

more than once. One rule of thumb that works well for many people is that you shouldn't look up a word until you have encountered it three times without being able to figure it out. This will save you a lot of time. You are also more likely to remember a word you've figured out from context than one you've looked up, especially if you looked up a great many words during that one reading session.

Sometimes it is not clear how far you have to read to get the context of something. Perhaps the best way to proceed is to read through the first sentence and then keep on reading until you get lost. You may be able to follow along for a paragraph, a page, or even a whole assignment. Once you begin to get lost, stop and go back to the beginning. Read along again until you come to the first word you still don't know. Underline the word so you can find it again quickly. Continue in this fashion to the point where you left off the first time, and then start over once more. If, on the third reading, you still cannot guess the meaning of a word you have underlined, look it up. Put a dot in the margin of the vocabulary or dictionary page beside the word to show you had to look it up. (Later, if you have to look the same word up again, add a dot. This will help you keep track of words that seem to be giving you extra trouble, so you can isolate and study them.) Find the English translation that best fits your sentence. Then, turning back to the text, reread the phrase in which the word occurs, trying to fix its meaning in your mind as you do so. Go through your whole first passage this way, looking up only the words you absolutely have to and making intelligent guesses at the others. Then tackle the next section in the same manner, until you have read about half of your assignment.

At that point, take a short break. Then reread the part you have already finished before you go on. Rereading while the section you have worked on is still fresh in your memory will really tie down the loose ends. If you wait until later on, much of it will have grown cold. Besides, seeing how easily you can read what you have worked so hard on should give you the courage to proceed with the second half of your assignment. Go through it in the same way, looking up only the words you cannot guess. When you've taken the second small break and reread the second half of your assignment, read quickly through the whole thing. Consolidate what you've learned, what you've worked so hard to achieve.

If you come to words, idioms, or grammatical constructions you cannot sort out, underline them. If after your second or third honest try you still cannot figure them out, put a vertical line in the margin to remind you to ask your instructor for an explanation. If you have been thorough about applying everything you know and systematic about making intelligent guesses, it will probably turn out that you are not the only one in the class who had difficulty in those spots.

This system of underlining phrases and making vertical lines in the margin should remind you of suggestions about marking your textbooks and writing questions in the margin discussed in Chapter 9. You might want to take the idea of making dots in the margins of the vocabulary pages a step further, and use 3 × 5 cards as discussed in Chapter 15. Remember, your aim is to read in the foreign language the way you do in your own, so it makes sense to apply some of the same techniques whenever you can.

LEARNING TO WRITE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Of the four language skills under discussion here, writing—at least writing on a sophisticated, adult level—is probably the most difficult. When you consider how hard it is for most people to write stylishly and clearly even in their native language, this is not surprising. Thus no one will expect you to produce very long or complicated written assignments in the early stages of your language study.

Nonetheless, the ability to put at least some ideas into writing is an important part of mastering another language. Learning to be accurate in the production of language as it is symbolized on paper is part of any foreign language course. Writing is a legitimate end in itself; it also involves motor memory, and it helps consolidate all aspects of what you are learning in the language.

Writing, too, has several different parts. The simplest aspect of this language skill is producing individual words and phrases on paper correctly. Essential to that is becoming a master of the language's sound-symbol correspondence. In other words, you have to learn to spell words, not just to recognize them. In fact, early assignments may include having you copy words, sentences, or dialogues from your textbook. Carrying out such simple tasks is the best way to get started on good writing habits. Accurately copying sentences that are known to be correct models keeps you from making mistakes. Writing is much more than putting words on paper, however. Even before you get to the point in your language courses where you are expected to do anything that might reasonably be called creative writing, some tips may be useful.

Study Tips for Learning to Write. Just as learning to speak correctly means learning to listen carefully to models and imitating them, learning to write correctly requires learning to observe written models closely enough to imitate them. Rule number one for writing is: Make sure you learn the spelling, gender and declension, or conjugation of each new word as it comes

along. Just looking at a new word, or even saying it out loud, is not sufficient. Spell it out loud. Copy it out (think again about using 3 × 5 cards), spelling it aloud again as you write it.

The same applies to whole phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Good oral and aural habits can help you in writing, just as writing things out can help your oral performance. Early assignments will almost certainly require you to put together in a sensible sequence sentences you already have read and know how to say. Take advantage of the existing models in your textbook to make sure you are reproducing such bits of language accurately when you write them.

