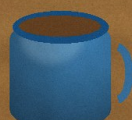
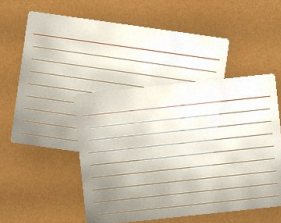
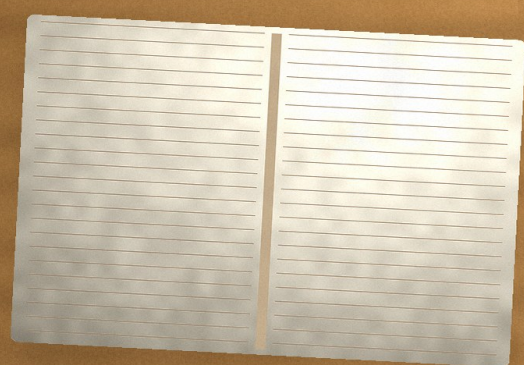


LANGUAGES FOR YOUNG MINDS

Michael Gannotti



Languages for Young Minds

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A warm, practical guide for parents and students learning any world language, including American Sign Language, at ages 11 to 14: the daily Language Hour, listening, vocabulary that stays, real reading, real conversations, writing to someone, tutors and community, tools and AI under the terms, and records a stranger can read. Book 2 of the SMF WisdomForge Languages series. Illustrated edition, 20 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 a weekday morning. This is an illustration, not a family we've met, but you may recognize it. A thirteen-year-old is holding a short letter from a pen friend, a girl her age in a club the family knows well. The letter is six lines long, in Spanish. The student reads it once to herself, frowns at one word, and reads it again. Across the table, her father waits with his coffee. He took two years of French a long time ago and has no Spanish at all. He is not here to check her grammar. He is here to listen.

"Okay," she says. "She's telling me about her school. She has a test on Friday, she likes biology, and her brother broke his arm playing soccer. I think. There's one word I don't know, but I think it's arm, because of the soccer." She looks it up in the paper dictionary, and she's right. "And she asked what I do on weekends. So I want to write back about the library and the swim meet. I know how to say *swim*. I don't know *meet*."

That's the whole book in one scene. A student who understands a real message from a real person. A parent who listens and says what they understood, without fixing anything. A gap the student noticed herself, and a plan to close it. Nobody gave a lecture. Nobody opened an app. Something true was said in a new language, to someone who wanted to hear it.

Why this book exists

Families want their middle schoolers to be able to talk with people. Grandparents who are more at home in Korean than English. A neighbor from Brazil. A church, temple, or mosque community. A Deaf classmate. The family on the other end of a trip that's two summers away. And many parents also want something solid on paper as high school comes into view.

Many parents feel unsure about this part of homeschooling. Some speak the language, and some don't. Some had a hard time with languages in school and would rather not relive it. Some have a student who has already passed them, which is a lovely problem but still a problem when you're the one in charge. If any of that is you, you're in good company, and you're in the right book. You're also among a sizable group: about 3.4 percent of school-age children in the United States were homeschooled in 2022–23.¹ Plenty of those families are working out the same question you are.

Here is the good news. At eleven to fourteen, a student can do much more of this work than a younger child can. They can set a goal and check whether they met it. They can learn how to make words stay instead of hoping they do. They can read a real text, write to a real person, and notice

their own patterns. That means your job changes. You become the person who keeps the habit steady, chooses wisely at first, listens well, and keeps everyone safe. The student does more of the learning work each month.

What a good Language Hour looks like

The book is built around a short daily habit we call the Language Hour. It's about 30 to 45 minutes at 11–12 and 40 to 55 at 13–14, four or five days a week. In the student's hands it looks like this. They open with a greeting in the new language and today's goal, written as an "I can..." line. They listen to or read something they mostly understand, first for the gist and then for the details. They spend a few minutes making words stay by covering a card, saying the word, and checking. They use the language for real with someone: a question, a short conversation, a message, a two-minute talk. Then they check what they can do, write one line in the log, and pick a phrase to carry into the rest of the day. That's the Hour. The rest of the book shows you how to run it well and how to hand it over.

What you can honestly expect

This book promises steady, real progress you can see on paper. It promises a student who can do more each term, and who knows it, because they've been checking. Over a year, that looks like a growing stack of dated goal cards, a word box that keeps getting heavier, a reading log, a few journal pages, and a private recording or two that make the student wince and grin at the same time.

It doesn't promise fluency by a date, an accent that sounds like a native speaker's, or a score. Language takes time, and the time has to be spent most days. A good first year at this age often lands in the early beginner levels that teachers call Novice Mid to Novice High, and that's success. Chapter 1 explains what those words mean, and why they're good news.

What this book won't do

- It won't hand you a 180-day stack of worksheets. You'll get a daily shape, a week's plan, and a bank of activities you can choose from.
- It isn't a course in one language. It works for Spanish, French, Mandarin, Arabic, Korean, Japanese, Hindi, Tagalog, Portuguese, German, Russian, a heritage language, or American Sign Language. Examples rotate on purpose.
- It won't sell you an app. Tools have a place, and chapter 8 shows you where it is. Most of the activities here use no screen at all.
- It won't promise that a second language will make your student better at math or anything else. People are the reason to learn a language.
- It won't issue certificates. Your records will describe what your student can do in words a stranger can read.

The focus line

Everything in the book comes back to one sentence:

Understand first; then try it for real; check what you can do; a little every day.

Understand first means most of the Hour is spent taking in language the student can mostly follow: listening, watching, reading. Understanding drives everything after it. *Then try it for real* means using the language with real people for real reasons, rehearsed at first and unrehearsed later. *Check what you can do* means the student measures progress with plain “I can...” statements instead of guesses, scores, or streaks. *A little every day* means the habit matters more than the session. A fifteen-minute Hour on a hard day still counts.

Where this book sits

This is the second of four Languages books in the WisdomForge Hour series, written for ages 11 to 14. *Languages for Little Thinkers* comes before it, for ages 5 to 10, and *Languages for Emerging Adults* and *Languages Refresh for Adults* come after. A student who used *Little Thinkers* will recognize the rhythm of the Hour. A student who didn’t loses nothing; this book starts from wherever your student is. If you have other middle schoolers in the house, *Science for Young Minds*, *Art for Young Minds*, and *Computing for Young Minds* share the same shape.

How to start

Turn to “How to Use This Book This Week.” It gives you seven days, one at a time. On day one, you and your student read this Welcome and the Language Hour together, choose or confirm the language, and fill in two cards. That’s it for day one. By the end of the week you’ll have run four or five Hours, and the student will have written their first goal, their first log lines, and their first “Now I can...”

You don’t need to know the language to do this well. You need to show up, listen, and keep the habit. The student will do the rest, a little more each week.

How to Use This Book This Week

You can start on Monday. You don't need to read the whole book first, buy a course, or know the language. Here's the first week, one day at a time, and then a short tour of how the chapters work.

Day 1: read, choose, and place

Read the Welcome and the Language Hour together, taking turns aloud if that helps. It's about half an hour.

Then choose the language, or confirm the one you already have. Chapter 1 has a short set of questions for this, with family, real people nearby, and the student's own reasons at the top of the list. If the choice is obvious (Grandma speaks Tagalog, the student has been asking about Japanese for a year), confirm it and move on.

Then the student fills in two cards. The first is GOAL-07 Where Am I Now?, a first self-placement: the student reads a short set of beginner "I can..." statements and marks each one *not yet*, *with help*, or *on my own*, then dates the page. The second is GOAL-01 Can-Do Goal Card: one "I can..." line for this week, in the student's own words. Both cards are explained in chapter 1. A brand-new beginner will mark nearly everything *not yet*. That's the point. In six weeks, the same sheet will look different.

Day 2: gather what you need

Collect a short list:

- Index cards and a box to keep them in (a shoebox works), with five tab dividers. This becomes the **word box** (chapter 3).
- One notebook for the student, for the Hour log, the pattern page, and journal lines.
- One easy reader in the language, or a library visit to find one (OUT-01 Library Language Shelf, in chapter 1).
- One short recording source you've checked yourself: a course's audio, a library audiobook, a children's story read by a speaker. Short and clear beats long and exciting.
- A dictionary with recordings made by people and example sentences, plus a printed dictionary for checks if you can find one.

If you're learning ASL, the "recording" is a video of a Deaf signer from a source you trust, and the dictionary is a signing dictionary with video.

Days 3 to 7: run the Hour

Run the Language Hour every day you can this week. Here's a plan you can follow as written.

Day	The Hour (11–12 about 35 minutes; 13–14 about 45)	Carry phrase
Monday	Goal and Greet with the goal card · Take It In: LISTEN-01 Three Listens on a short, easy clip · Work With It: WORD-01, the first ten cards · Use It for Real: TALK-01 Keep It Going Phrases · Check and Carry	"Again, please"
Tuesday	WORD-10 quick review · READ-01, the first pages of a graded reader · WORD-02 Cover and Recall · TALK-09 Daily Check-In Talk · Check and Carry	"What does ____ mean?"
Wednesday	Review · LISTEN-02 Gist First · WORD-03 Chunk Collection · TALK-02 Information Gap · Check and Carry	"How do you say ____?"
Thursday	Review · READ-03 Read, Listen, Read · WRITE-01 Three-Line Journal · TALK-03 Role-Play Card · Check and Carry	one chunk from Wednesday
Friday	Review · LISTEN-09 Live Speaker Listening (or a recorded story) · WRITE-03 Pattern Notebook · AS-01 Can-Do Self-Check · Check and Carry	the student's choice
Weekend	OUT-01 Library Language Shelf · GOAL-04 Weekly Plan Sheet (13–14)	—

If you start on a Wednesday, start with Monday's row. If a day goes sideways, a fifteen-minute Hour (five old cards, one listen, the exit line) still counts. Each card's code tells you which chapter owns it: GOAL in chapter 1, LISTEN in 2, WORD in 3, READ in 4, TALK in 5, WRITE in 6. The Hour explains enough to begin.

How the chapters work

Each of the eight teaching chapters has the same eight parts, in the same order. **Why this matters** says what the skill is for. **For the parent: understand it yourself** explains the idea in plain words, with one line from the national standards teachers use and a short list of wrong answers you should learn to hear. **How to teach it this week** tells you where the skill sits in the Hour, who runs what, and the exact words to say, with a **talk box**: one opening question, three follow-ups, how to wait, and what to do if it goes quiet. **Practice that actually builds learning** holds the try-its, each named with a code and a title (In-home — LISTEN-01 Three Listens, Out-of-home — OUT-01 Library Language Shelf). **For the student** is written to the student. **If it isn't clicking** gives three common snags and the next move for each. **Tools, including AI** is short and points back to the Hour. **What "done enough" looks like** is a checklist and one short check.

Chapters 9 and 10 are reference: records and transcripts, then resources.

Bands, and "ready 12"

Throughout the book you'll see two bands: **11–12** and **13–14**. They're planning bands, not rules. The difference is mostly about who runs the Hour and how long it goes. At 11–12 you run more of it and choose the material at first. At 13–14 the student leads, and you become the first listener and the safety-keeper.

When you see **Ready 12**, it marks a 13–14 move that some twelve-year-olds are ready for. Place by skill, not birthday. A careful eleven-year-old heritage speaker may be ready for things a fourteen-year-old beginner isn't, and that's fine.

The student sections

Every teaching chapter has a section called **For the student**, written directly to the student. At 11–12, you read it too and talk it over briefly. At 13–14, ask what they thought, and let them tell you.

What to keep this week

Three things, and only three:

1. **The Hour log.** One line a day, kept by the student.
2. **The word box.** The first ten to fifteen cards, moving through the review tabs.

3. **One dated check.** The Friday AS-01 Can-Do Self-Check.

That's a record already. Chapter 9 shows how a year of these becomes a portfolio and a transcript line.

Two students at once

If you have two students at different stages, run one Hour with shared **Take It In** (the same clip or story, with different questions for each), then split for **Work With It**, where each keeps their own word box. **Use It for Real** can be the two of them talking to each other, with you as first listener. Some days the older student is the younger one's first listener. Both of them learn from that.

Coming from *Languages for Little Thinkers*

Welcome back. You'll recognize the Language Hour, the talk box, the try-it cards, and the carry phrase. The five steps have grown-up names now: **Goal and Greet · Take It In · Work With It · Use It for Real · Check and Carry**. Start with chapter 1's placement, not page one of anything. Years spent don't decide where your student starts; what they can do now does. Some students who spent years with songs and stories will place higher than you expect in listening and lower in reading. That's normal and useful to know.

Other situations

If you're learning alongside your student, be the first listener, use answer keys and recordings, and say "Let's find out together" often. If your student has already passed you, celebrate it, keep your safety role and the talk-box question, and ask them to teach you five words a week. If your student is a heritage speaker, expect the Hour to shift toward reading and writing; the Language Hour explains how. If reading is hard in every language, or attention or anxiety get in the way, shorten the blocks, use more listening, and see the Hour's notes on hard days. If you're starting fresh at thirteen or fourteen, good. Older starters often move quickly at first.

Now turn to the Language Hour. It's the one part of this book worth reading twice.

If You Only Remember Five Things

Some weeks you won't open this book. Some weeks the Hour will be fifteen minutes in a waiting room. That's fine. If you keep these five things, you're still doing it right.

1. Understand first; then try it for real; check what you can do; a little every day.

Understand first; then try it for real; check what you can do; a little every day. That's the whole method in one line. Understanding comes before speaking. Real use with real people comes before polish. Checking replaces guessing. And a short Hour most days beats a long one on Saturday. If you're ever unsure what to do next, read the line again and ask which part you've been skipping.

2. Most of the Hour is taking in language you can mostly understand.

Listening, watching, and reading are where most of the learning happens, and they get the biggest share of the Hour. The trick is *mostly*. If your student understands almost nothing, the material is too hard, and no amount of effort will fix that; find something easier. If they understand all of it, add something a little harder. Most, with a few new things, is the sweet spot. Your student should finish the Take It In step able to say who, where, and what happened, even if some words got away.

3. Make words stay: space them out and quiz yourself; don't just reread.

Rereading a list feels like studying. Covering the word, saying it, and then checking is what actually makes it stick, and coming back to it after a day, then three days, then a week, makes it stick longer. That's what the word box is for. Five minutes of quizzing beats twenty minutes of staring. Review the old cards before adding new ones.

4. Use it with a real person, safely — the parent knows who, where, and what’s shared.

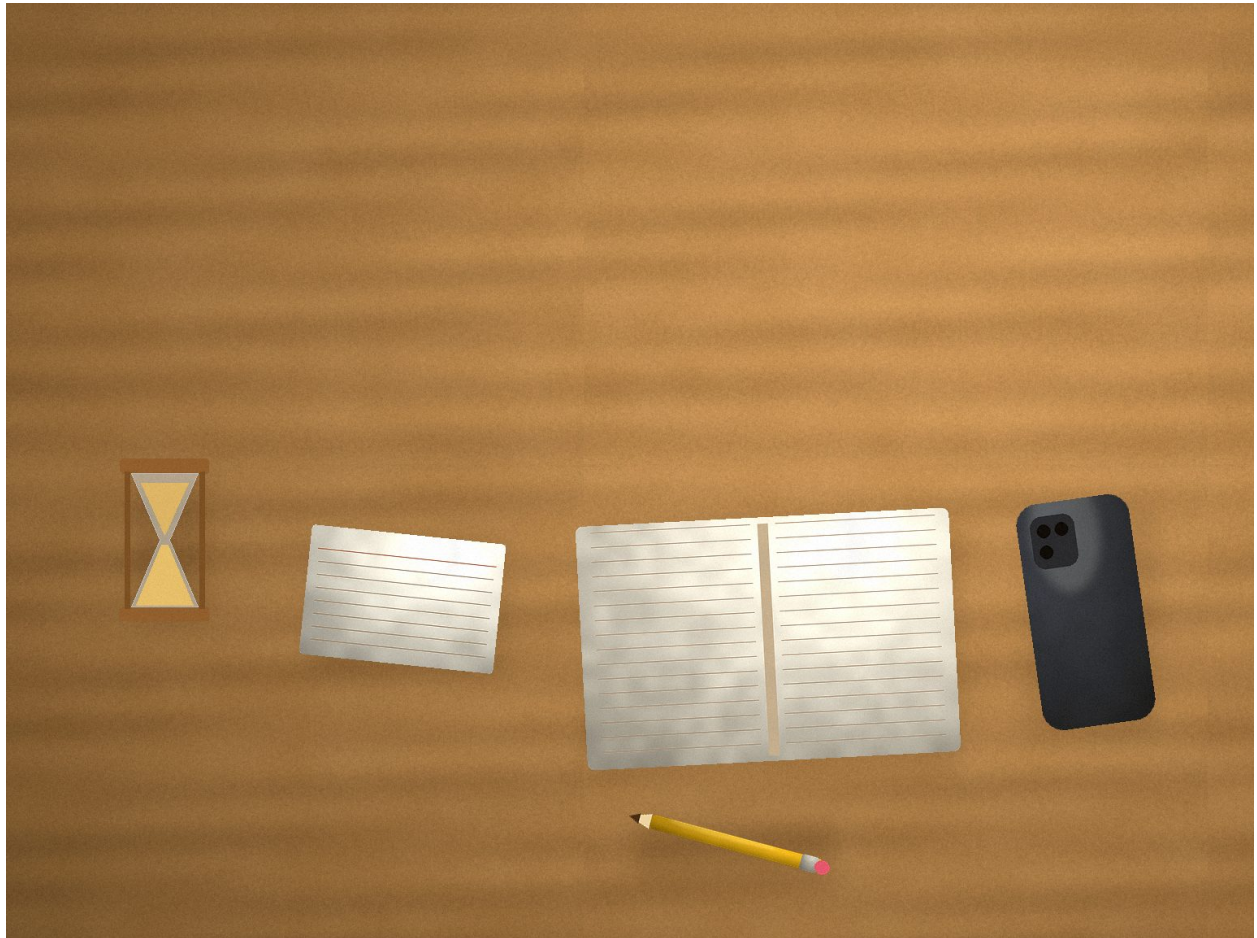
A language is for talking with someone. Every week, your student should use the new language with a real person: you, a relative, a speaker in your community, a class, a tutor, a pen friend through a program you know. Rehearse first, then try it for real. And keep it safe. You always know who your student is talking with, where, and what’s being shared. First names only. No moving to another app. If anything feels off: stop, save, tell. The Language Hour’s Family safety basics spell it out.

5. A tool’s work is made by a tool. Write “Help I used” every time. The checks are always tool-free.

Dictionaries, translators, apps, and chatbots can help a learner check and explore. What they produce isn’t your student’s work. Anything a tool wrote, translated, or fixed is **made by a tool**, and it’s labeled that way. Every Hour ends with one line: **Help I used:** ... (a book, a person, a tool, or “none”). And every check your student does to show progress is done without any tool at all, so the record shows what they can really do.

That’s it. Five things. The rest of the book is detail.

The Language Hour



The Language Hour is the habit at the center of this book. “Hour” is the habit’s name, not the clock. At 11–12, it runs about 30 to 45 minutes; at 13–14, about 40 to 55. Aim for four or five days a week. A fifteen-minute Hour on a hard day still counts, and it counts for more than you’d think, because the habit is what carries a language across months and years.

Everything in the Hour serves one line:

Understand first; then try it for real; check what you can do; a little every day.

The five steps

Step	Minutes (11–12 / 13–14)	What happens	Cards to start with
Goal and Greet	3 / 3–5	Greet each other in the language. Name today's can-do goal from the goal card. Run a quick review of five old words.	GOAL-01, WORD-10, TALK-09
Take It In	10–15 / 12–18	Listen to, watch, or read something the student mostly understands: the gist first, then the details.	LISTEN, READ
Work With It	8–12 / 10–15	Make it stay: the word box, a self-quiz, one pattern noticed, a game or an information gap.	WORD, WRITE-03, WRITE-04, TALK-02
Use It for Real	5–10 / 8–12	Say, sign, or write something to someone: a conversation, a message, a role-play, a session with a tutor, a short talk.	TALK, WRITE, PEOPLE
Check and Carry	3–5 / 3–5	A can-do check, the exit line, "Help I used," one carry phrase for the day, one log line.	AS-01, GOAL-05, GOAL-06, TECH-07

For a signed language, every step works the same way: Take It In is watching, and Use It for Real is signing.

What each step sounds like

These are shapes, not scripts. Fill the brackets with this week's words, checked in a dictionary or your course.

Goal and Greet. "[Hello. How are you?]" The student answers in the language. "Today's can-do is: *I can ask someone what they like to do.* Five old cards first." In Spanish, the greeting might

be *Hola, ¿qué tal?* (“Hi, how’s it going?”).² In Korean, it might be 안녕하세요 *annyeonghaseyo* (“hello”).³ The review is fast, five cards from earlier weeks, just enough to wake the language up.

Take It In. “First listen: who’s talking, and where? ... Second listen: what do they want? ... Third: which words did you catch?” The student answers each question before the next listen. A thirty- to ninety-second clip is plenty. So is two pages of an easy reader.

Work With It. “Cover it. What is it? Flip.” The student moves each card forward or back in the word box. Some days this step is a pattern noticed in today’s clip (“Every one of these verbs ends the same way when it’s *I*”), written on the pattern page. Some days it’s a game.

Use It for Real. “Two minutes: ask me three questions about my weekend. Use ‘again, please’ if you need it.” Then you answer, and you let the student keep it going. If they stall, count to five in your head before you help (see the rescue order below).

Check and Carry. The student says the exit line (below), writes “Help I used,” picks a carry phrase to use three times before bed, and writes one line in the log. In French, a carry phrase might be *À plus tard* (“See you later”).⁴

Why five steps, in this order

Input first, because understanding drives everything after it. What a learner can say grows out of what they’ve heard, watched, and read many times, and the time spent with understandable language is what moves progress.⁵ **Then practice that makes words stay**, because spacing review out over days beats cramming,⁶ and quizzing yourself beats rereading.⁷ **Then real use**, because working out meaning with another person, asking again, checking, rephrasing, is where language starts to belong to the student.⁸ **Then a check**, because plain “I can...” statements give the student a way to see their own progress, and learners who use them tend to underrate themselves more often than they overrate.⁹ And then **carry**, because a phrase used three times outside the Hour adds practice without adding lesson time.

No study has tested this exact Hour in homeschools. Each step rests on research or on the standards language teachers use, and together they make a sensible daily shape.¹⁰

Who runs it: the step-up

This is the biggest change from the younger years. The student runs more of the Hour each month.

At 11–12. For the first month, you run Goal and Greet and choose the Take It In material. The student runs Work With It from week one. It’s their word box, and they move the cards. The student also leads Check and Carry: they say the exit line, write the log line, and choose the carry phrase. By midyear, the student picks the material and sets the goal, and you check that the material is mostly understandable and the goal is one week’s size.

At 13–14. The student is the session lead. On the weekend, they fill in GOAL-04 Weekly Plan Sheet: this week’s goal, what they’ll take in each day, how they’ll practice, and who they’ll use the language with. Then they run the clock, choose the input, and keep the log. You become the **first**

listener: you listen or read, and you say what you understood, without fixing anything. You ask the talk-box question from the chapter they're working in. And you hold the safety rules. Once a week, spend ten minutes together looking at the log and the goal card. That's your check-in.

Ready 12. Some twelve-year-olds are ready to plan their own week. If yours is, let them. Place by skill, not birthday.

If you're learning the language too, the step-up is a relief. You don't have to be the expert. You have to be the one who keeps the habit steady and listens well.

Languages during the Hour

Use as much of the new language as the student can understand. Use the family's main language for safety, for feelings, for planning, and for short explanations of a pattern ("In German the verb comes second; let's find it"). There's no prize for an all-new-language Hour that leaves the student lost.

At 13–14, try a **language-only ten minutes** inside Use It for Real: a timer, both of you staying in the new language, Keep It Going phrases allowed, gestures allowed, English not. Many students like the challenge once it has an end time.

The rescue order

When the student gets stuck, help in this order:

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

Ask the question. Wait: count to five in your head. Most stuck moments resolve in those five seconds, and the student who gets there alone remembers it. If they don't, give a hint. At this age, a good hint is often the first sound, a gesture, a word-box card held up, or "What's the pattern?" If the hint doesn't do it, model it: say it once, clearly. Then hand it back: "Your turn." The student says it. That last step is the one that teaches.

Feedback at this age

Students at 11–14 can fix their own mistakes when you point to them, and in classroom studies, nudges that let learners correct themselves worked better than simply repeating the correct form.¹¹ So feedback depends on the step.

During Work With It, for this week's target pattern only, prompt first. A **prompt** is a nudge that lets the student fix their own mistake: "Try that ending again?" If they can't, give a **recast**, repeating their idea back correctly without saying "wrong," and let them say it again.

During Use It for Real, don't correct at all. A real conversation is about meaning. Stopping it to fix an ending teaches the student to stop talking. Instead, make a quiet note of one thing to work on, and bring it up afterward, in the next Work With It.

The exit line and “Help I used”

Every Hour ends the same way. The student says or writes:

“Today I understood... I said (or signed, or wrote)... Now I can... Next time I want to...”

and then:

Help I used: ... (a book, a person, a tool, or “none”).

The exit line takes about a minute. It makes the student notice what happened, which is half of remembering it. “Help I used” keeps the record honest. If a dictionary helped, that’s fine; write it down. If a tool wrote something, that’s labeled too. Over a term, those lines show you how much help the student needs, and that number should be shrinking.

The Hour log

One line a day, kept by the student (GOAL-05 Hour Log Keeper):

date · minutes · language · what I took in · what I used for real and with whom · can-do
checked · carry phrase · help I used

Keep it on paper or in a file on the family drive. At 11–12, you look at it together each week. At 13–14, the student keeps it and you see it at the weekly check-in. A year of these lines is the backbone of your records (chapter 9).

The bands in brief

11–12: more structure; you choose input at first; shorter Use It for Real; tools operated by you; the first graded readers.

13–14: student-led; longer input; two-minute talks; drafts and redrafts; pen friends through programs you know; supervised AI under the terms.

Ready 12: a twelve-year-old ready for a 13–14 move. Place by skill, not birthday.

When the Hour goes wrong

What’s happening	What it usually means	Next move
The student understands nothing in the recording.	It’s too hard.	Swap to something easier. Aim for most of it, not some of it.
The student only wants the app.	The app feels like progress, and the Hour feels like work.	Keep the app short and after the Hour. Show the can-do record from week one next to this week’s.

What's happening	What it usually means	Next move
The student is embarrassed to speak.	Anxiety, which is common and real.	Rehearse first, then a private recording (TALK-10), then a kind audience of one.
You can't check an answer.	You're learning too.	Dictionary, answer key, or a speaker. Say, "Let's find out together."
The student is racing ahead of you.	Good news.	Become the first listener. Ask them to teach you five words a week.
A heritage student is bored by beginner material.	They understand far more than they read or write.	Move the weight of the Hour to reading and writing.
A tutor session went badly or felt off.	Something to take seriously.	Stop, save, tell. Choose another tutor. Chapter 7 has the details.
The Hour keeps shrinking.	Life is full.	Protect Take It In and Check and Carry. Drop the rest for a week.
A younger sibling keeps interrupting.	They want in.	Give them a job: the student reads to them (READ-08 Read Aloud to a Younger Sibling).

Dose honesty

How much is enough? ACTFL, the national organization for language teachers, describes the most common US model, two years of language study in middle or high school, as one that keeps students in the Novice range.¹² Longer, continuous study goes further. A Language Hour most days, kept up for several years, is how a family can go further than the usual course. Even so, progress is gradual. A good first year at this age often lands around Novice Mid to Novice High in a language written with an alphabet, and reading a new writing system, like Chinese characters, starts slower. No homeschool study ties minutes to outcomes. This is a professional picture, not a promise.

Family safety basics

These are the safety rules for the whole book. Chapters point back here.

Who holds the keys. At 11–12, you create and hold every account and password. At 13–14, your student may hold passwords for tools the family has approved; you keep a sealed copy or an entry in a family password manager, and two-step login is on.

The 13 shift. A federal rule called COPPA requires sites and apps aimed at children under 13 to

get a parent's permission before collecting personal information, and that includes photos, video, and voice recordings. The rule's latest update has been in full effect since spring 2026.¹³ That protection ends at 13, which is why so many services start there. Thirteen is a rule for companies, not a readiness test.

Live lessons and calls. Use your account, or a teen account you've set up where the service's terms allow it. Keep the device in a shared room. At 11–12, you're in the room. At 13–14, you're within earshot with the door open. No private messages you can't read. No moving to another app, ever. First names only. No photos, addresses, school names, or schedules. Recordings only by family choice, stored privately.

Pen friends and exchanges. Only through a school, club, or family you know. Letters are read both ways. No photos of faces. No addresses beyond what both families agree on.

Stop, save, tell. If anything online is scary, mean, or pushy, or asks for secrets, photos, or money: stop replying, save it (don't delete it), and tell a parent. You are not in trouble. Say that last sentence to your student out loud, more than once. Chapter 7 has one more calm box about strangers online.

Two places. Your student's work and recordings live in two places: on paper or the family drive, plus one backup. Never on a shared bot computer, and never in an AI tool.

Photos and recordings of the student stay off AI tools and shared computers. For project photos, show hands and work, not faces.

Out of the home. You're present or nearby for classes, events, and meetups, and the plan is agreed beforehand. Meet in public places.

Publishing is optional. A video, a blog post, a social post: that's a family decision, made by you. Keep files local first.

A note on screens

The Language Hour is mostly screen-free by design: 80 of the 100 activities in this book use no device at all, and the rest are short. Pediatricians' current guidance says that what's on the screen, and what it pushes aside, matter more than a single number; it recommends phone-free meals, bedrooms, homework, and the hour before bed, limits tailored to your family, and counting schoolwork separately from entertainment.¹⁴ The World Health Organization advises limiting recreational screen time and getting at least an hour of movement a day.¹⁵ Sleep matters too: about 9 to 12 hours a night up to age 12, and 8 to 10 hours from 13 to 18.¹⁶ These are guidelines for families, not a stopwatch rule.

The AI box

Tools and AI in the Language Hour

What AI is here for. AI can explain, suggest, and check, sometimes well and sometimes confidently wrong. It never does your student's learning, and what it produces

is never your student's work. Chapter 8 explains how it works with languages.

Ages 11–12: parent-operated. Most chatbots set their minimum age at 13, several require a parent's permission until 18, one major company sets its minimum at 18, and one lets a parent turn on a supervised account for younger children.¹⁷ So at 11–12, AI runs on your account and your device, with you at the keyboard or reading every exchange. Your student can dictate a question and read the answer with you. No student accounts on chatbots or AI tutors, even inside a course or app that offers one.

Ages 13–14: supervised, under the terms, with you nearby. Use only a service whose terms allow your student's age, with a teen or parent-linked account where one is offered. Keep the screen in a shared room. Turn off training on your student's conversations and turn off memory where you can. No companion or role-play characters, and no features that copy a voice. A chatbot can be a practice partner for a few minutes; a person is still the main one.

Whose work is it? Your student's work is what they understood, said, signed, or wrote, and can explain without the tool. Every Hour ends with **"Help I used: ..."** (a book, a person, a tool, or "none"). Anything a tool made is **made by a tool** and gets a Who Made This? card. The checks in chapter 9 are always tool-free.

Check before you trust. Translators and chatbots miss politeness and tone, flatten family and regional varieties, invent facts about cultures, and sometimes produce wrong letters or characters. Check against a dictionary, a book, or a speaker.

One study, honestly placed. In a large experiment with high-school *math* students (not languages, not this age), Bastani and colleagues found that unrestricted chatbot help raised practice scores but students did worse on a later test without it; a version with guardrails avoided most of the harm.¹⁸ It's a different age and subject. We mention it because help that does the work for you can feel like learning when it isn't.

Never upload your student's voice, face, or name to an AI tool.

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, and keep your student's portfolio on a family drive.

Terms change. Check the current terms before you start; the notes list the ones we checked and when.

A first Hour, start to finish

Here is one Hour, minute by minute, for a thirteen-year-old starting Japanese with a parent who doesn't speak it. It's an illustration, not a family we know.

Goal and Greet (4 minutes). The student says the greeting from the course audio: おはよう *ohayō* ("good morning," casual).¹⁹ The parent answers with the same word, a little slower. The student

reads today's goal card aloud: *I can say good morning and good night, and ask how someone is.* There are no old cards yet, so the review is the greeting itself, three times.

Take It In (15 minutes). A sixty-second dialogue from the course, two friends meeting in the morning. First listen: who's talking, and where? ("Two kids. Outside? There's a bike bell.") Second listen: what do they want? ("One of them is late.") Third listen: which words did you catch? The student catches the greeting and a name. That's a good first listen. The parent writes nothing but the gist, in English, in one sentence.

Work With It (12 minutes). The student makes the first ten cards from the course's word list: Japanese on one side, English on the other, copied from the book, not from a tool. Cover and recall, twice through. Each card goes into the Day 1 slot of the word box.

Use It for Real (8 minutes). The parent learned the greeting yesterday too. The two of them greet each other, then the student asks "How are you?" from the course, and the parent answers with the one reply they know. It's two lines. It's real. The student tries the Keep It Going phrase "Again, please" on purpose, so the parent repeats, and they both laugh at the parent's accent. Nobody corrects anybody.

Check and Carry (4 minutes). The student says: "Today I understood two friends meeting in the morning. I said good morning and asked how you are. Now I can greet someone in the morning. Next time I want to say good night." Help I used: the course audio and the book's word list. Carry phrase: the morning greeting, to be used at breakfast tomorrow, to everyone, including the dog. One log line. Done in forty-three minutes.

Notice what didn't happen. No grammar lecture. No app. No one asked the student to perform for anyone. And the parent, who knew one word more than nothing, ran a good Hour by listening.

The weekly check-in

At 13–14, ten minutes a week replaces a lot of nagging. Sit down with the log and the goal card. Ask three things:

1. "Is this week's can-do true yet? Show me."
2. "Where in the log did the language feel easy? Where did it feel too hard?"
3. "What's next week's goal, and how will you show me?"

Then look at the "Help I used" lines together. If the same tool appears every day, talk about it, without alarm. If "a person" appears more often than last month, say so; that's progress worth naming. At 11–12, you do this check-in together on Fridays, and you write the next goal side by side.

The talk box in the Hour

Every teaching chapter has a **talk box**: one opening question, three follow-ups, a note on how to wait, and what to do if it goes quiet. Use the chapter's opening question once a day, usually at the end of Take It In or Use It for Real. It's a question for thinking, not quizzing. Ask it, then **count**

to five in your head before you say anything else. At 13–14, this question is one of your most important jobs. The student runs the Hour; you ask the question that makes them think about it.

Hours that look a little different

Heritage homes. If your student grew up hearing the language at home, their listening and speaking are probably well ahead of their reading and writing. The Hour shifts its weight: Take It In leans toward reading, Work With It toward spelling and the patterns of the written language, and Use It for Real toward writing to relatives. Daily life at home in the language is the main course; the Hour is the side dish that builds literacy. Family and regional ways of speaking are real language. When a book says it one way and Grandma says it another, both go in the word box.

ASL and other signed languages. Take It In is watching a Deaf signer, live where you can, on video from a trusted source where you can't. Use It for Real is signing with someone. Learn from Deaf adults whenever you can; Deaf-led classes and events are the best resource there is. For written work, the student writes in English and keeps notes or private videos. Photos for projects show hands only.

Parents learning alongside. Learn the week's words a day ahead if you can, or don't, and learn them with your student. Your job is the frame, the question, and the listening. When you can't tell whether an answer is right, say, "Let's find out together," and check the answer key, the dictionary, or a speaker.

Learning differences. If reading is hard, lean on listening, with audio for every text. If attention is short, run the five steps in shorter blocks, with movement between them. If anxiety is the problem, start with private practice and recordings no one else hears, and add an audience of one later. If reading is hard in every language, an evaluation may help; a new language doesn't cause reading trouble, and it can be part of the plan.

