

Top Ten Secrets of Learning a Foreign Language

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- 1. How to Study** – When learning foreign language, avoid cramming which simply does not work. Your brain needs frequent sessions – approximately 3-5 per week that last between twenty and forty five minutes each. If too much is learned at once, your brain may start going into “language-learning overload”. With this in mind, it’s great to set a goal of the number of times per week you will study and a consistent study time for each session. For example, you may choose to study Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 12:00 – 12:30 p.m. during your lunch hour.
- 2. Visualization** – As humans, we link the words we use to pictures; for example, if I said the word “shoes” you would maybe think of your favorite pair of shoes or possibly the ones you have on. When you learn new Spanish words, it’s important to link them with pictures so they can start penetrating your long-term memory. If you link the new words you learn to pictures, instead of having to translate from English to the foreign language, you can instantly recall what you’ve learned as your mind links the picture to the word you need to use. Repetition, the next key, along with pictures, helps words to be retained in your long-term memory better, faster and longer. Also, if the pictures you use with this technique have some type of motion and represent something out of the ordinary, you will learn and retain new words better and faster. This cuts down on your study time and makes it possible to learn more words in a shorter period of time.
- 3. Repetition (Do I really have to?)** – According to the experts, in order for new foreign language words to cement themselves into your long-term memory, they must be repeated around 50 times in a meaningful way. Some courses tout “no repetition” – it’s a great thought, but words simply can’t get into your long-term memory without repetition. This presents a problem because you don’t want a repetitive, boring and tedious course to teach you; however, you do have to repeat enough so words can have a chance to lodge themselves into your memory for later recall. The answer to this dilemma is simple. What you really need is a way to repeat words and concepts in a fun way without realizing that you are repeating them. If your Spanish course doesn’t do that, you may experience “language-learning burnout” and never complete your goal. You should look for a course that repeats words in a meaningful way but also keeps your attention and is fun. This will help you successfully achieve your goal of learning a foreign language.
- 4. Pronunciation** – As an adult, your mouth and brain have been programmed to pronounce words according to your native language. When you start learning a foreign language, you tend to pronounce the new words based on your native language. In other words, you will have an accent and sound like a foreigner – it is possible that you may not even be understood. So what should you do? The key to great native pronunciation in a foreign language is to learn, see and hear how natives pronounce it, and then form habits of pronouncing the new sounds correctly. Having native pronunciation is all about forming correct habits from the beginning. If you start learning a foreign language with incorrect pronunciation, you will form habits that are difficult to break and may even stay with you for the rest of your life if you don’t initially form **correct** pronunciation habits. Have you ever heard foreigners who have lived in your country for 20-30 years and still have an accent? It’s because when they first learned your language, they didn’t

take the time to form correct pronunciation habits, and as a result they continue saying certain sounds incorrectly. When you learn a new foreign language, it is so important to dedicate enough time to forming habits of correct pronunciation. If this is done, almost anyone can attain close-to-native speech – it just takes time and effort. If your goal is to have native or near-native speech, it is recommended that you take ½ hour per day, three to five times a week with the sounds that are most challenging in the foreign language. Every foreign language usually has about 12 sounds that take extra work to master. Once you form a habit of correct pronunciation with these sounds, you are set for life!

5. The More Senses You Use, the More Effective the Learning

- **Repeat Aloud** – Repeating aloud actually helps stimulate and possibly even helps develop different parts of the brain as related to the new language. This means that you will be more effective at the moment of conversation if you've practiced saying the words you learn aloud.
- **Type or Write the Words** – As you type or write the words you learn, you are using the sense of touch to kinesthetically learn the words at a higher brain level. This also helps with future recall.
- **Sight – Look at Words and Relate them to pictures** – (See Key #2 on Visualization)
- **Hear the words** – As you hear new words, you are using yet another sense to implant them into your long-term memory. You can also train your ear to hear differences in the words you learn as compared to the same sounds in your own native language. This is a key part of developing great pronunciation skills – the ability to hear the difference between sounds in your native language as compared to those in the foreign language. (For more on pronunciation, see #4) It is important to find a foreign language course that has both moving pictures in some type of software (as mentioned in the previous point) as well as audios CDs so you can practice hearing the language and learn at a higher level.

