

# **Progression through High Frequency Words**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to look at the importance of High Frequency Words (HFW) in language learning and how they can be incorporated into a progressive methodology. The author demonstrates that the use of HFW can be a powerful tool as they provide pupils with a range of essential words for receptive and productive use. HFW enhance communicative and grammatical competence thus increasing motivation as the learner becomes confident in their ability to deconstruct language.

‘Progression through HFW’, presented in this paper, offers a structured learning approach which uses HFW as the platform for progression. The result is a self-reliant student who is able to use these key words in an increasing range of contexts.

## **Introduction**

Recently David Hart, the General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "The collapse in modern foreign languages is a catastrophe". (BBC 2005 online) Many suggestions have been made to reverse this phenomenon: exciting materials, stimulating content, contact with foreign nationals. But one of the main contributing factors to this perceived ‘catastrophe’ is that many of our pupils are incapable of producing a simple sentence, even after years of learning a foreign language. This beckons a review of modern teaching techniques.

I became interested in HFW when I realised how many times my older pupils were asking me questions such as, ‘How do you say ‘the’ in French?’. I therefore began to make lists of HFW and noted down every time a pupil asked me how to say one of them. Soon they became a fundamental part of my teaching and I was impressed with the impact this was having on all of my classes. I also made lists and sub-categorised the HFW thus providing a way for the pupils to build increasingly harder and more complex sentences. I found these lists particularly useful in mixed ability classes, where pupils were able to work at their own pace through tasks which steadily increased their standard of language output, with very little help from me. Feeling this method to be very productive, I then went on to develop this approach, which I have named ‘Progression through High Frequency Words’.

The importance of HFW in language-learning has generally been accepted in linguistic circles for some time: Schmitt (2000) and Meara (1995) state that HFW are so essential that they should be explicitly taught at the beginning of any language course and should be the main aim of all beginners, including Primary school pupils.

However, the Scottish Curriculum gives little attention to HFW and only in recent years has the National Curriculum (England and Wales) begun to recognise the importance of these words. No suggestions have been made, however, on how to embed these words into our every day teaching.

This paper aims to look at the importance of HFW and provide teachers with a methodology which uses HFW as the focus for learning and progression. This approach will be addressed through the following objectives:

1. Set out why HFW should be at the centre of our teaching.
2. Consider why HFW are not currently taught.
3. Identify HFW and suggest how many and which ones to teach.
4. Examine practical approaches on how to teach HFW.
5. Show examples of how pupils can progress through HFW.
6. Look at ways in which we can teach grammar through HFW.
7. Understand the role of Low Frequency Words, (LFW).

Because I have been teaching mainly French all my examples are in French.

## **1. The importance of High Frequency Words**

The 100 most common words actually make up about 50 percent of the material we read. The 25 most common words make up about a third of our written material (Fry, Kress, and Fountoukidis, 2004). These facts alone highlight the importance of HFW. I will look at the importance of HFW in the context of the four language skills: Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing.

### **Listening and Reading**

Hirsch and Nation (1992) claim that in order to reach text comprehension readers and listeners need to be familiar with 85% of the words in a text. This may explain why our older pupils struggle with more difficult reading and listening tasks. We expect them to attempt these but, partly because of their limited knowledge of HFW, they have no idea how to begin to decode the language.

Many course books do not focus on HFW and do not prepare pupils for the massive step expected of them in their later editions. It is often at this stage that they become disenchanted with language-learning. If HFW are taught from an early stage, by the time they tackle more difficult texts, pupils will have a solid base on which to build their knowledge.

### **Speaking and Writing**

Nation (1990, 1993, 2001) underlines the critical importance of developing HFW, since the learner's skill on producing the language is heavily dependant on the number of words they know. He also suggests that fluency in speaking and writing are developed where 100% of the vocabulary is already known.

With the present exam system, pupils merely have to memorise a pre-prepared set text. They do not necessarily need to understand every word they are speaking or writing in order to achieve fluency. But this word understanding is crucial when they need to speak or write for themselves. Their confidence in sentence-building and fluency of output is mainly determined by their knowledge of HFW.

I have determined that HFW are important in the context of the four language skills as they provide the key tools for pupils to understand and produce their own language. Now I will look at the reasons why, despite their importance, HFW are overlooked in the present Curriculum.

## **2. Why are High Frequency Words not taught?**

Despite their importance, there are many reasons why we do not teach HFW. I will now look at these in detail.

### **2.1 Current teaching trends**

Current teaching trends focus on communication in language and not on language structure. However, if a pupil cannot form a simple sentence because it does not fit exactly into their set of learnt phrases, how are they then able to communicate? Whilst rote-learning (a method often used in 'communicative methodology') can be fun and make the children feel confident as they are able to produce language, that language is limited and is not transferable to other contexts. Most set phrases are placed in pupils' short-term memory and serve no purpose other than to satisfy short-term aims.

