

Tips for Studying a Foreign Language

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General Study Tips

- **Study often** – Study for short periods of time throughout the day, every day.
- **Actively participate in class** – Speak with, listen carefully to, and ask questions of classmates and the instructor.
- **Read the text** – As with every class, one should read the text well before class so that he or she is prepared to actively participate.
- **Take notes in class** – Use a coherent organization strategy for taking notes. Also, attempt to take them using as much of the new language as possible.
- **Use the language in every way you can** – The eyes, pen, and mouth should work together to help reinforce language learning. For example, do not just read; read out loud. Do not just listen; write what is heard.
- **Do not ignore past lessons** – Language learning is cumulative. Continual review is important to ensure that previously learned material is retained.
- **Have fun with the language** – When any subject seems boring to the learner, progress slows. Use the language in ways that are new and entertaining. Playing games, reading tongue twisters, and listening to music are only a few ways to have fun with a new language.

Tips for Studying Vocabulary

1. Do not write English translations of unknown words in the margins of the text; this causes the student to rely on the English translation.
2. Study with flashcards until the vocabulary words are more than just familiar; the vocabulary of the new language should be automatic and ingrained much like the student's native vocabulary.
3. Flashcards should be made for common words that the student continually has trouble with, even if they are not current vocabulary words in the class.
4. Place post-it notes on objects or draw pictures on flashcards so that words can be associated with objects or concepts as opposed to English words. For example, if a student is learning the Spanish word "gato," he or she should strive to associate the word with the concept and image of a cat as opposed to the English word "cat."

Tips for Studying Grammar

Vocabulary is only the superficial part of a language; grammar is the deep structure that allows language to function. Simply memorizing vocabulary will not help the student as much if the student does not understand how those words can be arranged.

1. If the student hears a term like 'preposition,' 'pronoun,' or 'present progressive' and is unsure of what those terms mean, the student should conduct research. Once the concepts make sense in the student's native tongue, understanding the concepts in the new language will be easier.
2. Make separate flash cards for practicing grammar concepts such as verb conjugations, common phrase constructions, and rules of syntax.
3. When a new grammar rule is introduced, attempt to write sentences using that rule. As new rules are introduced, write paragraphs and use each rule at least once.

Interact with the Language on Every Level

Read

Just as reading often helps a student become more proficient with his or her first language, the same is true when learning a foreign language.

1. When unfamiliar words appear, try to use context clues and words that are already known to help with understanding the unfamiliar words. The more a student advances in the study of a language, the harder it is to look up every unknown word. Instead, make a list of words to look up after reading and realize that attempting to understand 'rough' translations is part of the learning process.
2. Read children's stories or short works in the new language. Reading familiar stories in a new language is sometimes the best choice since the student will already have a rough understanding of the storyline.
3. Read the news in the new language. Websites offer international news in a variety of languages. News is current, relevant, and often accompanied by pictures that provide context.

Write

By writing often for practice and having a teacher, classmate, tutor, or bilingual friend check the practice, the student's writing skills will increase. A student's skill will only progress with time and practice, so do not become frustrated if it is initially difficult to convey the same meaning in the new language that can be conveyed in the student's native tongue.

1. Keep writing practice relevant. Writing about issues the student cares about or is interested in is far more useful than attempting to write about something the student would never talk about in the first place.
2. Keep a personal diary or practice journal in the new language.

3. Write mock emails to the course teacher or friends in Spanish. Whether the student sends them is optional.
4. Participate in online media with the new language. For example, construct a short Facebook status update in the new language.
5. Attempt to write a short story or poem in the new language. This will encourage the student to utilize new vocabulary and require him or her to play with the sounds of words.

Listen

It is very important for students to become familiar with the sounds, cadences, and flow of their new language in order to help them understand despite the speed of speech or dialect differences.

1. Some areas provide channels that are broadcast entirely in a foreign language. By watching a show or simply having the channel on in the background while doing chores or homework, students can become more comfortable with the sounds of their new language.
2. Music, while at times harder to understand than regular speech, is a great way to become accustomed to a new language and learn vocabulary. Songs are often easier to remember than rote phrases, so foreign language music can often be a pathway to vocabulary learning as well.
3. Foreign language movies can be hard for new learners as students often focus on subtitles as opposed to the actual language, causing the acquisition process to stall. Still, foreign language films provide a lot of context for understanding through images and storyline. Also, they make language learning more fun.

Speak

Language is meant to be used, and speaking is one of the most natural expressions of language learning. Students may feel intimidated by speaking, but they should remember that speaking a second or third language opens up new worlds and greater opportunities for those willing to pursue the skill.

1. Speaking with peers, the instructor, friends, tutors, individuals at work, or anyone who may speak the new language, is a great way to become proficient in a language. Speaking requires an individual to use all of his or her skills at once, accelerating language learning. Sometimes foreign language discussion groups held at your school or in your community can offer a place for discussion that students might not have access to otherwise.
2. At times it is useful for the student to simply to speak to themselves. By reminding themselves of what they need to buy at the store, having a mock conversation in their car, or simply reciting phrases in their new language, students are able to enhance their speaking ability all on their own.
3. Finally, remember that speaking can be integrated into other studies students are pursuing as well. Speaking should be integrated into reading and writing practice as well.