6. **To be Successful and Learn to Converse, you have to Learn to form Words into Sentences** – One of the most important secrets of learning a foreign language is to be able to take the words you learn and practice fitting them into sentence patterns so you can converse with people without having to strain your brain or feel embarrassed. Look for a course that does this, not one that teaches a lot of vocabulary words and never spends time teaching you how to put them together into sentence patterns. Learning to build sentences will make it possible for you to converse and take advantage of all the time you spent learning the language.

The Final 4 Secrets: How to Practice Your New Language (Key #s 7, 8, 9, 10)

7. **Check out a Spanish Book (children's or more advanced), or Spanish Magazine:** Create an English glossary of 20 to 30 words you understand. Also, write 20 to 30 cognates you find. A cognate is a word in Spanish that looks like a corresponding word in English. For example, the word "concentración" in Spanish means "concentration" in English. Here is a list of suffixes (word endings) that will help you recognize cognates in Spanish:

- "-ty" = "-dad": university (universidad), activity (actividad), intensity (intensidad), ability (abilidad)

- "-tion" = "-ción": activation (activación), penetration (penetración), station (estación), vacation (vacación)
- "-ssion" = "-sión": session (sesión), passion (pasión), depression (depresión), aggression (agresión)
- "-ction" = "-cción": action (acción), attraction (atracción), fiction (ficción), reaction (reacción)
- "-ive" = "-ivo": active (activo), passive (pasivo), relative (relativo), intensive (intensivo), massive (masivo). Partly because of this "ivo/ive" technique, people try to ineffectively put an "o" on the end of any English word to turn it into Spanish.
- "-ly" = "-mente": recently (recientemente), actively (activamente), relatively (relativamente), effectively (efectivamente). This technique ("ly/mente") isn't as reliable in taking words from English into Spanish but can help you better decipher the meaning of written Spanish words.

8. Listen to Spanish Radio or TV

After going through a quality Spanish course, listen to a Spanish radio station for fifteen to thirty minutes and write down any words you recognize from songs, commercials or programs. Also try to guess the topic that is being discussed. This may be difficult at first because you may have a limited amount of vocabulary, and radio announcers and songs use a seemingly unlimited amount of words. However, the more you do this exercise, the more you will tune your ear to Spanish.

9. Comprehending Native Speakers

To fully learn a language, it is vital to learn basic techniques to understanding native speakers. When you first talk to a native speaker, it will probably sound like they are talking 100 miles per hour. Don't worry, this is normal! When people from other countries first heard you talk, they thought the same thing. The more you practice conversing, the more you will understand. Key 8 will also help you understand native speakers. The more you do it, the better you will become.

10. Go Start a Conversation with a Native Speaker

After learning Spanish with a quality Spanish course, one of the most important things you can do to improve your Spanish skills and really become fluent is to practice speaking with the natives.

Many people are very nervous about striking up a conversation with a native Spanish speaker. They're worried that maybe they'll say something wrong or that the native speaker won't understand them. They're also worried about saying things incorrectly or possibly becoming embarrassed.

After completing a Spanish course, we challenge you to start a conversation with a native Spanish speaker. Once you overcome the fear of the initial conversation, you'll most likely be amazed at how easy and comfortable it can be to talk to them. In general, native Spanish speakers are some of the friendliest people in the world.

Here are a few phrases that we recommend to get you started. First you could say "Hola, ¿Qué tal?" [Oh-lah, keh tall] which means "Hi, how are you?" Next, you could say "Me llamo Dave"

[Meh yah-moh Dave], or in English "My name is Dave". *Of course, you don't want to say your name is "Dave" unless your name really is "Dave"*. Finally, to spark some conversation, you could say "¿De dónde es usted?" [Deh doan-deh es oo-sted] which means "Where are you from?". And, the last phrase for a successful start is: "Qué le gusta hacer?" [keh leh goose-tah ah-ser] which means "What do you like to do?"

Here is our assignment to all of you reading this article. Are you ready? Go through a quality Spanish course, then practice the phrases above and set a goal of when you are going to approach a native speaker. Once you have done it and had a conversation in Spanish, send us an e-mail and let us know how it went. Feel free to contact me any time at: dave_c@spanishprograms.com.