Many pupils, after four years or more of learning a foreign language, know little else other than a few numbers and a handful of phrases about where they live and how many brothers and sisters they have. Enough possibly to make a small impression when they go abroad (although they possibly would not understand the question in the first place which could be 'Tu viens d'où?' and not 'Où habites-tu?', as learnt in class) but maybe not much else. HFW are essential for communicating as they occur in every context and they allow the pupil to free themselves from restrictive learnt phrases.

### **2.2 The constraints of the curriculum**

The Curriculum is based on topic-specific vocabulary, a large percentage of which are Low Frequency Words (LFW). I agree these are important, as they often carry the meaning of a sentence (whereas HFW often do not carry any meaning e.g. 'the', 'it', 'and'). Learning lists of vocabulary, only to start again with another completely non-associated set a few weeks later, in my experience is neither motivating nor particularly helpful. I suggest that teaching simple learning strategies to tackle these words, using a dictionary for example, would be a much better use of the teacher's time and energy. Many teachers tell me that breadth of vocabulary is an important part of language usage and comprehension. I agree, but the question is, what vocabulary? I rarely see HFW appearing in vocabulary lists or being taught. The National Curriculum (England and Wales) now recognises the importance of these words and states that:

These words (HFW) appear regularly but because they often do not receive the same emphasis as, for example, the words for numbers, or month names, or colour adjectives, and because they are often literally little words, they can seem to learners to be relatively unimportant. The truth is in fact the very opposite: failure to appreciate the value of these words is a major problem and results in the common situation of pupils knowing large numbers of topic-related words (mainly nouns) with which they can actually do very little.

HFW build a 'bridge' between topics and provide pupils with language continuity and familiarity. They also allow pupils to make sentences instantly within new unfamiliar contexts.

Teaching HFW does not mean a move away from the Curriculum, but merely a change in the focus of our teaching.

### **2.3 A belief that pupils 'acquire' High Frequency Words**

Some believe that you do not need to teach HFW because, according to Groot (2000), they occur so frequently in the teaching materials to which they are exposed that many are easily acquired. However, if the pupils 'acquire' HFW, why then are they constantly asking us for these words? Because of this lack of basic vocabulary, they are unable to produce even a simple sentence after years of learning French. This is demotivating for both pupils and teachers.

Many teachers tell me that their pupils do know HFW because they use them all the time. However, there is a big difference between on the one hand, merely using a word in one particular context and on the other hand, knowing its meaning in order to use that same word in a different context. Just because a pupil knows how to say 'j'ai un frère', it does not follow that they know that 'j'ai' means 'I have' and 'un' means 'a', which is of far greater importance than the phrase itself or the word 'frère'.

We now know that HFW are essential to develop language skills. I have looked at possible reasons why they are not being taught, and why, in my opinion, they should be. Let us now understand exactly what we mean by HFW.

## **3. Listing and categorising High Frequency Words**

In order to use HFW in our teaching, it is important to be confident in choosing which HFW to focus on. Firstly, I will consider a list of general definitions. Secondly, I will examine existing lists of HFW with suggestions on how to create your own. Thirdly, I will look at how many HFW can be realistically taught within timetable restrictions.

### **3.1 What are High Frequency Words?**

Here are several ways of describing HFW.

1. HFW are the words which appear most frequently in language. Wren (2003), writing about English, suggests that the words 'the', 'of' and 'and' are the three most frequently used words in the English language. He believes that there are 125 words in English that make up half of the words we use. A list of these words is set out in Appendix 1.
2. HFW are often small words which carry no meaning. For example, 'and', 'but', 'who' etc.
3. HFW are words that pupils spend a lot of time looking up in a dictionary only to become frustrated and conclude that, 'it is not there'.
4. HFW are not usually nouns.

If HFW are to become central to your teaching approach you must identify and recognise them. The lists laid out in Appendix 1 and 2 are a good starting point.

### **3.2 What High Frequency Words should I teach?**

We cannot teach all the HFW at once and it is important to know what HFW to focus on. Lists of HFW have existed for a while. You need only put ‘High Frequency Word lists’ into a search engine to get several versions. I have chosen to ignore these lists, simply because they can change slightly depending on needs and contexts. The lists I have, set out in Appendix 2, are mainly based on fourteen years experience of teaching French in a classroom and the needs of my pupils. I have noted the words that the children have asked me. Then, using these same words, I have encouraged the pupils to write their own piece of coursework without stock phrases which they would otherwise ‘lift’ and present as their own.

Rather than looking at general lists, you may wish to make your own HFW list based on a particular activity. For example, you can make a list of HFW appropriate for classroom language (see Appendix 3). All lists of HFW will vary slightly in content but also in number.

