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Sannu Ku
hola

Peace Corps Volunteer

On-going Language Learning Manual

Beyond hello



Information Collection and Exchange
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VOLUNTEER ON-GOING LANGUAGE LEARNING MANUAL



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I. INTRODUCTION

To many of us, it may seem that some people are born with a gift for learning languages, while others seem burdened with a poor memory. But fortunately or not, those descriptions apply to only a tiny percentage of adults tackling a new language. Although language learning sometimes seems like a long and complex task, nearly everyone can do it and most find it enjoyable and rewarding. Thousands of Peace Corps Volunteers will tell you the same thing.

*I tried learning from vocabulary lists,
but that did not work. I had to try to
learn the words I was actually hearing
and needed.*

– PCV

How THIS Book CAN HELP

This book will help you figure out how you learn best and how you can capitalize on this. For instance, to be a successful language learner, you should:

- ◆ be involved in learning inside and outside of class;
- ◆ take responsibility for your learning;
- and
- ◆ remember that everyone learns differently.

This book will help you:

- ◆ identify and reflect on your learning style, attitudes and motivation;
- ◆ organize your learning;
and
- ◆ experiment with a variety of strategies and tools for learning a language on your own.

It is not necessary to read through the entire book from start to finish. Rather, you should select the chapters that meet your needs at the moment. No single book can possibly provide everything you will need to learn a language, so you should also be using other materials, especially ones about the language you are learning. Books available from Peace Corps in your In-country Resource Center can help, too, so look over the titles in the bibliography that concludes this book.



II. WHAT SUCCESSFUL LANGUAGE LEARNERS DO

Finding out how successful language learners go about learning can enhance your own learning of another language. Reflecting on how you learn and comparing notes with other learners are just as important as studying the language itself.

Successful language learners do not all use the same strategies, but they do have a few things in common.

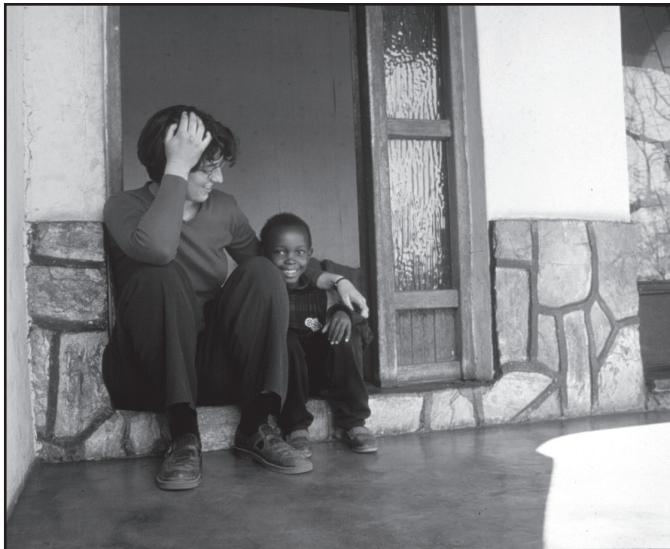
1. **Ambiguity:** Successful language learners are able to live with a lot of ambiguity in everyday situations.
2. **Trust:** Effective language learners believe and trust the people around them; they trust that those people will help them understand and become a part of what is going on.
3. **No definite answers:** Successful language learners are comfortable with many shades of gray. They realize that what is right or wrong, linguistically or culturally, is often determined by the situation, not by an ironclad rule.
4. **Community involvement:** Effective language learners participate in the community and interact in the language as much as possible.

In America, I am basically a shy person, but I found that I had to break out of my shell and be more outgoing if I wanted to learn the language.

Much to my surprise, I found it was fun and really helped me to learn. I discovered a whole new me!

– PCV

Successful language learners socialize whenever possible. In fact, they sometimes see socializing as key to their language learning. They give themselves a reason to be with people so that they can be exposed to the language and culture.



Following are some strategies for interacting in your community. Check off (✓) the ones you would like to explore.

- Invent an excuse to drop in on friends—to get air for your bicycle tires, maybe, or to tell them some news—then use that opportunity to **hang out** and be exposed to the language and culture.
- Attend social events. Learn how to sit for long periods of time “just listening.” You may find that this is actually a good way to spend time—that “being” is as valuable a way of spending time as “doing.”
- Find a family to “adopt” and get involved in your adopted family members’ lives.
- Talk to the senior members of the community to find out what life was like before. One Volunteer said, “This was a huge motivation for me. I wanted to learn more language so I could understand the elders’ stories.”
- Get involved in whatever is going on around you. Go fishing, attend religious services, take dance lessons. The possibilities are endless.

III. CULTURAL ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Knowing a language well is just part of learning how to communicate with the people of your new country. Not only do you have to learn the parts of the language—the new sounds, words, and grammar—you have to learn how to use them in a culturally appropriate way. Culture and language are closely intertwined. Our culture influences the way we view the world and the words we select to describe it. It tells us how to behave when we interact with other people and helps form our notions of “right” and “wrong.” It establishes roles for males and females, foreigners and natives, adults and children. These rules and roles influence how we communicate.

In any conversation, one of these two purposes usually dominates, but generally they are **mixed**. We try to establish a friendly social relationship through small talk and courtesy expressions even when all we need is to get a shoe repaired or to give directions.

BUSINESS: carrying out a task such as buying a can of vegetables, getting information about planting crops, or asking to borrow a neighbor's hammer.

SOCIAL: establishing or maintaining a relationship through small talk, gossiping, or telling a joke.

The balance between social and business-related talk in an interaction varies greatly across cultures, and between rural and urban areas within a culture. **When planning your activities, keep in mind the social purpose in business settings.** Time spent chatting with the shopkeepers or



people in the government office before asking your business questions will contribute greatly to your getting what you need in a pleasant way. As a newcomer and an outsider, it is up to you to establish rapport and build respect.

People vary what they say and what they do to get their message across according to who they are with, where they are, and what their purpose for being together is. For example, there are many more words and phrases than “hello” to greet someone in English. You might say “Hi” to a child you know, or nothing to one you do not know; “How is it going?” to a close friend; and, a more formal “Good morning, Dr. Jones, how are you today?” to your boss. But if you see your boss on the weekend at the beach or at the mall you might say something less formal, such as, “Hi, how are you?” or “Nice to see you.” Or, if you are a shy person, you might just smile and nod your head politely.

There is more than one word for “you” in some languages—*tu*, *vous*, in French; *tú*, *usted*, in Spanish. To use them properly, you must know when it is appropriate to

use each form, under what circumstances, and with whom. To do this, you must know about the cultural system and social norms.

In order to be polite you try to choose

words

phrases

non-verbal gestures

that are culturally appropriate. As your learning advances, you will feel the need to become more conscious and careful in making these choices.

Another important related aspect of communication is **the use of gestures, facial expressions, and body language**. Much of what someone is “saying” is in the gestures and movements which accompany (and sometimes replace) the actual spoken words. These also may have both a “business” purpose (pointing to indicate, “I want this one.”) or a social one (using eye contact or touch to say, “I am pleased to be talking with you”). Careful observation to learn subtle non-verbal information can be as important as listening for verbal nuances.

IV. MOTIVATION

What do you think motivates successful language learners?

- ◆ Word lists?
- ◆ Grammar books?
- ◆ Self-study workbooks?
- ◆ Good intentions?

In reality, you have to *want* to learn the language and to want to learn it, you need to have:

- ◆ motivation to learn
- ◆ self-confidence
- ◆ a positive attitude

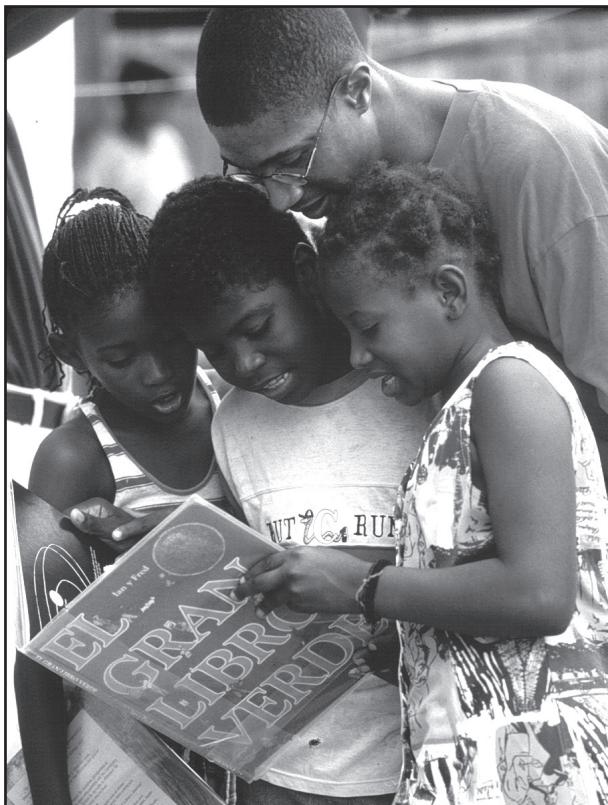
Begin by reflecting on your reasons and need for learning the new language. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, how important is it for you to learn the language? Is learning the language one of the things that makes you special, that sets you apart from other well-intentioned foreigners in the country? Have you found things about the people that you like? How much more of their perspective do you want to understand or make a part of your own?

Another key factor for maintaining your motivation is maintaining your self-confidence in yourself as an intelligent adult. It takes a kind of courage to approach strangers and ask them questions in the new language, knowing that you are likely to make mistakes. Fear of speaking to strangers, especially in a foreign language, is natural—we all experience it. The trick, however, is to learn ways to

deal with the fear and the other feelings so that they do not interfere with your language learning. Although at times it might feel like it, you have not become a child just because you are learning a new language.

I feel great when I can speak a little or make a connection—just to be more a part of the culture and know what is going on.

— PCV



ATTITUDE

Here are 10 tips for finding and maintaining a positive attitude—and your motivation.

