

Get Started,  
Don't Stop.



# THE EVERYDAY LANGUAGE LEARNER'S COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO GETTING STARTED

The complete guide for getting started learning any language and empowering you to reach your goal.

BY AARON G MYERS

To language learners everywhere who endeavor to make a difference  
in the world even as they work to learn another language.

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Cover: Author's children being kids and getting started.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greetings from Istanbul! My name is Aaron Myers and besides being the author of this guide, I also write at The Everyday Language Learner blog as well as work as a language coach. I grew up in Kansas in the states, am married to my wonderful wife Consuelo and we have two great kids. I've been learning languages since 1996, have been a language coach and have been writing about language learning since 2010 and am passionate about helping others. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of your language learning journey.





# INTRODUCTION

# GETTING STARTED

The last ten years have seen a revolutionary change in the world of language learning. A paradigm shift has occurred. The Internet has ushered in the information age and now for the first time in the history of the world, language learners have access to every major language. This has not always been the case. Even ten years ago, teachers necessarily were the main source of input for language learners. They did a great job of collecting materials, creating activities and directing student's language learning. But with the Internet age, not only do language learners have access to every major language in the world; they have access to both high quality and an almost infinite quantity of resources as well.

And herein lies the problem. While the playing field has changed astronomically, the way we play has not. Electricity has been discovered, the light bulb invented and yet we still read by candle light. A new day has dawned in language learning and it is the day of the self-directed, independent language learner. With the ushering in of this new day in language learning however, a shift will need to take place in the beliefs and strategies of language learners everywhere.

The basic belief in the past was not that language could be learned as much as it was that we learn languages when we are taught. The basic strategy was to sit back and listen, doing whatever the teacher instructed. We didn't know any better, there weren't a lot of resources available and we didn't have a lot of other options, so it was off to Russian class at the local community college or the French Language School if we happened to have been transferred to Paris. But today both the resources and the options are plentiful.



The missing piece of the equation is the knowledge of what it takes to be a self-directed language learner. The gap in knowledge is large, but it is a gap that can easily be closed. While it may seem daunting to most who want to learn another language, it needn't be.

The missing piece of the equation is the knowledge of what it takes to be a self-directed language learner.

## THE DIGITAL CAMERA REVOLUTION

Let's look at an example from another area of our modern life. I graduated from high school in 1992 - I know - I'm nearly forty! When I graduated, senior pictures were a big deal. As graduation day drew near, I made my appointment with Don, one of the local photographers, and on the appointed day, came with several outfits and gave my best smile to his very expensive and very exclusive cameras and equipment. A few hundred dollars and a few weeks later, I picked up a little box full of enough pictures to give to all of my friends.

But somewhere between then and now, everything changed. The digital camera was invented. Photo editing software became widely available and YouTube taught everyone how to take and make pictures like the pros. I am now an amazing photographer because I have a digital camera and a little program called Picasso to edit my pictures. Now, any high school kid can take their own senior pictures. That is not to discount the work of professional photographers - they still have expertise to offer - but I think we can all agree that the playing field has been leveled and unlike twenty years ago, the tools to take and make great photos have been placed in our hands. We can see it in other places as well - making music, designing websites, interior design, and so on.

In all of these instances:

- ☼ First the playing field changed with innovations in technology and the sharing of information.
- ☼ Right on the heels of that innovation however, came a conversion of belief.

Before the digital camera, we believed that great photography came from professional photographers and professional photographers alone. We on the other hand, were relegated to poor quality snapshots. Slowly and surely though, our beliefs about photography changed. It didn't happen overnight. We saw our friend's new digital camera and thought it was neat but it would never catch on. Then we saw their photos. Amazing! Cameras got cheaper and easier to use. Software got cheaper and then free. "How To" books were published. Websites popped up dedicated to helping me, the average Joe, take amazing photographs. Suddenly we were empowered to be great photographers. A revolution had taken place and we didn't even know it.

## THE LANGUAGE LEARNING REVOLUTION

A revolution is taking place in language learning as well. The innovation has come, the technology is here and the resources are abundant. The missing piece is the change in beliefs of learners like you. You need to be empowered to be a self-directed language learner.

That is the goal of this guide; to empower, to encourage and to educate. As I have thought about this, have worked to become a self-directed language learner of Turkish and begun coaching others along their own language

learning journeys, I have come to recognize that one of the first tasks in shifting beliefs from a teacher directed mindset to a self-directed mindset is to give you an understanding of how to go about learning language.

In the classroom, the teacher did all this for you. And so if the shift is to take place, it is essential that this new way of thinking be adequately explained so that you, the everyday language learner can be empowered to be successful. It is what I work to do at my **blog** and will inevitably be a broad and evolving discussion. My hope is that this comprehensive guide will help you think about language learning in this new paradigm and lead you into the amazing life of the language learner.

It goes without saying that nothing here is new. These ideas are merely my slant on the great corpus of work that has already been presented by others. Hopefully, my perspective on these ideas will be helpful. Before we go any further however, I want to take a moment to talk with you about the secret ingredient to language learning.

## THE LANGUAGE LEARNER'S SECRET INGREDIENT

The first and perhaps most important ground rule for language learners is the idea of comprehensible input. This is the secret ingredient and is the bedrock upon which all language learning rests. It is an idea that has been around for some time, but was articulated most clearly by a professional language guy named Stephen Krashen.<sup>1</sup> The idea behind comprehensible input is that languages are acquired in one way: when we understand messages - when we understand what people tell us or what we read. We



don't need to understand every word and every grammar form, but we do need to understand the basic message that the speech or text is carrying.

Let me explain with an example. If, as a new Turkish learner, I had turned on a radio program about medical science, I would have heard a great deal of Turkish, but would have understood nothing. No learning would have taken place and for the most part, I would have wasted my time.

On the other hand, if I had turned on the television to the children's cartoon, *Dora the Explorer* which is on CNBC every Saturday morning here in Istanbul, I would have seen Dora and her sidekick monkey Boots walking down a yellow road toward a castle on a hill. If you have kids you know what I am talking about. Dora narrates everything she does, telling me that she is walking, walking, walking as I see her walking. When she needs help figuring out a problem, a song begins to play. “Çanta, çanta -- Çanta, çanta!” the song goes (in Turkish) as her “backpack” comes to life and begins to help. Similarly when Dora and Boots are lost, the “harita” song begins as Dora's “map” comes to life on the screen and shows us where to go.



Knowing very little Turkish, I was easily able to understand a great deal of what Dora was talking and singing about. I actually remember learning the words for dig, climb, crawl, jump and many others, backpack and map included, from my Saturday mornings with my two kids and Dora.

I think you get the picture. Most of *Dora the Explorer* is in the realm of comprehensible input. While Dora is fun and entertaining, where we get our comprehensible input from matters very little. A grammar class, a text book and *Dora the Explorer* can all give forms of comprehensible input. The difference is in the quantity and the quality.

Regardless of how boring a text book or grammar based class may be, comprehensible input is present. But, where in the past these seemed to be the only option for learning another language, today there are literally hundreds of more efficient and effective - not to mention fun - ways to go about learning another language - *Dora the Explorer* included. So no matter what you do, the fact remains that in order to learn a language you need to expose yourself to comprehensible input, and the more the better.

## THE ROAD MAP TO SUCCESS

Understanding the importance and power of comprehensible input is a great place to begin as a self-directed language learner. But it is hardly enough to build a language learning journey around. It is the foundation, but the house still needs to be built. With *The Everyday Language Learner's Guide to Getting Started*, I want to give you the tools and know-how so that you are empowered to take charge of your language learning from beginning to end. To do this, I'll begin with my own language





learning journey, sharing with you the lessons I learned as I worked to master German, Spanish and then Turkish. I'll then give detailed instructions about how to set up a personal language learning program. For many this is the single greatest challenge when learning outside of the structure and direction of a classroom. I also want to give you three principles, that when applied will allow you to maximize your time and effort, giving you more bang for your buck in everything you do. I'll also give you real world examples of how you can put these principles into practice. Finally, be sure and visit the resources page at the back of this guide or the online version at The Everyday Language Learner website. A big part of creating an amazing personal language learning program is knowing where to find the best tools for the job and the resource page is a great place to begin for this.

My goal with this guide is to empower you; to help you understand that you don't need a degree in Spanish to learn Spanish.

My goal with this guide is to empower you; to help you understand that you don't need a degree in Spanish to learn Spanish. My desire is to bring language learning out of the ivory towers of the academic world and into the homes of the average, everyday language learner. In it all, I hope more than anything else, to help you become a more efficient and more effective language learner who has a lot more fun on the journey.

Let's get started!

# A LANGUAGE LEARNER'S JOURNEY



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# AN EPIC FAILURE, A LONG SLOW SLOG AND A JOYOUS JOURNEY

While I have divided this section into three parts, there is but one character - me - however, there are three languages, German, Spanish and Turkish. This then is the story of my epic failure with German, my long, slow slog through Spanish and my joyous journey into Turkish. In sharing both my failure and my successes with you, I hope that together we can begin to discover what it takes to be a self-directed, independent language learner.

Before I begin though, I should probably also add that the first language I learned was English and the method I used was really quite complicated. First of course, I had to be born. This didn't require much of me personally, but it was the beginning. After being born I had to listen for nearly five years. It occupied every moment of my time as I interacted with my family and their friends and eventually with my friends. It was tough too, because when I didn't understand something, which was most of the time at first, I had no way of clarifying what anyone was saying or even letting them know I didn't understand. They just kept talking and I kept listening. Pretty soon I got it. I don't know how I got it, but I did. By the time I was five years old I could pretty much use the English language without ever messing up any grammar forms or mispronouncing any words - except that I had a slight problem saying the "S" sound after my big teeth came in crooked, but I figured that one out too.

I write that last section tongue in cheek, but I do want to point out one thing that I think we often take for granted when we say things like, "Kids learn language so easily." Five years of constant immersion doesn't sound

all that easy. So while we were not conscientiously “studying” the language, we did spend the majority of everyday immersed in and learning it. As adults, if we were to mimic our first five years of life as we learn our new language, I assume we too would “naturally” become fluent. It makes one wonder if academic study is not just a bit overrated. But I will leave that topic for the linguists and researchers among us.

## MY EPIC FAILURE WITH GERMAN

For now I will skip ahead to my senior year at tiny Tabor College in central Kansas where I was a care free English major. The day before classes began I wandered into my advisor’s office only to be informed that, if I wanted to graduate in May, I needed to take a year of foreign language and the lone Spanish class was full. I was doomed! Doomed until I found out that there was a German class available. I signed up.



As a kid growing up in rural Kansas, I had no real interest in learning another language and was, at that point, in great need of a language learning motivational speaker. Two semester’s of German later, I passed with all C’s and graduated. As I look back now, my German professor was pretty good. He did a lot of things well and a few things great but unfortunately none of it was enough to overcome my total lack of motivation which lead to my epic failure to actually learn any German.

As I remember back, I had no understanding of what it might mean to take control of my own learning. My teacher was in charge and I was a passive member of his class. We were definitely functioning in the old paradigm of the teacher directed classroom. Even had my motivation been higher, I would have had no idea how to go about learning the language on my own without the expertise of the teacher and the resources he provided.

Many of you can look back at your high school Spanish or French classes and find much the same results. While I do think that better teaching methods are needed, perhaps the biggest challenge a high school foreign language teacher needs to work on is finding ways to motivate their students to want to learn. Teachers have to convince students that there is a reason. Without a reason for learning, even the best methods and most dynamic teachers will surely fail. Teachers also need to give their students a chance to experience tangible progress. One of the best ways to do both of these is to empower students to take control of their own learning.

So I completed a year of a traditionally taught German class and in the end could say little more than common greetings and a small list of vocabulary words. It was probably a bit more than that, but I share my epic failure with you to let you know that language learning is more about mindset and the right tools than about anything else. I hope my German experience gives you hope. You may have read that section nodding your head as your own experience resonated with mine. You too may look back on your language learning up to this point and recognize it as an “epic failure.” But my journey didn’t end there and yours doesn’t need to either. Thankfully, even in my failure, there was also a whole lot of stuff that I didn’t know I had gotten from the class, which came up three months later when I began to learn Spanish.



## MY LONG, SLOW SLOG THROUGH SPANISH

As an English major with no real prospect for a job and no real plan for life after graduation, when my friend Travis asked if I wanted to tag along to Tijuana, Mexico with him, another friend and a family who were thinking about moving there to work among the urban poor with a local church, I jumped at the opportunity. One hot September morning, we loaded into one of those old travel vans whose back bench seats turn into a bed and off we went. The experience was a powerful one and soon I too was planning on moving to Tijuana in February.



I didn't speak a word of Spanish at the time, but I had five months, so I set to work. Unlike my German experience, I was motivated. I had a reason and a purpose, so I checked out a beginning Spanish grammar book from the library. I talked to my friends still in college who were taking Spanish 1. I distinctly remember sitting on a bench one fall afternoon as my friend Dave made this list of verbs and explained how verb conjugation worked. I went home and began making lists and lists of conjugated verbs. I made flash cards of all the common words I could think of and studied them religiously. While the Internet did not yet exist for me, I was able to assemble a number of resources, buying a Spanish dictionary and a CD called *In Flight Spanish*. Motivation was high and on my own I began to attack learning Spanish. I didn't know it, but I

had stepped out of the teacher directed mindset and into the paradigm of the independent, self-directed language learner.