### **3.3 How many should I teach?**

Whilst researching this paper, the magic figure of 2000 words appeared several times. Waring (1997) suggests that, with a vocabulary size of 2000 words, a learner knows 80% of the words in a text. Whilst 2000 words is a number to aim for, I feel that this would be rather ambitious within a Secondary School context. For this reason, I believe that Primary Schools can play an important part in the process of learning HFW. According to Wren (2003), there are roughly only 12 words (see Appendix 2 for my own list) which make up 25% of the words in a text. If pupils come to Secondary School confident in their knowledge of these words, they come already equipped to tackle some basic sentences. This would give the Secondary School teacher a solid starting point and common ground on which to progress. It is best to start modestly with the most common HFW, teaching and testing a handful every week, thus building a bank up slowly.

We have just looked generally at the nature of HFW and I have made suggestions on how to start building your own lists. Let us now look at ways in which we can embed these words into our every day teaching.

## **4. Teaching High Frequency Words**

### **4.1 Practical suggestions on how to teach HFW.**

Nation (1999) suggests that because HFW can be so useful, each word requires a specific focus. They need to be identified in listening, speaking, reading and writing and also need to be directly studied. My experience of teaching HFW has not meant a radical rethink of teaching strategies but simply a re-adjustment of techniques. HFW can be taught through Communicative or Grammar methodologies, or a mixture of both, in keeping with a department’s philosophy. The key is to shift the teaching emphasis from LFW to HFW and make pupils understand the importance of these words by reinforcing them at every opportunity,

I have frequently found that pupils are often not able to transfer skills or knowledge to other contexts. In contrast, because HFW occur in many contexts, they are easily transferable. I am keen to show pupils the versatility of HFW at an early stage because they soon realise their importance. With only a handful of these and a dictionary to look up nouns, they are soon able to create their own sentences, which can motivate. I will now look at two practical approaches to teaching HFW.

***Example 1: Teaching the HFW as an individual vocabulary item first, and then placing it in different contexts.***

HFW can be drilled and practised in the same way as other vocabulary items: pair work (e.g. one person says the English, the other says the French); games; repetition techniques; the look-cover-test method etc. (<http://www.beelingua.com> has some free downloadable materials specifically for the teaching of HFW, <http://literacyconnections.com/Dolch.php> also has some practical ideas). It is a good idea to get the pupils to build their own list of HFW by adding words to a wall chart or making a list in the back of their jotters, which they refer to regularly. I call this a 'special page' with 'special words', or 'Les Petits Mots Magiques'. The younger ones make cardboard cut-outs and I get my children to update and type out lists on a regular basis. I often test them or begin a lesson with revision of HFW.

The main problem with HFW is that it is difficult to communicate meaning because they do not have any (e.g. try drawing or miming the word 'the'). Direct translation is therefore often needed to teach HFW and I will look more closely at the use of translation later. Information is often best remembered, however, when we can use it within a visual context.

For example, you may want to introduce the HFW 'j'ai'. Tell the pupils what it means and drill it as an individual vocabulary item. When the pupils know it well (i.e. they can understand say and write it confidently), introduce it into simple sentences such as:

J'ai un chien

J'ai un stylo

J'ai un frère

J'ai un rhûme

J'ai quinze ans (This will make them think!)

You can help the pupils get the meaning of these sentences by using flashcards, mimes or drawings, or they can look them up in a dictionary.

The pupils can then make up their own sentences (see Appendix 4 for suggestions on how to develop this lesson).

This technique uses HFW as a starting point and builds the context around them. The second approach is the converse.

**Example 2: Introducing different contexts and then teaching the HFW as an individual vocabulary item.**

Start off with a context, or several contexts, where the HFW appear, identify the HFW, understand their meaning through the context and then drill and practise them. For example, if you want to teach the HFW 'souvent' you could introduce the following sentences:

**Je vais/ souvent / au cinema / le soir / avec / mon frère.**

**Je vais/ souvent / en ville / avec/ mes amis / parce que / j'aime / faire / les magasins.**

**Je joue/ souvent / au football / parce que / j'aime ça.**

**Je suis/ souvent / malade / parce que / je mange / mal.**

**Je me fâche / souvent / quand/ je suis fatigué.**

The words in bold are common HFW. The pupils guess the meaning of 'souvent' through the contexts. 'Souvent' is then drilled and practised as an individual vocabulary item (e.g. using methods given in Example 1). By repeating new HFW in different contexts, they are reinforced and pupils are more likely to recognise them in future language passages.

This is an excellent way to increase confidence- an important ingredient for motivation. Because the pupils immediately recognise the new HFW and are able to work out most of the sentences through their knowledge of common HFW (e.g. those highlighted in bold on p 10), they are less likely to be put off by the handful of words that they find a little difficult such as 'fatigué', 'fâché' etc.

These are two different approaches to teaching HFW. But I would like to make comments on two other important aspects of teaching; testing and translation.

