LEARN ANY LANGUAGE PROGRESS WITHOUT STRESS!

How To Find the Time, Energy and Resources To Master Your Target Language! Tried and Tested Tips and Tactics!



JOAN PATTISON

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by Joan Pattison

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joan Pattison is a qualified and experienced teacher of English for speakers of other languages. She divides her life between a little town in the north-east of England, a hamlet in Italy and a little town in Sicily where she teaches English and studies Italian.

Over the years, Joan has taught countless adult students at all levels and from many cultures and backgrounds. She has a great deal of experience in preparing students for language exams; for external exams such as for a medical or law degree; for job or university interviews and for business meetings and international negotiations.

However, her main focus is on helping her students to gain confidence in speaking, becoming fluent, using and enjoying their new communication skills in the classroom and in the real world. Work/life balance is important to Joan and her classes are relaxed and without stress, making the experience for participants a positive and enjoyable one.

An enthusiastic student of the Italian language, she knows very well from experience the frustrations and difficulties of learning to speak in a different tongue. She embraces the idea that she will never stop learning this beautiful language and discovering the culture, it's a friend for life!

When not in the classroom, you can find Joan browsing the food markets, experimenting in the kitchen or doing a spot of yoga on the balcony, to the alarm of the house cat, Merlino. She enjoys walking in all weathers, learning new things and is a dedicated chocoholic.

A PROBLEM SHARED IS A PROBLEM HALVED

THANK YOU so much for your purchase. Enjoy getting to grips with your target language – and your life. Let's get started!

LEARN ANY LANGUAGE – PROGRESS WITHOUT STRESS is an inspiring, motivational and practical guide for those people who are struggling to master their way to fluency in a foreign language. It contains the tips and tricks that have helped me and my students over the years. I know they work for many people. They can work for you too.

There can be many problems and challenges along the way. Have you ever experienced a lack of time; an over-abundance of resources to choose from; grumbles about the dreaded grammar; memory issues; a loss of motivation or are you simply too tired after a long day to pursue your dream of speaking in a different lingo?

Do you feel frustrated at your lack of progress? Do you hesitate when you have to speak your target language? Is it difficult for you to find opportunities to converse? Are you making the most of your study sessions? What are the best ways for you to learn? What resources should you use? How can you find the time? How do you remember all of that new vocabulary? How can you stay motivated?

Whatever your sticking point, you will find many tried and tested tips and tricks in *LEARN ANY LANGUAGE – PROGRESS WITHOUT STRESS* to help you find your way, gain in confidence and start speaking your target language from today. I'm going to show you how to fit the study of a new language into your everyday routine so that learning becomes a daily habit for you. I will explain how to work in short, stress-free sessions and give you practical, easy to follow suggestions. This is about learning and progress but also about having fun with your foreign language and simplifying your life.

Why did I write such a book?

That's simple. I want put a stop to the angst and anguish I have witnessed too many times when people start to really learn a language. They enrol for classes, they're enthusiastic, ready to learn and motivated. I work only with adults and nobody is dragged kicking and screaming to come to school, it is their choice. The stress and suffering comes from trying to fit the language study into their lives, not making the best use of the most appropriate resources and galloping lethargy at the end of a brutal day.

The language itself is very rarely the problem! I have never met a person who could not learn a new language. Even the students I know who have learning difficulties have conquered their problems and now communicate with ease and confidence. The secret is a positive, can-do attitude.

You simply need to find your own Language Get Up and Go, wherever that is…! Don't worry, I'll help you, it's not painful. However, it is necessary if you want to learn and enjoy your learning.

Many of us have jobs, a home, bills to pay and mouths to feed. We find it very difficult to find the one or two hours a week to come to class. For those who are unemployed and looking for work, this is a stressful and draining business. You probably don't feel bright-eyed and bushy-tailed very often.

Or we have all the time in the world but somehow we fill up our days and don't get around to practising the language despite our best intentions.