Another of the suggestions made in connection with learning to speak is also useful when it comes to writing. Try to resist the temptation—at first—to express thoughts as complicated as those you are accustomed to writing in your native language. Build a solid base by getting the simple things right, often; the more complex matters will begin to fall into place later.

Rule number two for writing—especially as you move on to the point of creating original sentences and paragraphs—is: Follow the same procedures and steps you would for a written assignment in your native language (see Chapter 18). To be sure, the requirements with respect to length and complexity of topic will be very different. But you need to have exactly the same concerns: Define your topic precisely; organize your thoughts carefully; and make notes or an outline before you start to do the actual writing. You should follow these steps even on a very short assignment.

Above all, you will need to allow time to edit what you have written. If editing is an important part of writing in your native language, how much more so that will be in a language that is relatively new to you! Leave yourself time for a break between the initial writing and the editing (a day or more is ideal) so that you can look at what you have written with fresh eyes.

Remember, too, that editing is a complicated job. You should not expect to do an adequate job of editing simply by rereading what you have written. You'll need to go through your finished draft once to check mechanical details like spelling and punctuation; this is called copyediting, and it is only a small part of the editing process. Then you'll need to go through once to check the grammar and at least once more to make sure the ideas you tried to express are coming across clearly and correctly. Nothing less will do. This sounds time consuming, and it is. But it is also much more efficient than trying to tackle everything at once, and the results will be better than if you skip one or another of these tasks. If you break the task into its separate parts, you can be reasonably sure that the time you spend will be spent effectively.

You should read your paper out loud to test the sound. If you have been doing most of your homework orally, as has been recommended, you will gradually develop an ear for how things ought to sound. Does what you have

written flow smoothly? Are the sentences too long and therefore hard to read? Are they too short and therefore choppy? Is it easy to follow the point of what you have written? Even better than just reading your work to yourself is to get a classmate to listen, to serve as a friendly critic. Offer to do the same for her or him. The practice of reading, listening, and criticizing will help both of you.

Finally, make a fair copy. You do not want the evidence of your hard work to get lost in a sloppy presentation. Give yourself plenty of time to copy the whole thing over carefully. This stage of the operation also gives you one last chance to make changes or corrections, if the need arises.

Writing well is hard work. Don't let the difficulty of the process surprise or discourage you. By following the models in your textbook, you are bound to do more right than wrong. You will get better as you go along, if you proceed cautiously.

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR TEXTBOOK

Look back at Chapters 8 and 9, "Learning from Your Textbooks" and "Making Notes in and from Your Textbooks." A lot of what is said there you will be able to apply to work with your foreign language textbook as well. On the other hand, your foreign language textbook will be different from others in some ways. This just means that surveying it is especially important. Language teachers are constantly working on new methods to help students learn foreign languages efficiently and thoroughly. Their efforts are reflected in the textbooks that get written. But because language learning is such a complex matter, the books differ; no one book can possibly be the best in every regard for every student. You need to become familiar with *your* book so that you can make it mesh with your learning style.

For example, some books give grammar explanations and rules first and only afterward give exercises for you to work on. Others provide a couple of models for you to follow in doing the exercises, giving you a chance to figure out the rules for yourself, before you come to any explanations. This is the difference, roughly, between a deductive and an inductive approach, from the student's point of view. Each method has much to be said in its favor. What you need to do is be sure you understand which your book is using; only then will you be able to work effectively with it.

If your book gives rules and explanations first (and encourages you to work deductively), you don't necessarily have to do every assignment in that way. You may discover that you learn better by doing the exercises first and

trying to establish the rule on the basis of what you are doing (you may work better inductively) and then checking what you have figured out against what the book tells you. Most foreign language textbooks are deliberately written so that they can be used in a variety of ways. Feel free to experiment a bit until you find how your book works best for you.

Once you have become familiar with your book and have made any necessary adjustments in the way you approach assignments, to fit your learning style, stick with your system. Developing a systematic approach to your language study is an important part of building the new language habits.

Whatever system you develop, it should not entail short cuts. Don't leave things out. The people who write foreign language textbooks work very hard to include no extraneous material; everything in the book—every exercise, explanation, and example—is there for a reason. Furthermore, if a workbook or a lab manual and recorded materials accompany your textbook, be faithful about doing the work in them as well. Remember, learning a language is a complex task that is best aided by having frequent small doses repeated often. The various components of your foreign language program are designed to help strengthen the habits you are building.

One of the best ways to help yourself in this regard is to do exercises more than once. The second time will not take so long as the first, and you will have more than twice as good a chance of retaining what you've learned. Doing an exercise is one thing; learning the material well enough to retain it is quite different. Making new language material second nature requires extra effort.