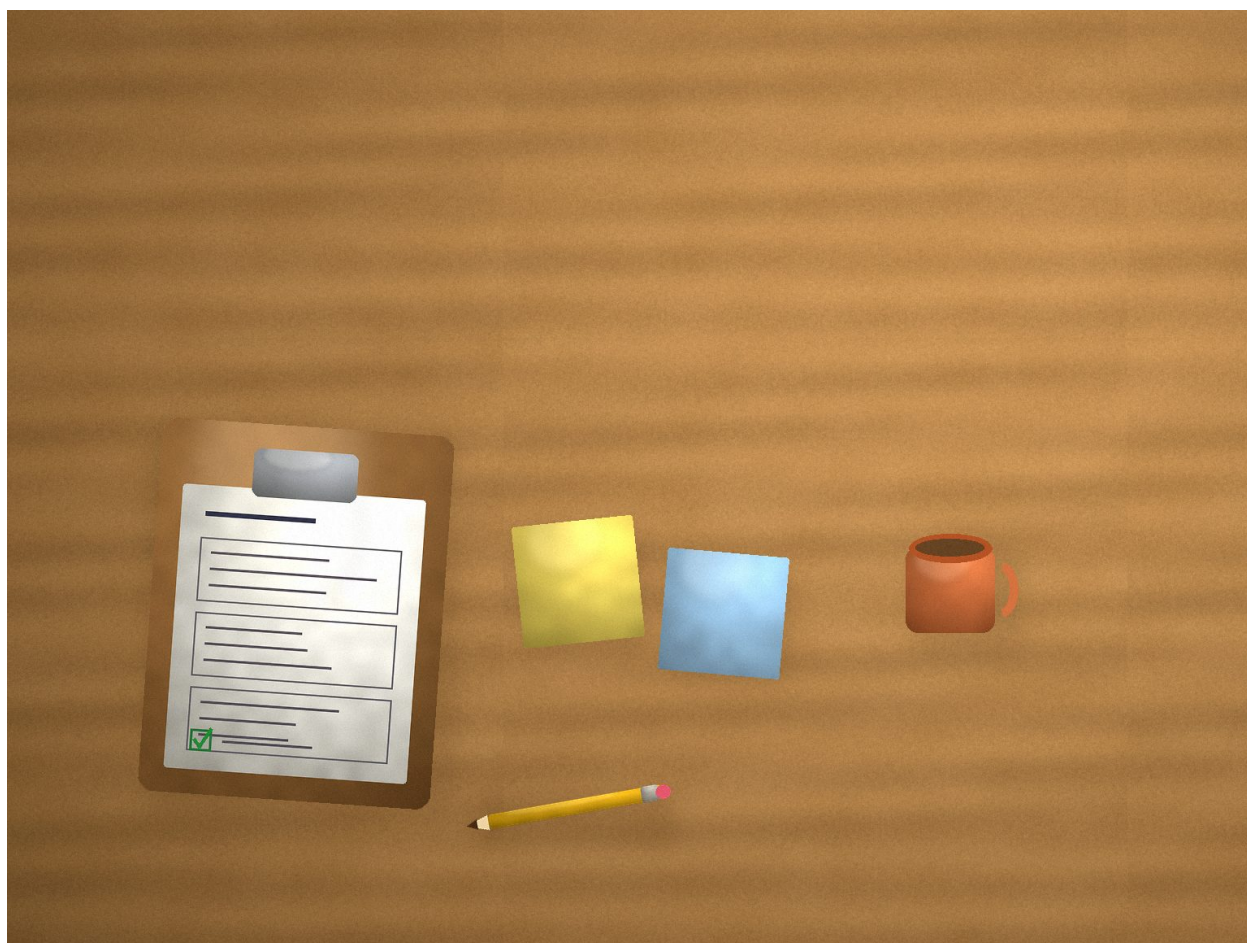
The Hour on a hard day

Some days there are fifteen minutes and a tired student. Do this: five old cards, one listen to something familiar, the exit line, and "Help I used." Write the log line. That's an Hour. The habit survived, and the habit is the thing.

On a trip or during a move, keep Goal and Greet and Check and Carry, and one carry phrase a day. A trip is a reward for the Hour, not a replacement for it.

Chapter 1

What Language Learning Looks Like at 11–14: Goals, Can-Do Statements, and Choosing (or Continuing) Your Language



Why this matters

Somewhere between eleven and fourteen, a language stops being something that's done *to* a student and becomes something they do. A younger child learns because the songs are fun and the grown-

up is enthusiastic. A middle schooler learns because they have a reason, a goal they chose, and proof that it's working. Take away the reason and the proof, and even a willing student drifts. Give them both, and you'll be surprised how much of the work they'll carry.

That's what this chapter is for. It gives your family a map of what progress actually looks like, a way for your student to set goals in plain "I can..." language and check them, and a set of questions for choosing a language, or for deciding to keep going with the one you have.

It also clears away a story you may have heard: that this is a late age to begin. It isn't. Eleven to fourteen is a very good age to start a language, or to get serious about one. The rest of this chapter explains why, and what to do with that good news.

For the parent: understand it yourself

The story you may have heard, and a better one

The popular story about this age goes something like this: the window closed years ago, a teen beginner will always have an accent and never really learn, apps can do the job alone, and language study is mostly a box to tick for high school.

The research tells a story that's more hopeful and more demanding.

No window has closed. In a very large online study of English grammar learning (more than 669,000 people took a quiz), researchers estimated that the ability to pick up a new language's grammar stays strong until about seventeen and a half.²⁰ Your eleven-year-old has years of that generosity ahead. This is a useful study, not a promise that every home will see the same result, and the people in it were learning English, mostly online, not studying a new language at a kitchen table. But it points in a clear direction: this is a good age, not a late one.

Older starters often move faster at first. In a long Spanish project that followed school students who began a new language at different ages with the same limited weekly hours, the students who started older made faster progress at first.²¹ Older learners can read, can notice patterns, can use a dictionary, and can plan. Those are real advantages, and your student has them.

There's no IQ prize, and you don't need one. You may have heard that a second language makes children better at thinking in general. Careful reviews that correct for how studies get published find that any such bonus is very small or absent.²² Any thinking bonus is a maybe, not a promise. The reason to learn a language is the person on the other side of the conversation. That's the prize, and it's a big one.

What moves progress is time and use. That's the demanding part. Progress tracks time spent with the language and real use of it, which is why the next section matters.

How progress actually happens

ACTFL, the national organization for language teachers, publishes descriptions of what learners can do at each stage. Its description of the most common US model, about two years of study in middle or high school, is blunt: that model keeps students in the Novice range. Longer, continuous

study reaches further. The same descriptions note that age, a learner's general development, and how well they read in their first language all shape progress.²³

Three things follow for your family.

First, **understanding outruns speaking**, often for years. Your student will understand much more than they can say. That's not a gap to worry about; it's how language grows. Chapter 2 is built around it.

Second, **a new writing system starts slower**. A student learning Spanish or German can sound out words in week one. A student learning Mandarin, Japanese, Arabic, Korean, Hindi, or Russian is learning a new script as well as a new language, and reading will lag behind listening for a while. Plan for it, and celebrate the first sentence read in a new script as the real milestone it is.

Third, **steady beats intense**. A Language Hour four or five days a week, kept up for years, is how a homeschool can go further than the usual course. A burst of six hours on one Saturday doesn't do the same work.

The proficiency map, in plain words

Teachers describe language ability with a small set of levels. You only need the first two for this book.

Novice is ACTFL's word for beginners: words, lists, and memorized phrases. A Novice learner can greet someone, say their name and age, list foods they like, and use phrases they've practiced.

Intermediate is the word for learners who *create* with the language: they make their own sentences, ask and answer questions, and hold simple conversations about daily life.

Each level has three steps: Low, Mid, and High.²⁴

Here's an everyday picture. Learning to cook, you first follow recipes exactly, then you can follow most recipes without checking every line, and eventually you can open the fridge and make dinner from what's there. Novice is following the recipe. Intermediate is making dinner from the fridge, simply.

And here's a more precise picture. A student at Novice High can usually handle a short exchange on a familiar topic, like what they did this weekend, using practiced phrases plus a few sentences of their own, and they can often understand the main idea of a short, simple text on a topic they know.²⁵ They'll stumble, they'll reach for phrases, and they'll get their point across.

Can-Do Statements: the student's map

The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, revised in 2026, turn those levels into plain "I can..." lines.²⁶ A **can-do statement** is an "I can..." line describing what a learner can do with the language. The document says these exist so learners can "set learning goals and self-assess and chart their progress."²⁷

The statements are grouped by the ways people use a language: understanding what they hear, read, or watch (interpretive); talking or signing with someone (interpersonal); speaking, signing, or writ-

ing to an audience (presentational); and acting appropriately across cultures (intercultural). There's also a reflection tool. At Novice levels, the lines sound like "I can greet people and introduce myself," "I can ask and answer simple questions about familiar things," and "I can understand a few familiar words in a short announcement." Those are paraphrases; this book points you to the statements rather than reprinting them. Download them free from ACTFL for your family's educational use, print the Novice pages, and keep them in the binder.

Can-do self-assessment works well for exactly what you'll use it for. In a study of college learners of Chinese, students' can-do ratings tracked most of their real gains over time, and they were more likely to underrate themselves than overrate.²⁸ That makes these statements a good low-stakes tool for setting goals and checking progress at home. They aren't a certificate, and they aren't a test score.

Throughout this book, your student will rate statements three ways: *not yet*, *with help*, or *on my own*. You'll pair that self-check with something you observe yourself, without any tool: a short conversation, a reading, a writing sample. The two together make a record anyone can trust.

What a good year looks like

State programs give a realistic picture of what middle-school study usually produces. These are illustrations, not targets. In one state's middle-school program, a year of daily study starting in sixth grade is expected to reach about Novice High in a language written with an alphabet, with reading about a step behind, and a language written with characters a step or more slower; Intermediate Low comes in the second year, and Intermediate Mid in the third.²⁹ Another state describes a first-level course of about 135 to 150 hours as reaching about Novice Mid in listening and reading in an alphabetic language, with character-based languages slower.³⁰

So: a good first year often lands around Novice Mid to Novice High; Intermediate Low usually comes after two or more steady years; and reading a new script comes slower. If your student gets there, that's success. If they get there and they're still glad to be learning, that's a lot more than success.

Choosing, or continuing, your language

If the choice is already made, by family, by community, by a passion, skip to the end of this section. If it isn't, here's how to think it through. These questions are in rough order of weight.

1. **Family and heritage.** Is there a language in your family's background? A heritage language comes with people to talk to, stories, food, and a reason that lasts. It often comes with ears that are already tuned.
2. **Real people nearby.** Who uses which languages near you? A language with a library shelf, a community class, a church or temple, a Deaf club, or a neighbor is easier to use for real.
3. **The student's own reason.** At this age, weigh this heavily. A student who chose Japanese because of a story they love will work harder than a student assigned Spanish for practical reasons. Both are fine reasons. The student's own matters most.
4. **Continuity into high school.** Can you keep this language going for four or more years? Can you find materials, classes, or speakers for the later years?

5. **Your willingness to learn alongside.** Are you willing to learn a little too, or at least to listen every day? That matters more than whether you already speak it.

Continuing from earlier years. If your student learned the language when they were younger, re-place them by what they can do, not by how many years they spent. A student who sang songs for four years may place high in listening and low in reading. Use GOAL-07 Where Am I Now? and start from there.

Switching languages. Switching at this age is fine. Start the new one at Novice, which is normal and nothing to apologize for. The old one isn't wasted; your student learned how languages work.

One at a time. If your family is starting fresh, learn one language at a time. A second can join once the first is steady, after a year or so. Bilingual homes are different; daily family life in two languages isn't "two at once" in this sense.

American Sign Language is a full language, with its own grammar, and it's a strong choice: there's a Deaf community near most families, there's a rich culture, and it's taught in many high schools and colleges.³¹ Learn from Deaf adults where you can.

The standard behind this chapter

The national standards for language learning include a goal called Lifelong Learning: learners "set goals and reflect on their progress in using languages for enjoyment, enrichment, and advancement."³² That's the step-up at this age, in one sentence.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

These come up a lot. Each one usually means something specific.

- **"I'm bad at languages."** This usually means the material has been too hard, or progress has been invisible. Show the record: "Let's look at your September can-do sheet next to today's."
- **"I already know Spanish. I took it for two years."** Two years usually means Novice, which is normal. Re-place by can-do: "Great. Let's find out which of these you can do on your own."
- **"I'll start when we travel."** Time with the language can't be crammed into a trip. "The Hour starts now. The trip is the reward."
- **"I can understand Grandma, but I can't read."** That's the classic heritage profile: strong ears, newer reading and writing. It's a strength with a clear next step. Chapters 4 and 7 have it.
- **"What's the point? Everybody speaks English, and my phone translates."** That's a values conversation, not a fact dispute. Talk about people, not percentages: who would your student like to talk to, in their language? Chapter 8 shows where translators fail, and it's often exactly where people matter most.

Your five-minute warm-up

Before the first Hour, download the Novice pages of the Can-Do Statements. Read them for five minutes. Mark three statements you think your student can already do, and three you think they'll do by summer. Don't show your marks yet. After your student does GOAL-07, compare. You'll probably find they rated themselves lower than you did. That's normal and useful.

How to teach it this week

Where this sits in the Hour

This chapter lives mostly in **Goal and Greet** and **Check and Carry**, the bookends of the Hour. The goal card opens each day; the can-do check closes it. In the first week, you'll also run the full Hour once, with every step, so the student sees the whole shape.

Who runs what

At 11–12, you and your student fill in GOAL-07 together. You read each statement aloud; the student marks it. You choose the first goal together, and you write it in the student's words. You run Goal and Greet for the first month; the student leads Check and Carry from day one.

At 13–14, the student fills in GOAL-07 alone, then shows you. The student writes the first goal. Your job is one question: "How will you show me?" From week two, the student fills in GOAL-04 Weekly Plan Sheet on the weekend.

The first Hour, with the exact words

Goal and Greet. "Today we're finding out where you are. No score, no grade, just a starting point." Hand over the Novice statements. The student marks each *not yet*, *with help*, or *on my own*. Date it. Then: "Choose one statement that's *not yet* and could be *on my own* by Friday. Write it in your own words." That's the goal card. In Mandarin, a first goal might be *I can greet someone and say thank you*, using 你好 *nǐ hǎo* ("hello") and 谢谢 *xièxie* ("thank you").³³

Take It In. "Listen once, just for who and where." Play a short, easy clip from your course, thirty to sixty seconds. "Again. What do they want?" "One more time. Which words did you catch?" Stop there. That's enough.

Work With It. "Let's make your first five cards." The student copies five words from the course's list or a dictionary onto index cards: the new language on one side, English on the other. "Cover it. What's this one?" Run through them twice.

Use It for Real. "Teach me one thing you said today." The student teaches you the greeting from the clip. You say it back, badly if that's honest. The student corrects you. That's real use: a learner explaining something to someone who doesn't know it. In German, it might be *Guten Tag* ("good day," a polite hello).³⁴

Check and Carry. “Finish the line: Today I understood... I said... Now I can... Next time I want to...” Then: “Help I used?” Then: “Carry phrase?” The student chooses one phrase to say three times before bed. Write the log line.

The first try

On day one, the student’s first try is the self-placement and the goal. Let them do it without commentary. If an eleven-year-old marks everything *not yet* and looks discouraged, say, “That’s what day one looks like for everyone. In six weeks we’ll do this again, and you’ll see.” If a thirteen-year-old marks everything *on my own* and you doubt it, say, “Great. Show me two of them,” and let the showing do the correcting.

How to fade help

Week one, you hold the statements and ask the questions. By week three, the student chooses the goal and writes it before you sit down. By the end of the first term, at 13–14, the student plans the week, and you only ask, “How will you show me?” At 11–12, by midyear, the student chooses the goal and you check that it’s one week’s size.

When to stop talking

When the student is choosing a goal, stop. Let them sit with the list. The goal they choose after a quiet minute is worth more than the goal you suggest after five seconds. And when they’re explaining a can-do back to you, let them finish, even if the explanation wanders.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: “What can you do with this language now — and what do you want to do next?”

Follow-ups: 1. “Which of these ‘I can’ lines is true already? Show me one.” 2. “What would you need to do to make the next one true?” 3. “Who would you most like to talk with, in this language? What would you say first?”

Wait: count to five in your head. Goals take a minute to think about, and the first answer is often “I don’t know.” Wait through it. If you want, say, “Take your time,” and then actually give it.

If it goes quiet: a stuck silence here usually means the question feels too big, or the student is worried about choosing wrong. Make it smaller: “Point to one line on this page you’d like to be true by Friday.” Pointing is an answer. Then ask, “How will you show me?”

Don’t say / say instead: Don’t say “You should be fluent by now.” Say “Show me what you can do this week that you couldn’t in September.”

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — GOAL-07 Where Am I Now?

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** the Novice pages of the Can-Do Statements (downloaded free from ACTFL, for family educational use), a pencil, a folder
- **Safety and privacy:** the sheet stays in the family binder; no need to share it anywhere
- **The fun:** finding out you can already do more than you thought, or seeing exactly where you'll start
- **The skill:** a first self-placement with Novice can-do statements
- **The crumb:** a dated self-placement sheet

How it goes. The student reads each Novice statement and marks it *not yet*, *with help*, or *on my own*. *With help* means “if someone slows down, or I can look at my notes.” *On my own* means “right now, no notes.” Date the sheet. Put it in the front of the binder. Repeat at the start of each term with a fresh copy, and lay the sheets side by side. This is the first record in the portfolio (chapter 9), and it's one of the most encouraging things a student can look at in March.

11–12: Read each statement aloud together; the student marks. Skip any that don't make sense yet and come back next term. **13–14:** The student does it alone, then picks two *on my own* lines to show you, without notes. **Ready 12:** A twelve-year-old who reads the statements easily can do it alone.

In-home — GOAL-01 Can-Do Goal Card

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** an index card in a color different from the word-box cards
- **Safety and privacy:** nothing personal; first names only if the goal involves a person
- **The fun:** choosing your own target, and knocking it down by Friday
- **The skill:** choosing one “I can...” goal for the week from the Can-Do map
- **The crumb:** the goal card, dated

How it goes. On Monday, the student chooses one statement from the *not yet* or *with help* lines and writes it on the card in their own words, starting with “I can...” Make it one week's size: *I can order a snack and ask for the check*, not *I can talk about food*. Read it aloud every day in Goal and Greet. On Friday, AS-01 asks whether it's true yet. If it is, the card goes in the binder. If it's *with help*, it can stay for another week, or the student can make it smaller.

11–12: Choose the goal together. You write the date; the student writes the words. **13–14:** The student chooses. You ask one question: “How will you show me?” The answer goes on the back of the card.

In-home — GOAL-02 Why This Language?

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** a sheet of paper, the student's own handwriting

- **Safety and privacy:** first names for any people mentioned; this page stays at home
- **The fun:** naming what you actually want from this
- **The skill:** writing three real reasons to learn this language and who it connects you to
- **The crumb:** the reasons page

How it goes. The student writes three reasons they want to learn this language, in English, in full sentences. At least one should name a person or a group of people: *I want to talk to my cousins in Manila without my mom translating*, or *I want to understand the Deaf players on my team*, or *I want to read the comics I like in Japanese someday*. Below the reasons, they write one thing they'd like to be able to do by summer. Put the page in the front of the binder. When motivation dips, in February, it nearly always does, read it again together. If the reasons have changed, write new ones. That's growth, not failure.

11–12: Talk it over first, then the student writes. You can offer a sentence starter: "I want to be able to..." **13–14:** The student writes it alone and decides whether to show you. Ask if you may read it; most will say yes.

In-home — GOAL-03 Language Choice Interview

- **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Materials:** a list of five interview questions the student writes, a notebook
- **Safety and privacy:** interview family only, or friends of the family you know; notes use first names
- **The fun:** being the interviewer, and hearing family stories you didn't know
- **The skill:** interviewing family about which language to choose or continue
- **The crumb:** interview notes (first names)

How it goes. This card is for families still choosing, or deciding whether to continue. The student interviews two or three family members, a grandparent, an aunt, a parent, in person or by a phone call you set up. Questions might be: "What languages did people in our family speak? Who still speaks them? Which language would you like me to learn, and why? Who could I talk to?" The student takes notes and reports back at dinner. Then the family makes the choice together, with the student's reason weighted heavily.

11–12: You help write the questions and set up any calls. The student asks the questions and takes the notes.

In-home — CULT-05 Map Project (optional)

- **Time:** 30 minutes, once or twice
- **Materials:** a large printed or hand-drawn map, colored pencils, a library atlas or a book about the language
- **Safety and privacy:** no personal addresses on the map; places are cities and regions
- **The fun:** finding out how far your language travels
- **The skill:** where the language is used, by whom, and how many varieties
- **The crumb:** the map

How it goes. The student marks where the language is spoken, signed, or written, using a library book or atlas as the source. They label two or three places with a note about how the language sounds or is used there: different words for the same thing, a different accent, a different writing tradition. Spanish is spoken across many countries with different words for everyday things; Arabic has a shared written standard and many spoken varieties; English and American Sign Language are separate languages, and British Sign Language is different from both. Put the map on the wall near where you run the Hour. Add pins all year.

11–12: One afternoon, with a book from the library. Keep it to the big picture.

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

- **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Materials:** a library card, a short list the student writes ahead of time
- **Safety and privacy:** a parent comes along; if the library has a conversation group, you visit it together first
- **The fun:** a treasure hunt you're allowed to take home
- **The skill:** finding readers, magazines, films, and conversation groups at the library
- **The crumb:** the borrowed list

How it goes. Before you go, the student writes what they're looking for: two easy readers or graded readers in the language, one picture book or comic, one audiobook or film with audio in the language, and a question for the librarian: "Do you have a language conversation group, or language-learning access through the library?" At the library, the student does the asking. Back home, the student writes what they borrowed on a list in the binder. Many libraries have more than you'd expect, including books for younger children that make excellent easy reading for a beginner of any age. Chapter 4 explains how to tell if a book is the right level.

11–12: Go together, and let the student talk to the librarian. **13–14:** The student plans the visit and makes the list; you drive and browse. **Signed languages:** Look for ASL storytelling videos, books about Deaf culture and history, and posted notices for Deaf community events. Ask the librarian about local Deaf-led classes.

For the student

(Read this on your own. At 11–12, your parent reads it too, and you talk it over for a few minutes.)

You're not late. You're on time.

You may have heard that languages are for little kids, or that if you didn't start at five, you'll never really get it. That's not what the research says. At your age, your brain is still very good at picking up a new language's patterns, and older beginners often move faster at first than younger ones, because you can read, notice patterns, and plan. That's you.

Here's what's different at your age: you get to run more of this. You choose a goal. You check whether you met it. You keep the record. Your parent is there to listen, to help when you're stuck, and to keep things safe. The learning is yours.

What can-do statements are. They're plain "I can..." lines that describe what people can do with a language. *I can greet someone and introduce myself. I can ask what time something starts. I can understand the main idea of a short message about something I know.* Language teachers use them to describe progress, and you'll use them to set goals and see your own progress.

Your goal card. Each Monday, pick one "I can..." line you can't do yet. Make it small enough to do in a week. Write it on a card. Read it every day. On Friday, check: *not yet, with help, or on my own?* If it's *on my own*, it goes in the binder. Pick the next one.

How to tell if you're improving. Not by how you feel. Some days you'll feel like you know nothing. Look at your cards. In six weeks, do your first self-check again and lay the two sheets side by side.

A tiny example. In Hindi, a first goal might be *I can greet someone and say my name*: नमस्ते *namaste* ("hello"), then your name.³⁵ In Tagalog, it might be *I can say thank you and hello*: *salamat* ("thank you").³⁶ In ASL, it might be [the greeting and name sign your teacher shows you]. Try it in your language: what's your first "I can..."?

Try this: Read five Novice can-do statements. Mark each one *not yet, with help, or on my own*. Be honest; nobody's grading this.

Try this too: Write one goal for this week, starting with "I can..." Make it so specific that someone else could watch you and say yes or no.

Explain it back: What's the difference between Novice and Intermediate, in your own words? Try it in one sentence. (Hint: one is mostly memorized; the other is mostly made up as you go.)

One more thing: Most students rate themselves lower than they really are. If you're unsure between two ratings, pick the lower one, and then show your parent. You might be pleasantly surprised.

Challenge: Find one real person you'd like to talk with, or one real text you'd like to understand, by summer. A grandparent, a neighbor, a song, a comic, a website for a place you want to visit. Write it on the back of your reasons page. That's where you're headed.

If it isn't clicking

The goals are too big or too vague. If the goal card says *I can speak French*, nobody can check it, and it never turns into *on my own*. *Next move:* one can-do per week, small enough that you could watch it happen. *I can ask three people what they like to eat* is a good size.

The material is too hard. If the student understands almost nothing in the recording or the reader, motivation collapses fast, and it looks like laziness when it isn't. *Next move:* swap to something easier. Aim for the student to understand most of what they hear or read. Chapter 2 shows how.

The student has no reason of their own. If the language was chosen for them and they don't care, the Hour feels like a chore. *Next move:* run GOAL-02 Why This Language? again, more slowly. Ask about people. Look at chapter 7 for ways to meet people who use the language. If the reason never comes, it's fine to reconsider the choice at the end of a term.

When to slow down: if the student is anxious about the self-check, make it lighter. Do it together, out loud, with no paper, for a few weeks. Anxiety and achievement are linked in a moderate way in research with language learners;³⁷ lowering the pressure is part of teaching well.

When to go ahead: if the goal card turns *on my own* by Wednesday every week, the goals are too small. Make them bigger, or set two.

When to find more help: if your student places much higher than Novice in some areas, for example as a heritage speaker, a class or a teacher who works with heritage learners may help them place properly and build reading and writing. If you're not sure whether the choice of language is right, a conversation with a language teacher or a community school can help.

Tools, including AI

The Hour's AI box covers the rules: at 11–12, AI is parent-operated; at 13–14, it's supervised under the terms, with you nearby. For this chapter, the first tool is a dictionary with recordings made by people and example sentences. Goal-setting and self-checks need no tool at all, and they should stay that way. Goal cards are written by hand, in the student's words. Every Hour ends with "Help I used." Chapter 8 has the full treatment of tools and AI.

What "done enough" looks like

You're ready to move on to chapter 2 when:

- ☐ Your student has a dated self-placement (GOAL-07) in the binder.
- ☐ Your student has a goal card for this week, in their own words.
- ☐ Your student has a reasons page (GOAL-02), with at least one reason that names people.
- ☐ Your student has run Check and Carry at least three times, with the exit line and "Help I used."
- ☐ You can recognize the Novice can-do statements by sight, and you know what *not yet*, *with help*, and *on my own* mean in your house.

Short check: AS-01 Can-Do Self-Check. On Friday, the student rates five statements from this week's work: *not yet*, *with help*, or *on my own*. Date the sheet. Then you pick one of the *on my own* lines and ask the student to show you, with no notes and no tools. Write one sentence about what you saw. Never timed, never graded. Repeat every few weeks; chapter 9 gathers these into the portfolio.

Chapter 2

Taking It In: Listening, Watching, and Understanding More Than You Can Say



Why this matters

You can only say what you've heard many times. Every phrase your student will someday say without thinking (a greeting, a question, a quick "I don't know") will have reached them first through

their ears, or, in a signed language, through their eyes, dozens of times before it comes out.

That's why the biggest share of the Language Hour is Take It In. And it's why this chapter matters so much at eleven to fourteen. A younger child soaks up a language without trying. An older student can do something more powerful: listen *on purpose*. They can learn to catch the gist, then the details, then the words that matter. They can learn to guess smart from context. They can learn that not catching every word is normal and fine, and that understanding most of something is how understanding all of it begins.

This chapter shows you how to choose what your student takes in, how to teach listening and watching as a skill, and how to work on the new sounds, rhythms, tones, and handshapes that make a language sound like itself.

For the parent: understand it yourself

Understanding comes first, and stays ahead

For years, your student will understand much more than they can say. That's not a gap to close quickly. It's how language grows, at every age. What learners understand is the soil that speaking grows from, and time spent with language they can follow is a big part of what moves progress.³⁸ So when your student can follow a two-minute story but can only say four sentences about it, things are going exactly right.

Input is the language your student takes in by listening, watching, or reading. The Language Hour gives it the largest block of time for that reason. In this chapter, we focus on listening and watching; chapter 4 does the same for reading.

Here's an everyday picture. Think of how your student learned the rules of a sport they love, by watching dozens of games before they could explain the offside rule. They understood the game long before they could coach it. Listening works the same way.

And a precise one: the national standards describe the interpretive mode, the kind of communication where a learner is taking in rather than producing, as the ability to "understand, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed on a variety of topics."³⁹ Notice there's no person to ask "What did you mean?" That's what makes it its own skill.

Choosing what your student takes in

Most of the success of this chapter depends on one choice: what your student listens to or watches. Four tests.

Mostly understood. Your student should understand most of it, with one or a few new things. If they understand almost nothing, the clip is too hard, no matter how good it is. Swap it. If they understand all of it on the first listen, that's fine for a review day; on most days, add a little challenge.

Repeated. The same clip, heard three times in one day and again later in the week, teaches more than three new clips. Repetition is not boring to a learner who's catching more each time.

Real voices. Recordings by people who grew up speaking the language, at a natural pace. A course's audio is a good start. Later, add audiobooks, children's programs, podcasts made for learners, and songs. Different voices matter: a student who only hears one speaker struggles with the second.

Short. Thirty to ninety seconds is a full Take It In at the start. Two to three minutes is a lot at 13–14. Long is not better; repeated is better.

Live speakers first, where you can. A real person telling a story, answering questions, slowing down when your student looks lost, is the richest input there is. A recording is a second listen: useful, repeatable, and always there. If you have a speaker in your life, a relative, a neighbor, a member of your community, a monthly visit to tell a story is worth more than a month of clips.

Listening on purpose: the three listens

The single most useful listening habit at this age is to listen to the same short clip three times, with a different question each time.

1. **Gist.** Who's talking? Where are they? What's happening? Answer in English if needed.
2. **Details.** Three details: a name, a number, a time, a place, what someone wants.
3. **Words.** Which words did you catch? Write two of them down, check them, and add them to the word box.

Before the first listen, **predict.** Look at the title, the picture, or the topic. "This is called 'At the Market.' What words might we hear?" Prediction primes the ear.

During any listen, **listen for anchors:** numbers, names, question words, words that sound like English. These are the handholds.

And teach your student to **accept not catching everything.** It's the hardest part for conscientious students. They want every word. But a listener who stops at every unknown word loses the thread. Train the habit of letting go and catching the next thing.

Sounds, stress, tones, and rhythm

Every language has sounds English doesn't, and a few English sounds it doesn't use. At first, your student's ear may hear two different sounds as one. That's normal at every age, and it improves with focused listening.

Some examples of what "a new sound that changes the meaning" looks like:

- In Arabic, قلب *qalb* ("heart") and كلب *kalb* ("dog") differ in the first sound: one made far back in the throat, one like an English *k*.⁴⁰
- In Korean, 달 *dal* ("moon"), 딸 *ttal* ("daughter"), and 탈 *tal* ("mask") differ in how the first consonant is made, and English speakers often can't hear the difference at first.⁴¹
- In French, *dessus* ("on top") and *dessous* ("underneath") differ only in the vowel of the second syllable.⁴²
- In Japanese, the length of a vowel can change a word: ここ *koko* ("here") and こうこう *kōkō* ("high school").⁴³

Stress is which part of a word gets the push. In Spanish, *papa* (“potato”) and *papá* (“dad”) differ only in which syllable is stressed.⁴⁴

Tones are pitch patterns that change meaning. In Mandarin, the same syllable *ma* means different things with different tones: 妈 *mā* (“mother”), 麻 *má* (“hemp”), 马 *mǎ* (“horse”), 骂 *mà* (“to scold”).⁴⁵ For a student learning a tone language, tones aren’t decoration; they’re part of the word, and they need the same attention as the consonants.

Rhythm is the overall beat of a language: how syllables are timed, where the pauses fall. Students pick it up from lots of listening, and from shadowing (below).

For signed languages, the “sounds” are handshape, movement, location, palm orientation, and facial grammar. Two signs can differ by one of these, the way two spoken words can differ by one sound. Facial expression and the eyebrows carry grammar, like whether something is a question. Your student learns these by watching Deaf signers, closely and often. This book doesn’t describe signs in words; learn each one from a Deaf teacher or a checked video dictionary.

Shadowing, for 13–14, means speaking just behind a recorded speaker, a half-second back, matching their rhythm and melody. It’s a powerful way to tune the mouth to the ear. It works best on a short clip the student already understands.

Captions: a stage, not a crutch

Captions in the new language can help connect sounds to written words once your student has started reading in the language. They’re especially useful for a second viewing: watch once without, then once with, then once without again.

Captions in English do something different: they turn listening practice into reading practice in English. Your student’s eyes will go to the English, and their ears will relax. Use English captions sparingly, for a first watch of something long, perhaps, but not as the default.

When listening is hard for other reasons

If your student has trouble hearing, or trouble processing what they hear in English too, a second language didn’t cause it. Learning more than one language doesn’t cause language delays or disorders, and it can be part of the plan whatever the cause.⁴⁶ If you’re concerned, talk with your pediatrician, an audiologist, or a speech-language pathologist.

If you’re learning alongside

You can run every part of this chapter without understanding the clip yourself. Use the course’s transcript or answer key. Listen with your student. Say what *you* understood; your honest gist is a model, not a failure. And let your student hear you say, “I didn’t catch that. Again?” It’s one of the most useful phrases a learner can hear a grown-up say.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

- **“I didn’t get any of it.”** Usually the clip is too hard or too long. Ask, “Who was talking, and where?” If they can answer that, they got the gist, and that’s a start. Then find an easier clip.
- **The student writes down every word and misses the point.** They’re treating listening like dictation. Go gist first: no pencil on the first listen.
- **“It’s too fast.”** Natural speech is fast. That’s normal. Play it again; it’ll seem slower the third time. Slow playback is fine once, then return to normal speed.
- **The student swaps a new sound for an English one.** Their ear may not hear the difference yet. Use sound pairs (LISTEN-03), a mirror, and, at 13–14, shadowing.
- **The student understands you, but not other speakers.** They’ve gotten used to one voice. Add more voices: different ages, different regions, different speeds.

Your five-minute warm-up

Before you introduce this week’s clip, listen to it twice yourself. Write the gist in one sentence, in English. That’s all. You’ll be ready to ask the first question and to know whether your student’s gist is close.

How to teach it this week

Where this sits in the Hour

This chapter lives in **Take It In**, the longest step of the Hour. For the next month, run LISTEN-01 Three Listens every day you use a recording. Most Take It In blocks this month are listening; reading joins in when you reach chapter 4.

Who runs what

At 11–12, you choose the clip for the first month and ask the three questions. The student answers and keeps a short listening log: the clip’s title, the gist in one sentence, and two words caught. By the second month, the student suggests clips from the sources you’ve approved, and you check them.

At 13–14, the student chooses clips from sources you’ve approved, runs the three listens, and keeps the log. You’re the first listener for the gist: the student tells you what the clip was about, and you say what you understood from their summary. Once a week, you ask the talk-box question.

Once a month, at either band, arrange one live speaker: a relative, a community member, a class, or a tutor under the rules in the Language Hour’s Family safety basics. The speaker tells a short story; the student retells the gist.

The exact words

Before the first listen. “This one’s called [At the Bakery]. What might we hear?” Let the student guess three words in English or the new language.

First listen. “Just the gist. Who’s talking, where are they, what’s happening?” Play it. Wait. In Portuguese, a clip about a bakery might open with *Bom dia* (“good morning”).⁴⁷ If the student catches that, they’ve already got the time of day.

Second listen. “Three details. A name, a number, what someone wants.” Play it again.

Third listen. “Which words did you catch? Pick two for the word box.” Play it again. The student writes them down, checks them in the dictionary or the transcript, and makes cards.

After. “Tell me in one sentence what happened.” If the clip is in Russian and someone says спасибо *spasibo* (“thank you”) at the end, the student may catch it on the third listen, and that’s a word for the box.⁴⁸

A month of listening, week by week

Week 1. Three Listens every Take It In, on course audio. Same clip Monday and Thursday. Sound Pairs for five minutes, twice.

Week 2. Three Listens on two new clips, each heard three days. Add Gist First once, with a clip a little harder than usual. Start the listening log in earnest.

Week 3. A new voice: a different speaker, an audiobook, a learner podcast. At 13–14, start shadowing on a familiar clip. At 11–12, add a song.

Week 4. A live speaker, once. Then the short check (AS-02) on a clip the student hasn’t heard. Look back at week one’s log together, and notice how much longer the gist sentences have become.

The first try

The student’s first try is the gist, on the first listen, without a pencil. They will want to write. Take the pencil, kindly, until the second listen. “First time, just your ears. You’ll get the pencil back.”