1. **Maintain a sense of humor.** In the course of learning a new language, one does and says countless things that appear silly, puzzling, and strange to the native speaker. As one Volunteer noted, “The people in my village are usually surprised when I speak the language. Sometimes they laugh at me, but I am okay with that.”
2. **Do things you enjoy!** Look for things to do in your community that you **like to do in the United States**, like playing sports, playing cards, or taking dancing lessons. Learning them in the new language will improve your language skills, too.
3. **Picture yourself** functioning in your new community as an adult, in the same way you function at home in your own community—talking easily with friends and neighbors about topics of mutual interest, doing things in your spare time with them that bring you **pleasure** and make you feel like the **adult** you are, instead of the child you sometimes feel like.
4. **Try not to worry about making mistakes**—they are a natural part of the learning process. In fact, welcome the opportunities they present for learning. A mistake tells us exactly what we do not know and need to work on.
5. **The strongest motivation will wane at times.** Expect it to happen, but be ready to deal with it when it does. Try changing some things in your routine. Try different learning techniques. Keep reminding yourself that you *can* learn the language.

6. **Try to view life in the new country as a big puzzle** to be solved, and then go about solving it. Become a detective and crack the secret code of the language and culture. Make it fun!
7. **Think in terms of doing what you want to do to learn the language**, not what you or someone else thinks you *should* do. Make reasonable plans and do them as well as you can, considering the other demands on your time.
8. Similarly, **do not let competition divert you** from the task of learning the language. It does not help to compare yourself with other Volunteers in your group. Instead, challenge yourself to master new aspects of the language and to find ways to do better than last time.
9. **Try to relax** in situations where the language is being spoken all around you and you do not understand much. Use it as an opportunity to work on the sounds of the language or listen for specific words or phrases.
10. **Nothing improves motivation like success and reward for accomplishment.** Try following suggestions in this book for managing your learning and try some of the learning strategies. Then give yourself a **treat** when you reach a goal or manage a difficult language situation.

V. LEARNING STYLES

Do you know your preferred learning style? To get a sense of what your learning style is, do the exercise below.

Suppose that you are at a party surrounded by people who look, act, and speak differently from you.

	Yes	No
Do you decide to sit back, observe, listen carefully, take your time and learn from watching what others say and how they act?		
Do you ask yourself questions and make guesses about what is going on based on what you see and hear?		
Do you wait to say something until you are pretty sure you will not make any errors?		
Do you experiment with things you have learned in other situations in an attempt to communicate in this new situation?		
Do you wish you could see the new words you are hearing in writing?		
Do you jump right in and begin talking to the people at the party and sharing in the activity even if your language is pretty minimal?		

Each of the above questions represents a different learning style. Language learning styles are the general approaches that we use to learn a new language. Each of us is unique and learns in the way that suits us best. However, by being aware of how we prefer to learn and of other possible ways, we may be able to improve our learning by capitalizing on our strengths and accepting or improving our weaknesses. None of these are “right” or “wrong”; they are simply ways to learn.

To identify your preferred learning style, and to see other possibilities for yourself, answer the questions below. As you consider each question, you might find it useful to refer to the descriptions on pages 15–16.

1. Do I focus on **details** or on the “**Big Picture**”?

2. Do I have a **visual**, **auditory** or **kinesthetic** preference?

3. Is my preferred style more **abstract**, random and intuitive or is it more **concrete**, organized and sequential?

4. Is language learning a **game** or a **task** for me?

Focus on the details, or the Big Picture?

People who like to focus on details probably like to analyze the language. How does the new language compare to English? What are the rules for forming the past tense? What is the appropriate word order for adjectives? They tend to want to use a dictionary to find the meaning of new words rather than guess the meaning from context. They do not like to make mistakes.

Those people who see the big picture like to put themselves in social situations where they can use the language. They do not worry about grammatical mistakes and they are happy to guess the meaning and paraphrase when they do not know the exact word they want to use. Mistakes do not bother them.

Are you a Visual, Auditory, or Kinesthetic Learner?

Visual learners like to see things in writing, and associate meaning with what the words look like. They may be good at figuring out meaning from gestures and visual context, but may have difficulty conversing when there is little visual back-up to convey meaning (as in phone conversations).

Auditory learners, on the other hand, do not need much visual input. They like to learn by listening to conversations. They are good learners of tone languages and sensitive to differences in pronunciation and tone of voice.

Kinesthetic learners like hands-on learning: acting in skits and role plays, doing activities that accomplish something, or working with real objects. They learn best

while doing something else (in the language), such as playing sports, singing songs, or while helping to prepare dinner with a friend.

Abstract, Random, and Intuitive, or Concrete, Organized, and Sequential?

Look at the following chart to see the differences between intuitive learners and sequential learners.

Intuitive Learners vs. Sequential Learners	
Intuitive learners prefer to: Jump right into a new situation and accomplish a task. Figure out the main principles of how the language works without benefit of the rules.	Sequential learners prefer to: Learn in a set order, slowly and steadily. Be told facts about the language.

Language Learning: a Game or a Task?

Some learners approach language learning as a game. They enjoy participating in open-ended communication and therefore do not worry about making mistakes or paying conscious attention to what they are learning. Other learners approach language learning as completing a task; they frequently like to plan and organize their learning and then evaluate what they have learned.

The most successful learners are ones who can combine characteristics of more than one learning style.

VI. SETTING GOALS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Now that you have explored your learning style, the next step is to decide on what it is that you would like to learn. Following are some questions to get you thinking about your language learning goals:

1. What do you want to be **able to do** in the new language that you can not do now?
2. Who do you want to be **able to talk to**, where, and why?
3. To what extent do you want or need to be **able to read and write**?
4. What is your **long-term goal**?
5. What are your **short-term objectives**?

Setting goals is important so that you can measure your progress, and devise a system for evaluating yourself.

What is your **main reason** for learning the language? Most Peace Corps Volunteers want to learn a language to be able to do their jobs better and to become a part of the communities they live in. In order to create your own language learning program, you need to:

- ◆ determine your goal;
- ◆ choose the topic(s) you would like to focus on;
and
- ◆ narrow down your topic or objective so that it is manageable.



The following Daily Activities Grid will help you identify the main goals, topics and objectives for your language learning.

Daily Activities Grid

The Daily Activities Grid (Wenden, 1996) can help you reflect on the settings in which you interact with the local people in your community/site.

An example of a week in the life of one Volunteer in the Republic of Kiribati is given below, with the situations in which she needs to use the language italicized.

Directions

1. Fill in the grid (copy or enlarge it, as needed). For each day and hour of the week:
 - a. Write where you usually are at each of the times stated (change the hours to fit your own daily routine).
 - b. Circle or highlight (in *italics*, on the sample, below) the situations and times of day when you need to use your new language.
2. Review the grid to identify the social settings in which you need to improve your language. Then select the settings in which you find yourself most often or those areas where you want to work on your language.
3. Answer the questions below for each of the settings that you want to work on.
⇒ Who is typically in this setting?



- ⇒ What happens in this setting?

- ⇒ What do you do in this setting?

- ⇒ What language skills are you required to use?
(i.e., listening, speaking, writing, reading)

- ⇒ What are the topics of conversation in this setting?

- ⇒ How do you usually feel when you are interacting in this setting?

- ⇒ For what purposes are you expected to **use** (speak) the language in this setting? (Where are your strengths and weaknesses?)

- ⇒ What do you need to **understand** in this setting? (Where are your strengths and weaknesses?)

- ⇒ List any behaviors or customs in this setting that you do not understand or find strange.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNES-	THURS-	FRIDAY	SATUR-	SUNDAY
06:00	Home	Home	DAY Home	DAY Home	Home	DAY Home	Home
07:30	<i>Walk to school</i>	<i>Walk to school</i>	<i>Walk to school</i>	<i>Walk to school</i>	<i>Walk to market</i>	<i>Walk to market</i>	Home
08:00	Teacher's room, school	Teacher's room, school	Teacher's room, school	Teacher's room, school	Teacher's room, school	<i>Shop at market</i>	Write letters home; Read
10:30	<i>Tea Break</i>	<i>Tea Break</i>	<i>Tea Break</i>	<i>Tea Break</i>	<i>Tea Break</i>	<i>Shop in stores</i>	Read
11:00	School	School	School	School	School	<i>Shop in stores</i>	Cook
13:30	Plan with teachers	Plan with teachers	Plan with teachers	Plan with teachers	Plan with teachers	Home	Cook
15:00	<i>Post office</i>	<i>Post office</i>	<i>Post office</i>	<i>Post office</i>	<i>Post office</i>	<i>Store</i>	<i>A walk with friends</i>
16:00	Home	<i>Play with children</i>	Home	<i>Play with children</i>	Home	<i>A walk with friends</i>	<i>Friend's house</i>
17:00	<i>Neighbor's house</i>	Home	<i>Friend's house</i>	Home	Head teacher's house	Home	Home
Evening	Home	<i>Friend's house</i>	Home	<i>Friend's house</i>	Head teacher's house	<i>Have friends visit</i>	Home

VII. A LEARNING PLAN FOR ANY TOPIC

Once you have identified your goals and the topics you will focus on, you are ready to create a learning plan.

LEARNING PLAN STEPS IN A NUTSHELL

- 1. Decide what to learn**
 - a. Assess your needs
 - b. Set goals
- 2. Develop a lesson**
 - a. With an informant: create a dialog, learn a song, listen to a story, describe pictures, question and answer, etc.
 - b. On the spot:
 - i. Focus attention: What should I pay attention to?
 - ii. Comprehend: How can I make sense of this?
 - iii. Remember: How will I remember it?
 - c. Check for accuracy
- 3. Practice**
 - a. With an informant: “classroom” activities
 - b. On your own: listen to conversation, use kids as teachers or to practice with, make sentences, etc.
- 4. Apply it in the community**
- 5. Evaluate**
 - a. Did I get it?
 - b. Did my approach work?

This chapter will help you plan language lessons for yourself about almost any topic that interests you. In the process you will play the roles of curriculum developer, teacher, and learner. As the curriculum developer, you will decide on the topic and set a goal. As the teacher, you will need to select the language material that is the content of the lesson and set up practice activities for yourself, the learner.