I had no idea what I was doing though. I created systems for myself based only on my explorations and experiences and proceeded in a very haphazard manner to learn lots of Spanish words and a lot about the basics of Spanish grammar. I did quite well. By February I had a base of understanding and I found myself nearly on par with my two friends who had taken Spanish in both high school and college. I had high hopes that I would now be able to take a class or get a tutor and my Spanish would grow and I would be able to come to a point of “being fluent.”

After moving to Tijuana, we lived and worked with the urban poor. There were roofs to fix, houses to build, kids to feed and because we had the time and the know-how, we soon found ourselves in the constant whirl of meeting needs. The idea of taking a class soon slipped to the back burner. My own study of the language fluctuated in a way that never approached any kind of real consistency. I lived in Tijuana Mexico for nine months with four other Americans in the same house. Simple conversations in Spanish were all I could muster and on my final day as I was saying goodbye to the church we had served, I could do little more than say “God bless you” and “goodbye”.

I was discouraged by the results but not defeated. Over the next few years, I continued to work at learning Spanish on my own. I continued learning, always in the same haphazard way, but always making small gains. My wife’s mother is Bolivian and so after a year of marriage and saving like crazy, we took a year off to travel and found ourselves with tickets to Bolivia. As the trip approached, I again poured myself into study and word lists and

reading a Spanish language newspaper, dictionary firmly in hand. My time in Bolivia found me more fluent than I had been in Mexico and it was another boost forward.

Returning from our year off, we settled in St. Paul, Minnesota where I began to work at getting my English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching credentials and we continued to be in contact with Spanish speakers. A household of guys from El Salvador down the street became frequent guests as we helped them fill out job applications, pay traffic fines, sign up for cable TV and a host of other jobs that they struggled to accomplish working 70 hours a week with no opportunity to learn English.

A few years later we found ourselves signed up with our local church to go to Mazatlan, Mexico to serve the urban poor. Again, I poured myself into study as the trip approached and again I found my Spanish ahead of where I had been in our trip to Bolivia. After a week with our group, we stayed on and I took the first Spanish class I had ever taken. I realize now that while I had been functioning in a self-directed, independent way, I still believed that the key for me to move on to the next level was found in a classroom under the expertise of a teacher. This class I supposed would be the boost I needed. After one week of one on one instruction and conversation however, I was getting closer to fluency, but realized that I still had a long way to go.

After my son was born, we chose to move back to my wife's home of Freeman, a small town of around 1,000 in very rural South Dakota. At the time, I wondered if my opportunities to interact with Spanish speakers had come to a close. I needn't have worried though as we soon found more Spanish speakers than we could have imagined there in our very rural surroundings. They were working at local farms, at a small local meat packing plant and at the local green house. Most spoke very little English and many soon began stopping by when they needed help

making an appointment at the doctor or for their car to get worked on or to fill out an application for a second job. Once again, my Spanish began to improve and while I still did not consider myself fluent, I felt as if I could pretty easily get there if only I could get into an immersion situation. Throughout this journey, I definitely took control of my language learning, but didn't really have the tools or resources to maximize what I was doing. I would read newspapers or novels with a dictionary in one hand and a notebook in the other. At one point I began journaling in Spanish. But I never listened to Spanish on my own. I knew little about what I should be doing and even less about what I could be doing. And that is where my Spanish journey was put on hold.

## A JOYOUS JOURNEY INTO TURKISH

At that point in my language learning journey, I had spent two semesters in a German class in college and about ten years learning Spanish off and on and mostly on my own. After I share the next part of the journey - Turkish - I will revisit all of them to see what we can glean from and about the process of learning languages. But now, to Turkish.

When some friends invited us to consider coming to Turkey, the idea seemed out of the question. But the more we thought and prayed about it, the more the idea grew on us and in January of 2008, we along with our two kids and sixteen pieces



of luggage, found ourselves boarding a plane in Sioux Falls, SD en-route to Istanbul, Turkey.

You will notice that from this point on I speak not of *my* learning, but of *our* learning. This is an important distinction to make for it was the first time that my wife and I (and our kids) were on the same journey. My wife's Spanish was light years beyond mine and so we never shared in starting together from scratch. But now that we were on the plane, we were officially entering the interesting life of the expat language learner together.

Our Turkish journey had begun a few months earlier with our purchase of *Rosetta Stone* and a two week training course aimed not at teaching us Turkish, but at helping us develop the skills and foster the knowledge to be self-directed language learners. This course was an invaluable experience and gave me, for the first time, the know-how and empowerment to be a successful language learner. After an initial few weeks of getting ourselves settled, we began to work toward learning Turkish in earnest. Living in a culture where few neighbors speak even a word of English created a make or break experience of immersion that did much to propel us on our journey.

We began at once to work a few hours everyday with language helpers that friends helped us find. My helper - not a tutor or teacher - was a university student and my wife worked with a single lady. Neither of the helpers spoke any English so we at once recorded a whole list of password phrases<sup>2</sup> that we had found in a Turkish resource book we had been given. With this list of phrases to help us access the language, we began to work on basic survival skills while at the same time beginning to build a strong foundation of understanding in the language.

I decided that the beginning was the best time to work on getting pronunciation and accent right so I worked a little bit every lesson on focused pronunciation practice. I began to do TPR<sup>3</sup> type of activities and each day I read aloud from children's books and other materials that provided comprehensible input. I also began almost at once to



journal in Turkish. These journals were a bit like in their grammar and structure, but each time I corrected them with my language helper, I got a bit more familiar with the language. I also began recording these and other materials to listen to on the bus or out walking.

Out in the community I began to work to control the things I was hearing using **strategic shopping**, the **dumb/smart question** and various other tactics to set the parameters of most interactions with Turks and ensure that I was getting comprehensible input. I carried a small notebook with me everywhere, pulling it out any time something stumped me and writing it down so that these real life situations became the content for the core of my language learning focus. I was consistently working at the language six days a week and even on my Sabbath day, Turkish was impossible to avoid.

After about a month, my command of Turkish had far outmatched my command of German and after my first six months, I could do with my Turkish what ten years of study had allowed me to do with my Spanish.

It was during these first years that I also began reading in earnest about second language acquisition and the ideas for this guide began to form in my mind. That is where I am at today - still learning Turkish while I work to help others learn the language of their choice.

## LESSONS LEARNED

So that is my journey. Three languages. Three very different approaches. With each there was much that I learned about language learning and about languages and these lessons built on one another in a very productive

way. To bring this chapter to a close, I offer this list of eight lessons I learned. It is by no means a complete list, but it is a reflection of what I consider most important.

1. My German study was not a waste. While I cannot speak a word of it now, when I began studying Spanish I distinctly remember thinking how much my time in German class helped me understand different aspects of Spanish. It was a springboard of sorts and made many things easier. So take heart. If, like me, you look back with regret on a year of Spanish or French or any language for that matter, there is much from that study that will be useful when you begin to learn another language. It also gives me a lot of hope. I had no knowledge of what I was doing then. But I have changed! My German failure is not the end of the story.
2. Motivation is one of the biggest factors in a language learner's success. If you are reading this, you probably already have the motivation. Motivation is the fuel that feeds the language learning journey. Now the task is to sustain that motivation. If you haven't yet, read my **free guide** on this subject.
3. Motivation is not enough because motivation will always wane. It is fleeting. It is the story of my ten years of Spanish. Scheduling a trip would often provide enough motivation for a one or two month sprint of focused study, but as soon as I was back - no matter how bad I wanted to continue improving - I always let Spanish study fall to the wayside.
4. Consistency is key. Two things create consistency - motivation and habits. Moving to a country does much to prolong motivation, but even that will wane. I know many who live as expats with only a

survival level of the language and if that is what you want, that is fine, but if you want to go further then you need to establish language learning as a habitual part of your life. Before you do anything else, I think your first priority should be to establish daily interaction with the language as a habitual part of your life.

5. In my time in Spanish, I rarely had any idea how I was doing and never really understood where I wanted to get nor how to get there. I always knew I had a long way to go to be where I would like to be, but that was about it. This changed dramatically as I stepped into Turkish. Having a plan and the ability to set goals and assess my progress did much to help sustain motivation and commitment toward learning.
6. My time working with Turkish has been far more effective, efficient and fun because I took intentional steps to maximize the amount of comprehensible input I was receiving. When I started studying Turkish, I knew what I was doing! This has been and made the biggest difference in my Turkish journey and is the subject of Chapter 5, *The Three Principles*.
7. Time is money. Not in the same sense that we usually think of this saying, but the number one defining difference between my level of German, Spanish and Turkish is the time that I put into each of them. My Spanish surpassed my German in hours studied in the first month. In six months of studying Turkish I surpassed my total hours spent on Spanish over ten years. When you are having fun and experiencing success at anything, you tend to want to keep at it. And the goal of this guide is to empower you to be successful!

8. Finally, anyone and everyone can learn another language. As I have worked toward knowing both Spanish and Turkish, I have met so many people of all ages, education levels and from all sorts of backgrounds who are learning another language and learning it well. Language learning is not an exclusive club. It is not overly difficult. It requires time and motivation and we can all find both of these if we desire. If I can learn another language, you can too.

These are a few of the lessons that I have learned on my journey. They are important lessons and I am grateful for the experience I have had in each of these languages. The outcomes were different, as were the methods, but from each I have learned valuable lessons that make learning Turkish a lot more fulfilling and successful. They are also the foundation of my coaching, my writing at the blog and this book and I am glad to be able to pass them on with the hope that I might play some small part in helping others learn another language as well.

3

# SETTING THE COURSE

# SETTING THE COURSE FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS

For most of our lives, teachers have directed our learning. They have provided the structure and direction and have been the experts who've provided evaluation. They have been the pilot while we sat in the back as passive passengers on their journey. In asking you to consider the life of the independent, self-directed language learner, I realize that the thought may be a bit overwhelming. What do I do? Where do I begin? How do I set goals for myself? How do I know if what I'm doing is actually working? These and other questions are what I hope to answer in this section. Now would be a good time to print off the two worksheets I have included with the guide. They are ***Worksheet One: Getting Started Planning*** and **Worksheet Two: The Weekly Planner**. Before we get to those however, I'll start with an analogy.

## PART 1: FREE TRIP TO ISTANBUL

John was a twenty something working as a computer programmer for a firm in Kansas City. He enjoyed his work, his circle of friends and was an active member of his community. But John also had a dream. It wasn't a big dream and he had never really done anything about it, but it was there, lodged in the back of his mind, waiting for the opportune time to be



realized. You see John always wanted to travel the world. He had read books about far off places as a child and had begun subscribing to *National Geographic* as an adult, and had even gotten his passport but he had yet to get out and actually travel. Then one day, he entered a contest and won a free round trip ticket to Istanbul, Turkey. Airfare and hotel stay were included! John was excited to say the least and immediately ordered the *Lonely Planet Guide to Turkey* from Amazon.

On the appointed day, John stepped onto a plane in Kansas City and headed to Istanbul. Upon arriving, he was met at the airport by a representative who drove him through the massive city to the hotel at which he would be staying. It was six pm and after grabbing a bite to eat in the hotel restaurant, John stopped by the front desk.

“Excuse me,” he asked the man stationed there, “but what are the best places to see in Istanbul and how do I go about seeing them?”

The man smiled and replied, “Well, that all depends of course. There is much to see, much more than you will be able to see in your time here. And there are two ways to see it. The first way is to join a tour. It costs more, but a bus will stop by the hotel at 8:00 am every morning to pick up guests and take them to the great sites of the city. It is an all inclusive program. But you will need to follow their schedule and eat at the restaurants the tour has chosen which are proven to satisfy our western customers. The bus will return here at 6:00 pm sharp every night. You can figure that two to three hours will be spent each day on the bus in transit where you will enjoy the company of our other guests. People who choose the tour will see the major sites chosen to satisfy our western customers. Everything is taken care of on the tour.” The man paused smiling again at John.

Trying to take in the idea of a tour he asked, “So, what is the second option?”



The man smiled and nodded as he replied, “You see the city on your own.”

John waited for the man to continue. When he didn’t, John asked, “Is that it?”

In answer, the man nodded again. That was it.

John was confused and a bit discouraged. “So what do you suggest?” he asked at last.

The man leaned forward then, as if he were sharing secret information and in a quiet voice shared his thoughts, “Those who take the tours see a great deal. They return with nice photographs and are satisfied with the meals. But by the end of the week, they inevitably seem a bit tired of our city and long to go home. And they never return. But those who see the city on their own,” the man paused, glancing around as if looking for eaves droppers before leaning in closer and saying in almost a whisper, “Those who see the city on their own, they sometimes never leave. The pictures they take are painted on their hearts.” He paused again, reached under the counter and tossed a fold out Istanbul city map toward John and finalized their conversation with, “Enjoy our city.” He turned then, exiting through a side door leaving John alone at the front desk. Reaching out, he picked up the map, looked at it and then turning, ran up the stairs to his room where his *Lonely Planet* awaited.