#### **4.2 Testing**

Testing HFW regularly is crucial. The test however should allow the pupils the opportunity to produce a sentence in context, i.e. produce a sentence, using the HFW that they learnt. For example, if the new HFW are 'j'ai', 'aussi', 'mais', 'je n'ai pas de', the pupil must be tested on these words individually and then be required to produce a sentence (orally or written) such as 'J'ai un stylo et aussi une gomme, mais je n'ai pas de crayon.' Or, 'J'ai un chat et aussi un chien, mais je n'ai pas de cheval'. Less able pupils could make smaller sentences e.g. 'j'ai un chat'. This way the pupil is learning to speak or write confidently and fluently, using the familiar HFW building blocks.

#### **4.3 Translation**

Translation is an efficient and effective technique for learning HFW and, in the words of a colleague, 'translation sets them (the pupils) free'. Unfortunately, it is an unfashionable approach in modern day language teaching and was possibly 'abandoned' because it was overused, with an emphasis on accuracy and grammar. It was also often pitched at the wrong level thus making it a difficult exercise. According to Harris and Prescott:

Texts must be cognitively challenging but accessible. They need to contain enough familiar language in order for strategy implementation to be achievable but, at the same time hard enough to provoke the use of strategies. (Harris & Prescott 2004:10)

HFW can be taught using teach-and-test cards (small pieces of card or paper with English on one side and the translation on the other). Pupils can easily build these up themselves and have their own set. It is more useful if the pupils also write a small sentence using that HFW. Here is an example:



With more complex sentences, pupils need to be taught how to break it up into manageable chunks (as shown in 4.1.2). Encourage the pupils to work out meaning based on their knowledge of HFW and show them strategies to work out Low Frequency Words (LFW) – which we will look at in more detail later.

According to Hirsch and Nation (1992) readers need to be familiar with 85% of the words in a text in order to understand it. This means that translation exercises should be selected carefully. I also suggest that, if your aim is to nurture confidence and fluency in speaking and writing, do not be detracted by the minutiae of grammatical precision. Translation is an excellent way of learning or reinforcing HFW. It helps pupils to build and work out sentences and is a good ‘thinking’ exercise. Set properly, the sense of achievement it generates can be very motivating.

I have looked at possible ways of teaching HFW as a focus of a lesson. I will now look at sentence building and using different ‘categories’ of HFW to make more complex sentences.

## 5. Progression through High Frequency Words

I have already mentioned that one of the reasons why we do not teach HFW is because the curriculum supports a vocabulary topic approach. As a PGCE student I remember it being suggested that ‘topic word lists’ was a good approach because every time you start a new topic, the pupils can start again. The advocates of this approach suggest that it is better to teach ‘breadth’ (a wide range of words with little grammar input) rather than ‘depth’ (a few words with a lot of grammar input), as, with ‘depth’, the pupils are quickly frustrated and give up.

But where is the motivation in starting again? It only serves to go through the agony of having to learn and teach different topics and words again and again. How much jumping around do teachers have to do in order to motivate the pupils to learn these disassociated lists of vocabulary? I suggest that by using ‘Progression through HFW’, it is possible to teach ‘depth’ without leaving behind the low-ability pupils. It allows teachers to set progressively more difficult but achievable goals.

The concept is simple: HFWs can be categorised into importance according to frequency (see Appendix 2 for example categories) and pupils can gradually form

more complex sentences by adding a few words from these categories. Here are some sentences which show progression. The HFWs have been highlighted.

	<b>HFW Category</b>
<b>J'habite/ dans/ une</b> ferme.	<b>1</b>
<b>J'habite /dans /une</b> ferme à la campagne <b>près d'une</b> petite ville.	<b>1-2</b>
<b>Avant, /j'habitais /dans /une/</b> petite ville <b>mais /maintenant/ j'habite/ dans /une/</b> ferme à la campagne.	<b>1-3</b>
<b>Lorsque j'avais dix ans j'habitais/ dans /une</b> petite ville <b>mais/ on</b> a déménagé <b>il y a</b> trois ans <b>et maintenant on habite dans une</b> ferme à la campagne.	<b>1-4</b>

These sentences show that, given a clear structure, the pupils can increase the complexity of their 'output' without feeling overwhelmed and losing confidence. The pupils do not need a long list of nouns or an explanation of a complex grammar structure; they are creating their own sentences based on lists and categories of HFW.

It suits high and low-ability pupils as they all start from a basic sentence and advance systematically at their own pace. Weaker pupils may wish to develop sentences using HFW from categories 1 & 2, whereas more able pupils have the opportunity to stretch themselves by creating sentences using HFW from categories 3 & 4. However, simply providing the pupils with lists of the categories of HFW and a few starting sentences is not sufficient. The teacher needs to be more selective and present pupils with a handful of appropriate HFW. Aims must be clear so that pupils know what HFW to focus on. The more pupils master HFW, the freer they will be to express themselves.

A fuller example of the aims and progression of the above sentences can be seen in **Appendix 5** and an example of a lesson using progression through HFW is shown in **Appendix 6**.

