Those three numbers tell a clear story. A reader can see that the language was steady, that it came mostly from people, and that it was built a little at a time. Nobody needs more than that from a five-to-ten-year-old's record, and you won't either.

A rhythm for keeping records

Records stay light when they have a rhythm. Here's one that works for most families. Adjust it freely.

Every day (30 seconds). Write the Hour log line. If you missed the Hour, write the date and “no Hour” or “five-minute Hello and Goodbye.” Gaps are honest, and they help you notice patterns, like a week when the Hour kept getting squeezed by errands.

Every week (5 minutes). On Friday or Sunday, look over the week's log lines. Move old words from the word wall to the word box. Add any new song to the song list. Clip any tool-made item to its Who Made This? card. If there was an outing or a call, add a one-line note.

Every few weeks (5 minutes). Do one short check, such as AS-01, AS-02, AS-03, or AS-04, rotating through them. Date the card and drop it in the folder.

Every term (30 minutes). Make the term recording (AS-05). Gather the check cards into the grid. Add up the minutes. Do a Portfolio Pick (AS-06) with your child. Look at the grid and ask yourself one question: what is my child ready for next?

Every year (an hour). Write the year summary paragraph. Choose the transcript line. Pick five or six items for a “best of the year” section at the front of the folder. Back up anything digital to your second place. Then put the folder on the shelf next to last year's.

If you fall behind, don't try to reconstruct every missed day. Start again today. A record with honest gaps is far more useful than a perfect record nobody kept.

Two or more children

If you teach siblings together in one Hour, keep one shared Hour log and a separate folder for each child. The shared log shows the time; the folders show each child's growth. Do the short checks one child at a time, with the other busy elsewhere, so neither one answers for the other. Siblings will be at different places on the grid, and that's expected. Place by skill, not birthday.

An older child can help keep the shared log. At 8–10, writing the day's carry phrase in the log is a small, real responsibility, and a lovely bit of practice with print.

Transcript titles a stranger can read

Someday, someone may read your child's record who has never met your family. Give them a title they can understand at a glance.

Use the language's own name. Spanish. French. Mandarin Chinese. Arabic. Korean. American Sign Language. Or, if your report uses subject headings, **World Language: Spanish** (or whichever language).

For heritage families, say so plainly. “Korean (home language),” with a short description of what your child does.

Don't use: a program's brand name, an app's level name, or a made-up course title like "Little Thinkers Spanish I." No credits at these ages; credits belong to high school. And this book doesn't issue certificates. If a program gives your child a completion certificate, enjoy it and keep it as an artifact. It isn't a credit or a proficiency level.

Grades can appear here. It's fine to note a grade level for the year, such as "grade 2," if your records use grades. Elsewhere in this book we use ages and bands.

Heritage families

If the language is your family's home language, your record has a different shape, and it's a rich one. Record what's actually happening: daily conversation with parents and grandparents, songs from home, first reading, a weekend heritage class.

Be honest and generous. "Understands everything at home; answers mostly in English; sings six family songs; started reading Hangul this spring" is a strong, truthful record. It shows a living language in a child's life. You don't need to measure it against a classroom course, and there's no reason to rank the family's way of speaking against any other.

If your child is learning to read and write the home language, note the script plainly ("reads 20 known words in Hangul," "writes first name in Arabic script") and keep a page of their writing in the portfolio.

Examples

These are illustrations of how a year summary or transcript line might read. They describe no real child.

World Language: Spanish (grade 2). Daily Language Hour (about 25 minutes). Understands and follows multi-step directions; sings eight songs; uses greetings, colors, numbers to 20, food and family words; answers choice and simple questions. Portfolio: Hour log, AS cards, two term recordings (kept privately).

American Sign Language (age 6). Weekly Deaf-led class plus daily practice at home. Signs greetings, family, colors, feelings; fingerspells first name; follows signed directions.

Korean (home language). Daily conversation with grandparents; first Hangul reading of 20 known words.

French (age 9). Language Hour four days a week (about 30 minutes), parent learning alongside; monthly library storytime. Understands familiar stories read aloud; asks and answers simple questions about food, weather, and family; reads about 40 known words; keeps a "mistakes the machine made" card set with a parent. Portfolio includes two tool-drafted stories, each with a Who Made This? card.

Mandarin Chinese (age 7). Weekly tutor session on the parent's account with a parent present, plus short daily practice. Understands classroom directions and greetings; sings four songs; counts to ten; recognizes a handful of characters for known words.

Notice what these share: the language's name, the setting, what the child does, and what's in the folder. Nothing is inflated, and nothing is hidden.

When someone asks for a report

Now and then, someone may ask for a one-page summary: a co-op, an evaluator, a relative, or a program your child wants to join. Here is a shape you can copy. It's an illustration, not a real child's report.

Student: [first name], age 8 **Subject:** World Language: French **Year:** [school year]
Setting: Language Hour at home, four or five days a week, about 25 minutes; parent learning alongside; library storytime monthly; family video calls with a French-speaking aunt (parent-run). **Time:** about 70 hours over the year, from the Hour log, plus outings and calls. **What [first name] can do:** understands familiar stories read aloud and everyday directions; sings ten songs; greets people and says please and thank you; names foods, colors, family members, animals, and numbers to 20; asks and answers simple questions about food, weather, and how someone feels; reads about 30 known words. **Evidence:** Hour log; dated short checks (understanding, directions, naming, little conversation); song list; word box count; two private term recordings; mini-books; outing notes. Tool-made items are labeled with Who Made This? cards. **Next year:** more conversation with speakers; more reading of known words; first short writing.

That's the whole thing. It names the language plainly, shows the time honestly, describes what the child does, and points to evidence you can show if asked. You can write it in fifteen minutes from a well-kept folder.