Does this sound familiar? Are you also gnashing your teeth in frustration?

This is the reality for many people in this busy world that we live in. I'm too busy to do anything, we cry! And we may well be right. But that word BUSY…

I refuse to use the ***B*** word. It stresses me and makes me feel overwhelmed and anxious. There was a time when it made me feel useful and important… How does it make you feel?

Of course I have looming deadlines, things I must do, appointments to keep. We all do. But when I found myself exhausted and ill, I learned to let go of some things. I started looking carefully at my expenses, managed to pull my belt in a bit and was able to work a few hours less because of these savings. I asked for help. I delegated. I learned to manage my time better and taught myself how to focus my energies onto what really mattered. My life became simpler and I was finally able to have some "Me" time. I slowed down a bit, I took time to think, plan and enjoy life. My Get Up and Go came back. I'm going to show you how to do that for yourself.

I also understand what it means to learn a foreign language. I know how difficult it is. I've been there too. I am still learning – and loving every minute!

Please – no excuses! Do not let anything hold you back. Think of people who achieve incredible things under near-impossible circumstances. People like Michel Thomas who survived several Nazi concentration camps to become a decorated war veteran. He mastered ten languages, developed a language teaching system called the Michel Thomas method and became famous for teaching many of Hollywood's A list celebrities. Or Helen Keller, deaf and blind before she was two years old, learned to read and write and became the first deaf and blind woman to gain a Degree. She used her strong personality to campaign against suffrage, disability rights and social welfare. Look at the people in your own life. Who inspires you?

Your dream of being fluent in a new language is not an impossible dream! All you have to do is to practise little and often to see impressive results.

Accept that you don't become competent and good at a language. Rather, you get used to it, it becomes a familiar friend, an automatic reflex. It starts to become natural to you. This is achieved through repetition and NOT by trying to remember. Think about TV commercials. We see these ads so many times that we can remember them years later, we know the dialogue from memory. But I don't think you ever sat down and consciously tried to remember an advert, at least I hope not! Continuous exposure to your target language in any form provides you with the repetition that you need to remember.

Work systematically through the chapters in this book. Choose only the activities that appeal to you. I'm sure you're learning a language to communicate, right? So spend more time on speaking and listening because it's the best way to get to grips with the language and to become fluent as quickly as possible. Make sure that you also include reading, writing and a little grammar so that you can practise all the skills you need to feel really confident with your new language.

This is YOUR learning, YOUR golden opportunity. Take control of it! Manage your time! Grab this language by the scruff of the neck and master it!

To know two languages is to possess a second soul. (Charlemagne)

Lots of people feel they become a different person when they communicate in another language. How exciting!

Will you have Excuses or Experiences? Reasons or Results? Buts or Brilliance? You will either have what you want or a detailed list of the rational reasons why not. Anonymous

So, what do you want from your target language?

REMIND ME – WHY AM I DOING THIS?

To learn a new language is a wonderful opportunity to step into another world, with its culture and traditions; food and drink; shops and shopping; housing; art and literature; legends and stories; architecture and history; climate and landscape; music and dance; costumes and fashion; transport and travel; feasts and festivals; gestures and body language; social norms and taboos; stereotypes; newspapers and television; religions and beliefs; health and education systems; politics and economics; currency and business; imports and exports and the LANGUAGE itself!

Why are YOU learning a new language? Maybe you want to:

Meet new people

Travel

Give your brain a good workout

Increase your chances of getting a job

Strengthen your personal or professional network

Work, study or live overseas

Do business globally

Communicate with international colleagues or friends

Enjoy and appreciate literature, music and films in the original language

Discover your roots

Pass an exam

Explore a new culture

Make your dream come true

Have fun!

One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way.
Frank Smith

How are you going to do this? Where do you start?

BULLSEYE! WHAT'S YOUR GOAL?

Let's think about that for a minute or two. Why exactly do you want to learn a new language?

What are your goals? How do they make you feel? Excited? Nervous? Overwhelmed? That's normal, there's no need for concern.