## PART 2: VAGABONDING THROUGH ISTANBUL

John returned to his room to plan his itinerary for the coming days. While he was a bit intimidated by the prospect of a self-directed tour of Istanbul in which he would be in charge of where he would go and when he

would return, the prospect was also invigorating. He had his *Lonely Planet Guidebook* and trusted that the man at the desk was right.

First, John had to decide what it was that he wanted to see. There were lots of choices but first he needed to answer the question:

### **“Where do I want to go?”**

After paging through his well marked guidebook, John decided that his first destination would be the Aya Sofya, the fourth century cathedral situated in the old district of the city. Pulling out a map of Istanbul, he found and marked the Aya Sofya. That is where he wanted to go.

What John needed now was to know how to get there. But before he could answer that question, he had to answer another question:

### **“Where am I right now?”**

John had been driven to the hotel through a city about which he knew nothing. And so it was that as he looked at his map with his destination so clearly marked, he had no idea how to get there because he did not yet know

where to begin. Grabbing the map, John ran down to the front desk where the man at the counter kindly circled the hotel in a neighborhood some distance from the Aya Sofya. Now that he knew the answer to the first two questions, John was ready to tackle the third question:

### **“How do I get from where I am to where I want to go?”**

As John looked at the map, he realized that he had quite a journey in front of him. He was in a neighborhood called Bostanci on the Asian side of Istanbul. The Aya Sofya was on the other side of the Bosphorus Straight on the European side of the city. There were no direct routes to his destination - John would have to use multiple forms of transportation with multiple stops along the way. Starting at the Aya Sofya and working backwards, John mapped out the major places where he would need to change transportation. John would first need to get from Bostanci to Kadikoy. At Kadikoy, John would need to find a way - a ferry boat he presumed - to cross the mile wide Bosphorus Straight. Once he had crossed the straight, he would need to find a way up the hill from the water front to the Aya Sofya. Rather than one long journey, John was now facing three smaller, more manageable journeys on which he would find clearly defined landmarks.

In this manner, John enjoyed his two week vacation in Istanbul. He made loads of friends, got to know the culture, saw a great many historic sites and when the man at the desk asked him about his stay as he was checking

out, John replied, “Could you direct me to a cheap youth hostel with wireless internet? My company has agreed to let me stay two more weeks as long as I complete a few projects.”

The man smiled wryly, “So your not leaving eh?”

“No. Not yet.”

The right path leads to where we want to go and the path that most often leads to success as a language learner is the independent, self-directed one.

## THE POWER OF CHOICE

I share this analogy to highlight the power of choosing to learn another language in a self directed, independent manner. Our success in any endeavor is often directly determined by the path we take to achieve our goal. The right path leads to where we want to go and the path that most often leads to success as a language learner is the independent, self-directed one.

Think back to your high school language course. You were not in charge and you did not direct your learning. In the end, you completed a ‘tour’ of Spanish or French, but you left it like yesterday’s news to move on to something else. When you were done with Spanish class, you were most likely done with Spanish. The reason is that too often the goal of the foreign language classroom is short sighted. The goal should not be to bring students to a certain level, but rather to build a foundation of language while fostering in students a love for the language and “giving them the tools to continue to improve on their own, to make them autonomous.”<sup>4</sup>

Thankfully, languages have a way of capturing our imaginations and so while I know of few people who actually left their high school language classes as autonomous, self-directed learners, most left with a sense at least that it would be nice to actually learn the language. In fact I have yet to meet anyone who is opposed to learning another language. Most think it is a good idea. Most however have no idea where to begin. In this section, I want to lay out a plan for knowing:

**1. Where do I want to go?**

**2. Where am I right now?**

**3. How do I get from where I am now, to where I want to go?**

Your ability to effectively answer these three questions, to identify the “end vision” and then work toward that vision, is one of the most important indicators of success for the independent learner. Language learning is a new and strange world that we have rarely experienced in our lives outside of the classroom. We can all relate to our analogy’s character John because, since childhood we have watched others find their way through cities they knew little about and have learned to do the same ourselves. I suspect that, put in John’s shoes, many of you would have chosen as he did, and even those of you who would lean toward signing up with the tour can easily understand how one might find their way around a city, even a foreign city. Finding your way has always been a part of life and for

the most part, it has always been a self-directed, independent task. It is even a part of America's national humor; men never ask for directions, right?

Unlike finding your way around a city though, language learning is an endeavor that has rarely been modeled as anything other than something done in a classroom. For many of us, the idea of being told to go out and learn a language on our own is about as unfathomable as being told to go out and overhaul the engine of our car. Even if we had a garage full of tools, we still would have no idea where to begin. I wouldn't anyway.

It is in this section then that I want to spend some time helping you think about navigating the language learning process. It is something that few of us have had any experience with and much of the independent language learning process is counter intuitive to how we have learned in the past. One of the great assets of the teacher directed model of learning was the presence of an expert who would tell us how we were doing and who laid out the path we would take on the journey. But as John discovered, that traditional method doesn't usually lead to the kind of life of learning that keeps us in the language long enough to actually learn it. Classroom based language learning usually finds its end in the final exam. But to be successful language learners we need to be empowered to keep going, to take control of our own learning and do what it takes to achieve our goals. Because of this, I now want to help you build a personal language learning program.

## STEP ONE: WHERE DO I WANT TO GO?

Yogi Berra once quipped, “If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up someplace else.” It was a classic Berra comment, but it strikes a cord for language learners. Understanding the end vision of your language learning should determine the path you choose in order to get there. Most will tell you that they want to be fluent.

Using a word like fluent as the goal of your learning is then a bit like not knowing where you’re going. And if this is the case, you’ll probably end up someplace else.

Unfortunately, the statement that I want to be “fluent” is too often bantered around with no real understanding of what “fluent” actually means. I am certainly not going to try and define it. So rather than choosing a squirrely and often debated word like fluent to be your goal, I want to encourage you to define where you want to be with a description of what you want to be able to do with the language. You see, one person’s ‘fluent’ is another person’s bumbling attempt to communicate. Using a word like fluent as the goal of your learning is then a bit like not knowing where you’re going. And if this is the case, you’ll probably end up someplace else.

Think about what you want to be able to do with the language. Do you want to be able to have a more enjoyable travel experience by being able to talk a bit with native speakers, get around on public transportation and order at restaurants? Are you planning on moving to a beach front home in Mexico for winters and need a basic level of Spanish? Are you planning on moving to the country and you want to make friends with whom you can enjoy good conversation about a broad range of topics? Or are you planning on working for a foreign firm where



you need to be able to do all your work duties in the language? Each of these will require a different level of the language and will require different paths to reach the goal.

Like John in Istanbul, your first goal is to identify where you want to get to as a speaker of the language you are learning. Think about the four scenarios above and realistically decide where you need to get in regards to your command of the language. I think it important as well that you allow yourself the freedom that comes in knowing that what you want may change with time and life experiences. If you start out thinking that you really want to get to a survival level of the language for example, you can always adjust that goal later. This will of course mean an adjustment in the path you are on, but you need to decide for yourself and take responsibility for your learning. Only you can decide on appropriate goals for language learning.

Now is the time to print off ***Worksheet One: Getting Started Planning*** and put it into play. To help you begin to think clearly about knowing where you want to go, I want to encourage you to take a moment to write a short paragraph in the first box of *Step One* on the worksheet which starts with the words, “*I want to be able to . . .*” List some of the practical day to day activities and tasks you want to be able to competently accomplish in the language you are learning. Think about the highest level you wish to attain. *I want to be able to buy bread* is far different than *I want to be able to read original research and write articles for publication in academic journals*.

In order to be a bit more precise, I have included a copy of the ACTFL<sup>5</sup> assessment grid on the worksheet. It is the simple version, but will give you a better handle on where you want to be with your language competence. You can find an expanded version in *The Everyday Language Learner’s Guide to Self-Assessment*, but for now, the place to start is by taking a few moments to study the chart and decide which of the levels you would like to attain.

Put some real thought into this. Be realistic while allowing yourself to think big. Circle the level you want to attain. This is your goal, a target toward which you can now work.

**ACTION:** Print out [Worksheet One: Getting Started Planning](#). Complete Step One of the worksheet before you move on.

## STEP TWO: WHERE AM I RIGHT NOW?

Now that you know the desired destination, the end vision, it is time to figure out your current level so that you can begin to plan your route forward. I want to encourage you to revisit ***Worksheet One: Getting Started Planning*** and briefly describe what you are currently able to do with the language. If you've yet to begin, your paragraph will be short and that's okay.

After writing your summary, revisit the ACTFL scale and identify where you are at on it. Don't let your ego get in the way. Lying to yourself may make you feel better, but it does nothing to help you get to your goal. And besides, you are the only one who needs to see this. If you feel like you are somewhere in between two levels, I would encourage you to choose the lower level. This will ensure that you get the motivational boost of moving to the next level sooner!

**ACTION:** Complete Step Two of [Worksheet One: Getting Started Planning](#) before you go further.

## SETTING THE PATH

Now we come to our third question, “*How do I get from where I am now, to where I want to go?*” Every path in life has a destination. Andy Stanley reminds us that, “*direction - not intention - determines our destination.*”<sup>6</sup> You will not learn the language with good intentions. You must put the pieces in place that will get you to your destination. If the path you choose - the tasks, activities and methods you use in your daily life to learn language - do not lead to your goal, you won’t get there.

Like John in our analogy, we now face two challenges. For John the question was in identifying the first destination on the journey to the Aya Sofya. For language learners it is in identifying the first things that we need to learn. This is our first challenge and I’ll come back to it in a second.

The second challenge is in thinking about how we will get to that destination. For John the options were many. He could ride the commuter train, take a minibus, a city bus or a taxi. He even could have walked. Was there a best method? Probably not, but some were definitely better than others. As language learners we face a similar challenge. Joan Rubin says

A solid language learning program then is built on the two questions of What do I need to learn? and How am I going to learn it?

that “*Once you have decided on what your objectives are, you will need to find the optimal learning environment in which they can be achieved.*”<sup>7</sup> A solid language learning program then is built on the two questions of What do I need to learn? and How am I going to learn it?

Before we move on, we also need to talk about your goals in regards to time. By when do you want to reach your goal? Just about anything is possible if you are willing to put in the effort. As we move on to the next session and begin creating a personal language learning plan, keep this in mind. If you have a lot of time and are wanting to get going quickly for example, you can probably learn a lot more in a given week than if you don’t have much time to devote to language learning. Beware though, that you want to put yourself in position to *feel* tangible results. Erwin McManus reminds us that “*we need to have a dream we are pursuing and at the same time experience enough of that dream to keep us inspired.*”<sup>8</sup>

## STEP THREE: WHAT DO I NEED TO LEARN?

In traditional educational settings the question of what we need to learn, and especially what do we need to learn next, rarely comes up. The teacher or textbook has been given the liberty of setting the course for the learner. It doesn’t take much to realize that this is not the “optimal learning environment.” Text books are often laid out in some sort of topical manner. Teachers choose to proceed from one grammar form to the next. None of this of course takes into account the objectives you, the learner, have for learning the language. You weren’t asked.

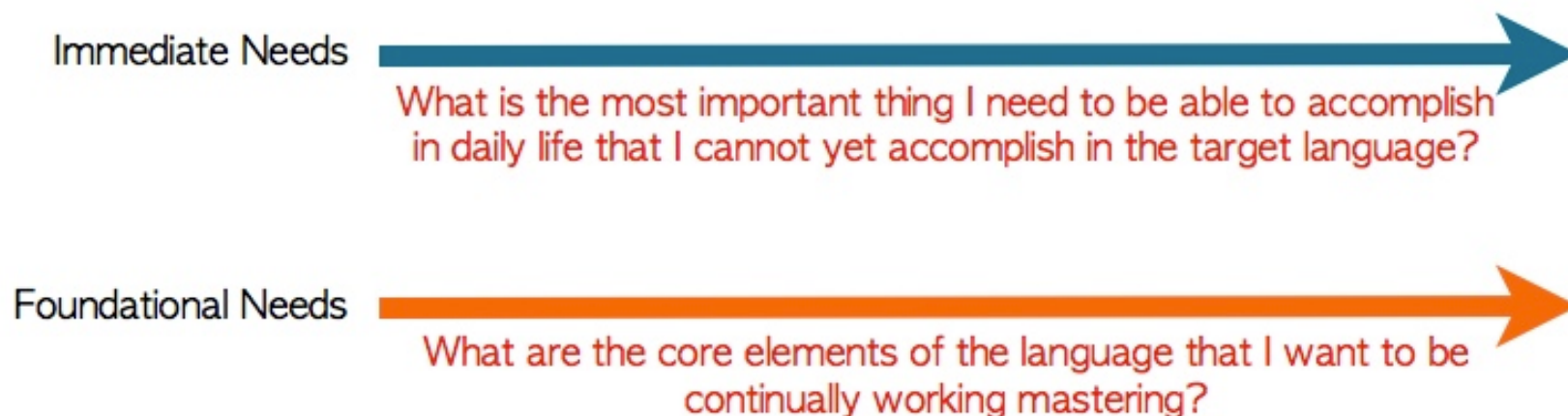
Well now I'm asking. The beauty of the process of identifying the end vision is that you can work backwards to where you are now in a way that reveals the next step in the journey. Then you can begin the journey by asking, *"What is the most important thing I could do to get to that next step?"* Everyone will have a different answer because everyone has different objectives. If you are leaving on a trip to go abroad next week, your first steps will look different than if you are planning a trip a year from now.