I have looked at how pupils can gain confidence in their language skills through knowledge of HFW. Some teachers believe however that fluency should not compromise accuracy and that grammar should form an integrated part of any course. I will now look at the role of grammar.

## **6. How can grammar be taught through High Frequency Words?**

We need only look at the categories of HFW to see immediately how grammar is easily applied:

- articles (definite/indefinite)
- prepositions
- conjunctions
- personal pronouns
- adverbs and adverbial phrases
- interrogative words
- possessive adjectives

- common verbs
- impersonal verbs/expressions
- negative words
- ordinal and cardinal numbers (equivalents of *one, two/first, second, etc.*)
- relative pronouns

By teaching the HFW ‘the’ or ‘a’ in French, you are instantly teaching them about the different genders for nouns. The individual teacher can decide how much detail to go into.

Here is one example I had recently of teaching grammar through HFW. A pupil asked me, ‘how do you say “I was” in French?’ (‘I was’ is a HFW). Given that it was pointless him looking it up in the dictionary, I gave him the answer. I then looked at his sentence which was ‘Quand j’étais onze ans j’habitais à la campagne.’ When I corrected him he was naturally puzzled: ‘but you told me that ‘I was’ is ‘j’étais’’. I then asked him the question, ‘Quel âge as-tu?’ To which he dutifully and confidently replied, ‘j’ai quinze ans’. I then asked him what ‘j’ai’ meant, and he told me. It was only then that he started to realise why ‘j’étais’ was not appropriate in this sentence. Had he been taught that in French they say ‘I have fifteen years’, he may have found it easier to change verbs.

Because HFW often fit into a grammatical pattern it is easy to teach grammar through HFW. It can be taught ‘incidentally’ as in the above example or by making it the main teaching point. However, whether you want to make grammar a point of focus or not I believe knowledge of HFW is crucial when teaching grammar. This is because one of the problems with grammar exercises today is the lack of a basic understanding of the sentence in the first place. The pupil becomes frustrated as more time is spent deciphering the sentence; the grammatical pattern takes second place. Ellis (1990) has shown that vocabulary knowledge is indispensable in acquiring grammar. Knowing the words in a text makes it easier for the pupil to identify the grammatical pattern.

‘Progression through HFW’ lends itself to grammar teaching and the progression can be grammar-led. A sound knowledge base of HFW allows the learner to work out grammar patterns without being sidetracked by unknown words. The only words that pupils are likely to hesitate over are Low Frequency Words which I now consider.

## **7. What about Low Frequency Words (LFW)?**

LFW have been the focus of our teaching in recent years. Yet, as I have already pointed out, the focus has not been productive. There are too many of them and the time spent on them is not repaid by opportunities to meet and use them.

It is not the focus of this paper to suggest ways of teaching LFW. However, the teacher’s focus needs to be on giving the pupils strategies for coping and remembering them, rather than spending valuable classroom time and energy teaching them. Here are some strategies: guessing from context (though to achieve this, learners already need to know most of the words); looking at cognates; breaking complex words down; recognising the stem of a verb, using dictionaries. When introducing a new topic I ‘teach’ a maximum of ten LFW and the rest are left to the learner. The key is to give pupils the tools to be responsible for their own learning of LFW.

## Conclusion

According to Professor Johnstone (comments made at the Scottish CILT conference on motivation in May 2006) 'Motivation correlates with performance. Motivation can simply come from enjoying the learning process, interest in intellectual challenge and curiosity of knowledge'. From experience, my conviction is that 'Progression through HFW' motivates learners as it provides them with a familiar platform of words to understand and construct progressively more complex sentences. It gives them 'ownership' of their own spoken and written output.

Furthermore, 'Progression through HFW' is a blend of both communicative and grammar methodology: 'communicative' because HFW give pupils the tools necessary to produce their own sentences; 'grammar' because many HFW do have a grammatical component, (e.g. *le, la, les*), and therefore can be taught not only as an individual word but also as part of a grammatical concept.

'Progression through HFW' provides a possible way forward for teachers who do not wish to go back to a traditional grammatical approach and yet realise the limitations associated with a 'communicative' approach. This concept is not throwing the baby out with the bathwater, but merely using modern and traditional teaching skills and refocusing them in a different direction.

I believe that the true benefits of this method are best realised when the teacher or department is fully engaged in it. Furthermore, if pupils at primary school level learnt basic HFW, it would make transition a lot smoother because pupils and teachers would have a starting point of familiar words on which to build.

A strong commitment to HFW, in particular at the early stages of learning, can motivate pupils to continue learning a foreign language.