Are they a bit vague? Do you want to order a coffee and a local delicacy, read the local newspaper and chat to your native speaker friend? That's tremendous. But how will you achieve these goals?

You must have very immediate, specific goals, goals for today and tomorrow. You must decide your own particular short-term goals and be able to describe them quickly and in detail. Ask yourself what you want to achieve in this session, why are you doing this particular task?

As I told you earlier, I'm learning Italian and here is my list for today. It took me two minutes to scribble down:

1. Read the next page in my textbook. It's about the Italian church, by the way. I had a peek last night. And there's a grammar exercise that I might just be able to start. 10 minutes

2. Switch on the radio in the morning and let it play in the background.

3. Learn one new phrase in the shower, talking to myself. Strange, I know and more about this later. 5 minutes

4. Write my shopping list, spelling the items and speaking aloud. 4 minutes

5. Watch my favourite Italian soap opera on TV after dinner. A relaxed 25 minutes listening and commenting aloud: *What are you doing, you idiot! You know he loves another!*

6. Speak to myself about my day and my plans for tomorrow. 3 minutes

7. Listen to an Italian audio book while I'm in bed and sleepy. 10 minutes

This adds up to about an hour, which is incredible. I simply do not have a spare hour in my day and I suspect you don't either. But by taking a few minutes here and there I will have a productive day. I'll end the day with a sense of satisfaction and progress. This makes me want to do it all over again tomorrow.

I also get to practise all the skills I need to learn a language: speaking; listening; reading and writing with a bit of grammar thrown in. My goals for today are small, manageable and don't take up much time, as you can see. At the end of a day like this you will feel a sense of achievement and development because today you did something in your new language.

If you do nothing today then you have a feeling of failure and a niggle of negativity…

Speaking to yourself is very effective indeed even though it feels a little odd to begin with. Whatever your level, you can build up confidence and practise pronunciation in this way. When you come to chat with a real person you will find it so much easier.

Later on in the book I'm going to show you how you can schedule many more little goals like this into your day. It's absolutely feasible and all of my successful students follow this method.

Focus 100% on the task in the little time you have. Set a timer for however many minutes you have spare and then Go For It! Do not allow yourself to be distracted. Maybe you will finish, maybe not. If you don't, then it becomes your goal for later today or tomorrow.

Tick these goals off as you achieve them and give yourself a pat on the back. Scribble down your goals for tomorrow.

Remind yourself about your reasons for learning and about your goals. Write them down. Keep a copy in the front of your file. Stick a copy on the wall. Stay focused and get busy.

Share your goals with your friends and family. Your loved ones can give you invaluable support and help keep you going, making sure you stay consistent and persistent.

But choose these people carefully! If someone close to you is unsupportive, either distance yourself or try to tune out the negativity. In that case then maybe it's better to keep your goals to yourself.

As your language skills develop, your goals should be continuously revised and updated.

HAVE A PLAN AND STICK TO IT BUT BE QUICK ABOUT IT!

Don't spend hours and hours planning your goals. This is precious time that you could spend on your learning.

Have confidence and belief in yourself. You already know at least one other language – your mother tongue. Then you can learn another one! Start now with a positive attitude. If you believe you can't, then you won't. But if you believe you can, then you will!

This is an enormous, infinite topic. This is lifelong learning at its very best. You will never finish studying your elected and exquisite language. So why hurry? Take your time, relax and enjoy the journey.

ARE YOU ENTWINED IN THE DAILY GRIND?

I know I am. I understand this very well. Do you wake up full of good intentions but then find your day whizzing by with no time for anything, not even a bathroom break?! There are many things that creep up on you and embezzle your time. Here is a quick list of some of the daily chores:

Work. Paid, voluntary or forced labour
Stuck in traffic
Queuing at the bank
Shopping
Walking the dog
Phoning a call centre
Public transport delays
Surfing the internet for a cheap flight, car insurance, credit card
Cooking
Social networking
Health problems
Housework
Getting ready for work
Cleaning

But what about the nicer things in life…?

