

The Complete Guide to Foreign Language Immersion

FluentU

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Introduction

Learning a foreign language is an exciting endeavor that can change your life by exposing you to new cultures, people and places. Furthermore, speaking a second language undeniably opens an array of new doors for you in terms of employment.

But in order to reap these benefits, first you need to learn the language.

So what's the best way to soak up a foreign language in the shortest amount of time? Immersion.

Now, we know that few have the time and money to simply hop on a plane and head to the nearest country that speaks your target language, and that's exactly why we've put this guide together for you.

There are so many useful ways, tools and tricks to immerse yourself in a foreign language *right now*, no matter where you currently live.

Let's get started—instant language immersion is but a page turn away!

[1]

9 Big Advantages of Learning a Foreign Language

Rachel Wagers



We live in a hyper-connected, fast-paced world, and things aren't changing anytime soon.

How can you keep your head above water?

You need to be hyper-awesome to survive.

That means you'll have to develop some special advantages to get a boost, help yourself stand out and make you better fit for survival in this crazy, modern world.

As our world becomes more and more connected through technological advances, it's becoming increasingly obvious that learning another language is beneficial for many reasons.

Here we present just a few of the many positive side effects of becoming bilingual (or multilingual).

9 Advantages of Learning a Foreign Language (+ Resources!)

1. Meet New People

One of the most phenomenal benefits of learning a new language? Doors are opened to you around the world. If you're learning in a group setting, you immediately have new friends to share your new language with.

If not, then once you go somewhere and are actually able to employ what you've learned, you'll be surprised how open people are when you speak their mother tongue.

2. Employers Love It (And They'll Love You More)

If your resume accolades include fluency in a second language, your chances of employment in today's economy are much greater for you than for those who speak only one language.

Multilingual people are able to communicate and interact within multiple communities. Potential employers consider this a valuable asset in an employee's skill set, as they're able to connect with a broader range of people.

In this new age of start-ups, companies are increasingly breaking into new markets. You up your personal and professional value if you're able to negotiate with manufacturers in another country or communicate with customers who don't speak your native language.

Not to mention, your ability to speak a second language conveys that you're motivated and driven to learn new skills, and this also gives you a competitive edge over those who haven't yet become bilingual.

3. It's Becoming Essential

Many would argue that bilingualism is becoming a progressively necessary and essential skill for anyone who wants to keep up with today's rapidly increasing global economy.

As more and more people recognize the importance of learning an additional language, those who only speak one language will begin to get left behind in our shift towards a more integrated and connected global society.

4. It's Great for Traveling

Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein is credited with saying that “the limits of your language are the limits of your world,” and he was right.

Knowing more than one language opens up your vacation destination possibilities. Traveling through a foreign country becomes much easier if you can speak the language of that country. Fluency isn't required. Locals anywhere appreciate that you've taken the time to at least attempt to learn and communicate in their tongue. It shows a greater level of respect and is an easy way to meet new people.

Also, getting to a comfortable speaking level in a foreign language is a great motivator to get you out there and practicing your new language in a new country.

5. After Learning One, It's Way Easier to Learn Another

As you begin to learn a second language, you'll find that the acquisition techniques you're using can be applied to learning additional languages as well.

The positive cognitive effects of learning to speak a second language can train the brain to analyze and process different linguistic structures. It's not specific to your first target language—it's a skill that can be applied to learning any language.

You're increasing your ability to replicate the process with multiple languages. This is called “metalinguistic awareness,” where your brain learns to identify the techniques of learning a language and break them down into a

series of steps. After learning one language, you retain the muscle memory. Your brain will intrinsically understand how to learn a language and how different languages are structured, through increased awareness of syntax, grammar and sentence structure.

6. You Become Smarter

Acquiring a second language improves your memory and increases your attention span. The process of becoming bilingual exercises your brain, challenges you to concentrate and boosts your problem solving skills.

Bilingual students tend to score higher on standardized tests than monolingual students, especially in the areas of vocabulary, reading and math. As you learn to toggle from one language to another, you improve your multitasking abilities. Bilingual individuals have also been shown to be more logical and rational, have better decision-making skills and be more perceptive and aware of their surroundings.

Learning a second language also improves your native language, as it teaches you the mechanics and structure behind *any* language—not just *new* languages.

7. You'll Stay Smarter for Longer

Recent research has shown that bilingualism can stave off the effects of Alzheimer's and dementia by *years*. Regardless of their education level, gender or occupation, bilingual subjects in the linked study experienced the onset of Alzheimer's, on average, 4.5 years later than monolingual subjects did.

Study results out of the American Academy of Neurology are showing that speaking more than one language increases the amount of neural pathways in the brain, allowing information to be processed through a greater variety of channels. They've also begun to demonstrate that multilingualism improves development in the brain's areas of executive function and attention, no matter what age the language learner is.

8. It Boosts Your Creativity

Researchers are also concluding that multilingual speakers are more creative than monolingual speakers. Learning a foreign language improves not only your ability to solve problems and to think more logically, it also makes you experiment with new words and phrases.

Leveling up your second language skills forces you to reach for alternate words when you can't quite remember the original one you wanted to use. It improves your skills in divergent thinking, which is the ability to identify multiple solutions to a single problem.

9. It Builds Up Your Self-confidence

You're about to teach yourself to believe, "Yes, I can." It'll become your new personal mantra.

Confidence increases when a new skill is mastered, and learning a foreign language is no different. It increases your self-confidence. And let's face it: Confident people are more interesting than those who are unsure of themselves. The techniques you use to develop a second tongue result in a greater sense of open-mindedness.

In order to master a new language, conversations with native and fluent speakers are essential. If you're shy but want to meet new people, using the excuse that you want to practice your speaking skills is a great opener and a doorway to making new friends, expanding your horizons and broadening your life experiences. Plus, who doesn't want to be more interesting?

So, How Do I Get Started?

Fortunately, gone are the days where the only way to learn a second language was to either become stranded in a foreign country or go back to high school language classes (and be honest, did you actually learn all that much in there?). There are now many different online lessons and tutorials to help you become proficient in the language of your choice.

FluentU stands out among language learning websites, thanks to the huge range of learning opportunities it provides.

FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons. It's all stuff that native speakers *actually watch*.

You can use FluentU's videos, interactive subtitles, vocabulary lists, personalized flashcards and more to improve your reading, writing, speaking and listening skills—all while exposing yourself to the average, everyday language spoken by natives.

You'll become immersed in the way people actually speak and communicate, as opposed to the phrases you learned back in high school (because how many times have you actually used, “¿***Donde está la biblioteca?***”)

No matter which tools you use when you decide to learn a language, just decide to learn one! You won't regret it.

[2]

How to Learn a Language Fast: 5 Ways to Set Yourself Up for Success

Frank Macri



What if I told you the ordinary ways of learning a language aren't actually that helpful?

What if I also told you those same methods are not only ineffective, but a huge waste of time?

Yes, it's true. But your time doesn't have to be thrown away whenever you decide to pick up a new language.

Thankfully, there are much more efficient ways to speed up the process of learning a new language. These strategies will help you chop off some precious learning time while still increasing your language acquisition.

Without further ado, here are the five biggest time-wasters when learning a new language and how we can correct them.

How to Learn a Language Fast: 5 Ways to Set Yourself Up for Success

1. Immerse Yourself in the Country *and* the Learning

The ordinary way: Immersing yourself solely in the country

When you live abroad, it's easy to think that by putting yourself in the culture, you'll naturally begin to start picking up the language. News flash: Immersion is a waste if you don't know what's being said most of the time. While immersion may have worked when we were babies, our brains make it a lot harder to formulate language through immersion as adults.

When I was living in China, I met several expats who had been living in the country for three, five and even nine years but *still* had not picked up the language. To put that into perspective, nine years means over 3,000 days without learning Mandarin. Yikes!

At first, I couldn't believe how someone could live in a country so long without learning the language. But over time, I began to see the loopholes that come from language immersion. For instance, most natives will at least try to speak English when you approach them, even if you are living in their country.

While in China, I was shocked to find that natives were eager to practice their English skills with me. While I was glad to do this, it prevented me from practicing my Mandarin at times.

What to do instead:

Immerse yourself in the learning, not just the environment. If you do move to the country that speaks the language you are studying, great! That simply means there are more chances for you to seize learning opportunities. Resist the urge to use English. Even when you are surrounded by others speaking the language, the responsibility still lies on you to study, learn and practice.

If you're not living in the country that speaks the language you would like to learn, design your home environment into a place where growth is unavoidable. Create visual cues that encourage you to study at times you normally wouldn't. This can mean changing your cell phone's language or even that of your Facebook account. Give it a shot!

2. Focus on the Most Commonly Used Words and Expressions

The ordinary way: Focusing on vocabulary

This is what we call "textbook learning." In other words, you are mostly focused on rote memorization. While this may build your arsenal of new words, it won't get you very far when actually implementing the language.

Speaking a new language is not a formulaic process. It requires quick and flexible thinking. Unless you plan on sounding like a robot, you may want to devote your attention to areas outside vocabulary.

What to do instead:

Strategize and prioritize your learning by focusing on what matters. Mandarin is a language of over 3,000 characters. But did you know that by learning the 500 most commonly used words, you acquire approximately 75% of language understanding?

This is not just isolated to Mandarin. In just about all languages, about 20% of the vocabulary accounts for 80% of understanding. So why waste time trying to learn more words?

While vocabulary is important, it must be considered holistically when learning a new language. Identify what words, phrases and expressions will get you the most bang for your buck, and work from there.

3. Be Mindful During the Learning Process

The ordinary way: Rushing the learning process and cramming

It may be tempting to cram loads of information into your head and expect it to stay there. The truth is, acquiring any new skill takes time. Canadian author Malcolm Gladwell's "10,000 Hour Rule" theorizes that it takes 10,000 hours of practice before one can truly master a skill.

He came to this conclusion by studying the lives of some of the world's most successful people and observing how long it took them to become masters at their skills. No matter what language learning hack you consider, be aware of how you are spending your time.

For those of you wanting to learn a new language fast, the idea of slowing down may seem counterintuitive or abstract. It may be tempting to quickly fill our brains with as much information as we can in the shortest amount of time. Unfortunately, cramming usually doesn't end up help us achieve long-term learning.

What to do instead:

Be mindful while learning a new language. It's easy to start a new language with our heads caught up in the fact that we aren't yet perfect. We become so focused on the end goal of becoming fluent that we lose track of our progress along the journey.

Not only will presentness help you absorb new information in the moment, it will also aid your long-term memory. Try more effective and efficient methods, such as a Spaced Repetition Software (SRS), and you will be pleasantly surprised with the amount of information your brain holds on to.

You can also try taking short breaks from your studying to reflect and practice what you've learned. These breaks can be as short as three minutes and consist of you simply summarizing what you've learned. Play around with new words and phrases. This simple exercise can help prevent you from going on autopilot while studying by honing in on every step of the learning process.

4. Be an Active Learner

The ordinary way: Learn passively

All learning is not created equal. In fact, most of the time we learn in a passive style that lacks any kind of critical thought. Think of that professor you had in the past who conducted lessons by parroting words from the textbook.

There is no classroom engagement, dialogue or discussion. Unfortunately, we've been conditioned to learn in this one-way fashion where information is passively given to us without any response or analysis.