How to fade help

At first, you ask all three questions. By week three, the student asks them of themselves, out loud. By the end of the month, at 13–14, they run the three listens silently and give you the gist at the end. At 11–12, by midyear, the student chooses the clip and you check it’s mostly understandable.

When to stop talking

During a listen, stop talking entirely. No pointing, no “Did you hear that?” mid-clip. Let the student’s ears work. And after the first listen, wait before asking: give them a moment to sort what they heard.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: “What did you understand — and what told you?”

Follow-ups: 1. “Who’s talking, and where are they? What told you?” 2. “What does one of them want? Which words gave it away?” 3. “What’s one word you didn’t know but could guess? What was your guess based on?”

Wait: count to five in your head. A listener needs a moment to replay what they heard. If the student closes their eyes, they’re replaying. Let them.

If it goes quiet: a stuck silence here usually means the student caught less than they hoped and doesn’t want to say so. Make it easier to answer: “One person or two? Inside or outside? Happy or upset?” Any of those is a gist. Then play it again.

Don’t say / say instead: Don’t say “What does every word mean?” Say “Who’s talking, where are they, and what do they want?”

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — LISTEN-01 Three Listens

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** one 30- to 90-second recording you’ve checked, from a course, audiobook, or learner podcast; a listening log
- **Safety and privacy:** you choose the source at 11–12, and the student chooses from sources you’ve approved at 13–14; the student listens, nothing is recorded or uploaded
- **The fun:** catching more each time, and noticing it
- **The skill:** gist, then details, then the words you can catch, on one short recording
- **The crumb:** three-listen notes in the log

How it goes. Predict from the title. First listen: gist only, no pencil. Second listen: three details. Third listen: words caught; two go into the word box after a dictionary check. Write the clip’s title, the gist in one sentence, and the two words in the log. Return to the same clip later in the week; the student will catch more, and should notice it.

11–12: You ask the questions aloud. Clips stay short, about a minute. **13–14:** The student runs it alone and reports the gist. Clips can grow to two or three minutes. **Signed languages:** Three Watches. First watch: who, where, what’s happening. Second: three details. Third: signs you caught; check each in a video dictionary before it goes in the word box.

In-home — LISTEN-02 Gist First

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a short recording slightly harder than usual, or a new topic
- **Safety and privacy:** a source you’ve checked; nothing recorded
- **The fun:** detective work; getting the story without all the words

- **The skill:** saying who, where, and what's happening before any details
- **The crumb:** the gist sentence

How it goes. This card trains one habit: getting the big picture first. Play a clip once. The student says or writes one sentence: who, where, what's happening. That's the whole task. No details, no words. Then reveal the transcript or the answer key and check how close they got. Do it with clips a little harder than the Three Listens clips, so the student learns that even a hard clip gives up its gist.

11–12: Offer choices if the student is stuck: “A shop or a school? Friends or strangers?” **13–14:** Add a prediction before listening and compare after. **Signed languages:** Watch once, sign or write the gist. Use stories from a Deaf storyteller you trust.

In-home — LISTEN-03 Sound Pairs

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** a list of four to six word pairs that differ by one sound, tone, or stress, checked in a dictionary with recordings
- **Safety and privacy:** no recording needed
- **The fun:** a quick game you can play anywhere, including the car
- **The skill:** telling apart two close sounds, tones, or handshapes
- **The crumb:** pairs tried, with a tally

How it goes. Find this week's hardest sound difference in your language, from the course or a speaker, and make a short list of pairs (like the Arabic, Korean, French, Japanese, and Mandarin examples in this chapter). Say one word from a pair, or play it from the dictionary. The student says which one it was. Then swap: the student says one, and you guess. Tally right guesses. Keep it short and quick, and come back to it all week. If the student is guessing at random, go back to an easier pair.

11–12: Start with pairs that are easy to tell apart, then move closer. **13–14:** The student finds the pairs and makes the list, checking each word in a dictionary. **Signed languages:** Pairs of signs that differ in one parameter (handshape, movement, location). Learn the pairs from a Deaf teacher or a checked video dictionary; use [placeholders] in your list until you have.

In-home — LISTEN-04 Shadowing

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a short clip the student already understands well, with a transcript
- **Safety and privacy:** private; the student's voice isn't recorded, uploaded, or graded by any app
- **The fun:** sounding like the speaker, at least for a sentence
- **The skill:** speaking along just behind a recorded speaker
- **The crumb:** the line shadowed, noted in the log

How it goes. Choose a clip the student knows from Three Listens. Play the first sentence. The student says it right after, matching the rhythm and melody. Then play the sentence again, and the

student speaks along a half-second behind the speaker, like an echo. Sentence by sentence, then the whole clip. It's a mouth workout, and it'll feel silly. That's fine. The aim is rhythm and melody, not perfection. Three or four rounds is plenty.

13–14: The student runs it alone, in a room where they're comfortable being heard, or not. **Ready 12:** A twelve-year-old who enjoys it and isn't self-conscious can start now. **Signed languages:** Sign along a half-beat behind a Deaf signer on video, matching movement and facial grammar. Choose a clip from a Deaf-led source.

In-home — LISTEN-07 Stress and Tone Map

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a short transcript (four to six lines) from a clip the student knows, a pencil, the recording
- **Safety and privacy:** no recording of the student; a source you've checked
- **The fun:** turning a sound you can barely hear into marks you can see
- **The skill:** marking stressed syllables or tones on a short checked text
- **The crumb:** the marked text

How it goes. The student listens to one line at a time and marks the transcript: a dot over the stressed syllable in a language like Spanish, Russian, or German, or the tone of each syllable in a language like Mandarin, if the transcript doesn't already show it. Then they check the marks against the course, a dictionary with recordings, or a speaker. Next, the student reads the line aloud using their own marks, and listens again to compare. The marked page goes in the pattern notebook. Over a few weeks, patterns appear: where stress usually falls, which tone combinations are tricky. That's noticing, and noticing is half of learning a sound.

13–14: The student works alone and checks with the course or a speaker. **Ready 12:** A twelve-year-old who enjoys puzzles may like this one early. **Signed languages:** Mark a short signed sentence, in written English notes, for where the eyebrows go up or down and where the movement is bigger or smaller, after watching a Deaf signer on video. Check your notes with a teacher.

In-home — LISTEN-10 Signed Story Watch

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** a short story told in ASL by a Deaf storyteller, from a source you trust
- **Safety and privacy:** you choose the source; the student watches, nothing is recorded
- **The fun:** watching a skilled storyteller use space, movement, and expression
- **The skill:** watching a Deaf storyteller and retelling the gist (for ASL families, and open to all)
- **The crumb:** retell notes

How it goes. Watch the story once, all the way through. The student retells the gist, in ASL if they're learning it, or in English otherwise. Watch again for details: characters, places, what happened first and last. For ASL learners, a third watch for signs caught. For students learning a spoken language, this card is still worth doing once: it shows how much meaning travels through

the face and body, and it's a respectful introduction to a language many people near them use every day.

11–12: Short stories, a few minutes long, chosen by you. **13–14:** Longer stories; the student retells in more detail.

Out-of-home — LISTEN-09 Live Speaker Listening

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** a person who speaks or signs the language, a quiet place, a notebook
- **Safety and privacy:** someone you know, or a community class or event; a parent is present; see Family safety basics in the Language Hour
- **The fun:** a real story from a real person, who can slow down when you're lost
- **The skill:** listening to a real speaker tell a short story and retelling the gist
- **The crumb:** retell notes

How it goes. Ask a speaker you know, a relative, a neighbor, someone from your community, to tell your student a short story in the language: how they spent a holiday as a child, a funny thing that happened at work, how to make a family dish. Ask them to speak a little slowly and to use gestures. The student listens, can use Keep It Going phrases ("Again, please"; "Slower, please"), and then retells the gist, in the new language if they can or in English if not. The speaker says whether they got it. Once a month is a good rhythm. Grandparents, especially, often love this.

11–12: You're in the room. Keep it to five minutes of story. **13–14:** You're nearby. The student asks the speaker one follow-up question at the end.

Optional — LISTEN-05 Song Lyric Gaps and CULT-03 Music Deep Dive

If your student loves music, two more cards fit here. In LISTEN-05 Song Lyric Gaps, you print a lyric sheet from a checked source, cover eight to ten words, and the student fills them in while listening. In CULT-03 Music Deep Dive, the student learns about one song: who made it, where it comes from, why people love it. Choose songs you've listened to all the way through. For signed languages, look for songs performed in ASL by Deaf artists.

For the student

(Read this on your own. At 11–12, your parent reads it too, and you talk it over for a few minutes.)

Your ears are doing most of the learning right now, even when your mouth isn't. (If you're learning ASL, your eyes are.)

That might feel strange. You'd think you'd learn a language by speaking it. But every phrase you'll ever say easily, you'll have heard many times first. Understanding comes first, and it stays ahead of speaking for a long time. That's not a problem. It's the plan.

Three listens. Here's the habit. Take one short clip. Listen once for the gist: who's talking, where, what's happening. Listen again for three details: a name, a number, something someone wants.

Listen a third time for words you caught. Put two of them in your word box. Done. Next day, listen to the same clip again, and notice how much more you catch.

Guess smart. You won't catch every word. Nobody does, not even in English, honestly. When you miss a word, don't stop. Keep listening for the next thing you know. Use what's around the gap: the topic, the tone of voice, the words before and after. A good guess based on context is a real listening skill.

A tiny example. In Spanish, *papa* ("potato") and *papá* ("dad") sound almost the same; the only difference is which part gets the push. In a sentence about dinner, you'd guess potato. In a sentence about who's picking you up, you'd guess dad. Context does a lot of work. Try it in your language: is there a pair of words you keep mixing up?

Try this: Choose one short clip your parent has approved. Do three listens, and write one sentence of gist after the first listen, before you touch a pencil for anything else.

Try this too: Find the hardest sound pair in your language (ask your parent, a speaker, or your course). Play Sound Pairs for five minutes with someone. Keep a tally.

Explain it back: What's the gist of what you heard today? Say it in one sentence, to your parent, without looking at your notes.

One more thing: "It's too fast" is the most normal thing anyone ever said about a new language. It'll seem slower on the third listen. It'll seem slower again next month. Your ears are getting faster, not the speakers getting slower.

Challenge: Pick one song in your language. Learn the chorus by listening, without the lyrics. Then check yourself against a lyric sheet. How close did you get?

If it isn't clicking

The material is too hard. If the student can't say who's talking or where, the clip is too hard, and three more listens won't fix it. *Next move:* find something easier. A course's earlier lessons, stories for younger children, a slow learner podcast. Most of it should make sense.

There's too little of it. If the Hour keeps shrinking and Take It In is the first thing to go, listening won't grow. *Next move:* protect Take It In above everything except Check and Carry. If the Hour is fifteen minutes, ten of them are listening. Add a little listening outside the Hour too: a song in the car, a short clip at breakfast.

There may be a hearing or processing concern. If your student has trouble hearing or understanding in English as well, or struggles more than the material explains, look at that directly. A second language doesn't cause it. *Next move:* keep going with the Hour, shorter and with more repetition, and talk with your pediatrician about a hearing check or a referral to an audiologist or speech-language pathologist.

When to slow down: if the student is frustrated after most listens, drop back to clips they've already heard and enjoy, and rebuild confidence for a week.

When to go ahead: if the student gets the gist on the first listen most days, choose harder clips, add new voices, and try shadowing (at 13–14 or ready 12).

When to find more help: a speaker or teacher can show your student exactly how a hard sound is made, which a recording can't. For signed languages, a Deaf teacher is the best help there is.

Tools, including AI

The Hour's AI box covers the rules: at 11–12, tools are parent-operated; at 13–14, they're supervised under the terms, with you nearby. For listening, the tools are recordings you've checked, from courses, libraries, and learner programs. Slow playback is fine for a listen or two. Captions in the new language are a useful stage once reading has begun, and English captions are for occasional use. No app grades your student's pronunciation; speech recognition is weaker with younger voices and isn't a judge of your student's speaking.⁴⁹ If an app says your student is wrong, ask a person. Every Hour ends with "Help I used." Chapter 8 has more.

What “done enough” looks like

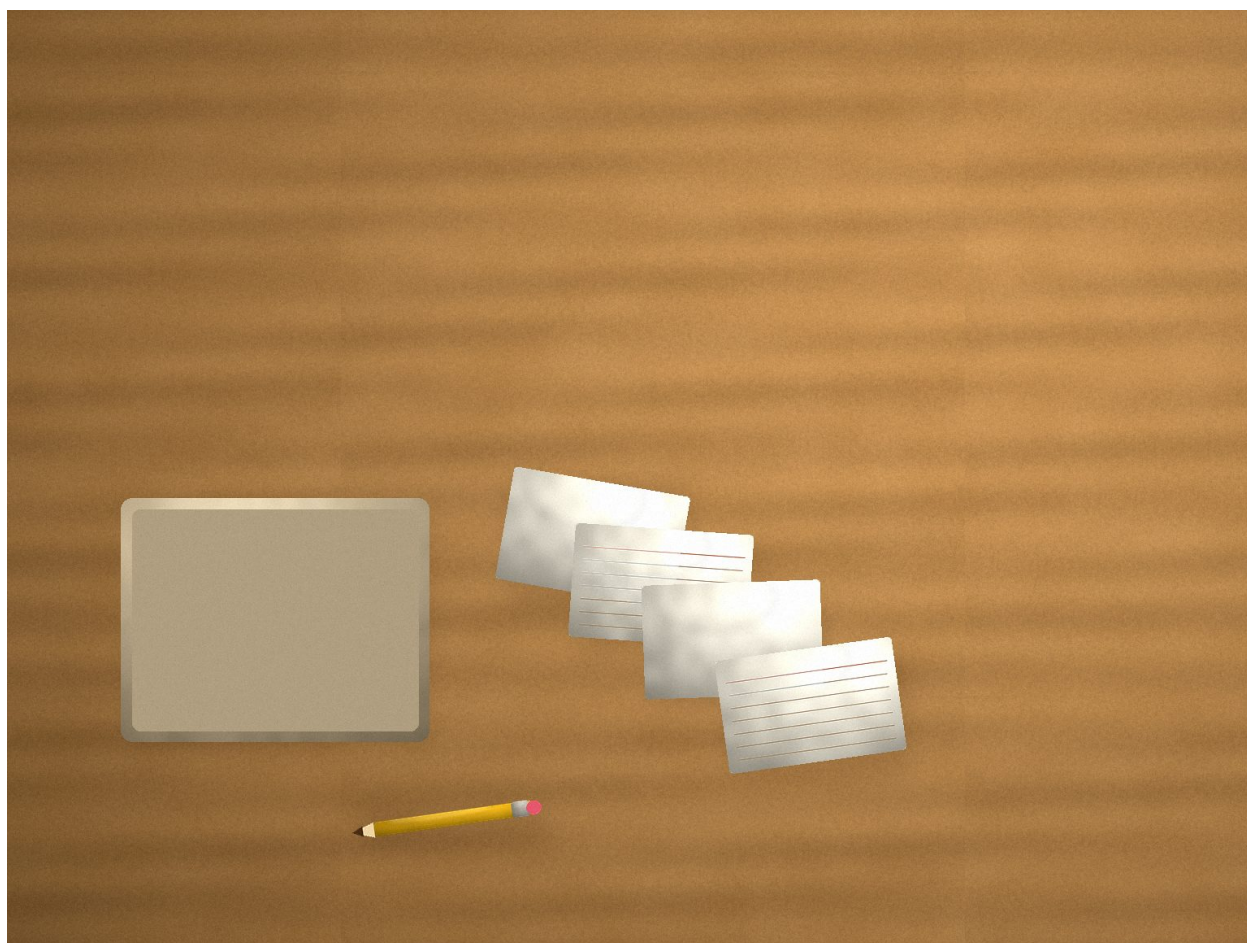
You're ready to move on to chapter 3 when:

- ☐ Your student gets the gist of short, familiar-topic recordings on the first or second listen.
- ☐ Your student catches key details: names, numbers, times, places.
- ☐ Your student tells apart the language's hardest sound pair (or tone, or handshape pair) most of the time.
- ☐ Your student has a listening log with at least two weeks of entries.
- ☐ Your student has listened to at least one live speaker and retold the gist.

Short check: AS-02 Listening Check. Choose a short recording your student hasn't heard, on a familiar topic, at about the level of their recent clips. Play it twice. The student writes or tells you the gist and three details, with no transcript and no tools. Mark it *not yet*, *with help*, or *on my own*, and write one sentence about what they understood. Date it and put it in the binder. Never timed, never graded with a score. For signed languages, use an unseen short signed story from a trusted source.

Chapter 3

Words That Stay: Vocabulary, Chunks, and Practice That Sticks



Why this matters

Words are the bricks. A student can understand a surprising amount from tone, pictures, and context, and Chapter 2 leaned on that. But sooner or later every learner hits the same wall: they know what the conversation is about, and they can't find the word they need to join it. That wall comes down one card at a time.

Here is the good news for this age. An eleven-year-old can do more than learn words. They can learn *how* words are learned: why some stick and others slide away by Thursday, why rereading a list feels productive and isn't, why a phrase from a real conversation stays longer than a word from a textbook column. That is a study skill they will use in biology, in history, in a first job, and in the next language after this one. You aren't only filling a vocabulary. You're handing over a method.

The method is short. Space it, quiz it, use it. Each move is small, and each takes only a few minutes a day. Spread review out over days instead of cramming it into one sitting. Pull each word out of memory instead of looking at it again. Put it into a phrase you'll actually say to somebody. Most of this chapter is the detail behind those three moves, plus a few traps, such as words that look like English and mean something else, that catch nearly every learner once.

Why not just hand over a list and a test date? Because lists teach recognition, and conversations need recall. A student who has stared at a list can usually pick the right word out of four choices. Ask them to say it, mid-sentence, with someone waiting, and it's gone. The word box, the chunk page, and the habit of checking look-alikes are built for the moment someone is waiting for an answer. That's the moment that counts.

You'll also notice what this chapter leaves out: a word count to hit. Families often ask how many words a student "should" know by the end of the year. There's no honest single number for that, because languages, scripts, and lives differ too much. What we can say is which words come first, and why. That comes later in the chapter. For now, hold on to one idea: a smaller number of words that come out when needed beats a bigger number that only show up on a list. By the end of this chapter, your student will have a box running, a chunk page started, and a short list of tricksters they've caught.

For the parent: understand it yourself

The everyday picture. Think about how you learned the names of your student's friends' parents. You didn't sit down with a list. You heard a name once at a park, forgot it, heard it again two weeks later, used it awkwardly at a birthday party, and by the third time it was yours. The forgetting in between wasn't failure. It was part of how the name settled in.

The precise picture. Two findings from memory research carry most of this chapter.

The first is **spacing**: spreading review out over time, with gaps between sessions. A large review of distributed-practice studies found that spaced review beats massed review, and that the best gap grows with how long you want to remember something.⁵⁰ Want a word for a quiz on Friday? Short gaps are fine. Want it next spring? The gaps need to stretch. That's the whole logic of the **word box**, which moves cards to longer and longer review days.

The second is **retrieval**: pulling a word out of memory (quizzing yourself) instead of rereading it. In a well-known study with college students, people who practiced recalling a passage remembered more a week later than people who spent the same time restudying it.⁵¹ This is a useful study, not a promise that every home will see the same result. But it matches what teachers see every day. Rereading feels smooth because the word is right there. Recall feels harder, and that bit of effort is what does the work.

Add two classroom truths to those findings.

Chunks are phrases learned whole, like “Can I...?” or “I’d like...” or “What does ____ mean?”, before the student could build them from parts. They aren’t a shortcut around grammar. They carry grammar inside them, ready to be noticed later in Chapter 6. A student with twenty good chunks can do more in a real conversation than a student with two hundred loose nouns.

Personal words stick because they matter. The student who plays soccer needs *goal*, *pass*, and *coach* before they need *umbrella*. The student who bakes needs *flour* and *oven*. A word box that holds the student’s own life gets reviewed. A word box that holds someone else’s list gets abandoned.

Which words come first? Chapter 4 explains a reading guide you’ll meet there in full: comfortable reading needs the reader to know nearly all the words on the page. The practical result for vocabulary is simple. The most frequent words (the ones in every conversation, every menu, every easy book) pay off first. Your student’s course or graded readers usually introduce them in a sensible order. Personal words come next. Rare and fancy words can wait.

Different scripts, same method. If your language uses a script your student is still learning, such as Korean Hangul, Arabic, Japanese kana, or Chinese characters, each card has one more job. The front shows the word in the script; a common romanization (letters that show the sound) can go in small print underneath while the script is new and then fade away. Korean 물 *mul* (“water”) is a good first card: short, common, and needed every day.⁵² Mandarin 谢谢 *xièxie* (“thank you”) is another.⁵³ For characters, the card can hold the character, its sound guide, and a meaning picture. Chapter 4 maps the scripts; here, just know that the word box works the same way for every one of them.

Heritage students and the box. A student who grew up hearing the family language often understands hundreds of words they’ve never seen written. For them the box does a slightly different job: it attaches spelling and script to words they already own, and it fills in the school-and-world words that home conversation never needed. Start their cards from reading, not from basic lists, and invite the family’s own words in. If Grandma says it differently than the book, both go on the card. Both are real.

Signed languages and the box. For an ASL student, the front of the card can carry the English word and the back can carry a reference to the checked model (a course video timestamp, a page in the student’s ASL book, or a note from a Deaf teacher). The student produces the sign from memory, then checks it against the model. The method of spacing, recall, and chunks is the same.

Look-alike words. Many languages share words with English, through shared history or borrowing. These are called cognates, and most of them are a gift. Some, though, are false friends: they look familiar and mean something else. Spanish *éxito* looks like “exit” and means “success.”⁵⁴ (The Spanish word for “library” is *biblioteca*, which looks nothing like the English.)⁵⁵ French *librairie* looks like “library” and means “bookshop.”⁵⁶ Spanish *actual* means “current” or “present,” not “real.”⁵⁵ Learning to check look-alikes in a dictionary is a skill in its own right, and it starts this chapter.

One standard to keep in mind. The World-Readiness Standards describe a goal called Language Comparisons: learners “investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of language through compar-

isons of the language studied and their own.”⁵⁷ Cognate hunts, word-family maps, and the false-friend list are exactly that kind of comparison. Your student is learning words, and also learning how languages work.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

These are the things students say that sound like problems and are really signposts.

- **“I studied for an hour and forgot it all.”** That was massed study: one long session. The fix isn’t more time, it’s the same time spread out. Say: “Let’s split it over five days and quiz instead of reread.”
- **“I know it when I see it, but I can’t say it.”** Recognition isn’t recall. Seeing the new word and knowing its meaning is the easier direction. Say: “Flip the cards. English side up. Say it before you look.”
- **“I learned the whole list, but I can’t use any of it.”** Loose words don’t come out in conversation. Say: “Pick three and put each one into a phrase you’d really say this week.”
- **“This word means exactly the same as the English one.”** Sometimes, but meanings stretch in different directions. Spanish *papa* can mean “potato” in much of Latin America and also “pope.”⁵⁸ Say: “Let’s look at the example sentences in the dictionary and see where it’s used.”
- **The student’s cards have mistakes.** A misspelled card practiced fifty times is a misspelling learned well. Say: “Cards come from the book, the course, or the dictionary, never from memory. Let’s check these three.” (Dictionary Detective, TECH-01, helps.)

A five-minute parent warm-up

Make five cards yourself tonight from the student’s current unit: the new word on one side, English and a small drawing on the other. Tomorrow, before the Hour, quiz the student with your cards. Then hand them over and let the student quiz you. Two things happen. You find out how the box feels from the inside, and the student sees that forgetting is normal for grown-ups too, and that the box treats everyone the same way. Plenty of parents are learning alongside their student, and this is the easiest place to start.

How to teach it this week

Where it sits in the Language Hour. Words live mainly in **Work With It**, the third step. The word box review comes first in that step, every day, before anything new. Five minutes of mixed review from earlier weeks (Old Words Come Back, WORD-10) can also open the Hour during **Goal and Greet** once the box is a month old. New cards come from what the student met in **Take It In**: the recording, the reader, the conversation. The **carry phrase** chosen in **Check and Carry** is often a chunk from today’s cards.

Who runs which step. At 11–12, you run the review with the student for the first two weeks: you hold the cards, you ask, they answer, they move the card. By week three they run it and you sit nearby as first listener. At 13–14, the student runs the box from day one and plans the week’s new

cards on their plan sheet. Your job is to ask once a week, “Show me the box,” and to quiz them on five random cards.

How many new words? About ten new cards a week at 11–12, up to fifteen at 13–14, with review first every day.⁵⁹ That’s a family default, not a research number. If review is taking more than ten minutes, there are too many new cards. Cut back, not the review.

Exact words to say. The scripts below are in English with [bracketed] spots for your language. One checked example is rotated in each paragraph.

- To start: “Today’s box. Old cards first, then new. Ready?” Pick up the Day 1 tab. “Cover it. What is it?” Wait. “Flip. Right? Forward it goes. Not yet? Back to Day 1, no big deal.”
- For a new card from today’s reading: “You met [word] in the story. Where was it? Read me the sentence.” Then: “Write the card from the book, not from memory. Draw something on the back.” For example, a German learner might copy *Hund* (“dog”) straight from the reader, with a quick sketch.⁶⁰
- To make a chunk: “Don’t just write [word]. Write the phrase it came in.” A French learner writes *s’il vous plaît* (“please”) whole, not *plaît* alone.⁶¹
- To check a look-alike: “That looks like English. Is it really? Let’s check.” A Spanish learner who sees *librería* finds “bookshop,” not “library.”⁶²

A first week of the box, day by day.

- **Monday:** Set up the box with its tabs. The student makes five cards from something already understood and files them behind Day 1.
- **Tuesday:** Review the five, then add five more. Some of Monday’s cards move forward.
- **Wednesday:** Review is due for Day 1 cards; the Day 3 tab is still waiting. Start the Chunk Collection page and turn two chunks into cards.
- **Thursday:** Day 3 cards come due for the first time. The student feels the half-forgetting. Name it: “That’s the sticking happening.”
- **Friday:** Write the box count in the log. Five random cards from you. Choose the next week’s carry phrase from the chunk page.

That’s about ten new cards in a week at the 11–12 pace, and the box already has a rhythm.

The student’s first try. Today, the student makes five cards from something they’ve already understood. That’s all. They copy each one from the book, course, or dictionary; draw or write the meaning on the back; and put them all behind the Day 1 tab. Tomorrow they quiz themselves first, before any new cards.

How to fade help. Week one: you hold the cards. Week two: the student holds them and you listen. Week three: the student runs the box alone and shows you the tally. Week four: you quiz five random cards on Friday. That’s the shape. If the box stalls, go back one step for a week and then fade again.

Two students, one table. If you’re teaching an 11-year-old and a 14-year-old together, give each their own box. They can share a single review time, though. The younger one reviews aloud with you while the older one reviews alone, and then they swap five cards and quiz each other. Siblings make excellent quizmasters, and a younger student hearing an older one’s harder words picks up

more than you'd expect. Keep scores out of it: the point is the tally going up, not one sibling beating the other.

When the course has its own word list. Many courses and textbooks come with a vocabulary list per unit. Use it as the source for cards, which keeps spelling checked, but let the student choose which words make it into the box first, starting with the ones they'll actually need. A list of forty words per unit doesn't mean forty cards this week.

When to stop talking. As soon as the student has the card in hand, your talking slows the retrieval down. Ask and wait. If you've explained a word twice, stop explaining and let the dictionary's example sentences do the work.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: "Which words will you need this week — and how will you make them stay?"

Follow-ups: 1. "Where did you meet that word: in the reader, the recording, or a conversation?" 2. "Which of these is a word you'll actually say to someone this week?" 3. "What's a phrase you could put it in?"

Wait: count to five in your head. A student pulling a word out of memory needs that silence more than any hint. Watch their face; if they're searching, keep waiting.

If it goes quiet: the card has no hook: no picture, no phrase, no reason to exist. Give the first sound or first letter as a hint, then model it, then hand it back ("Your turn, whole phrase"). Later, help them add a hook to the card.

Don't say / say instead: Don't say "Just memorize them." Say "Cover it. What is it? Now flip."

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — WORD-01 Word Box with Review Days

- **Time:** 10 minutes a day
- **Materials:** a recipe box or shoebox, index cards, six tab dividers labeled Day 1, Day 3, Day 7, Day 14, Day 30, and Retired
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed; cards stay home
- **The fun:** watching cards march toward Retired
- **The skill:** spaced review: coming back to words after growing gaps
- **The crumb:** the box count (cards in each tab) written in the Hour log every Friday

How it goes. New cards go behind Day 1. Each day, the student reviews any tab that's due. Right answer: the card moves forward one tab. Wrong answer: back to Day 1. A card that survives Day 30 retires, but retired cards come back in Old Words Come Back once a month. Review comes before new cards every single day; that one rule keeps the box from collapsing. Every card is copied from a checked source: the course, the reader, or a dictionary.

11–12: Parent runs the first two weeks; student runs it from week three. Ten new cards a week. **13–14:** Student runs it from the start and adds the box count to the weekly plan sheet. Up to fifteen new cards a week. **Ready 12:** A steady twelve-year-old can plan their own new cards for the week.

In-home — WORD-02 Cover and Recall

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** the student's own cards, or a vocabulary list with one column covered
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** a tally that goes up
- **The skill:** retrieval: pulling a word out of memory instead of rereading
- **The crumb:** a recall tally (for example, "18 of 25") in the log

How it goes. English side up. The student says the new word before flipping. Mix the order every time so the student can't lean on the list's sequence. Count how many come out, not how fast. Then flip the direction for a round: new word up, say the meaning. The first direction (English to new) is the harder one and the one that matters for speaking and writing, so it gets more turns.

11–12: Parent shuffles and holds; student answers aloud. **13–14:** Student quizzes alone, then a parent spot-checks five.

In-home — WORD-03 Chunk Collection

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a notebook page titled "Chunks," and this week's input (a reader, a recording, a conversation)
- **Safety and privacy:** if a chunk comes from a person, write their first name only
- **The fun:** sounding more natural overnight
- **The skill:** collecting whole useful phrases from real input
- **The crumb:** the chunk list, dated

How it goes. While reading or listening, the student hunts for phrases a real person says, not single words: ways to ask, to agree, to say "I'd like," "I think," "Can I...?" Each one goes on the page whole, with its meaning in English and where it came from. Then each new chunk gets a card in the word box. Japanese learners might collect もう一度 *mō ichido* ("once more"), which turns up every time someone asks for a repeat.⁶³ Spanish learners might collect *por favor* ("please") and *otra vez* ("again") as a pair they'll need in the very next conversation.⁶⁴

11–12: Parent helps spot chunks in the first three readings; aim for five chunks a week. **13–14:** Student collects independently and tags each chunk: ask, answer, react, or keep it going.

In-home — WORD-05 Cognate Hunt (and False Friends)

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a short easy text, two highlighters, a dictionary
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** catching the tricksters

- **The skill:** finding words that look like English and checking which ones mislead
- **The crumb:** a hunt list in two columns: True friends / False friends

How it goes. The student highlights every word that looks like an English word. Then, one by one, they check each in the dictionary and sort it. *Restaurant* in French really is “restaurant”: a true friend.⁶⁵ Spanish *éxito* means “success,” not “exit”: a false friend.⁵⁴ Every false friend found goes on a special card with a little warning mark. Languages that share few words with English (Korean, Arabic, Japanese, Mandarin) still borrow some, and the hunt works there too, often through the sound rather than the spelling. Russian *ресторан* *restoran* means “restaurant,” and the sound is the clue.⁶⁶

11–12: Hunt together; the parent reads the dictionary entry aloud if needed. **13–14:** Student hunts alone and explains one false friend at dinner. **Signed languages:** Signed languages have their own look-alike traps, such as signs that seem to picture something and mean something else, or that differ between ASL and another signed language. Hunt them with a Deaf teacher or a checked course rather than by guessing.

In-home — WORD-08 Teach the Parent Five

- **Time:** 10 minutes, plus 3 minutes a week later
- **Materials:** five of the student’s cards
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** the student gets to be the teacher, and grades you
- **The skill:** explaining and quizzing, which deepens the student’s own recall
- **The crumb:** the parent’s score, a week later

How it goes. The student picks five cards they’re confident about and teaches them to you: says or signs each one, gives the meaning, puts it into a short phrase, and has you try. A week later, without warning, they quiz you. Your score goes in their log. Whatever you miss, they reteach. It’s one of the best tests of whether a student really knows a word: can they hand it to someone else?

11–12: Keep it to five; the parent can laugh at their own mistakes. **13–14:** Add a twist: the student must teach each word inside a chunk, not alone.

Out-of-home — OUT-04 Signs and Menus Walk

- **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Materials:** a notebook and pencil; a pocket dictionary if you have one
- **Safety and privacy:** write words down instead of photographing; no photos of people
- **The fun:** finding your language in the wild
- **The skill:** spotting and checking real words in public signs and menus
- **The crumb:** a word list from the walk, with where you found each

How it goes. This card belongs mainly to Chapter 4, where it’s about reading for the main idea. Here, use it as a word hunt. Visit a grocery aisle, a restaurant menu, a museum label, or a neighborhood where your language is in use. The student writes down five words they recognize and five they don’t, exactly as printed. At home, they check the unknown five and add the useful ones to

the word box. A Spanish menu might give *pan* (“bread”); a French bakery sign might give *pain*, the same meaning and a classic false friend for English speakers.⁶⁷

11–12: Parent chooses the spot and walks alongside. **13–14:** Student plans the walk, picks the spot, and leads.

Optional — CONN-01 Math in the Language

At 11–12, a few short word problems with numbers and measurements in the language (no prices) turn number words into words that stay. Copy the number words from the course, and put each new one in the word box.

Optional — CONN-03 Science Words Lab

At 13–14, the student describes a simple experiment or a nature walk in three to five sentences, using new words checked in a dictionary. It’s a natural home for Word Family Map (WORD-04): a Spanish learner might start from *libro* (“book”) and find *librería* (“bookshop”) and *librero* (“bookshelf” or “bookseller”).⁶⁸

Optional — WORD-09 Personal Word List

Words for the student’s own hobbies, friends, food, and feelings, each checked in a dictionary before it becomes a card. My Picture Dictionary (WORD-06, 11–12) and Category Race (WORD-07) are good company for it, and Old Words Come Back (WORD-10) brings retired cards around once a month.

For the student

(Read this on your own. At 11–12, your parent reads it too, and you talk it over for a few minutes.)

Your brain keeps what you pull out of it.

That’s the whole secret, and most people get it backward. They look at a list over and over, it starts to feel familiar, and they think they’ve learned it. Then someone asks them the word and nothing comes out. Looking isn’t learning. *Pulling* is learning. Every time you cover a word and drag it out of your memory, you make the path to it a little wider.

Here’s how your word box works. New cards go behind Day 1. Each day, check whichever tab is due. Get it right? The card moves forward: Day 3, then Day 7, then Day 14, then Day 30, then retired. Get it wrong? Back to Day 1. That’s not a punishment. It just means that card needs more turns.

You’ll notice something odd: by the time a card comes back on Day 7, you’ve half forgotten it. Good. That small struggle to remember is exactly what makes it stick. If review always feels easy, the gaps are too short.

A few rules that save time:

- **Review first, every day.** New cards are fun, and that's why they go second.
- **Copy cards from a book, course, or dictionary,** never from memory. A mistake you practice fifty times is very hard to unlearn.
- **Write phrases, not just words.** "Can I have..." is more useful than "have."
- **Put your own life in the box.** If you skate, draw, game, cook, or play an instrument, learn those words. You'll use them.
- **Check look-alikes.** Some words that look like English are tricksters. French *librairie* is a bookshop, not a library.⁵⁶

What a good card looks like. Front: the word or phrase in your language, copied exactly, with any accent marks or script written carefully. Back: the meaning in English, a tiny drawing if it helps, and the sentence where you found it. In a corner, a note of where it came from ("reader p. 12," "Abuela," "course unit 3"). A card with too much on it turns into a page of notes, and you'll stop reviewing it.

Try this: Make five cards from something you read or heard this week. Tomorrow, quiz yourself before you do anything else.

Try this too: Pick one word that looks like English and check it in a dictionary. True friend or false friend? If it's false, give it a warning mark.

Explain it back: Tell someone at home, in your own words, why spacing works better than one long study session. If you can explain it, you understand it.

