

# HELP WITH YOUR LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Language Learning is an active process. If you want to be successful in learning a foreign language, you have to be in control of your own learning and manage it.

In order to manage your learning, you will need to think about the following questions:

## What kind of a learner are you?

- All learners have different styles of learning languages. Your learning style shows your preferred way of learning. Some learners like listening and talking, others prefer to analyze a text, focus on detail, or study with the help of visual support. Most learners have a mixed learning style. The important thing to remember is that any learning style can lead to successful foreign language learning.
- Try a questionnaire about your learning style and find out more about yourself.  
<http://agelesslearner.com/assess/learningstyle.html>

## Why are you learning this language? What do you want to be able to achieve?

- Why not try a questionnaire to identify your motivation styles?  
<http://agelesslearner.com/assess/motivationstyle.html>

## How much time are you required to spend on your language learning per week?

- How much time are you prepared to spend on your language learning per week? How much time do you think you need?

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We suggest that in order to be able to manage your learning:

- use the activity sheets and help sheets in these web pages;
- familiarize yourself with the resources available to you in the University Language Center;
- familiarize yourself with resources available on the Internet;
- familiarize yourself with resources available at the University Library
- find a study partner;
- engage in learning activities meaningfully: don't just passively watch some TV or scan a magazine article. You need to work on the language **actively**.

## RECEPTIVE SKILLS (Reading and Listening)

If you want to be a successful listener, here are some hints:

- Listen to the language you are learning whenever possible. You can use recordings or streamed video/audio from the Internet. Although live TV helps to train your ear, for effective language learning the use of recorded material presents the advantage that **you can PAUSE and PLAY.**
- Think about the subject before you start to listen. You can make a list of words and phrases you expect to hear, and tick them off as they come up.
- Listen actively. **Always have a pen and paper with you.** Note interesting vocabulary, language points etc.
- Try to take your notes in the target language. When listening to normal speech you do not have time to translate everything. Working only in the target language will train your brain to **THINK** in that language.
- Don't worry if you can't understand everything. Concentrate instead on what you **DO** understand.
- First listen to the whole item without stopping. This will give you a better understanding of the overall context before concentrating on the detail. For more detailed work, concentrate on short sections e.g. a single news item.
- **Use the PAUSE and PLAY buttons often.**
- If a transcript is available, **DO NOT** look at it until the end of your activity. Your last step should be to listen again, reading the transcript simultaneously.
- Try using a monolingual dictionary when checking vocabulary. Often a definition is more useful than a translation, especially for items which are difficult to translate directly, and it is good practice to work entirely in the target language.

If you want to be a successful reader, here are some hints:

### **Before reading**

- Look at the title and introduction. What do you think the text is about ? Try to find a text in a topic you are interested in.
- Make a list of any relevant vocabulary you can think of.

### **First reading**

- Read the text once without stopping.

### **Second reading**

- Underline words and expressions you are not sure of. Don't look them up immediately.
- There should be one main idea per paragraph. Summarize each paragraph in one sentence.

### **Vocabulary**

**Don't look up every word ! If you stop and look up every word which you don't recognize, you will get frustrated and miss the point of the text. Use the dictionary SPARINGLY and follow the stages below, you may need to use it less than you are expecting.**

First look at the CONTEXT. Do you NEED to know this word to understand the overall meaning? Can you guess the meaning?

- What part of speech is it ? (verb, noun etc)
- Is it similar to a word in another language you know?
- Can you recognize the origin or root of the word?

Select a maximum of 10 words or expressions to look up in a **good** dictionary (use a monolingual dictionary to get a definition in the target language)

When you read an article in a magazine or newspaper (printed or online) it can be quite difficult to understand. You may not be accustomed to the specialist vocabulary and level of language. But you can train yourself to read authentic articles and improve your language level generally.

### **Try these strategies:**

#### 1. Choose the article well.

Whether you are researching a particular topic or just reading out of interest or pleasure, scan the index of the magazine, the headlines of the paper, or the chapter titles of the book carefully. If you are looking for passages on the Internet, think carefully about the key

words you want to use as you search. From the available clues, choose an article or passage to read.

2. Predict the content.

Before you start reading, on the basis of the clues you already have, make a list of the topics or subject areas you expect to be covered. For example, if you are reading about 'family relations', you need to know the terms for members of the family. Make sure you know all these terms - use a dictionary if necessary.