What to do instead:

Become an active learner. The brain works on a use-it-or-lose-it style, meaning you must apply whatever you learn. After memorizing a new phrase, say it aloud 30 times. After learning how to write a new Mandarin character, rewrite it 20 times. And then use the new phrase or character in a real situation: with a language partner or writing online to a native speaker, for example. The key is to implement what you learn until it sticks.

To make words and phrases stick quickly, a great tool for some in context active learning is FluentU. FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized and engaging language learning lessons. Learning the words and phrases through authentic videos makes them stick easily, making you learn faster.

5. Become Passionate About Learning Your New Language

The ordinary way: Treating your new language like a hobby

Hobbies are activities we enjoy doing at our own leisure. They are simply for the purpose of fun, but there's no pressure to keep at them every day.

This mentality may seem trivial, but it can mean the difference between you spending five months and five years when learning a new language. If you are nonchalant about learning, you'll achieve nonchalant results.

What to do instead:

Make language learning a passion. Merge the fun of language learning with the commitment to follow through. Knowing that you want to learn a new language is not enough to get us to actually take action.

Give yourself clarity on what exactly compels you to learn a new language. Figure out the *why* behind your desire to learn. What's the goal behind the goal? What's the bigger picture here? How will learning a new language open opportunities in your future? Simply answering these questions for yourself will motivate you on much higher level to take action when necessary.

While learning any language takes time, implementing these strategies will skyrocket your efficiency while minimizing your learning time. As always, have patience with the process and enjoy every achievement (and failure) along the way.

[3]

How to Learn a Language by Yourself: 5 Rockstar Tips for Success

John Fotheringham



So you've decided that you want to learn a second language.

Rock on! Good for you!

But now what? How are you going to do this on your own?

Are you aiming too high? Can you really learn a language by yourself?

Yes you can! So let's leave the doubts right here at the door and never look back.

You *can* learn a language on your own, and to set you up for success I'm

sharing five awesome tips that are filled to the brim with actionable items you can start today!

How to Learn a Language by Yourself: 5 Rockstar Tips for Success

1. Work with—Not Against—Your Psychology

“In language learning, it is attitude, not aptitude, that determines success.”
-Steve Kaufmann

Set S.M.A.R.T. goals

If you don't know where you are going, how are you ever going to get there? I know, it sounds like something that would be printed on one of those corny motivational posters from the '80s. But it's still a valid question to pose to oneself before embarking on a self-guided language learning mission.

When most people think of goal setting, short-lived New Year's resolutions probably come to mind. Many of us set out to conquer the world on January 1, vowing to learn a new language, drop one's spare tire, get out of debt, etc. Yet a few weeks later, we somehow find ourselves watching bad TV instead of studying, stuffing our face holes with pizza instead of broccoli and charging a new big screen on our Visa.

But why does this happen? Is it simply a matter of laziness and weakness of character? Perhaps for some. But I think the *real* problem for most people is poorly defined goals. While *setting* goals is no guarantee that you will actually *achieve* them, it is an important step in the right direction.

So what's the problem with most goals, especially the aforementioned resolutions? They are either vague, unmeasurable, unattainable, irrelevant to one's life, have no clear deadline or all of the above. **To prevent such wimpy goals, try instead to employ the acronym S.M.A.R.T. to your language learning goals.** A “smart” goal is:

- Specific.
- Measurable.

- Attainable.
- Relevant.
- Time-bound.

Instead of saying, “I want to learn Spanish” (What do you mean by “learn”? By when? For what purpose?), you can instead say, “I am going to speak with my Spanish language partner every Wednesday for 15 minutes for the next 6 months.” See the difference?

Embrace the process over the destination

Setting goals is essential, but contrary to popular belief, picturing yourself *attaining* those goals is actually not as helpful as you might think. Positive thinking is great, but what ends up happening for many people is that they subconsciously think, “I have already reached the goal, so why work so hard?”

I know, it sounds crazy, but it’s a real phenomenon. So set goals, yes, but instead of picturing yourself crossing the finish line, visualize yourself actually running the race.

View language learning as an adventure, not a chore

Instead of telling yourself, “I *have to* study a language today,” use a little linguistic jujutsu and say instead, “I *get to* study a language today.” Yes, it’s a small change, but it can have a significant effect on your outlook and likelihood of staying the course day in and day out.

Remember that languages are doorways into new lands, new cultures, new foods, new music and perhaps, new romances. The minutes and hours you spend today, could earn you years of joy down the road.

Choose inherently enjoyable learning activities

If you wouldn’t watch a soap opera in your *native* language, why would you force yourself through one in your target tongue? (Well, all right, unless you’re studying Spanish—because Spanish soap operas are their own unique form of entertainment! But you see my point). Part of making language

learning fun is doing things *in* the language that you would do anyway, activities that bring you joy and fulfillment.

For me, it's learning martial arts or other physical activities. The immediate physical context makes it much easier to figure out what's happening, helps make vocabulary stick (especially if someone *sticks* a punch because I did the drill wrong) and is inherently enjoyable in its own right. Do a quick survey of your personal passions and find some opportunities to do something with them using your target language.

2. Design Your Environment to Maximize Language Input and Output

“Excellence is never an accident. It is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, and intelligent execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives. Choice, not chance, determines your destiny.”

-Aristotle

Replace your media with target language equivalents

It's imperative to stop “choosing” to study throughout your day. When you make your target language the *only* option, you have no choice but to get valuable exposure each and every day. And one of the best ways to limit choices and maximize learning is to switch all your sources of media (TV, movies, magazines, blogs, podcasts, etc.) to your target language. Place foreign film DVDs by the DVD player. Replace the magazines in the bathroom. Put a stack of foreign language manga next to the bed. You get the idea.

And if you're looking for an easier and natural way to learn from foreign language media, then you should check out FluentU. FluentU takes real-world videos like music videos, movie trailers, and TV shows and turns them into language learning experiences. It's a terrific way to quickly pick up natural vocabulary and to learn with context.

Change all your devices to your target language

This one is a game changer. Given how many hours a day most of us spend with our eyeballs glued to our various screens, changing the device display

language can significantly increase our target language exposure. Granted, this increases passive reading input, not active speaking output (the most important language activity), but hey, every little bit helps.

Best of all, you can make lots of educated guesses about new vocabulary based on your previous experience using the user interface in English. For example, if you are new to Japanese, you probably don't know the word for "Settings" in the language yet, but once you change your iOS interface to Japanese, you will see that ?? (*settei*) is written below the "Settings" icon. Boom. That's one more word in the bag.

Label key items in your home and office in the target language

An old idea, but a good one. Just as changing your device language increases exposure to contextual vocabulary throughout your day, labeling items around your home and office accomplishes much of the same goal. The difference of course is that these labels will be providing less tech-centric input, meaning you'll learn lots of useful real-life vocabulary that's necessary if you ever travel or live abroad.

Create visual study cues and "When I..., then I..." statements to promote new habits

Creating new habits (or quitting old ones) can be an extremely difficult task, but there are a few tricks to stack the behavior change deck in your favor:

- **Create constant visual reminders in your environment.** Place flashcards on your nightstand, put language apps on the home screen of your device and swap out your media as discussed above.
- **Create some "When I do X, then I do Y" statements.** For example, "When I wake up, then I immediately review 15 flashcards." Make these statements tied to specific times of day, specific locations or other activities you do on a regular basis.

3. Track Your Progress

"What gets measured gets managed."

-Peter Drucker

Measure progress in hours, not years

Most people assume that it will take years to learn a foreign language. And sure enough, it does seem to take most folks at least a few years to reach conversational fluency in a foreign language. But this is because most people only put in a few hours (if not a few *minutes!*) each week.

But if you made language learning your number one priority and put in at least an hour *every day*, you would be able to reach your fluency goals far faster. Forget about years. Such measurements of time are too big and too intimidating to be of much good for our purposes.

Instead, try to **keep track of how many hours you spend actively learning the language each day**. If you are not improving as fast as you want, the answer is very likely that you are not putting in enough hours each week. But unless you measure, you won't know. You will likely *feel* like you are putting in gobs of time, but may in fact be doing very little.

Record yourself speaking at least once a month

While there are many ways to measure your progress, unscripted speaking is by far the best test of your actual level in a language. It doesn't matter what device you use (smartphone, tape recorder or phonograph), just make sure you do it at regular intervals. I recommend once a month so that there will be enough time to see—or rather *hear*—observable progress.

Write a daily journal in your target language

While speaking ability is the main goal for most language learners, writing skills should not be underestimated. Keeping a daily journal in your foreign language is a great way to both improve your word smithing skills while also measuring your progress over time.

The journal doesn't need to contain beautiful, flowing prose. The only requirement is that you get words down on paper (or on the screen) on a daily basis. Months later, you can then go back and review what you've previously written. You will be amazed how far you've come!

4. Create a Tribe: Learning “By Yourself” Does Not Mean Learning “Alone”

“Yes, I think it’s okay to abandon the big, established, stuck tribe. It’s okay to say to them, ‘You’re not going where I need to go, and there’s no way I’m going to persuade all of you to follow me. So rather than standing here watching the opportunities fade away, I’m heading off. I’m betting some of you, the best of you, will follow me.’”

-Seth Godin

Get a tutor, language exchange partner or private teacher

Though the title of this post is “How to Learn a Language by Yourself,” I am in no way encouraging you to learn in isolation. You must (I repeat, **must**) apply what you learn by interacting with native speakers. What I *am* saying is that you don’t need to attend formal classes to do that.

With the advent of Skype (and similar VOIP services), you can now interact with native speakers of nearly any language, just about everywhere. There are countless free (or at least affordable) language exchange sites, some of which even connect you with professional teachers. My favorite is iTalki, but you can Google around until you find something you like.

Find or make friends learning the same language

Learning alone is not only boring, it’s also a recipe for failure. Having at least one friend learning the same language as you means that you will have a trusted confidant to share with, whether it’s sharing resources or venting frustrations. It also allows for a little friendly competition.

5. Consistency Trumps Quantity: Make at Least a Little Progress Every Day

“You don’t set out to build a wall. You don’t say ‘I’m going to build the biggest, baddest, greatest wall that’s ever been built.’ You don’t start there. You say, ‘I’m going to lay this brick as perfectly as a brick can be laid. You do that every single day. And soon you have a wall.’”

-Will Smith

Commit to a small amount of study every day no matter what

Is it better to study five hours a day than five minutes? Sure. But it's also way better to study five minutes a day than not at all. No matter how many curve balls, emergencies or defeats your day throws at you, do your very best to fit in at least a tiny bit of language study.

Even if it means just reviewing one single flashcard. When you completely miss a day, you are that much more likely to miss the next, and then the next, and so on. Don't let yourself break the streak.

Use "hidden moments" throughout the day

As I mentioned in my last post, "hidden moments" are a great way to squeeze in language learning time even in the busiest schedule. Any time you find yourself waiting for something (may it be waiting in line or waiting for the elevator), whip out some flashcards or listen to a podcast. A few seconds here, a few minutes there, can all add up to a big chunk of time at the end of the day.

Study first thing in the morning

Literally, put language learning "first." Before you do anything else in your day, make sure that you spend a little bit of time listening, speaking, reading or writing. That way, no matter how many TPS reports you end up having to resubmit at the office, you will have already checked off "language study" from your list of daily commitments.

Do you feel confident now? You should, because you *can* learn a language by yourself—and feel like a rock star as you progress towards reaching your specific language goals.

Just put these tips into action and you'll be on the road to success.

Good luck!