As you begin to think about your personal language learning program, also consider that in language learning, there should always be two parallel themes playing. The first is all about learning the skills necessary to survive with the language or the immediate needs. You'll want to learn the basics: saying hello and good-bye, yes and no and of course how to find a toilet. This theme is always asking the question, *"What is the most important thing I need to accomplish in daily life that I cannot yet accomplish in the target language?"* The answer to this question will drive one portion of your personal language learning program and I want to encourage you to take a moment to write down the first ten answers that come to mind on ***Worksheet One: Getting Started Planning***.

**ACTION:** Complete Step Three on [Worksheet One: Getting Started Planning](#) before moving on.

The second of our two parallel themes is the foundational needs. This is the meat and potatoes; the words, expressions and grammar structures that make up any language. There is less urgency here, but we must make consistent progress at building this foundation of understanding if we are to achieve our goals. This theme is

always asking the question: “*What are the core elements of the language that I want to be continually working mastering?*” Building this foundation won’t necessarily meet the most pressing language needs we have, but it is upon this foundation that our new language will be built.



To help you think about and plan for these two ideas, I have included a second worksheet called **Worksheet Two: The Weekly Planner**. It is a simple form with three weeks on it and it has been left blank so that you can fill it out yourself. You will notice that each week is divided into three sections: immediate needs, foundational needs and reflection. This sheet will act as a guide to get you started on your journey. After you finish reading the guide and completing our first worksheet, you will want to keep this one with your language learning materials or somewhere close at hand.

For immediate needs, choose one to two of the ten things you wrote down earlier. Those are the things you want to learn in week one. Do the same for weeks two and three. For now I would stop at week three. You're new at this and you'll need a few weeks to discover your rhythm and pace.

Now think about the foundation section. Think about the core elements of any language. Language is made up of words of course and grammatical structures. It is also made up of individual and collective sounds and rhythms. There is also body language, common expressions and every language is intimately connected to culture. All of these are foundational to language. For now, start with a few of the major pieces that you can begin to build in your particular environment. Again, fill this out through week three to give yourself time to find out what works for you.

Below I have included a sample of this weekly planner. As you can see, I have first written down a few of the things that I want to learn or work on in both the immediate needs and the foundational needs box. Again, this is what I want or need to learn. The next step, which we'll talk about in a minute, will be to identify how I will go about actually learning them.



Immediate Needs	Foundational Needs	Review
<p>basic greetings, gratitude</p> <p>leave takings</p> <p>how to ask where something is (bathroom, bank, museum, etc)</p>	<p>vocabulary building</p> <p>learn the present tense</p> <p>↑</p> <p>↖</p> <p>The first step is to identify and write down what you want to learn!</p>	

## STEP FOUR: HOW WILL I LEARN IT?

Now that you have identified what you need and want to learn, the task is to figure out how you will go about learning it. Now is the time to think about methods and resources and learning activities. Like John in our analogy, you have identified where you want to go, now you need to choose a vehicle to get there. You will do this by:

1. Identifying all available resources for language learning.
2. Choosing the best resources for you.

The first step in identifying how you will learn the language is to take inventory - what resources are available to you? If you are reading this book, you probably have access to the Internet. In the Resource Section I have include a robust list of live links to many great learning resources online. You can also visit the *Getting Started Resource Page* at The Everyday Language Learner website. Other resources to consider are text based resources like dictionaries, grammar books, work books and regular reading material in the target language. Think also of the available opportunities to interact with native speakers. Finally, are there any language courses or conversation groups in your area. Use ***Worksheet One: Getting Started Planning*** to compile a thorough list.

**ACTION:** Complete Step Four on [Worksheet One: Getting Started Planning](#) before moving on.

As you look at this list, there are a few factors that will determine which ones will most help you create an “optimal learning environment”. Don’t worry too much about what you have read on someone’s blog or in a book or have been told by a well meaning friend. You need to choose what’s best for you. The number one rule here is that you take responsibility for your own learning. Before you choose any method, program or language learning tool you need to consider your personal learning style, available time, convenience and program cost.

The first and perhaps most important factor is your personal learning style. If you look back at your life, I hope you will see that you have continued to learn even after school. Problems have needed to be solved, new hobbies have been learned and life has given you lots of opportunity to figure out which way you like to learn best.

Think about work. When something new is introduced, would you rather figure it out on your own, figure it out with a partner or go to a seminar and have someone explain it to you? Think about a new hobby you picked up. Did you learn it by buying books and perusing the internet and then just going for it or did you sign up for a community ed class?

**You need to make the best choices for you.** If you are not a self starter, have a hard time with ambiguity but love to learn in the interactive setting of a classroom - then sign up for a class! Sign up because it is the best choice for your learning style, your personality and your life situation. But don't sign up because it's easier not to have to prepare. Know yourself. Know what you want. And then get it done. And don't worry if you are not sure which method or activity best suits your learning style or personality. Begin by making the best choice that you can, hold your choice lightly and make changes if and when you realize there might be a better fit.

Also remember that cost, available time and convenience are all factors and need to be weighed as you choose how to learn the language. Think first about what would create the “optimal learning environment” and then factor in the practical concerns that real life presents. Somewhere in the middle is the place where you can learn. One of the great benefits of our modern world is that you can find so much online for free. There is no risk - outside of a few hours spent - to trying some of these great programs. And there is no excuse for not creating the language learning program that best fits you.

I want to again walk through an example of what this process of choosing might look like. Let's say that I want to learn all of the basic greetings and survival phrases in a certain language. I have choices! I can find most of what I need to learn online with audio for free. I can purchase a phrasebook or an *In Flight* audio series for

about \$10.00. I can spend more on a *Pimsleur* CD series. Or I can find a native speaker - much easier than you might think - and ask them to help me. All of these are valid and will help me learn how to ask where the bathroom is.

If we look at the more foundational learning of language structures, I again have choices. Free online programs like ***Livemocha*** and ***Busuu*** will both get me started with the language.

I can buy a grammar text and workbooks or any of the *Teach Yourself* series of books. I can spend quite a bit more to have *Rosetta Stone* or I could sign up for a class. I could also sit down with native speakers, either in person or through Skype on the Internet and learn from them. My unique situation will dictate what is best for me and in the end, I'll probably be using several of these resources at the same time. It is my responsibility to find the “*optimal learning environment*” for me. And now, it is your responsibility too.

It is my responsibility to find the “optimal learning environment” for me. And now, it is your responsibility too.

Immediate Needs	Foundational Needs	Review
<p>basic greetings, gratitude</p> <p><i>leave takings</i></p> <p><i>how to ask where something is (bathroom, bank, museum, etc)</i></p> <p>-----</p> <p>I'll use my phrasebook and make flash cards for all expressions</p>	<p><i>vocabulary building</i></p> <p><i>learn the present tense</i></p> <p>----</p> <p>create flashcards from new words that come up in my study time</p> <p>use Teach Yourself book to get started with present tense</p> <p>Write 3 journals of what I did to be corrected by a native speaker and recorded</p>	<p>The next step is to identify and write down how you will go about learning it.</p>

## REFLECTION

The third section, *reflection*, will allow you to evaluate how you are doing. You can find a more robust evaluation in *The Everyday Language Learner's Guide to Self-Assessment*, but for now, this brief review should be enough to get you off to a good start. In this section, you will want to make brief notes at the end of each week about what went well, what didn't go well and what you think you could change to be more effective. Be gracious with yourself, but ruthless in your evaluation of the activities, tasks and methods you are using. Let me explain what I mean by this. If in week one you set a goal to learn 100 new words, but only got to 75, be gracious with yourself. You learned 75 new words after all. Great Job! But be ruthless as you evaluate what you were doing to learn them. If traditional flashcards didn't work well because they were forgotten at home each day, switch to a

computer based flashcard program that you can work on throughout your work day in a time sensitive manner as you sit at your desk. Find what works for you. I for one tried a computer based program but switched back to flashcards. They fit my style.

Immediate Needs	Foundational Needs	Review
<p>basic greetings, gratitude</p> <p><i>leave takings</i></p> <p><i>how to ask where something is</i> -----</p> <p>I'll use my phrasebook and make flash cards for all expressions</p>	<p>And finally, you will want to reflect at the end of each week so that you can evaluate what went well, what needs improvement and figure out how to find that "optimal language learning environment" for you. →</p>	<p><i>Pretty good week of study. I like the flashcards and The Teach Yourself book, but feel like I could do a bit more. This week I just studied whenever. I want to make a plan. Next week 30 min. in the morning, 15 min. at lunch and 30 at night. I also want to meet with my native speaking friend. Journaling was really hard. Next week maybe just sentences.</i></p>

It is your responsibility to create a personal language learning program that will help you learn the language. Do it yourself or enlist the help of friends or a language coach, but in the end you need to make the call. Choose activities and methods and make a plan. If you are still having trouble getting started, consider signing up for *The Ten Week Journey* at The Everyday Language Learner blog. Find out what is working for others. Find out what

works for you and begin to do it. Begin today and don't stop until you have achieved your goals. Hundreds of thousands have learned languages before you and now I hope, you have been empowered to do the same.



# THE THREE PRINCIPLES

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4

# THREE PRINCIPLES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS

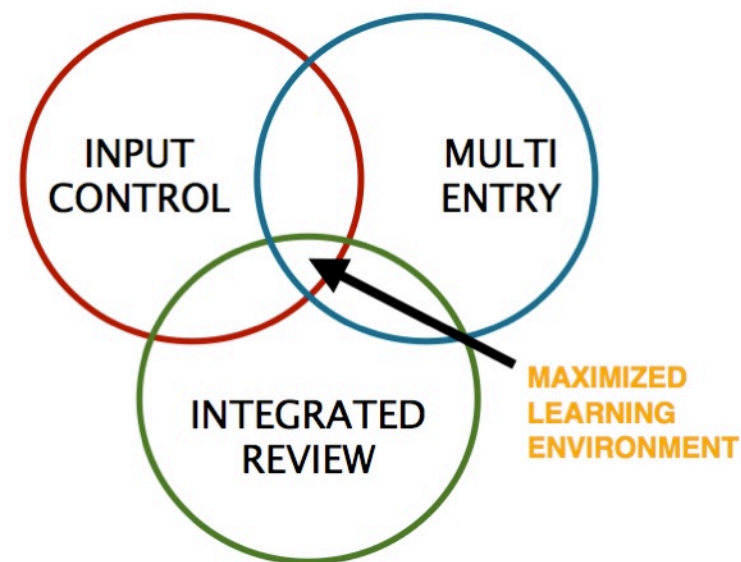
I hope that you now feel some level comfort with the idea of planning your own language learning journey. You should now have the tools to take charge and get started and the ability to make a plan for your language learning. With what we have covered so far, you should be able to do pretty well. I don't want you to just do pretty well though. I want you to do amazingly well. I want you to be a rockstar language learner who finds immediate and lasting success. I want you to be a super hero language learner with a red cape. And so with this next section, I want to introduce you to three principles that will allow you to maximize any method or activity you choose to use to learn the language. By using these three principles, you will be able to take your language learning to a whole new level.

The three principles can be thought of as a framework around which you can build a language learning journey. It is upon this framework that you can be more effective, more efficient and have a lot more fun - *yes fun* - learning the language of your choice. Productivity guru David Allen says that *the highest performing people I know are those who have the best tricks in their lives*. The framework, while not exactly tricks, can be applied no matter what method you are using to learn, be it a language class, a text book, a tutor or a purely community based learning method.

These three ideas are ways I have found to truly maximize the language learning journey while also giving me a way to evaluate activities, resources and experiences to determine if they are worth my time and effort.

**The three principles are:**

1. The more you take control of the input you receive, the more opportunities for comprehensible input you will have.
2. The more ways you find to enter into engagement with the language, the more deeply and quickly you will learn.
3. The more ways you find to integrate review into your language learning the more you will retain of the language.



For the sake of brevity, I will refer to these as: Input Control, Multi Entry and Integrated Review. In the next section I will elaborate on each of these principles, explaining them in detail, giving you a better understanding of how they affect our language learning. In the proceeding chapter I will attempt to put some meat to the ideas,

offering real examples of how to implement these in a personal language learning program as an everyday language learner.

## INPUT CONTROL

If it is not already evident, it should be stated that while comprehensible input is what we need in order to learn a language, it does not grow on trees. In fact, the harsh reality is that comprehensible input is often rather difficult to find on our own. But find it we must if we intend to learn a new language. To do this, we must take control of not only our own learning, but of every input we receive in the new language.

In the past, our teachers did this for us in our language classes - or at least they should have. Outside of the teacher directed classroom however, I think we at times live as though our only option in language learning is to throw ourselves into the gale and hope for the best. We head out into the community only to come back frazzled by the onslaught of the high-speed speech of shop owners and friendly strangers, little of which we understood. We turn on the television and watch a half an hour of a sitcom or the news in the target language and come away feeling more than a bit defeated. We pick up a 1,000 page Leo Tolstoy novel, because - hey we're learning Russian - spend 30 minutes on the first page, write down 45 new words in our little "new words" notebook, look them up in our new Russian dictionary and wonder if Tolstoy was such a good choice after all. We have thrown ourselves into the storm with no anchor to hold on to.