Favourite TV shows
Dinner with friends
Social events
Participation in sports
Exercise sessions
Walk in the fresh air
Hot drink and a good book
Beer and sports
Listening to music
Playing a computer game
Reading the newspaper
Cinema / theatre
Cultural events
Sporting events
Sunday papers
A long lie in

Sounds familiar? And no doubt you'll have your own inventory.

These things are important and cannot simply be eliminated. But you can become a Dalek and exterminate a bit…

STOP! TIME THIEF!

Who or what is pinching your precious time? Be wary of Time Thieves. You can NEVER get this time back!

SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE and exterminate distractions. Here are some ideas:

Check your mobile phone only at appropriate times during the day. Turn off non-essential notifications for social networks etc. Put it on silent when you're studying.

Check your personal emails and social network pages once in the morning and again in the evening. Reply to any urgent messages as soon as you can. Leave the rest until after your study time. Resist the urge to respond immediately unless it's absolutely necessary.

Write your To Do list in a big book. This has the effect of removing some of the muddle in your mind, you don't need to keep these things in your head any more. Keep your list where you can always see it. Share it with any others living in your household. Check your list regularly, keep it up to date, eliminate items when they are done, add new ones, prioritise.

Complete short, one or two minute tasks as they crop up, whatever they may be. Get the small things out of the way because they clutter up your mind – and often your home, garage or workplace.

De-clutter the house and work space. Tidy up. Aim for less visual jumble. Everything in your line of vision pulls a little at your attention. Clear tables, worktops, walls and your desk and keep them that way.

How long do you spend watching terrible television? Or do you watch a football match on TV and then the highlights… And then the discussion programme afterwards… And then read about the game on the internet?! You can find some time hiding here. Keep a TV diary for a week. Most people are really shocked at how much time they spend in front of the box. Reach for the remote and simply switch it off.

Surfing the internet and find yourself playing cards, watching funny videos featuring cross-eyed cats and babies eating lemons?! I know, they are hilarious but are they adding value to your life? Set a limit and set an alarm for 5 minutes. Stop when the alarm goes off. Answer that important email. Refuse those "virtual" friendships. Schedule a beer or a coffee with a friend and speak face to face. Do the essential things and ignore the rest.

Has this ever happened to you? You get home after work, flop down into your armchair and decide to have five minutes with the newspaper. Two hours later you wake up with a stiff neck in a cold, dark house with no dinner made! Save the newspaper as a treat to yourself for *after* you've done a little language learning.

Do you spend ages shopping for food with no idea what you're going to eat tonight? Do you give up and buy a take-away instead? Save time, money and possibly your waistline by planning some simple meals for the following week. Then prepare your shopping list based on your menu and stick to it.

Have a good supply of dried and tinned foods, baking supplies, condiments, coffee, sugar, cereals,

whatever you like to eat. Stock the freezer with food and also milk for an emergency. Use these staples when you plan your menu for the week.

Build up a supply of essentials like toilet rolls, toothpaste, shampoo and soap so that you never have to waste time and suffer an unexpected shopping trip.

We all tend to buy the same things over and over again. Using a simple spreadsheet or table on your computer, prepare an A-Z shopping list for the items you buy regularly. Add a few blank rows where you can write any additional things you need. Add a column where you can translate your list into the language you are currently studying. Print it off and use it every time you shop. This will jog your memory and make sure you only buy what you need.

If you're a confident chef then collect recipes for quick and easy meals and paste them into a scrap book. If you're a novice cook then buy yourself a basic cookery book or ask your friends and family to suggest ideas for new recipes. Save the more complicated recipes for high days and holidays.

Zoom around the shops with your list and get back home as quickly as possible. Shop online and get things delivered. Don't allow yourself to be distracted by goodies and special offers that aren't on your list. If you really needed them they would be on your list – right?!

