

PROACTIVE LEARNERS

5 Tips for learning a second language

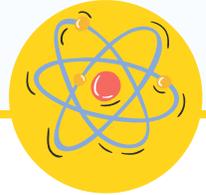
WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Tip #1
Talk with your Instructor and tell him about your previous experience with languages. Use that experience to your advantage.



HOW DO YOU LEARN LANGUAGES?

Tip #2
There is a lot of research on language. Find information that may help you understand your own process.



TEACHING METHODS FOR YOU?

Tip #3
There has been a thorough exploration on how to best teach a language. Find out which one your Instructor uses.



HOW CAN YOUR COURSE MEET YOUR GOALS?

Tip #4
Make the goal of your course meet your own personal goal for learning a language.



HOW CAN LITERATURE HELP YOU LEARN A LANGUAGE?

Tip 5
Literature's purpose is aesthetic. And yet, you can use it to learn a language.





Tip #1

Let your Instructor know about your previous experience with languages. Do you speak more than one language? If interested in Spanish, do you speak French or Italian? In that case, Spanish will be easier. When was the last time you took a language course? What did you like about it? For example, teaching style, material, activities etc. What worked for you? What would you like to add to your course this time?

Why is that important?

All your previous knowledge is stored in a mental storage from which you retrieve information that facilitates your current understanding of the world. For example, Spanish and French are two Romance languages (languages that evolved from Latin); if you already know how to speak one of them, when you study the second one, you retrieve information from your linguistic storage that will help you learn Spanish more easily.

We also store our emotions and predisposition to learn a second language.

Tip #2

Having a general understanding of the way humans are able to produce language may help you understand your own process better. It can also help you find more effective ways to work on those areas that require more practice.

For example, what is the difference between acquiring a language and learning a language?

Language

acquisition describes the process in which a baby develops the ability to speak. During her everyday interaction with family and friends, she observes and analyzes the language they speak, and when ready, she starts speaking. So, understanding a language occurs before the ability to speak, and the only way to make it perfect is by practice and formal study.

The same applies to language learning, but in different order. The learner is provided with a formal study of the language first, rules and structures, that he will eventually reinforce and expand during his interaction with other speakers inside and outside the classroom. And the only way to make it perfect is by practice and formal study, which implies ongoing analysis and observation.



Tip #3

Get the gist of the methods or approaches used to teach languages.

Here are some of them:

a) Communicative Approach. The main focus is on communication and the material reflects real communicative situations with a real communicative purpose.

b) Grammar-translation. It focuses on grammar and uses translation as a way to study and practice.

c) Direct method. It uses only the language of study and focuses on speaking.

d) Audio-lingual. Repetition of structures and patterns until the student's responses are automatic.

In the past, the tendency was to use one method or approach only. However, instructors seem to follow a more eclectic style nowadays. And not only that. There seems to be a rediscovery of previous methods, such as the Grammar-Translation, which is now used with a new perspective.





Tip #4

Make it your course!!!

Why do you want to study a second language? Travel?
Business? To study abroad?

Keep your goal in mind at all times. It is your driving force. Invest the time, resources and effort accordingly. That is your commitment to yourself.

The content of general courses is planned from basic to advanced structures and functions of the language; there is a general assumption as for why their learners want to study. Courses with specific purpose, let's say Spanish for business, are specifically designed to meet the language needs of a group. The content reflects specific parts of the language, such as specialized vocabulary, that they may use in real situations. Private lessons are intended to meet the specific needs of a single individual; they focus on providing what that person needs to communicate.

The learner's saying in regards to what should or should not be included in the content goes from very limited, which is the case of regular language courses, to determinant, when take private lessons with specific purpose.

Whatever your case may be, the more involved you are in your course, the more meaningful it will be. Find out which goals and objectives each course you take has and see if they meet or surpass your expectations, or if you and your Instructor can add information geared towards your needs.

Tip #5

Poem « Rima XXI »
by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

¿Qué es poesía?, dices mientras clavas
en mi pupila tu pupila azul.
¡Qué es poesía!, ¿Y tú me lo preguntas?
Poesía... eres tú.



This is the translation by Karin Wiberg
What is poetry? you ask
as your blue eyes stare into mine.
What is poetry? And you ask this of me?
Poetry is you.

This is a beautiful poem you can learn during your first sessions of Spanish!

Literature is a fantastic reading material when learning a second language. Why?

- It is written for native speakers
- You can practise and expand your reading comprehension skills
- You can learn more about the language (grammar, vocabulary, etc.)
- It is a good reason to have a conversation or discussion
- It can prompt you to write and be creative!
- You can learn more about their culture
- You may relate to the content -values, beliefs, concerns, etc.- and find another reason of joy when learning a second language.

Literary material in Spanish is abundant. You may choose literature written by authors living in Spanish-speaking countries; authors living in Spanish-speaking communities in USA or Canada; you can read simplified texts and translations as well.

Sometimes, learners choose to read a piece of work in Spanish and then its translation!

You can do the same with any other artistic expressions.
Movies? Songs? You choose!