

## Tips for Learning a Foreign Language

*While it takes time and effort to learn a language well, there are many benefits to studying a foreign language:*

- ✓ You will be able to communicate directly with the people who speak the language.
- ✓ You will gain self-confidence and broaden your horizon of experiences and opportunities.
- ✓ You will develop your awareness and understanding of cultural assumptions and unspoken societal expectations in both your own and foreign countries.
- ✓ You will grow in your ability to compare, contrast, and critically assess cultural products such as literature, songs, advertisements, film, etc.
- ✓ You will grasp the importance of listening to and learning from those of other cultures both in your home country and abroad.

### **Suggestions for Studying a Foreign Language:**

*Be sure to ask your individual instructor for language and course-specific tips!*

**Study Carefully Every Day:** To learn a language, you need to study it daily and review often. Classes at the university level expect more than the average high school course: the pace is faster and the standards are higher. For a 3-credit class, you may need to study 5-6 hours per week to do your best. Many people find that studying one hour per day is more productive than studying two hours every other day. And keep up with your coursework: it's much easier to keep up day-to-day than to catch up!

**Prepare for Every Class:** Make the most of your course! Don't just do the minimum amount of work to get the grade you want. Schedule enough time to complete all of the homework the way it's meant to be done: review your class notes and the assigned textbook pages first, study the related grammar and vocabulary carefully, then move on to the activities. Make a note of your questions as you go and ask them during class and/or during office hours.

**Participate in Every Class:** Classes give us the chance to discuss questions about the homework, practice the language, and expand on the material assigned as homework. So, attendance and participation are *essential*. Don't forget that your classmates are still learning too, and everyone makes mistakes, so you shouldn't be afraid to participate. If you miss class, you miss more than just the review of the homework; you miss the chance to work with your instructor and your classmates to better understand the material, to practice using the new words and structures, and to talk about the culture. What's more, you'll miss new and important information if you're absent, and that will make it even harder to keep up!

**Make Friends in Class:** Knowing your classmates, if only by their first name, will help you feel more comfortable asking questions and participating in class. Friends can also help explain things to you outside of class and clue you into any changes in the course schedule, special instructions, and hints. Encourage each other, share your notes when it's appropriate, and help each other gain confidence through mutual respect!

**Ask Questions:** Don't be afraid to ask questions during class: everyone benefits from the clarification! Depending on the level of study, you can prepare your questions (in the language) while doing your homework and, then, just read them when the subject comes up in class [try to ask the question when

the teacher is covering the related topic or activity]. If you miss your chance, for whatever reason, ask your questions during office hours. That's why we have them!

**Study for Quizzes and Tests Efficiently:** Don't just cram for quizzes and tests! Foreign language learning is by nature cumulative, so studying and reviewing every day helps a *lot*. Once you have an idea of what's on the test, focus your review on that material (see also the tips for specific skills, below). Most tests involve a mixture of skills (reading, writing...), and you'll need to be able to produce the language -- not just recognize it-- so practice writing out the verb forms, vocabulary, etc., in advance. Try to master the material (practice it until you *know* it and don't have to guess anymore) by the day before the test or quiz, and use the day of the exam for review only; in other words, *over study* so that you'll be confident and able to finish the test without struggling or having to search your memory for vague recollections.

**Seek Out Opportunities to Practice:** For most of you, class will be the best opportunity to practice the language. But, that doesn't mean that it should be the only time you practice! Practice the vocabulary and phrases out loud when you study; participate in Language Tables; use the audio and visual materials in the language lab and/or connected to your textbook program; participate in a language club; ask your instructor if you can practice with him/her during office hours; read newspapers, watch television and other videos, and listen to foreign-language radio on line. And, of course, study abroad if you can!