Can you cut down on the washing and housework? Can you wear your clothes again without offending people sitting next to you?! Clean and tidy up as you go to save a mammoth clean once a month or just before your visitors arrive! How can you save your time at home? Give it some thought.

If you share your home with other people then ask / persuade / twist their arms to help you with the daily chores.

Do you have a full-on job with a load of responsibility? Delegate. Ask for help. Negotiate longer deadlines. Take the lunch breaks and holidays that you are entitled to. Refuse to work over your contracted hours. Organise your time at work, hit the ground running and get through your work as quickly and effectively as possible. Organise your desk and your computer files so that you find everything you need immediately. Become more efficient by carefully planning and prioritizing your day. Work, work, work on your Work/Life balance.

Make a decision not to be distracted or upset by the behaviour of people who don't matter to you. This is a huge waste of energy and precious time.

Learn to say NO! Do it with a smile, don't give any reason or excuses. If you are naturally a YES person, this can be terribly difficult the first time you do it but it gets easier and easier and is so empowering. You will never again do anything you don't want to do. And you will save a load of time and hassle.

One of the most effective ways to save time is to give every single thing you do your complete attention. Do not allow yourself to be distracted. Get things done.

These small things can free up more time to study your favourite language and can also help relieve some of the stress – and expense – of daily living.

What is the optimum time of the day for you to learn? Are you a night owl or an early bird? Get up early, earlier than anyone else in your household. Or wait until they're all in bed. Enjoy the silence. Make yourself a nice drink or your favourite snack. Have a few minutes to yourself, settle down to study for a while. This gives you a sense of satisfaction, motivation and peace. A great way to start or finish your day.

Become a decisive master of scheduling and prioritizing!

THERE'S NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT

This is where you can find a few minutes for yourself here and there in your busy day.

But for now, the most important thing …is to RELAX. Take a deep breath and relax your shoulders. Be calm and at peace with the new language that you want to learn. Take it easy and go with the flow of the lingo.

Learning anything new is not as enjoyable when there is tension. For many people, where there is tension, there is NO learning.

So now you've eliminated some of the Time Thieves but you're still pushed for time. You certainly don't have the one hour Me Time that you crave. But you do have two or three minutes here and there, don't you? Think about:

Your morning routine. Waking up, having a shower, grooming, getting dressed
Preparing and eating breakfast
The walk from your house to your car and back
Drive time
Time spent in queues at the bank, post office, supermarket, petrol station
Time spent waiting at the doctor's, dentist's, hairdresser's
Coffee break
Lunch break
Advertisements during television - and there are many!
Time spent on Autopilot when you're cooking, cleaning the house or walking around the shopping centre and your thoughts can wander freely.
In the gym or swimming pool
After dinner sit-down with a beer or a cuppa
Bathroom before bed
Bed time

All of these give you the opportunity to take a little time back for yourself and your lovely new language. Ten 6-minute bursts of learning are better than one hour of study. Your brain needs time to absorb the new information. Language learning is a bit like eating. Three meals a day are easier to digest than one huge feast!

The secret is to incorporate your language learning into your daily life in small chunks from the minute you get up until last thing at night. But what on earth can you do at these times?! I'll tell you later in the book.

HOW TO KEEP YOUR PECKER UP

Change your thoughts and you change your world. Norman Vincent Peale

Attitude and confidence are everything! Work on your mentality. Create a very genuine desire to embrace your target language and include that language in your daily life. This requires a level of commitment that many people are unfamiliar with, or scared of. But when you follow my suggestions and get started, it's much easier than you may think and it feels great! If you truly enjoy learning your chosen language and have a real wish to learn then remaining enthusiastic and motivated should be fairly easy.

However, there are bound to be times in your life when it's difficult to find your driving force, your learning gets put on the back burner and you find it difficult to get moving again. That happens to us all. I have a few ideas for when you need a little boost to get going again.

