

# Supporting Occasional Teachers



## Introduction

The teaching of French is shifting away from photocopied worksheets towards communication strategies involving listening, speaking, reading and writing. Occasional teachers are often not part of professional development training sessions, and may not therefore be aware of the tremendous shift taking place in the FSL classroom. This document is intended to provide links to other documents where this shift is clearly explained, and will give the occasional teacher some practical tips in some of the challenges taking place in an FSL classroom. There will be information that may also be useful for long term occasional teachers. Curriculum support for FSL should be available at the board, and contact with the FSL co-ordinator or consultant is encouraged.

This document has two parts: The first section is meant to inform an occasional teacher of what to look for and what questions to ask. The second section is intended for classroom teachers to guide their occasional teaching plans and to include specific information an occasional teacher will need when taking over daily lesson plans.

**Please note: this module includes suggested Internet resources. Teachers must review their Board's policies for acceptable use of Internet and ICT as well as preview all Internet resources before sharing them with their students.**

## Part One

### Communicative and Action-Oriented Approaches

Teaching and learning in French Immersion, Extended French and Core classrooms, both elementary and

secondary, are moving away from grammar-based worksheets to functional action-based authentic tasks. Students will be engaged in small groups or partners and will be speaking French with one another in various activities. Because everyone will be speaking at once, even when students are using regular speaking voices, the classroom will be louder than many teachers are accustomed to.

The focus of teaching French as a second language is on communication, beginning with listening and speaking and moving into reading and writing. If there are any worksheets, these must be directly related to the lesson being taught. Word searches and colouring sheets have not proven to be useful to learning a second language. Teachers of FSL are being encouraged to speak only French in class to their students. When giving directions to students, use images, gestures and language the regular teacher uses.



The main purpose of learning a language is communication. Communication is a social act. In order to learn French, therefore, students need to see themselves as social actors communicating for real purposes. Teaching language as a system of disconnected and isolated components gives learners some knowledge of the language, but does not allow them to use the language effectively. In contrast, communicative and action-oriented approaches to teaching French put meaningful and authentic communication at the centre of all learning activities. [\*The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core French, Grades 4-8; Extended French, Grades 4-8; French Immersion, Grades 1-8, \(revised\) 2013\*](#) and [\*The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core French, Extended French and French Immersion, Grades 9-12, \(revised\) 2014\*](#), hereafter referred to as the Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula (p. 9)

The vision of [\*The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula for elementary\*](#) and [\*secondary\*](#) hereafter referred to as, The Revised FSL Curriculum, 2013 is shared by all three programs: Core French, Extended French and French Immersion and states that, “Students will communicate and interact with growing confidence in French, one of Canada’s official languages, while developing the knowledge, skills, and perspectives they need to participate fully as citizens in Canada and in the world.”

## Checklist

This checklist includes the most important information an occasional teacher should have with them before stepping into a classroom to begin teaching that day.

**Arrive early** - When first arriving at the school let the principal and secretary know you have arrived. If it is the first time at a school, ask for a tour along with an explanation of basic expectations. Find the lesson plans and read through them to clarify any confusion in scheduling. Request class lists if they are not available with the lesson plans. Plans can include the names of students who will be the most helpful in class. Some students are very good at helping with technology. Others do well at helping students with special education needs.

**What to do if there is a problem** - If there is an in-school telephone system, include the phone numbers of the school secretary, principal, vice-principal and nearby classrooms if necessary. There should be a clear explanation of what to do if students pose difficulties as well as any specific needs or behaviour challenges in the classroom.

**Procedures with each class** - Depending on the regular classroom teacher, these may vary. If the occasional teacher is covering for an itinerant FSL teacher, it is possible that the procedures change for each classroom. Find out how many students may leave the classroom at a time to use the washroom or get a drink. Are students permitted to use classroom materials such as markers, extra pencils, extra paper, etc. during French class?

**Classroom routines** - Many students find it difficult to adjust to a new person in the classroom. Maintaining regular classroom routines can help, if possible. Find out how the teacher welcomes the class and begins. Stick to the schedule given. If students do not normally go outside during French class, then keep them inside. Following the lesson plan is important for the regular teacher, as the next day’s work often depends on what students accomplished the day before.

