

Strategies for Learning a Second (or Third!) Language

Learning a language is just like learning anything else:

- Know your style!
 - If you're an auditory learner, put the radio on in the background, make sure to go to class, talk to yourself, make a playlist, and practice verb forms aloud. Take dictation while a friend speaks to you. Teach someone else. Above all, practice speaking; you'll get to hear the word and you'll get your mouth moving in the right ways.
 - If you're more visual, flashcards will especially work well for you. Watch more movies (youtube or full-length films), color-code your notes, label everything in your room, get a crossword or word-search puzzle book, make an alphabet poster, and practice visualizing new words (picture a mountain when you learn the word "mountain").
 - If you learn by reading and writing, surround yourself with newspapers, find a pen pal, email your language professors just for practice, check out some children's books in your target language, and change your online settings so most-visited websites appear in another language (facebook comes in 69 languages, including "English Upside Down.")
 - Kinesthetic folks learn by "doing." You're likely to benefit from actual conversations, complete with body language and gestures. You might also enjoy working with a partner.
 - Reinforce your style with other modalities. We learn best when we get information multiple ways.
- Take time. You can't learn how to knit if you don't spend time knitting. Practice, repeat, practice, repeat. Build it into your schedule every day, even if it's just listening to one song every morning. Hint: Make a Pandora station.
- You'll get more out of class if you come prepared. Review new vocabulary and grammar, do the reading, and bring questions to class. It helps to spend a few minutes "switching on" your target language; read or speak for a few minutes before every class. Participate fully once you're there. You can form answers when others are called on, take notes (if that's your style), and take advantage of opportunities to practice speaking with an expert around to guide you.
- Use your resources: tutors, language scholars, native speakers of other languages, faculty, staff, and the Instructional Media Center (IMC).
- Use the community. After English, the top four languages in Multnomah County are Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese, and Chinese. SEEDS has volunteer opportunities for working with non-native English speakers, some of which require other language skills. To find a service opportunity in your hometown over break, check out <http://www.volunteermatch.org>.

But it's also kinda different:

- Languages are both information-based and skill-based. There are characters, words and rules to memorize, but changing tenses, ordering sentences, and developing an accent are skills. You might excel at one aspect more than the other.
- Language is cumulative; you can't put it off until the last minute.
- If you're not naturally outgoing, speaking in class can be especially tough. Learning a language takes an interesting blend of confidence and humility. You will make mistakes—everyone does.
- Your goals in learning a language may be very different from other subjects. If your goal is to expand your knowledge base, fulfilling a requirement, explore ideas, or get exposure to new theories or concepts, you can treat your language classes in much the same way you approach your other classes. However, you may be taking a foreign language *because you actually need or want to use it—forever*. If you're going abroad and/or you want your language acquisition to be a life-long skill, remember to “use it or lose it”—practice constantly!

A Few Small Tips & Tricks:

- Flashcards aren't just for vocabulary. Use them for singular/plural, verb tenses, and fill in the blank sentences.
- Stick a new vocabulary word into an English sentence until it seems natural. For example, “Two and two *siempre* make four.”
- Make up a story or image to go with the words you're trying to learn. For example, *boletus* means *mushroom* in Latin. The first syllable sounds like “bowl” and a mushroom cap looks like an upside-down bowl.
- Use what you already know. Every language you know any tiny bit of can potentially help you decode another language.
- Keep it fun! You'll lose interest otherwise.

Over Break:

- Send a note to your language prof (not in English!) to thank them for a good semester.
- Watch a movie three times—first with subtitles in your native language, then with target language subtitles, then with no subtitles.
- Order food (from a waiter or food cart) in your target language.
- Play language games online:
 - <http://freerice.com> Vocab for French, German, Italian, and Spanish. English grammar too! When you play, sponsors donate rice through the UN World Food Program.
 - <http://www.verbs-online.com> Practice regular and irregular verbs in French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish.
 - <http://www.clueword.com> Word searches, crosswords, jumbles, anagrams, hangman etc. in Japanese, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Malay, Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Dutch, Portuguese, Afrikaans, and Swahili.