3. Skim through the article.

Read the article through quickly, skimming over the lines looking for the words/phrases you have on your list. Read more carefully the sentences and/or paragraphs in which your words/phrases appear to check to what extent you were right about the article's subject matter.

4. Scan the article in more depth.

Pieces of material serve different purposes. Decide what kind of information is being presented and then you can try an appropriate exercise from those shown below.

**Here are some types of exercises to help you with your reading/listening skills**

**1. While you read/ listen you can prepare a "Two sides of an argument/debate."**

- Subject of the argument/debate: \_\_\_\_\_
- Summarize what you have read into the table below - not your own opinions but those of the author. Make sure to COMPLETE IN SAME LANGUAGE AS ORIGINAL.

ARGUMENTS FOR -----

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

ARGUMENTS AGAINST -----

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

**2. You can look for how the author has put forward a point of view.**

- Subject matter:
- Writer/speaker's perspective/point of view: \_\_\_\_\_
- For each entry in one column balance it with an entry in the other if it is presented in the original text.

COMPLETE IN SAME LANGUAGE AS ORIGINAL TEXT

Persuasive statements

Supportive evidence produced

Counter arguments

Accepted/dismissed

**3. You can look for how the author informs the reader in documentary manner**

Subject matter: \_\_\_\_\_

For each entry in one column balance it with an entry in the other if it is presented in the original text. Use this to summarize what you have read – do not write your own opinions.  
COMPLETE IN SAME LANGUAGE AS ORIGINAL TEXT

Assertions/facts

Supportive evidence

**4. You can learn how the author tells events.**

Subject matter: \_\_\_\_\_

For each entry in one column balance it with an entry in the other if it is presented in the original text. Use this to summarize what you have read. COMPLETE IN SAME LANGUAGE AS ORIGINAL TEXT

Dates/Times/Temporal Expressions EVENTS

## 5. Work on the language

Note the ways in which the writer:

- persuades
- argues for
- argues against
- balances views
- links points
- cites evidence
- asks questions
- narrates, etc...
- 

You might be noting actual phrases. These are particularly useful to you when you need to write in the target language.

Here are some newspapers in Arabic:

- [Al Anwar](#) | [Alayam](#) | [Al-Ayyam](#) | [AlGomhuria and AIMessa](#) | [Al-Quds](#)

## **Productive skills (Speaking, Writing)**

Listening and Reading regularly can contribute to the development of your Speaking and Writing Skills.

You need to practice Speaking and Writing regularly applying what you have learnt from your Listening and Reading in a conscious and active way.

### **Speaking**

- Try finding yourself a language partner that you can exchange languages with
- Speak in your target language regularly with friends on the same course as you
- Read aloud
- Use text-based internet chat-lines to develop your 'conversational' style and speed of response to native speakers if you can
- Record your own voice and listen to it to raise your awareness of your own strengths and weaknesses as a speaker
- Record yourself in dialogue with a friend
- Seek constructive feedback and corrections from friends

### **Here are some tips to help you with your speaking skills**

Languages are all about communicating with people and most communication is through speech. Clearly the best way to improve your speaking is to talk with a native speaker of the language, and the presence of native speakers of a range of languages in the University presents an ideal opportunity to exchange conversation in your mother tongue with conversation in the language you are learning. This will greatly improve your fluency, although this should not be at the expense of accuracy. Make sure your partner corrects your mistakes, or you could develop bad habits.

### **Other ways to develop speaking skills:**

- Listen actively to authentic speech. Note in particular the little words and expressions that are used to link ideas, start sentences, give opinions, change the subject, etc. Try to think "how would I have said that?" and analyze any differences with the actual speech.
- Repeat phrases or whole sentences, attempting to imitate exactly the pronunciation, intonation and the speed of the original. If possible, record yourself so you can compare and try again as necessary.
- When there is a transcript available mark the stresses, and the vowels then after listening to the passage several times read the whole script aloud, again trying to mimic the original. Time yourself and compare this with the duration of the recording.

**Pronunciation**

Although it is important to work on your pronunciation in order to be understood, never be ashamed of your accent.

You need to make sure that the basic sounds, especially vowels, are correctly pronounced.

Beyond that, most problems of understanding are actually caused by poor intonation, misplaced stress, etc. When listening and repeating, pay particular attention to the rise and fall of the voice. Which syllable is stressed in each word? Which words are stressed in the sentence?