## Acknowledgements

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The Standards Site: Appendix 3: High-frequency words

[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/keystage3/respub/mflframework/appendices/appendix3\\_high\\_frequency\\_words](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/keystage3/respub/mflframework/appendices/appendix3_high_frequency_words)

Wren, S. Volume, and becoming a virtuoso reader;

[www.balancedreading.com/volume.html](http://www.balancedreading.com/volume.html)

## Appendix 1: The 125 most common words in the English language.

According to Sebastian Wren (2000) these words make up half of the words in text.

the	of	and	to	a
in	that	is	was	he
for	it	with	as	his
on	be	at	by	i
this	had	not	are	but
from	or	have	an	they
which	one	you	were	her
all	she	there	would	their
we	him	been	has	when
who	will	more	no	if
out	so	said	what	up
its	about	into	them	than
can	only	other	new	some
time	could	these	two	may
then	do	first	any	my
now	such	like	our	over
man	me	even	most	made
after	also	did	many	before
must	through	back	where	much
your	way	well	down	should
because	each	just	those	people
my	how	too	little	state
good	very	make	world	still
see	own	men	work	long
here	get	both	between	life

## Appendix 2: Categories and lists of HFW

I make sure that all of my pupils know these 13 HFW within the first few weeks of learning French.

<b>French</b>	<b>English</b>
<i>le, la, les</i>	the
<i>un, une</i>	a
<i>des</i>	some
<i>mon, ma, mes</i>	my

<i>et</i>	and
<i>avec</i>	with
<i>de</i>	from/ of
<i>mais</i>	but
<i>dans</i>	in
<i>c'est</i>	it is

<i>je</i>	I
<i>j'ai</i>	I have
<i>je suis</i>	I am

By the end of first year most of the pupils will know the following basic HFW (this list changes slightly every year, depending on the demands of the pupils.)

<i>je</i>	<i>ne ...pas</i>
<i>tu/ vous</i>	<i>ne ...jamais</i>
<i>il</i>	<i>ne .. rien</i>
<i>elle</i>	
<i>ils</i>	<i>à</i>
	<i>et</i>
<i>j'ai</i>	<i>mais</i>
<i>je suis</i>	<i>aussi</i>
<i>je vais</i>	<i>de</i>
<i>je fais</i>	<i>ou</i>
	<i>dans</i>
<i>a</i>	<i>ou</i>
<i>c'est</i>	<i>donc</i>
<i>est</i>	<i>il y a</i>
<i>sont</i>	<i>j'aime</i>
<i>ont</i>	<i>je n'aime pas</i>
<i>va</i>	<i>ça</i>
<i>vont</i>	<i>pour</i>
<i>fait</i>	<i>sur</i>
<i>font</i>	<i>avec</i>
	<i>aujourd'hui</i>
<i>aller</i>	<i>parce que</i>
<i>avoir</i>	
<i>etre</i>	<i>très</i>
	<i>assez</i>
<i>le la les l'</i>	<i>trop</i>
<i>un une</i>	<i>beaucoup</i>
<i>du de la des de l'</i>	<i>bien</i>
<i>au à la aux à l'</i>	
<i>mon ma mes</i>	<i>est-ce que</i>
<i>ton ta tes</i>	<i>qu'est-ce que</i>
<i>son sa ses</i>	<i>comment</i>
	<i>qui</i>
	<i>quand</i>
	<i>où</i>

Cont'd overleaf

Here is a third list. I would expect all middle ability groups to know all of these. Again, it is not a prescriptive list.

<p><b>Opinions</b>  <i>malheureusement,</i>  <i>heureusement</i>  <i>je trouve</i>  <i>a mon avis</i>  <i>je pense que</i>  <i>je sais que</i>  <i>ça me plaît</i>  <i>parce que/ car</i></p> <p><b>Time markers</b>  <i>quand</i>  <i>bientôt</i>  <i>demain</i>  <i>après-demain</i>  <i>dans trois ans</i>  <i>cette année</i>  <i>enfin</i>  <i>depuis</i>  <i>il y a (un an)</i>  <i>hier</i>  <i>avant hier</i>  <i>semedi dernier</i>  <i>l'année dernière</i>  <i>la semaine dernière</i>  <i>maintenant</i>  <i>aujourd'hui</i>  <i>en ce moment</i>  <i>normalement</i></p> <p><b>Frequency markers</b>  <i>tous les jours</i>  <i>tous les deux jours</i>  <i>toujours</i>  <i>encore</i>  <i>souvent</i>  <i>quelque fois</i>  <i>parfois</i>  <i>de temps en temps</i>  <i>une fois par</i>  <i>rarement</i>  <i>quelques</i></p> <p><b>Modal verbs</b>  <i>je peux</i>  <i>on peut</i>  <i>je dois</i>  <i>on doit</i>  <i>il faut que</i></p> <p><b>Negatives</b>  <i>ne .. rien</i>  <i>ni...ni</i>  <i>ce n'est pas</i></p>	<p><b>Other</b>  <i>chez moi</i>  <i>meilleur</i>  <i>un autre</i>  <i>si</i>  <i>ensuite</i>  <i>comme</i>  <i>encore</i>  <i>chaque</i>  <i>puisque</i>  <i>cependant</i>  <i>le même etc.</i>  <i>pendant que</i>  <i>par contre</i>  <i>donc</i>  <i>surtout</i>  <i>vraiment</i>  <i>tellement</i>  <i>j'ai mal à la tête</i>  <i>je suis fatigued(e)</i>  <i>je voudrais</i>  <i>loin de</i>  <i>sinon</i>  <i>presque</i>  <i>sauf</i>  <i>sans</i>  <i>bien sûr</i>  <i>parmi</i>  <i>a peu près</i>  <i>environ</i>  <i>ensuite</i>  <i>puis</i>  <i>seulement</i>  <i>pas grand-chose</i>  <i>plusieurs</i></p> <p><b>Tenses</b>  <i>c'était</i>  <i>il y avait</i>  <i>j'ai eu</i>  <i>je voudrais</i>  <i>j'avais</i>  <i>j'étais</i>  <i>je serai</i></p> <p><b>Pronouns</b>  <i>y</i>  <i>en</i></p>
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### Appendix 3: Teaching HFW for a specific task

