

Bonus

How to use a Vocabulary Notebook

The basics

Divide the page in two columns, write words in your target language on the left column, and translations in the right column. This way, you can cover one column and train your memory by guessing the words or their translations. Do this daily to achieve the best results. Write new words in the notebook as you discover them. When possible, write phrases or chunks of sentences rather than isolated words. Words are easier to remember and reuse if you learn them in context.

Keeping the list under control

If you are like most French learners, you will likely run into this problem: your vocabulary list grows very fast and tends to get out of control. This is particularly annoying if you use a vocabulary notebook, and you watch your notebook getting filled with way more words than you can review in your 10 minutes daily session, let alone remember them.

Here is how to avoid this. First, be mindful of the words you write in your notebook. If your brain is normal, and you study everyday as recommended, you can expect to learn about 10 words a day. So, if you write much more than ten words a day in your notebook, you will have a problem. To avoid this problem, write down only the words that you will always need. For example "maison" (house/home) is obviously more useful than "bric-a-brac" (paraphernalia), so even if it's tempting to write down all the fancy words, do your best to stick to the most useful words for now. You can learn all the advanced words when you're an advanced student. Not sure a word deserves to go in the list or not? In doubt, don't add the word. If the word is important, you will see it again later and then you'll know to add it.

Trimming your list

Even if you are really mindful of the words you write down, your list will eventually get too long for you to review it in one sitting. Besides, you will have a lot of words in there that you already know and don't need to review anymore. When your list becomes cluttered and inefficient, it's time for a little trimming. You can decide to do this periodically (schedule it in your calendar!), each time you have filled a complete notebook, or whenever you feel that your list has got out of control.

During your trimming session, you will copy your list to a new page or a new notebook, and discard all words you don't need to learn anymore. Discard two types of words:

- Those you know by heart.
- Those you don't need after all. If it turns out that a word is less important than you thought, discard it. Make room for words you do need.

Once you're done, resume your regular vocab study with the new, shorter list. It will feel much easier and more encouraging.

Advanced vocabulary notebook: the Goldlist method

This is an advanced method to learn, which has a trimming technique built-in. It's a bit complex and better explained in video. I recommend this one if you are curious: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19BS-yQx2y8>

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Cheatsheet

Do:

- Break the page in two columns: one for the word and one for the translation.
- When possible, write chunks rather than isolated words.
- Cover the translation and try to guess it as you review your vocab. Then cover the French words and try to guess them.
- Write only the words you absolutely need to learn. If you're not sure, don't write the word. Important words will show up again.
- Learn your vocabulary everyday for 10 minutes
- Trim your list periodically. Remove the words you know by heart, and the words you don't need.
- Keep learning.
- Trust the process. It doesn't have to be perfect.
- If you find that the vocabulary notebook doesn't work for you, after you've tried for a few weeks, try a different vocabulary learning technique.

Don't:

- Write the translation right next to the word.
- Mindlessly read the list when you review the words.
- Write any word you see that you don't know yet. Many words are not important and will only take space in your notebook and your brain.
- Procrastinate or try to catch up by learning longer once a week. 10 minutes a day is more efficient than 2 hours once a week.
- Get overwhelmed or frustrated because the list grows too long.
- Be a perfectionist. It doesn't have to be perfect.
- Give up.