To keep the repetition of exercises from being boring, adapt the exercises slightly the second time through. If the exercise is oral, write it out the second time. If it is written, do it out loud. Start at the end of an exercise and work backward the second time. Combine related exercises in your textbook and your workbook. And so on. Try to think of ways to put every kind of memory (visual, oral, auditory, motor) to work. With a little creative effort and extra time, you can make your textbook do double duty for you.

Remember, too, what has been suggested in Chapter 9 about marking your book up. Use the margins to ask yourself questions. Put vertical lines or dots in the margins to remind yourself of trouble spots. Figure out other ways to make the book yours. Make it help you. Eventually, however, you will want to be able to be independent of it.

Resist the temptation to write interlinear translations in your foreign language textbook. Such translations guarantee that you won't be learning to think in the other language, because your eye will keep going to the translation you have written in. They also prevent you from getting valuable additional practice with the foreign language material by going through it a second time or in class, again because your eye will go to the translation instead of to the original.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF CLASS TIME

Any time you emerge from a foreign language class without being tired, you probably haven't been working hard enough. Your few hours of classes each week are a substitute for the countless hours you had for listening and imitating when you were learning your native language. You have to concentrate hard during those few hours; the effort of concentration should make you tired, even if you are having a good time.

If your instructor has decorated the classroom with pictures and artifacts from the country whose language you are studying, this was not done merely to make things look cheerful. Rather, it is part of an attempt to create an atmosphere where it will seem appropriate to speak a language other than English. You should do everything you can to add to and maintain the illusion that you are in a foreign language environment, because your hours in class are the closest you will come to it in most foreign language courses. Learn to greet your classmates and instructor in the new language. This will help set the mood and save you from switching back and forth between English and your new language—a sure way to interrupt the process of establishing new language habits.

Thus, even when material is presented in English in your textbook, you can endeavor to raise any questions you have and ask for clarifications in the foreign language. Try to think in your new language. It will help a lot if you seek out others in your class willing to make the same effort. Sit next to them, and arrange study sessions with them. Nothing will undermine your good intentions so quickly as sitting next to someone who maintains a steady undecurrent of English commentary on the work at hand.

Because of the cumulative nature of language learning, falling behind is an even more serious problem than in most courses. Because catching up is extremely difficult, be very disciplined about doing all your assignments completely and on time. If you have trouble, get help right away. There are several ways to get help. You can go over things again (after taking a break to clear your head). You can get a classmate who is doing well to help straighten you out. You can go to your instructor. If you know someone who has a different textbook for the same language, you may occasionally find it helps to see how another set of textbook authors presented the subject that is giving you difficulty. The different or additional explanation may do the trick for you.

Getting the most out of class time is closely related to getting the most out of your textbook. Look back at the previous section, and review the suggestions for learning effectively from your textbook that appear in Chapter 8. Pay special attention to the steps of reciting, reviewing, and reflecting when you are preparing for your foreign language class. The primary watchwords for making class time worthwhile are: Prepare before class. Attend every class. Work hard in class.

SPECIAL NOTES ON CULTURE

The skills discussed in this chapter are not the whole story when it comes to learning a foreign language. One reason for going to all this trouble is to learn about native speakers of the language you are studying—the places they live and the lives they lead. You are trying to gain access to a culture. Learning a language and learning a culture—by which we generally mean both high-brow culture (art, history, music, literature) and features of everyday living (people's customs, habits, likes and dislikes, food, clothing)—are integrally related. Those cultural matters are to a considerable extent the subject matter of foreign language courses, though it is easy to forget this when you are deeply involved in learning vocabulary and grammar. Because they do go hand in hand, everything you learn in the language opens avenues to the culture, and every exposure to the culture will help you in your understanding and eventual mastery of the language.

It is highly desirable for you to listen to music or go to movies in the language you are learning. If there are restaurants in your area that serve foods from the countries where your new language is spoken, go. If the waiters there can and will speak the foreign language, go with a friend who is willing to join you for a foreign language evening.

If your college or university has a foreign language house for your language, see what is involved in joining. If there is no foreign language table for your language on campus, see whether you can find an instructor willing to help you start one. If there is one already, go. Spending a mealtime even once a week speaking your new language and hearing it spoken will help, and you will find out which other students are as eager as you to press forward with their new language skills.

Try always to talk to your language instructors in the new language, even when you meet them outside of class. Try to get to know native speakers of the language, and use your new language skills to talk with them. Ask them to tell you something about the place they come from. You will get valuable practice in listening comprehension as well as interesting, firsthand cultural information.