One more thing: Everyone has the week when review gets skipped and the Day 1 tab fills up. Stop adding new cards until the backlog is clear, even if it takes three days. The box forgives you fast once review is back on. And around week four, a word will pop into your head mid-conversation before you've had time to think. That's what the box is for.

Challenge: Teach five words to someone: a parent, a sibling, a grandparent. Don't tell them when, but quiz them in a week. Then check yourself: did *you* remember all five?

If it isn't clicking

The box is overflowing and review takes twenty minutes. Too many new words are coming in faster than old ones can settle. *Next move:* cut new cards to ten a week, or even five, until the Day 1 tab is thin again. Use the rescue order on the cards too: ask → wait → hint → model → hand it back.

Review keeps getting skipped. The box only works if old cards come back on time. *Next move:* put review at the very start of **Work With It** and make it non-negotiable for two weeks. At 13–14, the box count goes on the weekly plan sheet so the student can see it slipping.

The words aren't sticking, even with review. Usually they aren't personal, or they're floating alone. *Next move:* do a Personal Word List for the student's hobbies, put every word into a chunk, and add a drawing to each card. If one card has bounced back to Day 1 five times, the student uses it in a real sentence with a person today.

When to slow down. If the student is anxious about the box or treats every Day 1 card as a failure, slow the pace and celebrate the forward moves for a few weeks.

When to go ahead. If the box runs smoothly and most cards survive Day 7, raise the new-card count a little, or start a Word Family Map.

When to find more help. If a student struggles to remember words in every subject, in English too, talk with your pediatrician or an education professional about an evaluation. A speaker, tutor, or class (Chapter 7) can help with words that need hearing, such as tones or sounds the student can't yet tell apart.

Tools, including AI

The Language Hour's AI box covers who uses which tools at which age; this chapter's tool note is short. The first tool for words is a dictionary with real example sentences and, ideally, recordings by human speakers (Dictionary Detective, TECH-01): check every card against it. Flashcard apps can run the review schedule if the student makes the cards from checked sources; the app is a box, not a teacher, and its streaks aren't records. Under the family's rules, a practice set a tool generates with answers hidden (TECH-04) is labeled **made by a tool**, and any word the student keeps is checked before it goes in the box. The Hour still ends with **Help I used**: dictionary, book, person, tool, or none. Chapter 8 has more.

What “done enough” looks like

You're ready to move on to Chapter 4 when:

- ☐ The word box has been running for four weeks, with review days kept most days.
- ☐ Review comes before new cards, without reminders.
- ☐ Every card is copied from a checked source.
- ☐ The student recalls most of last month's words in a Cover and Recall round.
- ☐ The student uses about ten chunks in real exchanges (the Hour, family, a speaker).
- ☐ The student can name and explain one false friend in their language.
- ☐ The student can explain, in their own words, why spacing beats cramming.

Short check: AS-01 Can-Do Self-Check. Five can-do statements about words, such as “I can name things I use every day” and “I can ask what a word means,” each marked not yet / with help / on my own, and dated. Never timed, never graded.

Chapter 4

Real Reading: Easy Books, Everyday Texts, and New Scripts



Why this matters

Reading is the most generous teacher your student will ever have. A book doesn't get tired, doesn't mind being asked to repeat itself, and goes exactly as fast as the reader does. An hour of easy reading puts more of the new language in front of a student than almost anything else a family can arrange: more words, more sentences, more patterns, met again and again in context.

There's one condition, and it's the whole chapter in a sentence: the text has to be easy enough. When a page is full of unknown words, reading stops being reading. It turns into decoding, a slow hunt through a dictionary that leaves the student tired and no closer to the story. When a page is mostly familiar, something different happens. The student reads for meaning, guesses the odd new word from context, and comes away with more language than they started with, without noticing the work.

At 11–14, students are ready to read in the new language on purpose: to choose books, to track what they read, to tell the difference between reading for pleasure and reading to study. They can also start reading the world, meaning menus, signs, schedules, recipes, and weather reports, which is where the language lives outside a course. And if your language uses a new script, this is the age when a student can make real progress in it, because they can understand *how* the script works, not just copy shapes.

Picture a family where the reading shelf for the new language holds three thin graded readers, a borrowed comic, and a printed recipe from a relative. That's enough to start. Most of the growth will come from reading those easy things again and again, not from finding the perfect book.

This chapter covers easy books and graded readers, the weekly harder text, everyday reading, a map of the world's scripts, and the culture that rides along inside every text.

For the parent: understand it yourself

The everyday picture. Think about reading a car manual for a model you've never driven, written by an engineer. Every sentence is in English, and you still have to stop every few lines. Now think about rereading a favorite mystery novel. You fly through it. You might even pick up a new word or two without noticing. Same skill, completely different experience. The difference is how many words on the page are already yours.

The precise picture. A widely cited study found that most readers of fiction needed to know about 98 percent of the words on the page, roughly one unknown word in fifty, to read comfortably with good understanding.⁶⁹ A recent replication confirmed the general picture and also cautioned that 98 percent is a guide, not a guarantee.⁷⁰ Some readers do fine with fewer known words, and some struggle with more. But the guide gives families a practical tool: if a page is full of unknown words, it's the wrong page, not the wrong reader.

That's the job of **Count the Unknowns** (READ-02), which you'll meet below. On a hundred-word stretch of text, about two unknown words or fewer means read on; five or more means try an easier book. That's a family rule of thumb drawn from the 98 percent guide, not a lab measurement.

From there, reading splits into two different jobs.

Extensive reading means lots of easy reading for meaning and enjoyment. A meta-analysis of thirty-four studies found that extensive reading programs improved reading ability compared with regular instruction.⁷¹ Most of those studies involved older learners and learners of English, so treat it as a strong signal rather than a promise for your home. In practice, extensive reading uses **graded readers**: books written for learners at a set level, with controlled vocabulary and grammar. Good

graded readers exist for teenagers in many languages, with real plots and topics that don't feel babyish.

Intensive reading means a short, harder text read closely, with help, once a week. It's a different job: slow, careful, dictionary in hand, working out exactly what each sentence says and why. It stretches the student. It doesn't replace the easy reading, which is where most of the growth happens.

Everyday texts are the third kind of reading: a menu, a sign, a bus schedule, a recipe, a weather forecast. The student reads these for the main idea, often with lots of unknown words, because the format carries much of the meaning. A sign on a door that says *salida* in Spanish, *sortie* in French, or *Ausgang* in German means “exit” every time, and its position above a door tells you that before you've decoded a letter.⁷²

One standard to keep in mind. The World-Readiness Standards describe the interpretive mode, the reading and listening side of language, as learners who “understand, interpret, and analyze what is heard, read, or viewed on a variety of topics.”⁷³ Notice that the standard says *understand* first. Decoding sounds is a step on the way, not the goal.

A map of scripts (a map, not a course)

Your student's language may use a script they already read, a script with a few new marks, or a writing system that's entirely new. Here is the landscape in plain terms. Always learn the details from a checked chart, course, or textbook.

- **Familiar letters with new marks.** Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, and Vietnamese use the Latin alphabet with accents and extra letters. The marks matter; Chapter 6 shows one where a missing accent changes the word.
- **New alphabets.** Russian uses Cyrillic, Greek uses its own alphabet, and Korean uses Hangul, which builds letters into syllable blocks. Russian *пестопан* *restoran* (“restaurant”) is a nice early reward, a word the student can sound out and recognize.⁷⁴
- **Right-to-left scripts.** Arabic and Hebrew are written right to left, and most letters connect and change shape depending on their position in a word. Arabic *مرحبا* *marḥaban* (“hello, welcome”) is a common first word to read.⁷⁵
- **Syllable scripts.** Japanese uses two kana sets, hiragana and katakana, in which each symbol stands for a syllable, alongside kanji (characters). The word *ひらがな* itself is written in hiragana.⁷⁶ Hindi uses Devanagari, in which consonants carry a built-in vowel and other vowel signs attach to them: *नमस्ते* *namaste*, a greeting used for hello and goodbye.⁷⁷
- **Characters.** Chinese uses characters that carry meaning and sound, with a romanized sound guide (pinyin, in mainland China) used while learning. *出口* *chūkǒu* (“exit”) is one a student will see on signs.⁷⁸ Korean signs use *출구* *chulgu* for the same idea.⁷⁹
- **Signed languages.** ASL has no everyday written form. A “reading” text for an ASL student is usually signed video by a Deaf signer, with English print, fingerspelling, and sign illustrations as supports. Reading print in English is still part of the work, especially for fingerspelled words, but the main “text” is signed.

Two rules hold across every script. Copy from a checked model, never from memory or from a

screenshot of unknown origin. And read lots of easy text in the new script, because fluency in a script comes from reading known words many times, not from drilling the chart forever.

Culture lives in texts. Every menu, folk tale, and holiday flyer carries culture: products (things people make and use), practices (what people do), and perspectives (why it matters to them). At 13–14, students can start naming all three. A recipe isn’t just a list of ingredients; it’s a window on how a family eats, celebrates, and remembers.

Reading aloud has a place, a small one. Reading aloud helps a student connect spelling and sound, and it lets you hear how a new script is going. But it’s slower than silent reading, and it splits the student’s attention between pronouncing and understanding. Use it for the first page of a new book, for Read, Listen, Read, and for reading to a younger sibling. Let most easy reading be silent.

What the parent doesn’t need. You don’t need to read the language to run this chapter. The gist conversation happens in English if that’s what you share. Count the Unknowns is the student’s count, not yours. Graded readers come with levels already set by people who know the language. Your job is to protect the time, ask the questions, and notice when a book is too hard, which you can see on your student’s face long before you can read the page.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

- **The student looks up every single word.** The text is too hard, or it’s a habit. Say: “Read the whole page first for the gist. Then look up only the words you needed to follow the story.”
- **The student reads aloud beautifully and can’t tell you what it meant.** That’s decoding without understanding. Common in new scripts and in heritage students. Say: “Great reading. Now close the book and tell me what happened.”
- **“This book is babyish.”** Graded readers for teenagers exist, with mysteries, sports, science fiction, and real history. Say: “Let’s find one at your level about something you actually like.”
- **A heritage student speaks easily and reads slowly.** That’s a normal profile, not a problem.⁸⁰ Say: “Your ears are way ahead. Let’s get your eyes caught up with easy reading every day.”
- **The student reads a new script letter by letter, month after month.** More drilling won’t help. Say: “Let’s read lots of easy texts with words you already know, so your eyes learn the shapes of whole words.”

A five-minute parent warm-up

Take the book your student chose, open to any page, and do Count the Unknowns yourself on a hundred words, even if you don’t speak the language. You’ll likely find dozens of unknowns, which is exactly the point: you’ll feel what a too-hard page feels like. Then watch your student do the same page. If their count is low, you’ll see why easy reading flows. If it’s high, you’ve found the next conversation: an easier book.

How to teach it this week

Where it sits in the Language Hour. Easy reading belongs in **Take It In**, the second step, three times a week. On those days it can replace or share time with a recording. The weekly intensive text goes in **Work With It**, where slow, careful work belongs. Everyday texts can turn up anywhere, and are especially good for **Use It for Real**: read a real menu, then order from it. The reading log line goes in **Check and Carry**.

Who runs which step. At 11–12, choose the first graded reader together, do Count the Unknowns side by side, and read the first chapter aloud together: the student reads, you listen as first listener and ask gist questions. After that, the student reads silently and tells you about it. At 13–14, the student chooses books, keeps the reading log, and picks the weekly intensive text with you. Your job is the gist conversation and the occasional “Show me your log.”

Exact words to say. English with [bracketed] spots for your language, and one checked example per paragraph.

- To start easy reading: “Ten minutes, for the story. Skip words you don’t need. Tell me what happened when you’re done.”
- For the gist: “Who’s in it? Where are they? What’s the problem?” Then: “Which line told you most?”
- For a new word: “Can you guess it from the sentence? Try. Now check.” A Spanish reader who meets *menú* on a café page guesses “menu” from the picture and checks: right.⁸¹
- For everyday texts: “You don’t need every word. What’s this for? What would you do with it?” A French learner looking at a forecast that says *pluie* finds “rain” and decides on an umbrella.⁸²
- For the intensive text: “This one’s harder on purpose. We’ll go slow. One paragraph, every sentence, then tell me in English what it says.”

What a reading week can look like.

- **Monday:** Easy reading, ten to fifteen minutes, in **Take It In**. Log line.
- **Tuesday:** Recording or conversation in **Take It In**; one everyday text (a forecast, a menu) in **Use It for Real**.
- **Wednesday:** Easy reading again. Gist conversation at the end.
- **Thursday:** The intensive text in **Work With It**: one paragraph, slowly, with the dictionary. Two new words to the word box.
- **Friday:** Easy reading, then the reading log total for the week and a carry phrase from the book.

At 13–14, sessions can stretch to twenty minutes, and the student can plan the week on the plan sheet.

What a log line looks like. Date · book or text · pages or minutes · one sentence about what happened · one word or phrase worth keeping. For example: “Tues · [reader title] · ch. 3, 12 min · the brother finds the map · [new phrase].” That’s enough. A student who logs every session for a term has a record of real reading that means more than any app score.

Choosing graded readers. Look for a clear level system on the cover or in the course, short

chapters, an audio version if possible, and a topic the student chose. Avoid buying a whole set before testing one book with Count the Unknowns. The library is the cheapest way to try levels. Ask the librarian about borrowing between branches.

Heritage readers. A student who speaks the family language at home often reads much more slowly than they speak. Start with texts whose spoken words they already know: family recipes, children's books relatives remember, simple news for young readers. Read, Listen, Read is especially helpful, because their ears can pull their eyes along. Respect the family's variety. If a book uses a different word than home does, both are real, and both go in the word box.

The student's first try. Today, the student picks one graded reader, from the library if you can (Library Language Shelf, OUT-01), does Count the Unknowns on the first page, and reads for ten minutes. Then they tell you three things that happened. That's the whole first day.

How to fade help. Week one: read together, gist questions after every page. Week two: the student reads a chapter alone; you ask about it afterward. Week three: the student keeps the log alone; you have one gist conversation a week. By week four, the student chooses the next book on their own.

Two students, one table. Siblings at different levels can read at the same time, each in their own book. Afterward, each tells the other the story in three sentences. The younger one gets to hear a harder retell; the older one practices summarizing simply. If one is far ahead, Read Aloud to a Younger Sibling (READ-08) turns the gap into a job.

When to stop talking. Once the student is reading, silence. Interruptions break the thread that makes easy reading work. Save your questions for the end. If you catch yourself translating sentences for them, stop and ask "What do you think it says?"

Make room for it. Reading is the step families drop first when the Hour gets squeezed. Protect three sessions a week. If the Hour keeps shrinking, keep **Take It In** and **Check and Carry** and let other things go for a week.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: "What's this text about — and which words carried you there?"

Follow-ups: 1. "Who's in it, and what do they want?" 2. "Was there a word you guessed from the sentence? How did you guess it?" 3. "How many unknowns on your test page? Is this the right book?"

Wait: count to five in your head. A student retelling a story is organizing it as they go. Let them.

If it goes quiet: the text was too hard, or the student read without following. Ask an easier question: "Who was in it?" Then a choice: "Was it at school or at home?" Then model a one-sentence gist and hand it back: "Now say what happened next."

Don't say / say instead: Don't say "Translate it for me." Say "Tell me the story in your own words. Which line told you most?"

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — READ-01 Graded Reader Pick

- **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Materials:** two or three graded readers or easy books at different levels; a pencil
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** choosing a book about something you care about
- **The skill:** choosing an easy reader at the right level and reading for pleasure
- **The crumb:** the book title in the reading log

How it goes. Lay out a few options. The student reads the back cover and the first page of each, does a quick Count the Unknowns on the first page, and picks the one that’s both interesting and easy. Then they read. No quizzes, no worksheets: the point is to enjoy a story in the new language. If a book turns out boring by chapter three, it’s fine to switch.

11–12: Parent pre-selects three options; student chooses. **13–14:** Student browses the library shelf or a course’s reader list and chooses alone. **Signed languages:** An ASL student “picks” from a set of signed stories by Deaf storytellers at different levels, using the same check: can they follow most of it the first time?

In-home — READ-02 Count the Unknowns

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** the chosen text and a pencil, or a sticky note
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** a quick test that settles “is this too hard?” without arguments
- **The skill:** checking a page: about one new word in fifty means read on
- **The crumb:** the page check (book, page, number of unknowns) in the log

How it goes. Choose a stretch of about a hundred words. The student reads it and makes a light mark at every word they don’t know. About two or fewer: read on, this is a good book for easy reading. Three or four: fine for intensive reading, a bit much for pleasure. Five or more: go down a level. It’s a family rule of thumb drawn from the 98 percent guide, and it ends a lot of “this is too hard / no it isn’t” debates.

11–12: Do it together the first few times. **13–14:** The student does it alone before every new book. **Signed languages:** For a signed story, the student pauses a short section and counts signs they didn’t understand; the same thresholds work as a rough guide.

In-home — READ-03 Read, Listen, Read

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** a short text with an audio version (many graded readers include one), or a parent or speaker who can read it aloud
- **Safety and privacy:** audio from the course, library, or a known speaker; no uploading the student’s voice anywhere

- **The fun:** the text gets easier on every pass, and you can feel it
- **The skill:** connecting written words to their sounds
- **The crumb:** the text title in the log, with one sentence on what changed between reads

How it goes. First, the student reads the passage silently for the gist. Second, they listen to the same passage read aloud while following the text. Third, they read it again, silently or aloud. Afterward, they say what changed: words that clicked, sounds they'd been getting wrong, a sentence that suddenly made sense. This is especially helpful for new scripts and for languages where spelling and sound don't line up neatly.

11–12: Use audio from the course or library; parent sits nearby. **13–14:** Student does the three passes alone and notes one change. **Signed languages:** Watch, read, watch: watch the signed story, read the English summary or gloss, then watch again.

In-home — READ-06 Script Practice from a Model

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a checked script chart or textbook page, lined or grid paper
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** a new set of shapes that start turning into words
- **The skill:** reading and copying a new script from a checked chart or book
- **The crumb:** the practice sheet, dated

How it goes. The student reads a short row of known words in the new script, then copies each one carefully from the model, saying it aloud. Then they read the row again without the model. The focus is on reading known words, not drilling the whole chart in isolation. Five known words read easily are worth more than fifty symbols recited. For alphabets with new marks, the same card applies: copy accents and marks exactly.

11–12: Parent checks the model is from the course or a trusted chart. **13–14:** Student builds a personal list of “words I can read” in the script and adds to it weekly. **Signed languages:** ASL students practice fingerspelling known English words from a checked chart or course video, then reading fingerspelling from the model at a comfortable speed.

In-home — CULT-01 Product, Practice, Perspective

- **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Materials:** a text from or about a culture that uses your language (a recipe, a holiday description, a folk tale, a museum label); a page divided into three columns
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** finding the “why” behind something people do
- **The skill:** picking a cultural product, the practice around it, and the idea behind it
- **The crumb:** the three-column page

How it goes. The student picks a thing from the text (a food, a song, an object), writes what people do with it, and then what it seems to mean to them. Every column comes from the text, a speaker, or a book, never from a guess or a stereotype. If the text doesn't say why, the student writes a

question to ask a speaker later (Chapter 7). Variety matters: one family, one region, one text isn't the whole culture, and the page should say so.

13–14: All three columns, with sources listed at the bottom.

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

- **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Materials:** a library card, a short list of what you're looking for
- **Safety and privacy:** usual library rules; parent nearby at 11–12
- **The fun:** walking out with a stack of new books
- **The skill:** finding readers, magazines, films, and conversation groups at the library
- **The crumb:** the borrowed list in the log

How it goes. You may have met this card in Chapter 1 as a first visit. Here's how it changes for reading: go hunting specifically for graded readers, bilingual picture books, easy magazines, comics, and audiobooks in your language. Ask the librarian: many libraries can borrow from other branches, and some have world-language sections that aren't obvious from the front desk. The student does Count the Unknowns on the spot before borrowing.

11–12: Parent and student go together and borrow three books. **13–14:** Student makes the list beforehand and does the asking.

Out-of-home — OUT-04 Signs and Menus Walk

- **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Materials:** a notebook and pencil
- **Safety and privacy:** write things down instead of photographing; no photos of people; parent alongside at 11–12
- **The fun:** finding out how much of the real world you can already read
- **The skill:** reading public signs and menus for the main idea
- **The crumb:** a list of what you read and where (no photos of people)

How it goes. You met this card in Chapter 3 as a word hunt. Here's how it changes for reading: the goal is the main idea, not the words. Visit a market, a restaurant with a menu in your language, a museum with labels, a neighborhood with signs, or a cultural center. For each text, the student writes what it's for and what a reader would do with it: "a menu, lunch specials, the second one has chicken"; "a sign, this way to the exit." Use the format, the pictures, and the position to help. Unknown words are expected; the test is whether the student can act on the text.

11–12: Parent picks the place; aim for five texts. **13–14:** Student plans the route and reads ten texts, including one longer one (a notice or a flyer).

Optional — READ-08 Read Aloud to a Younger Sibling

An easy picture book read aloud to a younger child gives the student an audience who's happy with any level, and gives a busy parent ten quiet minutes. Practice the book once first.

Optional — READ-10 Folk Tale Deep Read

At 13–14, a folk tale from a culture that uses the language makes a good weekly intensive text. Read it closely, then talk about what the story seems to value, and note where the text says so.

Optional — CONN-04 History Through Its Words

At 13–14, the student traces a few borrowed words to the history behind them, using a dictionary's word-origin notes rather than guesses.

Optional — READ-05 Everyday Texts

Menus, signs, schedules, recipes, and forecasts read for the main idea, at home or out the door. Retell in Five Sentences (READ-07), Same Story, Two Languages (READ-09, 13–14), the Reading Log (READ-04), and Song Lyric Gaps (LISTEN-05) round out the bank.

For the student

(Read this on your own. At 11–12, your parent reads it too, and you talk it over for a few minutes.)

If a page has too many new words, it's the wrong page, not the wrong reader.

That's worth saying twice, because almost everyone learning a language has sat in front of a page they couldn't follow and decided they were bad at it. They weren't. The page was too hard. Real readers, in any language, read mostly easy stuff, and that's how they get good.

Here's how to read in your new language:

- **Pick easy books on purpose.** Graded readers are written for learners. Look for ones about things you actually like.
- **Test the page first.** Count unknown words in about a hundred words. Two or fewer? Great. Five or more? Find an easier book. No shame in it.
- **Read for the story.** Skip words you don't need to follow what's happening. Guess from the sentence. Look up a word only if it keeps showing up or you're lost.
- **Read a lot.** Three times a week is a good start. More if you're enjoying it.
- **Once a week, read something hard.** Slowly, with a dictionary. That's a different workout, and it's fine for it to feel like work.
- **Log it.** Title, pages or minutes, one line about what happened. In a few months, that log will surprise you.

When you read for the story, you'll notice that some words you never looked up start making sense anyway, just from seeing them in five different sentences. That's reading teaching you. Let it.

Try this: Do Count the Unknowns on the first page of a graded reader. If it passes, read for ten minutes.

Try this too: Tell someone three things that happened, without opening the book.

Explain it back: What's the 98 percent idea, in your own words? Why would a book with too many new words actually slow you down?

One more thing: If your language has a new script, give yourself time. Your eyes need to see the same words many times before they read them as words instead of letters. Easy reading of words you already know is the fastest way there.

Challenge: Finish one whole easy book in your language, cover to cover. Write the title in your log with a star. Then pick the next one yourself, one level up if your page test says you're ready.

If it isn't clicking

The student says they hate reading in the language. The texts are almost always too hard or too dull. *Next move:* go down a level and let the student choose the topic. Read the first chapter together. If a book is a slog by chapter three, switch.

There's never time for reading. Reading is the first thing squeezed out of a busy Hour. *Next move:* put easy reading in **Take It In** three days a week and treat it as fixed. Ten minutes counts, and bedtime reading goes in the log too.

Reading is hard in every language, English included. The supports in this chapter help every reader: easy texts, audio alongside print, short sessions. *Next move:* keep them going, and talk with your pediatrician or an education professional about an evaluation. Learning a new language isn't a reason to wait, and it isn't a reason to stop.

When to slow down. If a new script is causing frustration, spend a few weeks reading only known words before adding new ones.

When to go ahead. If graded readers come easily and Count the Unknowns keeps coming up at zero, move up a level and add one simple authentic text a week, such as a children's magazine, a comic, or a recipe.

When to find more help. A speaker or tutor (Chapter 7) can help with a new script's sounds, or with a heritage student's leap from speaking to reading. Use the rescue order first: ask → wait → hint → model → hand it back.

Tools, including AI

The Language Hour's AI box sets the rules for tools by age; this chapter's tool note is about reading. Pop-up dictionaries are fine for the occasional word, and audio versions of graded readers are made for Read, Listen, Read. Running a whole text through a machine translator defeats the point of reading, because the student ends up reading English; anything a tool produced is **made by a tool**, not the student's reading. Whatever helped goes on the last log line: **Help I used:** dictionary, audio, person, tool, or none. Chapter 8 has more.

What “done enough” looks like

You’re ready to move on to Chapter 5 when:

- ☐ The student reads easy texts for the gist and key details.
- ☐ They finish graded readers at the right level and choose the next one.
- ☐ They use Count the Unknowns without being asked.
- ☐ They’ve read ten everyday texts (menus, signs, schedules, recipes, forecasts) for the main idea.
- ☐ If the language has a new script, they read known words in it without sounding out each symbol.
- ☐ The reading log has entries for at least six weeks.

Short check: AS-03 Reading Check. The student reads an unseen easy text and gives the main idea and three details, with no tools; the parent writes one line about what was understood. Marked not yet / with help / on my own, and dated. Never timed, never graded.

Chapter 5

Conversations for Real: Asking, Answering, and Keeping It Going



Why this matters

Conversation is where a language becomes yours. Someone asks you something, you answer, and they understand. You ask them something back, and suddenly you're not practicing anymore.

You're talking. For most learners, that first real exchange, with a grandparent, a shopkeeper, a tutor, or a new friend, is the moment the whole project starts to feel worth it.

It is also the moment most learners dread. Speaking in a new language means being slow in public. It means not having the word, saying it wrong, and watching someone's face while they work out what you meant. Eleven- to fourteen-year-olds feel that more sharply than younger children do. They care what people think. That's not a weakness to push through; it's a fact to plan around. This chapter is built for it.

Here's the shift that makes conversation possible: the goal isn't perfect sentences. The goal is keeping it going. A conversation survives mistakes, pauses, gestures, and the occasional English word. What kills it is silence and giving up. A student who can say "Again, please," "Slower, please," "What does ___ mean?" and "How do you say ___?" can stay in almost any conversation long enough to learn something from it.

Picture a family where a twelve-year-old has been studying for a few months. At a cousin's birthday, an aunt asks her a question in the family language. She understands it, freezes for a second, then says the one phrase she's practiced all week, which is "Slower, please?" The aunt smiles, slows down, and asks again. The girl answers in four words. It's not a speech. It's a conversation, and she'll remember it for years.

Conversation at this age also carries something the earlier years didn't: the student is starting to sound like themselves. At five, a child repeats the phrase you hand them. At thirteen, the same child wants to say the thing *they* mean, which is usually bigger than the words they have. That gap can feel like failure. It isn't. It's the best sign you'll get that the language has stopped being a school subject and started being a way to reach people. Your job is to help them say a smaller version of the big thing, today, and to trust that the words will catch up. "I liked it because it was funny" is a real opinion, honestly given, and it's enough.

One more promise before we start: you don't need to be fluent to run any of this. Most of the practice in this chapter needs a parent who can read a role-play card, keep a timer, listen kindly, and ask "Again?" when something is worth hearing twice. If you speak the language, wonderful; you'll be the first partner. If you don't, you'll be the audience, the timekeeper, and the person who notices when your student kept going instead of stopping. That noticing matters more than you'd think.

So this chapter teaches four things: the phrases that keep a conversation alive, practice activities that give the student a real reason to ask, the difference between a rehearsed exchange and a real one, and how to give feedback without stopping the talk. Along the way, it deals honestly with nerves, because nerves are part of almost every learner's story at this age, and planning for them works far better than pretending they aren't there.

For the parent: understand it yourself

The everyday picture. Think of the last time you asked directions in a place where you didn't quite know the way. You didn't need perfect grammar. You needed "Excuse me," a question, and

the nerve to say “Sorry, could you say that again?” when the answer went by too fast. That last phrase did more work than any vocabulary list. Conversation runs on repair.

The precise picture. Language researchers call that repair *negotiating meaning*: the back-and-forth of checking, asking for repetition, and rephrasing when one person doesn’t follow.⁸ It isn’t a sign the conversation is failing. It’s how learners get language they can understand, shaped just for them, in real time. That’s why the **Keep It Going** phrases come first in this chapter and get taught in week one.

From chunks to sentences. In Chapter 1 you met the Can-Do Statements and the broad picture of Novice and Intermediate learners. Novice learners (beginners working with words, lists, and memorized phrases) lean on chunks: whole phrases learned as units. Intermediate learners (learners who create their own sentences and simple conversations) start building new sentences and, importantly, *asking questions*.⁸³ Asking is the hinge. A student who only answers is being interviewed. A student who asks is having a conversation. That’s why so many activities in this chapter force a question.

Rehearsed versus real. ACTFL draws a useful line between *performance* (what a learner can do with something they practiced) and *proficiency* (what they can do with something they didn’t).⁸⁴ Both matter. A rehearsed exchange is practice. An unrehearsed exchange on a familiar topic is the proof. This chapter uses both, on purpose, in that order: **rehearse, then real**.

One standard to keep in mind. The World-Readiness Standards describe the interpersonal mode as learners who “interact and negotiate meaning in spoken, signed, or written conversations to share information, reactions, feelings, and opinions.”⁸⁵ Notice “spoken, signed, or written”: an ASL conversation is a conversation, and so is a written exchange of messages. Everything in this chapter applies to all three.

Feedback that doesn’t stop the talk. In classroom studies, two kinds of correction get compared most often. A **prompt** is a nudge that lets the student fix their own mistake (“Try that ending again?”). A **recast** repeats the student’s idea back correctly, without saying “wrong.” A review of fifteen classroom studies found that prompts tended to help more than recasts, and that younger learners benefited more from feedback overall.⁸⁶ This is a useful study, not a promise that every home will see the same result. In practice, this book’s rule is simple:

- During practice, prompt first for this week’s target, then recast if the student can’t fix it.
- During a real conversation, never stop to correct. Respond to what they meant.
- Afterward, note one thing, just one, and practice it next time.

Nerves are real. Chapter 1 described the moderate link researchers have found between language anxiety and lower achievement. It’s a connection, not a cause, but every teacher has watched a capable student freeze. What helps: rehearsing before real exchanges, private recordings the student controls (TALK-10), small and kind audiences, and never asking a student to “say something in [language]” on demand for visiting relatives.

Wait time. Research on classroom wait time found that giving learners a few seconds before rescuing them changes how much they say.⁸⁷ In this series the rule is short: **count to five in your head** before you help.

Heritage conversations. A student who grew up hearing the family language may understand nearly everything Grandma says and still answer in English. That's one of the most common patterns in heritage families, and it isn't rudeness or laziness. Answering in the home language takes confidence the student may not have yet, especially around relatives who speak quickly. Start small: one exchange a day in the home language, on a topic the student chooses. Rehearse with a parent first if that helps. Let relatives know the plan, kindly: "She's practicing answering. Slow down a little, and don't correct her mid-sentence." Honor the family's way of speaking. A regional word or an accent that differs from the textbook is real language, not a mistake to be trained out.

Signed conversations. For an ASL student, conversation means signed exchange, face to face or by video. The Keep It Going ideas carry over completely: asking for a repeat, asking someone to sign more slowly, asking what something means, asking how to say something. Learn how to do each from a Deaf teacher or a checked course; this book describes no signs. Deaf-led classes and community events (Chapter 7) are where real signed conversation happens, and watching first is good manners as well as good learning.

Visiting relatives and guests. "Say something in [language]!" is the request every learner dreads. It turns a skill into a trick. Have a family answer ready: "She's working on conversations, not performances. Ask her a question about her week, and she'll try to answer." That gives a real reason to talk, which is what this chapter is about.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

- **One-word answers, forever.** The student isn't lazy; they don't have a frame. Say: "Good. Now add *because*." Give a sentence starter: "I like it because..."
- **The student switches to English the moment they're stuck.** Normal, and fine for a moment. Say: "That's okay. Now, how could you ask for the word?" Point to the Keep It Going card. Then back into the language.
- **The student only answers and never asks.** They need practice asking. Say: "Your turn to ask me three." That's Question Swap (TALK-06).
- **The student is fine with you and freezes with a speaker.** Completely normal; you're safe and a stranger isn't. Say: "Let's rehearse it twice, then try one short exchange. Two lines is a win."
- **"I said it wrong, so I stopped."** Anxiety talking. Say: "I understood you. Keep going, and we'll fix one thing after."

A five-minute parent warm-up

Learn the four Keep It Going phrases yourself in your student's language, from the course, a dictionary, or a speaker. Practice them aloud until you can say them without looking. For example, *otra vez* is Spanish for "again"; *encore* can mean "again" in French; *langsam* means "slow" or "slowly" in German. In Mandarin, 慢 *màn* means "slow"; in Korean, 다시 *dasi* means "again."⁸⁸ Your course will show you the polite full phrase that each of these words lives in, and the phrase, not the single word, is what goes on the card. Then use them as the student's partner this week. When the student hears you asking "Again, please?" in the new language, two things happen: they hear the phrase used for real, and they see that asking for help is what people do.

How to teach it this week

Where it sits in the Language Hour. Conversation lives mostly in **Use It for Real**, the fourth step. Rehearsal happens in **Work With It**. The Daily Check-In Talk (TALK-09) can open the Hour in **Goal and Greet**: three minutes about today, in the language, growing each week. The carry phrase chosen in **Check and Carry** is often a Keep It Going phrase or a chunk from today's talk.

Who runs which step. At 11–12, you're the main conversation partner most days, and you set up the activities. Keep sessions short and frequent. At 13–14, the student plans one real exchange a fortnight on their weekly plan sheet (who, where, what they'll talk about) and leads the rehearsal. You're the first listener: you say what you understood, and you don't fix things mid-conversation.

The weekly rhythm. The Daily Check-In Talk grows a little each week. One information gap or role-play a week gives a reason to ask. One rehearse-then-real exchange a fortnight puts it all to work with someone new.

Exact words to say. English with [bracketed] spots for your language, and one checked example per paragraph.

- To open the Daily Check-In: "Three minutes, in [language], about today. I'll start." Then ask one question and wait. A Korean learner might greet you with 안녕하세요 *annyeonghaseyo* ("hello") before you begin.⁸⁹
- When the student gets stuck: "What could you say to keep it going?" Point to the card. A Japanese learner reaches for もう一度 *mō ichido* ("once more").⁶³
- During practice, to prompt: "Try that [verb, ending, word] again?" Wait. If they fix it, nod and move on. If not, recast: say their sentence correctly as a natural reply, and keep going.
- During a real conversation: respond to the meaning. If they say something with a mistake, answer the question they asked.
- Afterward: "I understood you the whole time. One thing for next time: [the one thing]. Want to try it once now?"

Growing the Daily Check-In, week by week.

- **Week 1:** Greeting, how are you, one question about today, and goodbye. One minute.
- **Week 2:** Add "What did you do?" and one follow-up question from each of you.
- **Week 3:** Add an opinion: "Did you like it? Why?" Two minutes.
- **Week 4:** The student asks most of the questions. Three minutes.
- **After that:** Add a new topic every week or two: plans, food, the weather, something from the reading.

Keep it short and real. If the student has nothing to say about today, that's the conversation: "Why was it boring?"

What rehearse-then-real looks like, step by step.

1. **Choose the situation.** A short, real exchange: ordering, asking a relative about their childhood, asking a librarian a question, greeting the tutor and asking about their week.
2. **Script it lightly.** Not a full script. Three or four lines the student expects to say, plus the Keep It Going phrases.

3. **Rehearse twice.** The parent plays the other person, once kindly and once with a surprise (“We don’t have that,” “Can you say that again?”).
4. **Go real.** Someone new, someone who didn’t rehearse. The parent stays nearby and doesn’t jump in.
5. **Debrief.** One thing that went well, one thing for next time. Log it. Keep the debrief short and start with the win; the student should walk away wanting to try again, not replaying every stumble.

A fortnightly rhythm is plenty. The rehearsal is where the learning happens; the real exchange is where the student finds out it worked.