[4]

5 Killer Language Learning Strategies Guaranteed to Help You Make Time

John Fotheringham



Have you ever thought to yourself, “I’d love to learn a foreign language but I’m just too darn busy. If only I had more hours in the day...?”

I hear you.

Work life and home life are demanding, and those 24 hours a day won’t be getting any longer.

So when are we supposed to learn an entire other language?

I have good news for you. There are effective, surefire ways to make time for language learning. (Yes, even for those of you with the busiest of schedules!)

So sit tight and keep on reading, because here are my five best strategies to make time for language learning every day—and they actually work!

5 Killer Language Learning Strategies Guaranteed to Help You Make Time

1. Apply the 80/20 Rule to Focus on What Matters Most

The modern world is a buzzing chaotic mess of activity and it seems to get worse with each passing year. In reality, however, the problem is not a lack of *time*, but a lack of *prioritization*. As Tim Ferriss shares in his best-selling book “The 4-Hour Workweek“:

Most things make no difference. Being busy is a form of laziness—lazy thinking and indiscriminate action. Being overwhelmed is often as unproductive as doing nothing, and is far more unpleasant. Being selective—doing less—is the path of the productive. Focus on the important few and ignore the rest.

This is where the “**80/20 Rule**” (a.k.a. “**Pareto Principle**”) comes in. This simple but extremely powerful tool can help you identify **the most important, high-yield activities in your life**, eliminate unimportant, low-yield activities and free up extra time for language learning.

In a nut shell—or rather, in a pea pod—the 80/20 rule states that a comparatively large number of effects tend to be the result of a very small number of causes. The ratio is often 80 to 20, but can sometimes be as extreme as 90/10 or even 99/1.

This interesting phenomenon was first popularized by Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto in the early 1900s when he observed that 80 percent of Italy’s land was held by only 20 percent of its population. Intrigued by the disparity, he then took his curiosity to the garden where he saw that 80 percent of the peas were produced by just 20 percent of the pea pods.

You probably don’t care about Italian real estate or peas, but Pareto’s discovery can have a major impact on how you live your life and whether or not you **reach your language learning goals**.

Spending just 10 minutes now to run an 80/20 analysis with these steps can free up massive swaths of previously unavailable time:

1. Jot down as many recurring daily, weekly and monthly tasks as you can think of (work, chores, play, exercise, study, etc.)
2. Review the list and star the tasks that produce the greatest, most perceivable pay-offs. These are the high-yield “big rocks” that you should prioritize.
3. Now identify which tasks create the least benefit or greatest misery. Cross these off the list and do everything you can to cut them out of your life.

By applying the 80/20 rule to your language learning endeavors, you’ll increase results and have more time to practice.

2. Put First Things First: Schedule Time for Language Study Before Everything Else

Another way to make time for language learning is to make it a higher priority in your life, to have it come first.

Fit in the “big rocks” before your life fills up with “small pebbles”

Waiting for convenient chunks of time each day to study your target language? Good luck with that; chances are you will end up waiting forever and never even get started. Despite our best intentions, the important things usually get crowded out by the endless flood of little things that fill our days.

Don’t let yourself get “lost in the thick of thin things,” as Stephen R. Covey puts it. If learning a foreign language really is important to you, it’s up to you to make time for it in your day.

No matter how busy you are, you *can* carve out time for a few high-yield, life enriching tasks *if*—and this is a big *if*—**you put them first**.

Order of operations is critical here. As Covey demonstrates in his famous “big rock” demonstration, trying to squeeze in all the “big rocks” (important things in your life) is impossible if you let your life fill up first with all the sand and small pebbles (the myriad less important things).

Study first thing in the morning and right before bed

Studying a language right away in the morning has three key advantages:

- **It ensures that you put in at least a little study time every day, no matter how crazy your day becomes.** Maybe you find out when you get to work that an urgent report is due by the end of the day. You may grimace at the heavy work load and late night ahead, but at least you can pat yourself on the back for already meeting your daily language learning target.
- **It reminds your brain that language learning is a top priority in your life.** By literally “putting language first” in your day, it keeps the task at the forefront of your mind, and you are then more likely to return to language learning activities when “hidden moments” arise (more on this below).
- **It reinforces material you studied right before bed the night before.** Repetition is one of the most important (and often neglected) elements of successful language acquisition. By quickly reviewing last night’s language material each morning, you create a poor man’s spaced repetition system and drive words, phrases and structures further into long-term memory.

Studying right before bed has three further benefits:

- **It creates a “habit sandwich”.** You started the day with language learning and now you end the day in the same way. This positive behavioral symmetry feels good, increases motivation and helps strengthen the language learning habit (more on habit formation below).
- **It can help lull you to sleep.** Maybe you are one of those lucky sons of guns who falls gracefully into La La Land as soon as your noggin hits the pillow. But if you tend to toss and turn, studying a language (especially more mentally taxing tasks like learning grammar rules, conjugations and new vocabulary) can be a powerful sleep aid. For most folks, it just takes five minutes looking at a declension table to draw the Sand Man near.
- **It sets the neurological stage for memory consolidation.** Our brains interpret, consolidate and store new experiences and information as we

slumber (especially during REM sleep). By studying right before bed, you help language cut to the front of the consolidation line.

Add language study to your calendar and to-do list

A simple way to put language learning first is to schedule blocks of study time on your calendar each week. Treat these like urgent appointments you cannot miss or reschedule. This is *your* sacred time.

Or if you prefer, you can use a task management system to remind you each day to put in some study time. I've tried dozens of task management apps, but my two favorites are:

- **Wunderlist.** Pros: Free for the basic version. Available on all major platforms. Simple, elegant design. Cons: Too simplistic for some business needs.
- **OmniFocus.** Pros: Extremely powerful task and project management system. Integrates well with the “Getting Things Done” approach. Cons: Expensive! \$39.99 for Mac, \$29.99 for iPad and \$19.99 for iPhone.

Putting language learning first by scheduling time—or even literally doing it *first* every day—will result in more time spent on your foreign language goals, and in return, more progress.

3. Harness “Hidden Moments” Throughout Your Day

Harnessing your hidden moments, those otherwise meaningless scraps of time you'd never normally think of putting to practical use, and using them for language study—even if it's no more than fifteen, ten, or five seconds at a time—can turn you into a triumphant tortoise.

—Barry Farber, “How to Learn Any Language”

Listen to audio as you do other brainless activities

Listening is one of the most important components of learning to communicate in a foreign language, and lucky for us, one of the easiest to fit into a busy schedule. Since listening doesn't require use of your eyes and hands, you can get valuable listening input by listening to audio lessons and podcasts as you go about a host of other activities:

- Walking/Jogging
- Driving
- Shopping
- Cooking
- Doing household chores

Review flashcards whenever you find yourself waiting

Assuming you have free use of your hands, waiting for things is the ideal time to review flashcards. Even 10 seconds is enough time to review a few cards. Get in the habit of whipping out your flashcards (whether actual cards or an app on your smartphone like the upcoming FluentU iOS app) whenever you find yourself:

- Waiting in line at the store.
- Waiting for the elevator.
- Waiting on hold.
- Waiting for a call to connect.

Schedule a 15-minute tutor session during every lunch break

Being able to speak is the primary goal of most language learners, and there is no better way to reach that objective than daily speaking practice.

Just 15 minutes of speaking practice with a native speaker or tutor is enough to help solidify the material you've learned in your input activities, identify holes in your vocabulary and grammar, and build motivation to continue learning the next day. Moreover, knowing that you will be speaking with a tutor each day gives you that much more incentive to put in the study time beforehand.

4. Stop Choosing to Study: Make Language Learning a Robust Habit

Willpower is a finite resource, and every choice you make throughout your day, no matter how small, uses up your precious reserves. Dubbed “ego depletion” by psychologists, this phenomenon is the reason why many people

feel so exhausted after shopping and why most find it so difficult to fit in study time after a long, hard day.

The good news is that you no longer have to rely on the whims of willpower if you transform language study from a conscious daily decision to a hardwired habit. Here's how:

Create positive “habit loops”

The “habit loop” is the reason you check your e-mail 100 times a day even when trying to do more important tasks, and the reason you reach for a box of doughnuts even after you have promised to quit sugar. As Charles Duhigg lays out in “The Power of Habit,” these powerful loops are comprised of four steps:

The Email Habit Loop:

1. **Cue.** You *hear* a message notification sound, *feel* a vibration in your pocket, or *see* a new message notification on the screen.
2. **Routine.** You check your email inbox for new messages.
3. **Reward.** You get a temporary distraction from difficult, uncomfortable or boring work you *should* be doing, and feel an increased sense of self-importance or belonging if you receive new messages.
4. **Craving.** After checking for new messages and returning to other work, you start anticipating how it will feel to receive the next “inbox reward.” As soon as the next cue appears, the habit loop is triggered all over again.

The Doughnut Habit Loop:

1. **Cue.** You *see* or *smell* the doughnuts.
2. **Routine.** You stuff 2 bacon-covered maple bars into your face.
3. **Reward.** You experience the delectable taste on your tongue and get a temporary rush of energy as the glucose spike surges through your blood.
4. **Craving.** After your blood sugar crashes, you begin to again crave the sweet doughnut goodness and find yourself back at the box.

But not all habit loops are bad for us. With a little psychological engineering,

you can hijack the *cue-routine-reward-craving* loop and apply it language learning. The first step is to create an obvious cue for language study:

- Place a stack of flashcards on your nightstand.
- Put your favorite language learning apps on the home screen of your smartphone.
- Set a recurring alarm or calendar event to review at set times each day.
- Fill in the blanks in the sentence, “After I _____, I study a language for 15 minutes.”

The routine part is fairly straight forward; just do whatever language learning activities you enjoy most or get the most benefit from:

- Listen to a podcast.
- Read a news article, blog post or a few pages from a book.
- Talk to a tutor or try language exchange.
- Learn all the vocab in a music video or movie trailer through FluentU. FluentU takes real-world videos and turns them into language learning experiences. It’s the best way to learn a language through immersion, short of actually going to the country.

Next comes the reward. This is the most important part of the habit loop; the piece that keeps the whole thing spinning round and round and keeps you coming back for more without even thinking about it. You know yourself better than anyone else; make sure to identify innate and external rewards that will provide true gratification:

- **The buzz from learning new things.** Regularly add in new materials and topics to keep things fresh. Try stretching a bit beyond your current level of comfort and competence.
- **Edible treats or guilty pleasures.** Allow yourself that glass of wine with dinner or an episode of your favorite trashy television show *only* if you have completed your language study for the day.
- **Study streaks.** Each day in row you study, your streak gets longer and longer, and you will be that much more motivated to not break the chain. More on this below.

If you have chosen inherently enjoyable language learning routines and effective rewards, you should naturally find yourself craving your next study session. You may even end up adding more than one session a day or extending the length of each. If not, try mixing up your routine and testing out more immediate or tangible rewards (e.g. placing a piece of chocolate on your desk that you can't eat until you finish).

Identify your “keystone habits”

When people start habitually exercising, even as infrequently as once a week, they start changing other, unrelated patterns in their lives, often unknowingly. Typically, people who exercise start eating better and becoming more productive at work. They smoke less and show more patience with colleagues and family. They use their credit cards less frequently and say they feel less stressed. It's not completely clear why. But for many people, exercise is a keystone habit that triggers widespread change.

