THE
GOLDLIST
METHOD

IN A NUTSHELL

One notebook.
Thousands of words.
No memorizing.

Language mentoring

1. Introduction to the method

Are you struggling to remember new vocabulary in a foreign language? **Are you also fed up with the traditional way of memorizing words from glossaries** that you were forced to use at school? Did you then promptly forget all those words the next day?

What if I told you that learning vocabulary can be done far more easily? No memorizing and no big effort. With this method, you will remember huge amounts of new vocabulary in a natural and pleasant way.

What is the Goldlist method?

„The Goldlist method – incredibly simple and surprisingly effective at the same time!"

The basis of this method is that you write down lists of expressions you want to learn in a notebook. Then you wait for at least two weeks before copying them, sorting out the expressions that you remember from those you don't. You'll find out that you almost miraculously remember 30% of the expressions from each list without ever having studied them! Your long-term memory works subconsciously, and it learns especially when you are not aware of it. I know it sounds incredible, but that's how the Goldlist method works: it's incredibly simple and surprisingly effective at the same time. If you don't believe me, keep reading. Most people are skeptical at first... until they try the method themselves.
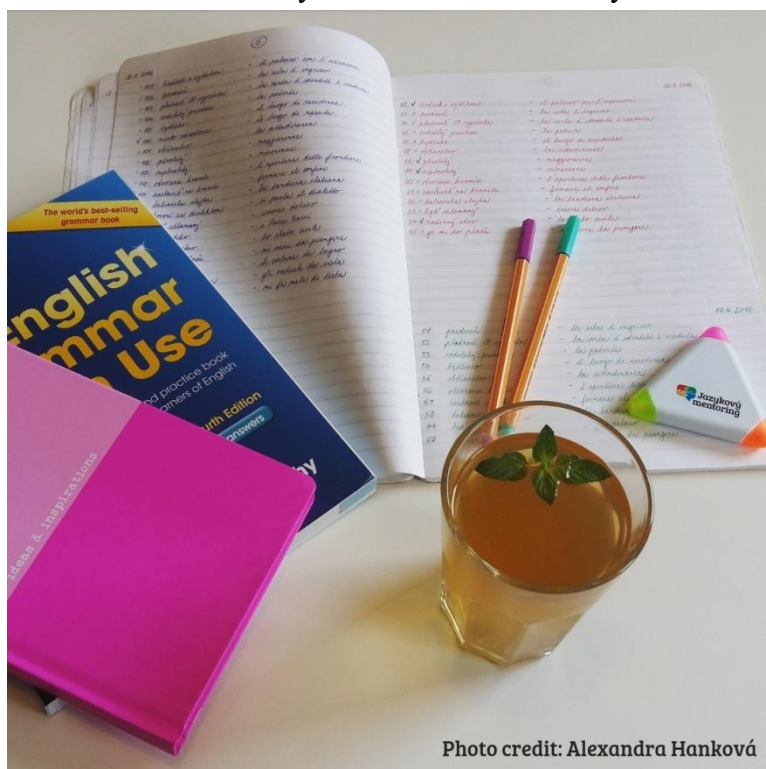
The author of this method is David James, known in the polyglot community as Uncle Davey. The result of the Goldlist method is **learning vocabulary in long-term memory**, i.e., you don't remember them for just a short period of time. That's the biggest problem with the traditional way of learning languages. At school, most of

us had to cram words into our heads for the next test, but within a few days, we didn't remember anything! Needless to say, we couldn't use them in practice later. I'm sure you also have experience with this short-term vocabulary learning. That's over now. With goldlisting, the focus shifts to the long-term memory to remember the words once and for all.

● **No apps, no programs. Just one notebook.**

The great news is that all you need to start using the Goldlist method is a standard school notebook, some color pens, a source of new vocabulary, some time, and peace and quiet. But careful! It's vital that you choose a notebook you love so much you'll never want to put it away. You may find it a bit excessive, but I guarantee that if you make the activity pleasing for the eye, you're going to come back to your Goldlist with joy and enthusiasm every day. I also recommend not restricting yourself to using only a blue or black pen. Choose your favorite colors. Remember, your brain cooperates with your eyes. And when your eyes like something, your brain will never forget it.

Photo credit: Alexandra Hanková

● **Everybody can learn with the Goldlist method**

The Goldlist method is there for everyone: perpetual beginners — people who aren't able to move forward in their language — active language enthusiasts, as well as seasoned and successful polyglots. Most people fall for the Goldlist method because it's **simple, playful, natural, and costs you only one notebook**. But the feeling you'll get when you find out it really works is priceless. Hundreds of thousands of people in the world already use it and swear by it. Are you going to join them?

2. How does the Goldlist method work?

Before you start

➔ Before you start goldlisting, you need to find a notebook for writing the lists. **Make sure you have a positive relationship with the notebook.** The cover can be a nature photo of the country whose language you're learning. It's going to boost your motivation, and every time you take the notebook in your hands, you will be one step closer to the land of your dreams. It's **a playful and natural way to learn vocabulary.** And when you like something, you'll remember it more easily. I always say you have to enjoy the learning!

➔ The next step is to find a source of new vocabulary you can regularly use. **You can "recycle" your old materials from a language course**, you can write down new words from your favorite foreign-language book or TV series that you're watching (it should have subtitles in the same language), or you can use vocabulary from a blog you read regularly.

You can even write down expressions that you understand passively but wouldn't be able to use in a conversation. The materials should be just above your current language level so that you find enough new words.

Let's do some goldlisting!

➔ Open your pretty notebook to the first double-page spread, write the date in the upper left corner and the number of the list centered at the top of the left page . For the sake of simplicity, we divided the double-page spread into four sections: **A, B, C,** and **D**.
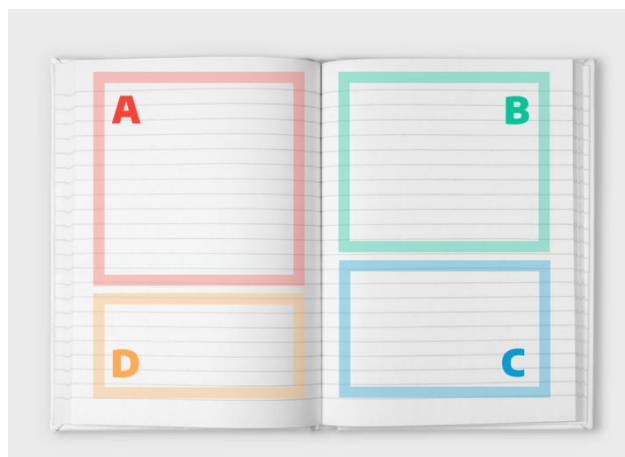
Pro TIP

You can also note the source of the vocabulary in the current headlist, be it a book or a TV series. Then you'll have the date in the upper left corner, followed by the number of the headlist in the middle, and the source (name of the book, magazine, or article) in the upper right corner of the left page. It never hurts to know where you collected the expressions from.

➜ **Starting in section A, create two columns, where you will write down a new list of expressions and their translations. This is called a "headlist".** Number them 1–20. The left column contains words in the foreign language and the column next to it contains their translations in your mother tongue. Remember, **always write the lists in a calm and quiet environment** with no distracting elements.

➜ Now read the list aloud, slowly and calmly. Only once. You can read only the expressions in the foreign language, but it's better to read every new word followed by its translation. **Don't try to memorize or remember them**; just read them, close the notebook, and voilà, you've just made the first list!

Goldlisting: Day 2

➜ Next day, do exactly the same thing. Find another set of 20 expressions, write them down on the next double-page spread in the corresponding section A block, and thus create a new headlist (the second one).

➜ Number the words in the second headlist 21–40. After you read the list aloud, close the notebook again. Warning! **Don't look at the previous list, no matter what!**

➔ For the next 12 days, repeat this and create a new headlist every day (write lists only in the section A block for two weeks). Don't look at any of the older lists during these two weeks. It's very important as this time period is the key for your long-term memory. If you look at the lists before you should, the expressions become active in your short-term memory, and long-term memory would be turned off.