Questions families ask

“Do I need to give grades?” Not for this book. Seen / growing / not yet tells you and any reader much more about a young language learner than a letter would. If your state or program requires a grade, talk with them about what they need; the portfolio will support whatever honest description you give.

“What if my child did better in the Hour than on the check?” That's very common, and it's worth knowing. In the Hour, your child has the song, the game, and you. On a short check, they're on their own. Both are real. The Hour shows what your child can do with support; the check shows what they can do alone. Over time, the gap closes.

“Should I record every session?” No. One short recording per term is plenty. More recordings mean more private files to protect, and more pressure on a child who may already feel watched. Keep it rare, short, and private.

“Can I share a recording with a relative?” That’s a family choice. If you do, send it privately to someone you trust, and never post it publicly or put it in an AI tool. Many families simply play it for Grandma on a call instead.

“What about the app’s progress report?” You can keep it as an artifact if you like. It isn’t a measure of what your child can understand or say with a person, and it isn’t a record on its own. Your log and your checks are the record.

Reading your own record kindly

At the end of a term, you’ll sit down with the folder and look. Here’s how to read it like a master teacher, not a worried parent.

Look for direction, not speed. Is the grid moving from “not yet” toward “growing” and “seen,” even slowly? That’s the whole question. Some terms move a lot; some barely move. A quiet term often comes right before a jump.

Look at understanding first. If AS-01 and AS-02 are growing, the language is going in. Speaking follows understanding, sometimes by many months. A child who understands a great deal and says little is on the normal path.

Look at the people column. Who were the models this term? If the log shows only you and a recording, the next step is probably a person: a call, a class, a storytime, a playdate. Chapter 7 has ideas.

Look at the joy. Which songs does your child still ask for? Which games come up again and again? Those are the parts of the Hour doing the most work. Do more of them.

Look at your own line. If you’ve been learning alongside, notice what you can do now that you couldn’t in the fall. Write it down somewhere. It belongs in the story too.

Then close the folder and choose one change for next term. Just one. More people, more play, a first step into print, or simply keeping going. A little every day is how the folder fills.

Next steps

When your child has a year or two of steady Language Hours behind them, a few things usually happen. They want more conversation. They’re ready for more print. They start asking about the people who speak the language and the places it’s spoken. Those are all good signs.

For families continuing past age 10, *Languages for Young Minds* (11–14) picks up where this book leaves off, with longer conversations, more reading and writing, and a record that begins to look more like a course. Bring this portfolio with you. The Hour log, the song list, and the check grid will tell the next book exactly where your child is.

For now, keep the folder simple. A line a day. A card every few weeks. A recording once a term. A paragraph at the end of the year. That’s enough.

Chapter 10

Resources



This is a short chapter about where to find help, and a long-standing piece of advice from good language teachers: look for people first, the library second, and everything else after that. The resources here are arranged by fit, not by rank. There's no best program for every family, and the right resource for a heritage family with grandparents next door is different from the right one for a family learning a new language in a small town.

You won't find prices here. They change too often, and a good resource for a young child doesn't

need to cost much. You won't find rankings either. You'll find kinds of help, how to tell whether each fits your family, and a few reference pages for you, the parent.

How to choose

Before you add any resource, ask four questions.

- 1. Does it bring a person, or point to one?** People are the main course; recordings are a second listen. A resource that connects your child with speakers (a class, a storytime, a community event, a relative) is worth more than one that only plays audio.
- 2. How much does it ask of me?** Some resources are open-and-go. Others need preparation, setup, or your full attention during a session. Choose for the week you actually have, not the week you wish you had.
- 3. Does it fit a 5- to 10-year-old?** Look for songs, pictures, movement, stories, and short sessions. A resource built for teenagers or adults can be useful for *you*, but it usually won't work for your child as written.
- 4. Does it have real voices in the language?** For any audio or video, listen for native or fluent human speakers. For ASL, look for Deaf signers.

And one more, for anything on a screen: **can I run it from my account, in a common room, with the Family safety basics from the Language Hour?** If not, it isn't a fit for this age.

People first

Relatives and family friends. The most powerful resource in this book may already be in your phone's contacts. A grandparent who sings, an aunt who tells stories, a family friend who'll say a few words on a weekly call. Chapter 7 shows how to make these calls easy and safe.

Your community. Festivals, cultural centers, places of worship that welcome visitors, markets, and restaurants where the language is spoken. Go as a guest. Ask before taking photos. Let your child try one phrase.

Heritage-language schools. Many communities run weekend or after-school programs for children in a family language. Some welcome learners from outside the heritage community. Visit first, ask about ages and approach, and see whether the class feels playful enough for your child.

Co-ops and homeschool groups. A small language circle of two or three families can share a speaker, take turns leading a game day, or book a community class together.

Deaf community events and Deaf-led ASL classes. If your family is learning American Sign Language, Deaf instructors and Deaf community events are the heart of good learning. Classes may be offered through community colleges, libraries, Deaf organizations, and other community groups.⁸⁶

Library storytimes. Many libraries offer bilingual or world-language storytimes. They're short, musical, free, and full of other children. For a 5- to 7-year-old, there may be no better first class.

Speaker friends and playdates. A friend's family who speaks the language, with "language time" agreed on for part of a supervised playdate (OUT-06), can give your child a peer, which is one of the strongest reasons to keep going.

Live tutors. If you choose a tutor, follow the rules in Chapter 7: parent's account, parent in the room for every session, common room, no private chat, first names only, and Stop, tell, close. Platform rules differ; check the current terms.

Your library

The public library is the best-kept secret in language learning for families. Before buying anything, spend twenty minutes with a children's librarian (OUT-01).