—Charles Duhigg, “The Power of Habit”

You may have noticed that when you hit the gym, you are that much more likely to hit the *books*, too. This is because exercise is a “keystone habit”, a heavy domino that – once tipped – influences a host of seemingly unrelated behaviors.

But the reverse is equally true: skip the gym and you will probably skip studying. Take some time to identify your keystone habits, those powerful triggers that have positive or negative ripples throughout your life. Then do everything you can to eliminate the bad habits and maximize the good.

Use a habit tracking app to monitor your progress and build momentum

While your smartphone will not miraculously change your behavior for you, habit tracking apps like Lift, Chains.cc or Habit List *can* at least help monitor your progress and create a positive feedback loop to help keep you going. The more days in a row you complete a habit, the stronger it becomes and the higher the motivation to not break the chain.

5. Set Social and Financial Stakes

Trying to build a new habit is hard, but you can stack the deck in your favor by

leveraging the power of competition, social accountability and commitment contracts.

Choose a partner in crime

Pick at least one friend to study with, or better yet, *compete* with. Not only is it more fun to learn with other living, breathing human beings, but a little friendly competition can significantly boost compliance.

As Tony Stubblebine (CEO of Lift) points out:

“You’re 50% more likely to succeed in your goal if you know at least one other person doing it.”

Make your goals and daily progress public

Beyond just your study buddy, I suggest sharing your learning goals and daily progress with the world at large. You can start a language learning blog, share progress with Give it 100 or just make daily update posts on Facebook, Twitter, etc. Knowing that people will see whether or not you have studied each day can help provide the added push you need on days when you really don’t feel like studying.

Use Stickk or Beeminder to put your money where your mouth is

If friendly competition and public accountability aren’t strong enough motivators for you, try leveraging a more tangible stake: your money. Services like StickK and Beeminder allow you to tie specific financial stakes to each of your goals.

If you fail to hit your daily or weekly targets, a predefined amount is charged to your credit card or sent to an “anti-charity” in your name (e.g. if you are a proponent of gun control, you can choose the NRA as your anti-charity).

“People who put stakes—either their money or their reputation—on the table are far more likely to actually achieve a goal they set for themselves.” —StickK

We’re all busy people, but if you want more time for language learning then start using any of these five strategies today. The more repetition and

consistency you have with your language learning, the faster you'll advance towards your targets.

[5]

8 Ways to Get Daily Language Practice on Your Coffee Break

Lizzie Davey



Finding the time to practice is one of the hardest things about learning a language.

It should be one of the easiest, but with our increasingly busy lifestyles and the never-ending list of things to do, it's often pushed to the sidelines in favor of something a little more, well, pressing.

The reality is that you need to practice (ideally every day) in order to retain the information you've learned.

Otherwise? Let's just say it'll take you a whole lot longer to master that language—an already seemingly endless task, am I right?

I can hear you now, all “Do you know how busy my schedule is?” and “Seriously? You do realize I have a life to live, right?” But fear not, fellow learners, **daily language practice needn’t be a chore—and it certainly doesn’t have to take any time out of your day.**

“What, there’s a way to make a day longer than 24 hours?” you ask.

Well, not exactly.

Instead, you can slip in practice around the big tasks that take up the bulk of your day—you know, like eating, working, watching TV and shopping for human essentials like food and clothes.

I’m going to take a shot in the dark and say that between these activities there’s a bit of a lull, a bit of downtime where you might find yourself twiddling your thumbs or scrolling through your Facebook feed.

The most obvious time? On your coffee break, of course.

If you’re anything like me, you drink a lot of coffee during the day. Now tell me this, how do you spend your time while you’re waiting for it to brew?

I have an idea.

Actually, I have eight ideas.

These activities don’t take longer than 10 minutes and they provide a great way to slip in some daily language practice even on the busiest of days. Plus, **taking the time to practice for 10 minutes here and there will work wonders for your progress—trust me.**

It gives you time to step away and retain the information without being overwhelmed. And you’ll never have to twiddle your thumbs again!

Download: *This blog post is available as a convenient and portable PDF that you can take anywhere. [Click here to get a copy.](#) (Download)*

8 Ways to Learn a Language on Your Coffee Break

1. Play a Game

Learning a language should be fun.

Games are fun.

Therefore... Yeah, you see where this is going. There are so many language learning games out there these days, from burrito builders (for Spanish learners—one of my personal favorites) to good old fashioned pairs. Take five minutes or so to complete a level or run through one round of questions or whatever.

Remember to choose a game that you can actually practice and learn from. There's no point in playing something that's easy, just so you can win—trust me, I've made this mistake.

As well as playing games, you can also have a quick run through of a language learning app. Many of these are laid out into levels and sections and presented in bitesized chunks, usually taking the same amount of time as it takes a kettle to boil. Convenient.

One great option is FluentU. FluentU takes real-world videos like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks, and turns them into fun language learning lessons. FluentU's app is launching soon and will be perfect for coffee break practice thanks to its real-world context and personalization of content. Sign up here to be notified of the launch.)

Top tip: *You can even change your non-language learning games into language learning games simply by changing the language setting. That means all your favorite games on your phone or your computer now double up as a tool for learning—how great is that?*

2. Read a Newspaper

You can learn many things from reading a newspaper, from serious situations taking place around the world to less serious things like who was the best-dressed at the Oscars.

You can also learn and practice a language by reading a newspaper.

Obviously it's near on impossible to buy a newspaper in your target language if you're not in a native-speaking country, but that's where the beauty of the internet comes in. Simply search for "Newspapers + your target language" in the mighty oracle that is Google and your world will immediately be blown wide open.

If you don't want to spend time searching, here are some great guides we've put together with tons of resources for using the news to learn these target languages:

- Chinese
- English
- French
- German
- Japanese
- Spanish

Reading the news in your target language means you can learn about serious situations around the world, who wore what best at the Oscars, and brush up on your language learning.

You can choose which section of the newspaper to get stuck into, so it'll hopefully be something you're interested in, plus it's mildly nostalgic to read the news with a coffee, right?

Top tip: *Newspapers tend to use really simple language, but remember to write down any words and phrases you're not sure about so you can check them out later.*

3. Listen to a Podcast

Podcasts are a great way to get used to the sound of your target language, to pick up on intonation, and to begin to improve your listening comprehension.

They're also a great way to fill the small pockets of time that occur in

your daily schedule. Getting the bus somewhere? Need to walk somewhere? Waiting for your coffee to brew? Whack on a podcast.

They're easy to dip in and out of and there's such a vast selection out there, you're bound to find one on a topic you're interested in or a topic you need to practice.

Not sure which podcasts are worth your time? No worries! We've already gone through and found the best for you in these target languages:

- Chinese
- English learner | Native English
- French learner | Native French
- German learner
- Japanese learner
- Spanish learner

Top tip: *Lots of language learning podcasts have a transcript and tasks to go alongside them. Notes in Spanish, for example, provides worksheets for every episode. This is the perfect way to delve a little deeper into the practice and create a multisensory learning experience.*

4. Write a Blurb About Your Day

Finding the time to write anything during the day, let alone in your target language, is a bit like finding a needle in a haystack. But if you think about it as if you're writing a to-do list (something I'm sure you write in abundance) then it'll seem like a much easier task.

While you're waiting in line in a shop, waiting for something to print, or—you've guessed it—listening to the kettle boil, grab a post-it note, or open up a "notes" app on your phone if you have one, and jot down a few words about your day.

Simple sentences are fine, just like if you were writing a to-do list or, if you have more time and a lot to write, feel free to crank out a full-page essay on what you've had for lunch or how late your bus was that morning.

This limbers up your writing skills in your target language and encourages you to think about simple things and actions in the foreign language. Plus, you can always look back over it the next day to practice further and remind yourself what you did.

Top tip: *Consider writing your to-do lists in your target language, too, so you're forced to look over it at various points throughout the day.*

5. Run Through Some Flashcards

Whenever you learn a new word, make sure you write it down on a flashcard along with a description that you'll understand and remember.

Make it as quirky as you want.

Use colors and images if you need to.

While you're waiting for your coffee to brew or your lunch to heat up in the microwave, run through a few of these flashcards and test your memory.

Top tip: *Keep flashcards grouped in batches that focus on a particular topic. You'll be able to create connections through similar words and phrases and are more likely to remember where and when you practiced what topic using the theory of set and setting.*

6. Flick Through a Dictionary

Flicking through a dictionary is so underrated. Think of all those words!

The thing to remember here is to not fill your head with obscure words that you're never going to use. Instead, flick through to words you learned in last night's lesson or turn to phrases you've been wondering about for ages.

It's easy to get sucked into dictionary browsing, so perhaps write down a list of words you'd like to practice and learn the meaning of beforehand so you have some focus.

Top tip: *After you've nailed a word and its meaning, create a couple of sentences using it to retain the information—maybe even write it down on a flashcard.*

7. Start a Language Practice Group by the Water Cooler

Starting an impromptu class by the coffee machine or water cooler isn't easy if there's no one in your office who is learning the same language as you.

But, if there are, make good use of them!

Plan to meet at a certain point throughout the day for 10 minutes and commit yourselves to only speaking in your target language during that time.

You can take this one step further, too, and test each other with flashcards, challenge each other to two-player language learning games, or discuss a podcast you'd all planned to listen to the night before.

Daily language practice is so much easier when you have other people to motivate you and you'll be able to share ideas and bounce questions off of each other.

Top tip: *Set a task for each meeting so that there's some kind of focus and you're not tempted to simply chat about the hottie who works in the office next door.*

8. Watch Commercials in Your Target Language

Everyone hates commercials.

But despite their numerous bad qualities, they are a great way to pick up a language because they offer lots of repetition and keywords.

All you have to do is search for "commercials" or "ads" in your target language in YouTube and you'll be inundated with pages and pages of them.

If you'd like to learn with commercials more efficiently, then you should check out FluentU. FluentU not only makes it easy to understand and enjoy any video, but it turns the video into a language learning lesson. There's no better way to learn how a word is used than by seeing examples of it in multiple videos.

The best thing about ads is that they're short and to the point, so you can watch a few in 10 minutes, or watch one over and over again until you've mastered its meaning.

Top Tip: *If you're trying to learn a certain set of vocabulary, choose commercials that match it. For example, if you're looking to learn words relating to cars, select car commercials, or if you're wanting to understand more words related to cleaning, choose cleaning ads—simple!*

How about it? Think you have a spare 10 minutes free every day? Not anymore you don't! I challenge you to choose at least three of these activities and incorporate them into your coffee break (or while you're waiting for the bus, or while you're waiting in line at a store) in the coming week.

I bet you'll be surprised at how well short, sharp bursts of daily language practice work for you!

[6]

9 Imaginative Tips for Absorbing Vocabulary Like a Sponge

Christina Hewitt



Language learners of all levels share one thing in common.

Every last one of y'all needs to learn more vocabulary.

That's right—even you, Ms. Almost Fluent.

Whether you're still stumbling over putting a sentence together or you're pretty much speaking like a native, you can never stop learning vocabulary!

It's the #1 priority for students of all ages, abilities and learning styles.

Heck, you can't even stop learning vocabulary in your *native* language.

Grammar may be the skeleton that gives our linguistic bodies structure, but vocabulary comprises our vital organs.

It's what allows us to say what we want to say in the way we want to say it.

Countless new words appear in our textbooks and are thrown at us in classrooms. Most of them fly straight through our ears, in and out, and are off out of the window, gone forever. Don't you wish you could catch them before they disappear, committing them to memory once and for all?