Why two weeks? Because your short-term memory stores information for that long. If you remember the expressions afterwards, you can be sure that they moved to long-term memory.
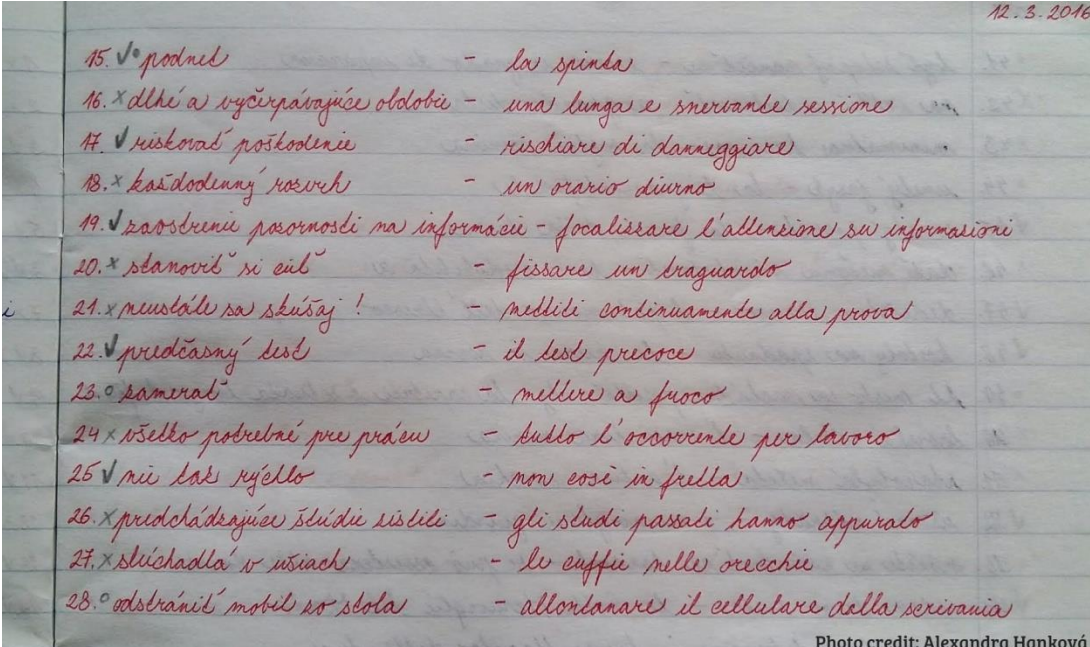
Bring on the distillations!

➔ On day 15, come back to the very first headlist and start "distilling." Two weeks have passed since its creation, and you can test yourself on how many expressions you remember. Cover the column with the vocabulary in your foreign language, go through the column in your mother tongue, and try to translate it into the foreign language. Believe it or not, you'll find out that you remember about 30% of the expressions (about 6 out of 20).

➔ Then copy the 14 remaining words that you don't remember into section B on the opposite page. That's the first distillation. Number this new list 1–14, repeat the expressions aloud, and don't look at them for the next two weeks. The 6 expressions that you remember are left just like that; don't copy them anywhere or come back to them anymore. They stay in section A. **Remember to record the date that you created the distillation**. Otherwise, you won't be able to keep track of the 2-week period until the next distillation.

➔ On the same day after you make the first distillation, you also create a new headlist (No. 15). That means that starting with day 15, the goldlisting is going to take you a bit more time. Apart from creating new headlists, you are going to distill the old ones as well. After some time, it's going to be too much. Don't worry; I'll explain

what to do later on in this ebook. You don't have to give up; goldlisting can be adjusted to your time availability.

➜ On day 16, you will make a distillation of the second headlist (that you created on day 2) from section A into section B. Again, you should remember about 30% of the expressions and copy the remaining 70% (14 expressions) into section B. That's how you create the first distillation of the second headlist. It should contain 14 expressions, numbered 15–28.

Photo credit: Alexandra Hanková

Section B always contains the first distillation of a headlist. As you've probably already guessed, on this day (day 16), you're going to create yet a new headlist (No. 16). You don't write anything in the C and D sections yet.

Keep on going

➜ This is what you do over the next two weeks. Add a new headlist everyday (No. 15–28) and create first distillations in the B sections.

I recommend that you create a little Goldlist calendar (like the one in the image). It will help you keep track of which filtrations (or distillations) you need to do each day.

1 January Headlist 1	2 January Headlist 2	3 January Headlist 3	4 January Headlist 4	5 January Headlist 5	6 January Headlist 6	7 January Headlist 7
8 January Headlist 8	9 January Headlist 9	10 January Headlist 10	11 January Headlist 11	12 January Headlist 12	13 January Headlist 13	14 January Headlist 14
15 January Headlist 15 1D from 1 Jan	16 January Headlist 16 1D from 2 Jan	17 January Headlist 17 1D from 3 Jan	18 January Headlist 18 1D from 4 Jan	19 January Headlist 19 1D from 5 Jan	20 January Headlist 20 1D from 6 Jan	21 January Headlist 21 1D from 7 Jan
22 January Headlist 22 1D from 8 Jan	23 January Headlist 23 1D from 9 Jan	24 January Headlist 24 1D from 10 Jan	25 January Headlist 25 1D from 11 Jan	26 January Headlist 26 1D from 12 Jan	27 January Headlist 27 1D from 13 Jan	28 January Headlist 28 1D from 14 Jan
29 January Headlist 29 1D from 15 Jan 2D from 15 Jan	30 January Headlist 30 1D from 16 Jan 2D from 16 Jan	31 January Headlist 31 1D from 17 Jan 2D from 17 Jan	1 February Headlist 32 1D from 18 Jan 2D from 18 Jan	2 February Headlist 33 1D from 19 Jan 2D from 19 Jan	3 February	4 February

Always remember to start distilling only after two weeks' time. It's okay if you do it later; it can be also after three or four weeks. The recommended maximum between distillations is two months. You can try to do it even later if you had a longer break from goldlisting. Thanks to the calendar, you won't get lost in the distillations that are due. But don't be stressed if you can't make it on some days.

One month in

➔ A month has passed since you started goldlisting regularly, and that's when you **start with the second distillations.** On day 29, come back to the first double-page spread in your notebook again and test yourself on how many words you remember from the 14 expressions in section B (the result

of the first distillation). You wrote them two weeks ago, and you already know that it's time to come back to the list and distill it.
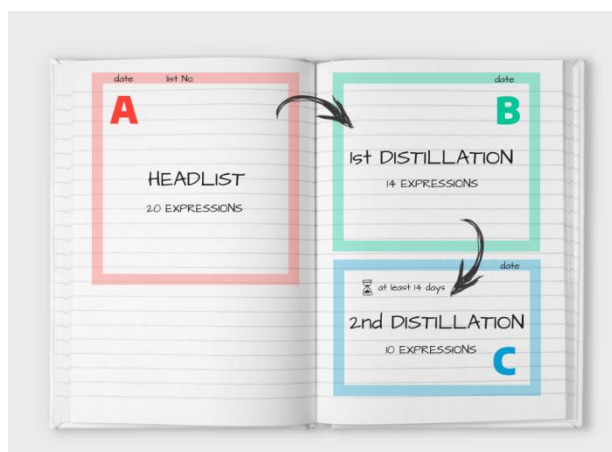
Cover the expressions in the foreign language and test yourself on how many you can translate from your mother tongue. You'll remember 30% again (about four words).

Then copy the rest (10 expressions) in section C. Number them 1–10 and record the current date. Read the list out loud once, and that's it.

➜ **That's not the end of goldlisting for today yet.** Go to headlist No. 15 and make the first distillation of the list from section A into section B (copy 14 expressions you don't remember). Then create a new headlist, No. 29. You noticed it's adding up, but I guarantee that **after one month, you're going to be a goldlisting pro** and the process will be automatic for you.