Ask about:

- **Picture books in your language, and bilingual picture books.** Many libraries keep a world-languages shelf in the children's section, and librarians can borrow from other branches.
- **Bilingual or world-language storytimes,** and any language classes for children or families.
- **Music and audio collections.** Children's songs and read-aloud recordings in the language.
- **Language-learning programs included with a library card.** Many libraries license a language app that's free to cardholders.⁷⁹ Ask what your library offers and whether it has a children's option. If you use it, set it up on your account and keep it parent-run.
- **Resources for you.** Beginner courses for adults, phrasebooks, dictionaries with audio, and, for some languages, textbooks with recordings.

Ask for your library's current list. Collections change, and librarians love being asked.

For the parent

These reference pages are for your own understanding. None of them is a curriculum. Each was checked when this book was written; addresses and editions can change.

The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages. The national framework for language learning in the United States, organized in five goal areas: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. You've seen one standard quoted in most chapters of this book. Reading the short summary gives you the big picture of where language learning is heading.⁸⁷

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Descriptions of what speakers can do at each stage, from Novice upward. Useful for understanding what "beginner" really means, and why years in the Novice range is success for a young child (Chapter 9).⁶⁰

The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements. "I can" sentences for each stage of language learning, from Novice upward. Use them as a map of what comes next, not a checklist or a curriculum. The

statements themselves say they aren't a prescribed curriculum and aren't meant for letter grades.⁸⁵

The AAP's parent page on children learning more than one language. Plain answers from the American Academy of Pediatrics to common worries: whether two languages cause delay or confusion (they don't), whether mixing is normal (it is), and whether it's too late (it isn't).¹⁹

The AAP Family Media Plan. A free tool for setting your family's screen and media rules together. It pairs well with the tools rule in Chapter 8.⁸⁸

The Federal Trade Commission's COPPA pages. Background on the federal children's online privacy rule, if you want to understand why learning apps ask for your consent.⁸⁹

The National Association of the Deaf on learning ASL. Where and how to learn American Sign Language, written by a Deaf-led organization.⁸⁶

Programs by fit

Families often ask, "Which program should I buy?" For ages 5 to 10, the honest answer is that a program is helpful but optional. The Language Hour and this book's activity bank work with any language and almost no materials. If you'd like a program to give you structure, audio, or ready-made pictures, here's how to think about the kinds you'll find. Before you choose any one, check that it's still offered, that it serves your child's age, and that its audio uses real speakers.

Song-and-story programs for 5–7. Built around songs, rhymes, puppets, and picture stories. Light on parent preparation; heavy on fun. A good fit for families who want something to press play on after singing live, and for parents learning alongside. Check the audio carefully, and make sure the songs are sung by speakers of the language.

Picture-book curricula for parent-led families. A sequence of themed units with picture cards, simple stories, and teaching notes for the parent. A good fit for families who like a plan and are willing to prepare a little each week. Look for audio recorded by native speakers so you can check before you teach.

Picture-based curricula for 8–10. More structured units with early reading of known words, games, and audio. A good fit for children ready for some print (Chapter 6). Look for programs that keep listening and speaking first, and don't rush into grammar worksheets.

Heritage-school weekend programs. Classes run by a language community for children, often with songs, stories, crafts, and celebrations. A good fit for heritage families and for any family that wants peers in the language. Parent load is low during the week, higher on the weekend.

Online live classes. Small-group or one-on-one lessons on a screen. A good fit for families far from any speaker. The rules from Chapter 7 apply in full: your account, you in the room, a common room, no private chat, first names only, Stop, tell, close. Check the current terms of any platform.

App-based practice. Short, game-like practice on a phone or tablet. Optional. If you use one, set it up on your account with parent consent where required, sit nearby, keep sessions short, and put them after the Hour or skip them. An app streak isn't a record (Chapter 9).

For your own learning. A beginner's course for adults, a library language program, a dictionary with human recordings, and best of all, a speaker friend. Ten minutes a few evenings a week keeps you a step ahead.

Whatever you choose, keep the Language Hour at the center. A program supports the Hour; it doesn't replace it.

Building a home language shelf

Over a year or two, most families gather a small shelf of things in the language. It doesn't need to be large. Ten good books your child loves will do more than fifty that sit untouched. Here's what to look for.

Picture books with strong pictures. For a beginner, the pictures carry the meaning. Look for books where you could tell the story from the pictures alone. That's what makes the Picture Walk (STORY-01, Chapter 4) work.

Repeating lines. Books with a line that comes back again and again are perfect for young learners. Your child joins the line every time it returns (STORY-02).

Bilingual books, used well. A book with both English and the new language on the page can help a parent who is learning alongside. With your child, read the new-language side first and let the pictures do the work. Use the English only when you need it.

Books from the culture, not just in the language. Folk tales, songs, and stories from places where the language is spoken (STORY-06, Folk Tale Night) bring culture along with words. Ask a speaker or a librarian which stories children there grow up with.

Song collections. A songbook, or a library collection of children's songs in the language, gives you new Hello and Goodbye songs for years.

A picture dictionary. A children's picture dictionary in the language is a wonderful shared reference for 8–10s and a pleasure to browse at any age.

Something for you. A beginner's textbook or course with audio, and a good dictionary with audio. These are your checking tools.

Borrow first. Buy only the books your child asks for again and again.

Making your own materials

Some of the best resources in this book are ones you make at the kitchen table in ten minutes.

Picture cards. Index cards with a drawing or a cut-out picture on one side. For readers, a checked word on the back. Make pairs for Go Fish (GAME-03) and Memory games.

Labels. Sticky notes around the house with a picture for pre-readers, and the word for readers (LABEL-01). Check every word before it goes up.

Mini-books. Fold two sheets of paper in half and staple. Your child draws; you write one checked line per page. These become portfolio treasures.

A café menu. A folded paper menu with five drawn foods, for Café Pretend (PLAY-01).

A word box. A shoebox where old words go when they leave the word wall (LABEL-04). Counting the box once a month is a small celebration.