BASIC STEPS FOR LANGUAGE LESSONS

1. Identify what you want to learn.
2. Prepare for the task by using resource books, reflecting on what you already know, asking for help from your language helper and/or listening to a native speaker.
3. Develop your lesson.
4. After some rehearsal, go out and do the task in the actual situation.
5. Evaluate your learning experience.

These steps are at the heart of learning a language on your own. Following them will allow you to learn the language you need at the time you want, when you feel ready to learn it. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, you stay in control of your learning and your own success—the key to maintaining motivation.

Step One: Decide What to Learn

As you begin to identify possible topics, think about the following questions:

- ⇒ What immediate communication needs do you have? What do you need to be able to say or understand in order to get something you need or accomplish a task?
- ⇒ Are there situations in which you do not feel comfortable or tend to avoid? What situations are they?
- ⇒ Are there any people you would like to understand better or be able to communicate with more effectively? Who are those people?

After reflecting on your communication needs, you are ready to write a learning objective. Be specific and break it down into manageable parts. For example, “participate in a meeting” is too general. You might divide it into “greet people appropriately, ask at least one question about the main topic, and compliment the food served at break.” In fact, these could be objectives for three separate lessons.

Step Two: Develop Your Lesson

This section describes two possible approaches to developing a language lesson:

1. **Getting help from a language helper:** You work with a native speaker to create and practice a lesson.
2. **Learning on the spot:** Lessons can be based on real-life situations (i.e. listen to others and try to remember what they said).

Developing a Lesson with a Language Helper

The following checklist outlines steps for developing a lesson with a language helper.

- ✓ Create a language sample:
Write down possibilities as a dialogue, a conversation, or a series of questions you plan to ask, and the answers you anticipate hearing.
- ✓ Discuss the situation with your help (i.e., the setting, who is there, and what people are doing).
- ✓ Ask your helper, “How would *you* say it in this situation?” with the emphasis on “you.” This means that your helper will use authentic language used by a native speaker.
- ✓ Consider how polite or formal your language needs to be in the situation.
- ✓ Select the appropriate words and actions for opening and closing your conversation, for making a request, responding to an offer and so on. When doing so, consider your perceived status; that is, how the people around you see you. Are you seen as a peer or as someone of high status? Are foreigners usually expected to speak more formally than others?
- ✓ Think about including social chit-chat in a lesson that is focused on a business task. For example, if you need

Throughout this discussion about language helpers, we refer to the helper as “she” to avoid the awkward use of he/she. Note that it is probably wise to have your language helper be the same sex as you are, for cultural and social reasons.

to buy a can of beef stew, do not stop with the language for asking if the storekeeper has your favorite brand. In addition to this business language, add some conversation with the shopkeeper about his family, about the weather, or about the expected arrival of a new supply of beef stew.

- ✓ After you have developed a lesson, check it carefully with your helper to be sure that what you have written sounds accurate and natural.

Developing a Lesson “On the Spot”

A Volunteer in Tonga said that she was able to learn a lot of the language she needed for community meetings by visiting another Volunteer and sitting in on her meetings: “Then I am just the guest, and no one is asking me for opinions or expecting me to join in the discussion.”

To learn how to teach something to others, it would be a good idea to ask people in your community to teach you something first. As you learn how to prepare a local dish, do a dance or carve a paddle, you can be listening to the way your mentor gives instructions, corrects you or praises your skill.

The following steps will allow you to develop a language lesson on the spot, in the actual situation where you want to improve your language skills.

1. Choose settings in which you can listen without pressure to participate.
2. Listen in a very focused way and listen for only a few specific elements.
 - Listen for key words: Try to capture the gist of what you are focusing on or you will have an extremely difficult time remembering any of it.
 - Listen for transitional words: Depending on your objective, you may need to ignore a lot of what you hear, and just listen for cues that indicate a new topic is coming up. Similarly, listen to learn how someone concludes a topic so that you can spot the transition.
 - Look for visual cues: Pay attention to changes in people's expressions or other body language, and refer to any other helpful cues, such as a written agenda for a meeting. The same strategies will help you figure out the meaning of what you are hearing.
3. Use tools to help you remember what you are listening to. Can you use a tape recorder? Can you write things down? (You could pretend to be writing a letter home while listening to conversations at a lunch counter, for example). Can you repeat words and phrases over and over in your mind until you have a chance to write them down later?

4. As soon as you can, write down the language you want to learn in the form of a dialogue or conversation, so that it is in a social and culturally appropriate context.
5. Check your lesson material with a native speaker to be sure it is natural sounding and accurate.

Step Three: Practice

Your main goal during the practice step is to memorize new expressions and to learn how to say them smoothly, without stumbling over the difficult sounds. You will also want to get a better feel for what the sounds mean at the moment you are hearing them—to have the meaning come automatically.

Here are some tips to help you practice:

1. **Repeat** your dialogue or conversation out loud, or play games that require repeating the new phrases and vocabulary over and over again until you become comfortable with the new sounds. Do not expect perfection during one practice session.
2. **Listen** carefully to the rhythm, melody and tone of the language.
3. **Listen** to the way people use their voice to convey the meaning. Ask your language helper to record your lesson and try to imitate her.
4. **Observe** the way she uses her gestures and facial expressions to get the meaning across.

5. **Play** language learning games for building your vocabulary with neighborhood children, your language helper or another friend.
6. **Role play** your lesson with your language helper. Put your lesson into a complete, culturally acceptable exchange (an appropriate greeting at the beginning, appropriate behavior throughout, a leave-taking at the end—and appropriate gestures).

For additional practice ideas, look at the techniques and learning activities described in Chapter XII, “Suggestions and Strategies for Communication,” on writing, vocabulary, listening and speaking skills.

Remember—you do not have to use everything in your original plan or everything your helper may suggest. Decide for yourself what is a manageable amount of new language to use each time you go out on your learning adventures. This is important for maintaining your self-confidence and motivation.

Step Four: Apply It in the Community

Now step outside and put yourself into a situation where you can use your lesson. Plan a time of day when people will be willing to stop and talk, or a situation that is appropriate to the topic of your lesson.

Remind yourself of the phrases that will allow you to control the conversation when you have trouble understanding what is going on or when you want to end the conversation politely.

Try it out more than once with different people so that you become increasingly comfortable and confident.

Take notes as you go along, if the setting and situation permit, about what the people said and what you think they said; also, make note of things they did that puzzled or surprised you.

Step Five: Evaluate

The following are ideas for assessing the way you are learning as well as what you are learning:

1. **Reflect on the experience.** Ask yourself *what* you learned and about *how* you learned it. Think about what worked and what did not.
2. **Reread the chapters** on learning styles to gain more insights into what helps you to learn.
3. **Make a list of new words and phrases** you now feel you have mastered. Make another list of the ones you wish you had known or been able to use more smoothly. Write down any new phrases you heard that were variations on what you had planned.

4. **Note any pronunciation difficulties you had.**
5. **Make a list** of things that surprised, puzzled, or upset you, or in general, made you feel “different.” Most likely, these involved cross-cultural misunderstandings. Describe what the other people did, what you did, how you felt, and how you would expect someone from your culture to behave in a similar situation. Then reflect on what you think the underlying value in your culture is that makes you expect this kind of behavior (and not expect it in your new culture).
6. **Get together with your language helper.** Show her your notes and ask your questions. Discuss the reactions of the people to you—talk about what happened that made you feel “different.” Get her perspective on what happened and compare it with yours. Work at understanding better why the people behaved the way they did and what it means in the culture. Talk about what you would like to do or say differently the next time you are in a similar situation, and get your language helper’s advice. You might do a revised role play or some language learning games, or ask her to record a new or revised dialogue using what you learned.
7. **“Spiral” your topics.** Revisit a topic you covered earlier—even one from Pre-Service Training—with a fresh perspective (and wider vocabulary) to do a more thorough job. Go deeper into the language and culture and use more natural phrases as your language ability increases.

VIII. USING A LANGUAGE LEARNING NOTEBOOK

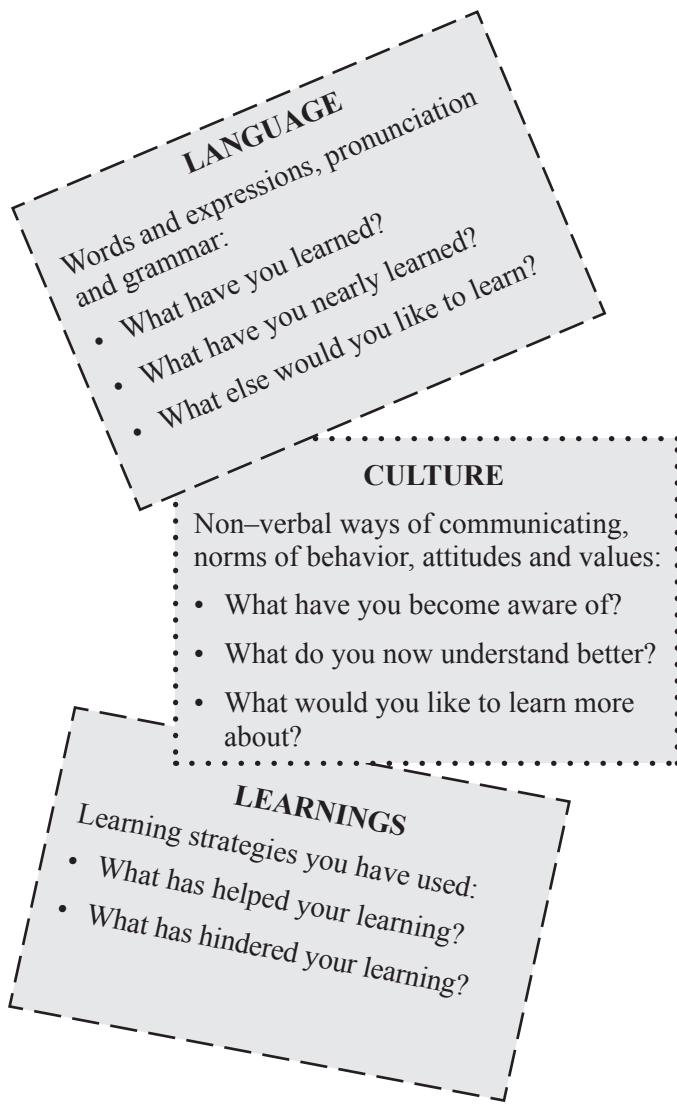
Most people find that spending time reflecting on their language learning experiences and writing about them, however briefly, can make their learning easier and more effective. In addition, your language notebook can become a personal record of your time in country and your experiences with the people you work and live with.

