

The Secret to Learning: Listening While Driving

This blog post was translated by ChatGPT.

Hello everyone, I might have discovered a world-class innovation. That is, spending the whole day learning by listening to lectures and podcasts while driving. Find the best teachers in the world, listen continuously, and repeat. Especially while driving, listening is the best. Your eyes are focused on the road, and your visual system is occupied, but your auditory system can multitask. At this time, listening to lectures and podcasts becomes particularly effective. Driving for two hours allows you to focus on listening for one hour and thinking for half an hour, resulting in rapid learning. The brain relies on repetition for memory, and the more you listen, the more you'll naturally think and understand.

I listened to a geek on YouTube talk about how he built his own small rocket, launched it, and recovered it. I spent an entire week listening. I listened on my commute, while walking, lying in bed, showering, and eating. But I found that listening while driving was the best. I can now talk to you for five minutes about how to use the convex hull algorithm to adjust the landing based on flight data from sensors, how to adjust the rocket engine's attitude to stand upright. Convex, landing, thrust, rocket, flight data...

This feeling is truly amazing. At first, I didn't understand much, but just by listening repeatedly, I eventually grasped the surface meaning. Although it's not in-depth, and I still need to practice it myself, it's already a significant improvement.

I listen to some lectures repeatedly, especially on topics I'm not familiar with. Fields Medal-winning mathematician June Huh spent six months perfecting one dish, pasta, until it was flawless. I realized that this approach really works. Even after listening multiple times, I discover something new each time. Sometimes it's an English word or grammar, sometimes an expression, sometimes imagining the actual operation, and sometimes connecting it to something else.

For example, in a 2004 conversation between Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, in the last five minutes, Jobs talked about his friendship with Gates, likening it to a lyric, "You and I have memories longer than the road that stretches out ahead".

Or a Russian spy, Jack Barsky, in the 1980s, memorized 100 words a day to learn English. When he left the United States, he found his vocabulary far exceeded that of the average American.

Or Tony Fadell, one of the co-founders of the iPhone, recalling Jony Ive's design team, said, "color, shadow, feeling," and how the feeling of color and shadow influenced the design. Tony said just watching Jony's design process taught him a lot.

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These lectures and podcasts were things I initially didn't understand much of. After the first listen, I might have only understood a third of the words. But after a week of repeated listening, I found that not only did I understand the English, but I also grasped the actual meaning. The brain is truly amazing under repeated stimulation.

I wondered why I discovered this idea, and why am I the only one who has noticed it?

One explanation is that in the past, most cars were fuel-powered, and no one was crazy enough to drive all day to learn—it's too expensive. Second, those who drive for a living, like taxi drivers, may have lower levels of education, so they don't use the time to learn other things, just playing music or the radio. Third, now that electric vehicles are emerging, there may be few people who combine them with learning.

Lying in bed at home or walking around is not as effective as driving. Lying in bed is particularly ineffective because it feels like you're forcing yourself to listen and learn, which doesn't work well. It's not relaxing. Plus, I tend to be more restless and can't stay still for long. After half an hour in bed, I start feeling bored. Walking doesn't require much visual focus, so it's also somewhat boring. But driving requires some focus, yet not too much, so the brain has just the right amount of energy to listen and think, and it doesn't feel forced. Therefore, it's incredibly effective.

Just six months of listening to English radio during my commute turned my English from basic to fluent, with rapid progress.

Podcasts aren't a new thing; many people listen to them. YouTube's background playback after downloading is also great, as there's more content available there.

As for safety, driving 100,000 kilometers in the city is a small price to pay for the enormous benefits and rapid learning. In half a year of commuting, I've had very few minor scratches—mostly when reversing due to my old second-hand car lacking a backup camera.

Does this method mainly suit me? I'm currently anxious and impatient, often finding it hard to focus on studying or working while sitting down. So I happened to discover that learning while driving works well for me. But I think it could work for many others too. After all, we grew up in the internet age, and it's inevitable that we all feel a bit anxious.

By the way, could it be that this method isn't actually that effective, and it's just about staying focused? Maybe my mindset is just off. That's possible too. Let time be the judge. I'll continue for another six months to a year.

Over the years, I've written down thousands of ideas in my note-taking software. This is just one of many ideas, but it currently excites me the most.

I've finally found something that makes me so excited that I can't sleep. It has also helped me set a longer-term goal.

In the next two years, I plan to challenge myself with high scores on the TOEFL and IELTS, enough to apply to top universities worldwide. Since language learning has become relatively easy for me, especially to a fluent level, I'll start learning another language from scratch. More importantly, I'll delve into entirely new fields, like chip hardware and mathematics.

I'll drive ride-sharing services, picking up passengers all day after work and on weekends, playing podcasts and lectures in the car. I'll practice and refine my learning methodology. Since electric vehicles are so cheap to run, I might as well drive around Guangdong Province, following the coastline, enjoying the scenery, and learning at the same time. How wonderful!

I'm so excited, and I'm gradually changing myself. I think that when I reach half the skill level of a master like Wang Yin, I might also inspire some young people.