A family book. Answers from the Grandparent Interview (FAM-02), the Family Recipe (FAM-05), and the Heritage Object Story (FAM-04), all in one place, first names only.

The one rule for homemade materials is the same as everywhere in this book: check before you teach. Use a dictionary with human recordings, a textbook, or a speaker for every word you write down. If you can't check it yet, leave a blank or a picture, and fill it in later.

Questions to ask before you join a class or hire a tutor

Before your child joins any class, program, or tutoring arrangement, a short conversation can tell you a great deal. Here are questions worth asking. Good programs answer them gladly.

For any class or program:

- What ages is this for, and how is a typical session shaped?
- How much of the session is songs, games, stories, and movement?
- Who teaches it, and do they speak the language natively or fluently? For ASL, is the teacher Deaf?
- May I watch a session first?
- Where can parents be during class?
- How do you handle photos and recordings of children?

For a tutor or online class:

- Are you comfortable with a parent in the room for every session?
- Will all messages come to my account?
- Do you use props, songs, and movement with young children?
- What do you do if a child is shy or quiet?
- Can we agree that you'll use first names only and won't ask for photos or personal details?
- How do you keep sessions short and playful for a 5- to 10-year-old?

Signs of a good fit: the teacher is warm with young children, welcomes parents, uses the language for most of the session while making meaning clear, and doesn't push a child to perform. Your child leaves wanting to come back.

Signs to keep looking: worksheets for a five-year-old, pressure to speak before your child is ready, discomfort with a parent present, requests for private contact with your child, or any rule that makes you uneasy. Trust that feeling and move on kindly.

A first month of resources

If you're starting from nothing, here's a gentle way to gather what you need in four weeks, without buying anything up front.

Week 1: the library. Visit the children's librarian. Borrow three or four picture books in your language, or bilingual books, and one song collection if they have it. Ask about storytimes and any language program included with a card. Get yourself a beginner's book or course with audio.

Week 2: a person. Make a list of everyone you know who speaks the language, even a little: relatives, neighbors, friends of friends, a coworker's family, a parent at the park. Reach out to one. Ask whether they'd enjoy saying hello to your child on a short call, or teaching you one song. Most people are delighted to be asked.

Week 3: your homemade kit. Make ten picture cards, a few labels, and a word box. Check every word with a recording or a speaker first. Choose your Hello song and your first carry phrase.

Week 4: one outing. Go to a storytime, a festival, a market, a cultural center event, or a class you've visited first. Bring one phrase to try. Afterward, write three things your child noticed.

At the end of the month, look at what you've gathered. You'll probably have a stack of library books, a person or two, a homemade kit, and one good memory of hearing the language out in the world. That is a complete set of resources for a young child. Anything you add from here is a bonus.

If one week doesn't work, skip it and come back. The order isn't sacred. If a grandparent is already eager to help, start with week 2. If the library is closed for a holiday, make your kit first.

When resources run thin

Some languages have shelves full of children's books; others have very few. Some towns have festivals every month; others have none. If you're learning a language with fewer resources nearby, or a heritage language spoken by a small community, a few ideas help.

Ask the library to borrow from farther away. Interlibrary loan can bring books from other systems. Librarians can also suggest ordering titles in your language for the collection.

Make more yourself. Homemade picture books, recorded family songs kept privately, and cards checked with a speaker can carry a language for years.

Lean on the people you have. Even one speaker, met once a month, is a strong model. Ask them to sing, tell a story, or simply talk with your child about their day.

Connect with other families. Community organizations for the language often know of family groups, weekend classes, or online gatherings. Online, follow the Chapter 7 rules every time.

A language with few resources isn't a language your child can't learn. It's a language where every person who shares it becomes even more precious.

When you do find a speaker, a book, or a song, write it down on the inside cover of your log with the date. Over a year, that short list becomes your family's own resource guide, and it's often the most useful page in the folder.

Low-device and no-device homes

You don't need a screen for any of this book's core work. Of the 98 cards in the activity bank, 89 need no device at all. Songs, games, labels, stories, pretend play, recipes, outings, and short checks all run on paper, objects, and voices.

If your home has little or no device time by choice or by circumstance, here's how to cover the few places where a device usually helps:

- **Checking pronunciation:** ask a speaker, use a library dictionary with audio on a library computer, or borrow an audio course from the library.
- **Hearing more voices:** library storytimes, community events, relatives, and a library audio collection played on a simple player.
- **Family calls:** a phone call works beautifully. Grandma's voice on speaker at the kitchen table is a perfect second listen.
- **Picture cards:** draw them, cut them from magazines and catalogs, or use real objects. Hand-drawn cards are often a child's favorites.
- **Records:** a paper log, a folder, and a box of word cards. If you make the term recording, a borrowed device and a private copy kept in two places is enough.

A no-device home isn't a lesser home for language learning. In many ways it's the home this book was written for.

Special situations

Speech, language, or hearing concerns. A second language doesn't cause these concerns.¹⁹ If you're worried about your child's speech, language, or hearing in any language, keep the home languages going and talk with your pediatrician or a speech-language pathologist, ideally one who can work with more than one language.

A move or long travel. Keep the Hello and Goodbye rituals and one carry phrase a day. The language can travel in your pocket.

Two new languages at once. Possible in bilingual homes. For families starting fresh, one new language at a time keeps the Hour simple.

Short seasons. A new baby, an illness, a hard month. A five-minute Hour of Hello, one song, and Goodbye still counts. The folder will show a quiet stretch and then a return. That's a real record too.

The series

Languages for Little Thinkers is the first title in the SMF WisdomForge Languages series. When your child is ready, *Languages for Young Minds* (11–14) continues the path, followed by *Languages for Emerging Adults* (15–18) and, for grown-ups returning to a language, *Languages Refresh for Adults*.