Well, we've brainstormed nine great tips to help you naturally absorb language without having to memorize long (and painful) lists of vocabulary.

9 Imaginative Tips for Absorbing Vocabulary Like a Sponge

1. Find Out How You Learn Best

Our brains all work in different ways, which means we all learn differently.

Forget one-size-fits-all. You know that perfectly-fitting pair of jeans, your most-worn and most-loved pair, is always a pleasure to wear—just because they're perfectly tailored to your unique body. In the same way, your brain can relax and work at its most efficient when you're engaging it in a way that most suits you.

Some of us are predominately visual learners, so we have to see the word written down in order to remember it.

Others are kinetic; our hands and bodies need to write it, do it and touch it to remember.

The luckiest ones are auditory learners. They've really got it easy when it comes to learning languages. All they have to do is hear the word to commit it to memory.

Think back to school when you had to study for an exam. When test time came around, did you remember how the textbook pages looked? Or did you

better remember what you learned while actually doing a hands-on activity or experiment? Or could you hear the teacher's voice more clearly?

Most of us will favor one of these types of learning, but you'll also find that we all use all three types of learning to differing degrees. So, the ideal situation would be to apply all three methods in combination and give more emphasis to your preferred learning style. That way those tricky words really get stuck in your head.

So, which type of learner are you?

2. Stick Words on Sticky Notes

Thank god someone invented sticky notes. They're the perfect size for one word. Write the words you're studying down on some little sticky notes and stick them all over everything: *mesa* (table), *silla* (chair), *cuchillo* (knife), *puerta* (door), *novio* (boyfriend).

When you're done with those, you can write down your more complex words and stick them where you're most likely to look at them—on the fridge, above the bathroom sink, on your computer and so on.

Once you accumulate too many words for sticky notes, you can make a poster with **big letters** (this is important—we're far too busy and/or stressed to spend our precious free minutes reading minuscule writing) and stick it on the wall, in a place where you're likely to look at it frequently. Even just catching the words subconsciously out of the corner of your eye helps your brain grab onto them.

I have mine in the bathroom. So, every time I sit down I have to look at 'em. Even if I'm not consciously reading the information, I'm subconsciously seeing those words and absorbing them.

3. Let out Your Inner Artist

For those visual learners among us, or those of you who simply like art and graphics in general, we've got an artistic method in mind. Print or draw a picture of the word and then write the word in or around it. Something like *mano* (hand) might be easy, but how would you depict the word *castigar* (to punish), for example?

Stick those pictures up where you'll see them every day. Inflict these drawings and vocabulary interpretations on your colleagues, friends, partners and kids. The funnier the better of course!

For the more modern among you, get out your tablet drawing programs and let your imagination run wild. One picture a day used as your tablet desktop background or screensaver would add to your vocabulary repertoire in no time.

There are even online programs, such as Wordle, that let you create word clouds with funky designs which you can then print as posters.

However, if you'd rather not display your artistic talents to all who enter your home or pass your desk, the good news is that just the mere act of drawing (or trying to draw!) that picture will take you one step closer to never forgetting the word that inspired it.

4. Make a Sentence

Quite simply, write a sentence with the word in it.

This is important because you're using the word in context. Your brain will remember the kinds of situations and collocations associated with that word for next time.

For example: You just learned the word *burro* (donkey). You could write: "*Los burros apestan*" (Donkeys are smelly).

Then don't forget to go out and use that word again and again in real life.

Make it your mission to speak to someone and use that word when you speak: "*Mira ese burro, es muy gordo!*" (Look at that donkey. It's so fat!)

You may come up with some strange and wonderful things, but your brain sure will remember!

5. Use Your Own Language

Association. This can be fun. There are some words in your target language,

no doubt, that sound like ones in your own native language. Do your best to associate them with one another in your mind.

For example: *Bigote*, Spanish for “beard,” sounds like “Big goatee!”

Call up the associated word in your native tongue and you’ll find yourself remembering the new word. This works especially well with funny-sounding associations!

6. Use Gestures

For those kinetic learners among you, associating a word with a gesture can be extremely helpful.

Let’s not forget that Latin speakers naturally tend to be far more expressive with their gestures than anglophones anyway. For example, rubbing the bottom of your chin with the tops of your fingers means something like, “¿*Qué me importa?*” (*What do I care?*) in Argentina. Why should Argentinians have all the fun? You should go ahead and invent your own!

How would you act out “to land a plane?” (*aterrizar*) or “to win” (*ganar*)?

Assign a hand gesture to that difficult word and your brain will be more likely to recall it when you repeat that gesture later on.

7. Avoid Word Overload

Generally our brains can’t take in too much new information, so don’t go crazy and try to memorize 40 words a day. Not to mention, you won’t have any wall space left in your house!

Limit yourself to 10 new words a day, maximum. Ideally, I’d start with 5 a day. That’s 35 new words a week, 140 a month and 1,680 a year.

That gets you well on your way to reaching the average of 2,000 words we use on a regular basis and what makes up the core of our vocabulary. That’s plenty to practice with! Don’t forget that you’ll need to review old vocabulary words that slip through the cracks of your memory, so you’ll be busy as it is without piling on more daily words.

8. Practice Makes Perfect

Unfortunately, the age old proverb is right: Practice makes perfect.

Think about riding a bike. How did we all learn?

Someone explained it to us. We listened and half-understood. We thought we might try and we fell off. Perhaps we held back some tears, but we got back up and then we fell off again. This went on until eventually our muscles learned the movements and we were flying down the road.

So, how do we get the cogs moving in our memory system and get on our way to imprinting information in our long-term memories?

The key, as with all new things, is to repeat, repeat and repeat.

Listen, draw, see, write, act out and speak those new words again and again and they'll be committed to your memory for a damn good long time, if not forever.

9. Learn a Language with FluentU

FluentU is all about learning through context. FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons.

After choosing an individual video based on your skill level and personal interests, you'll be prompted to choose between “watch” and “learn” modes.

If you opt for “watch,” you'll watch your videos as normal with interactive subtitles that are translated both by word and by sentence. Missed a word? Simply hover your cursor over the word in the subtitle to see its definition and usage on-screen!

If you click on “learn,” then you'll go straight to flashcards featuring key vocabulary from the video. This gives you a chance to practice your language skills either before or after watching the clip. “Learn” mode integrates pictures, video clips and additional usage examples into the flashcards, making for truly memorable, visually-oriented, in-context learning experiences. It's really a visual learner's dream come true!

Well, there are your **nine useful tips for learning new vocabulary**. Now all you need to do is begin applying them!

[7]

12 Wicked Fun Ways to Learn Any Language

Maureen Stimola



Looking for minimum stress and maximum fun?

Too many “fun” ways to learn are just typical study tactics in disguise.

C’mon, flashcards are never going to hold a candle to video games.

It may sound strange, but you can’t learn everything by studying.

As it turns out, you may have to **totally stop studying to really become fluent.**

I’m dead serious.

So, blow off your work.

Procrastinate that assignment.

Put your textbooks back on the shelf.

I promise it isn't too good to be true!

Why Learn a Language the Fun Way?

Say goodbye to making excuses

I'm the guiltiest of this. No time, no energy, no money, no resources. You don't need any of that anymore. Don't join the pity party, wondering "however will I learn my target language?" You won't ever have to force yourself to stay motivated again, 'cause I know you're always going to be down for a little fun time.

Manipulate your brain's rewards center

With fun methods, your brain's pleasure system is triggered constantly. It's why we can scroll through dozens of funny cat pictures without getting bored, even though we're doing nothing beneficial for our brain or body (except for absorbing cuteness).

Now, your brain will start to connect that positive feedback and pleasure with language learning.

Remove roadblocks

Sometimes you study so much that you actually start getting *worse*. Has this happened to you? This is a major complaint from near-fluent learners living abroad and encountering their target language in the real world for the first time.

They get paralyzed and don't know what the heck they should even study.

How do you study things like understanding fast-talkers, low-talkers, mumblers, obscure colloquial expressions, little-known dialects and slang that

became popular last month? You can't learn that stuff by studying in the traditional sense.

Train your brain to *live* using your target language

Right now, your brain knows that it should be using your target language in specific situations, like when reading a textbook, watching a subtitled movie or chatting with a conversation partner. Now it's time to train your brain to use that target language constantly in everyday life. That's the next big step from student to fluent speaker.

Keep language fresh and current in your mind

Language is always evolving, along with popular culture, current events and more. Cultural references are constantly embedded in people's language.

It's not a guilty pleasure anymore—to be fluent you *need* to know about modern entertainment, leisure activities and humor found in your target language's country. Any language learner knows: It royally sucks to miss out on jokes and references.

Transform everyday activities into language learning opportunities

Don't just wait for designated study time to roll around. Some fun learning methods are based on things you already do regularly, like cooking and browsing the internet. Other methods help you redirect spare time to fun language practice time. By using these fun activities, you'll be able to inject a little language learning into normal, everyday activities.

How to Integrate Fun Activities into Language Learning

Pepper your daily schedule with fun

Little bits of fun language learning can fit nicely even into the busiest of schedules. Whenever you have a few minutes, like when you're in the bathroom and browsing the internet on your phone (like I know you do), you can be practicing your target language. Let no spare moment go to waste!

Don't burn your books just yet

You'll still need formal learning and periods of focused study time. The idea is to incorporate more fun learning methods into your daily routine. You can certainly cut down on your more intense study sessions, but overall you'll still need these to succeed.

Take breaks

Plenty of research on human motivation has shown that we're more productive when we take lots of frequent, little breaks. Try the following patterns to structure your study time and keep your brain refreshed:

- Study for 20 minutes, take a 5-minute break.
- Study for 30 minutes, take a 10-minute break.
- Study for 50 minutes, take a 20-minute break.

During the study period, use your more formal study methods. During the break period, use one of our suggested *fun* language practice methods.

12 Wicked Fun Ways to Learn Any Language

The first five items on this list will get you connected online, showing you how to use the internet for some fun new ways to learn.

1. Browse Reddit

Reddit's my go-to place for language learning.

Make an account, explore and subscribe to “subreddits” (pages that are thematically-oriented to one specific region, interest, etc.) where people speak or study your target language. For example, if you're learning French you might want to subscribe to the subreddits [reddit.com/r/learnfrench](https://www.reddit.com/r/learnfrench/), [reddit.com/r/french](https://www.reddit.com/r/french/) or [reddit.com/r/france](https://www.reddit.com/r/france/)—that last one being bilingual.

There, you'll find great articles in your target language, along with comments from users. You'll also come across memes, gifs and fun images. Not only will you learn how other countries and cultures use these media—which is

kinda fascinating all on its own—but you’ll also learn about a society’s favorite types of humor, plus ongoing jokes related to popular culture, current events and social issues.

You can also filter Reddit search results to only pull up posts in your target language.

You’ll just feel like you’re browsing away on Reddit, but you’re actively connecting with communities of language learners and native speakers.

2. Use Region-specific Social Media

Yeah, Facebook is popular pretty much everywhere. But you may have also noticed that certain areas of the world have their own social media sites with intense regional followings. See what native speakers of your target language are using, then sign up and start chatting!

For example, WhatsApp is popular in Europe and Latin America, while Kakao Talk is what Koreans use to chat. Hi5, despite being based in the U.S., could not be more *latino*, while many in Spain still use Tuenti—the “Spanish Facebook.”