Starting the last distillation phase

➜ It's day 43 (two weeks later again) and time to come back to the first double-page spread again, **for the last—third—testing that concludes the distillations of the first headlist.** Yes, you're going to fill in the last section of the first double-page spread. Test yourself on how well you remember the expressions from the second distillation in section C, copy 70% (7 expressions) in section D, and number them 1–7. Record the current date in section D. You've just created the third distillation of the first headlist! Read the expressions aloud. What now? You'll see in Chapter 3: *Technical aspects of the Goldlist Method* on p. 9.
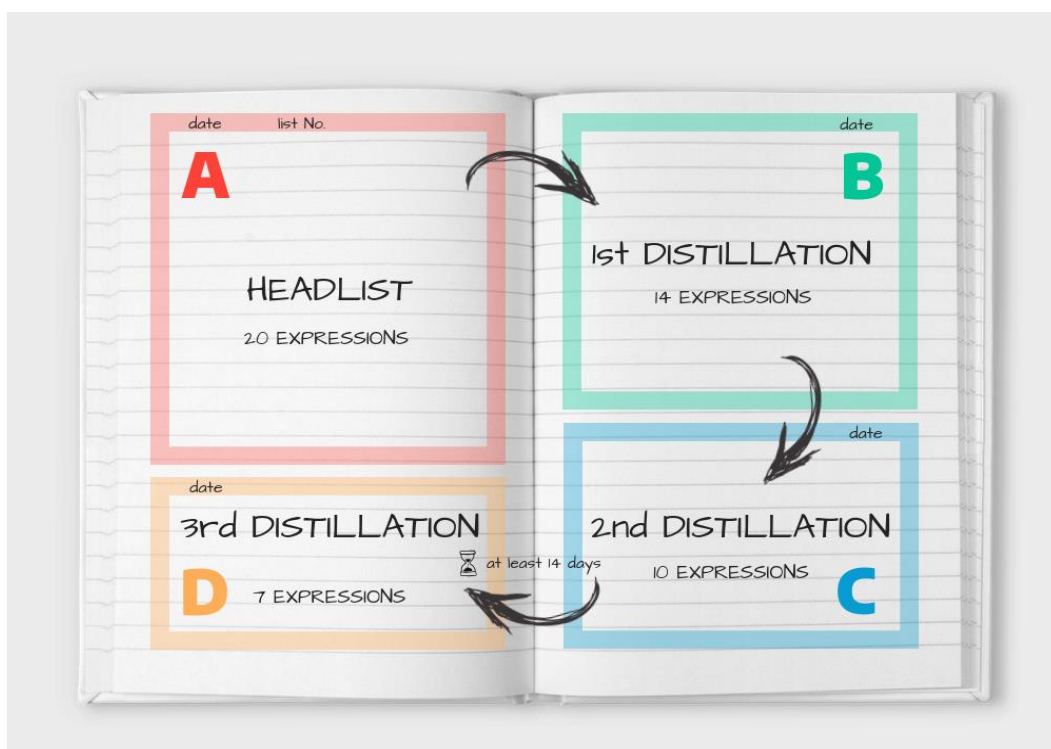
➜ After finishing the third distillation of the first headlist, go to the second distillation of headlist No. 15 and first distillation of headlist No. 29 and remember to create a new headlist as well (No. 43). The Goldlist calendar will come in handy, right? :)

➜ That's how you proceed every day. **Return to older lists systematically**, distill them after at least two weeks, and **create new headlists with 20 expressions at the same time.** That means you do something every day. Spend about 30–60 minutes a day with the method, depending on whether you have already prepared the vocabulary beforehand and if you want to make the filtrations and headlists regularly every day. I recommend that you put down the words from a book or article you're currently reading on a piece of paper or highlight them in your e-reader. And when creating a headlist, just use 20 of them. More on that in Chapter 4: *How to choose the expressions correctly* on p. 13.

➜ The method can be adjusted beautifully even if you don't have as much as an hour for learning, but more on that later. Right now, we've explained the system with 20 lines and daily goldlisting.

➜ The words that are already stored in your long-term memory require no further action from you. Just distill the lists all the time, which makes them shrink (while the number of expressions increases every time). But what do you do with the last 7 expressions that remain after the third distillation? No, it's not the end.

3. Technical aspects of the Goldlist method

● **Bronze, Silver, and Gold notebooks**

The Goldlist method requires not only one notebook, but three of them. The first set of lists goes to the Bronze notebook, then you continue with the Silver notebook, and at the end, you get to the Gold notebook (that's why the method is called Goldlist).

I promised to come back to the seven expressions that remain after the last distillation in section D. After you make several third distillations with 7 words, join three of them into a new headlist in the Silver book. It's okay that you'll get a list of 21 expressions. Keep distilling the 30%.

Photo credit: Hana Jokelová

You can simply copy the expressions from the Bronze book, or you can get maximum efficiency by distilling between the Bronze and Silver books. More on this trick in Chapter 8: *Tips and Tricks for Advanced Goldlisters*. The distillations in the Silver book work the same as in the Bronze book. Then you proceed to the Gold book by using distillations from the Silver book.

It's really not vital to do this to the very end. **Most people just stick with the Bronze book and prefer to create more lists with new vocabulary.** Sometimes you'll know all the vocabulary in the last distillation in the Bronze book, and it's not necessary to copy it again. Or you won't know some words, but if you don't remember them even after three distillations, you can rule them out as "not so important" and continue with new headlists.

Another option is to first finish off the Bronze book and then distill all the third distillations in the D sections (even if it's been more than two weeks). Join the

> „*Everybody can choose the way that suits them best.*“

expressions into new Silver headlists. Everybody can choose the way that suits them best. Are you going to write Bronze lists only? Or will you go all the way to the Gold book? It's entirely up to you!

- **20 expressions – too many?**

Are you already thinking about how on earth you are supposed to collect 20 expressions a day for the new headlist? The number is just a suggestion. You can make your lists shorter or even longer if you want. If you need a shorter version, I recommend making your headlists 14 expressions long. During the first distillation, you copy 10 expressions, then 7 and at the end, only 5 expressions will remain.

It's not so important how long the headlists are, as long as you maintain the 30% success rate in the distillations. For example, David, the author of the method, works with as many as 25 expressions.

- **Just one list a day?**

The method is not limited in any way. You can create more headlists in a day if you want. It's just important that you follow a certain system. Remember, if you create 10 new headlists on the first day, you're in for 10 first distillations in two weeks' time. And as you already know, the longer you're goldlisting, the more it adds up. But if you do decide to create more than one headlist a day, remember to always take at least 10 minutes' break between them. Take a walk, have a glass of water, or listen to some music.

The thing is, the long-term memory gets tired easily, though we don't feel it like we do with the short-term memory. If you don't take at least a short rest while goldlisting, you're going to remember fewer words in the distillations. For more information on the various factors that can influence the results of the Goldlist method, read on.

- **The whole list in one day?**

You should write the whole new headlist within one day. The date that you record in the upper margin should be the day when you wrote every word of the list. That means you collect the vocabulary first and create the list only after that. It's better to create a headlist every other day than just half of one every day.

If you find out that 20 expressions is too much but still want to create a new headlist every day, you can consider working with the shorter version of 14 expressions. It's much easier and faster to fill such a list. (How does the shorter version work? See the section "*20 expressions – too many?*") If you've already started with longer lists but feel it would be better to use the shorter version, don't worry. You don't have to throw the notebook away and buy a new one. Continue in the same book, just create shorter lists. You can add some pretty drawings now that you have much more empty space in the book!

- **Numbering the distillations**

The same method of numbering used in the headlists in section A (start with 1 and continue until you fill the book) applies for the lists of the first, second, and third distillations, i.e., in sections B, C, and D.

„Numbering will give you a huge motivation boost and a feeling of achievement."

That means on the first double-page spread, all the lists start with 1. On the second double-page spread, the lists start with 21 (section A), 15 (section B), 11 (section C), and 8 (section D). Then you can continue with numbering in this manner in each section until you fill the notebook. **Numbering is not obligatory.** But it's a great motivation boost and gives you a feeling of achievement. Just imagine the moment when you write expression No. 1180. Won't you be proud of yourself?

- **Every day or not at all. True or false?**

Many people think that if they start goldlisting, they have to strictly maintain the 2-week period between distillations and if they skip just one day, there's no point in doing it anymore. That's a huge mistake! The Goldlist method doesn't put you under pressure. Quite the opposite, the method works best if you see it as a pleasant leisure activity for learning vocabulary that you gladly come back to every day.

