

# How To Study A Foreign Language

## IN GENERAL (things you probably already know but frequently need to be reminded of):

- \* One hour each and **every day** is better than occasional marathon sessions.
- \* Set clear objectives: know what is expected of you for each day, each test, etc.
- \* Learn from your mistakes: look over corrected work carefully; redo work for practice.
- \* Remember that in language classes you're tested on different skills: writing, reading, speaking, listening; so you will need to emphasize different things in different combinations: grammar, vocabulary, accent, fluency.
- \* **Just looking at the book or your notes isn't enough; just reciting lists from memory isn't enough: to really be able to use what you've learned, you must study creatively!**

How Much We Remember		
Receptive	Reading	10%
	Hearing	20%
	Sight	30%
	Sight and Hearing	50%
Creative	Talking	70%
	Doing	90%

**Good, creative studying doesn't have to take more time, only more effort and concentration.**

## WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU HAVE?

- \* your textbook and dictionary: get to know their appendices and other helpful sections.
- \* the library: dictionaries and reference grammar books can be used in the library's Reference Section.
- \* your teachers: that's why we're here!
- \* people! your classmates, people who speak the language: just talk!

## SOME SUGGESTIONS ON STUDYING CREATIVELY:

- \* **Use your voice as a study tool:** Read your textbook assignments (or class notes) out loud, not silently; Practice explaining the lesson to someone-- even a stuffed animal!
- \* **Use writing to reinforce what you learn:** Writing out lists or conjugations from memory is useful (though not extremely creative); Write out the answers to practice questions; don't just look at them, write them!; Make up test questions on the material-- write them out and test yourself and classmates; Write letters or e-mail in the language to your teacher, classmates, friends, letters to the editors of foreign-language newspapers, magazines or websites.
- \* **Work in groups-- the purpose of learning a language is to communicate with other people!** Speak as little English (or whatever your native language is) as possible in and out of class; Meet your classmates and friends for meals where you won't speak English; Play foreign-language Hangman, Wheel of Fortune or Scrabble; Play vocabulary charades, where you act out a vocabulary word and your classmates guess what word it is; Role-play situations in the foreign language with classmates or friends.
- \* **We learn by doing-- What YOU create, YOU remember!** Make up phrases or sentences to combine vocabulary words, rather than learning them separately: see how many vocabulary words you can use in

a single sentence; Learn a poem or song that uses your vocabulary words; Write a rhyme or limerick in the language; Make illustrated flashcards or make furniture labels; Put your vocabulary or conjugations to music; Write a computer algorithm to conjugate your verbs . . . !

### **SOME SUGGESTIONS ON SPEAKING/LISTENING PRACTICE:**

Many students find it very difficult to do listening exercises-- the most common complaint is that the native speaker is talking too fast. Beginning language students *will* need to resign themselves to asking people to repeat what was said.

- \* Remember that natural speech is much less clear and precise than the patient "teacher speak" you typically hear in the classroom.
- \* Listen for emphasized words: the most important words in a sentence naturally get said louder and more clearly.
- \* Listen for combined words or syllables: what may initially sound like an unfamiliar word may be two or more familiar ones slurred together.
- \* When doing a written exercise based on an audio or video tape, study the questions carefully before listening. Make sure you understand the questions and what you are expected to listen for. Also anticipate what words you are likely to hear in the recording (if the questions are about where tourists stay, for example, expect to listen for words like 'hotel,' 'hostel,' 'lodging,' etc.). And be sure you are familiar with any assigned vocabulary list for the chapter you're working on, before listening to the exercise.
- \* Whenever you have a written exercise for homework, you should practice reading it aloud once you've done it-- this both reinforces the grammar and helps your fluency in pronunciation.

### **A WORD OR TWO ABOUT INDIVIDUAL LEARNING STYLES:**

Every student is a distinct individual, and every individual's brain works in slightly different ways. Different people find it easier to learn in different environments and from different methods. Teachers, of course, try to do what's best for the greatest number of students in the classroom, but you as an individual student should tailor your own study habits to suit the way your own brain works.

- \* Think of the different stimuli that you respond to best: do you remember best the things you see? hear? touch or manipulate? a combination of these?
- \* Think of the format of information you deal with best: written words? spoken words? numbers? charts, graphs or diagrams? pictures or illustrations? black-and-white or in colors? combinations of these?
- \* Think of the different environments that you work in best: in large groups of people? small groups of people? alone? what kinds of background noise?
- \* Use creative studying techniques that draw on your strengths-- for example, if you are a visual person, work out graphs, charts, layouts, illustrations, etc. to put the information in visual form; if you learn better by listening, make up rhymes and mnemonics, or consider recording your notes or exercises on cassette tapes and listening to them at the same time as you look over them.
- \* **HOWEVER**, language learning requires visual people to speak, and requires auditory people to write! When you study, you should combine techniques that draw on both your strengths *and* weaknesses, so that your strengths help to shore up your weak spots-- for example, if you are a visual person, you should be sure to read aloud the material you have arranged in visual formats; if you are a solitary learner, you should learn new material by yourself, but don't forget to get together later with classmates or friends to practice communicating.

<http://employees.oneonta.edu/smalle/howto.html>

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