

**What! You want me to sign what? I am not allowed to say a word of English for five weeks?
You've got to be joking!**

I am here to tell you that it works, and your effort will be well repaid. Decades of experience and a mountain of research tell us that committing completely to a new language significantly improves your chances of success. Your hosts, teachers and local Chicoutimiens will love you for it, and your advancement in the French language may surprise you.

I have taken part in similar summer immersion courses four times in my life: at the ages of 17, 18, 57 and 58. In between, in my travels, I have found myself many times in situations in which I had no language in common with the people around me. Rather than desperately search for an English speaker to translate, I chose to see this as a golden opportunity to learn about their culture and languages. This attitude is usually greatly appreciated by native speakers and consequently, I have at one time or another been able to function in Fijian, Indonesian, Malay, Nepali, Romanian and Czech. My acquisition of French and Spanish happened more traditionally through courses, music and immersion.

But... but...

I'm a beginner! How will I manage?

Yes, this is harder. We have a packet of ways to help you.

How am I going to discuss with my roommates?

In French, of course.

What about party time?

Your French gets better at party time, guaranteed.

If not your French, then at least your acting skills.

If I want to ask the meaning of something, can't I just say the word in English?

Well, that's still cheating a bit, isn't it? Why not try explaining it another way, through mime, pointing, drawing or simple language. Even writing it down to be translated is better than just blurting out 'How do you say my car is purple and I have a pet lizard?'

What about emergencies?

In an emergency, there are systems in place to help you.

Note: a crush on another anglophone is NOT an emergency.

One of the things I have found so impressive about the Chicoutimi experience is their choice of animators: a gang of the coolest young francophones, brimming with skills, energy and good humour. It is their job to talk to you, to spend time with you, to answer your questions, to help you succeed. They are some of the nicest people on the planet, and a tremendous resource for you.

Yes, you will feel uncomfortable at times. Yes, you will be unable to say what you want at times. You may have to explore the side of you that doesn't depend on your verbal wit. It is common to feel overwhelmed a few weeks into the program (sobbing sessions are fully expected half-way through).

All in all, this summer session at l'École de langue is a well-oiled machine that has been meticulously constructed to help you succeed. If they ask you to commit to speaking French exclusively for five weeks, why not just smile, take a deep breath, and jump in!

Marian Rose