Two students, one table. If you’re teaching two at once, conversation is the easiest skill to share. Siblings make natural conversation partners, and information gaps and role-plays work beautifully between them. Let the older one play the harder role. Keep an eye on balance: if one always talks and the other always listens, swap. And if one sibling corrects the other, give them the house rule: respond to what they meant, and save one note for afterward.

The student’s first try. Teach the four Keep It Going phrases today. Then have a two-minute conversation in which the student must use each one at least once. You’ll have to speak a bit fast or use a word they don’t know on purpose, so they need the phrases. Tally the uses. That’s the crumb.

How to fade help. Week one: you lead every exchange and model the phrases. Week two: the student starts the Daily Check-In. Week three: the student asks more questions than you do. Week four: the first rehearse-then-real with someone new.

When to stop talking. As soon as the student starts a sentence. Don’t finish it for them. Count to five in your head. If you’re talking more than they are during **Use It for Real**, swap roles: they ask, you answer.

What the parent doesn’t need. You don’t need to speak the language well to be a conversation partner. You need the Keep It Going phrases, the week’s chunks, and a willingness to be slow. If you’re learning alongside, you and the student are both practicing, and the student often ends up leading. That’s a good sign, not a problem. When you can’t check whether something was right, write it down and check it later with the course answer key, a dictionary, or a speaker. “Let’s find out together” is a perfectly good answer.

Where conversations come from. Real reasons to talk are everywhere once you look: planning dinner, describing a photo, retelling the reading, asking about a relative’s childhood, deciding what to do on Saturday. The best conversation topics this year are the student’s own life and the books they’re reading. Use course dialogues as rehearsal, not as the whole thing.

Language-only ten minutes at 13–14. Once the student is steady, try ten minutes a day where the conversation stays in the new language. English is still there for safety, feelings, and planning outside those ten minutes.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: “What did you want to say — and how did you keep it going?”

Follow-ups: 1. “Which Keep It Going phrase did you use? Did it work?” 2. “Was there a moment you switched to English? What could you have asked instead?” 3. “What question did you ask, not just answer?”

Wait: count to five in your head. In conversation, five seconds feels like forever; let it. A student building a sentence needs the time more than the hint. Look at them kindly, not at the clock, and resist the urge to fill the gap.

If it goes quiet: the student doesn’t have a frame for the answer, or doesn’t know a key word and is embarrassed to ask. Offer a starter (“I think...,” “Because...”), then a choice of two, then model a short answer and hand it back. Point to the Keep It Going card as a reminder that asking is allowed.

Don’t say / say instead: Don’t say “Say it properly.” Say “I understood you. Want to try that verb once more, then keep going?”

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — TALK-01 Keep It Going Phrases

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** a card with the four phrases in your language, checked against the course or a dictionary, and a tally sheet
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** a tally that proves you can stay in a conversation
- **The skill:** asking for repetition, slower speech, meaning, and how to say something
- **The crumb:** phrases used, tallied in the log

How it goes. Write the four phrases in your language on a card: “Again, please,” “Slower, please,” “What does ___ mean?” and “How do you say ___?” Copy them from the course, a textbook, or a speaker; don’t build them from a translator. The card lives on the table during every conversation. Each time the student uses a phrase, add a tally mark. Week one, the goal is just to use all four. By week four, they shouldn’t need the card. German learners often add *Wie bitte?* (“Pardon? / Come again?”) as a fifth.⁹⁰

11–12: Parent models each phrase until the student uses them unprompted. **13–14:** Student adds two more phrases of their choice, such as ways to agree, disagree, or buy time. **Ready 12:** A confident twelve-year-old can add the extra phrases too.

In-home — TALK-02 Information Gap

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** two half-sheets with different missing information (two copies of a weekly schedule, a simple map, or a menu, each with different blanks)
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed; use made-up or public information
- **The fun:** you literally can’t finish without asking
- **The skill:** asking for and giving information each partner is missing
- **The crumb:** the completed sheet

How it goes. Each partner gets a sheet with information the other one needs. No peeking. The student has to ask: “What time is [activity] on Tuesday?” “Where is the [place]?” The partner answers, and the student fills in the blank. Then swap: the parent asks, the student answers. When both sheets are full, compare them. Information gaps work because the question is real; the asker truly doesn’t know.

11–12: Simple sheets: five blanks, familiar vocabulary. **13–14:** Longer sheets, and the student makes the next pair themselves.

In-home — TALK-03 Role-Play Card

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** situation cards written in English: “You’re at a shop and want a smaller size,” “You’ve lost your bag at the station,” “You’re making weekend plans with a friend”
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** a little theater, and the parent can play a grumpy clerk
- **The skill:** handling an unscripted situation from a prompt
- **The crumb:** which card was used, in the log

How it goes. The student draws a card and reads the situation. Thirty seconds to think, no writing. Then the scene. Keep it short: two or three minutes is plenty, and it’s better to run the same card twice than to drag one scene out. The parent plays the other role and keeps it realistic: they don’t understand everything, they ask questions back, they might not have what the student wants. The student uses chunks and Keep It Going phrases to get through it. Afterward, one thing that went well and one thing to try next time.

11–12: Familiar situations, short scenes, parent as a kind partner. **13–14:** Add a complication halfway (“We’re out of that”), and the student writes the next set of cards.

In-home — TALK-04 Two-Minute Talk

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** a timer, a list of familiar topics (my family, a hobby, a place I like, my week)
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** beating the timer
- **The skill:** talking, or signing, for two minutes on a familiar topic without notes
- **The crumb:** the topic and the time reached, in the log

How it goes. The student picks a topic, takes a minute to think, and then talks for two minutes without notes. The parent listens as first listener and says afterward what they understood. If the student runs dry at forty-five seconds, that’s useful information: which topic needs more words? Try again next week. Two minutes of connected talk is a real milestone.

13–14: Two minutes, no notes, a new topic each week. **Ready 12:** A twelve-year-old with a solid word box can try the full two minutes.

In-home — TALK-10 Private Recording, Then Again

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a family device that records audio or video, stored privately
- **Safety and privacy:** recordings stay on a family device; never upload them to any app, website, or AI tool; keep or delete by family choice
- **The fun:** hearing yourself improve between takes
- **The skill:** recording a short talk privately, listening, and redoing one part
- **The crumb:** two dated recordings, kept privately (or a note that they were made and deleted)

How it goes. The student records a sixty- to ninety-second talk on a familiar topic, alone or with a parent nearby. They listen once, pick one part to improve (a word, a sentence, the ending), and record again. That's it. It's practice without an audience, which is exactly what an anxious student needs. Nobody grades it, and no app scores it. Once a term, a version of this becomes the Recording Snapshot in Chapter 9.

11–12: Parent handles the device; the student chooses whether to keep the recording. **13–14:** Student runs it alone and decides what to keep.

Out-of-home — OUT-02 Order in the Language

- **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Materials:** a rehearsed exchange; a café, bakery, market, or restaurant where your language is spoken
- **Safety and privacy:** parent present; first names only; no photos of people
- **The fun:** actually eating what you asked for
- **The skill:** ordering politely where the language is spoken
- **The crumb:** the phrase used, and how it went, in the log

How it goes. This is the classic rehearse-then-real. At home, rehearse ordering two or three times: greeting, the order, a question, thanks. Then go. The student orders; the parent stays nearby and steps in only if needed. If the server switches to English, that's fine. The student can say thank you in the language and count it as a win. A Tagalog learner might finish with *salamat* ("thank you"); a Portuguese learner, *obrigado* or *obrigada*.⁹¹ Afterward, the parent notes one thing that went well.

11–12: Parent picks the place and stands beside the student. **13–14:** Student chooses the place, rehearses alone, and orders while the parent waits a few steps back.

Out-of-home — PEOPLE-06 Conversation Group

- **Time:** 45 minutes
- **Materials:** a library or community conversation group for learners of your language, found through the library or a cultural center; a few rehearsed questions
- **Safety and privacy:** parent present or nearby, following the family rules in Chapter 7; first names only; no swapping contact details or moving to other apps
- **The fun:** a room full of people who are also figuring it out
- **The skill:** keeping a conversation going with new people

- **The crumb:** the group's name and the topic, in the log

How it goes. Chapter 7 is this card's home; there it's about community and safety. Here, it's about conversation. Before the first visit, the student rehearses three questions to ask others and three things to say about themselves. At the group, the goal is modest: use the Keep It Going phrases, ask at least two questions, and listen. Many groups mix adults and teens; a parent stays present or nearby according to the family's rules, and contact happens only through the group.

11–12: Parent attends with the student. **13–14:** Parent nearby; student participates and reports back.

Optional — TALK-08 Rehearse, Then Real

The step-by-step version earlier in this chapter, as a card: rehearse a short exchange twice at home, then do it unrehearsed with someone new. The parent notes one thing that went well.

Optional — TALK-07 Opinion Ladder

At 13–14: give an opinion and one reason, then answer a “why?” Then another “why?” Three rungs is a good day.

Optional — CONN-02 Weather Report

Read a forecast in the language and give a short weather report at the start of the Daily Check-In. Describe and Draw (TALK-05) and Question Swap (TALK-06) are good company, and the chunk page from Chunk Collection (WORD-03, Chapter 3) becomes the student's conversation toolkit.

For the student

(Read this on your own. At 11–12, your parent reads it too, and you talk it over for a few minutes.)

You don't need perfect sentences. You need to keep it going.

Every person who speaks more than one language has been slow, wrong, and confused in front of someone. Every single one. The ones who got good kept talking anyway. They didn't wait until they felt ready, because nobody ever does. They learned a few phrases that let them stay in the conversation, and they used them constantly.

Here are yours:

- **Again, please.** When it went by too fast.
- **Slower, please.** When it's still too fast.
- **What does ____ mean?** When one word is blocking everything.
- ****How do you say ____?*** When you know what you want to say and not how.

Learn them in your language this week. Use them shamelessly. People like helping someone who's trying.

A few more things that help:

- **Ask questions, don't just answer them.** Asking is what turns an interview into a conversation, and it gives you a breather while they talk.
- **Rehearse, then go real.** Practice an exchange at home, then try it with someone new. Two lines is a win.
- **Mistakes don't stop conversations.** If the other person understood you, it worked. Fix one thing later.
- **Nervous? Record yourself first.** Privately. Listen once. Try again. Nobody hears it unless you decide.
- **English slips out sometimes.** That's okay. Ask for the word, then keep going in your language.

What to do when your mind goes blank. Breathe. Say the phrase that buys time ("Slower, please" works even when speed isn't the problem). Answer with the simplest true thing you can say, even two words. Then ask a question back, which hands the talking to the other person while you regroup.

Try this: Have a two-minute conversation at home and use all four Keep It Going phrases at least once.

Try this too: Ask three questions in a row without answering any.

Explain it back: What's the difference between a rehearsed conversation and a real one? Why does this book want you to do both?

One more thing: You'll know you're improving when your answers get longer, you need the card less, and you catch yourself fixing a mistake halfway through a sentence without anyone prompting you. One day a conversation will go on for a while before you notice you haven't switched to English.

Challenge: Have a three-minute conversation with someone new: a relative, a speaker you know, or a tutor during a lesson under your family's rules. Afterward, write down one thing you said that worked, one question you asked, and one thing you want to be able to say next time. That last one goes on next week's goal card.

If it isn't clicking

Real exchanges keep collapsing. The student is going in cold. *Next move:* spend more of **Work With It** rehearsing: say the exchange, swap roles, say it again with a twist. Then go real.

The student only ever talks with you. They get very good at your speed, your accent, and your favorite questions. *Next move:* bring in other voices: a relative on a parent-run call, a conversation group, a tutor under the family rules (Chapter 7).

Anxiety is high. The student refuses, freezes, or gets upset. *Next move:* step back to private recordings for a few weeks, shrink the audience to one kind person, and talk with the student directly and respectfully about what feels hardest. Never push for a performance in front of guests.

And if you're prompting every sentence, pick one target for the week and let everything else go; a student who talks a lot with some mistakes learns faster than one who talks a little with none.

When to slow down. If every conversation ends in English, go back to rehearsed exchanges and chunks for two weeks.

When to go ahead. If familiar topics come easily, add opinions (Opinion Ladder at 13–14), unfamiliar topics, and longer unrehearsed exchanges.

When to find more help. A speaker, tutor, or class is often the single biggest boost to conversation; follow the family's safety rules in Chapter 7. If anxiety shows up across many parts of the student's life, talk with your pediatrician or a counselor. In the moment, use the rescue order: ask → wait → hint → model → hand it back.

Tools, including AI

The Language Hour's AI box gives the rules by age; this chapter's tool note is short. The best conversation partner is a person. Tools support the practice around conversation, such as a dictionary to check a chunk before you use it or course audio to hear how a phrase sounds, and a family device can hold private practice recordings (TALK-10) that never go to an app, website, or AI tool. Chatbot conversation practice is never for 11–12; at 13–14 it happens only under the terms, supervised and short, with a person still the main partner. Whatever helped goes on the last log line: **Help I used:** person, card, recording, tool, or none. Chapter 8 has more.

What “done enough” looks like

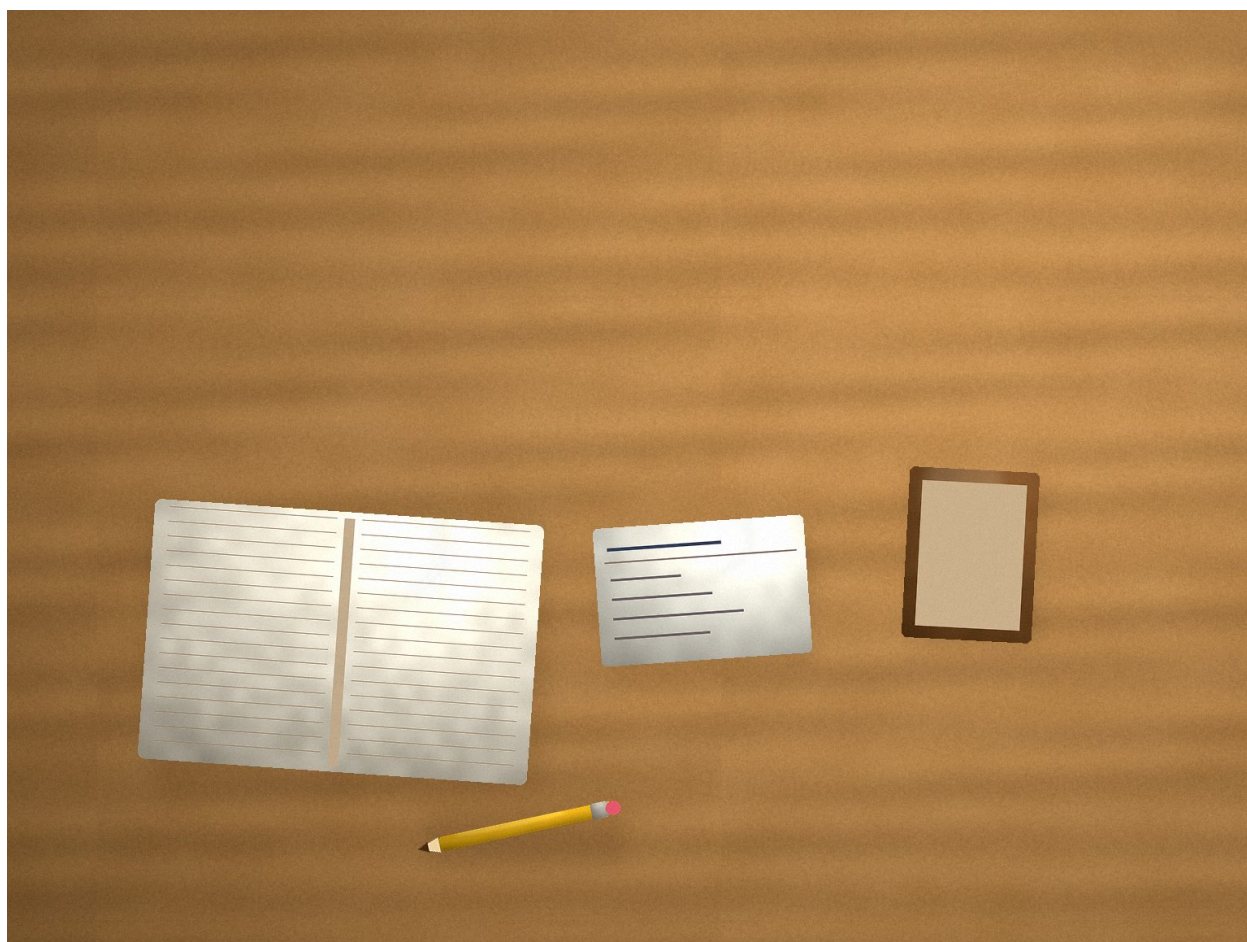
You're ready to move on to Chapter 6 when:

- ☐ The student asks and answers simple questions on familiar topics.
- ☐ They use the Keep It Going phrases without the card.
- ☐ They ask questions, not just answer them.
- ☐ The Daily Check-In Talk has grown from a minute to several minutes.
- ☐ They've done at least one rehearse-then-real with someone new.
- ☐ At 13–14: a two-minute talk without notes.

Short check: AS-04 Unrehearsed Conversation. Three to five minutes on a familiar topic with someone who didn't rehearse with the student, plus a one-line parent note about what was understood and kept going. Marked not yet / with help / on my own, and dated. Never timed, never graded.

Chapter 6

Writing to Someone: Journals, Messages, and the Patterns You Notice



Why this matters

Writing slows language down. In conversation, words fly past and the moment is gone. On paper, a sentence sits still long enough for the student to look at it, ask why it's built that way, and change

it. That's why writing is where many students first see how their language works: the ending that changes, the word order that flips, the little word that shows who did what.

Writing also reaches people. A short note to a grandparent, a letter to a pen friend through a program the family knows, a message to a tutor, a poster for a co-op: each one is language with a reader on the other end. That reader changes everything. A student who writes "for the page" writes as little as possible. A student who writes to someone wants to be understood, and wanting to be understood is the best writing teacher there is.

At 11–14, students are ready for both jobs: writing to communicate and writing to notice. They can keep a short daily journal, write a real message every couple of weeks, keep a notebook of patterns they've found in their reading and listening, and (at 13–14) draft, get feedback, and redraft. None of this needs a grammar course. It needs a reader, a notebook, and a habit.

Picture a family where a thirteen-year-old writes three lines every evening about the day, in a notebook that lives on the kitchen counter. Most entries are small: what was for lunch, a rainy walk, a game. Once a fortnight, one of those small entries grows into a note to an aunt overseas, and the aunt writes back. By spring, the notebook is thick, the student's sentences are longer, and the aunt's letters have become the family's favorite reading.

Writing is also the skill where progress is easiest to see. A recording disappears unless someone saves it; a conversation is gone the moment it ends. A journal stays. Six weeks in, the student can flip back to the first page and see, in their own hand, how far they've come. For a student who sometimes feels stuck, that page is powerful evidence.

A word about the parent's part, because many parents worry here. You don't have to be able to correct the writing. You have to be its first reader. Read every entry with interest, ask about what it says before you look at how it's spelled, and keep the checked model nearby so your student can compare their copy against something reliable. When you don't know whether a sentence is right, say so, and add it to the list of questions for the course, the answer key, or a speaker. "I don't know, let's find out" is a teaching move, not an admission.

And a word about pace. Three lines a day sounds small, and it is small on purpose. Small is what survives a busy week, a cold, or a family trip. A student who writes three honest lines on most days for a school year will have written several hundred entries, a pattern notebook full of their own discoveries, and a handful of real letters with real replies. No single page will look impressive. The stack will.

This chapter covers writing what you can say, the pattern notebook, giving feedback on writing without crushing it, drafting and redrafting, and the practical side of spelling, accent marks, and writing in a new script.

For the parent: understand it yourself

The everyday picture. Think about the difference between writing a thank-you note to someone you love and filling in a form. The thank-you note might be short and imperfect, but you choose every word for the person reading it. The form you fill in as fast as possible. Students write the

same way. Give them a reader, and the writing gets better before anyone corrects a thing.

The precise picture. Three ideas carry this chapter.

Write what you can say. At this stage, good writing is built from language the student has already met: chunks from the chunk page, phrases from the reading, sentences from the Daily Check-In. The journal isn't a place to invent new grammar from scratch. It's where familiar language gets put together in new ways. A student who writes from English, word by word, will produce sentences no speaker would ever write. A student who writes from their chunks will sound like a learner, which is exactly right.

Notice one pattern at a time. Grammar in this book is neither the starting point nor something to avoid. The student finds a pattern in real input, such as an ending, a word order, or a small word that does a lot of work. They write down three real examples from what they read or heard, add one of their own, and check it. A short explanation in English (from the course, a textbook, or a speaker) helps, and then the pattern gets used right away. That's the **pattern notebook**, and it's how a student builds grammar they can actually use, one page at a time.

Feedback that builds the writer. You're the **first listener**, or in writing, the first reader. Your first job is to say what you understood. Accuracy comes second, and it comes as a prompt before an answer: "Look at your verb endings in line two." Answer keys from the course, a speaker, or a tutor handle what you can't check. At 13–14, the cycle becomes draft, feedback, redraft, and both versions get kept.

One standard to keep in mind. The World-Readiness Standards describe the presentational mode as learners who "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."⁹² The key words for this age are *adapting to audiences*. Writing to a grandparent and writing a poster for a co-op are different jobs, and the student can start to feel the difference.

Thinking in English, writing in the new language

The most common writing trouble at this age has a simple cause: the student builds the sentence in English and swaps in new words. Languages don't line up that way. A classic example is age. English says "I am twelve." Spanish says *Tengo veinte años* for "I am twenty," which is literally "I have twenty years."⁹³ French does the same thing: *Elle a 19 ans*, "She is 19," literally "She has 19 years."⁹⁴ A student who writes the English pattern with Spanish or French words will be understood and will also be wrong, and the pattern notebook is where that gets sorted out.

Marks, spelling, and scripts

Accent marks matter. In some languages, a small mark changes the word. In Spanish, *papá* means "dad," while *papa* can mean "pope" or, in much of Latin America, "potato."⁹⁵ In French, *où* means "where," while *ou* means "or."⁹⁶ Students who drop marks to save time are dropping meaning. Copy every mark from the checked model.

Capitals and conventions differ. German capitalizes every noun: *Haus* ("house") always starts with a capital letter.⁹⁷ Spanish questions open with an upside-down question mark. Every language

has a few conventions like these, and the course or textbook lists them.

Scripts and direction. Arabic is written right to left, and شكرًا *shukran* (“thanks”) is one of the first words many learners write.⁹⁸ Japanese mixes kana and kanji, and ありがとう *arigatō* (“thank you”) is usually written in hiragana.⁹⁹ For any new script, the student copies from a checked model until the shapes come easily, and builds a list of words they can write without looking.

Keyboards. Typing in another script or with accent marks means adding a keyboard layout in the device’s operating system settings. At 11–12, the parent sets it up; at 13–14, the student can do it with the parent nearby. Handwriting comes first for most learners anyway, because writing by hand slows the student down enough to notice.

Signed languages. ASL has no everyday written form. For an ASL student, “writing” in this chapter becomes two things: written English about the language and culture (journals, letters to a Deaf pen friend through a known program, written in English), and *recorded signed presentations*, which are the signed equivalent of a polished piece. The draft-feedback-redraft cycle works for signed video exactly as it works on paper.

Heritage writers. A student who speaks the family language comfortably may barely write it. That’s the usual pattern, and writing is often where heritage students grow fastest once they start. Begin with what they say every day: a family recipe, a note to a grandparent, a description of a holiday. Spelling will lag behind speaking for a while; copy from checked models and let the family’s way of saying things stay in the writing. Where home usage and the textbook differ, both are real, and the pattern notebook can hold both.

Why not a grammar course? Grammar drills and charts have their place, and many courses include them. The trouble comes when grammar is the whole plan: students can conjugate a verb in a table and still can’t write a note to their grandmother. The pattern notebook flips the order. The student meets language first, notices how it works, checks the explanation, and uses it right away in writing that matters to someone. The course’s grammar pages become a reference for checking, not a wall to climb before anything real happens. Not a grammar course, and not grammar-free: that’s the balance.

Handwriting or typing? Both are useful. Handwriting helps a student notice spelling, marks, and new script shapes, and it keeps the journal off a screen. Typing makes messages easy to send through family email and lets the student practice a new keyboard. A reasonable default: journal and pattern notebook by hand; real messages typed or handwritten, whichever the recipient prefers.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

- **Word-for-word English.** The student wrote “I am twelve” with new words when the language uses another pattern. Say: “Find the pattern page. How does the language say this?”
- **Missing accent marks or misspelled script.** The student is in a hurry, or copied from memory. Say: “Marks change meaning. Check this line against the model.”
- **A perfect paragraph that sounds nothing like the student’s speaking.** Usually tool help or copied text. Say: “What help did you use? Explain line two to me without the screen.” Then talk about what counts as the student’s work.

- **One endless sentence with no endings.** The student is writing past their language. Say: “Make it three short sentences. Each one with its own verb.”
- **The student refuses to redraft.** Redrafting feels like being told the first draft was bad. Say: “Change one thing. Just one. Then we’re done.”

A five-minute parent warm-up

Read the student’s last journal entry aloud, as the first reader, even if you stumble on the pronunciation. Then tell them one thing you understood: “You went to the park and it was cold.” That’s all. Don’t correct anything today. You’ll see how much it matters to a writer that someone actually read their words.

How to teach it this week

Where it sits in the Language Hour. The Three-Line Journal fits in **Check and Carry** or at the end of **Use It for Real**: three lines about today, in the language. The pattern notebook belongs in **Work With It**, once a week. A message to someone real is **Use It for Real** at its best, about once a fortnight. Redrafting at 13–14 goes in **Work With It** on the day after feedback arrives.

Who runs which step. At 11–12, you’re the first reader every day for the journal, and you sit with the student for the first few pattern-notebook pages. Real messages go to people you know, and you read them before they’re sent and after replies arrive. At 13–14, the student keeps the journal and the notebook alone, plans real messages on the weekly plan sheet, and runs the redraft cycle. You stay first reader for anything sent outside the home, and you read replies too, as part of the family’s safety rules in Chapter 7.

The weekly rhythm. Three lines a day. One pattern a week. One message to someone real every couple of weeks. One redraft a week at 13–14.

Exact words to say. English with [bracketed] spots for your language, and one checked example per paragraph.

- To start the journal: “Three lines about today. Use your chunks. I’ll read it after.” A Spanish learner might check the age pattern on the pattern page before writing *tengo* plus their age.⁹³
- As first reader: “I understood that [what you understood]. Tell me more about [one thing].”
- To prompt for accuracy: “Look at line two. Check the [ending, mark, word order] against your pattern page.” Wait while they look. A French learner rechecks a line and adds the accent that turns *ou* (“or”) into *où* (“where”).⁹⁶
- For a real message: “Who’s this for? What do they need to understand first?” Then: “Read it aloud to me before it goes.”
- For the pattern notebook: “What did you notice this week? Find three real examples, then make one of your own.”

What a writing week can look like.

- **Monday:** Three-Line Journal at the end of the Hour. First reader responds.
- **Tuesday:** Journal. Five minutes hunting for this week’s pattern in the reading.

- **Wednesday:** Pattern-notebook page in **Work With It:** title, three real examples, one of the student's own, checked.
- **Thursday:** Journal, using the new pattern at least once. At 13–14, the week's paragraph goes to a speaker, tutor, or answer key for prompts.
- **Friday:** Journal. Every other week, a message to someone real. At 13–14, the redraft.

That's ten to fifteen minutes of writing a day, and it adds up fast.

What good first-reader feedback sounds like. Start with meaning, then one specific, kind observation, then (only sometimes) one prompt.

- "I understood that your cousin visited and you played outside all afternoon. I'd like to know what game it was."
- "You used your new pattern twice. That's exactly what the notebook is for."
- "This line made me laugh. Read it to Grandma."
- "Everything's clear. One look: check the mark on the second word against your model."

Notice what isn't there: a count of mistakes, a grade, or a rewritten version in your handwriting. The student's page stays the student's page.

What to keep. Keep the journal notebook, the pattern notebook, copies of real messages and replies, and both drafts of every redraft. These are the raw material for the portfolio in Chapter 9, and a stack of dated writing is one of the clearest records of growth a family can have.

The student's first try. Today, the student writes three lines about their day in the language, using at least one chunk from the chunk page. You read it aloud and say what you understood. That's the whole first day.

How to fade help. Week one: you suggest the topic and read every entry. Week two: the student chooses topics; you read and respond. Week three: the first pattern-notebook page, together. Week four: the first real message, read by you before it goes. At 13–14, add the first redraft in week four or five.

When to stop talking. While the student is writing, say nothing. When they hand it over, say what you understood before anything else. If you've given more than one accuracy prompt on a short piece, stop. One is plenty.

Two students, one table. Siblings can write to each other in the language, a short note a day left on a pillow or the fridge, and answer each other's notes. It's real writing with a real reader, and nobody needs to post anything. Keep corrections out of sibling notes; that's your job, and only one at a time.

What the parent doesn't need. You don't need to write the language well to run this chapter. The first-reader response happens in English if that's what you share. Accuracy checks come from the answer key, the course, a dictionary, or a speaker. If you're learning alongside, keep your own three-line journal and swap with the student once a week. Students love finding a parent's mistakes, and they learn from it.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: “Who is this for — and what will they understand first?”

Follow-ups: 1. “What’s the one thing you most want them to know?” 2. “Which chunk or pattern did you use? Where did you find it?” 3. “Read me the line you’re proudest of. Now the one you’re least sure of.”

Wait: count to five in your head. A student rereading their own writing is often finding the mistake as you wait. Let them get there first.

If it goes quiet: the student may not know what they wanted to say, or may feel the writing was judged. Go back to the reader: “Who’s it for? What would they ask you?” Then offer a starter line, model one sentence, and hand the pencil back.

Don’t say / say instead: Don’t say “There are six mistakes.” Say “I understood this part. Find the verb in line two and check it against your pattern page.”

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — WRITE-01 Three-Line Journal

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a notebook used only for the journal; the chunk page
- **Safety and privacy:** the journal stays at home; first names only for people mentioned
- **The fun:** a record of your year, in another language
- **The skill:** writing three lines a day about real life
- **The crumb:** the journal page, dated

How it goes. Every day, three lines in the language about something real: what happened, what you ate, what you thought. Use chunks and patterns you already know. The first reader reads it and says what they understood. No red pen. Once a week, the student picks one entry and checks one thing against the pattern page. After a month, read the first week’s entries side by side with the latest ones. The difference usually surprises everyone.

11–12: Parent reads every day; topics can come from a jar of prompts. **13–14:** Student writes alone; parent reads a few times a week; lines can grow to five. **Signed languages:** Keep the daily journal in English about what you learned, and once a week record a short signed version of one entry, kept privately on a family device.

In-home — WRITE-03 Pattern Notebook

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a notebook section titled “Patterns”; this week’s reading, recordings, or course pages
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** cracking the code, one rule at a time

- **The skill:** noticing a grammar pattern in real input and writing three examples
- **The crumb:** the notebook page, dated

How it goes. Once a week, the student finds one pattern in what they’ve read or heard: an ending that keeps showing up, a word order that’s different from English, a small word that changes meaning. They write a title for it in their own words, copy three real examples from their input, write one of their own, and check theirs against the course, a textbook, or a speaker. A two- or three-sentence English explanation from the course goes at the bottom. Then the pattern gets used in the journal that week. One pattern a week, kept and reused, adds up to a grammar the student actually owns.

11–12: Parent helps find the first few patterns; keep titles simple (“how to say how old you are”).

13–14: Student finds patterns alone and links each to a journal line where they used it. **Signed languages:** Patterns in ASL, such as how a sentence is ordered or how space and facial grammar are used, are noticed from Deaf signers’ videos and checked with a Deaf teacher or course; this book describes no signs.

In-home — WRITE-05 Draft, Feedback, Redraft

- **Time:** 25 minutes across two days
- **Materials:** a short paragraph by the student; a speaker, tutor (under the family rules), or the course answer key
- **Safety and privacy:** feedback from known people only; tutors through the parent’s account and under the family rules in Chapter 7
- **The fun:** watching a paragraph get better because of your own fixes
- **The skill:** revising a paragraph after a prompt from a speaker or the answer key
- **The crumb:** both drafts, stapled together and dated

How it goes. The student writes a short paragraph on a familiar topic. A speaker, tutor, or answer key gives one or two prompts, pointing to where to look but not giving the fix: “Check the verbs in sentence two.” “One word in line three needs an accent.” The next day, the student redrafts, making their own corrections. Both drafts get kept. The student writes one line at the bottom: “I changed ___ because ___.”

13–14: One redraft a week. If no speaker is available, the parent uses the answer key to give prompts. **Ready 12:** A twelve-year-old who keeps the journal steadily can try one redraft a fortnight. **Signed languages:** Record a short signed presentation, get one or two prompts from a Deaf teacher or tutor, and record again. Keep both privately.

In-home — WRITE-02 Message to Someone Real

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** paper or a family email account; a known recipient (a relative, a family friend who speaks the language, a tutor, or a pen friend through a program the family knows)
- **Safety and privacy:** parent reads the message before it goes and reads replies; first names only; no photos of faces; no addresses or school details; messages go through family channels only
- **The fun:** getting an answer

- **The skill:** writing a short note to someone who will actually read it
- **The crumb:** a copy of the message kept, with the reply if one comes

How it goes. The student writes a short message, four to eight sentences, to someone real. Before writing, they answer the talk-box question: who is this for, and what will they understand first? They use chunks and patterns they know, ask at least one question so the reader has something to answer, and read it aloud to the parent before it goes. When a reply arrives, it becomes reading material, and the student's next message answers it. For pen friends, Chapter 7 holds the full safety rules.

11–12: Messages go to relatives or family friends; parent sends them. **13–14:** Student can write to a pen friend through a known program; parent reads both ways. **Signed languages:** A short signed video message to a known relative or Deaf pen friend through a known program, sent by the parent, with the same safety rules.

Out-of-home — WRITE-06 Mini-Presentation

- **Time:** 20 minutes to prepare, 5 minutes to present
- **Materials:** a poster, a few slides, or note cards; a real audience (a co-op class, a homeschool group, a family gathering)
- **Safety and privacy:** in person; first names only on any printed work; no photos of other children shared
- **The fun:** an audience that claps
- **The skill:** a short illustrated talk or poster for a real audience
- **The crumb:** the poster or slides, and a note of who saw it

How it goes. The student picks a topic they've written about (their town, a recipe, a hobby, something from the culture) and turns it into a short poster or talk in the language, with English support if the audience needs it. They rehearse twice at home. At the event, they present for two to five minutes. Afterward, one person tells them one thing they understood. It's rehearse, then real, the same rhythm as Chapter 5.

11–12: A poster with pictures and short labels, presented with the parent nearby. **13–14:** A short talk with a few slides or cards, taking one question from the audience.

Optional — WRITE-04 Fix-It Sentences

Five sentences, each with one mistake of a kind the student has studied, and the student finds and fixes each one. The parent can build the set from the pattern notebook and check against the answer key.

Optional — WRITE-07 Comic Strip Dialogue

At 11–12, a four-panel conversation drawn and written from known chunks. It bridges Chapter 5 and this chapter, and it's often the piece students are proudest of.

Optional — LISTEN-06 Dictation Lite

You met this card in Chapter 2; here's how it changes for writing. The parent or a speaker says three short sentences the student has met before, and the student writes them down, then checks spelling and marks against the text.

Optional — PROJ-01 Visitor's Guide

A short illustrated guide to your town, written for a speaker of the language. It can grow over a term and becomes a portfolio piece in Chapter 9. Letter or Postcard Exchange (WRITE-08) pairs well with it when there's a known pen friend to send it to.

For the student

(Read this on your own. At 11–12, your parent reads it too, and you talk it over for a few minutes.)

Write to a person, not a page.

When you write for nobody, you write as little as you can get away with. When you write to someone, a grandparent, a pen friend, a tutor, even your own future self, you start choosing words because you want them to understand. That's when writing gets good.

Here's how writing works in your new language right now:

- **Write what you can say.** Use your chunks, the phrases from your reading, and sentences you've used in conversation. Writing isn't the place to invent brand-new grammar.
- **Don't build it in English first.** Languages don't line up word for word. If you're not sure how your language says something, check the pattern page or the course.
- **Copy every mark.** Accents, dots, and little lines change meaning in some languages. If the model has a mark, so does your word.
- **Short sentences are fine.** Three short sentences you're sure of beat one long one that falls apart.
- **Keep both drafts.** When you fix your own writing, the before-and-after shows exactly what you learned.