Is that what this self-directed language learning is all about? Personally, if this were the case, I'd dust off the text book, sign up for the next class I could find and hope for the best. Thankfully this is not what self-directed language learning is all about. In all three of these situations, one thing was missing - control. Without giving yourself control over the input, without being able to set the parameters of your interaction with the language, comprehensible input will continue to be difficult, if not impossible to find.

Control gives you, the learner, the opportunity to find and create more comprehensible input in a number of ways. Control allows you to foster a learning environment that is rich in background knowledge while creating situations that allow you to anticipate what is coming next. Control allows you to start small and manage the expansion as your command of the language grows. Control allows you to always be focusing in the next thing, the next grammar form or the next topic that you are ready to learn. And control empowers you to evaluate resources so that you can find the most effective uses of your time.

But what does it mean to give yourself control? The phrase “control freak” or images of the Soup Nazi from *Seinfeld* may come to mind. Thankfully, you do not need to be a jerk to give yourself control over the input you receive. While “control” as a word does not always carry the most positive undertones, we do all understand the unpleasant feeling of being “out of control.” To reframe things just a bit, think of managing, steering or directing your input. We can also think of taking command,



giving leadership or setting the parameters of your input or you could think of limiting or constraining your input. However you think about it, removing as much “chance” from the input you receive - especially at the beginning - is an important element to creating a maximized learning environment.

## TYPES OF INPUT

Before we move on though, we should probably define more clearly the idea of input. Input is any message that your mind encounters - the spoken word, the written word, your own thoughts and subsequently your own spoken or written words. All of these are input. In order to better know how to control each interaction thereby creating comprehensible input, it is helpful to classify sources of input into two categories: Live Input and Recorded Input.<sup>9</sup>

## LIVE INPUT

Live input results when we interact with another human being. Other human beings have a mind, they make choices, they are emotional and they have ideas about which they want to talk. They are also often terrible sources of comprehensible input for all of these unruly reasons. Live input, as well, presents the added difficulty in that once it is received it ceases to exist anywhere other than in our poor, overtaxed and very forgetful memories. But live input also has a host of great advantages. Native speakers generally understand that you are a learner and will slow their speech down a bit. They can repeat and often clarify things you don’t understand. They are also fairly

easy to control to our advantage and are of course the main reason to learn a language and therefore offer tremendous motivation. Some examples of live input are: talking with a friend, listening to a speech, participating in a class discussion or Skyping with a language buddy.

## RECORDED INPUT

Recorded input, on the other hand, is anything that human beings create but which is no longer live. It is captured either as the written word, in audio or video and is re-playable. It is static and unchanging. It is not emotional - you will never hurt a recording's feelings if you don't listen to it often enough. It is easily reviewable and never gets bored with you. It is portable for the most part as well as timeless - a book fits in your pocket and never needs to sleep.

In order to understand the benefits and challenges of both live input and recorded input I would like to revisit Leo Tolstoy and his novel that we touched on at the beginning of this section. Leo Tolstoy is live input. He is a real person and for the sake of the analogy, he is still alive and lives down in the Russian district of a city near you. You met him at a grocery store there and he is a friend now. His novel, *War and Peace*, on the other hand is on your shelf in your apartment - right beside your Russian dictionary. It is recorded input. Leo is a patient friend who is excited that you want to learn Russian. He often explains things two or three times, rephrasing it each time so that you get it. He slows his speech down, knowing that it helps you understand better and is careful to speak more simply most of the time. He does however, launch into monologues at times about the Russian publishing industry - at least you think that is what he is ranting about. He has a wife and family that he has to spend time

with instead of spending time with you. Two weeks ago he got sick and couldn't get together with you and then he got mad at you because you did not call and see how he was often enough while he was sick.

Thankfully, during the time he was sick and ignoring you because he was mad, you had his novel on your shelf at home. It is big, but you can take it with you everywhere and read it whenever you have a spare moment - on the train, over lunch at work or at home in the evening. It never reads too fast for you, you can read it as fast or as slow as you need. It never says something and then can't remember what it said and it never gets bored if you read the same first page ten times in a row. But you miss the way Leo rephrases things so that you can understand them and the way he so often chooses to use simple grammar so that you can follow the conversation. Where you spent thirty minutes on the first page of the novel and wrote down forty five new words in your "new words" notebook, you still really don't understand a whole lot. You would never leave thirty minutes of talking with Leo with that feeling.

Live input and recorded input each carry their own particular set of advantages and challenges, yet each are an essential part of learning another language. They each demand that you approach them differently in order to create control over the input you receive. Live input is really about taking control and directing the flow of the input. Recorded input, on the other hand, can't really be directed but it can be chosen. It is in the choosing of recorded input that we have control - we choose to watch *Dora the Explorer* rather than listen to the radio program about medical science. How to do both of these well then is the subject of the next chapter, which we will get to in time. For now though, we must move on and talk about the second principle - Multi Entry.



## MULTI ENTRY

If you have ever had the experience of reading something, but not getting it and then hearing someone else explain the same thing and having that “Ah ha” moment, then you understand the importance of getting information from multiple sources. This gathering of information from multiple sources allows us to truly explore the idea we are trying to wrap our minds around. As language learners we are working to be able to speak, read, write and listen with some level of proficiency. We learn language through classes, text books, interactions with others, journaling, listening to the radio or reading the newspaper. Language is composed of words, grammar and cultural contexts. As broad and multi-dimensional as language is however, it is too often approached in a very one dimensional way. We do Rosetta Stone, or we take a class at the local language school, or we wander out into the community and make friends and begin speaking with them. Unfortunately that is all we do - one dimensional language learning.

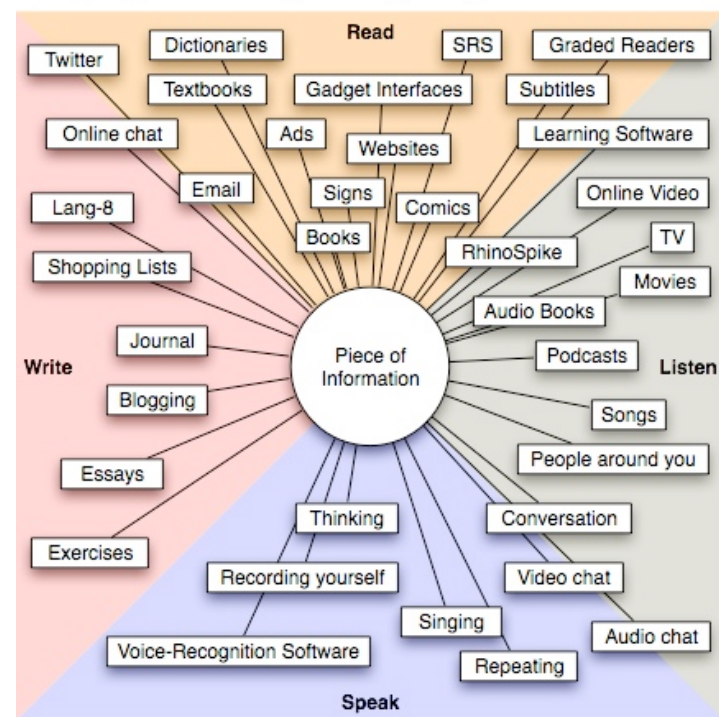
A maximized language learning environment however requires that we approach the language from multiple entry points. Like a well planned attack on a fortified city, we need to surround it so that we can enter into the language from multiple directions. At the same time, we need to allow and create an environment in which we are surrounded by the language so that we are receiving the language from many sources in many forms. It is in this kind of give and take multi entry where the maximizing takes place. To do this well however, requires multi entry on a number of levels. One level is achieved by entering the language through all four language functions - through reading and writing and listening and speaking. In a maximized learning environment each of these is

touched on regularly. On another level, we need to make sure we are receiving the same input from multiple sources.

If we think of each individual input of the new language as a “touch” on the mind, the more touches we can get in the language, touches from as many directions in as many ways as possible, the more it will begin to carve out its own place in our consciousness. I recently **read** that in order to learn a new word, you need to encounter it 160 times.<sup>10</sup> Now I am not sure how that number was decided upon, but I do agree with the basic principle. We need more touches. With each touch our mind makes, a growing connection with that particular word, grammar form or any given piece of information from the new language is reinforced. If we are learning a new grammar point or exploring a new area of the language, when we surround it and hit it from multiple directions each day, both the rate of learning and the depth of learning will increase.

Let me give you an example of how this might work. Let’s say you are learning a new grammar point. You come across it in some sort of language text book and it sort of makes sense. That’s one touch to your mind. You read your favorite “Archie” comic book in

### Language learning through exposure



<http://www.streetsmartlanguagelearning.com>

Vincent over at **Street Smart Language Learning** created this great visual which can help us understand the idea of multi entry.

the target language that night and notice this same grammar being used a few times while you're reading. Touch, touch, touch.

The next morning you quickly look back at the grammar book from the day before. Another touch. On the drive to work, you plug in the ipod and listen to a fifteen minute translated children's story you downloaded in the language and notice the grammar point as it is used. Touch, touch, touch. It is beginning to become clearer now, even though you can't really explain it yet.

At work, over lunch break, you log onto *Lang-8*, a great free social network for practicing writing in the language, and write a very basic and brief short story about a duck and a pig and submit it as a writing assignment. You use the new form more than anyone normally would, but you want to see the different ways it can come up in the language. You are exploring! Touch, touch, touch.

By reading, writing,  
listening and speaking, we  
reinforce each piece of  
newly learned material in  
different ways and from  
different directions.

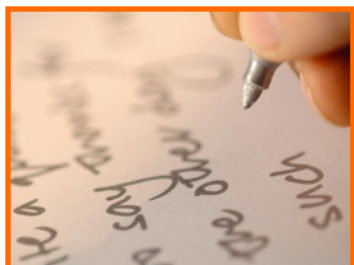
On the way home you listen to the children's story again. A few more touches. Then you switch over to the new album you just downloaded and rock out. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy after all! But that evening, you take ten minutes to log back on to *Lang-8* and see that three native speakers have already corrected your story and given some great insight into how they use the grammar form. Touch, touch, touch. You copy and paste the corrected story into a growing document of stories, summaries and journals you have written and then quickly log on to *RhinoSpike* and request that a native speaker record your story for you before you head back



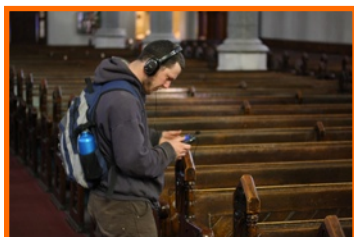
# READING



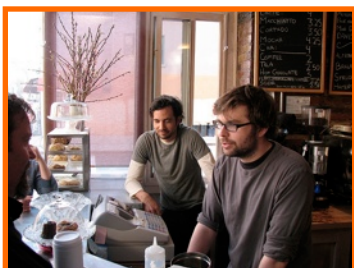
# WRITING



# LISTENING



# SPEAKING



in to wash the dishes for your lovely wife.

You end the day with a few more pages of “Archie” as you lay in bed before it’s lights out. A few more touches. The next morning, you log on to *RhinoSpike* as you eat breakfast and find that two native speakers have submitted one minute recordings of your little story. These go onto the ipod and you listen to each of the readers a few times on the way to work and enjoy hearing a silly story you wrote from two native voices. Since these are stories you wrote and understand these are like super touches.

I think you get the picture. By reading, writing, listening and speaking, we reinforce each piece of newly learned material in different ways and from different directions. As we find more ways into the language, we broaden the input we will be receiving and thus our language learning journey will be more efficient, effective and fun.

Here is another point to remember; we were not just making touches with the particular grammar we were working on. Without even realizing it, we were making hundreds of touches with hundreds of words, expressions and other grammar points, some of which we had formerly learned. This moves us on to our next point.

## INTEGRATED REVIEW

One of the difficulties of learning a language is that we so often approach it as “study,” so we work at it as we would most academic endeavors. We begin at point A and move in a linear path toward point Z.

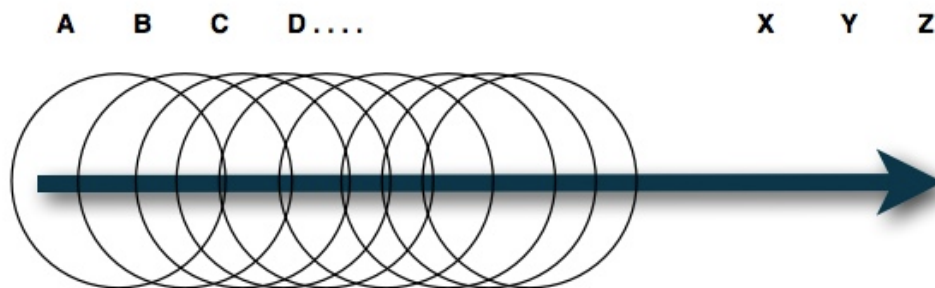


There are two main problems when it comes to approaching language in this manner. First is the false assumption that there is a point Z in language learning, some end, that when reached, will signal the end of our language learning and we'll be able to move on to the real work in our lives. But in learning languages, there is no end. There is enough to get by, enough to function well and enough to pass as a native speaker; but, like a relationship with a friend or spouse, there is no end to learning. I think this is important to understand because this false belief causes a number of problems. First, this type of thinking causes many to think that when they finish Level 3 at the local language school they will be fluent and ready to do everything. When they can't do everything, discouragement comes and they assume that they speak as good as they ever will and settle for far less than they should.

