

Chapter 1 : berlitz basic french course book | Download eBook PDF/EPUB

Berlitz Basic French A complete beginner s conversational course The bestselling, beginning language course from Berlitz, Berlitz Basic French concentrates on everyday conversation and authentic situations, and Berlitz has tailored the materials so learners become comfortable with the most frequently required words and phrases.

I recall poor Mr Myers as being terribly uptight, desiccated and "naturally" ridiculously old. In all likelihood he was laid-back, lubricious and absurdly youthful; either way, he dutifully drilled us through the chapters, which featured the predictable little screeds on the doings of stock French characters "Chantal, Pierre, their parents M and Mme Hulot" followed by exercises on grammar: Both my parents had a smattering of French; however, neither of them was a natural linguist either. Then again, I was being instructed in a class of 30 pubescent boys, most of whom had nothing much on our minds save for "pubescence. Suffice to say, my French did not advance by leaps, let alone bounds. Nevertheless, I wanted to go to university, and even back in the carefree s, we still knew that you needed an O-level language pass to matriculate" so I dutifully boned up a couple of weeks before the exams and scraped my C grade. End of story" or at least a seeming terminus. I was obsessed by language all right, but only the one I spoke with great fluency already. As I grew older and went through life, I met people who had a smattering of French, even those who had considerably more. In my late teens and early twenties I had a girlfriend who was a natural linguist, and who would go away on holiday to Tunisia and come back able to get along in Arabic. This was impressive, certainly, but I managed to convince myself that it was by no means essential: I prided myself on taking care of the latter" so what if I felt a certain amount of embarrassment when I was on the continent? I could still sit at a zinc counter and convincingly call for un paquet de Gauloises and a marc de Bourgogne; what more did a man need? Then, in my early thirties when my books began to be published in France, and I found myself travelling to France on a regular basis to meet my editors, to do media interviews, and even readings, the situation changed. I was delighted to discover that my basic French, far from remaining entirely dormant" or even senescent" within me, had in fact mysteriously grown. Armed with this and a curious braggadocio, I stormed the Left Bank. In those years, I would dare to conduct press conferences in my "French", interrupt interpreters who were chuchoter doing simultaneous translation for me when I appeared on TV shows, and generally trying to give the impression that I was a Samuel Beckett in the making. Needless to say, this emboldened me. I spent still more time there, and even began to labour a full-blown delusion: But the truth of the matter was, I could get by in an extremely proscribed fashion, while my newspaper reading was confined to headlines and standfirsts. What forced me to confront the reality was a weekend I spent in Paris with my eldest son when he was swotting in the traditional lacklustre way for his own GCSE. I resolved that in order to help him we would speak in French entirely, and took a dictionary and grammar with me to check what we were saying. All those years I had been confidently saying things such as "the theory Foucault what has sexuality human up leads on"; or, more prosaically, "station will show go you way me? In the subsequent years, I relapsed into muteness when with French friends and colleagues, while loathing the way they had to speak English because the Anglo-Saxon yokel was with them. I began to feel that lacking at least one other language was a form of stupidity like any other" but the consciousness of what might be entailed were I to decide to learn French properly left me psychically hamstrung. I had to try. Back in the s, Berlitz used to advertise extensively on the London tube" jokey, encouraging ads. When I went in to see them, their suggestions conformed with my own ideas: The Berlitz method consists of speaking in French from the get-go: Of course, some examples are written up on the board or on paper, but the emphasis is very much on the spoken tongue: Translation, Arlette told me" in French of course" is the enemy: On a few exhilarating occasions during the week I found myself wholly thinking and speaking in French, then, like a tightrope walker who looks precipitately down, I saw the firm ground of my native tongue below me, teetered, and fell. I feel my resolve stiffened and will go on with bi-weekly lessons, plus home study, throughout the rest of the year, aiming for a second intensive course in the late autumn, just before my next roman is published in France. Hopefully, by then, I will be able to more than get by. Add to this the increasing ubiquity

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of foreign English speakers, and you have a recipe for a right tight little island of yokels. Walking to Hollywood will be published by Bloomsbury in August Topics.

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