Stuck for something to write? Write about what you ate, what the weather did, what annoyed you, what you're looking forward to, what a pet did, or one thing from today's reading. Three true lines about a boring day still count. Some of the best journal entries are about nothing much, written honestly.

Your pattern notebook is your own grammar book. Every week, find one pattern in what you read or hear, copy three real examples, make one of your own, and check it. By the end of the year, you'll have a book of rules you found yourself, and you'll actually remember them, because you used every one.

Try this: Write three lines about today in your language. Give them to someone at home and ask, "What did you understand?"

Try this too: Find one pattern in this week’s reading and start a pattern-notebook page with three real examples and one of your own.

Explain it back: What pattern did you notice this week? Explain it to someone at home in English, in your own words, with one example. If you can’t explain it yet, that’s fine; look for two more examples next week and try again.

One more thing: Anything a tool wrote for you isn’t your writing, even if you tweaked it. Use tools to check a word or explain a pattern, then write it yourself. Your writing, mistakes and all, is what shows what you can do.

Challenge: Write a letter or message that someone actually answers. When the reply comes, read it, add two new words to your word box, and write back. Keep the whole exchange together in a folder. By the end of the year, it’ll read like a conversation that happened slowly, across months, in a language you’re still learning, and you’ll be able to see your own sentences getting longer from letter to letter.

If it isn’t clicking

The student writes almost nothing, or writes from English word by word. Usually they’re writing before they’ve taken in enough language. *Next move:* spend more time in **Take It In** for a couple of weeks, and have the student build journal lines straight from the chunk page and the reading.

Feedback is overwhelming. The student sees corrections everywhere and shuts down. *Next move:* one thing at a time. Say what you understood, then give a single prompt, and leave the rest for another day.

There’s no real reader. The journal feels like homework. *Next move:* find someone to write to: a relative, a family friend who speaks the language, a tutor, or a pen friend through a known program (Chapter 7). Even a sibling note exchange counts.

When to slow down. If the student is anxious about writing or each entry is a struggle, drop to two lines a day for a few weeks and celebrate the pieces that get answered.

When to go ahead. If the journal comes easily, stretch it to five lines, try a new kind of writing (a short story, a description, an opinion), and add the redraft cycle at 13–14.

When to find more help. If writing is hard in every language, English included, talk with your pediatrician or an education professional about an evaluation. A speaker or tutor (Chapter 7) is the best help for accuracy you can’t check yourself. Use the rescue order first: ask → wait → hint → model → hand it back.

Tools, including AI

The Language Hour’s AI box gives the rules by age; this chapter’s tool note is about writing. Spell-check in the language is fine, and so are dictionaries for checking a word. A machine translation of

the student's draft is not the student's work; it's **made by a tool**, and it hides exactly the mistakes the student needs to see. At 13–14, under supervision and the terms, a tool can explain a grammar pattern in English, and the student checks that explanation in a book or with a speaker (TECH-03) before it goes in the pattern notebook. Whatever helped goes on the last log line: **Help I used:** dictionary, pattern page, person, tool, or none. Chapter 8 has more.

What “done enough” looks like

You're ready to move on to Chapter 7 when:

- ☐ The student writes short connected sentences on familiar topics.
- ☐ The Three-Line Journal has run for six weeks.
- ☐ The pattern notebook has several pages, each with real examples and one of the student's own.
- ☐ Accent marks and script are copied carefully from checked models.
- ☐ At least one message has gone to someone real, and a reply has been read.
- ☐ At 13–14, one redraft has been improved by the student's own corrections.

Short check: AS-05 Writing Sample, No Help. Fifteen minutes on a familiar topic, with no tools and no notes, kept and dated. Marked not yet / with help / on my own. Never timed, never graded.

Chapter 7

People and Places: Tutors, Exchanges, Heritage Homes, and Your Community



Why this matters

Languages live in people. A word box can hold a thousand cards, and a reading log can stretch across a whole wall, but sooner or later the language has to leave the table and meet someone. That

meeting is where an 11- to 14-year-old finds out the work was real. The waiter understood the order. The grandmother laughed at the joke. The Deaf instructor nodded and signed the next question a little slower. Nothing in a textbook carries that charge.

People also give a student a reason to keep going in February, when the novelty has worn off and the word box looks long. A student who has a monthly conversation group, a weekly class, or a call with a cousin has someone waiting. That's a stronger pull than any streak.

This chapter is about finding those people and places and meeting them safely. It covers four situations that look different but share one idea. First, the home where the parent is learning alongside the student. Second, the heritage or bilingual home, where the language is already in the kitchen and the work is to keep it there and add reading and writing. Third, the community: libraries, classes, cultural centers, Deaf-led events, and the optional national exams and contests that give a student a day to aim for. Fourth, tutors, exchanges, and pen friends, which is where most of this book's safety rules come together.

Safety is part of the teaching here, not a fence around it. The Family safety basics in the Language Hour set the spine; this chapter shows how those rules work with a real tutor, a real pen friend, and a real festival. One calm box near the end covers strangers, pressure, and sextortion. It's short on purpose. You'll read it once, talk about it once, and then get back to the good part, which is people.

The focus line holds here as everywhere: **Understand first; then try it for real; check what you can do; a little every day.** "For real" mostly means this chapter.

For the parent: understand it yourself

What "people and places" means in a language plan

Here's the everyday picture. Think of a young musician. Practice at home builds the hands, but the first time they play with other people, even badly, something changes. They have to listen, keep time, and recover from a mistake without stopping. The home Hour is the practice room. People are the band.

Here's the more precise picture. The World-Readiness Standards name a goal called School and Global Communities: learners "use the language both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized world."¹⁰⁰ For a homeschool family, "beyond the classroom" is most of the world. The point of the standard is that using the language with people is a goal in its own right, not a reward for finishing the grammar.

In practice, a steady language plan at this age has three rings:

1. **The home ring.** The Language Hour, the parent as first listener, and, in some homes, relatives who already use the language.
2. **The near ring.** People the family knows or can visit: a library conversation group, a community or heritage class, a cultural center, a Deaf-led event, a family friend, a known pen friend.
3. **The wider ring.** Tutors and online classes, exchange programs, and optional national exams or contests. Each of these is useful, and each comes with rules.

A good term touches all three. It doesn't need to touch them often. One community contact a month and one family call a week is plenty for most homes.

Learning alongside

Many parents are learning the language too. That works well, and it changes your job less than you'd think. You're still the first listener, the person who listens or reads and says what you understood, without fixing. You still run the safety side. You just aren't the language model, and you don't need to be.

Expect your student to pass you. At 11–14, with a daily Hour, that often happens within a year, and sometimes within a term. That's a good sign, not a problem. When it happens, flip the roles a little. Ask your student to teach you five words a week and quiz you later (that's WORD-08 Teach the Parent Five, from Chapter 3). Teaching a word is one of the best ways to keep it. You'll also hear exactly how well your student understands it.

What you can't give, other people can: a speaker's ear, a natural accent, a joke that lands. So learning alongside also means bringing in other models on purpose. A recorded speaker every day, a live speaker every month, and a book or course with audio by speakers of the language are enough to keep your student's ear honest.

Picture a family where the father started Japanese the same September as his 12-year-old (an illustration, not a reported family). By March his daughter reads hiragana faster than he does. He's slower but steady, and he keeps the log of who they've met: a librarian who grew up in Osaka, a Saturday class, a monthly call with a family friend's aunt. His daughter's Hour is better because he's learning, not worse. She explains things to him, and every explanation is a small review.

Heritage and bilingual homes

A heritage language is a language from the family's background. If your home already uses one, your student may understand far more than this book's Novice descriptions suggest and read or write far less. That uneven profile is normal. A large survey of college students who grew up with a heritage language found that listening and speaking were usually stronger than reading and writing, and that family and community were the main reasons these students wanted to study the language.¹⁰¹ That's a college sample, but the shape will look familiar to many families with younger teens.

So in a heritage home the Language Hour shifts its weight. Daily life in the home language is the main course. The Hour adds literacy (reading, writing, a script, if the language has its own) on top of a strong ear.

Three ideas help.

Honor the family's way of speaking. Every language has varieties: regional, national, family. Grandma's Spanish, the Spanish in the textbook, and the Spanish on a news broadcast are all real Spanish. None of them is "proper" and none is "kitchen." When a book and a relative disagree, the student's job is to add both forms to the word box with a note about where each one is used. Reading

brings standard spellings in naturally. Ranking the family's speech against the book's teaches the student that home is wrong, and that's the fastest way to lose a heritage language.

Keep the home language strong. A classic account by the linguist Lily Wong Fillmore described how children who learn the school language can lose the family's language, sometimes within a few years, when the home switches over.¹⁰² A later study by Annick De Houwer found that children in bilingual families were more likely to speak both languages when both were used at home, and when more people used the home language with them.¹⁰³ The practical takeaway is gentle: more input from more people beats rigid rules. The American Academy of Pediatrics' parent guidance agrees that learning more than one language doesn't cause delay or confusion, and that mixing languages is a normal part of bilingual development.¹⁰⁴

Write it down. A Family Language Plan (PEOPLE-07, below) is a short, posted agreement about who uses which language and when. It turns good intentions into habits.

Picture a family where the grandparents speak Korean, the parents switch between Korean and English, and the 13-year-old answers almost everything in English (an illustration). He understands nearly every word at dinner. He reads Hangul slowly and writes very little. His Hour now spends most of its time on reading and writing: a short text each day, a letter to his aunt each week, and a heritage interview with his grandmother each month. His grandmother is now his best teacher, and she doesn't have to change how she talks.

Your community

Start with the library. Most public libraries offer more for language learners than families expect: graded readers and easy books, magazines, films, audiobooks, sometimes conversation groups, and often a language-learning app licensed by the library and free with a card (check yours).¹⁰⁵ Ask a librarian. Librarians are very good at this and rarely get asked.

Then look wider:

- **Community and heritage-language schools.** Many communities have weekend schools run by families who share a language. Some welcome learners from outside the community; call and ask.
- **Places of worship and cultural centers.** Many welcome visitors and learners at public events, festivals, and classes. Go as a guest, follow their customs, and ask before you take part.
- **Deaf-led events and ASL classes.** If your student is learning American Sign Language, Deaf-led classes and community events are the best places to learn, and the National Association of the Deaf encourages learners to learn from Deaf people.¹⁰⁶ Deaf culture is part of the language. At a first event, the student watches more than they sign, follows the community's lead, and is a respectful guest.
- **Volunteering.** At 13–14, with a parent nearby, helping at a community event where the language is used is a strong step (PEOPLE-05).
- **Optional national exams and contests.** Some languages have national exams or contests for middle-school students. One national Spanish exam serves grades 6–12, and homeschool families can take part if a parent arranges an independent proctor. One national French con-

test lets homeschool parents register much as teachers do.¹⁰⁷ Dates and rules change every year, so check the current dates and rules before you plan. Results are artifacts for the portfolio (Chapter 9). They're a nice day to aim for, not a credential and not a certificate from this book.

Tutors, exchanges, and pen friends

Here's where most of the people safety in this book lives. Read this section once, write your family rules on one page, and then let the rules do their job.

Platform rules differ, and they change. Tutoring platforms set their own age terms. When this book was written, one large platform required the account holder to be 18 and let a child learn through a parent's account with the parent's consent and supervision. It also advised against leaving a child alone for a whole lesson and said children shouldn't use its community features. Another platform allowed users from 13 to 17 only under a parent's supervision and didn't allow anyone under 13.¹⁰⁸ Those are two examples, not a complete list and not an endorsement. Check the current terms of any platform before you use it.

The family rules by band. These match the Family safety basics in the Language Hour.

- **11–12:** lessons run on the parent's account. The parent is in the room for the whole session.
- **13–14:** lessons run on the parent's account, or on a teen account set up by the parent where the platform allows it. The parent stays within earshot with the door open. The device sits in a shared room.
- **Both bands:** the parent reads all messages. There's no contact off the platform: no phone numbers, no other apps, no social media. First names only. No photos, school names, addresses, or other personal details. If a lesson is recorded, that's the family's choice, and the recording is kept privately.

Choose tutors who welcome a parent's presence. A good tutor for a young teen expects a parent nearby and says so. Before the first lesson, tell the tutor the family rules in a short message. A tutor who pushes back on them isn't the right fit, however good their teaching looks.

Pen friends and exchanges. Pen friends come only through a school, club, or family the parents know. Parents read letters both ways. There are no photos of faces and no addresses beyond what both families agree to. A paper letter is still a wonderful thing, and it's slower in the right way.

Language-exchange apps and open chat rooms aren't part of this book's plan at 11–14. They connect strangers. Most of the good that an exchange app offers, a known pen friend, a class, or a tutor under the rules can offer with less risk.

One calm box — strangers, pressure, and sextortion

Language-exchange apps, open chat rooms, and games with chat are routes strangers use to reach young teens. Sextortion is when someone pressures a young person into sending images and then threatens to share them unless the young person sends more or pays. Guidance from the FBI and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) points the same way, and this book teaches it plainly:¹⁰⁹

- Block and ignore strangers who message you.
- Never move a chat to another app because someone asks you to.
- Never send photos to someone you met online.
- If anyone asks for secrets, photos, or money: **Stop, save, tell.** Stop replying. Save the messages and the username. Tell a parent or another trusted adult.
- It isn't your fault, and you won't be in trouble for telling.

The parent's part: stay calm, thank your student for telling you, and don't delete anything. Keep the evidence. Don't pay or send anything. Report it to the FBI (tips.fbi.gov or your local field office) and to NCMEC's CyberTipline. If a nude or explicit image taken before 18 has been shared, or someone threatens to share it, NCMEC's free Take It Down service can help stop it spreading on platforms that take part.¹¹⁰

You'll talk about this once, calmly, early in the year. Then the rules stay on the family page, and you get back to the good part.

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

- **"Grandma's Spanish is wrong. My app says something else."** Varieties differ, and both forms are real. Say: "Both are real Spanish. Ask her where people say it her way, and add both to your word box."
- **"I don't want the tutor to see you there."** Privacy matters at 13, and so do the rules. Say: "Fair. At your age I can be within earshot instead of in the room, door open. The rules stay."
- **"My online friend asked to move to another app."** This is the moment the rules are for. Say: "That's a stop, save, tell. Thank you for telling me. You're not in trouble."
- **"Nobody near us speaks it."** It feels true, and it's usually not the whole story. Say: "Let's ask the library first. Then we'll look at an online class under our rules, and recorded speakers every day."
- **A heritage student answers relatives in English.** Very common, and it doesn't mean the language is gone. Keep speaking warmly in the home language, add peers who use it, and correct less.

A 5-minute parent warm-up

Before your first community week, take five minutes with a pencil. List three people or places where your student could use the language this month. For each one, write the safety plan in one line: who's there, where you'll be, and how contact happens. If you can't write the safety line, pick a different place for now.

How to teach it this week

Where it sits in the Hour. People work lives mostly in Use It for Real, the fourth step. On a tutor day or a class day, that session *is* Use It for Real, and the Hour around it is shorter: Goal and Greet before (what will you try to say?), Check and Carry after (what did you understand, and what's

your carry phrase?). On ordinary days, Use It for Real can be a short call, a letter, or a rehearsal for the next live meeting.

The rhythm. One community contact a month. One family call a week, run by the parent (PEOPLE-08). Tutor sessions, if you use them, under the family rules. That's enough.

Who runs what.

- **11–12:** you find the contacts and set up every session. You're in the room for live lessons and calls. Your student prepares one or two questions and the carry phrase.
- **13–14:** your student helps find the contacts, plans what to say, and writes the session notes. You set up the accounts, stay within earshot, read the messages, and keep the safety side.

Exact words to say. Keep it short.

Before a meeting: "Today you'll meet [name]. What's one thing you want to ask, and how will you ask it?" Then have your student say it in the language. In French, a simple opener is *Bonjour* (French, "hello").¹¹¹

During a call, if your student freezes, don't jump in. Count to five in your head. Then offer a first-sound hint, or point to the Keep It Going phrases on the card.

After the meeting: "What did you understand? What did you say? What will you carry?" If your student met a relative, the word for that person can become the carry phrase: *abuela* (Spanish, "grandmother") or 할머니 *halmeoni* (Korean, "grandmother").¹¹¹

The first try for your student. A two-minute call with a known relative or family friend, run by you, with one prepared question and the closing thanks in the language. *Gracias* (Spanish, "thank you"), *Danke* (German, "thank you"), or 谢谢 *xièxie* (Mandarin, "thank you").¹¹¹ Keep the first try small. One question, one answer understood, one thank you.

How to fade help. Move from you running the call, to your student asking two questions while you sit beside them, to your student leading a short call while you're within earshot (13–14). Fade the setup last. At 11–12 you'll still arrange everything. At 13–14 your student can draft the message that sets up a meeting, and you send it.

When to stop talking. Once the speaker and your student are talking, stop. Don't translate, prompt, or correct during a real conversation. If you notice something to fix, save it for one note afterward.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: "Who uses this language near you — and how will you meet them safely?"

Follow-ups:

1. "Which of those people would you like to meet first?"
2. "What would you want to ask them?"
3. "Where would we meet, and where would I be?"

Wait: count to five in your head. Your student may be thinking through people they've never connected with the language before. Let the list grow.

If it goes quiet: your student can't think of anyone, or is shy about meeting someone. Next move: start with the library and one recorded speaker, and say, "We'll find one person this month. You can watch first."

Don't say / say instead: Don't say "You need to talk to real people more." Say "Who would be fun to try one question on?"

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — PEOPLE-01 Tutor Session, Family Rules

- **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Materials:** a parent-held account on a platform whose current terms you've checked; the family rules page; a notebook for session notes
- **Safety and privacy:** parent's account; the family rules sent to the tutor before the first lesson; no off-platform contact; first names only; Stop, save, tell if anything feels off
- **The fun:** a real person who's there just for your student's language
- **The skill:** a live lesson with a speaker, under the family rules
- **The crumb:** session notes in the Hour log

How it goes. Before the first lesson, send the tutor a short message with your family rules: the parent's account, who'll be present, no contact off the platform, first names only, no photos. Ask the tutor to plan a lesson that's mostly conversation on a familiar topic. During the session, your student leads. Afterward, your student writes three lines of session notes: what they understood, what they said, and one carry phrase. You read the platform messages once a week.

11–12: parent in the room for the whole lesson. You can sit to the side with a book. The tutor should know you're there.

13–14: parent within earshot, door open, device in a shared room. Your student can message the tutor about scheduling on the platform; you read the messages.

Ready 12: a 12-year-old who has had a term of lessons with the same tutor can write the session notes alone and lead the scheduling messages, with you still in the room.

In-home — PEOPLE-03 Heritage Interview

- **Time:** 25 minutes
- **Materials:** a short list of questions in the home language; a notebook; a recorder only if the elder agrees
- **Safety and privacy:** a known family member; first names only in any notes; recordings by family choice, kept privately
- **The fun:** stories nobody else in the family has heard yet
- **The skill:** interviewing an elder about their life in the home language
- **The crumb:** answers written down, first names only

How it goes. Your student prepares five questions in the home language. Keep them simple: Where did you grow up? What did you eat for breakfast? What games did you play? Your student asks, listens, and writes key words in the language while the elder talks. Afterward, they write three sentences in the language summarizing one answer and read them back to the elder for corrections. The elder's way of saying things goes in the word box as it is.

11–12: five questions, a short interview, and one summary sentence. You sit in.

13–14: eight questions, follow-up questions on the spot, and a short paragraph. The paragraph can become the start of PROJ-02 Family Story Book.

For a family without a heritage language, this works with any known speaker who's willing: a family friend, a neighbor, a teacher from a class.

In-home — PEOPLE-07 Family Language Plan

- **Time:** 20 minutes
- **Materials:** a sheet of paper; a pen; a spot on the fridge or wall
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed beyond the usual
- **The fun:** a family agreement the student helps write
- **The skill:** agreeing who uses which language when, at home
- **The crumb:** the written plan, posted

How it goes. Sit down together. On one sheet, list the times and places in a normal week: breakfast, the car, dinner, weekends, calls with relatives. For each, write which language the family will use, or “either.” Keep it realistic. A plan that says “home language at dinner and on Saturday mornings” will last longer than a plan that says “home language always.” Post it. At the end of each term, look at it together and revise it.

In a home where the parent is learning too, the plan might be smaller: “Greetings and table words in the new language at dinner; one song in the car each day.”

11–12: you draft it; your student adds one time they want.

13–14: your student drafts it; you adjust it together.

In-home — CULT-02 Cook It in the Language

- **Time:** 40 minutes
- **Materials:** a recipe from a culture that uses the language, ideally from a cookbook, a relative, or a speaker; ingredients
- **Safety and privacy:** usual kitchen safety; hands-only photos if anyone wants a picture
- **The fun:** food at the end
- **The skill:** following a recipe from a culture that uses the language
- **The crumb:** a recipe card in the language

How it goes. Choose a simple recipe. If it's written in the language, your student reads it first for the gist and marks the cooking verbs. If it's in English, your student makes a recipe card in the language with the ingredient names and three steps, checked against a dictionary. Then cook

together while your student reads the steps aloud. *Receta* (Spanish, “recipe”) is a good word for the top of the card.¹¹¹ Ask your student one question about the dish: where do people eat it, and when?

11–12: a short recipe card with ingredient names and three steps.

13–14: a full card, plus one sentence about when and why people make the dish, from a book or a speaker, not a guess. This can grow into PROJ-04 Recipe and Video Script (hands only if filmed).

Out-of-home — PEOPLE-04 Community or Heritage Class

- **Time:** about 60 minutes a week
- **Materials:** a class you’ve visited or called about; a notebook
- **Safety and privacy:** a parent nearby; the class’s own rules; first names only on any shared lists
- **The fun:** a room full of people using the language
- **The skill:** a weekly class with other learners and a speaker
- **The crumb:** the class name in the log

How it goes. Look for a community class, a weekend heritage school, a library class, or, for ASL, a Deaf-led class. Visit or call first. Ask whether the class takes students your child’s age, how it’s taught, and whether parents can stay nearby. Once it starts, the class becomes one of your student’s Use It for Real days each week. On class days, the Hour shrinks to Goal and Greet before and Check and Carry after.

11–12: a parent stays on site.

13–14: a parent stays nearby, on site or close by, as the class allows.

Out-of-home — OUT-03 Festival or Cultural Event

- **Time:** about 90 minutes
- **Materials:** a notebook; a few prepared phrases; a little cash for food if it’s that kind of event
- **Safety and privacy:** parent present; public place; no photos of people without permission
- **The fun:** music, food, crowds, and the language all around
- **The skill:** attending and noticing three things to research later
- **The crumb:** three notes

How it goes. Choose a public festival, a holiday event at a cultural center, or a performance. Before you go, your student prepares two phrases: a greeting and a polite question. At the event, your student uses at least one phrase with someone and writes down three things they noticed: a food, a song, a custom. Back home, your student looks up one of the three in a book or asks a speaker about it.

11–12: one phrase, three notes, one follow-up.

13–14: two phrases, three notes, and a short follow-up paragraph. The follow-up can feed PROJ-03 Culture Presentation.

Out-of-home — OUT-06 Deaf Community Event

- **Time:** about 90 minutes
- **Materials:** information on an event that's open to learners, from a Deaf-led organization, an ASL class, or a local association
- **Safety and privacy:** parent present; public event; no filming people; follow the community's lead
- **The fun:** seeing the language used fully, fast, and with humor
- **The skill:** attending a Deaf-led event open to learners, watching first
- **The crumb:** what you learned

How it goes. Choose an event that says it welcomes learners. Before you go, your student practices fingerspelling their first name and a few greetings they've learned from a checked source or a Deaf teacher. At the event, your student watches first. If someone engages, your student signs what they can and is honest about being a learner. Afterward, your student writes or signs (privately recorded, if the family chooses) what they learned, including one thing about Deaf culture.

11–12: watching mostly; one greeting.

13–14: a short exchange if invited; a written reflection.

More cards for this chapter (optional). PEOPLE-02 Pen Friend Through a Known Program (13–14): letters through a school, club, or family the parents know; parents read letters both ways; no photos of faces. WRITE-08 Letter or Postcard Exchange: a paper letter to a known pen friend, read by the parent (you met this card in Chapter 6; here it's the people side of the same habit). PEOPLE-05 Volunteer with Speakers (13–14): help at an event where the language is used, with a parent nearby. PEOPLE-06 Conversation Group: a library or community group, parent present or nearby (you met this card in Chapter 5; here's where to find one). PEOPLE-08 Video Call with Family: a short, parent-run call with a known relative or friend. OUT-02 Order in the Language: you met this card in Chapter 5; here it becomes a monthly outing. OUT-05 Museum or Gallery Visit. OUT-07 National Exam or Contest Day (13–14). CULT-04 Compare a Routine. CULT-06 Respectful Questions: preparing curious, respectful questions for a speaker about their culture. PROJ-02 Family Story Book, PROJ-03 Culture Presentation (13–14), and PROJ-04 Recipe and Video Script.

Signed languages: for PEOPLE-02 and WRITE-08, a signing pen friend through a known Deaf school or program can trade short written letters in English with fingerspelled or glossed words, or short signed videos shared privately between the two families, parent-approved. For OUT-07, check whether an exam or contest exists for ASL in your area; many languages have none.

For the student

(Read this on your own. At 11–12, your parent reads it too, and you talk it over for a few minutes.)

Real people make a language real — and you get to choose who you share yourself with.

This chapter is about using your language with people outside your home study: a relative, a class, a tutor, a festival, a pen friend, a Deaf event. It works because a real person gives you a reason to

say something and tells you, just by answering, whether it landed.

Here's a tiny example. In Tagalog, *salamat* means "thank you."¹¹¹ That one word, said at the end of a conversation with a speaker, does more than you'd think. People notice. Try it in your language: what's the thank-you word, and who will you say it to this week?

One more thing: safety, in three lines.

1. People you meet through your language plan come through your family: a class, a tutor on your parent's account, a pen friend through a program your parents know.
2. If anyone you don't know messages you, asks to move to another app, or asks for photos, secrets, or money: **Stop, save, tell.**
3. You're never in trouble for telling.

That's it. The rest is the good stuff.

Try this: Write three questions you'd ask a speaker of your language about their daily life. Check each one in your book or dictionary. Ask one this month.

Try this too: Make a list of every place near you where your language might be used: shops, restaurants, places of worship, cultural centers, the library. Ask a parent to help you check one.

Explain it back: Tell a parent, in your own words, why lessons happen on a parent's account and why there's no contact off the platform. If you can explain the reason, you'll spot the moment it matters.

Challenge: Have one real conversation outside your family this month, even a short one. A greeting, one question, one thank you. Write down what you understood.

If it isn't clicking

"There are no people yet." Your student has nobody to talk to besides you. *Next move:* library first. Ask a librarian about conversation groups, community classes, and cultural events. Add a recorded speaker to every Hour. Look at an online class under your family rules. A trip later is lovely, but it isn't the plan.

"The student is shy." Your student goes quiet around speakers or refuses to go. *Next move:* watch first. Go to an event just to look and listen. Prepare one question, practice it with you, and use CULT-06 Respectful Questions. Some students do better with a paper letter before a live call. That's fine.

"The heritage language is fading." Your student answers relatives in English more each month. *Next move:* more people, more fun, less correction. Add a cousin or a peer who uses the language. Add songs, games, films, and food in the language. Stop correcting at the table. Use the Family Language Plan and let the elders be the elders.

When to slow down, go ahead, or find more help. Slow down if live sessions leave your student upset more than once; go back to rehearsed exchanges and watching. Go ahead when your student starts asking for more people. Bring in a class, tutor, or Deaf-led program when your own model

of the language runs out, which for many parents is early. If a contact ever makes you uneasy, end it. You don't need a reason a tutor would accept.

Tools, including AI

Video calls, tutor platforms, and online classes all run under the Family safety basics in the Language Hour: the parent holds the account, the parent is in the room at 11–12 and within earshot at 13–14, the parent reads all messages, and there's no contact off the platform. AI tools don't stand in for a person here. A chatbot isn't a pen friend or a conversation partner at 11–12, and at 13–14 it's a short, supervised practice tool, never the main partner. Chapter 8 covers the details. After any session, the Hour log still ends with **Help I used:** ... (for example, "tutor," "Grandma," or "none").

What “done enough” looks like

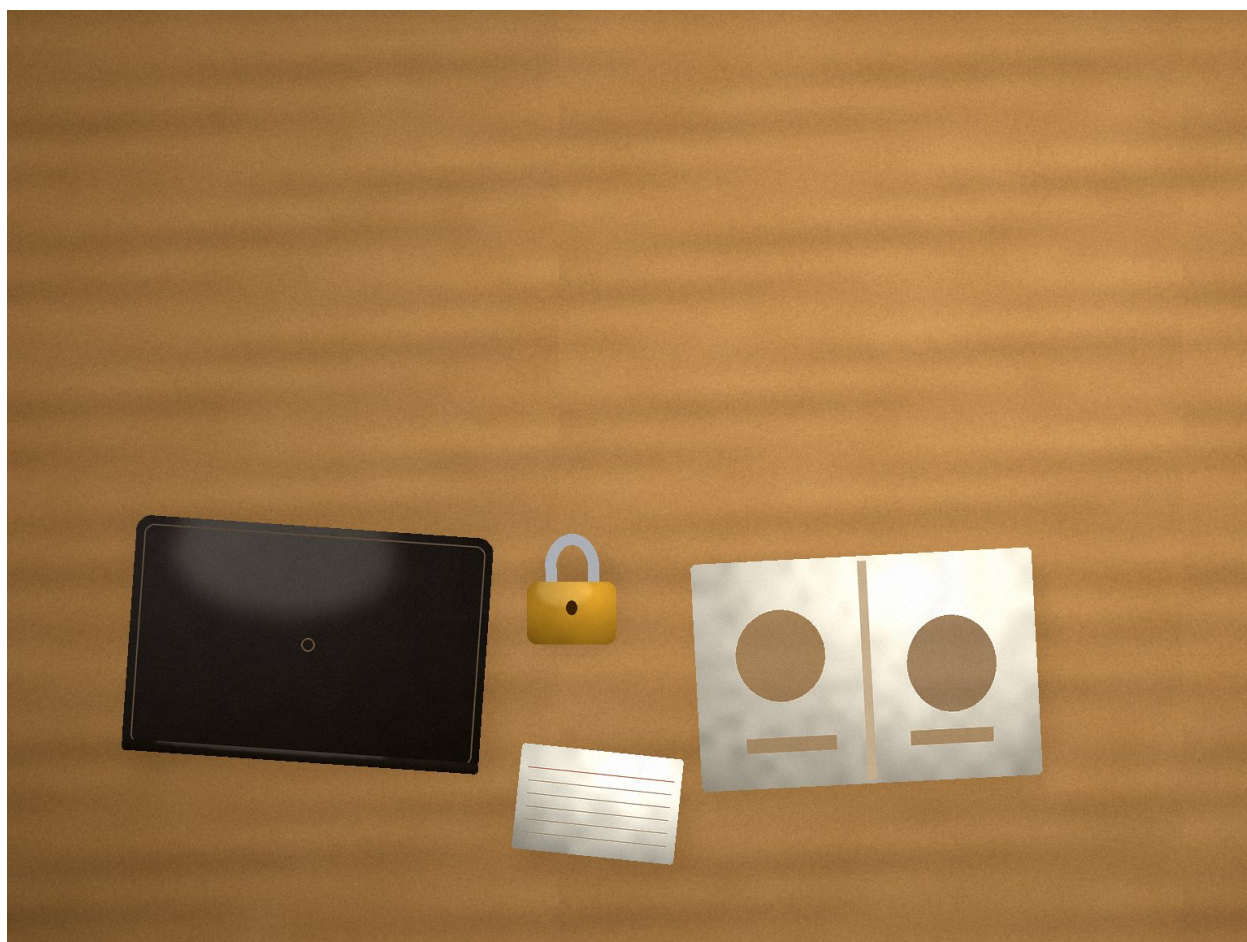
You're ready to move on to Chapter 8 when:

- ☐ Your student has used the language with at least one live speaker besides the parent.
- ☐ Your student has been to at least one community event, class, or library program connected to the language.
- ☐ The family safety plan is written on one page, and your student can explain it.
- ☐ Any tutor or platform in use has been checked against its current terms and knows the family rules.
- ☐ Heritage families: a Family Language Plan is posted and in use.
- ☐ Your student's log shows **Help I used** after each session with a person.

Short check: AS-04 Unrehearsed Conversation. Once this term, your student has a three-to-five-minute conversation on a familiar topic with someone who didn't rehearse with them: a relative, a class teacher, or a tutor under the rules. You write one line about what was understood and how your student kept it going. Mark it not yet / with help / on my own, date it, and put it in the portfolio (Chapter 9).

Chapter 8

Tools and AI: Dictionaries, Translators, Apps, and Chatbots — Under the Terms and Checked



Why this matters

At 11–14, your student will meet translators, learning apps, and chatbots whether you plan for it or not. They're on every phone, built into browsers, and mentioned by friends. So the question for a

homeschool family isn't whether these tools exist. It's how they fit into a Language Hour without quietly taking it over.

Good tools save time. A dictionary with recordings by real speakers settles a pronunciation question in ten seconds. An answer key lets a parent who's learning too check a page without guessing. A short app session after the Hour can keep words warm on a busy day. Used well, tools make the student more independent.

Used the wrong way, the same tools do the learning *for* the student. A translator can turn an English paragraph into a polished paragraph in your language in a second, and the student learns almost nothing from it. A chatbot can explain a grammar point clearly and confidently and be wrong. An app can award a score that looks like a level and isn't. None of that is a disaster if the family knows what to watch for.

This chapter gives you the whole picture in one place: a simple ladder of tools, what AI is in plain words, how translators help and hurt, the age terms and how this book's rules follow them by band, a short rule for chatbot conversation practice at 13–14, and privacy. The Language Hour's AI box holds the short version. This is the long one.

A word to the parent who feels behind on all this. You don't need to understand how these tools are built to set good rules for them. You need three habits you already have: you check where something came from, you notice when a piece of work doesn't sound like your student, and you ask what they used. This chapter turns those habits into a routine. The routine is short on purpose, because a rule that takes ten minutes to explain gets skipped by Wednesday, and a rule that fits on a sticky note gets followed for a year.

And a word to the student, who may know more about these tools than you do. That's fine, and it can be useful. Let them show you what they've seen. Then ask the questions this chapter teaches: Who made this? How do you know it's right? What did you do yourself? A student who can answer those three questions out loud is learning something that will matter long after this year's vocabulary list.

One idea runs through all of it. **Tools check; people teach; anything a tool made is made by a tool.** Every Hour still ends with **Help I used:** ..., and every check in Chapter 9 is done without tools.

For the parent: understand it yourself

The tool ladder

Here's the everyday picture. Think of a ladder leaning against a wall. The low rungs are sturdy and close to the ground. You can stand on them all day. The higher rungs reach further, but you climb them carefully, with someone holding the ladder. Language tools work the same way:

1. **A dictionary with recordings by real speakers and example sentences.** The lowest, sturdiest rung. Use it every day. A printed dictionary is worth keeping for checks, especially in a low-device home.

2. **An answer key.** Part of any good textbook or course. It lets the student and a parent who's learning too check work without a screen.
3. **A practice app, short and parent-set.** Optional, after the Hour, on an account the parent created. Scores and streaks aren't records.
4. **A translator, to check, not to write.** The student writes first. The translator's version is something to argue with.
5. **A chatbot.** At 11–12, parent-operated only. At 13–14, supervised, under the terms, short, and checked.

Here's the more precise picture. Each rung up gives the tool more control over the language the student sees and produces. A dictionary hands back one checked word. A chatbot hands back whole paragraphs it generated. The higher the rung, the more the family has to check, and the more important it is that the student did the thinking first.

What AI is, in plain words

A chatbot is a program trained on enormous amounts of text. When you type to it, it predicts likely next words, one after another, based on patterns in that text. That's why it can sound fluent and sure about almost anything. It's also why it can be wrong in a fluent, sure voice.