It is helpful to “write your own book” and not become dependent on a textbook or grammar book to decide what you learn. Here are a few ideas about what to write in your language learning notebook or journal and how to organize your thoughts.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

The graphic on the following page shows three basic topics to include in your notebook—language, culture and learning—as well questions to address when thinking about each topic.





Each time you write in your notebook, start by reading recent entries. Or write first, and then read. Look for patterns of both progress (to help your motivation) and difficulties (for planning future self-study lessons).

THREE FORMATS FOR KEEPING A LANGUAGE LEARNING NOTEBOOK		
Format One: Informal	Format Two: Semi-Formal	Format Three: Formal
<p>1. Write on a regular basis.</p> <p>2. Record your language learning experiences and what you are learning from them.</p> <p>3. Use the suggested topics and questions described on the previous page to organize your journal entries.</p>	<p>1. In each entry, try to write about the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • your goals and objectives for learning your new language • your self-study lessons • new words or expressions you have learned or want to learn • words you have heard or read that you want to ask someone about or look up in a dictionary • grammar rules you have learned • notes about conversations you have in your new language • summaries of what you read in your new language • a record of the errors you want to work on • comments on learning strategies you have used successfully or unsuccessfully <p>2. Record the amount of time you spend learning your new language</p>	<p>1. Use this format if you like to have everything organized on one page.</p> <p>2. Draw a horizontal grid by hand. (Use the grid on the next page as a model.)</p> <p>3. Make changes to the grid to suit your needs. Enlarge it as needed.</p> <p>4. Copy by hand or find a photocopy machine and make copies.</p> <p>5. Fasten the pages together to make your own notebook.</p>



The following grid is based on the work of Peace Corps/Hungary Volunteers. Remember that you can change the categories if you want to.

Accomplishments	Not sure yet	
Vocabulary	Words, Sentences, Expressions	Context
Sentences/sentence pattern	I needed to say...	
Cultural awareness and related language	Comments about learning techniques that seem to have been effective	
How I felt/my emotional state	Questions I am left with	



USING YOUR NOTEBOOK WITH A LANGUAGE LEARNING HELPER

The following are steps you can use when using your notebook with a learning helper. Use check marks (✓) to help you record your language learning process.

- After each self-study learning plan, record your “action plan” for *language*. What are the:
 - language objectives you tried to achieve?
 - problems you had learning?
 - successes you had learning?
- Record your “action plan” for *learning*.
 - language and behavior you noticed or paid attention to
 - learning strategies or techniques you used for comprehending and getting the meaning
 - strategies you used to practice the language
 - strategies you used for analyzing and learning from the experience
 - an assessment of what worked and what did not
- Share each of the above entries in your notebook with your language learning helper and discuss them with her; talk about what you did and what you might do differently the next time.

IX. ASSESSING PROGRESS

I sometimes get really discouraged because I do not see any progress. Then I step back and think about how much I could not understand a month ago and how much more I can understand—and say—now.

— PCV

Two types of assessment you should know about:

On-going monitoring: how people understand what you are saying. This occurs constantly throughout the conversation.

“Final” assessment: At the end of a self-study lesson, ask yourself, “Did I achieve my goal or objective?”

Assessing your progress on a regular basis can help you to:

- ◆ Sustain your motivation—often you might feel you are not making any progress at all, but, as the PCV above notes, you really are.
- ◆ Find things you need to work on which can be topics for your self-study lessons.
- ◆ Know how your techniques for learning are working and how you might be able to improve.
- ◆ Reinforce things you are saying correctly.

The most sensible criteria for evaluating your progress are the goals and objectives you have set for yourself (see Chapter VI, “Setting Goals and Learning Objectives”). As you plan each self-study task, devise ways to assess whether you have learned what you set out to learn. Ask yourself:

- ⇒ Where am I going?
- ⇒ How am I doing at getting there?

Try to avoid comparing your progress to that of others. Instead, measure yourself against yourself. Compare what you could do last month with what you can do now: then use that information to know where to direct your language learning efforts in the weeks ahead.

In addition to your own criteria for assessing your progress, you can use the ACTFL (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Guidelines. It is also another source for ideas of what to learn next. Use the ACTFL rating you get at the end of the Pre-Service Training (PST) as your benchmark for keeping track of your progress. A modified version of the ACTFL Guideline, called “The Language Learner’s Proficiency Scale,” can be found in Appendix A.

Here are techniques that successful language learners use to assess their learning. Choose ones that you think will work for you.

ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES THAT SUCCESSFUL LANGUAGE LEARNERS USE

Organize

1. **Set weekly goals** which relate to your main long-term goal. If you use a planning grid (see Chapter VI, “Setting Goals and Objectives”) to identify your learning needs, turn these needs into goals.
2. **Set long-term goals.** Compare where you are now on the Language Learners’ Proficiency Scale with where you were the last time you assessed yourself. Then set new goals for the next month or two.

Write It Down

1. **Keep a journal** to record the language you hear and use as well as questions you have. Summarize your learning in the journal on a periodic basis.
2. **Write letters home** to friends and family. Add a paragraph or two about your language learning. Keep copies of these letters (a piece of carbon paper works just as well as a photocopy machine) both as a record of what you are doing in general and your language learning in particular.
3. **Write letters or post cards in your new language** to your PST host family, copying patterns they use in their letters to you. You might ask your language helper to assist you.

Applying Assessment Strategies

1. **Share strategies** with others who are also learning the language. When you get together with other Volunteers, take a few minutes to talk about *how* you are learning as well as *what* you are learning.
2. **Ask your friends** how you are doing. What are they aware of that you can do better now?
3. **Assess your knowledge of grammar** by doing exercises in any grammar book you have and by having your language helper check them for you. Remember, however, that this will help you assess what you know *about* the language, not how well you can actually *use* it in conversation.
4. **Try “on the spot” assessment.** Pay attention to people’s body language when you are talking. How are they holding their bodies, and what facial expressions are they making? Do they look confused, bored, struggling to understand?
5. **If you are not getting the results you want**, take a look at Chapter V, “Learning Styles.” Which are your preferred learning styles? Would trying other kinds of learning strategies be helpful?



X. LEARNING WITH A LANGUAGE HELPER

To learn a new language on your own (that is, without formal instruction), you need someone you can turn for help. Pick a language helper who:

- ◆ can explain what to say and how to say it so you minimize your chances of offending and maximize your chances of communicating appropriately;
- ◆ cares about you and wants to see you succeed;
- ◆ is someone you like and trust;
- ◆ preferably speaks some English;
- ◆ will help you prepare for your learning adventures;
and
- ◆ will help you understand what you learned from your experiences.

Here are some formal and informal ways to work with your helper.

Formal Learning

The following suggestions are for times when you and your helper are working together on your self-study lessons or other times when you are formally engaged in language learning activities.

1. In general, the best way your helper can assist you is to guide you through the self-study lessons you create. She can help you:
 - choose and practice the right words to accomplish your task in a culturally acceptable way

- gain the confidence you will need to go out and do it
 - interpret the experience and learn from it
2. Concentrate on learning things that are of real importance to you. If you do not, you will probably quickly lose motivation and interest. Therefore, for the most part, do not ask or expect your helper to plan the lessons for you unless you have agreed in advance on the topic and what you are going to do with it. Remember, you are both learner and teacher.
 3. When asking for words and phrases, ask your helper how she would say it in a given situation. You want the answer to be what people usually say in real life, not a simplified or overly formal form. Asking your helper what she would say usually works better than asking if what you have written or said is right, because she might say “yes” to be polite.
 4. Pick a topic and talk about it for five or ten minutes with your helper. Tape record the conversation, transcribe it later, and then ask your language helper to look at what you have written. See Chapter XI, “Using a Tape Recorder,” for more ideas for using tape recordings in your lessons.

Informal Learning

1. Ask your language helper questions about the language and culture on a regular, ongoing basis—anytime you are together.
2. Try having a conversation in which you speak English and your language helper speaks her language. This is a good exercise for practicing listening compreh-

hension without the added stress of having to produce the new language. The conversation will flow more smoothly, and you will understand what you are talking about more easily than if you were speaking only the new language.

3. Ask your language helper to correct your mistakes, but help her learn truly helpful ways to do so. For example, some people prefer to be corrected in private when they are alone with their language helper but not in public. You could also ask your language helper to point out your mistakes, but give you a chance to correct them yourself before telling you how to say it. Remember that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process. They tell you what you know and where you need to do more work.
4. Ask your language helper to accompany you on your learning adventures to observe or “coach” you, but only when you need and want help.
5. In addition to practicing specific parts of the language, talk with your language helper about whatever comes up, with no particular language purpose in mind.



XI. USING A TAPE RECORDER

Most people's experience using language tapes has been in a formal classroom or language lab, using ready-made tapes. An advantage to using pre-recorded lessons is that you do not have to make the tapes yourself. On the other hand, tapes made for the "generic learner" can never match your own specific needs. Here in your new country you can make your own tapes to meet your specific learning needs. The process of making the tapes itself will contribute to your learning.

All you need to make your own tapes is a small tape recorder, some blank tapes and a supply of batteries.

Recording a Dialogue

Use the tape recorder during the *Develop a Lesson* and *Practice* steps of the "Learning Plan for Any Topic." Ask your language helper to record words and phrases that are the natural and appropriate for the specific situation.