**Assemblies** - Sometimes when you are at a school an assembly or other school event has been planned. Find out what the expectations are for moving through the halls, where students should sit once they arrive at the assembly, what the expectations are during the assembly, what to do if there is a problem, and how to leave the assembly when returning to the classroom. Sometimes, for itinerant teachers of FSL, the transition of supervision from one class to another takes place during the assembly time. If possible, knowing where the next class is seated, and what the expectations are once everyone has returned to the next class can be helpful in transitions.

## Classroom information and communication technology

If there is an interactive white board and the lesson will be using this board, ensure it is working. In an itinerant FSL classroom, try to make sure the board functions before the classroom teacher leaves, as sometimes there are simple fixes only the teacher knows about. If using a projector and a screen, ensure that students are engaged in something while the equipment is being set up. Some teachers will provide an occasional teacher with a USB key with all the information needed for that

particular lesson. If possible, try the key out beforehand to become familiar with the information provided. Find out if technological devices are being used by students in the classroom, who is to use them, what they are to be used for and the consequences if they are not being used properly. Expectations will be different for secondary students and elementary students, and within elementary schools there will be differences again, depending on the grade being taught. Be very clear what these expectations are, and ask the principal if necessary. Keep a personal USB key handy and ask permission to add files, games, or videos which can be used with other classes in other schools if the opportunity arises and there is a little extra time during a class.

**Classroom management** - Each class will have specific procedures for getting students' attention. If possible, find out what these are and use them. The students will be used to them and will respond accordingly. Wait until all students are quiet before beginning. Grab students' attention quickly by using an introduction that gets them thinking in French. More information may be found in the [Classroom Management](#) module.

**Plan B – Technical difficulties are common, and it is important to always have another plan** - In moving away from worksheets, there are several strategies for lessons that can be done with any class at any time. Arts-infused lessons are one example. If possible, learn a song and teach it to a class. Learn a finger play, a poem, or a dance to teach them. There are many simple yet effective vocabulary games which can be used to practice colours and numbers. Look for videos of songs on YouTube. Start an alphabet book. Give each student a letter and let them find a noun that can be illustrated. Put the book together for a primary class. Secondary students can listen to popular French songs and make comparisons to music they find popular. Secondary students can create more complex art. French Immersion and Extended French students can play games involving dialogues or descriptions, or word games.

**Culture** - If possible, bring photos of places you may have visited where French is spoken. Share photos with the class using a USB key and interactive white board or projector. Bring images for students to discuss such as paintings by French, French-Canadian or Québécois painters, and painters from other countries where French is spoken. Travel videos are interesting to students as well. [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula](#)

[for elementary](#) and [secondary](#) include intercultural understanding expectations for all grades in Core, Extended and French Immersion. Refer to each grade for specific examples, teacher prompts and instructional strategies.

**Speak French!** - Speak French yourself and encourage students to speak only French. As stated in [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula, elementary](#) (p. 33) and [secondary](#) (p. 37), "... it is essential that French be the language of communication in class so that students have constant exposure to correct models of the language and many opportunities to speak in French." The front matter of [The Revised 2013-2014 FSL Curricula for elementary](#) and [secondary](#) includes many suggestions for encouraging teachers and students to communicate in French.

Motivate students to speak French by using incentives to earn points and win a small prize at the end of the class. Demonstrate how to ask for help, or how to say a word in French and encourage students to use these phrases in class.

**Long Term Occasional Teachers** - If possible, meet with the regular classroom teacher beforehand to familiarize yourself with classroom routines and other important information. Refer to all expected practices including board or school learning plans. Contact academic curriculum consultants, including FSL consultants who are there for your support.



## Part Two

### Planning for an Occasional Teacher

Planning can be challenging if there is uncertainty about how much French the occasional teacher speaks. Leave a list of routines used with the students (for each classroom in the case of itinerant teachers) all in French with English translations beside. If French documents are left for the teacher to refer to, make sure there is an English translation available. All lesson plans should be in English, so a principal and other teachers could help out, if necessary.