The second problem and the one I want to focus on is pace. By approaching learning language in this linear fashion, many race from one lesson, or topic or grammar point to the next so that in moving from A to B to C, by

the time D comes around, much of what was learned back at A has been forgotten. Language schools seem to work like this and most participants I talk to complain that the pace is too fast. They move on to the next chapter before the content of the previous chapter sticks. It is a race to the end of the textbook and most are quickly falling behind.

An alternative then is to be a self directed language learner and to “camp out” in a particular grammar or topic until it is locked into the brain, but this too has its problems. For one it is a slow way to learn a language. Who has time to “camp out?” Is there no better alternative? I am happy to say that there is and it comes in the form of integrated review. We all know that review is important, but we also know that it is boring. We flip through flash cards of vocabulary words that are removed from all context. We pour back over the previous chapter’s contents. We look back at our notes. What we need is a system that allows us to continue to move through the language from where we are to where we want to be while constantly circling back in natural ways to revisit all that we have learned previously. It should be fun and it should be simple.



With this manner of integrated review, a good pace can be maintained, knowing that all previous knowledge will be brought along for the ride. There will be a natural recycling of words and grammar forms that simply does not occur on its own. Some things of course come up again and again naturally. We learn and easily remember how to use the present, past and future tenses of any language because they are used so much. We quickly learn a core of vocabulary for much the same reason. But languages are deep and broad and if our vocabulary and command of the grammar are to really grow, then intentional integrated review of everything being learned must be a part of the program.

The simplest form of integrated review is to carry a stack of flashcards with you everywhere so that you can look at them throughout your day. Posting a list of new phrases next to the mirror where you brush your teeth twice each day also offers an easy one to two minute review and integrates language learning with the daily habits that already exist in your life. These are but two examples and we will look at several more in the following section.

It does not matter if you are taking a class or studying on your own, integrated review allows the learner to leverage any method and maximize it so that the very most can be gotten out of it. Even the worst language class can be harnessed in positive ways with integrated review.



5

# PUTTING THE THREE PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE



# PUTTING THEM INTO PRACTICE

As part of my education to become an ESL and English teacher I took a class called “Theory to Practice”.<sup>11</sup> The basic idea was to somehow figure out how to apply the theories of how we learn to the actual rubber meets the road of where learning takes place. After all, great theory and good ideas are just hot air if nobody knows how to apply them.

Because I don’t want to be guilty of just writing good theory, I now offer you a few pages of strategies, tips, ideas, and methods that will help you take control, use multi entry and create a system of integrated review. These are all ideas that I have used and feel confident in. Feel free to share them with others, tweak them to your own style and if you have some of your own ideas, please share them with me and I will consider writing them up on the blog to share with others. Please understand that these are just a few of the ideas that I have or that are out there. You can find more in the resource section, at **The Everyday Language Learner** blog or can watch video presentations of many of many more **here**.

In order to organize these ideas in a useful way, I have separated them into three categories: the personal setting, the lesson setting, and the community setting. Personal setting ideas are to be used on your own. Think of this as study time - maximized study time. Lesson setting ideas can be used with a friend or helper with whom you are spending time with specifically to work on language. Community setting ideas are helpful when you are out in the community, interacting with native speakers of the target language.

Each of the principles shared here can be used in any of these three categories with some adaptation and a little work. It should also be noted that each of these categories can be accessed and used whether you are living in your home country or the host country. Community ideas may be more difficult to implement in Kansas if you want to learn Russian, but with a little effort you can put yourself into situations that get close to real community life with native Russian speakers.<sup>12</sup> You can certainly find native speakers of all of the world's major languages in every major city around the world. I say this to dispel the myth that you have to go to the country of the language to actually learn the language. Again, this is a myth. A trip to the country is a great idea that I hope all of you plan to make happen at some point in time, but it is by no means a prerequisite for efficient and effective language learning.

Okay, let's put this into practice and for the sake of creating more tangible examples, let's suppose that we are learning French.

## THE PERSONAL SETTING

So again, the personal setting is time when you are studying alone, not in the presence of a native speaker(s). How do we go about maximizing this time so that it is more efficient, effective and fun? Let's revisit the framework: Input Control, Multi Entry and Integrated Review. I want to share a few ideas with you about how you can incorporate each of these principles.

**Input Control:** In the personal setting environment, input control is more about evaluation than anything else. All input will be recorded input and so choosing useful input is your most important job. You have a limited number of hours per day. Thinking about controlling the input will help you make maximized choices as you evaluate where you will spend your time. Remember, we want control so that we can receive more comprehensible input. The main idea here is that **you** pick the input.

So if you have a daily commute to work each day, you have time in which you can take control. What will you listen to? To control the input you need to find listening material that is at your level, with which you are familiar and in which you are interested. You could choose a children's story. You could choose a translation of your favorite John Grishom novel. You could listen to French music.

At home in the evening or over your lunch break you could read French. Choose a topic you are passionate about. Choose a favorite translated comic book from your youth. Choose a new French children's picture book. You have to control the input; don't just pick something up willy nilly. And remember, you don't need to understand every single word or sentence. You are looking for material from which you can understand the message being communicated.

**Multi Entry:** In looking at multi entry, we have already begun to touch on the idea by thinking about what to listen to or read. To create a maximized learning environment, we need to get multiple touches of the same "stuff" from different sources. Let's say you are reading that great French translation of a John Grishom

novel. It is of course about law and lawyers and so it will be filled with lawyerly types of words and expressions. Finding a French or French dubbed lawyer movie to watch - maybe even the one based on the book you are reading - will provide a second entry point into the same sorts of grammar, vocabulary and expressions. Writing a short story about a lawyer will give you another chance to use what you are learning. Reading a French [Wikipedia](#) entry on something to do with law could be another access point.

**Integrated Review:** We create opportunities for integrated review when we find natural ways to continuously revisit what has already been learned. One great by product of multi entry is that it naturally creates integrated review. Words and expressions you have learned in the Grishom novel will naturally come up in the lawyer movie and the Wikipedia entry. A time tested form of integrated review is the use of flash cards. A stack of these in your pocket can be pulled out at a moments notice, integrating review within the rhythm of your day.

The best way I know to begin integrating review into your language learning is to begin writing. At first it will be simple sentences, but soon, you will move to writing short journal entries and stories. Within these journals and stories, your goal should be to pack in the new words, grammar forms and expressions you are learning. Typing these up in **Lang-8** will allow you to get near immediate feedback and correction to your writing from native French speakers. These corrected sentences should be copied and pasted into a growing document of your own handcrafted writing. Regularly reading back through these writings will allow you to bring everything you've been learning with you in an interesting way that is at your level.

## THE LESSON SETTING

The lesson setting is time spent with an individual native speaker for the specific purpose of working on language. This could be a paid language helper, a friend or a neighbor. This is not time spent with a tutor. You, the learner, are in charge and set the agenda. Read more about using a language helper [here](#), but it is an important distinction and part of the primary paradigm shift that I want to help you make as a learner. You will learn more effectively when functioning in a learner driven environment rather than a teacher driven environment.

**Input Control:** In the personal setting, control is mostly about making choices. When you are with the lesson setting however it is about actually controlling the conversation so that you can ensure you are getting comprehensible input. One great way to do this is through **Total Physical Response** (TPR). TPR is a tested method that is fun and easy to use. The name itself explains the idea but you can read more about it by clicking on the link above. TPR has been developed as a classroom method to be used by teachers and thus needs some adapting to be turned around and used by independent language learners. It is possible though. The basic idea is to connect new target language concepts directly to actions and items rather than working through translation. When you see someone stand up and hear the phrase for stand up in the target language, a direct connection is made to the action of standing up. This “acquiring” of the language proves to go deeper, more quickly than just merely translating one word for another. Watch [this demonstration](#) to see a teacher demonstrating TPR in his classroom. From it you will get the basic idea.

**Multi Entry:** As you work with a language helper, it may be tempting to use the time to just talk. This wouldn't be bad, but I would encourage you to think about ways to use all four language functions in your time together. Make sure you are speaking of course, but as you look at new topics or grammar points with your helper, make sure you are not only speaking about it, but also writing, reading and listening. For example if you have just been exposed to how comparisons are made in French, have your language helper explain it. Then have him give examples of it. Then read a story and look for it there. Next you could write your own story or perhaps just ten comparison sentences with your helper. In this way you are hitting the form from multiple directions and giving yourself multiple touches which will help your learning be both deeper and quicker.

**Integrated Review:** One of the most powerful forms of integrated review is an innovative approach called handcrafted audio. This starts with journaling or writing stories as discussed above. To create integrated review, make an audio recording of the corrected journal or story by having your language helper read it as you record it. Put this audio file on your favorite mp3 player and now you can take your lesson with you where ever you go and at probably less than a minute per recording, the time needed to review is minimal. Create a folder full of these recorded journals and soon an amazing source of comprehensible input that is filled with all the words, grammar structures and expressions that you have been learning will have been created.

## THE COMMUNITY SETTING

Going out into the community amongst native speakers can be an intimidating prospect, especially in the beginning, but it is the reason to learn the language so it is a must. You have to get out! The community setting is entirely composed of live input. Unlike your time with a language helper, the people you encounter in your community time are not looking for ways to help you learn the language. It can be so harsh in fact, that unless you are an outgoing personality who is not easily discouraged, I would suggest limiting a bit the amount of time you dedicate to getting out in the community in the very beginning. Success breeds success and if you can give yourself a head start with a little bit of personal and lesson study time, you will be more confident and prepared when you do venture out into the community. One thing you will want to do in this preparation time is learn (even memorize!) a range of password phrases. A password is used to get into locked areas. The new language you are learning is for all intents and purposes, a locked area. Password phrases then are sentences that you should memorize that get you into the language. You can find a list of these in Peter Pikkert's LACE Manuel (*See Resources*). He calls them power tools, but here are a few important password phrases to get you started:

- ☼ I am learning “target language.” Could you please help me?
- ☼ What is this?
- ☼ What does this word mean?
- ☼ Could you please repeat it?
- ☼ Could you write it down please?

- ☼ I don't understand.
- ☼ Did I say it correctly?
- ☼ Could you please correct me?
- ☼ Which way is better?
- ☼ Please speak more slowly.
- ☼ You say it first. I will repeat after you.

This, as you can imagine, is just a start. For different activities, you will want to find and use different password phrases. With all of them, you need to find the translation and the correct pronunciation and then commit them to memory. These phrases will be your password into the language and are one of the most important parts of giving you control over the input.

**Input Control:** Taking control of the input is extremely important out in the community. Great rivers and great winds can both be captured to create tremendous amounts of electricity; but they can both cause tremendous damage if not kept “in control.” Your password phrases are the first thing you will use to control the input. Asking someone to slow down or repeat something will allow you to get more comprehensible input. A small amount of planning and preparation will also allow you to take control by giving you much needed background knowledge. For example, if you need to buy a new watch, looking up and writing down a few key words before you wander into the jewelry store will give you a hand up and allow you to access



more comprehensible input. As well, by creating a project around your pursuit of a watch, I call this **strategic shopping**, the topics of conversation remains narrow. The clerk is less prone to wander in and out of topics you are unprepared to discuss.

**Multi Entry:** Multi entry is a bit more difficult to think about in the community setting, but there are many great activities you can pursue. The first is to be writing down the words and phrases you hear, for example when you are shopping for a watch. This writing of the words is multi entry. Another great activity is **number dictation**. To do this, begin by filling a note card with a long list of random numbers.

Next you will need to learn a few password phrases:

- ☼ I am trying to learn “target language.” Can you please help me?
- ☼ You read the numbers. I will write them down.
- ☼ Afterward you can check my answers.

Finally you will want to find a native speaker willing to read the numbers. Most will volunteer as it is a pretty easy task and they get to check your work. Hand them the card with the numbers and then on another sheet of paper, write the numbers you hear as they read them. Here is the thing with numbers, they are the first thing we learn, are systematic and easy to produce when we are alone with no pressure. Too often however, we wander out into the streets and numbers come in a flurry of sound that we miss. Number dictation allows you to get a ton of repetition in a low stress environment as well as use multi entry to work

on them. It also endears you as a learner to a native speaker. Of course you will want to move to the hundreds and thousands and millions and can also use number dictation for telling time and for money.

**Integrated Review:** Again, it seems a bit more difficult to consider how to work review into the community setting, but it is possible. The easiest way to integrate review into community time is to establish yourself as a language learner amongst the native speakers you know. Then it is easy to walk into your local French grocer, who you have begun to build a relationship with for example, and say (another password phrase):

- ☼ Can I tell you what I am learning today?
- ☼ I learned this new word today. Can you explain how to use it?
- ☼ Can I practice saying a few sentences with you? Please correct me if I say them wrong.

With these few sentences you can now review what you have previously learned with a member of the community. Another way to create integrated review is through what Greg Thompson calls the “Grand Tour Question.” Grand tour questions are usually about events in a person’s life.

- ☼ What was your wedding day like?
- ☼ What is your favorite childhood memory of a particular holiday?
- ☼ What do you remember about the earthquake (or other major national event)?