For language learners, a few failures matter most:

- **It can be confidently wrong.** A chatbot may give a wrong ending, a wrong word, or a wrong rule, and say it plainly.
- **It can invent facts about cultures.** Ask about a holiday custom and it may describe one that sounds right and isn't.
- **It can flatten varieties.** It may treat one country's or region's way of speaking as the only correct one.
- **It can miss politeness and tone.** Many languages have formal and informal ways of speaking. A tool may pick the wrong one for the situation, or mix them.
- **It may invent sources.** Researchers have documented chatbots producing citations that don't exist.¹¹²

None of this means AI is useless. It means its output is a draft for a person to check, never an answer to copy. That fits a standard every language teacher knows. Under Language Comparisons, the World-Readiness Standards ask learners to “investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.”¹¹³ Checking a tool's sentence against a dictionary and a speaker is exactly that kind of comparison.

Translators

Machine translators can be helpful for a learner who can already spot errors. For beginners, research reviews suggest the picture is mixed: beginners tend to copy forms they can't judge, including wrong ones, and keep less of what the tool produced for them.¹¹⁴ That fits common sense. If the tool did the building, the student didn't practice building.

So the rule in this book is simple: **the student writes first; the translator is a checker the student**

must argue with. That’s what TECH-02 Is the Translator Right? practices, below. The student’s own sentence, a dictionary, and the tool’s version sit side by side. The student decides which is better and why.

A one-word example of why this matters: ask a translator for “thank you” in Portuguese, and it may give *obrigado* — which is the form a male speaker typically uses; a female speaker typically says *obrigada*.¹¹⁵ A beginner who copies the first answer misses that. A dictionary, or a speaker, tells the whole story.

Age terms, and this book’s rule by band

The Language Hour’s AI box gives the short form of the age terms; here’s how they turn into a family rule. In plain parent language:¹¹⁶

- **Chatbots set minimum ages.** The Language Hour lists the current terms; check them before any account is opened.
- **One major company is 18+.**
- **One lets a parent turn on a supervised account for younger children,** in some regions.
- **Check the current terms** before any account is created, and again each year.

Those terms rest on the 13 shift, explained in the Family safety basics in the Language Hour: a rule for companies, not a readiness test.

This book follows the terms and adds a family layer:

- **11–12: parent-operated.** The parent’s account and the parent’s device. The parent is at the keyboard or reads every exchange. The student dictates what to ask and reads along. No student accounts.
- **13–14: supervised under the terms, with a parent nearby.** A teen or parent-linked account where the company offers one and the terms allow it. The device sits in a shared room. Training on the student’s chats and memory are turned off where the settings allow. No companion or role-play characters at any age. No voice features that copy a voice. Text first.

Be honest with your student about why. The rule isn’t that they can’t be trusted. The rule is that these tools are new, they make mistakes, and the companies themselves set ages and permissions. Your family layer is the same thing you’d do for a new driver: real use, with someone in the passenger seat.

Teens already use these

You don’t need to wonder whether your student has heard of chatbots. In a 2026 Pew Research Center survey of US teens ages 13 to 17, 64% said they had used an AI chatbot, and about 3 in 10 said they used one daily.¹¹⁷ So talk about it openly, early, and without alarm. A student who knows the family’s rule and the reason for it is far more likely to say, “I used a chatbot on this,” than one who thinks the subject is forbidden.

Chatbot conversation practice

Can a chatbot be a conversation partner? At 11–12 in this book, no. At 13–14, it can be a short, supervised extra, under these limits:

- **13–14 only**, under the terms, supervised.
- **Short**: about ten minutes, after a real-person Use It for Real, not instead of it.
- **Text by default**. No voice features that record or copy the student's voice.
- **Nothing personal**: no name, school, location, photos, or family details.
- **A person stays the main conversation partner**. The chatbot is practice; the class, the tutor, the relative, and the parent are the real thing.

There's no study showing that chatbot conversation practice works for language learners this age.¹¹⁸ This is a family rule built from caution and common sense, not a research finding. If it doesn't help your student, drop it. Nothing in this book depends on it.

Privacy

Two lines cover it:

- **Never upload a student's voice, face, or name to an AI tool**. That includes recordings of talks, photos of handwritten work that show a face or name, and pronunciation "checkers" that ask for a voice sample.
- Keep the student's recordings and files in **two places**, both private, as the Language Hour describes. Never on a shared computer and never in an AI tool.

Speech recognition is also weaker on children's and young teens' voices than on adults', so an app's pronunciation score says less than it seems to.⁴⁹

Learning apps, short and set up

Practice apps are optional in this book. If your family uses one, a few habits keep it useful:

- **Short, and after the Hour**. About ten minutes, once the Hour's real work is done. An app session isn't a Language Hour, even on a busy day; on a short day, the fifteen-minute Hour in the Language Hour section is the better fallback.
- **Parent-set accounts**. At 11–12, the parent creates the account, and many apps handle under-13 accounts through a parent's email, with social features restricted. At 13–14, the parent still sets it up and checks the privacy settings. Check the current terms of any app you use.¹¹⁹
- **Scores and streaks aren't records**. An app's level, points, or streak describes the app's own exercises. It doesn't describe what your student can do with a person. The portfolio in Chapter 9 holds can-do checks, samples, and logs, not screenshots of streaks.
- **Social features off**. Leaderboards, chat, and friend lists add strangers and pressure without adding much language.

A family tools rule, on one page

Write it together, post it near the study spot, and revisit it each term. Here's a sample for a family with a 13-year-old (an illustration; change anything that doesn't fit):

Our language tools rule. Dictionary and answer key: any time. Practice app: ten minutes after the Hour, on the account Mom set up. Translator: only after I've written my sentence, and only to check. Chatbot: the family-approved one, at the kitchen table, text only, nothing personal, about ten minutes, after I've practiced with a person. Anything a tool made gets a Who Made This? card. Every Hour ends with Help I used. Checks are done with no tools. If anything online feels pushy or strange: stop, save, tell.

For an 11- or 12-year-old, the chatbot line changes to: "Only with a parent, on the parent's account and device."

Wrong answers you should be able to hear

These are the student's ideas, and each one has a good next move.

- **"The translator is always right."** Say: "Let's test it. Write your sentence first, then we'll compare it with the translator and the dictionary." (TECH-02.)
- **"It's my sentence. I just fixed it with AI."** Say: "Good to know. Put that in Help I used, and fill in a Who Made This? card. Then tell me what you changed and why."
- **"The app says I'm 80% fluent."** An app's number isn't a proficiency level. Say: "Show me with a can-do. Order lunch, in the language, right now."
- **"The chatbot is my study buddy."** It's a tool, not a person. Say: "It's a tool that can help you check. Who's a person you could practice this with?"
- **"It explained the grammar, so I get it."** Say: "Great. Close the screen and explain it back to me with one example of your own."

A 5-minute parent warm-up

Pick one short English sentence about your own day. Write what you think it is in the language (or ask your student to). Then look up two words in a dictionary with recordings, and run the sentence through a translator. Notice where the three versions agree and where they don't. That small exercise is the whole chapter in five minutes, and it will make you a calmer judge of what your student shows you.

How to teach it this week

Where it sits in the Hour. Tools appear mostly in Work With It (checking words, practice sets) and in Check and Carry (the **Help I used** line). They don't belong in Take It In as a replacement for real recordings or texts, and they don't belong in Use It for Real as a replacement for a person.

Three habits for the week.

1. **TECH-07 Help I Used Line** at the end of every Hour. Book, person, tool, or none.
2. **TECH-06 Who Made This? card** on anything a tool touched.
3. **One TECH-02 Is the Translator Right?** this month.

Who runs what.

- **11–12:** you operate any AI tool, on your account and device. Your student decides what to ask and reads along. You both fill in the Who Made This? card.
- **13–14:** your student may use a family-approved tool under the terms, with you nearby and the device in a shared room. Your student fills in the card; you look at it weekly.

Exact words to say. “Before any tool, write it yourself. Then we’ll check.” Then, after the check: “Who made this — a person or a tool? What did you do? Who checked it?” When a dictionary settles a question, point to it: *biblioteca* (Spanish, “library”), with a speaker’s recording, is a better answer than a guess.¹¹⁵

The first try for your student. Your student writes one sentence in the language about their morning. Then you look up one word together in a dictionary with recordings. Then (11–12: you; 13–14: your student, with you nearby) run the sentence through a translator. Your student says which version is better and fills in a Who Made This? card. That’s it for day one.

How to fade help. At 11–12, keep running the tools. Fade the checking instead: move from checking together to your student checking and showing you. At 13–14, fade your hands from the keyboard but keep your presence nearby and your weekly look at the cards.

Two students, two bands. If you have a 12-year-old and a 14-year-old, the rule follows each student, not the household. The older one may use the approved chatbot at the kitchen table under the terms; the younger one sits with you when you run it on your account. Say it plainly and early: “Your sister is 14, and the companies’ rules and ours are different at 14. Your turn comes.” Most younger siblings accept a rule that’s clearly about age and clearly the same for everyone. Keep the Who Made This? cards and the Help I used line identical for both, so the habits match even when the access doesn’t. And when the older student checks a translator’s sentence out loud, let the younger one listen in. Watching someone argue with a machine is a good lesson at any age.

When to stop talking. Once your student is comparing versions, let them argue it out. Ask, “Which one would a speaker say?” and wait.

Talk box (this chapter)

Opening: “Who made this — a person or a tool — and how would you check it?”

Follow-ups:

1. “What did you write before any tool touched it?”
2. “Where do the tool and the dictionary disagree?”
3. “Who could tell us which is right?”

Wait: count to five in your head. Your student may be deciding whether to admit how much a tool did. Give them room to say it honestly.

If it goes quiet: your student isn't sure what counts as tool help, or worries about getting in trouble. Next move: "Using a tool is fine. Not saying so is the only problem. What did you use?"

Don't say / say instead: Don't say "Did you cheat with AI?" Say "What help did you use on this?"

Practice that actually builds learning

In-home — TECH-01 Dictionary Detective

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** a dictionary with example sentences and recordings by real speakers, or a good printed dictionary
- **Safety and privacy:** a parent-approved dictionary site or a book; no account needed
- **The fun:** solving a word mystery with evidence
- **The skill:** checking a word's meaning, gender or form, and a human recording
- **The crumb:** the word checked, written in the word box

How it goes. You met this card in Chapter 3; here it becomes the first rung of the ladder. Your student picks one word from today's input they aren't sure of. They look it up and write down three things: the meaning in this context, one form detail (gender, plural, the formal version, or the reading of a character), and one example sentence. If the dictionary has a recording by a speaker, they listen twice and say it. For Russian, *cnacu6o* (*spasibo*, "thank you") is a good first detective word: the spelling and the sound don't line up the way an English speaker expects.¹¹⁵

11–12: one word a day for a week; you check the first few.

13–14: one or two words a day, including one word a tool gave them, checked.

Signed languages: use a dictionary or video resource made by Deaf signers or a Deaf-led program. Watch the sign several times; note handshape, location, and movement in words; ask your teacher if two sources differ.

In-home — TECH-02 Is the Translator Right?

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** the student's own sentence on paper; a dictionary; a translator on the parent's device (11–12) or a family-approved device (13–14)
- **Safety and privacy:** no personal details in what goes into the translator; parent-operated at 11–12; parent nearby at 13–14
- **The fun:** catching a machine in a mistake
- **The skill:** comparing a machine translation with your own sentence and a dictionary
- **The crumb:** one mistake found, written down

How it goes. Your student writes a sentence in the language first, on paper. Then the translator is run on the English version of the same idea. Your student lays three things side by side: their sentence, the translator's sentence, and what the dictionary says about any word that differs. They argue for the better version, out loud, with a reason. Then they log one mistake the machine made,

or one thing it got right that they missed. Many months, the student finds that the machine chose a form that doesn't fit the situation: too formal, too informal, or the wrong gender.

11–12: you run the translator; your student argues. Keep sentences short.

13–14: your student runs it, with you nearby; they argue in writing in two sentences.

Signed languages: text translators don't translate into ASL. Use this card to compare an English gloss your student writes for a short signed phrase with what a Deaf teacher or a Deaf-made resource shows; the "machine" step drops out.

In-home — TECH-05 Generated Text Audit

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** a short paragraph in the language that a chatbot generated (13–14 under the terms, parent nearby; or generated by the parent); a dictionary; a book about the culture
- **Safety and privacy:** nothing personal in the request; output labeled made by a tool
- **The fun:** being the editor who catches the errors
- **The skill:** finding errors, odd tone, and invented facts in a generated paragraph
- **The crumb:** audit notes

How it goes. 13–14. Ask a chatbot for a short paragraph in the language on a familiar topic: a holiday, a city, a family meal. Label it "made by a tool." Your student reads it with a pencil and marks three kinds of things: words or endings that look wrong (check them), a tone that seems off (too formal, too stiff), and any fact about the culture (check it in a book or with a speaker). They write audit notes: what they checked, what they found, and what they'd tell a friend who trusted the paragraph.

13–14: this card is for 13–14.

Ready 12: a 12-year-old can do the audit on a paragraph the parent generated on the parent's account.

Signed languages: audit a generated written description of an ASL sign or a piece of Deaf culture against a Deaf-made resource or your teacher. Generated descriptions of signs are often vague or wrong.

In-home — TECH-06 Who Made This? Card

- **Time:** 5 minutes
- **Materials:** index cards or a printed half-sheet
- **Safety and privacy:** none needed
- **The fun:** a clear, honest label that ends the argument before it starts
- **The skill:** labeling anything a tool made, what you did, and who checked it
- **The crumb:** the card, clipped to the work

How it goes. Any time a tool touched a piece of work, your student fills in three lines and clips the card to it:

A tool made: . **I did:** . A person checked it: ____.

For example: “A tool made: a practice list of ten sentences. I did: answered all ten without the key, then fixed three. A person checked it: Dad, with the answer key.” The card goes in the portfolio with the work (Chapter 9). Nothing with a card is ever presented as the student’s unassisted work.

11–12: you fill it in together.

13–14: your student fills it in; you look weekly.

In-home — TECH-04 Practice Set, Answers Hidden

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** a practice set the parent (or a supervised 13–14 student) generates from this week’s words or pattern; the answers saved separately
- **Safety and privacy:** nothing personal in the request; labeled made by a tool
- **The fun:** fresh practice instead of the same worksheet again
- **The skill:** extra retrieval practice, with answers kept out of sight
- **The crumb:** the practice set, labeled made by a tool

How it goes. You met this card in Chapter 3; here’s the tool side. Give a tool this week’s word list or pattern and ask for ten short practice items with answers listed separately. Print or copy the questions only. Your student answers on paper without the answers. Then check against the answers *and* a dictionary or textbook, because the tool’s answer key can be wrong too. Any item where the tool was wrong goes on the Who Made This? card.

11–12: you generate it on your account.

13–14: your student may generate it under the terms with you nearby; you hold the answers.

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

- **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Materials:** a library card; a short list of what your student is looking for
- **Safety and privacy:** parent present; public place
- **The fun:** a librarian’s pick that beats the algorithm
- **The skill:** finding readers, magazines, films, and conversation groups at the library
- **The crumb:** the borrowed list

How it goes. You met this card in Chapter 4; here it’s a comparison. Before you go, your student writes down what an app or website recommended for their level. At the library, your student asks a librarian for help finding the same kind of thing: easy readers, a film, a magazine, a group. Back home, they compare: which pick fit better, and why? Many students are surprised. Ask the librarian whether the library licenses a language app, too (many do; check yours).

11–12: you go together; your student asks one question at the desk.

13–14: your student leads the conversation at the desk; you browse nearby.

Signed languages: ask for ASL storytelling videos, books by Deaf authors, and books about Deaf culture, and ask whether the library hosts or knows of Deaf-led events.

More cards for this chapter (optional). TECH-03 Grammar Explained, Then Checked (13–14): ask a tool to explain one pattern in English, then check the explanation in a textbook and fix anything wrong. LISTEN-08 Captioned Clip, Two Ways (13–14): you met this card in Chapter 2; here it’s a reminder that auto-generated captions are made by a tool and can be wrong. TECH-08 App Session, Short and Set Up: a short practice-app session on a parent-set account, after the Hour, ten minutes, minutes logged; scores and streaks aren’t records.

Signed languages: for TECH-03, ask the tool about a feature of ASL grammar and check it with a Deaf teacher; for TECH-08 and LISTEN-08, choose resources made by Deaf signers.

For the student

(Read this on your own. At 11–12, your parent reads it too, and you talk it over for a few minutes.)

A tool can help you check. It can’t learn for you.

That’s the whole idea. A dictionary, a translator, an app, or a chatbot can save you time, catch a mistake, or give you extra practice. But if a tool writes your sentence, the tool practiced, not you. And tools make mistakes in a confident voice, so anything a tool made is **made by a tool** until a person checks it.

Here’s a tiny example. In Arabic, شكر (shukran) means “thank you.”¹¹⁵ Look it up in a dictionary with a speaker’s recording and listen to it. Then type “thank you” into a translator and see what it gives. Same? Different? Is there a recording? Try it in your language with any common word.

One more thing: the age rules, in two lines. Most chatbots are for 13 and older, and many need a parent’s permission until 18; some are 18+. In this family, at 11–12 a parent runs any AI tool with you; at 13–14 you can use an approved one under the terms, with a parent nearby.

Every Hour ends with one line: **Help I used:** ... Book, person, tool, or none. Saying “a tool” isn’t a problem. Not saying it is.

Try this: Write one sentence about your weekend in your language, on paper, before you touch anything else. Then check two words in a dictionary. Did you change anything?

Try this too: Fill in a Who Made This? card for the last piece of work a tool helped with.

Explain it back: Tell a parent why you write first and check with a tool second. Use your own words and one example.

Challenge: Catch a translator mistake this month. Find a sentence where the translator chose a word, ending, or tone that a dictionary or a speaker says is wrong for the situation. Write it down. You’ve just done something the tool can’t: you noticed.

If it isn't clicking

“The tool is doing the work.” Your student's written work is polished, but their speech is halting, or they can't explain a sentence they wrote. *Next move:* student writes first, every time, on paper. Use AS-05 Writing Sample, No Help, from Chapter 6, and keep the Chapter 9 checks tool-free. Ask, “Explain line two without the screen,” and don't make it a trial.

“We argue about the rules.” Your student thinks the family rule is too strict, or that friends have no rules. *Next move:* write the family tools rule together on one page: which tools, at which band, on which account, in which room, and what goes on the Help I used line. Revisit it each term. A rule the student helped write is a rule they're more likely to keep.

“I'm not sure what's accurate.” You're learning too and can't tell whether the tool or your student is right. *Next move:* go back down the ladder. A textbook with an answer key, a dictionary with recordings by speakers, and a person who speaks the language settle most questions. “Let's find out together” is a fine thing to say.

When to slow down, go ahead, or find more help. Slow down if tool use keeps creeping into checks or real conversations; go back to paper for two weeks. Go ahead at 13–14 when your student reliably writes first and fills in the cards without reminders. Bring in a teacher or tutor when you and your tools keep disagreeing about the same pattern.

Tools, including AI

This chapter is the full treatment. The short version lives in the Language Hour's AI box: **11–12 parent-operated; 13–14 supervised under the terms, with a parent nearby.** Output is made by a tool. Nothing with a student's voice, face, or name goes into an AI tool. Every Hour ends with **Help I used: ...**

What “done enough” looks like

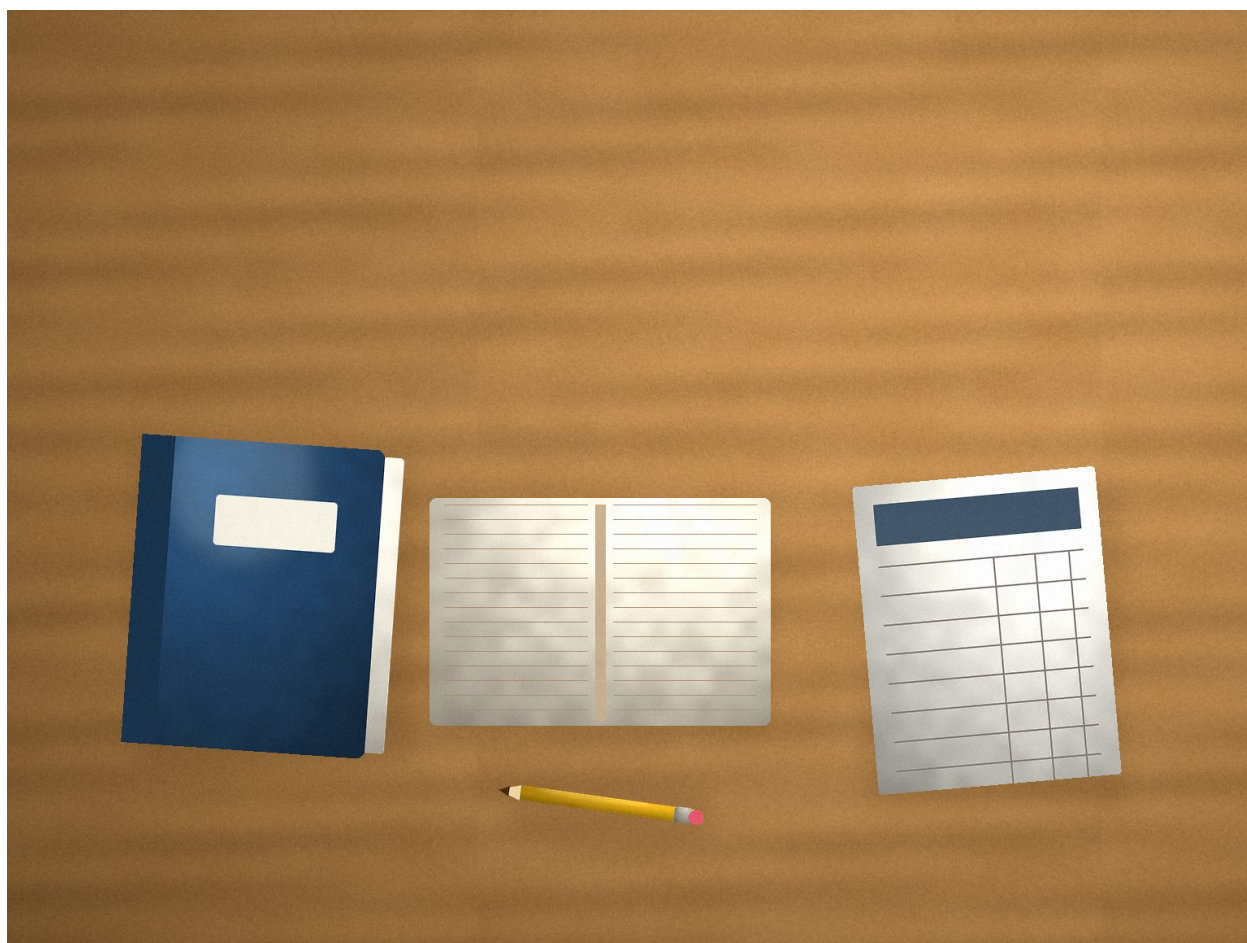
You're ready to move on to Chapter 9 when:

- ☐ The family tools rule is written on one page and posted.
- ☐ Your student can explain the age line for chatbots and why the family follows it.
- ☐ Who Made This? cards are clipped to anything a tool touched.
- ☐ Every Hour log line ends with Help I used.
- ☐ Your student has done at least one TECH-02 and caught at least one tool mistake.
- ☐ The checks in Chapter 9 were done without tools.

Short check: AS-05 Writing Sample, No Help. Once this term, your student writes for fifteen minutes on a familiar topic with no tools and no notes. Mark it not yet / with help / on my own, date it, keep it, and don't grade it with a score. Next term, put the two samples side by side. That pair shows more than any app score.

Chapter 9

Records, Portfolio, and Transcript



Why keep records

Language growth is easy to miss from the inside. Day to day, your student hears the same voice, opens the same word box, and writes the same three-line journal. Progress hides in that sameness. Then one afternoon in March you pull out a September writing sample, put it next to today's, and both of you go quiet for a second. The difference is obvious on paper and invisible in the moment.

That's the first reason to keep records: to show growth to the person who most needs to see it, which is your student. A student who says "I'm just bad at languages" can't argue with their own dated can-do sheets.

The second reason is practical. Someday someone may ask what your student studied: a co-op, a high school, an evaluator, a summer program, or a placement teacher at a community class. Good records answer the question in a few minutes, without exaggerating and without leaving out real work.

Requirements vary. Many states don't require a world language for homeschooled students in grades 6–8, and some have specific rules for what records you keep and how you report. Check your own state's rules; this chapter isn't legal advice.

You're also in good company if you're teaching a language at this age at all. In 2016, about 30% of homeschooled students in grades 6–8 were taught a foreign language that year, according to a federal survey of homeschooling families.¹²⁰ That figure is a snapshot, not a target. It simply shows that plenty of families make room for a language in the middle years, and that there's no single right way to do it.

This chapter covers what goes in the portfolio, the check set that gathers every chapter's "done enough" card, what progress usually looks like on paper, hours, transcript titles a stranger can read, one flagged paragraph on grade 8, heritage and ASL records, a few illustrations, and next steps.

The student owns most of this. At 11–12, your student keeps the log with you. At 13–14, your student keeps the log, picks the portfolio pieces, and writes the term reflection. You keep the safety side, the storage, and the final say on what leaves the house.

What goes in the portfolio

A portfolio is a folder, a binder, or a private digital folder kept in **two places**, as the Language Hour describes. It doesn't need to be beautiful. It needs to be dated, honest, and easy to read in ten minutes.

Here's what belongs in it:

- **The Hour log.** One line a day, kept by the student: date, minutes, language, input, real use with whom, can-do checked, carry phrase, and **Help I used:** ... (GOAL-05 Hour Log Keeper). The log is the backbone. It shows continuity better than anything else.
- **Goal cards and term reflections.** The weekly can-do goal cards from Chapter 1, and one term reflection each term (AS-08).
- **Dated checks.** The check set below: AS-01 through AS-06, each dated.
- **The reading log.** A list of books and texts finished, with the level if it's a graded reader. Count the finished books at the end of each term.
- **The word box count.** How many cards have reached the last review tab. A number your student can watch grow.
- **Writing samples.** A few journal pages, and at least one draft-and-redraft pair from Chapter 6, both versions kept.

- **Letters and messages.** Copies of letters to and from known pen friends or relatives, first names only.
- **A term recording.** One private recording each term (AS-06), stored in two places, never on a shared computer and never in an AI tool.
- **Projects.** Anything from the PROJ cards: a Visitor’s Guide, a Family Story Book, a Culture Presentation, a recipe script.
- **Who Made This? cards.** Clipped to anything a tool touched (TECH-06, Chapter 8). A piece with a card is never presented as unassisted work.
- **Contest or exam results,** if your student took an optional national exam or contest (Chapter 7). These are artifacts, not credentials.
- **Session notes.** Three lines after each tutor session, class, or community event.

What doesn’t belong: app streaks, app levels, screenshots of points, or anything that claims a fluency percentage. Those describe the app’s own exercises, not what your student can do with a person.

Keep photos to hands and work. If a project includes a photo, it shows the dish, the poster, or the hands holding the book. No faces.

The check set

Every chapter in this book ended with one check card in “What ‘done enough’ looks like.” Here they are in one place. Do the set once a term, or every few weeks for the self-check. Every check is done without tools.

Card	What it is	Who does it
AS-01 Can-Do Self-Check	Five can-do statements rated not yet / with help / on my own; dated	Student
AS-02 Listening Check	Gist and three details from an unseen short recording	Parent observes
AS-03 Reading Check	Main idea and details from an unseen easy text	Parent observes
AS-04 Unrehearsed Conversation	Three to five minutes on a familiar topic with someone who didn’t rehearse with the student; one parent line about what was understood and kept going	Parent observes
AS-05 Writing Sample, No Help	Fifteen minutes on a familiar topic; no tools, no notes; dated; never scored	Student, parent keeps
AS-06 Recording Snapshot	A private recording of a two-minute talk each term, kept in two places	Student, parent stores

Card	What it is	Who does it
AS-07 Portfolio Pick	One piece chosen, with a sentence on what it shows the student can do	Student
AS-08 Term Reflection	Goal cards compared with the work; next term's goals set	Student, with parent

Pair the self-check with an observed check. AS-01 is your student's own view. AS-02 through AS-05 are what you saw. Put them side by side. A study of learners using can-do self-assessment over time found that it tracked most of their gains, and that learners more often underrated themselves than overrated.¹²¹ That's one reason the pairing matters: your observed note often shows your student more than they'd claim.

Use the Can-Do Statements plainly. The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, explained in Chapter 1, give your student "I can..." lines to rate.¹²² Use their language to describe what your student can do. Don't award proficiency levels yourself. A home check can say "on my own: I can introduce myself and my family." It shouldn't say "Novice High certified." The family records what the student can do; it doesn't hand out ratings.

Mark it simply. Not yet / with help / on my own. Date every sheet. Keep every sheet.

AS-07 Portfolio Pick

- **Time:** 10 minutes
- **Materials:** the portfolio; a sticky note
- **Safety and privacy:** none beyond the usual
- **The fun:** choosing your own best evidence
- **The skill:** choosing one piece and saying what it shows you can do
- **The crumb:** the pick and one sentence

How it goes. Once a term, your student flips through the portfolio and picks one piece. On a sticky note, they finish the sentence "This shows I can..." and put it on the front.

11–12: you look through it together; your student chooses.

13–14: your student chooses alone and explains the choice to you.

AS-08 Term Reflection

- **Time:** 15 minutes
- **Materials:** the term's goal cards; the check set; a blank page
- **Safety and privacy:** none beyond the usual
- **The fun:** seeing a whole term at once
- **The skill:** comparing the goal cards with the work and setting next term's goals
- **The crumb:** the reflection page

How it goes. Your student lays out the goal cards and the term's checks. On one page, they answer four prompts, in the shape of the Hour's exit line: "This term I understood... I said (or signed, or wrote)... Now I can... Next term I want to..." Then they write two or three can-do goals for next term.

11–12: you talk it through first; your student writes.

13–14: your student writes it; you read it and add one line of your own.

If you'd like a short exchange to start, try this one:

"Which piece shows what you can do now — and what's your next can-do?"

Wait: count to five in your head, and let your student answer first.

A week of the Hour log (an illustration)

Here's how five lines might look for a 13-year-old learning French. Each line takes a minute to write at the end of Check and Carry.

Date	Min	Input	Real use, with whom	Can-do checked	Carry phrase	Help I used
Mon	45	podcast clip, 3 listens	rehearsed order with Dad	I can order a snack	[carry phrase]	dictionary
Tue	40	graded reader, ch. 3	—	I can tell what a chapter is about	[carry phrase]	none
Wed	50	class	community class, 6 learners	I can ask "how do you say...?"	[carry phrase]	teacher
Thu	40	song, lyric sheet	letter to pen friend (known program)	I can write about my weekend	[carry phrase]	answer key; translator checked one line (card)
Fri	45	review day	AS-01 self-check	—	[carry phrase]	none

The carry phrases are placeholders here; in a real log your student writes the phrase they actually used, checked. Notice the last column. A reader can see at a glance which work was the student's alone and where help came in. That honesty is what makes the whole portfolio believable.

At 11–12, you write the date and minutes, and your student fills in the rest. At 13–14, your student writes every column, and you glance at the week on Friday.

A can-do sheet (how to set it up)

One page. Five “I can...” lines across the top, chosen from the Can-Do Statements in your student’s own words. Three columns for each line: not yet, with help, on my own. A date at the top. Your student marks it alone, then you add one observed note at the bottom from that week’s AS-02, AS-03, or AS-04: “Understood the gist of an unseen clip and named three details.” Keep the old sheets in order. The stack of sheets, read front to back, is the clearest picture of a year you’ll have.

What progress looks like on paper

Here’s the honest picture, so neither of you expects the wrong thing.

In ACTFL’s terms, Novice learners communicate with words, lists, and memorized phrases. Intermediate learners create their own sentences and hold simple conversations.¹²³ State program descriptions offer a useful illustration of the pace: in some year-long school programs that start in middle school, a good first year in a language with an alphabet often lands around Novice Mid to Novice High, and Intermediate Low usually comes after two or more steady years. Reading often runs a step behind speaking and listening, and languages with a new writing system, especially characters, usually read slower at first.¹²⁴ Those are school programs, not promises for any one student; a daily Language Hour may move faster or slower.

On paper, healthy progress usually looks like this:

- **The can-do sheets move right.** More “with help,” then more “on my own,” on the same statements, across terms.
- **The writing samples get longer and more connected.** Lists turn into sentences, and sentences start to link.
- **The recordings get longer before they get more accurate.** That’s normal. Keep going comes before getting it right.
- **The reading log grows,** and the levels creep up.
- **Reading may lag,** especially with a new script.
- **Heritage profiles are uneven by design.** A heritage student may be well ahead in listening and speaking and just starting in reading and writing. Describe each skill on its own.

If the papers stop moving for a whole term, that’s information, not failure. Go back to Chapter 1’s goals and ask whether the input is too hard, the words aren’t being reviewed, or the student hasn’t had a real person to talk to.

Storing it, and sharing it

Two places. Keep the portfolio in two places: for example, a paper binder at home plus a scanned copy on a private family drive, or a private family drive plus an external drive kept at home. The Language Hour’s Family safety basics describe the rule. Recordings, especially, live in two private places and nowhere else: never on a shared computer and never in an AI tool. Records belong on paper or the family’s own drive, not on a computer shared with other people or with an agent.

Names and faces. First names only on letters and session notes. Hands-and-work photos only. If a record has to leave the house, remove anything that identifies other people, such as a pen friend's full name or a tutor's contact details.

Who decides what leaves the house. You do. At 13–14, your student helps choose what represents their work, but publishing anything — a video, a blog post, a project online — is optional and parent-decided. Local files come first.

When someone asks. If a co-op, a high school, or an evaluator asks about your student's language study, you rarely need the whole binder. Send a one-page summary in the shape of the illustrations below, plus two or three pieces: the latest can-do sheet with your observed note, a writing sample, and the reading log. Offer the rest on request. A placement teacher at a community class may want to hear your student speak for five minutes; that's often the best evidence of all.

Placement, not proof. When your student joins a class or moves to a new course, the portfolio helps someone place them by skill, not birthday. That's its job. It isn't meant to prove a level to a stranger, and you don't need to defend it like one.

Keep it boring. The best record system is the one nobody has to think about. A binder with five tabs, a dated folder on the family drive, and ten minutes at the end of each term to file what came in: that's the whole system. Families who build something elaborate in September usually abandon it by November. Families who keep it plain are still filing in May. If you find yourself color-coding, stop and file instead.

Let the student own part of it. At 11–12, the student files the Hour log and the word-box count; you file the checks. At 13–14, the student files almost everything and you look it over once a term. This isn't only about saving you time. A student who files their own work sees it pile up, and a growing stack is quiet, steady encouragement. Ask them once a term to pick the one piece they're proudest of and say why. Write their answer on a sticky note and put it on the front. Years from now, those notes will be the part of the binder everyone wants to read.

Hours

The Hour log adds up. Your student's minutes, totaled once a term, show how much steady work went in. A family Language Hour of about 40 minutes, five days a week, for 34 weeks comes to a bit over 110 hours in a year; more at 13–14, less at 11–12.

Hours matter for two reasons. They show continuity, which is what most people asking about a middle-school language want to know. And if your student does complete a full high-school-level course in grade 7 or 8 (see below), the log is part of the evidence.

Count real Language Hour time, classes, tutor sessions, and community events. Don't count app minutes beyond the short sessions the log already shows, and don't round up.

Transcript titles a stranger can read

Anyone who reads your student's record later should know at a glance what was studied. So name the course plainly:

- **Use the language's name.** Spanish, French, Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Korean, German, American Sign Language, and so on.
- **Or use a subject heading** if your report is organized that way: **World Language: [name]**, such as "World Language: Japanese."
- **For a heritage language**, add "(home language)" and a plain description: "Korean (home language)."
- **Never** a brand, an app level, or a book title. Not "Young Minds Spanish I," not an app's unit name, not this book's title.
- **No credits implied** for ordinary 11–14 study. Middle-school language work is listed as what it is: study in grade 6, 7, or 8, with a description.
- **No certificates.** This book doesn't issue them, and a family-made "certificate of fluency" helps no one.

A short description under the title does more than any label. Say how often your student studied, what they can do, and what's in the portfolio.

A note on grade 8

This paragraph covers an edge case. Most families won't need it. If your student completes a full high-school-level first course in a language in grade 7 or 8 (a real course with a syllabus, at a high-school pace), some families count it toward high school. Whether it counts is not something this book decides: check your state and any program you plan to use. The Home School Legal Defense Association's general guidance is that a one-year high-school course is usually worth 1.0 credit, with at least 150 logged hours for a core course. If it counts, a common way to show it is in the grade-9 section with the grade noted, for example "Spanish I (8th grade)," and keep the evidence: the Hour log, the syllabus or course outline, writing samples, and the checks.¹²⁵ Ordinary middle-school study under this book doesn't count as a high-school course, and nothing here should be read as awarding credit. *Languages for Emerging Adults* (15–18) covers high-school credits in full.