Other WisdomForge Hour series for this age use the same rhythm of short daily sessions, talk boxes, and try-its in and out of the home:

- *Art for Little Thinkers* (5–10): drawing, making, and looking closely, a little every day.
- *Computing for Little Thinkers* (5–10): patterns, steps, and debugging, with the grown-up at the keyboard.

For families who later want a grades 1–12 guide in one of seven languages, *Teaching World Languages* is the WisdomForge title for that next stage.

A last word

You started this book with a language and a child. Maybe you speak the language well; maybe you're learning alongside; maybe it's the language your grandparents spoke and you're bringing it home again. Whatever brought you here, you now have what you need: a Language Hour, a bank of games, a few people to talk with, a folder to keep, and a library card.

Understand first; then try it; play before print; a little every day. The rest is time, patience, and the people who love your child, speaking to them in a language that's becoming their own.

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.

Every word and phrase in a language other than English that appears in this book was checked against Wiktionary's bilingual entries on 15 October 2026, and each note names the entry used. Where a simplified Chinese character or a Japanese kana spelling is filed under another form, the note says so. Wiktionary is a good first check, not the last word; for a word you'll use every day, ask a speaker, and for ASL, learn from a Deaf teacher or a checked course. This book describes no signs.

Some things rest on the best available evidence rather than a perfect match. Much of the research on early language learning studies infants in laboratories, school classrooms, or older learners, not young children learning at home with a parent; the book borrows carefully and says where each study's population differs. Several studies were read at the level of their published abstracts, and the notes say so. Professional guidance from ACTFL, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and state education departments is cited as guidance, not as measured outcomes. Company terms for apps, tutoring platforms, and AI tools change often; the notes give the date each was read.

The five-step Hour, the activity cards, 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 examples are illustrations, not real people. Nothing here is legal or medical advice. Access date for web sources: 15 October 2026, unless a note says otherwise.

Notes

1. Spanish *salta* (“jump!”), the informal command form of *saltar*, “to jump”. Checked in Wiktionary, Spanish–English entry, s.v. “saltar,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/saltar>, accessed 15 October 2026.

2. National Center for Education Statistics, *Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2023* (NCES 2024-113), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2024/2024113.pdf>. About 3.4 percent of school-age children (roughly 1.765 million) were homeschooled in 2022–23.

3. The seven-day plan and card codes follow this book’s activity bank of 98 cards, 89 of which need no device. The log fields and the short checks are explained in **The Language Hour** and Chapter 9.

4. Spanish *hola* (“hello”); Mandarin Chinese 你好 *nǐ hǎo* (“hello”); Korean 안녕하세요 *annyeonghaseyo* (“hello,” polite form). Checked in Wiktionary: Spanish–English entry, s.v. “hola,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hola>; Chinese–English entry, s.v. “你好,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/你好>; Korean–English entry, s.v. “안녕하세요,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/안녕하세요>, all accessed 15 October 2026. No ASL sign is described here; learn greetings from a Deaf signer or a checked course.

5. James J. Asher, “The Total Physical Response Approach to Second Language Learning,” *Modern Language Journal* 53, no. 1 (1969): 3–17, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1969.tb04552.x>. TPR’s research base is mainly classroom work with older learners; it is used here as a playful starting tool suited to young children, not a proven home outcome.

6. The carry phrase follows this book’s activity card HELLO-04 Goodbye and Carry Phrase. The suggested carry phrases (more, please; thank you; let’s go; all done) are given in English for the family to put into their language.

7. Erika Hoff et al., “Dual Language Exposure and Early Bilingual Development,” *Journal of Child Language* 39, no. 1 (2012): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0305000910000759>. A study of bilingual toddlers: growth in each language tracked the child’s relative exposure to it, and total vocabulary was comparable. Read at abstract level.

8. Spanish *rojo* (“red”); ¿*El rojo?* (“The red one?”). Checked in Wiktionary, Spanish–English entry, s.v. “rojo,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/rojo>, accessed 15 October 2026. The recast pattern follows 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):

37–66, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263197001034>, a study of primary French-immersion classrooms.

9. Judith L. Shrum, “Wait-Time and the Use of Target or Native Languages,” *Foreign Language Annals* 18 (1985), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1985.tb01808.x>. High-school language classes; the average wait after questions was about 1.9 seconds. Read at abstract level. “Count to five in your head” is this book’s house habit, not a figure from the study. The order of the Hour’s five steps is this book’s teaching design, drawn from these sources and from early-language program practice; no homeschool study tests the whole Hour or ties daily minutes to outcomes.

10. ACTFL, “Early Language Learning,” position statement, 29 July 2012, <https://www.actfl.org/news/early-language-learning>. The statement recommends instruction that is continuous, articulated from grade to grade, offered more than twice per week, and totaling at least 90 minutes per week. This is a professional association’s recommended floor, not a measured outcome.

11. The first-year picture is this book’s expectation, drawn from ACTFL’s description of Novice learners, who rely on formulaic and memorized words, lists, and phrases (ACTFL, *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024*, <https://www.actfl.org/proficiency-guidelines-overview>), and from state program targets for early-grade learners (South Carolina Department of Education, “South Carolina World Language Programs and Learner Expectations,” <https://www.ed.sc.gov/instruction/standards/world-languages/instructional-resources/sc-modern-language-programs-and-learner-expectations/>). No homeschool study ties daily minutes to language outcomes; this is a professional expectation, not a measured promise.

12. Federal Trade Commission, “Children’s Online Privacy Protection Rule,” *Federal Register*, 22 April 2025, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/22/2025-05904/childrens-online-privacy-protection-rule>. The amended rule took effect 23 June 2025, with a compliance date of 22 April 2026. Children’s photographs, video, and audio files count as personal information; voiceprints are listed among biometric identifiers.

13. Tiffany Munzer et al., Council on Communications and Media, American Academy of Pediatrics, “Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents: Policy Statement,” *Pediatrics* 157, no. 2 (February 2026): e2025075320, <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/157/2/e2025075320/206129/>.

14. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Milestones by 5 Years,” *Learn the Signs. Act Early.*, <https://www.cdc.gov/act-early/milestones/5-years.html>. Among the parent tips: no more than 1 hour of screen time a day.

15. World Health Organization, *WHO Guidelines on Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour*, 25 November 2020, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240015128>. For ages 5–17, the guidelines advise limiting recreational screen time but give no numeric limit.

16. Age terms as of 15 October 2026, from company terms and help pages (company sources; check the current terms): OpenAI, “Terms of Use,” <https://openai.com/policies/row-terms-of-use/>, and “Is ChatGPT safe for all ages?,” <https://help.openai.com/en/articles/8313401-is-chatgpt-safe-for-all-ages> (13+, with parent permission under 18); Meta Help Center, “About supervision on Meta AI,” <https://www.meta.com/help/artificial-intelligence/1041579612020467/> (13+, 14 in some regions); SpaceX AI / xAI, “Terms of Service – Consumer,” <https://x.ai/legal/terms-of->

service (13+ with parent permission); Anthropic, “Minimum age requirement access restriction,” <https://support.claude.com/en/articles/13117299-minimum-age-requirement-access-restriction> (18+); Google, “Guide your child’s Gemini Apps experience,” <https://support.google.com/gemini/answer/16109150> (a parent can turn on access for a supervised under-13 account in supported regions). Naming these terms is not a recommendation of any product for children.

17. Vivek Bhardwaj, Mohamed Tahar Ben Othman, Vinay Kukreja, Youcef Belkhier, Mohit Bajaj, B. Srikanth Goud, Ateeq Ur Rehman, Muhammad Shafiq, and Habib Hamam, “Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) Systems for Children: A Systematic Literature Review,” *Applied Sciences* 12, no. 9 (2022): 4419, <https://doi.org/10.3390/app12094419>, accessed 15 October 2026. A review of 76 studies published 2009–2020; it reports that recognition systems are less accurate with children’s speech than with adults’, and that recognition accuracy for children still lags.

18. Hamsa Bastani et al., “Generative AI without Guardrails Can Harm Learning: Evidence from High School Mathematics,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 122, no. 26 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2422633122>. A field experiment with high-school mathematics students; a different age and subject from this book.

19. American Academy of Pediatrics, “Young Children Learning Multiple Languages: Parent FAQs,” [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx), last updated 20 November 2025, <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>, accessed 15 October 2026. The page says that learning more than one language does not cause language delay, disorder, or confusion; that mixing languages is normal; that children can learn a language at any age; and that more than 20 percent of children in the United States use a language besides spoken English at home. A professional association’s guidance for parents.

20. Tagalog *salamat* (“thank you”). Checked in Wiktionary, Tagalog–English entry, s.v. “*salamat*,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/salamat>, accessed 15 October 2026.

21. Joshua K. Hartshorne, Joshua B. Tenenbaum, and Steven Pinker, “A Critical Period for Second Language Acquisition: Evidence from 2/3 Million English Speakers,” *Cognition* 177 (2018): 263–77, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.04.007>. An online quiz of English grammar with 669,498 participants; the authors estimated that grammar-learning ability is preserved until about 17.4 years. The population is online English learners and speakers, not young homeschoolers.

22. Carmen Muñoz, ed., *Age and the Rate of Foreign Language Learning* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006). The Barcelona Age Factor project studied school classes learning English with limited weekly hours in Catalonia. Used here only for its broad finding.

23. Robert M. DeKeyser, “The Robustness of Critical Period Effects in Second Language Acquisition,” *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 22, no. 4 (2000): 499–533, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100004022>. A study of adult immigrants; the child advantage it describes concerns long-run attainment with extensive exposure, not speed of early learning.

24. Minna Lehtonen et al., “Is Bilingualism Associated with Enhanced Executive Functioning in Adults? A Meta-Analytic Review,” *Psychological Bulletin* 144, no. 4 (2018): 394–425, <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000142>. 152 studies and 891 effect sizes; no reliable advantage after correction for publication bias. Adults.

25. Hilde Lowell Gunnerud, Dieuwert ten Braak, Elin Kirsti Lie Reikerås, Enrica Donolato, and Monica Melby-Lervåg, “Is Bilingualism Related to a Cognitive Advantage in Children? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin* 146, no. 12 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000301>. Children; the overall effect was very small, with signs of publication bias.
26. Krista Byers-Heinlein and Casey Lew-Williams, “Bilingualism in the Early Years: What the Science Says,” *LEARNing Landscapes* 7, no. 1 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v7i1.632>.
27. Lily Wong Fillmore, “When Learning a Second Language Means Losing the First,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1991): 323–46, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0885-2006\(05\)80059-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0885-2006(05)80059-6). A survey of language-minority families whose young children attended English-only preschool programs in the United States.
28. The National Standards Collaborative Board, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 4th ed. (Alexandria, VA: Author, 2015), <https://actfl.org/uploads/files/general/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf>. Communication goal area, Interpersonal Communication standard.
29. French *bonjour* (“hello, good morning”); Arabic *مرحبا marhaban* (“hello”). Checked in Wiktionary: French–English entry, s.v. “bonjour,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/bonjour>; Arabic–English entry, s.v. “مرحبا,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/مرحبا>; all accessed 15 October 2026.
30. Hindi *नमस्ते namaste* (“hello”); Portuguese *obrigado / obrigada* (“thank you,” by the speaker’s gender); Korean *감사합니다 gamsahamnida* (“thank you,” formal polite). Checked in Wiktionary: Hindi–English entry, s.v. “नमस्ते,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/नमस्ते>; Portuguese–English entry, s.v. “obrigado,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/obrigado>; Portuguese–English entry, s.v. “obrigada,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/obrigada>; Korean–English entry, s.v. “감사합니다,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/감사합니다>; all accessed 15 October 2026.
31. National Association of the Deaf, “Position Statement on American Sign Language,” <https://nad.org/knowledge-hub/position-statements/position-statement-on-american-sign-language/>, accessed 15 October 2026. A community organization’s position.
32. Spanish *otra vez, por favor* (“again, please”); German *noch einmal, bitte* (“once more, please”); Japanese *もう一度お願いします mō ichido onegaishimasu* (“once more, please,” polite); Spanish *quiero* (“I want”), from *querer*. Checked in Wiktionary: Spanish–English entry, s.v. “otra vez,” https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/otra_vez; Spanish–English entry, s.v. “por favor,” https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/por_favor; German–English entry, s.v. “noch einmal,” https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/noch_einmal; Japanese–English entry, s.v. “もう一度,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/もう一度>; Japanese–English entry, s.v. “お願いします,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/お願いします>; Spanish–English entry, s.v. “querer,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/querer>; all accessed 15 October 2026. Bracketed words in this chapter are placeholders for your family’s language.
33. Spanish *pero* (“but”); *perro* (“dog”), a standard pair for the tapped r and the trilled rr. Checked in Wiktionary: Spanish–English entry, s.v. “pero,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/pero>; Spanish–English entry, s.v. “perro,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/perro>; all accessed 15 October 2026.

