



Creative English

When I first started teaching English as a second language in France, I quickly discovered some similarities in my client's past experiences of learning English. Here are a few observations:

- They all had experience of learning English when they were at school.
- The majority had a good understanding of grammar.
- They could all recite the English Irregular verb list (take, took, taken – put, put, put), but not all could then create a sentence when prompted. “*Can you give me a sentence with caught?*” for example.
- They described their experiences as “*not that great*”. I often viewed the stories of their past lessons in the same way they would describe their first trip to the UK and eating an English sandwich. Some described lessons as “*horrific*”, but most said that “*they were boring and uninspiring and nothing like a French sandwich!*”
- And a last but very important observation, amazingly all of them knew a man called ‘Brian’ who was often in the kitchen or had an umbrella.

From my own personal experience of moving to France in 2008, I also found myself in a situation where I wanted and had a need to learn a new language. I had moved to France and as someone who enjoys speaking with people, it was important for me to be able to do so on my own without needing someone there to translate.

I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to have weekly lessons in a small group of 3 people. As beginners, of course, we all had to learn the basics and like school, we had an exercise book that we worked through.

“Can I honestly say that I enjoyed them?” Yes, we had some good sessions.

“Did I learn a lot in four years?” Honestly, no. When I think back the lessons are all ‘blurred’. I still make mistakes even with the basics which generates the question ‘Why is that?’ Why didn’t I retain all that information? There was a lot of it. I have reams of paper and certificates of attendance that remind me.

The reality for me is that learning solely from a book just did not work. I have learnt more from taking the plunge and speaking with people in my local shops than I did in the lessons. I made lots of mistakes which now make for funny stories. The reality is I *learned by doing* and by creating memory-jogging moments.

Of course, I know I have the advantage of living in France. I am immersed. Wherever I go, I hear people speaking French. I turn the TV on and it’s in French. I have that advantage, and it’s this awareness and past personal experience with my French lessons which has helped me understand that what makes a good learning experience is when lessons are memorable, fun, interesting, varied and even playful on some occasions. By adding Creativity into the lessons creates a memory of that moment. Clients can reflect and remember what it was they were learning and were able to recall information their confidence and motivation grew.

Here is an example of one CréAnglais client, how a lack of confidence caused problems during what was becoming more and more his day-to-day work and how using a creative approach to learning, mixed in with more traditional learning methods helped him build confidence, recognition at work and a career progression.



'Monsieur X' had a good understanding of grammar but lacked confidence when speaking. He had studied English at school but not used it on a regular basis. He holds a sales position within his organisation and is required to travel and present the organisation's products and services to new customers. His current customers are French speakers. If he wants to progress and grow within the company he can, however, he will be required to work and present the company to English-speaking clients including public speaking. In addition to this, he must also speak regularly to English-speaking colleagues and customers on the telephone and communicate via email.

He finds ways to communicate with his work colleagues by reusing existing standard emails or seeking the help of *Google Translate*. He gets by, and more importantly, communicating with his colleagues holds no fear factor. They find a workable solution.

Presenting to new customers is a very different matter. He really mastered one key presentation (in French), however, he had to create a new 'English' version. He was familiar with what he had to say, it was all there for him to read and recite. He knows his business, the products, and services. He can speak eloquently in his own language. Problems start when he starts to think about the possible questions customers may ask. Fear and lack of confidence creep in. When he tries to think of responses, he becomes blocked and finally, he forgets even the most basic of language rules because he starts to panic. He would rather not even say that he can speak a little English for fear of looking unprofessional if he is unable to answer what he thinks could be the simplest of questions.

Monsieur X knows what he needs to do. He decides to sign up for 30 hours of English Lessons.

We focus on different areas of Business English. Building vocabulary by reading and discussing interesting and relevant online articles, books, magazines, and newspapers. Trust is built during our lessons, no questions are *stupid*, and it is normal to make mistakes. We fine-tune grammar weaknesses using exercises, applications online resources, games, and puzzles. As well as speaking in his lessons, he listens to lots of different English speakers via the Internet, English television, radio, and music as per my recommendations. We role-play scenarios using relevant examples, and work situations and he encourages his co-workers to speak more English on the phone and to correct him when mistakes are made. We work towards achieving a better understanding, and an improved level of proficiency. Our objective was to deliver the presentation in a mock scenario and to be able to respond to questions that may be asked.

Breaking down the fear factors, gaining more confidence, and learning to relax and listen were just some of the focus areas we worked on as well as increasing vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Learning common expressions that could be used in difficult situations (a plan b) and being more tense-aware and less *tense* were all goals that we set ourselves.

So, what was so creative about this approach? By using my methods, he gained confidence connecting his past knowledge (*building blocks*) with practical, fun and relevant exercises that created spontaneity, laughter in some cases and a different way of looking at learning English, which in turn helped prepare him to face real-life situations with a much higher degree of confidence, calmness and credibility.

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