As mentioned before, two weeks are the minimum amount of time that must pass before you start distilling. It can just as well be 3–4 weeks. I did some distillations of my headlists from a year before as an experiment. And guess what? It worked like a charm! I remembered just a little bit less than the usual 30%.

It's okay if you can't do it on one day. You can catch up the next day or the next week, or you can do just the distillations and create new headlists every other day. You can take a break anytime and then pick up where you stopped. **The only rule is at least two weeks must pass between the individual steps.** Otherwise, the information would be stored in your short-term instead of your long-term memory. Everything else can be adjusted to your time availability.

4. How to choose the expressions correctly?

- **Expressions, not words!**

Up to this point, "expressions" and "words" were used interchangeably in this ebook as people are used to calling new vocabulary "words". However, it's necessary to know that you should **never learn individual words.** They're much harder to remember without any context, and you'd struggle to use them in a conversation later. It's vital that you use whole expressions, phrases, parts of sentences, or even whole short sentences in your Goldlist (and not only there).

Pro TIP

Examples of expressions suitable for the Goldlist: "she bought a handbag," "a fascinating book," "I couldn't find him," "he was interested in diabetes," "if you had come sooner," etc. Don't put the expressions in their basic forms like infinitive or nominative. Your brain will remember them better, and you will be able to use them in practice. That means, no German words like "aufmachen + Akk." It's much better to write "er hat das Fenster aufgemacht."
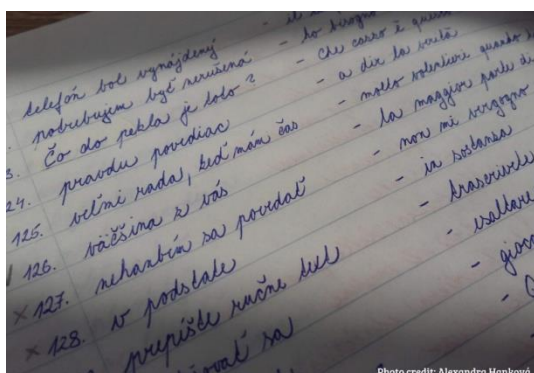
It's best if the expression consists **of 2–4 words, out of which only one is brand new for you.** That way, not only will you learn the new word, but you'll also know how the word is used in the language.

That's why you don't have to worry about inadvertently including the same word in several lists. If you always use it in a different context, it's, in fact, perfect for your long-term memory!

- **Where should I get the vocabulary from?**

There are many sources at your disposal. However, **before you start goldlisting, you need to prepare an extensive source** where you will be able to find new expressions for several days. There's nothing worse than spending 30 minutes every day looking for a new article to find 20 expressions for your headlist. It takes too long, and it's demotivating.

The best sources of vocabulary are **an interesting book, a TV series** that you watch regularly (even better if it contains subtitles in the same language), or **a blog** with many articles on interesting topics, or you can get your vocabulary from **podcasts**. Choose texts slightly above your level so that you can find enough new expressions there, but not too hard; otherwise, you'd have to look up every word.

You can also include words that you understand passively but would never know how to use in conversation. Goldlist will help you get them in your active vocabulary. If you're not sure about the correct translation of a certain expression, it's better to skip it. Your long-term memory is smart, and it won't store anything you don't trust.

Pro TIP

Many people feel discouraged by the fact that they have to find the vocabulary for their Goldlist themselves. They'd prefer to use methods that show them pre-chosen expressions, e.g., the Duolingo app. But don't be mistaken: If you let somebody else choose the vocabulary for you (e.g., an app), it saves you a little bit of time, but you won't learn the expressions as effectively as those that you pick yourself. Just like every other method for learning vocabulary, the Goldlist method works incomparably better when you learn expressions of your own choice. Learn to make looking for vocabulary a nice activity that you'll enjoy doing every day, and you'll see that the success rate will be even more than 30%.

● **One line – lots of information**

When goldlisting, you don't learn just vocabulary. **Your memory also collects information on grammar and pronunciation.** You can include in the line anything you consider suitable or necessary for learning the expression correctly. Feel free to include pronunciation (especially for English and French), accents (the meanings of certain Russian words depend on the stress placement), genders of nouns, or even past forms of irregular verbs. Don't torture yourself by memorizing grammar charts when you can add grammatical phenomena in your Goldlist and remember them much more easily.

When testing yourself, you can be strict and mark as "learned" only those expressions that you remember perfectly, including all the information that you added to them (pronunciation, accents, past tenses). But they don't have to be sorted only into those that you know and those you do not. I have good experience with creating a special group for the expressions that I knew almost perfectly. I could say them without any problem, but I got some detail wrong like the article or the accent. You can count such expressions as learned if you don't remember too many expressions from that list. On the other hand, if you remember the list very well, you can copy the "almost perfect" ones in the distilled list.

You can use various symbols to denote what expressions belong to which group. You can get creative here and think of any symbols you want. The most typical are: a tick (✓) for expressions you know perfectly, a dot (●) for those that you know just a part of, and an X (✗) for the ones you don't remember at all. More on symbols on p. 17.

● **Goldlisting in progress. Do not disturb!**

When creating new headlists and distilling, you should be well rested and have the time set aside specifically for this. No distractions. Do your goldlisting in a quiet environment and block out any distracting elements like music or TV. Your brain receives everything subconsciously, but you want it to focus solely on the vocabulary in your notebook.

You can goldlist in your favorite place, e.g., in your garden or on the balcony, but it could be the kitchen for some. Remember not to memorize the expressions in any way. Just be happy about them, and your long-term memory will take care of the rest.

- **Learn to write**

Always strive to use your prettiest handwriting in your lists. Don't rush it, take your time. No scribbling like you have to catch a train. The brain knows very well what you're writing. Believe it or not, **the strokes of your hand also influence your learning. That's why goldlisting is done on paper and not on a computer.** The memory effect with typing would be much weaker.
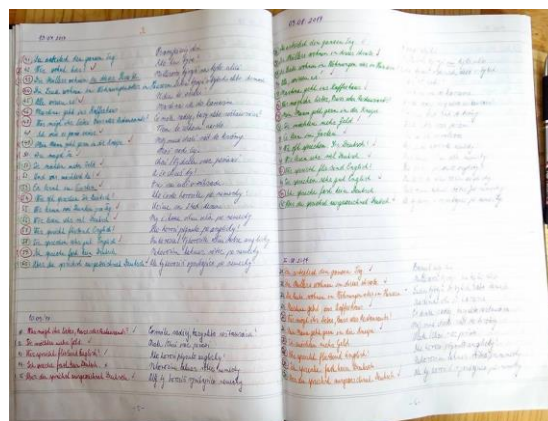
It also wouldn't hurt to **use color pens**. I write each list in a different color. It's up to you what colors you choose. For example, your headlists can be red, first distillations green, second distillations blue, and third distillations orange. Of course, that's just a suggestion. Various colors will make your lists bright and beautiful, and the remembering part will be a bit easier.

5. Testing and distillations

- **When should I test myself?**

A lot has been said about this, but it's always good to revise important information. As you already know, **at least two weeks must pass** between creating a headlist and doing the first distillation as well as between the individual distillations. If you break the rule and start distilling sooner, the expressions would renew in short-term memory and wouldn't get in long-term. That's what we're trying to avoid at all cost. Short-term memory must be excluded from the process completely, which can be achieved by waiting for two weeks.

Also, it's not recommended to wait more than two months between the distillations. But this period is not so strict as the two weeks. The upper limit is there to push you forward so that you can see progress and not lose time with long breaks. If you take a longer break from the

Goldlist method and switch to another method for learning vocabulary, you can come back to your lists later and distill them, that's no problem. It could be interesting to see how much you remember after six months or a year.

- **How should I test myself?**

I always test myself *from* Slovak (my native language) *into* the foreign language. I cover the column with the expressions in Swahili, Russian, or whatever language I'm currently learning, read the Slovak expressions one by one, and try to translate them aloud in the foreign language.