### **Tips for Specific Skills**

*Be sure to ask your individual instructor for language and course-specific tips!*

**Vocabulary:** Start learning the vocabulary as soon as you are given the words. It is important that you spread your vocabulary learning over several days. The more often you practice the words, the better and longer you'll remember them! Make flashcards and/or write the words out when you practice, and don't forget to check your work carefully. You may also find it helpful to sort words by part of speech [noun, verb...], word association, etc. Practice them out loud too! Then, the night before the quiz or test, take as many written practice self-quizzes as needed until you don't make any errors. Don't forget to review often: language learning is cumulative by nature!

**Grammar:** Review your class and textbook notes the same day the lesson is covered *first* and, then, complete the homework. Don't just rush through it! Homework is designed to help you internalize the structures, and you'll get better results if you complete it to the best of your ability and on time. Focus while you study: avoid distractions and don't try to multitask! Use the homework as a self-assessment tool by completing it without going back to your textbook or notes and, then, check to see how well you have mastered the new lesson. Be sure to fix any errors you may have made! Make a note of any questions you have and ask them during the next class and/or during office hours.

**Listening:** Before you begin a listening activity, read the instructions, related vocabulary and/or grammar explanations, and look at the title or any other orientation information first and, then, listen to the recording without stopping to get the gist the first time. Listen to the selection again, multiple times, while you complete the activity. You might catch only a small % of the content the first time, but your comprehension will increase each time. No matter how much you understand, don't give up. This will help you develop the ability to listen for key phrases and main points, train you to be comfortable

with material that might not be 100% familiar to you, and prepare you to communicate outside of a standard dialog and with native speakers.

**Speaking:** It is necessary to practice speaking a language in order to learn it! While this might seem obvious, it is also necessary to practice both during and outside of class! Practice saying the vocabulary words and phrases out loud, practice the dialogs and other activities out loud, and practice the listening/speaking activities out loud. Practice by yourself, with a friend, during class and during Language Tables. The more you practice, the more confident you'll be!

**Reading:** Before you begin a reading, read the instructions and/or introduction and look at the title or any other orientation information provided first. Then, read the selection once to try to get the meaning from overall context. After that, go back and read the text again looking up the words you don't know. Don't forget that the context is still important, so don't translate word-by-word. Be sure to take a moment to make flashcards to learn the new words. Don't procrastinate! Give yourself enough time to read the selection more than once, to make a note of word and structure usage, to practice new words and structures, and to review the content and complete the accompanying activities. Practice new phrases until you know them well in both written and spoken form so that you can build on your language skills. Reading is a great way to learn how to put the pieces of the language together fluidly!

**Writing:** Before you begin writing, read the instructions carefully. Don't translate word-by-word, don't use a translator, and don't plagiarize! Do use the words and phrases you know well, but don't limit yourself to them. When you use a new word or phrase, ask your instructor if you've used it correctly and add it to your flashcards or notebook so that you'll know it the next time you want to use it. While writing can be one of the more challenging skills to master in a foreign language, the writing assignments you'll be given are chosen and graded according to your skill level. We won't ask you to write a 10-page research paper in another language for an elementary or intermediate-level course! Still, writing well takes time. Don't procrastinate: allow yourself time to edit your writing carefully and ask questions. Be sure to edit for content, organization and formatting, vocabulary, and grammar. Before you print out your final draft, read your essay again to look for and avoid repetition of ideas and words (or phrases).

*Based on: "Tips for Studying Foreign Languages," by John Hessian*

### **MAINTAINING & INCREASING YOUR LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY**

*What you don't use, you lose.*

It's very important to set attainable, yet challenging goals for where you want to go with your new language skills. Don't underestimate your abilities, but don't underestimate the need to review and practice either!

Once you've decided what you want to be able to do, make the commitment to do what is necessary to achieve those goals. The most successful language learners purposefully seek out opportunities to practice and ways to continue to strengthen their skills.

Fortunately, there are many things you can do to expand your skills. Of course, immersion is the best way to increase your language proficiency. Study abroad if you get the chance. International travel can be a fun way to practice as well. Of course, you can also take more classes and/or study on your own.

Ask your language instructor for some specific ideas. There are so many print and online resources these days that there's no reason you can't practice if you take the time!