34. Janet F. Werker and Richard C. Tees, “Cross-Language Speech Perception: Evidence for Perceptual Reorganization during the First Year of Life,” *Infant Behavior and Development* 7, no. 1 (1984): 49–63, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0163-6383\(84\)80022-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0163-6383(84)80022-3). English-learning infants discriminated Hindi and Nthlakampx (Interior Salish) contrasts at 6–8 months but performed like English-speaking adults by 10–12 months. Infants.
35. Patricia K. Kuhl, Feng-Ming Tsao, and Huei-Mei Liu, “Foreign-Language Experience in Infancy: Effects of Short-Term Exposure and Social Interaction on Phonetic Learning,” *PNAS* 100, no. 15 (2003): 9096–101, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1532872100>. Nine-month-old infants; twelve 25-minute sessions (about five hours) with live Mandarin speakers led to learning of a Mandarin phonetic contrast, while infants exposed to the same material by audiovisual or audio-only recording showed no learning. Infants, laboratory sessions, one contrast.
36. French *tu* (“you,” informal); *tout* (“all”). Checked in Wiktionary: French–English entry, s.v. “tu,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/tu>; French–English entry, s.v. “tout,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/tout>; all accessed 15 October 2026.
37. Japanese おばさん *obasan* (“aunt”); おばあさん *obāsan* (“grandmother”). Checked in Wiktionary: Japanese–English entry, s.v. “叔母さん,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/叔母さん>; Japanese–English entry, s.v. “お婆さん,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/お婆さん>; all accessed 15 October 2026. The kana spellings おばさん and おばあさん point to these entries.
38. Mandarin Chinese 妈 *mā* (“mom”); 麻 *má* (“hemp”); 马 *mǎ* (“horse”); 骂 *mà* (“scold”), the standard textbook illustration of the four tones. Checked in Wiktionary: Chinese–English entry, s.v. “媽,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/媽>; Chinese–English entry, s.v. “麻,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/麻>; Chinese–English entry, s.v. “馬,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/馬>; Chinese–English entry, s.v. “罵,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/罵>; all accessed 15 October 2026. Simplified characters are shown; Wiktionary files 妈, 马, and 骂 under the traditional forms 媽, 馬, and 罵.
39. Korean 달 *dal* (“moon”); 딸 *ttal* (“daughter”); 탈 *tal* (“mask”), a common illustration of plain, tense, and aspirated consonants. Checked in Wiktionary: Korean–English entry, s.v. “달,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/달>; Korean–English entry, s.v. “딸,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/딸>; Korean–English entry, s.v. “탈,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/탈>; all accessed 15 October 2026.
40. The National Standards Collaborative Board, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 4th ed. (Alexandria, VA: Author, 2015), <https://actfl.org/uploads/files/general/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf>. Communication goal area, Interpretive Communication standard.
41. Spanish *más* (“more”). Checked in Wiktionary, Spanish–English entry, s.v. “más,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/más>, accessed 15 October 2026.
42. Spanish *por favor* (“please”). Checked in Wiktionary, Spanish–English entry, s.v. “por favor,” https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/por_favor, accessed 15 October 2026.
43. French *merci* (“thank you”). Checked in Wiktionary, French–English entry, s.v. “merci,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/merci>, accessed 15 October 2026.

