

Studying a Foreign Language

The tips included here are practical strategies to help you study a foreign language.

* **Use Flashcards-** A powerful tool for learning vocabulary is the simple flashcard -- 3 X 5 cards with the foreign language (FL) on one side and English on the other. You should always have two separate stacks: new words and words you have already learned. Every once in awhile, go through the stack that you have already learned, just for review. This should go very quickly. If you find that you have forgotten a word, move it back to the other stack for more intensive study. You can always move it back to the "learned" stack later.

VERY IMPORTANT: ALWAYS CARRY SOME FLASHCARDS WITH YOU! This will allow you to study them at times when you normally would be doing nothing -- standing in line, riding the bus, and waiting for class to start, etc. You can turn "wasted" time into productive study time. The key is that you have your flashcards with you. Even one or two minutes is long enough to study 5-10 cards. Do this, and you will find your vocabulary expanding more quickly than you ever thought possible. And don't forget to study the flashcard both ways, that is, sometimes use them with "English up," and sometimes use them with "FL up."

* **Use Colors-** Try writing vocabulary in different colors. For example, use blue for masculine objects and pink for feminine or red for irregular verbs and green for regular. You can also use colored note cards or paper. Another alternative is to use one color per unit so that you can mentally group like vocabulary together.

§ **For spelling-** When writing out vocabulary words, put all a's in one color, e's in another, etc. This takes a lot of time but has helped students with spelling.

* **Just Do It!** - Get active. Point to or touch objects as you say them and act out verbs. For example, make motions like you are eating and say the verb "comer" out loud.

* **Label it** – Tape little pieces of paper with the FL word on objects around you. Ex: put "la puerta" on your bedroom door.

* **Visually arrange words-** Put words that have something in common together. In one corner of your paper put words relating to sleep in another put the verbs that relate to sleep. Or Sketch a bed in the center of your paper and put all the words and verb around it. You might want to list masculine nouns on the left hand side of the paper and feminine on the right.

* **Write them out-** For some people repeatedly writing FL words and their English meaning works well. Try writing each pair of words 10-20 times.

* **Make up sentences to help you remember-** For example, the Spanish word for bear is 'oso'. To help you remember you might say "A bear is OH SO big" or "There's a mesa (Spanish word for table that looks like the English word mess) on the table."

* **Make up songs-** create silly or serious songs or raps out of words or phrases you're trying to learn. Make up a tune or use one you already know.

* **Tape yourself-** Record yourself talking in the FL. Listen to your accent and make improvements. You can also quiz yourself by recording the words or phrases you're learning. Pause between each one to give yourself time to think and say the words out loud.

* **Use friends and family-** Have someone quiz you. If they don't speak the target language (or know how to pronounce it) have them give you the words in English. You respond with the word in the foreign language. Provide your partner with flash cards or a list of words in both languages.

* **Play games-** You can make up your own games or modify ones you already know. For example, you can play the memory game. Make pairs of index cards for each word- one in English, the other in the target language. Shuffle the cards together then lay them face down on the floor/table/desk in columns and rows like a grid. Turn one card over then try to remember where its pair is. Turn over the card you think it is. If they match pick them up and put them to the side. If they don't match, turn them both face down in their original spots and start again.

* **Talk to yourself and your pets-** It's pretty simple. Talk quietly to yourself and/or your pets in the target language for more practice.

* **Write in your private journal.** – This is a good way to practice writing and also assures you a little more privacy. Don't worry if it is all correct. It's just for you. Just write.

* **Learn to read foreign text** – Read the text several times through. The first time just read it. Don't use a dictionary. The second time, look for KEY words to help you understand. If you cannot decipher their meaning from the text, look it up. DON'T look up every word. This gets frustrating and wastes time. After you've looked it up, you might want to jot the word down in the margin or on a sheet of paper in case it shows up later in the text. You may even want to start a list for later study to help you build your vocabulary. The third time read for understanding. After each paragraph, ask yourself what you read, what the main points were, etc. If you can't comprehend the paragraph, look at the paragraph before it and after it for clues. Look up more key words. Try to understand as much as possible on your own. Don't rely on the dictionary.

* **Learn to memorize vocabulary**

The following methods are taken from Mind Tools website. Explanation of Language Mnemonics

1. The LinkWord Technique

The Link Word technique uses an image to link a word in one language with a word in another language. The following are examples of use of the LinkWord technique:

English: Spanish vocabulary

rice = arroz – imagine ARROWS landing in your plate of RICE

río = river – picture a big river....the RÍO grande

thief- ladrón – imagine a thief disappearing down the street with a LADDER ON his back

The technique was formalized by Dr. Michael Gruneborg. Link Word language books have been produced in many language pairs to help students acquire the basic vocabulary needed to get by in a language (usually about 1000 words). It is claimed that using this technique this basic vocabulary can be acquired in just 10 hours.

2. The Town Language Mnemonic- This is a very elegant, effective mnemonic designed by Dominic O'Brien that fuses a sophisticated variant of the Roman Room system with the LinkWord system described above.

The fundamental principle rests on the fact that the basic vocabulary of a language relates to everyday things: things that are typically found in a small town, city, or village. The basis of the technique is that the student should choose a town that he or she is very familiar with, and should use objects within that place as the cues to recall the images that link to foreign words.

Nouns in the town

Nouns should be associated to the most relevant locations: the image coding the foreign word for book should be associated with a book on a shelf in the library. The word for bread should be associated with an image of a loaf in a baker's shop. Words for vegetables should be associated with parts of a display outside a greengrocer's shop. Perhaps there is a farm just outside the town that allows all the animal name associations to be made.

Adjectives in the park

Adjectives should be associated with a garden or park within the town: words such as green, smelly, bright, small, cold, etc. can be easily related to objects in a park. Perhaps there is a pond there, a small wood; perhaps people with different characteristics are walking around.

Verbs in the sports center

Verbs can most easily be associated with a sports center or playing field. This allows us all the associations of lifting, running, walking, hitting, eating, swimming, driving, etc.

Remembering Genders

In a language where gender is important, a very elegant method of remembering this is to divide your town into two main zones where the gender is only masculine and feminine, or three where there is a neutral gender. This division can be by busy roads, rivers, etc. To fix the gender of a noun, simply associate its image with a place in the correct part of town. This makes remembering genders so easy!

Many Languages, many towns

Another spin-off of the technique comes when learning several languages: normally this can cause confusion. With the town mnemonic, all you need do is choose a different city, town or village for each language to be learned. Ideally this might be in the relevant country, however practically it might just be a local town with a slight flavor of the relevant country, or twinned with it.

3. The hundred most common words

Tony Buzan, in his book 'Using your Memory', points out that *just 100 words comprise 50% of all words used in conversation in a language*. Learning these core 100 words gets you a long way towards learning to speak in that language, albeit at a basic level.

* **Don't forget the Web!** – You can access FL radio, read articles, research countries, find online dictionaries, build your vocabulary with a word for the day, etc. Some sites like WWW.studyspanish.com offer online lessons and games to help you.

GOOD LUCK and KEEP STUDYING!

From MendyColbert.com