



Fáilte ar ais arís, a chairde! I've reached my 9 month mark. It's time for a new evaluation. How did I do with the goals I set myself at 6 months? What do I think I'll be able to accomplish in the next months as I get to the first anniversary? The weather here is pleasant enough for the moment. I'm wondering how my journey will be as we start into the steaming days of summer.

It's the lot of every learner of a new language: frustration, embarrassment, seasoned with just enough delightful success to keep one going. Although I feel a deeply ingrained cultural pull toward the language and the country, I am learning Irish by choice. Nothing is forcing me to continue. I don't, for example, need Irish for work. All the pressure I put on myself is placed there solely by me. No one is standing over me, pushing me onward. When I feel frustrated, when I reach for Irish and it seems I've forgotten everything, I am the one who has to serve as his own cheerleader and shout "Onward!" When I make what I judge to be an utterly stupid mistake talking to my language partner in Cork, the sting of embarrassment makes me wish for a hole to open in the ground and swallow me.

What do I do when I feel like I want to quit? I ask myself questions to resolve my difficulties and they seem to work.

- **Have I lost interest?** The answer is always "No".
- **Am I pushing myself too hard?** Sometimes, it's "Yes" and I have to agree to back off, to ease up, to be nice to myself.
- **Have I lost focus and am wandering too much?** From time to time, this happens. I might spend too much time reading and not balance that with speaking and listening.
- **Are my study sessions out of kilter?** I've found I learn best in a series of short bursts. A study session that's too long saps my energy. Occasionally, though, I'll get sucked into it for one reason or another and, before I know it, I've burned out my study-brain.
- **Do I have an unrealistic expectation for myself?** I make myself a victim when I'm being a perfectionist. I have to counter this by taking myself a little less seriously. It's not important that I fell; it's important I got back up – even if I fell down immediately thereafter...and am getting up again.

I tried giving myself a vacation day from Irish. Sorry. Couldn't do it. I tried, though. There was no setting aside **an teanga** for a day. I will say I did less Irish that day. A vacation from Irish is not what I need. I need to remember to be kind and patient with myself and enjoy the ride. The journey is the destination.

Bitesize Irish

Three months ago, I had 9 courses remaining before I finished the Bitesize Irish content. The goal I set for myself was to complete them all by the end of May.

Goal status: Incomplete

I completed 3 of the 9 courses and half of 3 others. There remain 3 yet untouched. What happened? Not to make excuses but I think the University of Dublin Irish courses started taking the place of Bitesize courses for me. My Bitesize membership became more about feeling involved in the social aspect of the site, **Bitesize Pobal**. I did not often miss a day visiting the community site. I responded to Bitesize Emma's challenge to learn a song. I participated in forum conversations and was there for the live Q&A sessions. When I started talking weekly with a **gaeilgoir** in Cork, the **Bitesize Beo** live conversation sessions became less critical for me. I did study all the **Bitesize Comhrá** lessons. Since I had (and still have) a goal of becoming "conversational" within 9 to 12 months, those lessons have been a big aid.

Goal status: rudimentary conversation: complete (but needs work, obviously)

Thanks to Bitesize, there are at least 9 areas in which I can have very basic conversations.

Goals for next 3 months: study the remaining 3 untouched courses and complete the 3 courses I've done half of. I also have the goal to make a video in Irish, perhaps by the end of July.

Duolingo

At my 6 month evaluation, I set myself the goal of completing the entire Irish language tree by the end of May.

Goal status: incomplete

There are 5 levels in the Irish language tree: a basic level and 4 others that follow it. Between each level, one takes a test and must pass the test to continue. I passed the test for the final level in Irish and began working on the remaining material. There are 19 sections in level 5. I have done 2 and a half. I have also maintained a streak of over 250 days daily use of Duolingo.

Goal for the next 3 months: continue to enjoy Duolingo. No pressure to finish the tree. If I do, fine; if I don't also fine. The goal is to keep doing it every day.

Gaeilge gan Stró

I had several goals related to this course material. The first goal was to complete the Beginner Level book by the middle of March, spend the rest of March reviewing, and start on the Lower Intermediate Level book by the end of the month.