David James, the author of the Goldlist method, does it the other way around. He tests himself from the foreign language into his mother tongue, and then he activates the vocabulary in the future by traveling to the relevant country. But I want to be sure that I know the expressions not only passively but also actively; that's why **I always test myself from my mother tongue into the foreign language.**

Choose whichever way you want. This testing proves to me every day that this method works, even for words and expressions that I've seen only once. I'm always astounded that I'm always able to use them actively in two weeks.

Remember to always test yourself out loud and not count yet how many you know or don't know. Count these only after testing. Just write symbols next to the expressions for now, and you'll see how it went at the end. No rush and, of course, no cheating. :)

- **Symbols**

Symbols, as mentioned above, are a great help for testing yourself. As you already know, you don't have to divide the expressions into those you know from those you don't yet. Elements such as articles, pronunciation, accents, and various suffixes create flexible situations when you fail to translate the expressions 100% correctly. This group should be separated as well. It's up to you what symbols you use for the distillations.

For example, you can use a tick (✓) for expressions you know perfectly. You can use a dot (●) for the ones where you hesitated a little, didn't say them 100% correctly, or mixed up the noun article or some other detail. If you don't know the expression at all, you can use an X (✗).

Then when doing the distillation, you copy the expressions with the X symbol, and if you need some more expressions to fill in the distilled list, you can choose from the expressions with dots. Not all little mistakes have the same importance. If you get an accent in a Russian word wrong, which changes the meaning of the word completely, make sure to copy it. But if you mess up articles in German and it doesn't bother you too much, you can consider the expression learned.

If you end up with more than 70% of expressions with X's and dots (i.e., those you don't know perfectly yet), you have several options. More on that in the next chapter.

How can you take the symbols to the next level and get the most out of using them? See p. 27 in Chapter 8: *Tips and Tricks for Advanced Goldlisters.*

6. What if the Goldlist method doesn't work for me?

The Goldlist method doesn't always work 100%, but don't give up on it. Sometimes you just need to get the ball rolling by using the method and making the whole process automatic before you can determine how to adjust it to make it more effective for you Even though the method may have worked like a charm so far, it can still happen that you'll encounter a list you'll remember only 10–20% from. It's totally okay.

Goldlisting requires a specific approach. You need to try it yourself, experiment with resources that produce the most relevant and interesting vocabulary for you, and find places where you feel the most comfortable when writing and distilling.

If you haven't achieved the desired 30% with your first lists, it's possible that you're making a mistake somewhere. Read the following list of frequent mistakes, and maybe you'll find out what you've been doing wrong. Avoid them and you'll see that your goldlisting will flow like a dream.

a)   Possible reasons why the Goldlist method doesn't work for you

1. **Cheating on the 2-week break:** Some people are impatient or want to cheat on the method because they're afraid that they won't remember 30% of the expressions in two weeks. So they sometimes peek at the lists before the end of the required 2-week period. In this way, short-term memory is activated, and long-term memory doesn't bring them the desired results, i.e., the results won't be long term. If this point applies to you, try coming back to goldlisting, and this time, no cheating!

2. **Memorizing vocabulary:** As mentioned before, the Goldlist method is pleasant, chill, and playful. The whole remembering process works subconsciously. If you consciously try to remember the expressions, the long-term memory is switched off, as described in point 1. Memorizing works only with short-term memory. Don't worry; read the vocabulary only once, and in two weeks you'll see how amazingly the method works.

3. **Being distracted:** Writing headlists and distilling them requires your full focus without any outside distractions. If all you can think about is tomorrow's shopping, or you keep your eyes on your children or TV all the time, I guarantee that you're not going to be happy with the results in two weeks. You have to pay attention to what you're writing; do it consciously, don't rush it, and keep your full focus. There's no point in doing it otherwise.

4. **Music in the background:** Some people like to learn and work with music. I don't recommend this, even if it's just in the background. The brain switches its focus to your favorite song and stops focusing fully to the expressions in the list you're writing. It's really important that you find a calm, distraction-free time slot in your day, and you'll be in for a nice surprise in two weeks.

5. **Illness:** It's no surprise that you can't do much at school or work if you don't feel too well. If you're ill, feverish, or in pain, your health is priority no. 1. You can come back to goldlisting when you're better. Illness weakens your body as well as your memory. Keep that in mind and take a few days' break from goldlisting.

6. **Writing and distilling lists takes too long:** It's possible to grow tired while goldlisting, and so does your memory. That's why it's good to take short breaks to give the long-term memory some time to recuperate. You should spend no more than 20–25 minutes in one sitting with goldlisting. If you take a rest afterwards, you can continue on with your distillations or writing another headlist. It's totally okay. But if you like to goldlist for an hour at a time, it would really be better if you take a walk and only come back to goldlisting afterwards.

7. **Sleep deprivation:** Not getting enough sleep at night can also negatively affect your results when testing yourself. You should be well rested for writing headlists and distilling. Don't do it right before going to bed, when you almost can't see the letters anymore, or after pulling an all-nighter at work or at a party. Tiredness can greatly affect the number of expressions you're going to remember in two weeks. If you feel tired when goldlisting, try doing it at a different time of day. I have had great experience with waking up a bit earlier and doing my goldlisting first thing in the morning.

> „*Sleep deprivation can affect your results.*"

8. **Stress:** If you write under pressure, don't have much time, or want to get it over with as fast as possible, you surely already know you're doing it wrong. The process takes place on the subconscious level—you're not learning this consciously—that's why you need to put in some time and focus. You need to feel absolutely calm for this method. Otherwise, there's no point in doing it.

9. **Using unattractive materials:** Resources and materials for collecting new vocabulary should be interesting to you, and the expressions should be useful for conversations with foreigners or coworkers. If you write down expressions you know you won't ever use, your brain has no reason for remembering them. That can happen if you use fiction as your resource, which is often too literary and contains unusual expressions not used in normal conversation. It's much better to work with nonfiction (e.g., biographies or popular science). So if you've chosen Jane Austen novels and you're wondering why you can't

remember words like *dowry* or *bonnet* (meaning "hat"), consider using another book. I always recommend nonfiction for language-learning purposes, such as self-development literature (like books on success, happiness, how to be a good parent, etc.).

10. **Lack of interest:** Another reason why the method doesn't work for you as you'd like could be your lack of interest in the language. If you're not really interested in the language, topic, or vocabulary, you're not going to remember the expressions you write down. I hope you don't belong in this group and you're driven forward by a generous dose of motivation. But if you feel that your motivation for learning the language is insufficient, consider looking for a stronger one, or change the language you learn.

11. **Sloppy writing:** I'm sure no one is proud of sloppy writing. However, scribbling in your notebook can have a huge impact on how many expressions are going to be kept by your long-term memory. Try taking 30–60 minutes to be deliberate with your handwriting, play with it, and use color pens. I always say your eyes must enjoy this as well! So make your lists beautiful, neat, and colorful. (By the way, it's not just me who's saying this. I got this recommendation directly from David James. His notebook might not be that colorful, but he's always really careful with his handwriting in order to have aesthetically pleasing lists.)

12. **Alcohol:** Do you write your lists when you relax with a glass of wine? If it's just an occasional way to make the method more enjoyable, it's totally okay. But if you find out that you don't remember much in two weeks, try excluding the alcohol next time. Let your long-term memory work without any influence of substances.

13. **Too much information:** Writing too many words in one line is also a frequent mistake. If you use the line space for a whole sentence with three new words, their pronunciation, and past tense or declination forms, your brain is not going to manage it all. In that case, divide the expression into several lines. Remember that each expression should contain no more than 1–2 new words. If you also include too much information on one line, try to avoid this by making the expressions simpler.

b)   I can't remember 30%! How do I write it down in the book?

If you've just found yourself in one or more points in the list above, try changing that in the next lists. **Think about what you could do differently to improve your goldlisting process.** Do you use materials that suit you best? Do you write them during the most optimal time for you?

If your distillations haven't proven to be as great as you expected, don't quit on the method just yet, especially now that you've discovered what you were doing wrong. You don't even have to start anew; you can use the lists you've already created.