Here are ideas for having your language helper assist you in developing an authentic dialogue (based on Anita Wenden's work for Peace Corps/Suriname):

1. Discuss the purpose of making this tape with your helper. Explain how it is important that you learn the words, phrases, and expressions that your helper would actually use herself, in the same situation.
2. Explain the setting and what you hope to accomplish there. Discuss:
 - where you will be when you actually use the dialogue



- who you will be talking to
 - what your relationship is to them
 - why you will be there
 - how polite you need to be, how formal your speech should be, and whether there are any gender-related factors you need to take into consideration
3. As you record each line of the conversation, give it a number, saying the number into the microphone. Also ask for an English translation of the line and write that down (do not record it).
 4. Guide your helper in developing the dialogue. Before you record each line of the dialogue, ask the questions like the following:
 - How should I begin? What do I say to get started?
 - How might “X” respond? (Ask for two or three possible responses.)
 - What should I say then?
 - What might “X” say then?
 5. If you have a business purpose, ask your helper for advice on when and how to do it in a smooth, polite way. You might say something like:
 - Would now be a good time to introduce my purpose? If not, then what should I say to “X” to keep the conversation going? If yes, then what should I say?
 - How might “X” respond?
 - And then what should I say?

6. Finally, ask how you can end the conversation:
 - What should I say to end this conversation?
 - What might “X” say in reply?
7. Listen to the tape with your language helper to check that it sounds natural and authentic. Is there anything that needs to be changed? Is this how a native speaker would really say it?
8. If it is culturally appropriate, record conversations in situations where people are saying things you want to be able to understand or say. Before you do any recording, find out if you need to get their permission to record.



Practicing with a Taped Dialogue

1. Transcribe your tapes. Try to write down every word—at least for part of what you record. Listen over and over again to the same passage, each time trying to get more out of it. Later, ask your language learning helper to listen to the tape with you to help you fill in the gaps and correct mistakes. Then ask questions about the meaning and usage of the new material.
2. Create a transcript of the dialogue. Either your language helper, or you (with your helper’s assistance), write out the dialogue in the target language.
3. Have your helper read the transcript aloud to you (or listen to tape) a few times, while you listen and concentrate on the rhythm and melody of the language.
4. Wait until you feel comfortable hearing the sounds and can make sense of them before you begin learning to say them.
5. Use the transcript as a source for grammar points you might want to work on.

Recording Language Exercises

1. Ask your language helper to record drills based on grammar points. Record a pause after each utterance so that you have time to repeat or to change the grammatical structure as required by the activity.
2. To practice the sounds of the new language, record yourself reading aloud. Focus on making your rhythm and intonation as natural as possible. Record your language helper saying the same things, and then compare your attempts with hers.

XII. SUGGESTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATION

LISTENING

At first I thought I was wasting time when I sat at a gathering. I could not really participate in the conversation. Then I realized how much I could learn just by listening.

— PCV

What is the key to learning a language?

Speaking?

Listening?

If you can not hear the sounds in the new language, you can not make them (at least not the way the native speakers of the language do). And as children, we need to hear words and expressions over and over before we comprehend them and can begin using them ourselves. So listening is not only a means to understanding what others are saying—it is, along with observing, a crucial means to learning to speak a language.

Listening is not a passive skill. When we listen to understand what someone is saying, we are trying to transform a stream of sounds into meaning. Listening requires active thinking, trying to figure out the entire meaning from the parts that we are able to understand. This lays the foundation for developing speaking skills. When you want to

learn to say something, the way to begin is to listen to how others say it. Although it is useful to ask for clarification or repetition, frequently, when we are talking we are not learning.

In general, you will always be able to understand more than you can say. This is natural because speaking, which requires production of the new sounds and structures, is in a sense more complex than the skill of listening. Developing your ability to listen carefully will help you to understand more and will accelerate the rate at which you learn to speak.

Practice on Your Own

1. Listen to the radio.
 - Keep it on while doing other things.
 - Choose a particular program and listen to it regularly.
 - Imitate and repeat what is being said—parrot it back.
 - Record programs and songs to see how much more you can understand after listening several times.
 - Transcribe the recordings you make.
2. Record people doing or saying things you want to be able to do or do better. Listen over and over until you can understand most of the conversation. Transcribe it. Ask your language helper to listen to the tape with you to help you understand words and phrases you do not know.

3. Learn the phrases that are used in the language to control a conversation so you can check your comprehension of what is being said. Use the appropriate expressions for, “Did you say _____ ?” or “What was that word?”
4. Learn as much as you can about the news from talking to people or reading a local newspaper. The more you know about the topic before you listen to it on the radio, the more of it you will be able to understand.

Learning “On the spot”

1. Try to listen “selectively”. Try listening to one item at a time, in this order:
 - a. tone of voice
 - b. the sounds not found in English
 - c. similar sounds in English and the new language
 - d. words and phrases
 - e. grammatical forms
2. Guess the meaning. Look and listen for clues—key words, gestures, intonation, facial expressions—to help you understand.
3. Paraphrase. When the situation allows, check your understanding by repeating back to the speaker what you think he or she said and ask for confirmation.
4. Listen to conversations in public whenever you have the opportunity. Listen for words and phrases you already know; try to get the gist of the conversation;

observe the gestures, facial expressions, and other non-verbal ways people communicate. Going to religious services, participating in sports, and listening to stories are all opportunities for improving your listening skills.

5. Give yourself a listening-related purpose for going to events, such as making sure you get some important piece of information or discovering some new non-verbal way the people communicate.

SPEAKING

I can go around the village and talk to everyone. I feel a part of this place.

—PCV

We speak to express ourselves, but this is only one part of communication. The other part is someone understanding our thoughts from the sounds we make and the nonverbal body language we use.

To speak the language effectively, you have to make the sounds of the language flow the way native speakers do—at least well enough that they can understand what you are trying to say. You do not have to speak perfectly to communicate, but the better you speak, the easier it is for your friends to understand and the more comfortable they will feel being with you. Less than perfect pronunciation of individual sounds can be compensated for by good stress and intonation. The goal is to put the words, phrases, and sentences together in a way that captures the melody and spirit of the language.

In addition, to speak the language effectively we must speak it in a culturally acceptable way. This means learning rules of behavior for each situation. These include knowing when and how to begin the conversation, interrupt, ask for clarification, change the topic, and end the conversation.

Openings and Closings

Learn the culturally acceptable ways to open and close conversations, including the non-verbal gestures and behaviors that accompany them. Try this procedure:

1. For each situation in which you encounter people on a regular basis, write down and practice typical greetings and leave-takings.
2. Continue listening and observing carefully so you can correct mistakes in grammar, pronunciation, or usage.

Routines

Learn a standard routine for regular, predictable activities such as buying food or tickets, riding on the bus, going to a government office, and mailing a letter.

Concentrate on one specific situation or activity per day. Here are some ideas.

1. Build a repertoire of routines by watching and listening to the way people handle routine tasks.
2. Practice public kinds of questions, such as time of day, arrival and departure schedules, and the cost of purchasing items. Try these questions a number of times on the same excursion with different people.

3. Prepare set answers to the standard questions you get asked at social gatherings (for example, why you are in the country, your parents' names, ages, occupations, and how long you will be in the country).
4. Learn variations for expressing what you usually say or ask, or another way of handling the same situation. For example, instead of, "What time is it?" and, "It is twenty past five." Ask, "Is it twenty past five?"
5. Memorize a short poem or two, some proverbs, and anecdotes for an appropriate moment at a social gathering.

Learn Ways to Control Conversations

A useful strategy for practicing speaking is to learn to control conversations. The ideas below will help you manage conversations.

1. **Ask questions that have “yes” or “no” answers** so you get more practice speaking, can gauge if the other person has understood, and can remain unflustered by his or her reply, even if you understand nothing but the “yes” or “no” that starts off his or her answer.
2. **Keep your listener guessing** so the other person does not know what it is you plan to say. For example, when shopping:
 - get what you want first, then ask one or two questions about things you have no intention of buying.
 - when asking for a particular item, be holding or looking at something else.

- if you need more than one of the same item, practice the routine and language in several different shops. This will allow you to practice speaking as well understanding different responses.
3. **Prepare a conversation starter in advance** so that you are in control of at least the first topic you talk about.
 4. **Strike up conversations on public transportation** about topics you are comfortable speaking about:
 - If you are afraid of getting into a long conversation, wait until you are close to your destination before you start talking.
 - If you are traveling with a friend who also is learning the language, sit in different places, agree beforehand on a common topic to talk about with the person next to you, and then compare notes afterwards.
 5. **Summarize what you have heard and understood**, either with the person you are talking to on your own. For example, when walking alone, talk to yourself in the new language. Make sure this will not lead to cultural difficulties.
 6. **Enlist others as casual language helpers and teachers:**
 - Have a fellow PCV monitor you during a conversation, a transaction, or a meeting. The “monitor” listens and writes down what she hears, especially problem areas in vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.
 - Learn and use phrases to explain that you are a PCV and that you are learning the language.

- Learn and use phrases to check to see if you have expressed yourself well, such as, “Did I say that right?,” “What would it mean if I said, ‘ ___ ’?” or “Would you say, ‘ ___ ’ to a man? a woman? a child? someone older?”
- Gradually and deliberately increase the amount of socializing you do with local members of your peer group and limit your time with English speakers who are not close friends or colleagues. Keep a record in your journal of how you progress with this endeavor.

READING

Most Volunteers' main goal in learning their new language is to be able to converse in it. However, learning to read the language can still be helpful for:

- ◆ those who learn best by seeing things in writing;
 - ◆ so you can use dictionaries and write down things for others;
- and
- ◆ writing and reviewing notes.

**Reading helps confirm what we have learned
and allows us to learn more.**

Although there may not be a lot of reading material available in your new language, there is probably some. For example, there are letters from friends, notes from co-workers and supervisors, health brochures, a local newspaper, children's books, street signs, posters, and store signs. Even a small amount of reading will help you improve your speaking and listening skills.

