

French: A Good Choice for High School and College

Why did I study French? My logic was simple and driven by ambition—my older sister had opted for Spanish and I had no intention of following in her footsteps. To set myself apart and avoid having to live up to her highly-set standards, I chose French.

Experience in High School

I can honestly say that French bolstered my abilities to write in English by teaching me those oh so important “SAT words,” like efficacious and perspicacious. I believe that any Romance language will enrich an English-speaker’s vocabulary; for me it happened to be French. French, however, did present me with an excellent foundation from which to learn other languages, be they Romance or not.

Knowing French certainly has expanded my horizons and allowed me to read documents that would have otherwise been inaccessible. It is true that the most important works are well-translated into English, but what about the new, cutting-edge ones or even critiques of the old? Have you ever tried a banal search on Wikipedia? You may be amazed to find that much is written in French, especially about topics that occurred in France, and if you study history, you know there are quite a few of those.

At the time of my high school graduation, I was quite fortunate to receive an award and be sent to Paris to study for a summer. Living life *en francais* supplemented what I had been learning in a classroom setting. We must not forget that languages are spoken in real life by real people! I know that people learn languages for different reasons, and the goal may not be for the “practical” purposes we often hear. Living, even if only briefly, in France, however, showed me that those practical purposes actually *do* exist if they are what one wants.

Experiences as an undergraduate

As for now, I am an Arabic and Italian major at Georgetown University in Washington, DC—pursuing a minor in French. French certainly facilitated my study of Italian due to the lexical and grammatical similarities. I would avoid saying any language is *easier* than any other, but I do feel that starting with French was to my benefit because of the more unique pronunciation system and less intuitive, albeit regular pronunciation.

During my sophomore summer, I was an intern at the French Consulate General of Chicago. After years of studying French, it is rewarding to finally put French to use outside of the classroom, and working with such friendly people has proven to me that if I want to use French in the future, I will surely be able to, even if I stay right here in Chicago.

If people tell you that learning French is not practical, they simply do not know what is out there. If it is French that gives you the sense of *je ne sais quoi*, go for it. I promise you will not regret it.

John Deppe