Grand tour questions are used to create integrated review when they are asked, again and again, to many speakers of the language. Each speaker will have their own perspective, but all will be using similar vocabulary and grammar forms as they talk about the same experience. To put this idea on steroids, consider recording a number of community members giving their answer. Keep these together in an audio file to listen to later.

So there are a few ideas of how we can put these three principles into practice. There are many more ideas of course and you can start by reading **25 Ways to Create or Find Comprehensible Input**. I have also added a list of specific activities for doing each of these in the resource section at the end. I hope my explanations have been clear and helpful and will empower you to go out and take control, use multi entry and create integrated review for the language you are learning.

THE LAST  
STOP



# THE LAST STOP

It is my hope that as we come to this last stop, you are now empowered to go out and take charge of your language learning. My goal has been to give you both the understanding of how we learn languages as well as real, solid tools and knowledge for learning it on your own. Hopefully this has happened. The resource guide at the end of this guide can also be found online at [The Everyday Language Learner](#) and offers a host of great resources and ideas to help you on the journey. Take a look at the Weekly Planner sample plans to get yourself started. If you have purchased the intermediate edition, listen to all of the audio lessons to further expand your understanding. Learning another language is a fantastic journey that can and will open up new worlds to you. It will take hard work, but it is well worth the time and effort required. I know that you can succeed. Have fun, and blessings on your language learning journey!

Learning another language is a fantastic journey  
that can and will open up new worlds to you.

# Congratulations, you've finished reading!

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# RESOURCES FOR INDEPENDENT LANGUAGE LEARNERS





# RESOURCES

The following resources are updated regularly at The Everyday Language Learner Getting Started Resource page at the blog. [Visit Now](#).

- 1.1 The Toolbox
- 1.2 Books
- 1.3 Online Guides and eBooks
- 1.4 Language Learning Programs
- 1.5 Language Learning Tools
- 1.6 Language Exchange Sites
- 1.7 Flashcard Programs
- 1.8 Total Physical Response (TPR) Resources
- 1.9 Recording Tools
- 1.10 Evaluation Tools
- 1.11 Great Language Blogs
- 1.12 Learning Activity Ideas

## 1.1 The Everyday Language Learner Toolbox

There are a few programs and items that I have found to be indispensable as a language learner. Everyone is different and so everyone's tool box will look different, but these are a few of the items and programs that I have found most useful as I have endeavored to learn another language. Start with these few to begin with and then as time goes on and you begin to feel what is working for you and what is not, move on and explore the rest of the Resource Section for other great tools for language learning.

- Pocket Dictionary
- Online Dictionary
- Teach Yourself Series book for your language (**read a review at EDLL**)
- A small pocket notebook for writing down things I need to know as they come up.
- A larger spiral notebook for taking notes and writing practice sentences and journals in.
- A notebook to make “lesson plans” in. In this I would plan out what I wanted to do each week and would make specific plans for my time with my native speaking language helper.
- Livemocha or Rosetta Stone - at the beginning for building a beginning foundation.
- Lang-8
- The LACE Manual and the Peacecorp Manual.
- The EDLL Guide to Self-Assessment (included in the First Class Edition of this Guide)
- Recording Device of some sort and an ipod or other MP3 player.

## 1.2 Helpful Books<sup>13</sup>

***The Teach Yourself Series:*** This great series of books offers an easy to use, activity filled yet simple introduction to grammar structures, expressions and basic cultural ideas to most languages. I used the **Teach Yourself Turkish** book and thought it was a great place to start. (**[Read my review](#)**)

**The Whole World Guide to Language Learning:** This is the only book on the list that you will need to purchase. It is well worth the cost though as it does more than perhaps any other resource to prepare you for the life of a self-directed language learner. It is especially recommended for those preparing for or already living the expat life abroad.

**How To Be A More Successful Language Learner:** Another great resource filled with ideas to help you become an independent language learner.

**Language Acquisition Made Practical (LAMP):** Filled with lots of great ideas, this book is written especially for the person moving overseas and able to dedicate significant time to language learning.

**Lexicarry:** This wordless book has been created to be used with a language helper or native speaker. It is filled with pictures of all areas of life and is an excellent resource for learning language. Like TPR, this resource allows you to skip the translation process and get straight to matching items with words leading to deeper learning.

## 1.3 Online Guides and eBooks

**The Everyday Language Learner's Guide to Sustaining:** This is a free guide written to help you create, maintain and protect your motivation, commitment and attitude for language learning. Also available in Turkish and Polish and at the Amazon Kindle Store.

**Peacecorp Volunteer's On-going Language Learning Manual:** A great resource for the self-directed language learner with lots to inspire, empower and give you the tools to be successful.

**The LACE Manual for Language Learning:** Another great resource filled with practical ideas about how to learn the language using a language helper.

**Kick-Starting Your Language Learning:** Greg Thomson's short book will help you gain a better understanding of how we can most effectively learn language. This is a foundational document that is an essential read for all interested in learning another language.

**Language Learning in the Real World for Non-Beginners:** Another classic from Greg Thomson. This offering speaks to the language learner who is off to a good start, but needs direction to keep improving.

**Leave Me Alone! Can't You See I'm Trying to Learn Your Language:** Greg Thompson shares about the importance of relationships in your language learning journey. A very good read to get you thinking about language helpers.

**Language Impact:** This site is the home of so many great articles, including a few of the above. Many of the articles are an absolute must for independent language learners and will truly enhance your language learning journey.

**Omniglot:** This site is the a great repository of information and links to sites for many of the languages of the world. It includes a list of websites and blogs dedicated to just about every language in the world. Search for your language and you will find a whole host of great links to help you get started.

## 1.4 Language Learning Programs

**Livemocha:** With over thirty five languages available, Livemocha offers language courses very similar in nature to those of Rosetta Stone. While the courses are very good and free, the strength of Livemocha, in my mind, lies in the way it builds community through social media connections. A bit like Facebook, Livemocha allows you to make friends - native speakers - who will help you on your language learning journey. Part of the program is sharing both writing assignments and speaking samples with the community for feedback - and of course taking the time to give a little feedback yourself. Livemocha is a great place to start for the everyday language learner. Twenty minutes a day, five days a week will get you a great foundation

upon which you can build. Listen to Clint Schmidt, the VP of marketing and product at Livemocha, tell about the program on **this podcast**. Read about **one learner's experience**.

**LingQ:** LingQ, like Livemocha, is free. Based on reading and listening, LingQ is a unique system that allows you to have control over the input, implement multi entry and incorporates integrated review. LingQ is at twelve languages and growing. (No Turkish yet) Founder Steve Kaufman is an avid linguist and language learning expert who himself knows eleven languages. You can listen to Steve describe the LingQ program **here**. Coupled with Livemocha, I think these are the two most important programs to use to get started in building a strong foundation in the language in a low stress environment. LingQ offers English, Spanish, French, Italian, German, Swedish, Russian, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, Korean and are adding more languages regularly. LingQ has a great introductory video that you can **watch here**.

**Busuu:** I have not yet tried this out, but I have read that it is lot like Live Mocha and that it is a pretty cool site. Like Livemocha and LingQ, it is free to use. With all three you can buy in at higher levels if you would like. One thing I like is the ability to find other users from particular countries easily. Busuu has seven languages currently: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Russian and French. Give it a try and let me know what you think. Watch their tour of the site **here**.

**Rosetta Stone:** Rosetta Stone is probably the most well known and robust of all the home based language programs, but it is also quite expensive.

**Fluenz:** Another program like Rosetta Stone, I have heard great things about Fluenz, but have never tried it. It also is a bit expensive and as of now only has Spanish, French, Italian and Chinese.

## 1.5 Language Learning Tools

**Google Translate:** There are hundreds of different translation tools out there, and Google translate is by no means the best, but it is the easiest and most accessible. It is not suggested to be used as an online dictionary - there are far superior sites for this and most are language specific. But Google translate is a good tool to use to increase your access into the language. It can help you find the “password phrases” you need to get in. As an example, a **fellow author** recently embarking on a quest to learn Turkish in one year typed the words “children’s story” into Google translate and received the Turkish equivalent - “Çocuklar Hikayesi.” He copied this and pasted it into a Youtube search and quickly found a lot of children’s programs and cartoons in Turkish. Quick access to comprehensible input and a great example of how to effectively use Google translate as a tool to give you access to the language.

**Lang-8:** Lang-8 is a great social networking program that allows you to have a “virtual” language helper. Submit your writing in the native language and get it corrected by a native speaker (or two) from the language. Free membership. See a short introductory video of Lang-8 **here**.

**Rhino Spike:** Another social networking program allowing language learners to share their voice with those learning another language and allowing you to find and record native speakers reading your text - whatever it is. By becoming a member, you can find people to record audio for you. For example, you may post a short journal entry that you have written in the target language. A native speaker will record it and then upload it to the system. You can download it and listen. Likewise, you should lend your voice to the community and take the time to record and upload for language learners around the world. You can help!

**Lyrics Training:** A site dedicated to helping you learn languages through music videos and song lyrics. Add some fun to your language learning.

## 1.6 Language Exchange Sites

**The Mixxer:** The Mixxer is a social networking site designed to help language learners find one another for language exchanges using Skype.

**Conversation Exchange:** Language learners can find conversation partners, pen pals and online chat partners through the Conversation Exchange.



**Tonguetide:** Tonguetide is a language learner's social network offering opportunities to share ideas, read blogs, find tutors, classes and to find language partners.

**Meet Up:** Meet Up is for all sorts of clubs and organizations and hobbies, but you can also find or organize language learning meet ups through it in your area at this site.

**Fluent in Three Months Forum:** Launched in the spring of 2011, this forum has a thread dedicated to helping language learners meet up with potential language partners. It also has a lot of great language specific information and resources.

**italki:** italki helps learners find tutors, classes and language partners.

**Google Plus:** Google Plus is relatively new but the "Hangout" function is the place where all the language exchange action will probably happen. I think the key would be to create a circle of native speaking friends with whom you could then talk with anytime you are online together. You can see how Mike at Look Out, Knock Head is using Google+ **HERE**.

**Couchsurfing:** Couchsurfing was created to help folks find a bed and new friends in their world travels, but has also become a bit of a social network in its own right and can be a place to find native speakers with whom you can speak online. Read how one learner uses this **HERE**.

**Expat Blog:** When I listed my blogs on Expat Blog I began almost at once to get messages from Turks who have registered in hopes of finding language exchange partners.

**Expat Country Forums:** In general, expats like to create online communities through forums where they can share information. The largest in Turkey is called **MyMerhaba**. These are places where information is shared, including information about language tutors, etc. Nationals are also using them to find English speakers for language exchange partners and so language learners should be able to find language partners.

**Language Specific Blogs:** Some languages are difficult to find partners for due to a host of reasons. If you are struggling to find partners at any of the above mentioned sites, another place to look is at language specific blogs. People who are blogging about their journey in learning a lesser known language have probably figured out the best resources and would probably know how to help you. Two examples of great language specific blogs that I have found to be incredibly helpful are **Navajo Now** and **Women Learning Thai**.

## 1.7 Flashcard Programs

**Paper Flashcards:** Read this blog post about how to maximize your use of good old fashioned paper flashcards.

**Anki:** This is a free program that can be downloaded to your computer. Easy to use and you can create your own cards or use another learner's cards. Watch a demo **HERE**. Read the review at the site **HERE**.

**Byki:** This program is free to use though limited until you purchase the deluxe edition of your language. It boasts a language community with whom you can exchange or share cards.

**Flashcard Exchange:** A robust exchange with over 400,000 members. This is not just a language site, but language seems to be one of the larger categories with many languages represented if you want to use someone else's list. You can of course create your own and can print them off as well.

**Learn Click:** A flash card program that allows you to cut and paste whole sentences in order to capture the context of the word you are learning.

**iTunes App Store:** With literally hundreds of different apps for language learning, there is not much you won't find for your iphone these days. Many are free and all allow you to have language learning material with you wherever you are.

## 1.8 TPR Resources

Total Physical Response is one of the very best methods for getting started with language learning. It is simple to use and is great to use with a language helper or friend. There is a lot of helpful information on the web and I wanted to highlight some of it here.

**TPR World:** This is the website from the guy who created the TPR method. Lots of resources and articles.

**Maximize Your Language Learning Through TPR:** One of the few articles dedicated to helping independent learners understand how to use TPR affectively as a learning tool. A must read article.

**502 Words That Can Be Learned With TPR:** If you are wondering what and where to start with TPR, this list may be the kickstart you need.

**Video Demonstration:** This seven minute video shows how one teacher used TPR in his 6th grade Spanish class with remarkable results.

**LACE Manual:** This was already mentioned above, but pages 9-15 give a very good explanation of the method as well as four pages of topics and ideas for actually using it as a self directed language learner.

## 1.9 Recording Tools

You will want to find something to record with so that you can maximize your time with native speakers. Most laptops have this capability as do most new cell phones. The main thing is to keep recording at your level. Keep it simple but make it useful. If you are looking for recording software, **Audacity** is a free program that is simple to use and extremely versatile. One great feature in Audacity is that you can slow down a recording without losing sound quality. For example, you can slow down a podcast so that you can hear it better without losing sound quality.

