

Top tips for learning a new language.

Well here is EB Lingo blog number 3, already! I'm not sure where Summer 2020 disappeared to, but I hope everyone has had a peaceful and relaxing break at some point in the last few months. Good luck to everyone undertaking 'la rentrée' in the upcoming weeks, whether at school, university or work. If the start of the academic year is stirring those language learning neurons again, here are some tips to set you on the path to linguistic success!

Why learn a language?

Many of us harbour the desire to know another language and it's important to be realistic from the outset about how much time and effort is required, as obviously it won't happen overnight! Therefore, being clear about your goals for language learning will help to achieve your desired outcome.



Perfect reasons for learning a new language include:¹

- **Communicating when on holiday or travelling for long periods.**
Knowing the language will deepen the travel experience by creating more opportunities for interaction with local people and an improved understanding of the culture. We all recognise that feeling of accomplishment when we've chatted with the taxi driver in the foreign language and been given the lowdown on where to visit!
- **Communicating with family living abroad.**
Speaking the shared language maintains links to the family culture and cultivates a sense of heritage, which in turn has a positive impact on social connections.
- **More permanent relocation.**
Perhaps you are planning to move to a new country, for work or to start a new lifestyle. Learning the language provides a great insight into the country's culture, and therefore its national identity. The subtleties of social norms, or even the sense of humour of a country, are much better understood in the native language. This also avoids the embarrassment of the 'lost in translation' scenario!
- **Academic study.**
In-depth language study of the literature and historical writings provides the opportunity to really get under the skin of a country and its people.

This is beneficial in our globalised world as it improves intercultural understanding and provides a solid basis for outward-looking citizenship.

- **Mental challenge.**

Much has been written about the mental benefits of learning a language, and its impact on later life. Suffice to say, the challenge of memorising vocabulary and understanding grammatical patterns makes for the perfect cerebral workout! It's also a very social activity, bringing together like-minded individuals who can share their love of the language and culture. A win-win situation, agreed?!

Create good learning habits from the beginning...

So, you are clear about *why* you want to learn a language... now the *how*! Obviously, language learning relies on all learning styles, so it is important to develop the whole skillset. Some of us may learn 'parrot-fashion' by listening and repetition, others may excel at grammar and prefer writing. Flexing the strong and weak language muscles is vital to being able to communicate in all ways, so ensure that you spread language practice across reading & writing and speaking & listening.

Here are my 7 steps to language learning success:

1. **Watch and listen to authentic language sources.**

Radio, TV, films, songs on YouTube... the possibilities are endless now thanks to the internet. In the last blog post I discussed in more depth the ways in which watching and listening is beneficial, but the bottom line is that any opportunity to see and hear the language in its natural form will help you to become familiar with the language patterns and increase vocabulary.

2. **Speak... including talking to yourself!**



The trickiest part of the language learning puzzle is applying what you have read and learnt to verbal expression. This requires the use of a different set of cognitive muscles when moving from passive reading to actively forming and coherently articulating the

language. This can only be achieved through practice, so find a native speaker friend, a language class, or a virtual buddy and go for it! Failing that, talk to yourself! The more times a word or structure is actively used, the more likely it will be remembered long-term. Moreover, finding like-minded individuals to

share experiences or to practice the language is far more interesting than spending hours reading a grammar textbook. So get chatting!

3. Practise often, daily if possible.

Practise vocabulary, apply grammar rules you have learnt to make sentences, read passages of a book or a news article online whenever possible. Don't make it into a chore, but rather treat it as your mental workout for the day while enjoying a cuppa or maybe a glass of something stronger.

4. Focus on topics of interest.

Following social media channels on Spanish football, or reading the blogs of French chefs if cuisine is your thing, is a great way of learning vocabulary and structure in a meaningful and personally interesting context.

5. Be prepared for misunderstandings and mishaps.

Unfortunately, the adult fear of making mistakes can impede language learners from getting stuck in. But think about how young children learn and move on: getting beyond the comfort zone and making mistakes always makes for a greater learning experience, and what's the worst that can happen? It's highly unlikely that you will offend someone when starting out, just explain you are learning the language and want to practise, and most people will be happy to help.

6. Keep an open mind.

It will take several years of study to reach native speaker level, so get comfortable with educated guess work based on what you do know when coming up against unknown language. Have a dictionary app



handy to look up words and phrases and try not to translate literally from your native tongue. Use the foreign language vocabulary that you do know to work around a situation.

7. The key message? Enjoy the process!

Accept that it will take time, and motivation levels will fluctuate. Some days you may not be in the mood to practice past tense conjugations, so listen to the news headlines instead and pick out new vocabulary. As with everything, variety is the spice of life so if you are enjoying learning the language then you are well on the way! Always keep in mind that feeling of accomplishment when you have understood or been understood in the foreign language – eventually this will become the norm and the doors to that language and culture will be wide open!

Practical tips:

A few easy methods to incorporate into your language learning straight away:

- Treat yourself to some back-to-school stationary to arrange your language learning notes. A notebook for vocabulary lists and a nice file for your grammar notes will help you feel organized in your approach and make revisiting that fiddly grammar rule much easier!
- Post-Its can be your best friend: display short vocabulary lists or tricky phrases in highly visible places, such as the fridge door, bathroom mirror etc. Say them aloud when you see them or test yourself between English and the foreign language. Make your own flashcards to flick through when you have 5 minutes and keep reviewing!
- Number practice: one of the best tips that a student shared with me for number practice is saying the numbers on car number plates in the target language, although keep your eyes on the road too if driving! The same can apply to anything that contains numbers. If you still have the Yellow Pages then flick through that now and again and practise those 2 digit numbers!
- Apps certainly have a place in language learning, although they can't replace the physical skill of speaking (yet). But puzzles, reading and spelling activities are great for vocabulary practice. Duolingo is arguably the most popular and fastest growing app in the world and completion of a course takes you to A2 standard.

Et vous?

What are your top tips for learning a language?

Do you have a favourite TV show, radio station or podcast?

Are there any apps you can recommend?



Let me know on the Facebook page post! <https://www.facebook.com/eblingo/>

ⁱ Read more about the benefits of language learning in the MEITS research project 'Languages Change Lives' <http://www.meits.org/news/item/languages-change-lives>