It is important to keep student safety in mind when planning lessons. Stick with routines and activities students are used to. It could be challenging for an occasional teacher to take students outside, for example, if they are not used to this. Encourage an occasional teacher to follow the routines as there are students who have a difficult time with transitions and changes in routine.



Provide lists of students who are familiar with various aspects of the FSL classroom. Who is good with information and communication technology? Who can usually figure out what the teacher is saying in French and explain it to another student in the class? Who works well with a student who has special needs? Who can be relied on to go to the office and get help if necessary? Provide a list of students with special education needs and what kind of accommodations those students require.

### Learning Centres

If students have already been working in small groups, are organized into centres and are familiar with the routine, then this lesson structure can be easier for

occasional teachers. In the lesson plans encourage the occasional teacher to follow routines to begin and end the class. Include routines used for organizing students into small groups.

### Cultural Lessons

Have a series of cultural lessons a teacher can teach to a class for the day you are away. These can include videos of areas in the world where French is spoken or songs from various cultures with lyrics provided so students can figure out what the song is about and learn how to sing it. Students can correct the work and you can continue with your own action-based oral lesson the next day. Or, begin with a cultural lesson with an occasional teacher and continue the next day with a lesson based on the material students observed and/or participated in.

### Arts-infused Lessons

The day before an occasional teacher is to arrive, begin a lesson which is based on an art class using very simple materials such as paper, pencil crayons, scissors and glue. Keep all students' work in bins or large sealed plastic bags and provide this work to the occasional teacher. Students complete the art work and when the absent teacher returns, French instruction using the artwork continues. Provide images for students to look at and describe. These could be photographs, paintings or drawings. Give the occasional teacher a list of words in French and English to help describe the image by giving the appropriate vocabulary to the students. Secondary students can write descriptions of art work or artists. Teach elementary students several songs beforehand and provide a link to a website. Secondary students can watch a music video and discuss similarities and differences in culture.

### Recording a Familiar Voice

Some students respond well to the FSL teacher's way of explaining things and are familiar with accent and the voice. Record oneself giving directions (try [Audacity](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/elearning/)) <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/elearning/> and encourage the occasional teacher to play the recordings at the beginning of class so students know what to do. Another option is to film oneself doing the opening and closing routines and let the students watch this to get started into their routine.

## Blended Learning

If students have used the [eLearning Ontario](#) site before, set up a lesson for them on the site. Book the computer lab if one is available, or organize the class the way it would be if you were present. Core, Extended, French Immersion students can be encouraged to submit their work in the Drop Box for you to correct while you are away. Daily updates can be made to the [eLearning Ontario](#) site if necessary.

## Emergency Plans

When one is expecting to be absent, lesson plans are provided for the occasional teacher. However, in cases of personal emergencies, a kit of generic plans which include a schedule, game ideas, a USB key containing several short videos for each division or grade should be left in a folder. Updated occasionally, the plans should reflect any changes in delivery.

## Movement Lessons

Play games, do activities or show a dance video in French to get students moving. Adding movement breaks up the class and adds variety. Secondary students may enjoy short dance videos as well.

## Conclusion

Planning for an occasional teacher takes time, foresight, and good organization skills. Specific details in lesson plans are often appreciated as the more information an occasional teacher has, the better prepared he/she is to take over the classes.



## Resources

### **Audacity**

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

### **Curriculum Services Canada (2012). A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers**

<http://www.curriculum.org/fsl/projects/a-guide-to-reflective-practice-for-core-french-teachers>

### **Curriculum Services Canada (2013). On est capable! On peut se parler en français et on aime ça!**

<http://www.curriculum.org/fsl/projects/on-est-capable-on-peut-se-parler-en-francais-et-on-aime-ca>

### **eLearning Ontario**

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/elearning/>

### **Ontario Ministry of Education (2013). The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core, Grades 4–8; Extended, Grades 4–8; Immersion, Grades 1–8, (revised)**

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/fsl.html>

### **Ontario Ministry of Education, The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core French, Extended French and French Immersion, Grades 9-12, (revised) 2014**

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/fsl.htm>