You may like to teach HFW through classroom language.

For example, if you want to teach

*Est-ce que je peux ouvrir la fenêtre?*

you can break the sentence down into:

*Est-ce que*

and

*je peux*

as they are both very common HFW.

From there you can teach

<i>Est-ce que je peux</i>	<i>emprunter</i>	<i>un stylo?</i>
<i>Est-ce que je peux</i>	<i>aller</i>	<i>aux toilettes?</i>

LFW would be:

*ouvrir*

*la fenêtre*

*emprunter*

## Appendix 4: Continuation of an example lesson

This is a continuation of the lesson introducing 'j'ai'.

You can do the same with longer sentences. For example, after teaching 'j'ai' you can go on to teach 'je n'ai pas de', using the same technique. The context sentences could be similar:

*Je n'ai pas de chien.*

*Je n'ai pas de stylo.*

*Je n'ai pas de frère.*

*Je n'ai pas de rhûme.*

*Je n'ai pas quinze ans .*

Start off with a couple of examples and pupils can do the rest. (You could explain that 'un' and 'une' are replaced by 'de', thus introducing grammar.)

Then introduce another HFW 'mais', drill it and add it to your context sentences.

*J'ai un chat mais je n'ai pas de chien.*

*J'ai une règle mais je n'ai pas de stylo.*

*J'ai une soeur mais je n'ai pas de frère*

*J'ai mal à la tête mais je n'ai pas de rhûme.*

*J'ai quatorze ans, je n'ai pas quinze ans.*

Translate the meaning and finally get the pupils to produce their own sentences, using any context.

Give the pupils a vocabulary test. This reinforces the importance of HFW, where they have to produce them as individual items and in a sentence.

## Appendix 5: An example of language progression

This language table show clear aims and progression. Few nouns are taught at the beginning of this topic (I suggest a maximum of ten) with HFW as the focus throughout.

<i>Où habites-tu? / Où est-ce que tu habites? / Tu habites où?</i>	Where do you live?
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### 1: Where you live.

<i>j'habite dans</i>	I live in	<i>j'habite</i>	I live
<i>un appartement</i>	a flat	<i>au centre-ville</i>	in the centre of town
<i>une grande ville</i>	a big town	<i>au bord de la mer</i>	at the seaside

### 2: Where you live and who you live with.

<i>près</i> <i>ou</i> <i>où</i>	near or where	<i>avec</i> <i>qui s'appelle</i> <i>qui est</i>	with which was called which is
<i>J'habite avec ma famille dans un appartement</i>		I live <b>with</b> my family in a flat	
<i>près de la mer. Où habites-tu?</i>		<b>near</b> the sea. <b>Where</b> do you live?	
<i>J'habite dans une grande ville, qui s'appelle Bolton, avec mon père ou au bord de la mer avec ma mère.</i>		I live in a big town, <b>which is called</b> Bolton, <b>with</b> my father <b>or</b> by the sea with my mother.	

### 3: Where you used to live and where you live now.

<i>tout près</i> <i>avant</i> <i>j'habitais</i> <i>maintenant</i> <i>pas loin</i>	right near before I used to live now not far
<i>J'habite à Edimbourg, qui est une grande ville en Écosse, tout près de la mer.</i>	I live in Edinburgh, which is a big town in Scotland, <b>right near</b> the sea.
<i>Avant, j'habitais dans une petite ville mais</i>	<b>Before, I used to live</b> in a small town but
<i>maintenant j'habite dans une ferme à la</i>	<b>now</b> I live in a farm in the
<i>campagne pas loin de la mer.</i>	country <b>not far</b> from the sea.