I'm going to show you three ways of copying expressions into distilled lists if you didn't manage to remember 30% of them, leaving you with more than 70% of expressions to be copied. This advice is important, so read carefully.

➔ **Copy more than 70% – but don't number them.**

Photo credit: Alexandra Hanková
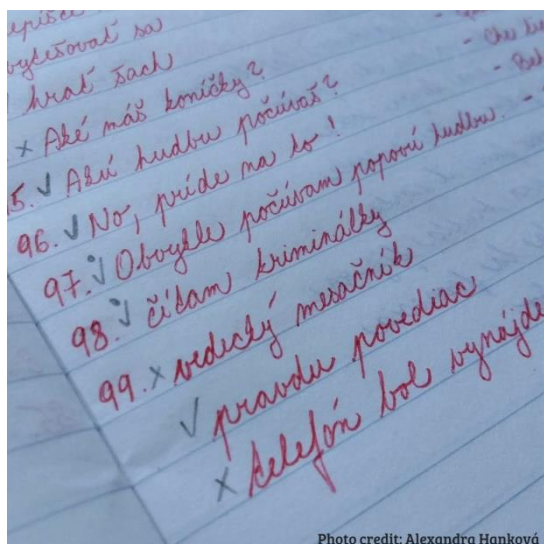
The first option is to simply copy more expressions. But remember to add only one or two lines to the list that aren't going to be numbered. That means that if you're doing the first distillation of a headlist, you copy 14 expressions that are numbered normally and add to them one or two lines without numbering. For the next distillation, try to copy only the 10 expressions that you'd normally do. It's possible that the extra lines are going to stay with us for a couple of more distillations, i.e., the next distillation will have more lines than it should; that's okay. It just sometimes happens that you encounter several difficult expressions in one list.

➔ **Combine the expressions.**

If you don't want to ruin your neat lists and extra lines are out of question, you can **join some lines together**. This way, you can **copy more than 70% of the forgotten expressions,** but you cram them in the lines at your disposal. Remember to observe a couple of rules, outlined below. The best-case scenario would be to join the expressions that go together due to their meanings.

Let's say that you can't remember the expressions "a whole bunch of problems" and "a broken air-conditioner." These two expressions had nothing in common in the text they came from; maybe you even picked them from two different sources, but you put them in one list. In the new distilled list you write down, "a whole bunch of problems with a broken air-conditioner." (NB: In languages that decline their nouns, i.e., Russian, remember to verify the expression at least in Google Translate to be sure that you got the grammar right.)

But this way of joining the expressions is often impossible, especially if you use longer expressions, not just individual words. If you can't join the expressions in any logical way, just write them down next to each other and separate them by a dash. That means, in our case, you'd write down "a whole bunch of problems – a broken air-conditioner," and next to that, you write a translation of both of them in the target language in the same way. It's just about saving one line. In two weeks, mark as learned only those lines that you remember entirely and perfectly.

➔ **Rule them out of the lists.**

The last option for the situation when you remember fewer than 30% of expressions is to rule them out of the lists entirely. But don't just throw away any expressions. Think about the expression. Do you need it? Are you going to ever use it in conversation? Maybe you used an expression from a marginal area of vocabulary that's not used very often, and maybe you're not even that much interested in it. If so, your brain already knew about that, and that's why it doesn't remember it. In that case, just rule the expression out and forget about it. The Goldlist method is a great help for learning vocabulary, even if you won't remember each and every expression from the lists. **Make as much of the Goldlist method as you can and don't worry about the rest.**

Personally, I don't use this option at all as I think in advance about the relevance of the expressions when I create the headlist. You'll gradually learn to distinguish useful words from the others, and you won't have to discard any expressions from your lists.

- **The Goldlist method doesn't work for everyone**

Even though the author of the method is convinced that it works for everyone who observes the basic principles, my experience with thousands of people whom I've told about it shows otherwise. Some people fall in love with this method right on the first day and keep goldlisting for even two years. Others try it but don't like it that much. I stand by the idea that everybody should spend time with the activities they personally enjoy. So if you feel the Goldlist method doesn't work for you even when

Photo credit: Veronika Harmanová

you did everything right according to Chapter 6: *What if the Goldlist method doesn't work for me?* don't force yourself into it and try other methods instead for learning vocabulary. Enjoyment is the most important ingredient.

As a part of an experiment, I tried the Goldlist method in different conditions than I recommend to people usually. I wrote just individual words, not expressions. I took them from the textbook I was currently using for my Swahili, but I jumped forward to the more advanced chapters that I wasn't working with at the time. **I had no personal relationship to the words.** It was as if I'd just opened a dictionary to a random page and wrote down some words. **In two weeks, I remembered zero of them.** I got fed up after four distillations and quit goldlisting for some time.

I came back to the method only later, when I spoke Swahili a bit better, and this time I did everything according to the recipe that had proven effective with my German and Russian: I use expressions, not words, and I find them in texts that I've already worked with in the past even though I've never learned those specific expressions. **The results are amazing.** Out of 14 expressions, I can often rule out 3–5 ones that I'm perfectly sure of. I enjoy learning Swahili vocabulary again.

7. Goldlist method explained: a tiny bit of theory

● **Human memory**

To understand as best as possible what's happening in your head while goldlisting, you need to differentiate between short-term and long-term memory. You already know that **the Goldlist method helps you to store vocabulary in your long-term memory subconsciously and effortlessly.** If you manage to achieve that, you're going to remember the expressions from the lists for a long time or even for the rest of your life. **Short-term memory, also called the "working memory," stores information only for a short time,** and if you don't work with the information any further, you'll simply forget it. An example of

„Long-term memory is really powerful, but don't forget that it works subconsciously."

such information in your working memory could be an instruction from your teacher on what page you're to open to in your textbook or a certain date that your colleague mentions in a conversation.

Many factors influence whether certain information in your brain gets transferred from short-term memory into long-term. I discussed the reasons affecting the results of the method in the section *Possible reasons why the Goldlist method doesn't work for you* on p. 19 of Chapter 6.

David James says that storing information in long-term memory only works *sub*consciously—not while we are *conscious*, or focused, on the expressions, and that's why we aren't able to influence it directly or control it. **Long-term memory works differently from short-term.** While short-term memory is able to store a huge amount of information in a short time (e.g., a day before an exam), long-term memory can't be fooled like this. It's almost impossible for the brain to remember such a huge amount of information forever. You're going to start forgetting it gradually, and only the information you remember after two weeks is safely stored in your long-term memory. But it's not much as you were trying to learn too much stuff by force.

As you can see, **long-term memory is really powerful, but you have to remember that it works subconsciously.** That's what you need to use for learning vocabulary. You'll avoid laboring over many expressions that will fade out from your memory sooner or later.

- **Learning should be like breathing!**

Maybe you're wondering what on earth learning has in common with breathing. David James explained this nicely in one of his [blog posts](#).

Memory and the remembering process itself can truly be compared to breathing. Imagine that! Most of the time, you don't realize that you breathe. It's a subconscious process. You don't need to put any effort into it, but your body still knows what to do. If you try to breathe in a special way, like taking deep breaths or breathing too quickly on purpose, you won't last long. In some time, you'll return to your original, involuntary way of breathing because it's best for your body.

Now look at it from the perspective of learning. If you're trying to memorize vocabulary, it's as if you turn off the natural processes in your mind. In other words, **if you take control of your memory and start memorizing, you automatically block out your natural long-term memory,** and the expressions will stay with you for just a short time.

As David James further explains in his blog post, it can be nicely understood through the example of children and their way of learning. Children under 5–6 years of age seem to be able to pick up a language effortlessly. The natural development of the brain also plays a role here, which allows children to soak up new information like a sponge.

Another element is that **children don't even realize they're learning something.** They pick up the language naturally, and the greater fun it is for them, the more easily they remember vocabulary. Only after they come to school do they suddenly realize that they are learning something, and they then have to make some effort to remember new things. That's how short-term memory gets to the foreground, blocking the natural function of long-term memory.