Understand that your new language is your best buddy and not your worst enemy. If you think that the language is hard then it will be. Many people believe that the Mandarin Chinese language is very difficult to learn. There is no alphabet, only thousands of characters. The tonal system of speaking is tricky for Westerners. On the other hand, the grammar is not nearly as complicated as many European languages, there are no verb tenses and no singular or plural. Focus on the positive aspects of your particular language. Work on your confidence. Tell yourself that you can and will communicate in your delightful language.

Remain positive. Smile! Be nice to yourself, give yourself little treats. Positive thinking and motivation go hand in hand. When you are motivated, you will be more productive, be more engaged in the study of your language. This gives you a feeling of satisfaction and achievement which will help you to maintain the momentum that you need.

Review your goals. Look at what you've achieved so far and don't focus on what you haven't done yet.

Reward yourself every time you do anything in your new language! It could be something as simple as an ice cream or a drink with a friend. Acknowledge your successes.

Don't be too tough on yourself. If you fail to meet your goals for today, or this week, then just move on. See it as a lesson. These things happen. Start again and continue working towards your goals.

Don't allow yourself to be overwhelmed. Understand that to learn a new language is a big deal. It's a subject that you will never, ever stop learning. Chip away at it, do it a bit at a time. Gradually build up your vocabulary and skills. Arrange small tasks which are easier to cope with than one large undertaking.

When you change your learning habits and you find that you really are learning every day, a few minutes here and there, you have a sense of well-being. Today you took another few steps closer to your goal. It feels fantastic and makes you want to do it again tomorrow!

Watch and read motivational speeches or stories. Get a pep talk. Who are your personal idols? They have probably made motivational speeches or have an inspiring tale to tell. Check them out.

Make things FUN for yourself. Remember this is your hobby!

Never procrastinate. Don't think about whatever you have to do. Don't give yourself reasons not to do it. Just do it. Then feel good about doing it.

Set an alarm for FIVE minutes and do something in your target language. Only FIVE minutes. Don't tell me you don't have FIVE minutes?! OK, you're tired, hungry, don't want to do anything. Or you're all dressed up and the taxi is due in FIVE minutes. Or your favourite TV show starts in FIVE minutes. Or your dinner will be ready in FIVE minutes. Do just one thing for FIVE minutes and then stop. Psychologically this is powerful. Once you get started you may find you want to do a bit more, then a bit more…

Listen to some uplifting and inspiring music for a few minutes.

Move your body. Check with your doctor first if you haven't worked out for a while. Stretch! Jump up and down! Shadowbox! Even 10 seconds of light exercise can affect your mood, make you feel more active and energetic and help you achieve your goals.

To quote Winston Churchill*: Never give up. Never give up! Never give up!! Never, never, never-never-never-never!*

GETTING TO FIRST BASE - ESSENTIAL TOOLS

First of all, a little preparation. Keep these things within easy reach. You may need to buy / beg / borrow:

A4 files
A4 transparent plastic pockets punched for your particular A4 file
Notebooks
Scrap paper
Pencils – keep them sharpened and ready for use
Pencil sharpener
Pens in various colours
Highlighter pens
Eraser
Ruler
Paper clips
Stapler and staples
Sticky notes in different colours and sizes

Reading glasses
Tissues
Water / hot drink
Snacks

Headphones and computer / audio player
Good overhead lighting or lamp
Desk or table
A suitable chair with a decent back support
Cushions

And whatever else you need.

Get organised! Find a quiet corner and set out your study area. Put your pens, pencils and ruler in a container. Get a box for your pencil sharpener, eraser, paper clips etc. Keep your space tidy so you can find what you need immediately.

Get comfortable! Do you need a cushion, drink, snack? Get it before you start working.

Switch OFF your mobile phone, television and unnecessary stuff on your computer (particularly social networks). Close the door. Tell any others in the house to LEAVE YOU ALONE for a while!

Get busy! It doesn't matter if you only have five minutes. Study for five focused minutes. Give it 100%. If time is not an issue then work for a little longer. A maximum of one hour and then stop. That's enough for a session like this - unless you have an imminent exam.