3. Play Online Video Games

Computer-based games like Minecraft, World of Warcraft and Team Fortress 2 let you join group conversations and work cooperatively with others.

To get an idea of what gameplay will be like in your target language, check out the videos on Twitch. I’d recommend either searching the site by language (for example, type “German” into the site’s search bar) or by video game title—or both. Listen to how French trolls berate other players and work the word “n00b” into their sentences.

As for other popular games like Call of Duty, Grand Theft Auto and so on, Google “party up” threads for speakers of your native language. Search for this using your target language! They often look to recruit more game companions on online forums, since gaming is always more fun when you’ve got buddies to chat with.

4. Find Friends Online

Don't just stop at language exchange sites. You may find it fun to use chat messengers and video conferencing to converse with native speakers, but that often involves stiff, formal conversation, awkward pauses and corrections. That adds a different level of pressure to the situation—you'll still be in "learning" mode, trying to watch your words carefully and improve your speaking.

Want some more chill interactions? Try making friends in real life!

To get started, try Meetup. This is ideal if you're living abroad and looking for more opportunities for casual interaction with native speakers or fellow learners. It's also great while living in a country that doesn't speak your target language—simply search for conversation nights and cultural activities related to the language, and you'll be sure to find some like-minded peeps to hang out with.

5. Date in Your Target Language

Single and ready to mingle? Okay, I'm not—I got into something committed before the inglorious rise of Tinder and Grindr—but I know there are a lot of language learners out there looking to hook up. There are a few ways to go about finding matches who speak your target language.

- Set your region to a place where your target language is spoken.
- Change your application interface to your target language.
- Include your spoken languages in your profile, and attract native speakers like flies.
- For sites and apps offering this option, filter potential matches by "languages spoken."

Want to arrange a hookup in your destination before your plane even touches down? **Tinder Plus**, "the next level of Tinder," is working overtime to market to us international, jet-setting, traveling types. If you're hoping for something a little less casual, **Match** has separate pages specifically for seeking partners internationally.

We're leaving web pages for now and heading to our phones! These next

two tips will show you how to use your phone for good, not evil. Your phone usually distracts you from anything and everything, but now it can help you learn while you waste your life away!

6. Set Your Phone Interface to Your Target Language

Easy as cake. Navigating your phone in your target language forces you to use your target language every time you pick up that mesmerizing little device.

Eventually, you'll learn all the key words you need to get to text messages, contact lists, emails and Facebook, and you'll find that you're swiping and tapping your device as quickly and easily as you did in your native language!

7. Use Only the Most Entertaining Apps

Skip the flashcard apps for now. Try out fun apps that aim to deliver instant gratification.

Duolingo gets you learning through cheerful, addictive games. You choose game content based on themes (food, animals, etc.) or linguistic points (present tense, gender, etc.) and play a round of three-strikes-you're-out. Get the answers correct to advance and earn points. You can use these points for rewards, like bonus lives and health elixirs to store for extra-challenging rounds.

FluentU has an app on the way, but in the meantime you can use it on your computer or tablet. We've collected tons of real-world video clips—like music videos, movie trailers, news, Disney movies and children's shows—and turned them into personalized language learning lessons.

Free City Maps and Walks is great for iPhone users who enjoy playing with the first-person street view on Google maps. Take walking tours of nearly 500 cities worldwide! Look at street signs, billboards and more as you go to learn about language, culture, architecture and more.

World Lens Translator is about to blow your freaking mind. The future has officially arrived. Simply point your smartphone camera lens at a text (or look at it with your Google Glass if you're so lucky) and have it translated before your eyes, in real time.

***Bonus:** Download your favorite smartphone and tablet games in your target language! For example, did you know that all those silly little game that you just can't stop playing—take, for example, *Plants vs. Zombies*—are frequently available in Spanish, French, Japanese and many, many more languages? For some, you'll need to do the initial download with the different language indicated. For others, you can simply change the interface language in game settings.

Finally, we'll be eating our way to fluency in these last five ways to learn a language while having a seriously fun time.

8. Seek out Recipes in Their Native Language

Can Paula Deen really make authentic fried plantains as good as any Ecuadorian *mamita*? Does Martha Stewart secretly have a Korean mother who taught her how to make that “ultimate” *kimchi*? Um, probably not.

If you want recipes that are authentic down to every last step of preparation, you're better off searching for them in your target language. For example, few English plantain recipes will suggest you grab a rock from outside to smash 'em down after frying. That's one beautiful little cultural detail you miss out on if you're not finding recipes directly from their country of origin!

9. Watch Step-by-step Culinary Instruction Videos

Step right into an authentic kitchen, and let a native speaker of your target language take you to culinary heaven. Quality, step-by-step cooking videos are absolutely everywhere on the internet. Just search for your desired recipe in your target language on YouTube!

You'll find everything from beautifully-lit and organized walkthroughs by professional chefs to normal people filming their home food preparation. Each type of video has its own advantages. The best part about any cooking video is that it was created for you to follow carefully. That means they're usually very detailed. The cook will speak clearly, slowly and explicitly, which is perfect for language learners.

Cook along with them, or simply binge watch these videos when you're hungry and daydreaming about delicious food.

10. Shop in Ethnic Grocery Stores with Imported Goods

As a lifelong dawdler, I love leisurely strolling through grocery store aisles and mulling over the different items. This is even more fun when wandering around an ethnic grocery shop.

Any major city is bound to have Japanese convenience stores akin to those found on the streets of Tokyo. Latin grocery stores are arguably the most cost-efficient places to stock up on bulk bags of rice and beans. Most or all of the items in these kinds of stores will have labels written in your target language. It's a language learner's goldmine.

Make a shopping list based on the recipe you've found online in your target language—and write it out in that language too, of course.

Head to Google maps and see what's in your area!

Even if you live in a rural area, like myself, the nearest large town or small city should still offer plenty of options. Visiting one of these stores is really worth the occasional drive if you can swing it.

11. Order Imported Food Online

If you enjoy shopping online and get a rush of excitement when an Amazon box appears on your doorstep, trying browsing online for foreign products related to your target language. What do native speakers order while they're abroad and feeling homesick? Is there a particular product their country is famous for?

Look for products with stellar reviews that offer little tastes of local cuisine.

12. Eat out in an Authentic Restaurant

If you're learning abroad, eat where the locals eat. Avoid tourist-packed restaurants like the plague—they're usually overpriced and serve food watered down to foreign palettes anyway.

If you're in your home country, track down where native speakers of your target language own restaurants. This will introduce you to authentic food, and often the menu will be partially or fully written in their home language.

You can chit-chat with the hosts, waiters and busboys to your heart's content, allowing you to try out your language skills and maybe even make friends.

See? I told you these were seriously awesome ways to learn a language without studying. Now go have some fun and get started today!

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5 Tips for Creating a Rock Solid Foreign Language Reading Habit

John Fotheringham



Wanna get hooked on phonics?

It's easier than you might think!

Reading in a foreign language can be intimidating at first.

That's understandable.

The good news is that once you start reading in your target language every day, you won't want to stop.

Many language learners get discouraged at the beginning, and avoid reading practice at all costs.

There's a reason why: they didn't have us to start them off on the right foot.

We've got some awesome tips, resources and habit-forming activities that'll get you in the foreign language reading zone, permanently!

5 Tips for Creating a Daily Foreign Language Reading Habit

These tips will help you steer clear of common pitfalls, and head towards all your language learning goals faster than ever. There's nothing too complicated about them—they might almost seem too easy. You might be left wondering, “Hey, why didn't I think of that?”

Well, that's the way it should be. We're going to get you reading in a way that feels simple, natural, fun and easy. Before you know it, reading in foreign language won't be a chore or an obligation—it'll be your daily dose of entertainment!

1. Choose Fun Things You'd Read in Your *Native* Language

Don't force yourself through boring materials you think are “important”

One of the most common mistakes I see language learners make? When it comes to reading in a foreign language, they're always forcing themselves to read through uninteresting topics and materials that they'd never consider reading in their native language.

For example, I've had many English students who painfully work their way through difficult articles in *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Harvard Business Review* because they think these materials are “important” for their English abilities, even though the content bores them to tears.

While such resources certainly offer exposure to lots of business-specific vocabulary, the value of this input is extremely low if one looks on the task as a chore instead of a treat. Our understanding and retention tends to be much higher when we read content we genuinely enjoy.

Which leads to the next point...

Find foreign language reading material about your *existing* interests

Perhaps you (unlike some of my former English students) love *The Harvard Business Review* and are already a regular subscriber.

For you, it would make perfect sense to find a business-centric magazine in your target language. But if biz articles aren't your jam, don't feel obligated to read them. You're in control of your language learning journey, so find reading materials that fit *your* unique interests.

Look at the blogs, magazines, books, cartoons and other materials that you read already and try to find foreign language equivalents. Read food and cooking blogs from Taiwan. Get yourself some Japanese car magazines. Buy a German book on carpentry. You name the interest, and there's bound to be a blog, magazine, book or other piece of reading material that serves it in most major languages.

Learn a new skill or hobby in your target language

In addition to finding materials about your *existing* interests, another great strategy is to pick up a *new* skill or hobby through your target language. The highly contextual nature of such learning will help you make lots of new linguistic connections without having to constantly rely on a dictionary, and will fill in gaps in vocabulary much more quickly than more passive forms of learning.

2. Choose Digital Materials Whenever Possible

I freaking love the look, smell and feel of physical books. But when it comes to learning a foreign language, the advantages of digital materials far outweigh the sensory advantages of print.

Digital materials are faster

One of the greatest advantages of digital materials in language learning is the ability to instantly look up unknown words or characters, saving you precious study time that would be wasted looking up words in a paper dictionary. Paper books also require you to carry around a separate dictionary, a weight disadvantage I discuss more below.

- If reading articles online, install a pop-up dictionary browser extension like the Firefox extension Pera Pera Kun for Japanese or the Chrome extension Zhongwen for Chinese.
- In the Kindle app (available for iOS, Android, Mac, Windows and more), you can download dictionaries for most major languages. As you read Kindle books in your target language, you can then just hold a word to reveal its definition and pronunciation.
- On iOS, select a word and then tap “Define” from the contextual pop-up. If no definition is shown, tap “Manage” and then download whichever additional dictionaries you want.
- On OSX, select a word and tap with 3 fingers to bring up its definition. To add additional dictionaries, open the built-in Dictionary app, go to preferences and check whichever you want to add.

Similarly, *saving* new words and phrases for later review is much faster when reading digital materials:

- The pop-up dictionary Pera Pera Kun, for example, allows you save words you look up so that later they can be downloaded.
- Some online dictionaries, Tangorin.com for example, allow you to save words you look up and categorize them in different lists, which can each be exported in a format that easily imports into the Anki flashcard app. Lots of exporting and importing involved there, but you catch my drift.
- More simply, you can always just copy and paste words or phrases into an app like Evernote for later review.

Last but not least, digital materials are faster than print since they allow you to instantly find specific words or passages using the search function. Instead of wasting hours flipping through a print book to find that quote you loved or that word you wanted to look up, you can just type in the search field and tap “Find.” Ah, modern convenience.

Digital materials are cheaper

In addition to being *faster* than their print counterparts, digital materials are also *cheaper*, if not free:

- Kindle books are usually \$10 or less on Amazon, while paperbacks tend to be twice that much.
- Many international magazines and newspapers offer their articles for free online.
- Books in the public domain are available as free eBooks from sites like Project Gutenberg.

