

The Minimal Course approach for teaching/learning Algonquian languages

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The Minimal Course is an approach to introducing core Algonquian language patterns quickly and simply, that so far has been picked up and implemented in full or in part for

- Wolastoqew/Maliseet
- Passamaquoddy
- Long Island Algonquian (Unkechaug-Shinnecock-Montaukett)
- Shawnee
- Anishinaabemowin
- Michif
- Western Abenaki

language efforts, among others (along with Makah, Irish, and Somali).

It is specifically designed to help learners face the heavy added challenges of becoming a proficient speaker of a language that has been marginalized. It counters the common misunderstanding (especially among heritage learners) that their often very non-English languages are “unlearnable”, by providing a completely non-technical but meticulously linguistically informed presentation of the language’s

- (a) practical everyday usage, and
- (b) core phrase-, sentence-, and conversation-building patterns,

all in a step-by-step series of small, easily learnable chunks we call “lessonlets”. Learners move forward by always looping back to the first small set of lessonlets, and expanding on them, relating new expressions to those now-familiar ones.

The core lessonlets are very brief, so a Minimal Course can be shared entirely orally (writing is possible but never required), or flexibly adapted into existing courses and/or various digital formats. And once they’ve mastered the essentials of just a single lessonlet, even beginners can “teach it forward”: they can pass on what they've learned directly to friends/family, outside of the classroom.

In this hands-on workshop, we will introduce the simple basic principles of the Minimal Course approach, then offer reports from community members on their experiences using it, and finally will spend the rest of the time helping all interested workshop participants to create the first steps of a Minimal Course for their own languages —putting together the first six or so lessonlets right on the spot.