Investigate possibilities for study abroad. If a year or semester program is not an option for you, perhaps a summer study trip is. Even an intensive summer school session at home or an "immersion" weekend is better than getting no exposure outside your regular classes. Talk to students in advanced courses about what they have done to supplement their regular class work; get recommendations from your instructor or other members of the language department.

The point is to find as many ways as possible to fill in the gaps that typically appear when adults try to learn a new language as well as to extend

your knowledge of the language's culture. It may be harder in some ways for adults to learn languages, but they also have a greater variety of means to attack the task than children do. Exploring those means is an important part of your job as an adult learner of a foreign language.

SUMMARY

How is learning a foreign language different from learning other subjects?

Learning a language entails learning both knowledge and skills. You have to learn "facts," but you also have to become proficient at using those facts. Furthermore, learning a language is not just one task; four distinct skills are involved.

What are the four language skills?

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Although these skills require some differences in approach, they also have some things in common with each other. You must work on all four skills more or less simultaneously, throughout your language study.

Why do children often have an easier time learning languages than adults do?

Children are less inhibited about imitating what other people say; imitation is an essential part of building new language habits. Children also do not have an established set of language habits to interfere with the new ones they are trying to develop.

What advantages do adult learners have?

Adults have rational skills that children do not have. These skills enable adults to understand something about how language works and make it easy to learn a lot quickly. Adults can use knowledge about language to speed up the imitation process that takes so long when people learn their first language.

Why is thinking not the most important part of learning a language?

Language is largely a set of habits, and you have to do things rather than just think about them in order to build those habits. Furthermore, languages do not always work in a logical way. Some things—the meanings of certain idioms, for instance—you

simply have to memorize, repeating them until they become second nature. You cannot figure them out, no matter how hard you think about them.

Visual and auditory memory are enhanced dramatically when they are supplemented by motor memory. The more different kinds of memory you have working for you at once, the more likely you are to implant what you are learning in your long-term memory.

Translating means reproducing in one language precisely what is said or written in another language. Reading entails thinking and understanding in the original language without using a second language as an aid. Hence translating necessarily involves at least two languages; reading involves only one.

In most language courses, the class hours are the closest you can get to an environment like the one in which the language you are learning is spoken. When part of what you are trying to do is learn by imitation, anything that helps create the right atmosphere is especially valuable. Your instructor and a well-run classroom come closer to creating the right illusion than your room or the library does.

Language is in part a means of communicating culture. The ways people think and behave—their hopes and aspirations, their customs and habits, their literature and art—are all conveyed in part by language. When you learn the language, you are learning something about the culture. Conversely, learning something about the culture will probably make your language study more interesting, and it should help put what you are learning into perspective.

Why is studying out loud important even on written assignments? Why is it a good idea to write out oral assignments?

How are translating and reading different from each other?

Why is the time spent in class especially important in a language course?

How is culture connected to language study?

HAVE YOU MISSED SOMETHING?

1. *Sentence completion.* Complete the following sentences with one of the three words listed below each sentence.

- a. Language study entails learning both knowledge and _____ facts grammar skills
- b. Language study is largely a set of _____ words habits rules

2. *Matching.* In each blank space in the left column, write the number preceding the phrase in the right column that matches the left item best.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| _____ a. Context | 1. Basic means of learning native language |
| _____ b. Culture | 2. Biggest challenge in reading a foreign language |
| _____ c. Motor | 3. Includes habits and customs as well as art |
| _____ d. Imitation | 4. Expression peculiar to a particular language |
| _____ e. Vocabulary | 5. Part of the best way to figure out what a word means |
| _____ f. Idiom | 6. The most efficient kind of memory |

3. *True-false.* Write *T* beside the *true* statements and *F* beside the *false* statements.

- _____ a. Adults learn languages better than children because they are more mature.
- _____ b. Language involves at least four skills.
- _____ c. The same language skills are equally easy or hard for everyone.
- _____ d. Translating is a necessary part of reading.
- _____ e. Memorization is a critical part of language learning.

4. *Multiple choice.* Choose the phrase that completes the following sentence most accurately, and circle the letter that precedes it.

One good way to improve your reading skill in a foreign language is to

- a. look up every unfamiliar word as soon as you come to it
- b. spend a long, uninterrupted block of time on one reading passage
- c. look up unfamiliar words only if you still haven't figured out what they mean by the third time you encounter them
- d. copy the whole passage into your notebook