Strategies for Improving Reading Skills

Here are some ideas for improving your reading skills. Check (✓) the ones you have already used or would like to try.

- Learn the sounds of the letters in the alphabet.
- Practice reading sentences you have written in your journal.
- Read signs written in the new language and see if you can figure out their meanings using clues such as their location, accompanying pictures and key words.
- Read excerpts from newspapers, magazines and children's stories. Use headlines, pictures and diagrams to help you understand.
- Correspond with people who speak your new language and ask them to write back. Pay attention to the conventions for writing social letters and use these as models for your own letters.



Tips for Reading

Often readers become frustrated because they cannot understand every single word. However, you do not need to understand every word or every grammatical construction to get the main idea of what you are reading.

In order to improve your reading skills, you need to develop the ability to read for overall meaning and for specific information.

Try following these steps to become a better reader:

1. Before reading, make guesses about the topic or main idea by looking at accompanying titles and pictures. Think about what you might already know about the topic.
2. Read through the piece once without stopping to get the general meaning. Skip over unfamiliar words or grammatical constructions.
3. Read it again without stopping to see how much more you understand.
4. Read it again, this time underlining only the words that are keeping you from getting the main part of the meaning.
5. Go back and look up what you need to know or ask a friend to help you.

WRITING

For most PCVs, the need to write in the new language is far less important than the need to listen and speak. Nevertheless, there are some things that you will want to be able to write. In addition, being able to write will help you develop your other communication skills.

Tips for Writing Practice

1. Learn the sound/letter correspondence of the alphabet. How are the letters and letter combinations used to represent the sounds of the language? At first, concentrate on the sounds of the words you already know—write a few of them every day.
2. Copy parts of an article in a local newspaper or from a children’s book. Focus on things such as:
 - correct spelling
 - word order
 - ways to mark tenses in verbs
 - other grammatical points
 - how the author writes descriptions or answers the who, what, when, where, why and how of newspaper questions.
3. Write the answers to grammar exercises in a grammar book and ask your language helper to check them for you.
4. Ask your language helper to dictate parts of a newspaper article or sentences from a grammar text to you. Have her check your writing for mistakes. Rewrite the sentences that had errors.

5. Tape record the news on the radio and practice transcribing it.
6. Try different types of writing:
 - a description
 - a comparison
 - a narrative of something that happened in the past
 - a summary of a news program or a meeting
7. Write captions for your photos and place them in an album to show your friends.
8. If you are a teacher, write down phrases you may want to use to give classroom commands or to discipline students and then use these in class.

Strive for accuracy as you write. Go back and read what you have written and correct mistakes or ask for help from your language helper. Use writing to practice constructing grammatically correct sentences and for choosing vocabulary more carefully than when speaking.



Writing to Communicate

1. Write notes to yourself such as shopping lists. Have your language helper check your spelling.
2. Write letters to friends, using the standard form for writing letters and addressing envelopes in the new language.
3. Take notes at a meeting. See how much you can understand and spell. You can use your notes later to develop a language lesson.
4. Try writing poetry in the new language to express how you are feeling or what you are experiencing.
5. Keep a journal or diary in the new language.

VOCABULARY BUILDING AND MEMORIZATION

*Constantly asking questions about words
and expressions gets me the farthest.*

— PCV

Learning new words will be a constant activity during your two years in your new country. While memorizing vocabulary lists is helpful, it is more important to use new words in a real situation.

Your goal is to learn to both say the new words in a way that a native speaker can understand them, and to understand them when they are spoken.

The following strategies will help you to expand and improve your vocabulary.

Practice

1. Guess meaning from context. Listen to the sounds and rhythms of the language to try to make sense of what you are hearing.
2. Make it a goal to learn several new words every day.
3. Say the words aloud as you study them.
4. Learn words for everyday objects. For example, use index cards or pieces of paper to label items in your home.

5. Use new words in your writing.
6. Tape record the words and their definitions; then listen to the tapes several times.
7. Create your own dictionary by listing new vocabulary in your language journal. Try the following ways of organizing your word lists:
 - synonyms: words that mean the same as each other
 - antonyms: words that mean the opposite of each other
 - cognates: words that are the same or similar in both the new language and English
 - words that rhyme
 - pairs of words that go together, like brother and sister, black and white, bacon and eggs.
7. Practice silently. When you are sitting in a room, practice saying the names of items in the room to yourself or think of words to describe the people you are sitting with.
8. Play vocabulary games with your language helper or neighborhood children. Some game ideas are:

Tic Tac Toe	Simon Says
Go Fish	Story Circle
Twenty Questions	Going on a Picnic



Memorize

1. *Learn words in sets that naturally go together.* Here are some examples of words that go together:
 - Parts of the body, days of the week, family relationships, items in a classroom, colors, items in the kitchen;
 - Situations in which you might use the word: for example, if you always have corned beef for lunch, learn the related words such as rice, tomato sauce, onions;
 - The words commonly used to apologize, compliment someone, greet someone, express one's condolences, make an excuse;
 - Words used to describe the way language works, like nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, adverbs.
2. *Vary the way you memorize words.* When you are memorizing a list of words, do it from beginning to end and then backward or in a random order.
3. *Study the words and their definitions in isolation.* Then, study them in the context of sentences.

4. *Associate the meanings of words with pictures* in your mind or with *similar sounding words* in English. You could even draw the images.
5. *Use flash cards* to write words and a sentence with a new word in it. You can write the English word on one side and the new word on the other. Use different color flash cards to organize by subject matter, function, situation or grammar point.
6. *Make a list* of words that change based on the social setting, for example, polite words depending on who you are talking with.
7. *Try acting out the word or saying it aloud*, instead of only relying on visuals. Make associations to help you remember. Does the word's sound match the meaning or does it rhyme with a word you know?
8. *Associate words with the context*. Where were you when you heard them first?



GRAMMAR

I cannot begin to talk to people until I have learned the grammar of the language.

— PCV

Who cares about the grammar? I just want to communicate.

— PCV

These two comments from Peace Corps Volunteers show the range of feelings about learning grammar. Perhaps you learned a lot of grammar rules but you never really learned to speak the language. Or, you may have gotten great grades on grammar tests and now feel frustrated that you can not get detailed, clear explanations for the grammatical features of the language you are learning.

In either case, your goal now is not to memorize all the rules, but to use them to help you communicate better.

Why is grammar important?

Grammar explains how to put the parts of words together and how to put the words in the right sequence in order to express ourselves in an understandable way.

Every language has its own set of grammar rules. Verb tenses and the way plurals are formed are examples of grammatical structures. In other words, what you need to learn are the structures of the new language: the ways the words themselves and their order in the sentences are modified and changed to help people say what they want to say.

Deciding What to Learn

When deciding what grammar to learn, think about the following questions.

Which grammar points are essential to convey your meaning?

In what situations do you need to be most accurate?

Remember, although your accuracy may influence other people's impression of you and is more important in some situations than others, your grammar does not have to be perfect.

What are the simple rules? Learn the clear and important rules before struggling with the exceptions, if this does not interfere with getting your meaning across. Work on fine tuning your control of irregular forms later.

Try to learn grammar every day from listening to people talk. You will come to recognize patterns of sounds and the meanings they carry. You can begin to figure out the rules from the many examples you hear in everyday speech. In fact, eventually you will become aware that you are internalizing many of the rules without giving conscious thought to them. Write them in your language learning notebook—create your own personal grammar book.

And above all else, be patient. It takes a long time to learn to communicate effectively and even longer to do so without any grammatical errors. The important thing is to keep working at it. Even if you think you are not learning, you really are.

Formal Practice: Using a Grammar Handbook

Besides creating your own grammar book, try these ideas when working with a formal grammar handbook. But make sure that you do not rely solely on studying grammar. You also need to practice it by getting out and talking to people.

1. Read through the grammar rules to confirm what you already know or to practice a structure you are not sure of.
2. Do the exercises in a grammar book and ask your language helper to help you correct them.
3. Carry a small notebook with you and write down utterances as you hear them. Try to figure out the grammatical rules and check with your language helper to see if you are right. Then try to work the new structure into a conversation at a later time.
4. Write sentences from a grammar handbook on a piece of paper. Then cut up the sentences word by word. Try to put them back together in the correct word order.



Practicing Grammar in Context

The following are more informal ideas for practicing grammar.

1. Practice prepositions by drawing a map of your town. With your language helper, describe where places are located.
2. Tell a story in present time and then re-tell it in different tenses (i.e., past, future).
3. Write descriptions of common events (i.e., what you do with your family at night or how meetings proceed). Then re-write them in the past tense.
4. Practice silently. When sitting in a place with lots of people, try:
 - ◆ describing people using adjectives;
 - ◆ comparing two or more people (for example, John is taller than Mary. He is the tallest person in the Peace Corps Office.);
 - ◆ using the present tense to describe what is happening.
5. Look for recurring errors and try to understand why you are making them.

PRONUNCIATION

Your pronunciation goal is to be able to speak intelligibly without making the people you are talking to uncomfortable. Pronunciation includes not only the sounds of individual letters and words, but other aspects of the sound system as well, such as stress and intonation. All affect the meaning of what is being said.

Thinking about each of the following questions will help you focus on a different aspect of pronunciation.

1. **What are the new sounds?** Concentrate and practice isolating and identifying individual sounds when you hear them. Develop a section in your notebook for pronunciation rules and examples.
2. **What sounds do you have difficulty pronouncing?** When you are having trouble pronouncing a word (i.e., people can not understand you when you say it), ask your language helper to show you in an exaggerated way how he or she makes the sound. Where is the tongue and what does it do? Is air blown out when making the sound? Does the sound come from down in the throat, the roof of the mouth or someplace else? Observe and imitate.
3. **How to sound when speaking the new language?** Ask a native speaker to record words with the new sounds so you can listen and imitate. Record yourself and compare your pronunciation with the native speaker's. Ask the native speaker to listen and give you suggestions.
4. **What is the rhythm of the language?** Imitate the general flow of the language without looking at it in writing—train your ear to hear. Do not worry about

accuracy—just try to make a string of sounds that approximate the key sounds and rhythm patterns of the new language. Where does the emphasis come? The pauses? What sounds do you hear the most? When you are able to pick them out, you can begin to imitate them.