Heritage and ASL records

Heritage languages. Describe each skill separately, because they'll be uneven. A strong record might say: "Daily conversation with grandparents; reads the script and short texts; writing letters to relatives." Keep the Family Language Plan (Chapter 7) in the portfolio, along with heritage interview notes (first names only) and any family story book.

American Sign Language. Most ASL work is visual, so the portfolio leans on private recordings, kept in two places and never uploaded to an AI tool or a shared computer. Written work can be English with fingerspelling notes or glosses. Include the name of any Deaf-led class or program, and notes from Deaf community events. When a teacher signs off on a check, note it.

If records start to feel like a chore

Records should take about five minutes a day and an hour a term. If they're taking more, something is too elaborate. A few fixes:

- **The log line is too long.** Cut it to date, minutes, real use, carry phrase, and Help I used. Add the other columns back later.
- **The portfolio is a pile.** Use one folder per term with three pockets: checks, samples, everything else. At the end of the term, your student pulls one pick (AS-07) and the rest can be filed as is.
- **The checks feel like tests.** Say so out loud: "These aren't graded. They're how we see what changed." Never put a score or a letter grade on a check. If your student is anxious, do the observed checks inside an ordinary Hour so they feel like ordinary work.
- **Your student hates the self-check.** Some students underrate themselves and find it discouraging. Let them mark it, then show them your observed note, which usually says more than they did. Seeing both side by side is often the moment the records start to feel useful.

Two students. Each student keeps their own log, check set, and portfolio, even if they share Take It In. A shared Hour can be one line in each log. Keep their can-do sheets separate, too; comparing siblings' sheets helps no one.

Coming from *Languages for Little Thinkers*. If your student kept a younger portfolio, keep it, but start a fresh one at this level. Re-place your student by can-do (Chapter 1), not by how many years they've studied.

Examples (illustrations)

These are illustrations of how a record can read. They aren't reported families.

Illustration: Spanish (grade 7). Language Hour about 40 minutes, five days a week, 34 weeks. Reads graded readers for the main idea; writes short connected paragraphs about daily life; holds short unrehearsed conversations on familiar topics; can-do self-checks at Novice High in listening and speaking. Portfolio: Hour log, can-do sheets, reading log (11 books), journal samples, term recordings (kept privately).

Illustration: World Language: Japanese (grade 8). Reads and writes hiragana and katakana and about 80 kanji from a course; understands short dialogues; introduces self and family; weekly online class under family rules.

Illustration: American Sign Language (age 12). Weekly Deaf-led class plus daily practice; signs about daily routines, family, school, and hobbies; fingerspells; follows short signed stories.

Illustration: Korean (home language) (grade 6). Daily conversation with grandparents; reads Hangul and short texts; writing letters to relatives.

Illustration (grade-8 edge case): Spanish I (8th grade) — listed in the grade-9 section; course completed; about 150 hours logged; check state rules.

Notice what these share. Each names the language plainly. Each says how often and what the student can do. None claims fluency, a level certified by the family, or a credit for ordinary study.

Next steps

At the end of each term:

1. Your student does the check set and the term reflection.
2. You add the term's hours and finished-book count.
3. Your student picks one portfolio piece (AS-07).
4. You both store everything in two places.
5. Your student writes next term's can-do goals.

A year of records at a glance. By June, a steady year usually leaves behind: about 170 log lines; three term reflections; three recordings; three writing samples with no help; a stack of dated can-do sheets with your observed notes; a reading log; a word box count; a few letters; one or two projects; and a handful of Who Made This? cards. That's a full, honest record. It fits in one binder and one private folder, and it tells the story of a year far better than any single score could.

At the end of the year, write a short summary in the shape of the illustrations above, and keep it with the portfolio.

When your student turns 15, *Languages for Emerging Adults* picks up from here, with high-school credits, the Seal of Biliteracy where states offer it, exchanges, and study abroad.

Chapter 10

Resources



This chapter is a map, not a ranking. A resource is good for your family if it fits your student's language, level, and schedule, your own load as the parent, and your family's rules. The best resource on someone else's list may be the wrong one for you.

A few principles run through everything here:

- **People first, library first.** Before you buy anything or create any account, look at who's near you and what your library already has.

- **Fit, not rank.** Nothing here is listed as “the best.” Each kind of resource comes with the questions that tell you whether it fits.
- **No prices.** Prices change and vary. Ask, compare, and use your library.
- **Check current.** Anything with dates, ages, or terms (contests, platforms, apps, chatbots) changes. Check the current dates and terms before you plan.
- **Paper works.** Eighty of this book’s hundred activity cards need no device at all. A family with a library card, a notebook, and one person who speaks the language can run a full year.

A word on “free.” Many of the best resources here cost nothing: the library, a relative’s time, a conversation group, a public festival, the free parent references above. When something does cost money, ask what it replaces. A class that gives your student a weekly speaker may be worth more than three workbooks. An app subscription that replaces a weekly speaker usually isn’t. And before buying any course, borrow it, sample it, or ask another family who used it how the second half went, since many courses start strong and thin out. Fit, not rank, applies to spending too.

How to choose

When you’re looking at any resource, ask these questions:

1. **Does it give my student language they mostly understand?** Most of the Language Hour is input your student mostly understands. A resource that’s too hard, however impressive, mostly produces frustration.
2. **Are the voices real?** Recordings by speakers of the language, not synthesized voices, for anything your student will imitate.
3. **What’s the parent load?** Some resources need a parent who speaks the language. Others are built for a parent who’s learning too, with answer keys, recordings, and clear instructions.
4. **Does it support the script?** For a language with its own writing system, does the resource teach it step by step, with practice, or assume it?
5. **Does it place by skill?** Good resources let your student start where they are, not where their age says they should be.
6. **Does it fit the family rules?** For anything online: whose account, which room, what messages, what data. If you can’t answer those, wait.
7. **Does it leave room for people?** A resource that tries to replace the conversation partner is missing the point.

People first

Relatives and family friends. If anyone in your circle uses the language, start there. A weekly short call (PEOPLE-08, Chapter 7), a heritage interview (PEOPLE-03), or a shared recipe (CULT-02) is worth more than most purchases.

Community and heritage-language schools. Many communities have weekend or after-school programs run by families who share a language. Some welcome learners from outside the community. Call and ask about age, level, and whether a parent can stay nearby.

Library conversation groups. Many libraries host groups for learners of common languages. Ask at the desk.

Deaf-led ASL classes and events. For American Sign Language, look for classes taught by Deaf instructors and events run by Deaf organizations that welcome learners. The National Association of the Deaf’s page on learning ASL is a good starting point for families.¹²⁶

Co-ops. A homeschool co-op may already run a language class, or several families may share a tutor or a class together.

Tutors under the family rules. If you use a tutor, choose one who welcomes a parent’s presence, and run every session under the rules in Chapter 7. Platform age terms differ and change; check the current terms before you sign up.¹²⁷

Cultural centers and places of worship. Many welcome learners at public events. Go as a guest and follow their lead.

Your library

Your library may be the most underused language resource in your town. Ask about:

- **Graded readers and easy books** in your student’s language: books written for learners at a set level, and simple children’s books for a first reading stage.
- **Magazines, comics, and films** in the language, with captions in the language once reading has begun.
- **Audiobooks**, especially ones that match a book you can borrow, for Read, Listen, Read (Chapter 4).
- **Library-licensed language apps.** Many libraries license a language-learning app that’s free with a card. Check yours; one example is in the note.¹²⁸
- **Interlibrary loan.** If your branch doesn’t have readers in your language, a librarian can often borrow them from another library.
- **A librarian’s eye.** Ask for help by level and interest. Librarians often find better fits than any algorithm (OUT-01, Chapter 8).

For the parent

These are free references worth bookmarking. None of them is a course. Each helps you understand what your student is working toward or how to keep them safe.

- **NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements (2026).** The “I can...” statements this book paraphrases throughout, free for educational and nonprofit use with attribution.¹²⁹ Read the Novice and Intermediate pages with your student when you set goals.
- **World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages.** The national standards behind the “For the parent” quotes in each chapter. Skim the summary; you don’t need the whole document.¹³⁰

- **ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines overview.** A plain description of what Novice, Intermediate, and higher levels mean.¹³¹
- **AAP HealthyChildren: multilingual families.** The American Academy of Pediatrics' parent guidance on children learning more than one language.¹³²
- **AAP Family Media Plan.** A tool for writing your family's screen rules, which pairs well with the family tools rule in Chapter 8.¹³³
- **The children's privacy rule (COPPA).** The federal rule behind the 13 shift. The Federal Register page has the full text; your student only needs the one-line version.¹³⁴
- **FBI guidance on sextortion, and NCMEC's Take It Down and CyberTipline.** Read the FBI page once, so the calm box in Chapter 7 makes sense, and keep the reporting links where you can find them.¹³⁵
- **NAD: Learning American Sign Language,** for families learning ASL.¹²⁶

Courses and readers by fit

This book doesn't recommend a single course. Here are the kinds you'll find, described by style, with what each is good for.

Textbook-plus-audio courses for parent-led families. A student book, a workbook, recordings by speakers of the language, and an answer key. Good for a family where the parent is learning too and wants a clear sequence. Look for: real recorded voices, an answer key the parent can use, script instruction if your language needs it, and a pace you can sustain at four or five Hours a week. Use the course for Work With It; keep Take It In and Use It for Real full of other input and real people.

Graded-reader series. Several publishers produce graded readers by level for common languages. Good for the read-easy-and-often habit in Chapter 4. Look for: clear levels, an audio version, stories your student actually wants to read, and enough books at each level to read widely before moving up. Use READ-02 Count the Unknowns (Chapter 4) to place your student.

Online live classes. Small classes taught live by a teacher, often by video. Good for families with no local speakers. Look for: teachers who welcome a parent nearby, small groups, clear age policies, and a platform whose terms fit your family rules. The Family safety basics apply in full.

Heritage-school programs. Classes run by a community for children who grow up with the language. Good for literacy in a heritage language. Look for: classes grouped by skill, a warm attitude toward family varieties, and reading and writing taught on top of what students already understand.

Practice apps. Short, after the Hour, on parent-set accounts. Good for keeping words warm. Look for: recordings by speakers, review of old words, restricted social features for young users, and settings you can control. Scores and streaks aren't records (Chapter 8).

Dictionaries. A dictionary with example sentences and recordings by speakers, and a good printed dictionary for checks and low-device days. For ASL, video dictionaries made by Deaf signers or Deaf-led programs.

When a course, reader series, or app comes recommended, check it yourself before you buy or sign

up: is it still operating, does it fit your student's age and level, does it have real audio and script support, and do its terms fit your family? Programs change hands, change terms, and close.

Resources across the Hour

It helps to know which kind of resource serves which step of the Language Hour. A family that tries to make one resource do everything usually ends up with an Hour that's all workbook or all app.

Hour step	What it needs	Resources that fit
Goal and Greet	a can-do goal and a warm start	the Can-Do Statements; goal cards; a greeting with a person
Take It In	input your student mostly understands	recordings by speakers; graded readers; audiobooks; songs; films with captions in the language; for ASL, signed stories and Deaf-made videos
Work With It	practice that makes language stay	the word box; a course with an answer key; the pattern notebook; a short practice set (labeled made by a tool if a tool made it)
Use It for Real	a real person or a real purpose	relatives; a class; a tutor under the rules; a letter to a known pen friend; a community event
Check and Carry	a quick check and a phrase to keep	the exit line; the Hour log; Help I used

If one row of the table is empty for your family, that's where to look next. For most families starting out, it's Use It for Real.

A first month of setting up

You don't need everything on day one. Here's a calm order for the first four weeks.

Week 1. Get a library card if you don't have one, and visit with your student. Ask a librarian about readers, audiobooks, films, any conversation group, and any licensed language app. Find a dictionary with recordings by speakers, and borrow or buy a printed one. Set up the word box.

Week 2. Choose one source of daily input your student mostly understands: a set of recordings, a graded reader at the right level, or a beginner course's audio. Choose, or confirm, the course or book you'll use for Work With It. Write the family tools rule (Chapter 8).

Week 3. Find one person. A relative for a weekly call, a community class, a conversation group, or a Deaf-led event. If it's a tutor, check the platform's current terms, write the family rules on one page, and send them before the first lesson (Chapter 7).

Week 4. Put dates on the calendar: one community contact a month, a term check set (Chapter 9), and any optional contest dates, checked current. Start your family resource list.

By the end of the month, you'll have a steady Hour and most of what you need for the year. Everything after that is adjustment.

When a resource stops working

Every resource wears out eventually. Signs it's time to change:

- **The input is too easy.** Your student understands everything on the first listen and is bored. Move up a level, or switch from graded readers to simple everyday texts (Chapter 4).
- **The input is too hard.** Your student understands little even on the third listen, or the reading log stalls. Move down a level. This isn't going backward. It's placing by skill.
- **The course has taken over the Hour.** Every day is workbook pages. Keep the course for Work With It and bring back real input and real people.
- **A class or tutor isn't a fit.** Your student dreads it, or it doesn't follow the family rules. End it kindly and look again.
- **An app has become the point.** Your student cares more about the streak than the language. Pause it for a month and see whether anyone misses it.

Before you buy or sign up for something new, look at what you already have. Most families own more than they use: a course that was set aside after a hard week, a shelf of readers that were too difficult in the fall and may be just right now, a library card that reaches more than anyone remembers. Try the old thing again at the new level first. Often the resource didn't fail. It was simply early.

Ask your student. At 13–14 especially, students usually know before you do when something has stopped working. Ask a plain question once a month: “What's helping most right now, and what feels like a waste of time?” Take the answer seriously, even when it surprises you. A student who helps choose the next resource is far more likely to use it. Write their answer in the Hour log so you can look back at it at the end of the term and see how their judgment has grown.

Keep a short graveyard list. On the last page of your resource list, write down anything you stopped using and why: “Too easy by March,” “Streak became the point.” It saves you from buying the same thing twice, and it's useful if a younger sibling starts later.

Change one thing at a time, and give each change two or three weeks before you judge it. A little every day, with resources that fit, is how a year adds up.

Questions to ask before you sign up

Whether it's a class, a tutor, a heritage school, or an online program, a short phone call or message answers most of what you need. Here are the questions worth asking, in plain words.

For a class or heritage school:

- What ages and levels are in the class, and how do you place new students?
- How much of each class is in the language?
- Do students read and write, or mainly speak?
- Can a parent stay on site or nearby?
- How do you handle different family varieties of the language?
- What would my student do at home between classes?

For a tutor:

- Are you comfortable with a parent in the room (11–12) or within earshot (13–14)?
- Will you keep all contact on the platform, and use first names only?
- How do you plan a lesson for a beginner who mostly understands but speaks little?
- How do you correct? (Listen for prompts during practice and no interruptions during real conversation.)
- Will you send short notes after each lesson that my student can put in the log?

For an online program or app:

- What's the minimum age, and what does the parent control? Check the current terms.
- Who can message my student, if anyone?
- What happens to recordings and written work?
- Can social features, leaderboards, and chat be turned off?

If an answer makes you uneasy, that's enough. You don't need to explain.

Resources by script

If your student's language uses a writing system other than the Latin alphabet, the script is often the first thing a resource gets right or wrong. Look for these supports.

- **Another alphabet** (Cyrillic for Russian, Greek, Armenian, and others): a letter-by-letter introduction with audio, a few weeks of reading practice with very easy words, and handwriting practice. Give a new alphabet a few steady weeks before judging how it's going.
- **Abjads and connected scripts** (Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, Urdu): letter shapes in each position, vowel marks in beginner materials, right-to-left practice, and a keyboard setting for later.
- **Syllabic or featural scripts** (Korean Hangul, Japanese kana): a clear chart, audio for every sound, and early reading of real words. Many learners find a small, regular script like Hangul comes sooner than they expected.
- **Characters** (Chinese, Japanese kanji): characters introduced slowly, with stroke order, meaning, sound, and a romanization alongside while reading begins. Expect reading to run

slower; that's normal (Chapter 9).

- **Abugidas** (Hindi's Devanagari, and many scripts of South and Southeast Asia): consonant-vowel combinations taught in a logical order, with audio and plenty of short readings.

For any script, a good resource keeps the script and the sound together and gives your student real, easy words to read early. If a resource leans on romanization for months, it may be putting off the script more than teaching it.

Resources for particular situations

You're learning too, or you don't speak the language. Choose resources with recordings by speakers and answer keys. Be the first listener. Plan a live speaker at least once a month. "Let's find out together" is a perfectly good sentence.

Your student has passed you. Celebrate it. Keep the safety role and the talk-box questions, and ask your student to teach you five words a week (WORD-08). Bring in a class or tutor for the language model you can no longer provide.

A heritage teen. Look for heritage-school programs and readers that build literacy on a strong ear. The Family Language Plan (Chapter 7) is your most important resource. The elders in the family are the rest.

An ASL family or ASL as a choice. Deaf-led classes and events come first. Video dictionaries and lessons made by Deaf signers come next. The NAD's learning page is the place to begin.¹²⁶

Starting fresh at 13–14. Choose resources that place by skill. Novice is normal at the start, whatever the age, and older starters often move faster at first.

Learning differences. Shorter blocks, more listening, and audio for every text help many students. If reading is hard in every language, consider an evaluation with a professional. For anxiety, private practice first and recordings only the family hears.

Short days, sick days, and travel. A fifteen-minute Hour counts: review, one listen, the exit line. On a trip, keep Goal and Greet and Check and Carry, and collect one carry phrase a day. A trip is a reward for the Hour, not a replacement for it.

Your own resource list

By the end of the first term, write your family's list on one page. Keep it in the front of the portfolio. Here's a simple shape:

People: [names of classes, groups, relatives, and events, first names only] **Library:** [branch, librarian's name if they're your helper, what you borrow most] **Course or books:** [what you use for Work With It] **Readers:** [series and level now] **Recordings:** [where daily input comes from] **Tools:** [dictionary; app, if any; family tools rule date] **Safety plan:** [the one-page family rules, date last reviewed] **Dates to check:** [any contest, class term, or platform terms to recheck]

Revise it each term. The list will change as your student grows, and that's the point.

Optional exams and contests

Some languages have national exams or contests that middle-school students can take. They're optional and low-stakes. A student who enjoys a target date may love one; a student who doesn't loses nothing by skipping. Results go in the portfolio as artifacts (Chapter 9). They aren't credentials, and they aren't certificates from this book.

- **A national Spanish exam** for grades 6–12. Homeschool families can take part, but they can't self-register; a parent arranges an independent proctor.¹³⁶
- **A national French contest** that lets homeschool parents register much as teachers do, with middle-school levels for grades 7–8.¹³⁶
- **Other languages** may have their own exams or contests, often run by a national teachers' association for that language. Ask a teacher, a heritage school, or the association.

Every one of these sets its own dates and rules each year. Check current dates and rules before you plan, and give yourself time to arrange a proctor if one is needed (OUT-07, Chapter 7).

Low-device and no-device homes

A family can run this whole book with very little technology. Eighty of the hundred activity cards need no device, and most of the rest need one only briefly.

What a low-device year needs:

- **A library card**, for readers, audiobooks on loan, and films watched together.
- **A printed dictionary** and a textbook with an answer key.
- **Index cards** for the word box (WORD-01, Chapter 3).
- **A notebook** for the log, the journal, and the pattern notebook.
- **Paper letters** to known pen friends or relatives (WRITE-08).
- **People**: a class, a conversation group, a relative, or a community event once a month.
- **One playback device** for recordings, used for Take It In and nothing else.

For ASL in a low-device home, a Deaf-led class and community events carry most of the load, with a short video lesson or dictionary check on a family device when needed.

If your family keeps screens to a minimum, the AAP Family Media Plan (above) can help you write that down, and the family tools rule in Chapter 8 can be very short.

Keep this chapter close for the first month, and then let it go. Once your family has a library routine, one steady source of input, a course for Work With It, and at least one person to talk with, you have what you need. Come back here when something stops working, when your student moves up a level, or when a new term begins and the dates need checking.

The series

This book is the second in the SMF WisdomForge Languages series. Each title stands on its own; none depends on another.

- ***Languages for Little Thinkers*** (ages 5–10). For younger siblings: play, songs, and stories before print, with the same habits of a little every day.
- ***Languages for Emerging Adults*** (ages 15–18). Picks up where this book ends, with high-school credits, the Seal of Biliteracy where states offer it, exchanges, and study abroad.
- ***Languages Refresh for Adults***. For parents and other adults starting or returning to a language for themselves.
- ***Teaching World Languages*** is the WisdomForge guide for teaching languages across grades 1–12, covering seven languages.

The other Young Minds books follow the same Hour, talk box, and try-it pattern for ages 11–14:

- ***Science for Young Minds*** — the same patient, hands-on approach for science.
- ***Art for Young Minds*** — looking, making, and talking about art.
- ***Computing for Young Minds*** — computing and AI with the same age-banded safety rules you’ve met here.

Whichever you pick up next, the idea is the same as this one: **Understand first; then try it for real; check what you can do; a little every day.**

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 on 20 October 2026, and the notes say so. 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 language learning studies school classrooms, laboratories, or college students, not young teens 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: 20 October 2026, unless a note says otherwise.

Notes

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83. NCSSFL and ACTFL, *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements* (2026), <https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements>, accessed October 20, 2026; ACTFL, *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024*, <https://www.actfl.org/proficiency-guidelines-overview>. Paraphrased, not reprinted; used for educational purposes with attribution. Paraphrase checked against the 2026 benchmark chart, accessed 20 October 2026.

84. ACTFL, *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* (Alexandria, VA: ACTFL, 2015), https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/ACTFLPerformance_Descriptors.pdf. 2015 edition; paraphrased, checked against the PDF accessed 20 October 2026.

85. The National Standards Collaborative Board, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 4th ed. (Alexandria, VA: Author, 2015), Communication goal area, interpersonal mode, <https://actfl.org/uploads/files/general/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf>.

86. Roy Lyster and Kazuya Saito, “Oral Feedback in Classroom SLA: A Meta-Analysis,” *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 32, no. 2 (2010): 265–302, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0272263109990520>. Fifteen classroom studies, N = 827; prompts outperformed recasts; younger learners benefited more. Volume, issue, and pages checked against the publisher record, accessed 20 October 2026.

87. 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>.

88. *otra vez* (Spanish, “again, once more”), *encore* (French, “still; more; again”), and *langsam* (German, “slow; slowly”). Wiktionary, s.vv. “otra vez,” https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/otra_vez, “encore,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/encore#French>, and “langsam,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/langsam>, accessed October 20, 2026. Mandarin 慢 *màn* (“slow”) and Korean 다시 *dasi* (“again, once more”) are common equivalents for the card: Wiktionary, s.vv. “慢,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E6%85%A2>, and “다시,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%EB%8B%A4%EC%8B%9C>, accessed October 20, 2026. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.

89. 안녕하세요 *annyeonghaseyo* (Korean, “hello; how are you?”). Wiktionary, s.v. “안녕하세요,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%EC%95%88%EB%85%95%ED%95%98%EC%84%B8%EC%9A%94>, accessed October 20, 2026. Romanization checked against the Wiktionary entry. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.

90. *Wie bitte?* (German, “Pardon? Come again?”, used to ask for a repeat). Wiktionary, s.v. “wie bitte,” https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/wie_bitte, accessed October 20, 2026. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.

91. *salamat* (Tagalog, “thank you”) and *obrigado* (Portuguese, “thank you”; *obrigada* is the form commonly used by female speakers). Wiktionary, s.vv. “salamat,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/salamat#Tagalog>, and “obrigado,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/obrigado>, accessed October 20, 2026. Wiktionary lists *obrigada* as the female equivalent of *obrigado*, so it is the form female speakers usually say. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.

92. The National Standards Collaborative Board, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 4th ed. (Alexandria, VA: Author, 2015), Communication goal area, presentational mode, <https://actfl.org/uploads/files/general/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf>.
93. *Tengo veinte años* (Spanish, “I am twenty,” literally “I have twenty years”), usage example under *tener*, “to have (a measure or age).” Wiktionary, s.v. “tener,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/tener#Spanish>, accessed October 20, 2026. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.
94. *Elle a 19 ans* (French, “She is 19 years old,” literally “She has 19 years”), usage example under *avoir*. Wiktionary, s.v. “avoir,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/avoir#French>, accessed October 20, 2026. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.
95. *papá* (Spanish, “dad”) and *papa* (Spanish, “pope”; also “potato” in Latin America, the US, and some regions of Spain). Wiktionary, s.vv. “papá,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/pap%C3%A1>, and “papa,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/papa#Spanish>, accessed October 20, 2026. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.
96. *où* (French, “where”) and *ou* (French, “or”). Wiktionary, s.vv. “où,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/o%C3%B9>, and “ou,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/ou#French>, accessed October 20, 2026. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.
97. *Haus* (German, “house”). Wiktionary, s.v. “Haus,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Haus>, accessed October 20, 2026. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.
98. شكر *shukran* (Arabic, “thanks, thank you”). Wiktionary, s.v. “شكر,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%D8%B4%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7>, accessed October 20, 2026. Romanization checked against the Wiktionary entry. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.
99. ありがとう *arigatō* (Japanese, “thank you”). Wiktionary, s.v. “ありがとう,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E3%81%82%E3%82%8A%E3%81%8C%E3%81%A8%E3%81%86>, accessed October 20, 2026. Confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>), accessed 20 October 2026.
100. The National Standards Collaborative Board, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 4th ed. (Alexandria, VA: Author, 2015), Communities standard, School and Global Communities, <https://actfl.org/uploads/files/general/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf>.
101. Maria Carreira and Olga Kagan, “The Results of the National Heritage Language Survey: Implications for Teaching, Curriculum Design, and Professional Development,” *Foreign Language Annals* 44, no. 1 (2011): 40–64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2010.01118.x>. Survey of 1,732 college heritage learners across 22 languages; volume, issue, and pages checked against the publisher record, accessed 20 October 2026.
102. 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).

103. Annick De Houwer, “Parental Language Input Patterns and Children’s Bilingual Use,” *Applied Psycholinguistics* 28, no. 3 (2007): 411–24, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0142716407070221>.

104. American Academy of Pediatrics, “Young Children Learning Multiple Languages: Parent FAQs,” [HealthChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx), last updated November 20, 2025, <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx>. Advocacy and medical-organization guidance, labeled as such.

105. Library-licensed language apps vary by library. One example: Mango Languages, “Find Mango,” <https://mangolanguages.com/find-mango/> (vendor page; accessed 20 October 2026; page live). Named as an example, not an endorsement; check your own library.

106. National Association of the Deaf, “Learning American Sign Language,” <https://nad.org/knowledge-hub/american-sign-language/learning-american-sign-language/> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live). See also National Association of the Deaf, “Position Statement on American Sign Language,” <https://nad.org/knowledge-hub/position-statements/position-statement-on-american-sign-language/>.

107. American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, “National Spanish Exam,” <https://nationalspanishexam.org/exams/national-spanish-exam/>, and “Individualized Testing Plans,” <https://nationalspanishexam.org/resources/exam-proctoring/individualized-testing-plans/>; grades 6–12; homeschool families can’t self-register, and a parent arranges an independent proctor; 2026–27 registration listed as 15 October 2026–1 February 2027, testing 22 February–2 April 2027 (check current). American Association of Teachers of French, “National French Contest,” <https://www.frenchteachers.org/nfc-home>, and “NFC Secondary Contest,” <https://www.frenchteachers.org/nfc-secondary-contest>; homeschool parents register as teachers do or through a chapter administrator; students in grades 7–8 take middle-school levels; the 2026 window was 12 February–10 April 2026, and the 2027 window was not yet posted (check current). All accessed 20 October 2026.

108. italki, “Terms of Service,” <https://www.italki.com/en/tos>; italki Help Center, “For Parents, Your Guide to Kids Learning on italki,” <https://support.italki.com/hc/en-us/articles/6732554220825-For-parents-your-guide-to-kids-learning-on-italki>; and “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> (vendor pages). Preply, “Terms of Service” (updated 25 November 2025), https://termsofuse.preply.com/terms_of_use/en_TermsOfService.pdf, and “Privacy Policy” (1 June 2026), https://termsofuse.preply.com/terms_of_use/en_PrivacyPolicy.pdf (vendor pages). All accessed 20 October 2026. Named as examples of differing terms, not as recommendations; terms change.

109. Guidance as summarized in this box; the FBI page could not be opened by automated check on 20 October 2026, so the steps are kept general and match NCMEC’s guidance. Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Sextortion,” <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/scams-and-safety/common-frauds-and-scams/sextortion>; and FBI Kansas City Field Office, “On Safer Internet Day, FBI Warns About the Dangers of Sextortion Schemes Against Minors,” <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/kansascity/news/on-safer-internet-day-fbi-warns-about-the-dangers-of-sextortion-schemes-against-minors>. Guidance as summarized in the research file: block strangers; never move chats to another platform; never send more or pay; save messages and usernames; tell

a trusted adult; it isn't the young person's fault; report. Accessed 20 October 2026.

110. NCMEC, "Take It Down," <https://takeitdown.ncmec.org/> (page live, accessed 20 October 2026); NCMEC CyberTipline, <https://report.cybertip.org/> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live); FBI tips, <https://tips.fbi.gov/> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live).

111. Non-English words in this chapter, each confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>, accessed 20 October 2026): *Bonjour* (French, "hello"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/bonjour>; *abuela* (Spanish, "grandmother"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/abuela>; 할머니 *halmeoni* (Korean, "grandmother"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/할머니>; *gracias* (Spanish, "thank you"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/gracias>; *Danke* (German, "thank you"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Danke>; 谢谢 *xièxie* (Mandarin, "thank you"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/谢谢>; *receta* (Spanish, "recipe"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/receta>; *salamat* (Tagalog, "thank you"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/salamat>. ASL: no specific signs are described in this chapter; fingerspelling and greetings are learned from a Deaf teacher or a checked source.

112. William H. Walters and Esther Isabelle Wilder, "Fabrication and Errors in the Bibliographic Citations Generated by ChatGPT," *Scientific Reports* 13 (2023), <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-41032-5> (authors confirmed on the article page, 20 October 2026). Adult research context; cited here only for the general point that chatbots can invent citations.

113. The National Standards Collaborative Board, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 4th ed. (Alexandria, VA: Author, 2015), Comparisons standard, Language Comparisons, <https://actfl.org/uploads/files/general/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf>.

114. Machine-translation research reviewed at summary level only; no figures are used. Sangmin-Michelle Lee, "The Effectiveness of Machine Translation in Foreign Language Education: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Computer Assisted Language Learning* 36, no. 1–2 (2023): 103–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1901745> (published online 2021; record checked accessed 20 October 2026). Not named in the body.

115. Non-English words in this chapter, each confirmed in Wiktionary (<https://en.wiktionary.org/>, accessed 20 October 2026): *obrigado / obrigada* (Portuguese, "thank you," masculine and feminine forms), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/obrigado> and <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/obrigada>; *biblioteca* (Spanish, "library"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/biblioteca>; спасибо *spasibo* (Russian, "thank you"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/спасибо>; شكر *shukran* (Arabic, "thank you"), <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/شكر>. Wiktionary lists *obrigada* as the female equivalent of *obrigado*. ASL: no specific signs are described in this chapter.

116. Company names, dates, and links for these age terms are in the Language Hour, note 16 (vendor pages, accessed 20 October 2026; check the current terms). Not repeated here.

117. Pew Research Center, "How Teens Use and View AI," February 24, 2026, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2026/02/24/how-teens-use-and-view-ai/>. Survey of 1,458 US teens ages 13–17, conducted September 25–October 9, 2025. Accessed 20 October 2026.

118. No study was found on chatbot conversation practice for language learners ages 11–14 (literature search, 20 October 2026). The 13–14 limits in this chapter are a family rule, not a research finding.

119. Duolingo, “Privacy,” <https://www.duolingo.com/privacy>, and “Terms,” <https://www.duolingo.com/terms> (vendor pages; accessed 20 October 2026): under-13 accounts are created through a parent’s email, with restricted social features and non-personalized ads. Named as an example of how one app handles young users, not as an endorsement.

120. National Center for Education Statistics, *Homeschooling in the United States: Results from the 2012 and 2016 Parent and Family Involvement Survey* (NCES 2020-001), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020001.pdf>. Subjects taught that year, foreign language, grades 6–8: 30 percent (total 32; grades 3–5, 40; grades 9–12, 35). Primary PDF opened 20 October 2026.

121. Wenyue Ma and Paula Winke, “Self-Assessment: How Reliable Is It in Assessing Oral Proficiency over Time?,” *Foreign Language Annals* 52, no. 1 (2019): 66–86, <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12379>. Low-stakes use.

122. NCSSFL and ACTFL, *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements*, 2026, <https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live). Paraphrased and pointed to, not reprinted; free for educational and nonprofit use with attribution; commercial use or sale prohibited.

123. ACTFL, *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024*, <https://www.actfl.org/proficiency-guidelines-overview> (accessed 20 October 2026).

124. 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/>; Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, “Proficiency Targets,” <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/World-Languages-and-Cultures/Proficiency-Levels/Proficiency-Targets>. Program illustrations, described in words only; check the current pages before relying on any target. See also ACTFL, *ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners* (Alexandria, VA: ACTFL, 2015), https://www.actfl.org/uploads/files/general/ACTFLPerformance_Descriptors.pdf.

125. Home School Legal Defense Association, “3 Ways to Determine My Teen’s High School Course Credit,” <https://hsllda.org/post/3-ways-to-determine-my-teens-high-school-course-credit> (1.0 credit for a one-year course; at least 150 logged hours for 1.0 credit in a core course, including foreign language), and HSLDA Transcripts, “User Guide,” <https://transcripts.hsllda.org/help>; both accessed 20 October 2026. Whether middle-school work counts depends on your state and any program you use; this book makes no credit claim. Flagged paragraph (D-15). Non-English words in this chapter: none beyond language names and the Spanish HSLDA post title.

126. National Association of the Deaf, “Learning American Sign Language,” <https://nad.org/knowledge-hub/american-sign-language/learning-american-sign-language/> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live).

127. Examples of differing platform terms are in Chapter 7, note 9 (italki and Preply; vendor pages; accessed 20 October 2026). Not endorsements.

128. Mango Languages, “Find Mango,” <https://mangolanguages.com/find-mango/> (vendor page; accessed 20 October 2026; page live; operating, with a library finder). An example of a library-licensed app, not an endorsement; availability depends on your library. No price given.

129. NCSSFL and ACTFL, *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements*, 2026, <https://www.actfl.org/educator-resources/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live). Educational and nonprofit use with attribution; commercial use or sale prohibited.
130. 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> (accessed 20 October 2026; PDF live).
131. ACTFL, *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2024*, <https://www.actfl.org/proficiency-guidelines-overview> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live).
132. 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 November 20, 2025, <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/7-Myths-Facts-Bilingual-Children-Learning-Language.aspx> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live).
133. American Academy of Pediatrics, “Family Media Plan,” [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/fmp/Pages/MediaPlan.aspx), <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/fmp/Pages/MediaPlan.aspx> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live).
134. Federal Trade Commission, “Children’s Online Privacy Protection Rule,” *Federal Register*, April 22, 2025, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/22/2025-05904/childrens-online-privacy-protection-rule> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live). Compliance date April 22, 2026.
135. Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Sextortion,” <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/scams-and-safety/common-frauds-and-scams/sextortion> (the FBI page could not be opened by automated check on 20 October 2026; cited for its general guidance, which matches NCMEC’s); FBI tips, <https://tips.fbi.gov/> (page live); NCMEC, “Take It Down,” <https://takeitdown.ncmec.org/> (page live: a free service for images taken before 18, working with participating platforms); NCMEC CyberTipline, <https://report.cybertip.org/> (page live). All accessed 20 October 2026.
136. American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, “National Spanish Exam,” <https://nationalspanishexam.org/exams/national-spanish-exam/> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live): grades 6–12; homeschoolers arrange an independent proctor; 2026–27 registration 15 October 2026–1 February 2027, testing 22 February–2 April 2027. American Association of Teachers of French, “National French Contest,” <https://www.frenchteachers.org/nfc-home> (accessed 20 October 2026; page live): homeschool parents register as teachers do or through a chapter administrator; 2027 window not yet posted. Check current. Non-English words in this chapter: none.