44. Mandarin Chinese 谢谢 *xièxie* (“thank you”; traditional characters 謝謝). Checked in Wiktionary, Chinese–English entry, s.v. “謝謝,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/謝謝>, accessed 15 October 2026.
45. Korean 감사합니다 *gamsahamnida* (“thank you,” formal polite). Checked in Wiktionary, Korean–English entry, s.v. “감사합니다,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/감사합니다>, accessed 15 October 2026.
46. Arabic شكرًا *shukran* (“thank you”; Wiktionary romanizes it *šukran*). Checked in Wiktionary, Arabic–English entry, s.v. “شكرا,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/شكرا>, accessed 15 October 2026.
47. Hindi पानी *pānī* (“water”). Checked in Wiktionary, Hindi–English entry, s.v. “पानी,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/पानी>, accessed 15 October 2026.
48. Louisiana Department of Education, *Louisiana Guide to Early World Languages Programming*, <https://doe.louisiana.gov/docs/default-source/academic-standards/louisiana-guide-to-early-world-languages.pdf>, accessed 15 October 2026. State guidance for school programs; quoted for its description of play-based early programs.
49. Japanese いぬ *inu* (“dog”). Checked in Wiktionary, Japanese–English entry, s.v. “犬,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/犬>, accessed 15 October 2026; the kana page いぬ points to it.
50. French *un chat rouge* (“a red cat”). Checked in Wiktionary: French–English entry, s.v. “un,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/un>; French–English entry, s.v. “chat,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/chat>; French–English entry, s.v. “rouge,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/rouge>; all accessed 15 October 2026.
51. 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): 37–66, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263197001034>. Primary French-immersion classrooms. Recasts were the most frequent feedback type; prompts were followed by more student repair. Used as good practice, not a home outcome.
52. The National Standards Collaborative Board, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 4th ed. (Alexandria, VA: Author, 2015), <https://actfl.org/uploads/files/general/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf>. Communication goal area, Presentational Communication standard.
53. Spanish *gato* (“cat”). Checked in Wiktionary, Spanish–English entry, s.v. “gato,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/gato>, accessed 15 October 2026.
54. Korean 고양이 *goyangi* (“cat”). Checked in Wiktionary, Korean–English entry, s.v. “고양이,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/고양이>, accessed 15 October 2026.
55. Arabic قطة *qitta* (“cat”). Checked in Wiktionary, Arabic–English entry, s.v. “قطه,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/قطه>, accessed 15 October 2026.
56. Portuguese pão (“bread”). Checked in Wiktionary, Portuguese–English entry, s.v. “pão,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/pão>, accessed 15 October 2026.

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58. Judith L. Shrum, “Wait-Time and the Use of Target or Native Languages,” *Foreign Language Annals* 18 (1985), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1985.tb01808.x>. High-school language classes; the average wait after questions was about 1.9 seconds. Read at abstract level. “Count to five in your head” is this book’s house habit, not a figure from the study.
59. Michael H. Long, “Native Speaker/Non-native Speaker Conversation and the Negotiation of Comprehensible Input,” *Applied Linguistics* 4, no. 2 (1983): 126–41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/appl/4.2.126>. Read at abstract level; adult and adolescent learners. Applied here as good practice for young children.
60. ACTFL, *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024*, <https://www.actfl.org/proficiency-guidelines-overview>. Novice speakers rely on formulaic and rote utterances, lists, and phrases. The distinction between performance and proficiency is ACTFL’s.
61. Spanish ¿*Rojo o azul?* (“Red or blue?”). Checked in Wiktionary: Spanish–English entry, s.v. “rojo,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/rojo>; Spanish–English entry, s.v. “azul,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/azul>; all accessed 15 October 2026.
62. German *ja* (“yes”); *nein* (“no”). Checked in Wiktionary: German–English entry, s.v. “ja,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/ja>; German–English entry, s.v. “nein,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/nein>; all accessed 15 October 2026.
63. Korean 네 *ne* (“yes”); 아니요 *aniyo* (“no”), both polite. Checked in Wiktionary: Korean–English entry, s.v. “네,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/네>; Korean–English entry, s.v. “아니요,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/아니요>; all accessed 15 October 2026.
64. Tagalog oo (“yes”); hindi (“no”). Checked in Wiktionary: Tagalog–English entry, s.v. “oo,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/oo>; Tagalog–English entry, s.v. “hindi,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hindi>; all accessed 15 October 2026.
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66. Arabic مرحبا *marḥaban* (“hello”). Checked in Wiktionary, Arabic–English entry, s.v. “مرحبا,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/مرحبا>, accessed 15 October 2026.
67. French *encore* (“again”). Checked in Wiktionary, French–English entry, s.v. “encore,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/encore>, accessed 15 October 2026.
68. Spanish *niño* (“child”). Checked in Wiktionary, Spanish–English entry, s.v. “niño,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/niño>, accessed 15 October 2026.
69. French *garçon* (“boy”). Checked in Wiktionary, French–English entry, s.v. “garçon,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/garçon>, accessed 15 October 2026.
70. German *Tür* (“door”). Checked in Wiktionary, German–English entry, s.v. “Tür,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Tür>, accessed 15 October 2026.

71. Korean 물 *mul* (“water”), written as one syllable block of three letters. Checked in Wiktionary, Korean–English entry, s.v. “물,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/물>, accessed 15 October 2026.
72. Arabic باب *bāb* (“door”). Checked in Wiktionary, Arabic–English entry, s.v. “باب,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/باب>, accessed 15 October 2026.
73. Japanese ねこ *neko* (“cat”), two hiragana symbols. Checked in Wiktionary, Japanese–English entry, s.v. “猫,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/猫>, accessed 15 October 2026; the kana page ねこ points to it.
74. Mandarin Chinese 猫 *māo* (“cat”), one character, first tone. Checked in Wiktionary, Chinese–English entry, s.v. “貓,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/貓>, accessed 15 October 2026, where the simplified form 猫 is filed.
75. The National Standards Collaborative Board, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 4th ed. (Alexandria, VA: Author, 2015), <https://actfl.org/uploads/files/general/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf>. Comparisons goal area, Language Comparisons standard.
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81. Two platforms’ current pages, both accessed 15 October 2026: italki, “Can children take lessons on italki and how?,” <https://support.italki.com/hc/en-us/articles/900004593923-Can-children-take-lessons-on-italki-and-how>, which says most users are adults, asks parents to create and manage accounts on behalf of their children, and says leaving a child alone for a whole lesson is not recommended; Preply, “Terms of Service,” updated 25 November 2025, https://termsofuse.preply.com/terms_of_use/en_TermsOfService.pdf, which limits the service to users 18 and older, allows users from 13 to 17 only with a parent or legal guardian’s supervision, and does not allow children under 13. Company terms, cited as examples of how rules differ; neither is recommended here.

82. Spanish *gracias* (“thank you”). Checked in Wiktionary, Spanish–English entry, s.v. “gracias,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/gracias>, accessed 15 October 2026.

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