Goal status: complete

When I started on the Lower Intermediate Level book, I had a goal of getting through at least six units by the end of May. By the second week of April, I came to the conclusion, this second book was at a different level (not to make a pun) than the first. I felt the book really needed to be used in some kind of classroom environment rather than as a “teach yourself” book. The audio recordings accompanying the book and the course material itself seemed to be quite a jump from what I was used to in the Beginner book. I made a couple of decisions: first, I would not try to study the Lower Intermediate book in the way I had done for the Beginner book; second, I decided I would spend most of the time doing aural comprehension of the material and take on the whole book’s content at once.

When I did my aural and spoken review of the Beginner Level book, I felt a strong need to work more on active language production – in other words, build my speaking ability. My aural comprehension of all the material in the Beginner Level was fine. My speaking was lagging behind. At the same time, I did not want to abandon the Lower Intermediate material. Since the middle of April, I have focused on strengthening my speaking ability based on the Beginner Level book and have listened to the audio material for the Lower Intermediate book. I am not trying to “learn” the Lower Intermediate material. I am familiarizing myself with it.

I have the impression the Beginner Level book is meant to equip you to pass the A1 and A2 levels of the TEG.

<https://www.teg.ie/exam-levels/-bonnleibh%C3%A9al-1-a1.307.html>

<https://www.teg.ie/exam-levels/bonnleibh%C3%A9al-2-a2.308.html>

When I took the sample examinations, my weakest point is in A2 writing.

Goal for the next 3 months: I will work on writing as I continue to build up my speaking skills.

FutureLearn Irish 105

It gives me a special thrill when I see a new word, try to pronounce it before listening to the recorded pronunciation, and I say it correctly. This small accomplishment is a joy to me and makes me feel like I’ve actually made progress. Of course, I don’t always get it right but often enough I do. At this point, that’s good enough for me.

I continue to enjoy this series of courses. At the sixth month mark, I did not set any special goals related to FutureLearn. My goal has simply been to continue. I am doing this and looking forward to moving on to Irish 106 on completion of Irish 105.

The teachers of these Irish courses said that Irish 101 through Irish 104 were designed to enable students to pass the TEG A1 exam. The next set of courses, which I think go up to Irish 108, is intended to prepare students to pass the A2 exam. It’s no wonder I have been finding the courses relatively easy. I have done so much of this work already. I see there are 200 level Irish courses. I have every intention of continuing to take these courses until I reach the last course offered.

Listening and Speaking

I have been truly blessed in finding a **gaeilgoir** in Cork who wanted to learn Hebrew and who was willing to do a language swap with me. The first few weeks we met, as far as Irish goes, I had so many questions we hardly got any conversation done. In the past weeks, though, we have had a conversation topic of the week. This is a similar practice to the weekly **Bitesize Beo** (live) conversation sessions except, first, there’s no script and, second, I’m talking for 15 minutes or more free-style instead of a structured minute and a half. The weekly Skype meetings have been vital to my progress and I hope I will be able to continue them for the foreseeable future.

Séadna

My interest in this marvelous book has remained high. I have begun a detailed outline of all the stories it contains. There are many more than I expected there would be. I haven’t completed this initial work but I hope to finish sometime in June. After that, I will start to consider a number of focus areas for potential papers I might write.

My Imaginary Long Walk

I am so glad I was inspired to start a virtual exploration of all the Irish-speaking areas. I started in November 2020 visiting the **gaeltacht** areas in Meath. I went south to Ring then west to the areas near Cork. A visit to the Clear Island gaeltacht was followed by going to the Dingle peninsula and the Aran islands. Now I’m in the area of County Galway known as **Gaeltacht Cois Fharráige**. Along the way, I also did Virtual City Walks in Drogheda, Dublin, Waterford, Wexford, Cork, Tralee, and Galway.

My initial goal – beyond becoming familiar with the areas – was to learn 50-100 new words in every place I visited. I have succeeded in this goal. I also altered my schedule from spending 2 weeks in each place to taking as long as I liked. This has meant spending more time in some places and less in others but has made the overall journey really pleasant.

I’m looking forward to continuing the trip and, even more, to doing the whole thing again after I’ve completed the first round!

Slán go fóill!