## Writing

- Find a correspondence partner to communicate with by email: this could be a friend on your course
- Encourage your friend to correct your spelling, grammar and style in a constructive manner
- When asked provide feedback to friends on their writing: this will build your own awareness of written style and common mistakes and make you more critical of your own written work
- Actively practice your writing.
- Make sure you are constantly developing your vocabulary, grammar knowledge and awareness of style and applying it to your writing

### Here are some tips and activities to help you with your writing skills

Before starting to write think of the following:

What is your purpose in writing (e.g. to inform/to persuade/to request information)? Bear this in mind to ensure you keep to your main purpose.

Who is/are your intended reader(s)? Bear them in mind all the time to ensure you keep an appropriate tone or register of language.

Who is/are your intended reader/s? Will what you write interest them?

While writing you may need to think of the following:

Will you address your reader(s) directly in the second person and if so using the formal or informal register? Or are you not addressing them directly? You need to decide. When quoting, are you going to use reported or direct speech forms and why?

When recounting events which time reference are you going to use?

When rereading your work, bear in mind the following:

Are your ideas well-organized and linked?

Are you being repetitive? Can you find another way of saying something rather than just repeating it?

Have you written concisely or could you communicate your message effectively using fewer words?

Check your conjugations and forms. Have you been consistent in your use of time expressions? Check your agreements by gender and plurality. Check any spellings you are unsure of. Check your word order.

Reread it again to check the register - does it read appropriately formally/informally. Is your written style appropriate to the subject matter and your purpose in writing about it? Have you achieved your original aims?

Do not draft the item in your own language first. Write directly in the TARGET LANGUAGE. Translating is harder than writing!

Your long-term aim should be to write in the target language in a way that doesn't make a native speaker smile (or wince). This aim can be achieved, by developing both grammatical accuracy and style.

**REMEMBER THAT**

- To improve your speaking skills you need to listen and imitate.
- To improve your writing skills you need to read and imitate.

**Here are some exercises for intermediate to advanced learners.**

Choose a newspaper/journal article which interests you and try the following activities.

1. If you want to acquire forms of expression try this.

Start by underlining useful phrases by function e.g.:

introducing a concept/argument  
 linking paragraphs/ideas  
 contrasting one idea/argument with another  
 proposing an alternative  
 disagreeing with or correcting a previous statement  
 being persuasive

Build up your own database of these phrases and use them when writing yourself.

Remember to continue adding to your lists and to vary usage when writing essays, reports or presentations. Whenever you do use a phrase from your lists, put a tick beside it so you can keep a running record.

2. If you want to avoid repetition

Choose a key concept or word in an article and find out how many different words or expressions are used to convey the same essential meaning but avoiding excess repetition. Repeat this exercise listing the alternatives each time. You could use colored pens to underline the various groups of equivalent words. Note how sometimes an alternative single word is used, sometimes a totally different part of speech and sometimes a phrase.

Apply these same principles when writing yourself by using a monolingual dictionary or creating phrases in a similar way. Keep records of synonyms and other phrases you have developed for yourself.

3. If you want to learn to summarize

Select 3 or 4 paragraphs and write:

- A title of no more than 3 words for each one.
- When planning your own writing, you could work from a series of 'titles' to develop the content of each paragraph.
- Or when rereading your work, try to write a title for each paragraph. If you find it difficult it could be because the content is not defined clearly enough.
- A single sentence to summarize the content of each one.

When writing conclusions and referring to, or summarizing points you have already made, this skill is a useful one to acquire.

4. You will need to develop a sense of style. Think of the following:
  - Think about the whole article and decide who its intended readership is. Is it directed at a particular intellectual level, subject interest group, professional interest group or even gender group?
  - How does the writer ensure that the reader remains interested in the subject matter?
  - How much background information is provided for the uninitiated?
  - What range of technical or subject specific vocabulary is used?
  - How simple and straightforward is the sentence structure? Or alternatively, how complex is it incorporating additional relative and subordinate clauses? What effect does such a choice create?
  - What tenses are used and what effect do they have? When quoting, note the use of direct or indirect speech and why.

## **FOR MORE HELP WITH YOUR LANGUAGE LEARNING**

We have prepared these pages for you using a variety of resources. You can also refer to some of them to get more help with your language learning.

GOOD LUCK AND GOOD HUNTING!

DIY Techniques for Language Learners

by [Maria Fernandez-Toro](#) (Author), [Francis R. Jones](#) (Author)

<http://www.langcent.manchester.ac.uk/resources/online/links/>

Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom

By David Nunan.

<http://agelesslearner.com/assess/learningstyle.html>