### 4: Where you used to live, when you moved house and where you live now.

<i>lorsque (quand)</i> <i>j'étais</i> <i>j'avais (j'avais dix ans)</i> <i>il y a (un an)</i>	when I was I had (I was ten years old) (one year) ago
<i>Avant, j'habitais dans une petite ville mais on a déménagé lorsque j'avais dix ans.</i>	Before, I used to live in a small town but we moved house <b>when I was</b> ten years old.
<i>Lorsque j'étais petit, j'habitais en banlieue mais on a déménagé il y a cinq ans et maintenant j'habite à la campagne.</i>	<b>When I was</b> little, I used to live in the suburbs but we moved five years <b>ago</b> and now I live in the country.

## Appendix 6: An example lesson of teaching Progression through HFW

With a flashcard, start off by teaching them:

<i>J'ai un chien</i>
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Establish the meaning and drill. Now you begin to decode and then build.

Ask them what 'j'ai' means, then ask them what 'un' means. Ask them if they know another way of saying 'a' in French.

Ask them to look up an animal in the dictionary and make a simple sentence like this. Elicit the answers orally or get them to write their answers on the board.

They may come up with something like this:

<i>J'ai un girafe</i>
<i>J'ai un chat</i>
<i>J'ai une souris</i>

The pupils have created these sentences themselves.

Now ask them to write down, 'I have two dogs.' They can compare their answer with their partner. Elicit the answer orally and then ask someone if he/she would like to write it on the board. Continue to build this sentence using the same words they looked up in the dictionary but adding HFW.

<i>J'ai un chat et deux chiens.</i>
<i>J'ai un chat et deux chiens mais je n'ai pas de cheval.</i>
<i>J'ai un chien et deux chats mais je n'ai pas de cheval. Cependant je vais bientôt avoir un éléphant.</i> (Just for fun)

All pupils therefore will know at least ten words (aimed at the lower ability groups):

<i>j'ai</i>	
<i>un</i>	<i>une</i>
+ the words that they looked up in the dictionary (about 7)	

Most pupils will know at least twelve words (aimed at the middle ability groups):

<i>j'ai</i>	<i>je n'ai pas de</i>
<i>un</i>	<i>une</i>
<i>mais</i>	
+ the words that they looked up in the dictionary (about 7)	

A few pupils will know at least sixteen words (aimed at the higher ability groups):

<i>j'ai</i>	<i>je n'ai pas de</i>
<i>un</i>	<i>une</i>
<i>mais</i>	
<i>cependant</i>	
<i>bientôt</i>	
<i>je vais</i>	
<i>avoir</i>	
+ the words that they looked up in the dictionary (about 7)	

Ask pupils to learn the list that they feel comfortable with for homework and a sentence which uses some of these words (Barry Jones at the Scottish SCILT annual conference repeated the importance of 'choice' for motivation.). When testing I simply write the sixteen words on the board and tell them all to write down 7 words which they looked up in a dictionary in French and then chose which group of HFW they want to be tested on. They also have to produce a sentence, orally or written, using the list of their choice. I then mark the test out of ten, twelve, or sixteen and correct their sentence. The pupils are therefore not just learning a list of words but are also able to produce their own sentence at a level they feel comfortable with.

For homework, or as an extension exercise, pupils can make more similar sentences by using a dictionary. Or you could give them some translation exercises, again, dividing each exercise into manageable chunks according to the ability of the pupils.

e.g.

*J'ai trois tigres et deux crocodiles / mais je n'ai pas de serpent. / Je vais bientôt avoir un lion.*

Low ability groups can translate the first part, middle ability groups can translate the first two parts and high-ability groups can translate all of it.

You can also get them to translate similar sentences but using other HFW which they are familiar with or which you feel they should be able to work out for themselves.

e.g.

*Il a trois tigres et deux crocodiles / mais il n'a pas de serpent. / Il va bientôt avoir un lion.*

Your pupils may have already come across the HFW 'il'. Get them to work out the meaning for themselves. Then get them to translate a sentence into French:

e.g.

**She** has three cats and one dog / but she does not have a mouse. Soon **she** will have a horse.

Or, completely change the context:

*J'ai un frère / mais je n'ai pas de soeurs.*

*J'ai un frère / mais je n'ai pas de soeur. / Cependant j'espère que je vais bientôt en avoir une **parce que ma mère est enceinte.***

In this last sentence, the only problem words which pupils will have to look up in the dictionary is 'enceinte' and possibly 'mère'. High ability pupils should be able to work out the rest. As I have already pointed out in 4.1.4, in translation keep the task accessible.

The above examples show that, given a clear structure, pupils can 'progress' and increase the complexity of their 'output' without feeling overwhelmed and losing confidence.

The examples also demonstrate how the pupils are able to:

1. learn some very important HFW and apply them in a context;
2. produce sentences fluently and with confidence because of 100% knowledge of vocabulary;
3. apply the HFW into other contexts;
4. guess the meaning of similar sentences based on the knowledge they have of HFW;
5. create sentences with minimum input from the teacher;
6. make increasingly more difficult words based on little vocabulary;
7. work at their own level.

Finally, the teacher's energy has not been taken up with teaching lists of vocabulary but, rather with helping the pupils create their own sentences.