

# The Big Lapse: Can your language learning habit survive a vacation?

In our last email, we talked about strategies to make your habit bomb-proof, so that both you and your budding language learning habit can survive a stomach flu. But can we apply these strategies to something as disruptive as a two-week vacation?



# What Makes Vacations Special?

Vacations are a particularly interesting challenge to deal with in terms of habits. On the one hand, they are spectacularly disruptive: they can be *long*, they can *completely scramble* your typical daily routine (so you may lose your normal cues), and even if your cues survive, you've thrown a new decision into the mix: "Do I *really* want to keep studying a language when I could go to the beach instead? I mean...seriously?"

On the other hand, they're typically not a surprise. You generally don't suddenly find yourself on an unexpected beach vacation, unless your plane crashes on a deserted island. This gives us a really nice opportunity to practice the skill of **Pre-Planning**, by thinking about a vacation scenario ahead of time and creating an effective backup plan.

We can actually start right now. Let's go through two strategies:

## Backup Plan Strategy #1: Keep going with your studies

**Should you *maintain* your language habit while on vacation?** You've put in a *lot* of work so far. The easiest way for you to hold onto your work despite your upcoming vacation is to keep going with your daily study habits.

This may seem insane: "Gabe, I am literally on the beach and you're telling me to study on my phone? What is *wrong* with you?"

This is a fair point. I'd like you to consider two things before dismissing this option as ludicrous:

**First**, you don't need to study for the same amount of time as you usually do; you can dial it all the way back down to ten flashcards a day—one minute of study—and it still counts for reinforcing your habit. That may change your calculus a bit: is it worth one minute of 'lost' vacation time each day, in exchange for returning home with a *reinforced* habit, rather than a *totally disrupted* habit? Perhaps.

**Second**, I want to point out that just because you're on vacation, you don't need to spend every minute doing touristy stuff. A lot of people feel an intense pressure to *perform* on vacation:

*Get up! It's time to visit the Colosseum! We have 1.75 hours there and then we need to flag down a taxi so we can see the Vatican! Once we're done with the 60 minute tour, we will have 45 seconds to find the nearest Help Desk so we can get directions to lunch! We have 73 minutes for lunch! OK, lunch completed! Back to*

*the trains!*

This often produces vacations that are more stressful than they are enjoyable. In contrast, you may find that you have a better time if you take it easy and choose to do what you *want*, rather than what you believe you're *supposed* to do.

Perhaps a new Hollywood movie just came out that you wanted to see. Is it a waste of time to see an American movie in, say, Bali? I'd suggest that it can be both luxurious and empowering, to shrug off expectations about how your vacation is *supposed* to go, and simply do what you want.

To that end, you may currently have an automatic tendency to pull out your phone and study, and you may *enjoy* that study time. Who has the right to tell you that you're not *supposed* to study your flashcards while lounging on the beach if that's what you want to do? This is your time. Use it how *you* want to use it.

## Backup Plan Strategy #2: Pre-plan your first days at home

Regardless of what you decide to do on your vacation, you'll still want to pre-plan your first days back home, because you're going to experience several disruptions to your habit: a shift in location, a possible backlog of flashcards, a backlog of work/chores, and some low-energy, low-willpower days from all that travel.

Here are some tools you can use to help you get back on track:

- Reduce your new cards/day and your maximum reviews/day until you're confident that your habit has returned to its former, pre-vacation strength. Then increase reviews gradually until you're done with your backlog.
- *While you're on your way home*, adjust your new cards/day and max reviews/day down, so that you don't need to fiddle with settings on the following day, when you're tired and have low willpower. This will make it even easier to study on your first day back. Set up a *super annoying* alarm to remind you to do this, rather than an easily ignorable notification on your phone. Put "CHANGE FLASHCARD SETTINGS" in your calendar, during your return trip.
- If you aren't already putting your study time in your calendar, do it for at least the first few days back.
- Increase rewards for doing your one minute of study. You can crank this up to *pint of ice cream* levels if you think you're at risk of killing your habit post vacation.

If you already have a vacation planned, decide upon which of these tools you'd like to try, and then put your plan in your calendar. Then reward yourself with well-deserved self affirmation - you just practiced the skill of Pre Planning, and you made your language learning habit even more robust. Nice job being so

awesome.

- Gabe

PS: Do you normally continue studying your language learning flashcards while on vacation? Join in the discussion in our Facebook group [here](#).



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