5. **How do people show excitement, uncertainty and other emotions?** Focus beyond the individual sound level and listen for the intonation patterns.
6. **Do words sound the way they are spelled?** Do not be misled by spelling; it is not always a reliable indicator of pronunciation.



APPENDIX A

THE LANGUAGE LEARNER'S PROFICIENCY SCALE

The following proficiency rating scale was adapted from the original ACTFL Proficiency Scale by Terry Marshall, a former Peace Corps Director in the Solomon Islands. You can use it in conjunction with the ideas presented in Chapter IX, "Assessing Progress." But remember, it takes a long time to move from one level to the next on the chart, so the scale may be more useful as a source of ideas for self-study lesson topics.

Novice—Low

Able to respond to or speak a few isolated words—those borrowed from English or commonly used.

Has identified him or herself as a language learner.

Novice—Low

- ✓ I can say "hello" and "good-bye."
- ✓ I can count to ten.
- ✓ I can use courtesy words such as "thank you" and "excuse me."
- ✓ I know a handful of words.
- ✓ I am eager to begin learning my target language.
- ✓ I have set some goals for my language learning.

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Novice—Mid

Can express very simple needs in polite language. Uses mostly memorized words and phrases. Can say short phrases if given time to think about what he or she wants to say.

Speaks in a heavy accent with many errors and confuses sounds that are similar.

Speech is difficult to understand, even to teachers used to working with language students.

Novice—Mid

✓ I can respond to simple commands such as “stand up” and “come here.”

✓ I can greet people and take my leave correctly.

✓ I can ask basic questions, using who, what, when and where.

✓ I can make simple statements and commands such as “it is hot” and “turn on the light.”

✓ I can thank people and make simple requests.

✓ I can sing one verse of a folk song or popular sing-along tune.

✓ I can perform at least one task at the Novice—High level.

Novice—High

Can ask questions and make simple statements based on memorized sentences. Understands conversation fragments and simple commands. Can deal with simple topics of daily need. Speaks mostly in short, direct sentences, but can say some longer phrases and sentences if given time to think about them first.

Still makes frequent errors in pronunciation and word use. Frequently asks speaker to slow down or repeat. Communicates with co-workers but has difficulty with others.

Behaves considerably in dealing with host-country nationals. Understands some nonverbal cues.

Novice—High

✓ I understand and can make simple statements about family, age, address, weather, time and daily activities.

✓ I understand some words when the context helps explain them, e.g., in the marketplace.

✓ My vocabulary includes names of basic concepts: days, months, numbers 1 to 100, articles of clothing, body parts, family relationships.

✓ I can use at least one hundred nouns and verbs in appropriate contexts.

✓ I am beginning to know what is expected of me in simple social situations.

✓ I can perform at least two tasks at the Intermediate-Low level.

Intermediate—Low

Can speak on familiar topics, ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements, and carry on face-to-face discussions. Can pick out the main idea in a friendly informal conversation.

Often speaks incorrectly but by repeating, generally can be understood by native speakers who regularly deal with foreigners.

Frequently can understand native speaker if he or she repeats or speaks more slowly.

Intermediate—Low

- ✓ I can initiate and close conversations appropriately.
- ✓ I can introduce myself or someone else.
- ✓ I can buy a ticket, catch a bus or boat, and get off at the right place.
- ✓ I can respond to simple directions from customs officials, policemen or other officials.
- ✓ I can discuss simple topics with friends.

Intermediate—Mid

Can participate in simple conversations about some survival needs and social traditions. Can discuss topics beyond basic survival, such as personal history and leisure time activities.

Beginning to use correct basic grammar constructions such as subject–verb and noun–adjective agreement.

Intermediate—Mid

- ✓ I can handle questions about my marital status, nationality, occupation, age and place of birth.
- ✓ I can order a simple meal from a restaurant menu.
- ✓ I can ask for or tell the time, date, and day of the week.
- ✓ I can handle simple business at the post office, a bank, and the pharmacy.
- ✓ I am beginning to speak more correctly; my subjects and verbs generally agree.
- ✓ I can perform at least one task at the Intermediate—High level.

Intermediate—High

Can participate in short conversations about most survival needs, limited social conventions, and other topics. Gets the gist of conversations on familiar topics, though finds it hard to tune in on long conversations or in unfamiliar situations.

Speaks mostly in short, discrete sentences, but shows occasional bursts of spontaneity. Can use most question forms, basic tenses, pronouns, and verb inflections, though still speaks with many errors.

Can be understood by native speakers used to speaking with foreigners. By repeating things, can frequently be understood by the general public.

In dealing with host country citizens, can get along in familiar survival situations and with native speakers accustomed to foreigners.

Intermediate—High

- ✓ I can buy my basic foodstuffs, rent a hotel room, and bargain where appropriate.
- ✓ I can talk about my favorite pastimes or hobbies.
- ✓ I can describe how to get from here to places like the post office, a restaurant, or a local tourist attraction.
- ✓ I can talk about things that happened in the past or might happen in the future.
- ✓ I can carry on simple conversations with native speakers who are used to dealing with foreigners.
- ✓ I can perform at least two of the tasks at the Advanced level.

Advanced

Can participate in most casual and some work conversations. Can give simple directions or explanations at work. Can talk about past and future events. With a minimum of repetition and rewording, can get the gist of normal conversation by native speakers.

Vocabulary is good enough to speak simply with only a few circumlocutions and can speak extemporaneously on many topics. Accent clearly that of a learner, but can generally be understood.

Advanced

✓ I can describe my work in some detail and discuss with my co-workers most work-related tasks.

✓ I can talk comfortably about topics of general interest, such as the weather and current events.

✓ I can deal with and explain unexpected problems, such as losing my travelers' checks.

✓ I can take and give messages by telephone.

✓ I can be understood by most native speakers, and I can follow normal conversations involving native speakers.

✓ I can perform at least one task at the Advanced High level.

Advanced High

Can handle most work requirements and conversations on topics of particular interest. Can express facts, give instructions, describe, report and talk about current, past, and future activities.

Often speaks fluently and easily, though occasionally pauses to think of a word. Continues to make some grammatical errors.

In dealing with native speakers, understands common rules of etiquette, taboos, and sensitivities, and handles routine social situations when dealing with people accustomed to foreigners.

Advanced High

✓ I can hire an employee, discuss qualifications, duties, hours, and pay in my new language.

✓ I can instruct a coworker on how to perform a common task.

✓ I can give opinions, facts, and explain points of view.

✓ I can talk with ease about my past, my current activities, and what I hope to do in the future.

✓ I can generally speak easily and fluently with only minor pauses.

✓ I can make culturally acceptable requests, accept or refuse invitations, apologize, and offer and receive gifts.

✓ I can perform at least two of the tasks at the Superior level.

Superior

Can converse on most practical, social and professional topics. Can deal with unfamiliar topics, provide explanations, resolve problems, describe in detail, offer supported opinions, and hypothesize. Beginning to talk about abstract ideas.

Rarely has to grope for a word. Control of grammar is good and errors almost never bother the native speaker.

Can participate appropriately in most social and work situations. Understands most nonverbal responses; beginning to understand culture-related humor.

Superior

- ✓ I can carry out most work assignments in the target language.
- ✓ I can handle routine social situations with ease.
- ✓ I can participate effectively in most general discussions involving native speakers.
- ✓ I can handle normal telephone conversations.
- ✓ I can listen to a radio program, oral report, or speech and take accurate notes.
- ✓ I can deal with an unexpected problem or a social blunder.
- ✓ I can support my opinions in a discussion or argument.
- ✓ I am beginning to understand jokes and word play.
- ✓ I seldom have to ask speakers to repeat or explain.
- ✓ I can speak at a normal rate of speed, without groping for words or trying to avoid complex grammatical structures.

Distinguished

Can use the language fluently and accurately on all levels of professional need. Can tailor language to fit the audience: counsel, persuade, negotiate, represent a point of view, and interpret for dignitaries.

Speaks with only rare pronunciation or grammar errors.

Picks up on most non-verbal cues; understands humor and most allusions. Behaves in a culturally appropriate manner in a range of social and professional settings.

Distinguished

✓ I can carry out any job responsibility in my second language.

✓ I can speak appropriately to a professional group, my staff, a government official, a friend, the elderly and children.

✓ I rarely make pronunciation or grammar errors.

✓ I always understand native speakers, even when they are talking to each other.

✓ I can participate in joking, including puns and word play.

✓ I can read cultural gestures, body language and facial expressions accurately.



APPENDIX B

BETSY'S STORY: A TEA TIME LESSON

Betsy, a Volunteer in the Pacific country of Kiribati, looked at her Daily Activities Grid and decided to work on language to use at tea break at her school. She chose tea break as the setting because:

- ◆ she could learn quite a bit on the spot;
- ◆ she was already fairly comfortable being around the other teachers during the daily tea break;
- ◆ she would be able to observe or participate as much or as little as she wished.

DECIDING WHAT TO LEARN

Betsy began by reflecting further on tea break at her school. What topics do the teachers talk about? Do they ask me questions in their language or do they tend to address me in English? Do I find myself sitting next to teachers who speak English well rather than sitting with those with lower English ability? What language do I need in order to get my tea? What language do I need to chat with the other teachers?

She decided to observe at tea time for a few days, noticing who talks to whom, the relationships between men and women teachers, where people sit, and what the general routine is. She knew that tea time is a good time to observe without being obvious because she would also be drinking tea and eating. She observed her own role—becoming aware of who talks to her, what they say, what she wished she could say to them. She thought about what she already knew and what she would have to do to become more a part of this group.

Next, Betsy chose objectives based on what she needed most. She already knows how to request tea—with lots of sugar. What she wants to learn now is how to converse with the teachers socially. She has to decide what specifically to focus on first, and chooses to work on the conversation about the food served at tea time and how to compliment food items brought by other teachers.