## 1.10 Evaluation Tools

**The Everyday Language Learner's Guide to Self-Assessment:** This robust assessment is designed for the independent language learner and is a one of a kind evaluation that will help you take control of your language learning journey.

**ACTFL:** This is the site of the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages and the assessment scales found here are the most highly regarded among second language educators. A simplified version of these scales are used in the EDLL Guide to Self-Assessment.

**CEFR:** Similar to the ACTFL, the CEFR are the mainstay of evaluation amongst European educators.

**Cactus Language Level Tests:** Cactus is one of the world's leading providers of tailor made language training. They have a language level test for eighteen languages. This is a traditional academic assessment. Watch a presentation about Cactus [here](#).

## 1.11 Great Blogs

The following is a collection of blogs by language learners and language experts. Most are people dedicated to learning more than one language. Most are not necessarily everyday language learners. I have learned much by reading their blogs and interacting with all of them though. They represent a wide variety of ideas, methods and opinions on language

learning. Anyway, here are a few of my favorites in no particular order. I encourage you to read them for inspiration and great ideas. I owe much to all of them for this reason and it is why I share them with you today. You may, as well, have your own favorite bloggers who are not mentioned here. Let me know who they are and I will try to add them to future editions.

- **The Mezzofanti Guild**
- **Multilingual Living**
- **Kantan datta**
- **Lingua Trek**
- **Adventures of the Directionally Challenged**
- **David Mansaray**
- **Foreign Language Mastery**
- **Create Your World Books**
- **Steve Kaufman's Blog**
- **AJATT**
- **Fluent Every Year**
- **Creativity and Languages**
- **Street Smart Language Learning**
- **ielanguages**
- **Leaky Grammar**
- **Spanish Only (Much more than just Spanish)**
- **Fluent in Three Months**

- **The Road to Fluency**
- **Lexophiles**
- **Bablehut**
- **The Omniglot Blog**
- **Keith's Voice on Extreme Language Learning**
- **Look Out, Knock Head**
- **Sunny Earth Academy**
- **Keep Fluency**
- **Polyglottally**
- **Language and Mind Mastery**

## 1.12 Learning Activity Ideas

### PERSONAL SETTING

1. **Children's Books:** Children's books are written with a narrower vocabulary and are usually supported with pictures, both of which help aid comprehension. **Read More.**
2. **Dora the Explorer:** Children's cartoons can be a great source of comprehensible input. Some are better than others. *Dora the Explorer* for example narrates nearly everything she does in a repetitive fashion so that as Dora is walking down the yellow brick road she is usually saying something like, "I'm walking down the yellow brick road. I'm

walking, walking, walking. I am walking down the yellow brick road.” Finding dubbed versions of these can be a great source of comprehensible input.

3. **Google Translate:** Finding resources like *Dora the Explorer* in the target language is usually the challenge. With Google Translate and Youtube though, you can find just about anything. Type: Watch Dora the Explorer into Google Translate and then copy the translated phrase into the Youtube search bar. You can use Google Translate to search for tons of things in this way. A few to consider: clothing catalogue, children’s stories, world news, or the name of your favorite hobby. **Read More. Read More.**
4. **Passion Podcasts or Blogs:** Using Google Translate, find podcasts or blogs about the things you are passionate about. If you are a Man United fanatic, find blogs and podcasts about Man United in the target language. What’s your passion? Harley Davidson? Fly Fishing? Star Trek? Apple Computers? George Cloony? Internet Marketing? Find a blog or podcast created by a native speaker about that topic.
5. **Comic Books:** Comic books use the pictures to tell half the story, giving you a tremendous amount of background knowledge. The reading is mostly just the dialogue between characters. A comic book or graphic novel can be a great source of comprehensible input.
6. **Dubbed Movies:** Finding your favorite movie dubbed into the language you are learning can be an excellent source of comprehensible input. Your interest is high, you have great amount of background knowledge and you can watch scenes or the whole movie again and again.
7. **Narrow Reading:** Rather than skipping around and reading about a lot of different subjects, reading a variety of different texts about the same subject builds background knowledge and creates more comprehensible input. As an example you may read four different newspaper articles about the same current event. Each author writes from their own point of view, but each uses the same set of words and structures. **Read More.** This could also be expanded to



other activities: watching movies, listening to podcasts and listening to other native speakers – all about the same topic.

**Read More.**

8. **Streamed TV Series:** Most languages can be found online. Most as well have a television series or two being streamed over the Internet. A TV series, like narrow reading, allows you to get to know the characters and storyline so that you can begin to understand more and more of what is going on in the story. Check out the **language specific resource page** for listings.
9. **Books in a Series:** Reading a series (Narnia or Harry Potter for example) is another great way to create comprehensible input. A great deal of background knowledge, vocabulary and the writer's style carries over from one book to the next. For example, as I have read through the Harry Potter series, there was a larger percentage of words that I knew in book 2 that had carried over from book 1. This allowed my mind to get integrated review of what I already knew while being able to focus on the new stuff that was coming up. **Read More.**
10. **Label Up:** We have probably all at one time or another labeled the things in our home with the new language. This is great, but we can increase the amount of comprehensible input available by expanding this labeling to include statements about what the object does, or what we do to it. For example if you label the door, why not also write a few sentences below the word: I open the door. I close the door. I knock on the door. This will give you more interaction with more of the language. **Read More.**
11. **Repeat – reread, re-watch, re-listen:** Don't be afraid to read the same book twice or watch a movie four times in a row. With each pass through, you will understand more, allowing your brain to make more and deeper connections of meaning with the words and structures you are seeing.

12. **Side-by-side reading:** Side-by-side books have the story in both languages in the same book. One language on the right page, the other language on the left page. I would avoid reading sentence by sentence, but being able to look back and forth as you read does much to increase comprehensible input. [Learn More](#).
13. **Livemocha or Rosetta Stone:** These two programs will not do everything for you, but can be a supplemental activity that will provide you with lots of comprehensible input. Do a lesson a day as part of your program and they can be a great resource. [Read More](#). [Read More](#). [Livemocha Reader Experience](#)

## LESSON SETTING

1. **Pronunciation Practice:** There is much you can do to improve your pronunciation in the target language. Your goal need not be to sound unmistakably native, but you should strive not to sound harsh to the native speaker's ear. You can find a list of idea for improving your pronunciation by reading [Stumbling Out of Bad Pronunciation](#).
2. **Catalogues:** Home Furnishing catalogues like the ones IKEA gives away can be a great resource to use with a native speaker. You can do a lot of great activities that provide really great comprehensible input with them. [Read More](#).
3. **Total Physical Response:** Total Physical Response is a classroom activity that language teachers have been using for some time. It is time tested and proven to really work. The challenge is to turn it around so that you the learner can direct what is going on while still receiving the great input. A good game of Simon Says may be a good place to start. [Read More](#).
4. **Language Acquisition Projects (LAPs):** Developed by Dwight Gradin, LAPs are an amazing way to get structured and ever expanding comprehensible input. There is a brief summary of how to use LAPs as well as 26 LAPs in Peter Pikkert's FREE [LACE Manual](#). I am hoping that a training video will be made for LAPs one day because they are

amazing once you know how to use them. LAPs were the single most powerful tool I used at the beginning of my Turkish journey.

5. **Handcrafted Stories:** Handcrafted stories are stories that you have written. After you correct them with a native speaking friend, they become a great source of comprehensible input because they are interesting and filled with background knowledge (you wrote them after all). And since you wrote them, they are at your level. Perfect! Record your native speaking friend reading them, put them on your ipod and now you have an amazing source of comprehensible input that you can add to your personal study time. **Read More.**
6. **Road Map:** On a large poster board, draw a map of your town with some of the main landmarks. Borrow one of your son's matchbox cars (optional). Now sit down with a native speaker and have him tell you how to get to one place or another as if you are the taxi driver. This is a great way to get a lot of input and also really get a lot of practice at understanding directions.
7. **Story Telling:** Have your native speaking friend or language helper tell you a common story that you both know. Thinks of childhood stories, folktales, etc. You could also give them a bunch of props and have them use the props to make up and tell a story. **Read More.**
8. **Re-tell:** Have a friend or language helper re-tell something that you both saw. Last night's football match. A TV show or movie. It has to be something that you watched as well. This will give you the background knowledge that will help create comprehensible input.
9. **Speak to a Topic:** Choose a common topic and have your native speaking friend talk about it for a few minutes. Have them tell you about their family, their favorite team, their favorite food, etc.
10. **Sentence Expansion Drill:** The basic idea with this drill is to begin with a simple sentence and expand it one structure at a time. This allows you to get a great deal of practice with a language helper or alone. **Read More.**

11. **Sentence Transformation Drill:** The basic idea here is to start with a sentence and then choose one part (usually the verb) and transform it by changing the verb. This allows you to practice all the different grammar forms. [Read More.](#)
12. **Series Method:** The series method is a good way to move into working with connected speech and to give yourself a great deal of practice and repetition with the foundational elements of any language. The basic idea is to describe in step by step order how you would go about doing something from your everyday life. You can find a good description of the Series Method in the LACE Manual. [Read More.](#)

## COMMUNITY SETTING

1. **The Grand Tour Question:** The grand tour question is asked about a specific personal narrative of a person's life. Examples could be questions about a favorite childhood memory, about a national event that everyone experienced, or about a future event. Questions about the past will give you answers using the past forms of grammar, questions about the future will give you future forms. The key to creating comprehensible input is to ask multiple people the same question. Each will give you their own story about the same topic. Grammar forms and much of the vocabulary will be repeated. Asking this question to four or five people in the same week and by the time you are listening to the last one, your comprehension will have improved significantly. If it's possible, record these narratives for later listening. [Read More.](#)
2. **Strategic Shopping:** Admit it. You love to shop. For language learning, shopping strategically will increase the amount of comprehensible input you receive. Choose an item that you need (want) to buy. Before you head out to shop for it, prepare yourself by looking up key vocabulary and writing down some key questions. Then proceed to the first store and ask the clerk about the product. Listen intently. Ask questions. Ask them to repeat what they said if you need them

to. Ask them to write new words down. Thank them and leave. Go to store two. Repeat the same process with a new clerk. Thank them a leave. Go to store three. Repeat the process. **Read More.**

3. **Dumb/Smart Questions:** One of my favorites, the Dumb/Smart question is dumb because you already know the answer to the question you are going to ask and it's smart because this background knowledge gives you a a much greater chance of understanding what the person says and thus, receiving comprehensible input. **Read More. Watch.**
4. **Take Control:** One of the best things you can do in the community setting to ensure you receive comprehensible input is to take control of the conversations. You can do this with some of the ideas above, but you can also do this by just asking people to slow down, or repeat things or to give examples. **Watch More.**
5. **Help them Help you:** In general, people aren't all that good at giving comprehensible input. Usually they either realize you aren't a native speaker and break into a really loud and generally grammatically incorrect sort of caveman dialect or they don't realize and continue to talk a mile a minute with no concept that you may not be following them at all. With a little gentle instruction however, most can become great sources of comprehensible input. As an added bonus this will increase the amount of actual communication that takes place and your friendship will become much richer. **Read More.**

## End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Krashen is the author of several great books on the subject of language learning. “Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use” published in 2003 is a great introduction to his theories and has a lot of practical ideas about how to actually use the theory in the classroom or in your own language learning. In this work he cites James Asher, Harris Wintz, Robin Burling, Frank Smith, and Kenneth Goodman as others who were writing about and researching the idea of comprehensible input well before he presented it as part of his Second Language Acquisition Theory. His small booklet, “Foreign Language Education: The Easy Way” is another great resource and is filled with ideas for learning language and for creating this sort of rich language learning environment in the classroom.

<sup>2</sup> We will discuss password phrases in detail later in the guide. If you want to look ahead, you will find that discussion on page 74 in Chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> Total Physical Response (TPR) will be discussed in more detail beginning on page 72 in chapter 5 as well.

<sup>4</sup> Krashen, Stephen. *Foreign Language Education: The Easy Way*. Culver City, CA: Language Education Associates, 1997. Page 9.

<sup>5</sup> ACTFL - The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language. You can find a fuller version to this assessment grid and one that may be a bit more helpful in The Everyday Language Learner’s Guide to Self-Assessment.

<sup>6</sup> *The Principle of the Path*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> *How to Be a More Successful Language Learner*, Heinle & Heinle Publishers, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> *Soul Cravings*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> These two categories are by no means scientific. They are merely a way for us to approach the idea of input so as to better harness the ideas presented here.

<sup>10</sup> I read this at *The Linguist*, the blog of Steve Kaufmann who started the LingQ online language program. You can find out more at [www.lingq.com](http://www.lingq.com).

<sup>11</sup> *Theory to Practice* I found out is also a Swedish “technical death metal” band. Yikes! They do have four CDs to their credit and their very own [website](#).

<sup>12</sup> Many will argue that this is impossible. If you want to learn Laz, a minority language spoken by a shrinking number of native speakers in eastern Turkey, you may have a point. But with a bit of diligent and persistent searching, you can probably find someone in nearly any language to share a Skype conversation with - or a meal. To learn a bit more about Laz, check out this [report](#).

<sup>13</sup> These are affiliate links from which I make a small commission. I have read and recommend all of them and of course they can be purchased from any bookstore where they are available.