

Appendix A.3

How to Learn a Language

A.3.1 Basics We have five channels by which we acquire knowledge and skills, and communicate with the outside world.

They are :

Visual - what we see through the eyes

Aural - what we hear through the ears

Oral - what we speak through the mouth

Kinesthetic - what we express with our muscles (hands, face, body, etc.)

Mental, Abstract - what we process in the brain

In each individual student, some of these channels may be more developed than others. At present you may find it easiest to learn by seeing a diagram, or you may find it easier to learn by watching someone demonstrate a process, or you may prefer reasoning things out for yourself.

Part of "Learning to Learn" involves exercising each of these channels and improving the use of channels which have been neglected previously.

Learning a language will help you to develop all channels. We must not only read and understand (analyze what strings of words mean), we must also be able to speak so that others will understand what we say; we must learn to comprehend what we hear; we must analyze the grammatical constructions and be able to use them correctly. And, particularly for modern languages, advanced students should use correct "body language", e.g. the appropriate ways of showing respect or greeting (bow, incline the head, put hands together, click the heels, etc) in various cultures.

When learning a classical language there is the difficulty of not having native speakers of the language. However, for most languages there are international conventions of what is regarded as "accepted pronunciation" so that, for example, Latin or Classical/Biblical Greek scholars all over the world can understand one another when they speak. There is always some variation, just as there are variations in English pronunciation, but the variations are generally not so great as to cause difficulty in communication. For example, YouTube has videos in Latin and Greek, posted by people from all over the world. There are differences in pronunciation, but the meaning is clear.

A.3.2 First Steps in learning a Language

You will need to learn the "alphabet" or equivalent (syllabary, ideograms, hieroglyphs)

The best way to do this is to write each character by hand, saying the name and the sound of the character as you do so.

e.g. "alpha - ah - alpha - ah - alpha - ah - . . ." Do this 50 times.

Say the sound of the character aloud as you write it, so that your ears, eyes, hand, and brain start to build up the circuit "this character = this sound"

Go through the whole alphabet in order each day until the movement of the hand, the use of the voice, and the auditory and visual stimuli all give an automatic signal to the brain

When you progress to reading sentences, you will need to read them aloud until you become fluent in speech.

A.3.3 Learn the assigned vocabulary

A good way to do this is to make and use flash-cards. Making your own flash cards is much more effective than buying or downloading someone else's cards. You will use your hands (and voice) while you make them, and the care taken to spell the words correctly will reinforce the mental channel.

I find a good system is to cut 5" x 3" blank file cards in half, to give approx. 2½" x 3" cards.

Then write a word in the foreign language on one side, and its English equivalent on the other side.

Do this for all your vocabulary words. Stack the cards in a pile with an elastic band to hold them together.

Use a colored blank marker card to show the bottom of the pile.

Each day, start at the top of the pile. Read the top card aloud, in the language, try to remember the English equivalent, and check with the back of the card.

If you got it correct, put the card at the bottom of the pile, below the marker card and try the next card.

If you cannot remember a word, or if you get it incorrect, check the correct word, repeat it a couple of times, and put the card back in the pile, about three quarters the way up from the marker card.

Go to the next card.

Repeat the reading and checking until all the cards have been answered correctly and are below the marker card.

Later in the same day, reverse the stack and go through the pile again, English to Language.

Read the English word, and try to remember the foreign word.

Keep going until you get all the words correct.

Carry the stack with you, and do spot checks when you have a few minutes of spare time during the day.

After a week, you will know some words so well that you get them correct each time. Put those cards in a secondary stack, to be checked through only once a week to refresh the memory. Continue to add new vocabulary words to the main stack as they are assigned during the course. Eventually you will have several stacks - a Daily Stack of new words, a Weekly Stack of words you know fairly well, and a Monthly or Semester Stack of very-well-known words.

After your first year of consistent learning you will probably not need to use flash cards, but will go on to vocabulary lists or other methods.

A.3.4 Learn to read and understand complete phrases and sentences

When we learn our native language as children, we learn to speak full phrases and sentences first, and then we learn the rules of grammar when adults correct what we say. I find a similar method to be a quicker way of developing fluency and comprehension than if I learn a set of "grammar rules" first, and then build up sentences a word at a time. Most textbooks have sets of good practice sentences, so that we learn fairly automatically to say "I am, she is, we are" rather than "I is, they am". For online courses, much will depend on you - the individual student.

I can check on whether or not you have typed something correctly, and have made a good translation, but I cannot check whether or not you have read it aloud while doing so.

Reading aloud may seem embarrassing or silly at first, but it is the key to rapid learning.

Our brains need that auditory stimulus. Even terrible pronunciation is better than not speaking.

It is easy to correct mis-pronunciation later, when one is in contact with others who speak the language.

It is IMPOSSIBLE to develop fluency or comprehension if we do not hear a language, and the main way online students get to hear a language is by speaking it themselves.

Keep on reading portions aloud, until the speech center of the brain supplies the sounds automatically as you read - until you see the printed or written text and "hear" the words in your mind

A.3.5 Learn the assigned Grammar

Sorry, guys and gals, there is no way of getting around this bit.

As children, we had to learn that "I" goes with "am" and "you" goes with "are". We learned this first by trial and error - hear someone say it, say it ourselves, and be corrected if we make a mistake.

Later, we went to school and learned the underlying rules of English Grammar.

As students of a foreign language, we will find that there are similar rules of grammar, and tables of endings to learn, to tell us whether something is plural or singular, or whether "I" am the person doing the action, or "You" are.

Then we will have to learn and practice using the correct combinations.

This is where a short practice time every day will really pay off. You did not learn to talk by waiting until Friday night and trying to talk for three hours non-stop, then not speaking all week until Friday rolled around again. Similarly, you will not learn another language successfully by trying to do six hours of assignments all on one evening. Do an hour a day for five days, and by the end of the week you will have it all mastered.

Or if you can't do a whole hour, do half an hour, or fifteen minutes, or several sessions of five minutes a day - you won't learn as fast as if you did an hour, but you will be learning and continuing to improve.

A.3.6 Keep on reading, writing, speaking, learning, practicing

Learning a language is a bit like learning to skateboard, ride a bike, play the piano, swim, or ride a horse.

There's an initial time when nothing seems to work, and the muscles and co-ordination just don't work together.

Then there's a bit of a breakthrough and things start to come together, but you still can't do the things some of the others are doing. But you keep on at it each day, and it gets easier, and it gets to be fun, and then you're off and running.

A Note of Encouragement

We all make grammatical, spelling, and orthographic mistakes, even in our native language - but that doesn't stop us talking and writing and making ourselves understood.

So mistakes are a natural part of learning a language.

Please don't feel bad if you worked hard and were sure you had your homework all correct - and then it came back with a long list of things to check. It's part of the learning process, and it probably means that you tried to express something for which we hadn't yet done the vocabulary or grammar.

"I done work real hardly, and I is received ten-and-six evil sentences?" -

Yes, I understand that you are disappointed that, after working really hard, you still had 16 mistakes - But you're working at a far higher level of communication than "See Spot run."

As a matter of fact, when we work with real texts by real authors, we find that they too made an occasional mistake.

In Greek, both Matthew and John (and even Luke) occasionally used verb forms which do not follow the grammar "rules" - they wrote the equivalent of "he opened-ed upped" or "they said-ed"

So if you make the occasional slip - You're in good company!

The main thing is to keep on reading, writing, thinking, and learning.