8. Tips and tricks for advanced goldlisters

If you have some experience with the Goldlist method and you can boast a nice collection of lists, I'm sure you'll appreciate some tips and tricks for advanced goldlisters. But the following advice can also come in handy for beginners who don't have that much time for writing lists or who want to use the method to the full right from the start.

- **I don't have that much time! What now?**

If you do your Goldlists regularly, there will come a time when the tasks somehow add up. If you have a notebook with several distillations in progress and keep making a new headlist every day, it could become too much at some point. But the Goldlist method is not supposed to put you under pressure. That's why I'm going to tell you how to adjust the system for your needs if you don't have that much time. In an ideal world, you'd create a headlist and first, second, and third distillations on one day. However, **nothing happens if you slow down a little bit** and divide the day's work into two days.

For example, when I have a busy day, I make a new headlist (section A) and a second distillation (into section C) in an eligible list (i.e., in an older list that I distilled for the first time at least two weeks ago). The next day, I do the remaining distillations, i.e., a first distillation (into section B) and a third distillation (into section D) – always in eligible lists. I combine them like this (A+C and B+D) because it always totals roughly the same amount of time every day. It's up to you how you combine the distillations with the new headlist.

It's true that the progress will slow down a bit as well, but it keeps you in contact with the language every day, and that's the key. Remember that **the goldlisting intensity can always be adjusted to your current time availability**. It's even perfectly okay to do just one distillation or headlist a day.

- **Alternative method of distillation**

If you don't like to multitask and would rather do things one after another, you're going to love this alternative way of distilling your lists. Just write one new headlist a day, and then after two weeks or even after a month, you start with the first distillations. Nothing less, nothing more. Put writing headlists aside and do distillations only. After the last A → B distillation, continue with the B → C distillations until you come to the last list. The same

goes for the C → D distillations. When you finish the whole cycle, start creating headlists again. This way of goldlisting doesn't take so much time, but your progress will be much slower. **It's not necessary to have each type of distillation in progress at the same time.** It's totally okay if you decide on this option and do one after another. The only condition is to keep the 2-week break.

● **System of symbols – extended**

I already wrote about the basic symbols indicating whether you know an expression or not. However, this system can be extended by combining the symbols. Try it for yourself.

Pro TIP

✓	(tick)	= I know it, no hesitation
.	(dot)	= I know it, but only partially or with mistakes
✗	(krížik)	= I don't know it at all
∨	(tick with a dot)	= I know it, but I made a tiny mistake (wrong accent in Russian, pronunciation of one syllable in English, etc.)
✗.	(krížik s bodkou)	= I don't know it, but I had at least a faint idea of how the word sounds, or that it ends with a certain syllable, etc.

When testing yourself, put a symbol in the margin that indicates how well you knew the expressions. The combination of a tick and a dot will help you very much when you decide which expressions you're going to copy. For example, if you need to rule out 6 expressions and you've put a tick by 8 expressions while two of them also have a dot, you will know that those two expressions should be copied.

● **Combining the Goldlist method with other methods**

If you have seen my video course (called [Language Master](#)), you already know of several methods for effective learning of vocabulary. If you'd like to also use another method for learning vocabulary at the same time, you can but **be careful not to use the same expression with two different methods.** You could write words from a book or blog only in your Goldlist, and if you decide to combine this method with Anki, you can learn unknown expressions from TV series or movies there.
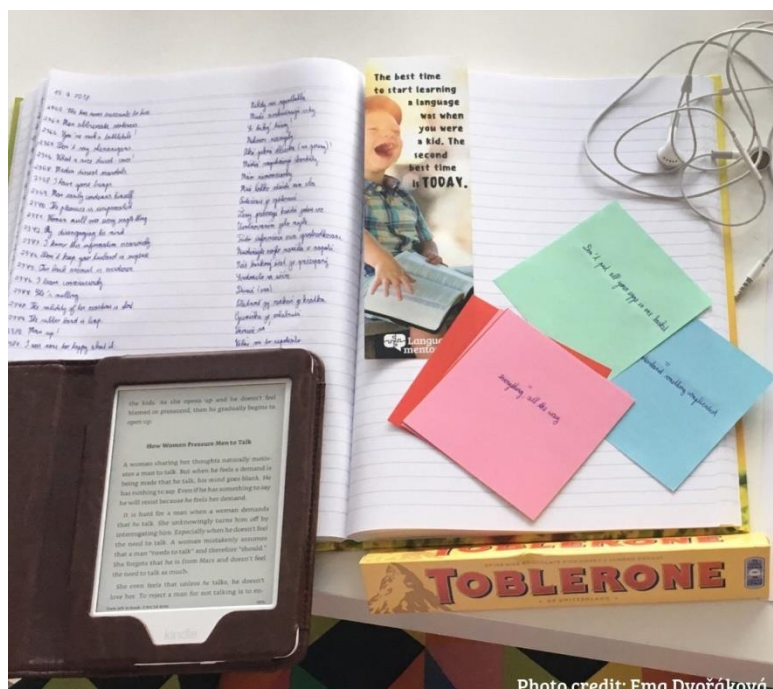
Just remember that these two methods work differently. While the Goldlist method is based on subconscious memory of vocabulary, with the AnkiDroid app you revise vocabulary systematically every day via your conscious memory. If you used the same expressions in both methods, you'd break the 2-week rule in the Goldlist method. That's why I generally **recommend**

Photo credit: Ema Dvořáková

using only one method at a time. You can switch them at some point, if you want. I like to hop between these two methods because I tend to get bored with using only one after a couple of months.

- **One Goldlist – two foreign languages**

If you want to have one Goldlist notebook to learn two languages at once, you're going to find out very soon that it's not a good idea. Imagine writing German-French lists (or insert any two languages that are not your mother tongues), and when you come to distillations, you don't know the German expression in one line, the French expression in the second line, and you have problems with both versions in the third line. This makes copying the distilled lists unnecessarily complicated, and it would be a huge downer for your motivation; maybe you'll even quit distilling for good.

It's vital that you use your native language for goldlisting – or a foreign language that you know really, really well. For example, I'd dare to make my Goldlists in English, but I'm still faithful to my native Slovak.

However, if you want to write two Goldlists in two foreign languages, you can. It's true that I say it's always more effective if you focus on only one language at a time, but if you want to learn two languages at the same time and see that you have great results, I see no problem in that. If you have two notebooks for two languages, it won't affect your ability to remember vocabulary in them.

● **Jumping from Bronze into Silver**

You already know one of the options of creating a new headlist in the Silver book. Just take three third distillations (D sections) in the Bronze book and copy them to form a headlist in the Silver book. It's okay that it makes up for 21 expressions instead of 20.

However, there's another way for those who want to **use the method's potential to the full**. Make four distillations in section D, wait two weeks from writing down the last (fourth) one, and then distill all four at once. Out of 28 expressions (4x7), pick 20 that you don't remember—the 30%-rule works here as well!—and use them in your new Silver headlist.

This way is much more effective as you don't lose time, and the Silver notebook will contain only those words that you haven't stored in your long-term memory yet. I have very good experience with this method and always do it like this.

