

CASE 10

Studying French

Every Thursday night of her freshman year, Karen studies for the quiz she knows she will have in her French I class the following morning. She begins her study sessions by preparing flash cards for the week's vocabulary words, writing each new word on one side of an index card and then copying the word's definition onto the flip side. After completing her flash cards, Karen locks herself in her room, turns on the radio, then repeats each word and its definition five times to herself. Unfortunately, her strategy doesn't seem to be working very well. Although she's getting **A's** and **B's** in her other classes, the highest score she's earned in French I is a 72% C-.

In May, as she and her friends are signing up for next year's classes, Karen is trying to decide whether or not to take a second year of French. She is well aware that the college she wants to attend requires its students to have at least two years of a foreign language. And her two best friends, Dawnece and Claire, are urging her to take Mr. Lamer's third-hour French II class with them. Dawnece reminds her that the French club is going to Paris the following summer. "Besides," Dawnece says, "Mr. Lanier is so cute!"

Karen grins sheepishly. "Oh, what the heck! I can't possibly do any worse in French II than I've been doing in French I."

The following September, Karen begins to panic as the first test approaches in her French II class. "No matter how hard I try, I'm just no good at French," she thinks. "Will Dawnece think I'm stupid if I ask her to study with me? Claire probably doesn't study at all. She's lucky; her parents are both French, so she was born knowing this stuff."

Karen brings up the subject at lunch. "You know, our first French test is tomorrow."

"Yeah, what a pain," Dawnece replies. "I hate studying."

"Me, too," agrees Claire.

"Uh...yeah," Karen says. "Say, I was wondering if...uh...Dawnece, I thought maybe we could study together." She nervously scrutinizes Dawnece's facial expression, wondering if her friend will think she's crazy for asking.

But Dawnece apparently doesn't think she's crazy at all. "Hey, sure! Claire and I are going to study at my house at 6:30 tonight. Come join us."

Karen seems quite surprised. "You and **Claire?** Claire, you **study** for your French tests?"

Claire laughs. "Of course!"

"But your parents are **French!**"

"**My** mom moved to the United States when she was three, and my dad moved here when he was a teenager. You know perfectly well that both my parents speak English at home. My mom says she doesn't even **remember** any French. Besides, don't you study for your **English** tests?"

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"Well, yeah, I guess so, but..."

"Like, it's the same thing!"

To prepare for her study session with Dawnece and Claire, Karen makes flash cards for all the vocabulary words the class has studied so far. She wonders whether her friends have completed their cards already or will make them while they study, instead. She spends an hour or so repeating the words and definitions on her flash cards and then arrives at Dawnece's door around 6:45.

"We started without you," Dawnece tells her. "I hope you don't mind."

When Karen notices that neither girl has any flash cards in front of her, she keeps her own cards buried at the bottom of her backpack. The study session continues where it left off.

"So, Dawnece," Claire asks, "what did you do for **attendre?**"

“Well, since *attendre* means ‘to wait,’ I came up with, ‘Each time I *attend* something, I have to *wait* in line before I get in.’”

“I came up with ‘I can’t *wait* to *attendre* in the driver’s license line.’ I think I like yours better.”

Claire writes Dawnece’s sentence in her notebook, and Karen decides to do likewise in her own notes. Even though Karen had gone through her flashcards less than an hour ago, she didn’t remember what *attendre* means.

“Karen, what’s your sentence for *attendre*?” Claire asks.

Naturally, Karen doesn’t have a sentence at all, but she tries to save face.

“Umm...mine’s pretty much like Dawnece’s.”

“Okay,” Dawnece says, “the next word is *demandeur*, which means ‘to request’.”

“Oh, I have a great one for that,” Claire says. “My mom’s *requests are* more like *demandeur* or *demands*.”

“*Good* one!” Dawnece exclaims. She and Karen both write the sentence in their notebooks.

“Okay, the next word is *l’histoire*, which means ‘story’,” Claire says. “How about, *l’histoire* or *history* is a *story* about the world?”

“That should be easy enough to remember,” agrees Dawnece.

“Is this how you guys always study?” Karen asks. “Like, making up sentences for each new word?”

“Sure,” Dawnece answers.

“First we put the word in an English sentence, and then we put it in a French sentence,” Claire adds. “For *l’histoire*, we might say, *u ce dif l’histoire*, which means ‘as the story goes...’”

“Wow!” says Karen. “What a good idea!”

Karen is nervous as Mr. Lamer passes out the French test, but she’s determined to do well. “Okay, Karen, you can do this,” she tells herself. She takes a deep breath and then looks at her test. “Okay, the first word is *l’histoire*. Let’s see, ‘history is a story about the world,’ so *l’histoire* means ‘story’. Okay, the second word is *demandeur*. Oh, yeah, ‘my mom’s requests are more like demands’, so *demandeur* means ‘to request’. Hey, I *know* this stuff. I really know it!”

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Karen quickly finishes the vocabulary portion of the test and then breezes through her translation of the assigned excerpt from *Candide*. She finishes the test in thirty-five minutes, several minutes before most of her classmates.

The following Monday, Mr. Lanier returns the graded test papers. On Karen’s paper, he’s written “Good job!” across the top. On the back page of the test is an A-in bright red ink. She’s answered all of her vocabulary words correctly, and she’s made only a few minor mistakes in her translation of the excerpt from *Candide*.

Possible questions for “Studying French”:

- 1. Attribution is an individual’s causal explanation for something that happens to an individual (e.g., success or failure experience). To what does Karen attribute Claire’s success in French?**
- 2. From an information processing perspective, characterize Karen’s approach to studying French prior to her study session with her friends.**
- 3. Characterize how Dawnece’s and Claire’s approach to studying French helps them encode and retrieve information from their long-term memory.**
- 4. As a teacher, what things might you do to help students develop effective study effective strategies?**