You can then put all the money you've saved towards tutor fees or a plane ticket abroad!

Digital materials are lighter and take up less space

Bits are lighter than atoms. My back still doesn't forgive me for all the harm I did hauling around textbooks, *manga* and massive dictionaries back in college. Had I begun learning a language today instead of in the relative "Stone Age" of the late '90s, I could have carried all the reading and reference materials I ever wanted right in my pocket on a smartphone or tablet.

Today, you never need to choose which books to take and which to leave on the shelf as you can take them all with you wherever you go in digital form.

3. Listen to Materials You've Previously Read

Reading alone won't improve your listening and speaking skills

While reading is extremely important, it's imperative that you keep your reading time balanced with the other three core language skills: **listening**, **speaking** and **writing**.

While teaching English in East Asia, I observed that most students felt much more comfortable reading and writing, while they struggled greatly with listening and speaking. This makes perfect sense since language classes in that part of the world (if not the world over) tend to focus most of their time on reading tasks, translation and so on with very little time spent actively listening and speaking.

We get better at what we practice most, so naturally reading will make you better at reading but will do very little for your listening and speaking abilities.

You'll improve retention when you consume the same content in multiple formats

In addition to helping improve both your listening and reading skills, consuming the same material in more than one form of input will increase your retention of new words and build stronger connections between previously learned materials. It's also more interesting to repeat the same content in multiple formats than it is to simply reread the same passage over and over again.

Listen to the content you've been reading

So what's the best way to listen to content you've previously read? Here are 4 suggestions:

- **Watch videos with subtitles.** FluentU has huge collections of real world videos in multiple languages, and we even kick things up a notch — we've made our subtitles interactive so you can view definitions of individual vocabulary words *on-screen* while they're being spoken. You'll be sure to never miss a thing! You can also use DVDs and Netflix movies with subtitles in your target language, YouTube videos with CC captions and so on.
- **Find podcasts with transcripts.** Podcasts are some of my favorite language learning tools as they cover a wide range of interests, tend to be short and are almost always free. Many podcasters include show notes or transcripts right alongside the MP3 file that can be revealed with just a tap on your smartphone or a click on your computer.
- **Get both the e-book and audiobook version of your favorite books.** While this may be an expensive proposition if buying copyrighted books, the benefits are well worth the cost. But keep in mind that you can also try finding e-book/audiobook pairs using Project Gutenberg and Librivox.
- **Get custom audio recorded.** You can ask a native speaker friend or tutor to record a given piece of text, or you can use the power of crowdsourcing with a site like Rhinospike. You simply submit some text you want read aloud in your target language, you record something for someone learning your native language, and then you can download the MP3 you requested when your submission is ready.

4. Don't Linger Too Long Over Details

Stopping and starting is difficult for building smooth comprehension. Try reading an entire page or paragraph before stopping to look up any words.

Avoid the “dictionary black hole”

As I mentioned above, being able to quickly look up new words is a major advantage of digital materials. But this *pro* can quickly become a *con* if you allow yourself to fall into the “dictionary black hole.” This is when you look up a word which leads you to a related term, and then another and another, until you forgot what you were doing in the first place.

Don't break the semantic flow

Stopping to look up every other word not only makes it more difficult to follow the flow of a story, but it also significantly slows you down. While skipping unknown terms may mean that you miss a little of what's going on, it offers many advantages:

- It increases your reading speed.
- It builds fluency.
- It encourages you to make educated guesses.

5. Commit to a Painless Minimum Page Count Per Day

You are more likely to procrastinate on bigger goals

As I discuss in my post on self-teaching languages like a rock star, simply setting goals isn't enough. To have any chance of success, your goals need to be “S.M.A.R.T.” (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound).

To this end, I recommend starting with an absurdly small daily reading commitment.

For example, “I commit to reading one paragraph every day.” You'll likely go on to read much more on most days, but starting with an easy task helps ensure completion. If you were to commit to reading an entire *article* per day, on the other hand, chances are good that you'll put off the task, fearing the time and work involved.

Read small chunks any chance you get

Just as you should commit to a tiny daily reading goal, you should use any tiny chunks of free time you find each day to fit in a little reading:

- If you take public transportation to work or school, use that time to read in a foreign language.
- If you're waiting in line at the store, whip out your smartphone and read a few sentences of a blog post.
- If you're stuck in a boring meeting, read a few news headlines from your favorite online foreign language newspaper while pretending to stare at the mind-numbing PowerPoint.

Don't let yourself miss a day

A key part of making reading a part of your daily routine is to not let yourself miss a day. The longer your unbroken chain becomes, the more you'll want to keep going. But when you let yourself miss just one day, you're that much more likely to miss the next day, and the next, and the next, until your reading habit has completely fallen out of your life.

So, keep the ball rolling with consistently good work!

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6 Tips for Effortless Language Learning with Foreign Movies

Alex Owen-Hill



We all love movies.

And *finding* foreign language movies poses no problem in the modern world.

We're not cavemen—we've got Netflix and Redbox.

That means you've probably heard all the buzz about learning a foreign language through movies.

It's supposed to be ideal for learning new vocabulary in context, understanding culture and all-around supplementing our language learning in an enjoyable way.

There's just one catch. **After a while, watching movies in another language can start to become a chore.**

It's happened to me a few times.

My initial enthusiasm with starting a new language had passed. The first excitement that came when I began to understand some bits of movies had been replaced by irritation at all the bits I still couldn't understand. I kept trying to push myself to watch more difficult movies, but every time movie night actually came around I found myself reaching for a movie in my native English.

You know what the problem was?

Foreign movie night had started to become Too Much Work.

It's no wonder that I'd started to lose interest! For most of us, watching movies or TV shows is a reward after a long day of work. If we start to treat it like "yet more work," then of course it's going to become a chore.

But, never fear!

I'm going to give you six great ways to re-engage with your foreign movie night and keep learning without it becoming a chore.

6 Tips for Effortless Language Learning with Foreign Movies

1. Become "That Annoying Person"

Are you one of "those people" who sit through a movie and give a running commentary on everything that's going on in the plot?

If you're not, you should be!

Provide a running commentary.

Providing a running commentary on a movie in your target language is a great way to get more engaged in the movie and practice your speaking at the same time. The more engaged you get, the more you'll enjoy watching the movie.

Okay, so this might be controversial advice, and it's not applicable in every situation—I wouldn't recommend you start chatting in a movie theater for example.

However, most of us watch loads of movies at home. When I'm traveling I often watch foreign movies alone on a computer. This is a great time to start chatting to the screen and getting really involved with what you're watching.

What to talk about?

It might seem an odd question, but what should you say when you're commenting on a movie?

Comment on those things that interest you! The same things you would comment on in your native language.

Personally, because I write short films, I'm interested in the “nuts and bolts” of a movie and its script. I talk about story structure and technique in English, so that's exactly what I talk about in my target language. **I practice talking about things that interest me.**

Maybe you prefer to predict what's going to happen later in the movie? Maybe you like commenting on the characters, costumes or the actors?

Whatever interests you about the movie, just say it right there when you're watching it. Get a dialogue going with yourself. You'll get great practice speaking about those things that really interest. The more you pay attention to details that you'd like to chat about, the more you'll be getting engaged in the movie.

How to avoid annoying others

People talk throughout movies more than you might realize. When you're watching movies with friends you'll often find that people add their own comments. It's a communal act!

However, in case you're bothered about annoying people, these three tips can help:

- 1. Save the commenting until you're on your own.** I don't always talk when watching movies with others, but when I watch movies alone I

really chat a lot. It allows me to try out vocabulary, and I can always rewind if I miss something.

2. Only comment on “less important movies.” If you’ve all been waiting for ages to watch this one special movie, don’t feel like you have to talk all the way through it, just enjoy it. But, don’t hold yourself back if you have a quick comment (as long as it’s in your target language!).

3. Save all your comments for afterwards. Maybe you’re with a crowd that likes silence throughout movies. That’s fine. Just wait until the end and have a good chat about it.

2. Quick Tip: Write Reviews

One quick tip to get really engaged in foreign movies is to write a quick review online after you’ve finished, in your target language of course.

It won’t take you very long (between 20 minutes and 1.5 hours depending on your level of detail) and you’ll develop some really useful vocabulary to talk about the movie (and others) in conversations.

3. Find Familiar Faces

We often think that difficult language is what stops us understanding a foreign movie, but it’s only half the problem.

One of the most overlooked issues when watching movies in another language is the difference in “cultural background.”

Cultural knowledge can be much harder to acquire than linguistic knowledge.

The culture that you live in currently or grew up in has given you a rich and varied set of life experiences. These make your view of the world different from the country in which the movie was made, even if you understand all of the vocabulary.

Foreign movies often feel strange and unfamiliar because *everything* about the movie is new—the actors, the “normal” home life of the characters, the locations, the type of humor, etc.

Even when I watch movies from Spain, a country where I've lived for years, I still sometimes get the feeling that "this is not my culture," so I don't get as involved in the movie as I would if it were in English.

This challenge can make watching foreign movies quite a chore.

How to connect with the country's movie culture

The best way to combat this "cultural disconnect" is to get as involved in the target culture as possible.

Here are three tips to connect with the culture and enjoy the cultural background of movies:

1. Keep your movie choices consistent. One of the quickest ways to feel familiar in the movie's culture is to watch several movies with the same actors and/or director. When you start seeing lots of familiar faces or getting a familiar vibe, that feeling of cultural strangeness goes away.

2. Watch movies set in your home country, or in the United States. Wherever you're from, these days we're all very familiar with the United States because of the far reach of Hollywood. Watching films in your target language with familiar locations is a sure way to feel connected to the cultural background of the movie.

3. Watch dubbed movies from your country. Sometimes it all gets too much and you just need a "rest" from foreign movies. Watching a dubbed movie set in your home country is a great way to feel connected to the culture of the movie, while still learning your target language.

4. Original Version vs. Dubbing

In general, you should be watching as many movies that are originally in your target language as possible.

Original versions are better for a variety of reasons:

- You learn the real vocabulary in context.
- You get used to the rhythm of the language in a way that dubbed movies don't allow.

- You have the added visual stimulus of being able to read the actor's lips, which you don't for a dubbed movie.
- You learn the culture as well as just the language.

On the flip side, dubbed movies have some advantages:

- The voice actors sometimes (not always) speak more clearly than the actor on screen.
- The culture of the movie might be more familiar to you, especially if it's a U.S. import.

The best advice is to “cycle” watching dubbed movies and original versions. Get the best of both worlds.

5. Pick Movies by “Difficulty Cycling”

How do you pick which movie to watch in your target language? Really, it's going to vary day by day.

Some days you'll be thinking, “I just want to watch something easy and relax.”

I realized that on those days when I felt too tired to watch a film in my target language, I'd usually reach for the English movies. They were an easy choice for my tired mind.

The thing is that **when you're learning a new language, movies in your native language will always seem an easy choice.** But it doesn't have to be like that.

The three types of movie difficulty

The relative “difficulty” of foreign language movies comes in three different flavors:

- 1. Difficult language.** The level of the language is hard for you to understand.
- 2. Difficult cultural background.** The cultural background of the movie is unfamiliar or uncomfortable to watch.

3. Difficult subject. The subject matter is harrowing and/or the story is complex.

When you're picking movies in your target language, try not to make everything hard for yourself at the same time. When you want to watch something easy, **only pick a film that's "difficult" in one of these categories.**

If you're feeling really lazy (it happens) then pick a film that's easy in all of these categories, like a dubbed action film or kids' animation. This way, you can watch films in your target language even when you don't feel like watching a foreign film.