At school today, during tea time, Betsy will try not to get very involved in conversations in English or in the new language. She is there to listen and learn.

Developing a Lesson

Focusing Attention

Betsy pays attention to the area she has chosen: complementing colleagues on the food they bring. She has decided to listen for food vocabulary, phrases for compliments and other language that is used as tea is served. She listens for the intonation used with compliments, the responses to compliments, and differences between men and women giving and receiving compliments. She is careful to listen for the word order in the statements and compares it to word order in questions.

Comprehending and Remembering

Betsy listens to specific aspects of the conversation and uses her knowledge of the language and her previous tea time experiences to make some guesses about unfamiliar expressions and phrases. She looks at people's facial expressions when tea is served and tries to guess when they are praising the food and the cook.

When she hears phrases that she does not know, she repeats them silently to herself so she can ask someone to explain them. She tries to remember new food vocabulary by thinking of the items within categories: things that are put in tea together and the new sweets by color or texture. She divides compliments by food and drink and homemade versus store bought items. As Betsy gets a feeling for the rhythm and melody of the sounds, she mentally links the sounds and the meaning. Immediately after tea time, Betsy writes down the new language and decides that next time she will bring her notebook and ask another teacher to help her write the new words and phrases right there as she hears them.

Creating the Conversation and Checking for Accuracy

Betsy now writes down what she wants to be able to say and understand, in the form of words, phrases and expressions that she wants to use, questions and expected answers, and a short dialogue that she thinks will work in the tea room. She uses a dictionary, consults a phrase list in the back of her PST language manual, but concentrates on using simple sentence structure that she knows she can manage. Finally, she checks her material for accuracy and authenticity with another teacher, asking for correct forms to use or more natural expressions.

Practicing

Listening

Betsy listens to conversations whenever possible. She listens for compliments at other events, such as parties or dinners, and adds those to her list.

Speaking

Betsy practices saying the new words and phrases until she can do it easily, without looking at notes. She plays some games with local kids to practice the names of food, putting descriptive adjectives or phrases on cards and matching them to certain foods that they like (or dislike). She tries out compliments on her neighbors and other acquaintances and looks and listens for their reactions.

Role play

Finally, in a little role play, Betsy takes the role of the Volunteer and a friend pretends to be another teacher.

Using It

At the next tea time, Betsy waits for the appropriate moment, and surprises her colleagues with her ability to use the language to compliment them on the food they have brought. She rewards herself by having three extra biscuits and an extra spoonful of sugar in her tea!

Evaluating

Thinking about the experience

When she has a free moment, Betsy thinks about what happened and writes down some notes. Who did I talk to? What was the reaction of the teachers to my attempts at conversation? Which things that happened surprised me?

New beginnings

Betsy compares her notes with her original phrases. What are the words and expressions I actually heard and used? What did I learn about the language? She starts listing different ways to compliment people on the food.

Culture

What have I learned about the culture of tea time at school? What are the conversation topics? Who talks with whom? What are the male/female relationships?

Telling others

Betsy asks another teacher a few questions that remain about the language and the culture and considers doing some drills or playing language games or maybe acting out one more role play. She discusses the possibility of recording the next tea time and listening to the tape with a friend.

Learning how to learn

Betsy considers how effectively her learning methods worked for her.

- ⇒ Did it help to write the dialogue in advance, or would a collection of phrases have been more helpful?
- ⇒ Was it worth the preparation and study or should I have just dived into the situation and done as much as I could on the spot?
- ⇒ In which language areas do I need more practice? What can I do to get this practice?
- ⇒ How will I remember the new vocabulary?

Planning another lesson

Now Betsy is ready for her next tea time and perhaps for a new topic of conversation. These are possible ways of following up that Betsy might consider:

- ♦ Record the tea time conversation (making sure it is all right with the other teachers) to listen to later. Listen to the tape, repeating after the phrases, and trying to figure

out the meaning. Then try some of the new words and expressions the next day.

- ◆ Practice the language involved in polite passing and requesting of food items with a friend the day before—by role playing, for example. Do the same with compliments and comments about the food that are appropriate in this situation.
- ◆ Tea time is a great opportunity to listen to small talk. Look for topics for other self-study lessons, such as one based on discussing the students in her classes. Learn the words and expressions the other teachers use to describe the students' work habits and intelligence, and their feelings toward them. Or learn to talk about the weather, next weekend's social events at the village meeting center, or the party last weekend.



APPENDIX C

COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING

From: Language Learning Strategies for Peace Corps Volunteers (ICE R0069)

TOPICS COVERED:

- ◆ Can Adults Learn Foreign Languages?
- ◆ What Is the Best Way to Learn a Language?
- ◆ Can I Avoid Making Mistakes?
- ◆ What Should I Do When I Do not Understand Something?
- ◆ How Long Will It Take Me to Learn the New Language?
- ◆ Why Are Some Learners More Successful than Others?

Can Adults Learn Foreign Languages?

It is commonly thought that children are the best language learners, and that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for older people to learn a new language. In fact, that is not true. Research shows that there is no decline in the ability to learn as people get older. Except in the case of hearing or vision loss, the age of the adult learner is not a major factor in their ability to learn a new language. Negative

stereotypes of the older learner as a poor learner, and inappropriate learning and teaching strategies are the greatest obstacles to adult language learning.

In some ways, adults are better language learners than children. Adults have developed learning strategies and have more experience in learning. Children give the appearance of learning languages more easily because they are better at pronouncing them. Adults almost always have a foreign accent when they learn a new language, while children do not. We also expect less of children. When they learn a little, we are pleased. Adults, though, have greater expectations of themselves and others as language learners, and easily become discouraged if they do not learn rapidly. But children do not necessarily learn faster, and many older adults have successfully learned second and third languages.

What Is the Best Way to Learn a Language?

There is no “one and only” way that works for everybody. Learning a language is a highly individual process and consists of a combination of factors. The most important factor is not the teacher or the course. The most important factor is you, the learner, and your contribution to the process of learning. Your motivation, your reason for learning the language, your need to communicate, and your attitude are all very important.

Although there is no single ideal way to learn a foreign language, it helps considerably if you try to find opportunities to practice the language, especially speaking and listening. Shyness and fear of using the new language can considerably slow your progress. Try to develop a comfortable and worry-free approach; for example, in your attitude toward mistakes.

Can I Avoid Making Mistakes?

One of the biggest problems that language learners must overcome is their hesitancy to make mistakes. You naturally want to express yourself well, but the truth is that there is no way to learn a language without making plenty of mistakes. You must practice to learn, and when you practice you will make errors. But usually you will be understandable, even with some mistakes. And the more you speak, the better your foreign language becomes. So overcome your shyness and use the language you learn!

Do not be afraid to make mistakes. Even when native speakers smile at your performance, remember that it is usually a friendly smile and they admire you for your effort as well as for what you have already achieved in their language. Native speakers generally focus their attention on the content of your message and not on your performance or grammar. Look at errors as part of your learning process and do not let them discourage you from practicing. Without practice you cannot be successful.

What Should I Do When I Do Not Understand Something?

Guessing is a very important part of foreign language learning. Even very advanced learners have to rely on guessing. Do not get discouraged or frustrated when your guess is wrong. The more you try, the better you will become. After some practice you will find that it is not necessary to get the meaning of every word or phrase in order to understand the message. Learn to treat uncertainty as part of the process of language learning.

Relate your guessing to a specific situation, sentence context, and speaker's intention. If you do not understand, ask

for clarification of words or phrases which are not clear. As you practice, you will get better and better at guessing the meaning of words you do not know.

How Long Will It Take Me to Learn the New Language?

This question cannot be answered in one sentence for all learners and all languages. Achieving fluency in a foreign language depends on many factors. There are “easier” and “more difficult” languages for an English speaker. There are languages in which it is much easier to master speaking and listening skills than reading and writing skills and vice versa.

There are also different types of learners. Some want to be perfect, want to rely on familiar rules and structures, and do not want to use the language unless they are confident about how they are going to perform. Others are afraid to appear ridiculous and slow down their learning by denying themselves opportunities to practice. Still others are impatient, want to learn everything at once, and get discouraged by lack of immediate results. Some learners are rule-oriented, while others rely on intuition. Some are shy, while others are sociable. Some have been exposed to foreign languages before, while for others it is the first foreign language experience. It is not possible to predict how much time achieving fluency will take, since it is a very individual process.

You will be safe if you do not expect too much at the beginning stage. Set realistic objectives that you can fulfill, and do not let yourself get discouraged. You can avoid developing a negative attitude toward learning the language when you realize that success comes slowly, step by step, at each stage of learning.

Why Are Some Learners More Successful than Others?

Success in learning a foreign language depends on many factors. One is the learner's native ability to learn a foreign language. Another is previous experience learning new languages. Yet another is strong motivation and a positive attitude. Finally, appropriate learning strategies are very helpful for foreign language learning. These strategies are the subject of this book. Return to the main text to find strategies for your specific learning needs.



APPENDIX D

FORMAL LANGUAGE NOTEBOOK PAGES

Date:

Accomplishments	Not sure yet	
Vocabulary	Words, Sentences, Expressions	Context
Sentences/ sentence patterns	I needed to say...	
Cultural awareness and related language	Comments about learning techniques that seem to have been effective	
How I felt/ my emotional state	Questions I am left with	

Date:

Accomplishments	Not sure yet	
Vocabulary	Words, Sentences, Expressions	Context
Sentences/ sentence patterns	I needed to say...	
Cultural awareness and related language	Comments about learning techniques that seem to have been effective	
How I felt/ my emotional state	Questions I am left with	

APPENDIX E

DAILY GRID (BLANK)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
07:00							
08:00							
09:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							
13:00							
14:00							
15:00							
16:00							
17:00							
evening							

DAILY GRID (BLANK)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
07:00							
08:00							
09:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							
13:00							
14:00							
15:00							
16:00							
17:00							
evening							

APPENDIX F

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NOTES