9. What do experienced goldlisters say?

Ema Dvořáková: *"Goldlist – love at the first sight. This charming method **changed my approach to learning vocabulary.** I used to memorize words with zero results. As soon as I discovered Goldlist, everything changed. The expressions pop up in my head in any situation and I'm able to use them. **I've been goldlisting for over a year and I still love it.** I'm always excited when I'm creating a new headlist and I'm so happy when I do the distillations. It's an amazing feeling when you distill the words and see that you know more and more of them.*

And they're not just somewhere in the back of my mind but I can use them actively! That's the best thing. I use this excellent method for English and Russian. I have 114 lists and 2281 expressions in my English notebook (and counting). My notebook is beautiful and that's why I can't wait to come back to it every day. It's my third Goldlist notebook for English. My Russian? At the time I have 13 lists and 260 expressions in my purple notebook which also makes learning so much fun."
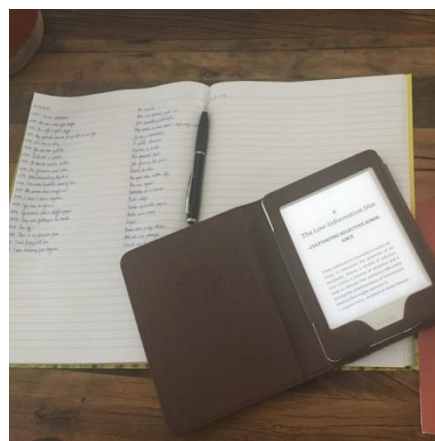
Miriam Kovalčíková: *"I think **the author of the Goldlist method should get a Nobel Prize!** I don't memorize words. They jump in my memory by themselves. I can suddenly create sentences and use words and expressions I was never able to remember. I use the method also for grammar. I note down phrases with prepositions and sentences in various tenses. I get new vocabulary from an Assimil book and from a book with exercises. I'm just finishing off the third notebook for my German Goldlist and I've already bought four for my Russian.*

*I had a problem at the beginning – I was trying to memorize the vocabulary like I used to do at school. Then I started to focus more on my pronunciation and it went much better. **This method helped me immensely.**"*
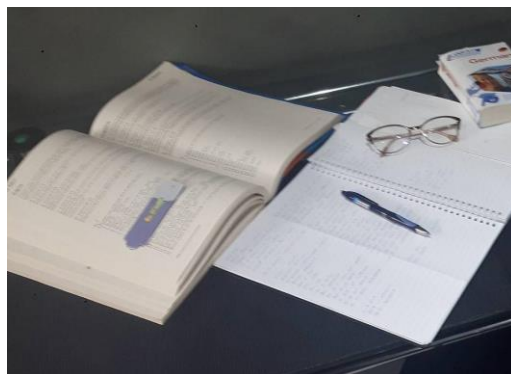

Mati Svobodová: *"I started goldlisting on January 15, 2018 and since then, there have been times of intensive learning and some longer breaks. I have 55 headlists, that means I wrote number 1100 today. And I have to say, I owe most of my Italian knowledge to the Goldlist method. I listen to audiobooks and podcasts, I have Italki conversations, but **I've learned the most with the Goldlist method.**"*

Michala Zuzáková: *"**I started goldlisting thanks to the Language Mentoring videos** two years ago. My first headlist is dated August 17, 2016. Since then, I've finished 4 notebooks. **I prefer to get my vocabulary from books, magazines and articles** that I read. Later when I do the distillations, I can say exactly what article or book it comes from, so I know the context. While writing new lists and distilling, I always try to focus on what I'm doing and eliminate any distractions.*
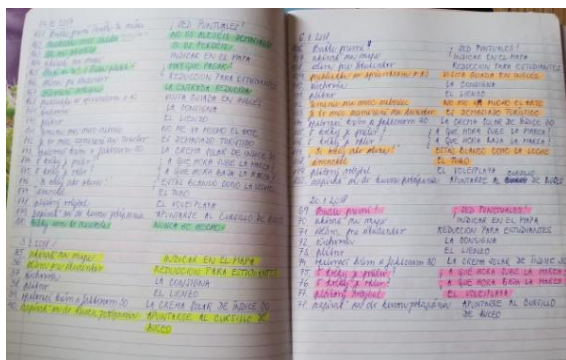
I was sometimes really motivated (especially during the [Autodidacts' Academy](#)) but sometimes I needed a break. The thing is, I found a system that works for me and that I enjoy."

Ivana Hofbauerová Veselá: *"When I started goldlisting, my English was at about A2/B1 level and I often struggled to understand even Facebook posts. **Today, I read books in English effortlessly.** I goldlisted almost daily during the first couple of months, then I slowed down a bit because of some obligations. Now I'm trying to do it every day again. I created 103 headlists with 2060 expressions during 182 days*

of goldlisting.

I'm 43 years old and my focus and memory aren't

*what they used to be. Still, I can do it! **All I need is motivation and resilience. I believe now that anybody can do it.**"*
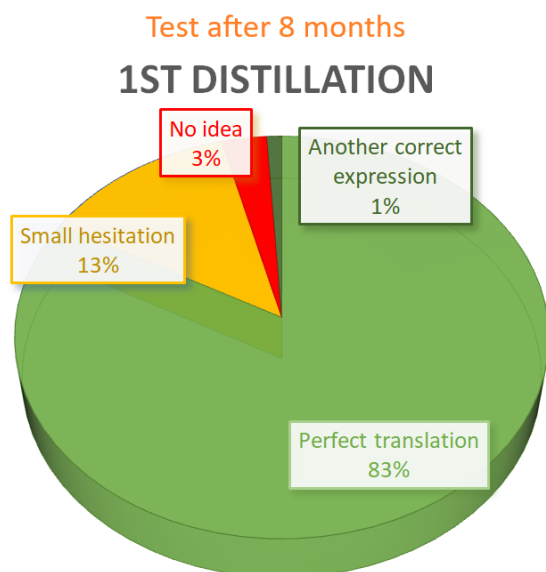
10.   Will I really remember the expressions long term?

Many people are skeptical at the beginning; they don't really believe that this method will work for them and that they're going to remember the vocabulary for a long time. Believe it or not, I also used to be this way. That's why **I decided to test my results after several months of goldlisting.**

Eight months from creating the first Russian headlist, I tested my knowledge. I did it from my native Slovak into Russian, and I went through the expressions that I knew already during the first distillation (the ones with a tick). I hadn't seen the expressions since the first distillation

was done, so I was really curious about the efficacy of the method. I was pretty shocked when I saw the result of my little experiment.

As you can see in the chart, a**s much as 83% of the expressions remained in my long-term memory.** That's an amazing result, don't you think? **I hesitated a bit when I was trying to translate 13% of the expressions** into Russian. Those were the cases in which I used a wrong preposition or pronounced the word with a wrong accent. And if I couldn't remember at least one whole word in the expression, I considered it not learned. Those were just 3% of all the expressions, which is almost negligible.

Test after 8 months

1ST DISTILLATION

No idea 3%

Another correct expression 1%

Small hesitation 13%

Perfect translation 83%

This test confirmed my belief that **learning vocabulary with the Goldlist method is much more effective than traditional memorizing** at school. Not only did I remember the expressions after eight months, I can still use them in active speech today—an achievement rarely seen at school. I love goldlisting; I have many notebooks full of expressions in various languages to prove that. Of course, there are also other effective methods for learning vocabulary (I write about one of them in my ebook *Flashcards Adventure*), and it's good to change them during long-term language learning. However, with Goldlist you don't even realize that you're learning!

It's amazing how this method works, and I think **it's definitely worth trying yourself.** Forget memorizing and forgetting. Remember the vocabulary once and for all.

One notebook. Thousands of words. No memorizing.

11. What's next?

If you're already a fan of the Goldlist method, I have important information for you.

1. First of all, **welcome among goldlisters**! You're starting a new era of your language learning. Enjoy it!

2. **System is king!** If you don't create a plan for how you're going to proceed with the method, there's a big chance that you'll soon forget about your learning. If you're really busy, create a plan that's not too demanding, e.g., a new headlist 3x a week and one distillation every other day.

3. **Goldlisting itself is not enough.** It must be combined with other methods to improve your comprehension and speaking. If you'd like a complete guide on how to improve your foreign language skills from the lower-intermediate level and higher, check out my Language Master video course.

   Remember, language learning must meet four conditions in order to be successful:

   - you need to enjoy it
   - you need to spend a lot of time with it (an hour a day is perfect)
   - you need to use effective methods (e.g., Goldlist)
   - you need to find a system

4. **Let's stay in touch!** Follow Language Mentoring and our language-learning tips on:
   - Facebook: Language Mentoring
   - Instagram: languagementoring
   - Youtube: Language Mentoring
   - Website: www.languagementoring.com
   - E-mail: info@languagementoring.com

   If you have any questions, feel free to drop us a line.

5. **If you would like to share this free ebook with your friends, please send them here: https://languagementoring.com/goldlist**

Finally, I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to my amazing team, especially **Saška Hanková,** without whom this ebook would never have come into existence.

I wish you success with this excellent method and lots of fun with learning your language!

Your language mentor,

Lýdia Machová