Not sure where to start in terms of difficulty levels? Try out **FluentU**.

FluentU takes real-world videos—including clips, trailers and behind-the-scenes commentary from your favorite foreign movies—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons. It's there to help you discover video content that's perfectly suited to your skill level, learning style and personal interests.

You can stop browsing Netflix and YouTube for decent movies—simply hop on over to FluentU for personalized suggestions. The site will keep track of your viewing history and figure out the best routes to continual learning and improvement.

The best part? We'll help you learn how to actively study language through movies. While you watch your chosen content, FluentU adds your newly-encountered vocabulary to flashcards and a running vocabulary list, so you can always go back to practice even more.

6. Watch "The Classics"

In any language there are "classic" movies which you have to watch. The best way to find these is to search for "top 100 movies in (insert language here)" into Google. You'll get the best results by searching *in* your foreign language and reading lists on sites written in that language. Once you've track down a good list, pick a few to start with.

Here are some of the great reasons you should watch the classics:

- **They're called "classic" for a reason.** You'll watch some wonderful movies.
- **Each country has it's own distinct movie culture.** You'll understand the movie culture in that country far more deeply than you did before.
- **You can see what's popular.** You'll begin to recognize some of the best actors in that country.
- **Everyone knows about them.** You'll have a sure topic of conversation when talking to someone from the country.

Now that you know all the joys and rewards of watching movies in your target language, pick a few cool flicks to start with and get to learning!

[10]

Immerse Yourself: 12 Ways to "Go Native" Without Going Abroad

Katherine Kostiuk



Living abroad is arguably the best way to learn a foreign language.

Can't hop on a plane tomorrow?

Stay tuned. You're about to learn how to simulate language immersion.

Lots of us language learners are far, far away from the countries where our target languages are spoken.

It feels like a darn shame, because being surrounded by the language every

day provides endless opportunities for learning and practice. Plus, while living abroad you never have to go far to find someone who speaks the language you're trying to learn.

Since it's a common problem, that means that there are tons of solutions out there.

As it turns out, you can immerse yourself in language even if you don't have the time, money or desire to become an expat tomorrow.

You can do this without leaving your community, your home or even your bed.

The key is to put yourself into situations where language learning is inevitable. Here are 12 ways to get started.

Immerse Yourself: 12 Ways to “Go Native” Without Going Abroad

1. Make Technology Work for You

You know that you aren't living in France or China, but your computer doesn't know that!

Immerse yourself and learn technical vocabulary by changing the digital language settings on your phone, camera, computer or TV. In addition to changing the universal settings on your devices, you can change the settings in individual programs, such as your internet browser. You can also change the language on websites or apps you use frequently.

This simple change can make language learning a part of the activities you do most, and this helps to reinforce a sense of immersion and ongoing commitment to your language learning goals.

2. Entertain Yourself Like a Local

We all need to take breaks, but why not use your breaks as opportunities to continue to learn?

Instead of lazing on the couch with an English language TV show, find a show or video in the language you want to learn.

Soap operas can be a particularly good way to practice your language skills. Regardless of your personal feelings about them, you can't deny that soap operas feature consistent characters and ongoing plot lines that stretch over a series of episodes. This repetition can help improve your comprehension and ensure that you have a chance to understand what's happening before the action moves elsewhere.

Ask native speaking friends for suggestions about which shows are best, or do an online search for the most popular ones. If you have a TV channel that broadcasts in your target language, this is an ideal place to start. If not, look online for sites that provide clips and full episodes.

Still need inspiration? Check out **FluentU**.

FluentU takes real-world videos and turns them into personalized language learning lessons. We've got something for everyone, with content ranging from "the Hunger Games" and "Sharknado" to cartoons, documentaries, dramas, music videos, Coca Cola commercials and broadcast news.

With FluentU, you can just sit back, relax and read along with the subtitles. Alternatively, you can kick things up a notch with interactive learning features like flashcards and vocabulary lists. **Not to mention, everything's personalized for your learning level and style based on the content you've been watching.** It's perfect for figuring out which types of video resources work best for you!

Social media sites are another fun way to practice your language skills. Try looking things up or chatting with people in your target language using Pinterest, Reddit, Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites.

You can also listen to the radio, check out foreign-language podcasts and enjoy music in your target language. If you start entertaining yourself in your target language, you might be surprised how much additional learning you gain without feeling like you're doing any work.

3. Keep Up on News and Current Events

One of the best ways to sound like a native is to be aware of the hot topics within the community and use the same vocabulary locals use to talk about these things.

You'd probably follow the local news and talk with people on the streets if you lived abroad, but it's remarkably easy to stay abreast of foreign news from your own home. Check out one of many online news sources. Ask native speakers what sites they use most, and browse the foreign language versions of international sources like the BBC and Google News.

4. Find a Conversation Partner

If you want to immerse yourself without leaving home, you need to find someone to talk with on a regular basis. That's where a conversation partner comes in.

A conversation partner does not need to be a teacher. In fact, sometimes it's better if your conversation partner isn't a teacher because your goal isn't to drill new vocabulary or work through lessons in a book. It's about having a friendly conversation with a native speaker.

That friendly conversation can help you practice what you're learning at home and give you a feel for the flow of the language. You'll learn colloquial phrases and deepen your understanding of another culture. It can also keep you motivated, since you know you'll need to use your language skills at least once every week or two.

To find a partner, start by talking to your friends and family members, and use Facebook to ask online friends for suggestions. You might be surprised how many people know someone who could help you. If this doesn't work, post an announcement on a local community listserv, or try posting a note on the bulletin board at your library, school or coffee shop.

Another option is to use an online language exchange site such as Cooffee, Linglobe or My Language Exchange.

5. Sign Up for a Conversation Club

Like a conversation partner, a club can give you opportunities to practice your target language and learn new vocabulary.

Although conversation clubs might not give you as many speaking opportunities as a one-on-one conversation might, there are many other advantages to a club.

First, the more the merrier! A club can introduce you to numerous other people interested in the language you're studying, and these people may be able to provide you with information about new language learning opportunities or resources.

You also have the opportunity to hear many different voices in a conversation club. Experiencing the ways different people use language and watching other learners use the language can help you experiment with new ways to express your own thoughts.

Another advantage of a conversation club is that it gives you a chance to listen to a higher level of language than you may be comfortable speaking. This is especially useful for beginners, who may not be able to sustain a long conversation but can gain a lot by listening to more advanced speakers.

So, where to find clubs like these?

Many libraries offer conversation clubs, and so do some universities and colleges. Another option is to look for clubs through sites such as Meetup. If you can't find a club in your community, why not start one yourself? All you need is a native speaker and a handful of people interested in learning the language.

6. Label Your Home

Want to get organized and improve your language skills at the same time? Start putting foreign-language labels on the things you use regularly.

Label your desk, window, coffee mug, bookshelf—anything you want! All it takes is masking tape and a pen (or if you like to be fancy, a label maker).

Seeing the word every time you use an item reinforces it in your mind and

can help keep you motivated to learn more. It's also an amazing way to bring language learning into your home and make it an everyday part of your life.

Just make sure you ask before labeling your roommate's or spouse's things!

7. Wine and Dine

We all have to eat, and most of us enjoy doing it. Since food is an important element in all cultures around the world, it can be an excellent bridge to help you learn a foreign language.

Start with a cookbook

Find a book that will instruct you how to prepare the cuisine of the country or culture where your target language is spoken. Even if the cookbook's in English, cooking some dishes will help you better understand the daily life and culture of the people who speak the language you want to learn.

For more language practice, look up recipes and cooking shows online.

Following a recipe in a foreign language gives new meaning to the cooking and eating experience and can help you develop the vocabulary you need to talk about important dishes in your target language.

Another option is to find a restaurant that serves the cuisine of the people who speak your target language. Practice your pronunciation when you place your order, and engage the owners and waitstaff in friendly conversation. Ask for recommendations and learn what dishes are most popular in the country they come from. If you get particularly close with the staff, you might even ask for a cooking lesson!

8. Do Your Errands

You have to buy groceries, drop off your dry cleaning and grab a double mocha frappuccino (okay, maybe that last one's optional). Why not get some language practice in at the same time?

Seek out a local immigrant community that speaks your target language and find the shops they use. You may be able to find an ethnic food market, convenience store, laundromat, dry cleaner, coffee shop, bakery and more.

Doing your errands at these places can open more opportunities to practice your language skills with the owners and the other customers. It can also be a way to meet new friends and conversation partners.

9. Volunteer in Your Target Language

Volunteering helps others, but it can also help you.

Better your community. Look for ways to get involved in organizations that work with people in your community who speak your target language. Schools, nonprofits, libraries, places of worship and medical clinics might need your help. Refugee resettlement agencies may also be looking for help introducing new refugees to your city.

There are a wide range of things you might do in a volunteer position. You might lend a hand by watching kids while their parents take ESL classes, helping translate basic information, serving as an English conversation partner or driving people to medical appointments.

Even if a position requires work to be done in English, you may meet a lot of people who speak your target language and can open new doors for you.

Look for postings on sites like Craigslist or VolunteerMatch, or see if your city has a volunteer match program of its own.

10. Make Your Job Work for You

Most of your time is probably spent doing your “day job,” so this is an ideal place to look for additional opportunities to study the language you want to learn.

To arrive to work in a language learning mindset, start practicing during your morning commute by playing music or listening to the news in your target language.

If you're in search of a job, consider opportunities at restaurants, companies or shops where your target language is spoken. If you're lucky enough to already have a job where the language is spoken, never miss an opportunity to practice with your colleagues.

You can also improve your language skills by doing job-related research in your target language. When you need to look up information, try a search in your target language and see if you can understand some of the articles.

If your company offers funds for professional development, jump at the chance to apply for money to help you take a course or pay for a private tutor.

11. Record Your Thoughts

Write your way to a happier life and practice your language skills by journaling in your target language.

You can write short stories, record your impressions from the day or simply keep track of your language learning progress. The possibilities are endless.

12. Have Fun!

The best way to keep learning is to make it fun.

Find ways to do your hobbies while learning your target language. Do you like to read? See if your library has books and magazines in your target language. Do you like to dance? Take a class that teaches dances from a country or region where your target language is spoken.

You can also look for foreign language blogs and videos related to your hobbies. Try to connect with an international audience that also enjoys doing whatever it is that you like to do.

If video games are more your style, search for smartphone apps or online games in your target language.

You might also be able to find old-fashioned board games such as Scrabble in foreign languages. If you have friends or family members who are learning the same language, this can be a fun way to practice together.

Ultimately, the best way to immerse yourself in a foreign language is to do whatever you would normally do—just in your target language. Look for opportunities online and in your community so you can truly immerse yourself without leaving your hometown.

Are you ready to take your foreign language to the next level through immersion?



FluentU is foreign language immersion online.

With FluentU, you can learn real languages through **real-world videos**.

We've collected **the web's best video content** and put it in one place.

Our videos are **fun, timely and ideal** for language learners.

Instead of staring at your textbook, learn new vocab in FluentU's learn mode through **engaging and rich experiences**.

Our **interactive captions** make authentic videos become understandable and enjoyable.

As our users have told us, language immersion online with FluentU **just works!**

Sign up for free, today!

www.fluentu.com