I NEED MY SPACE

Keep your study materials in a place where they are easily accessible. You only have a few minutes so don't spend those few minutes looking for your pen!

Keep your books open at the page where you are currently working. This gives you an invitation to go and spend a little time with them. Use a bookmark or a sticky note to mark your place.

Build up a store of resources (list coming up later), keep them within arm's reach and – most importantly – use them regularly.

In a perfect world you would have a quiet corner with a desk, a comfy chair, good lighting and all your things.

If you don't have a private space, then find a box or bag and keep all your study gear together. Get a big jigsaw puzzle mat with panels so that you can leave your work open inside, close the panels and put it away. Prop it up on your knee. Work on that.

Study in your bedroom. It's your private space. Work in your pyjamas if you want to!

Make friends with your local library and bookshop. They are becoming an endangered species and should be protected. Your clued-up librarians and booksellers hold a wealth of knowledge at their fingertips and can provide very useful assistance in many ways. Zillions of books and magazines to inspire you. Maybe a café so you can fuel up and keep going. Peace and quiet. Comfy chairs. Potentially perfect.

Borrow and buy books, dictionaries, phrase books, CDs, DVDs. Use the computers and the internet. Ask for their advice. Do they have any resources in your target language? Is there an evening class you can attend? Is there a local community from your chosen culture? Do they know anyone you can buddy up with for some speaking practice? More about this buddy in another chapter.

Hang out in your local coffee shop. This is perfect unless the background noise disturbs you. They often have a relaxing space where you can work uninterrupted even if it costs you the price of a coffee.

Check out the visitors' café in your local hospital, open 24/7, great wi-fi, food always available.

You might find a quiet space in your local museum or art gallery. Many churches also have a café and quiet area.

If it's a nice day then sit outside or in the park. The sunshine on your shoulders, birds singing, what a lovely way to take in some new language.

Find a spare desk at work or school and study there during your lunch break.

Ask a friend or family member if you can use their empty house or room to study while they're out or busy doing other things. There are fewer distractions in other people's houses.

Your local community swimming pool or gym may have a quiet room where you can study. After

you've exercised your brain you can go and exercise your body!

Study on train, plane or bus journeys.

If background noises bother you then put on a set of noise reducing headphones.

Be creative. Don't be defeated!

THINK FOREIGN

Now for some of the things you can do when you have a minute or two.

Let's kick off with Thinking in your target language. It's free, private and you can do it anywhere and at any time you want! Start with some basic sentences in your target language, something like this:

It's Monday.

It's 9 o'clock in the morning.

The sun is shining.

I'm going to have toast and coffee for breakfast.

For complete beginners you can focus on translating some vocabulary, counting from one to twenty, reciting the alphabet.

If your level is a little higher then look around you, describe what you see, what clothes you're wearing, what you're doing, eating, reading, watching. Going for a coffee? How do you say that in your target language? Did your sports team won? What is the language of celebration? Your friend's birthday is coming up? What do you want to say?

For more advanced learners, choose the everyday topics that are always in our minds. What's going on in your life right now? What's in the news today? What's your opinion about that? What do you think of the last TV programme you watched? Who are the most important people in your life and why? What makes you happy? What drives you crazy? Why? Can you do anything about it? What are your plans, short-term and long-term? How can you achieve them?

You get the idea? You made a decision to think in your new language. You're beginning to form a habit. It's not easy to start with and you need to prompt yourself. Try writing ***THINK*** in your target language on several sticky notes and positioning them around your home. This will stimulate you to think for a few seconds initially, building up to a few minutes at a time. Eventually it becomes an automatic process, a valuable habit, a great preparation for speaking to others in your target language.

Repeat some of the new language you come across. Remind yourself of your goals. Think positive, happy thoughts. Tell yourself – in your target language – I can do this!

It's the repetition of affirmations that leads to belief. And once that belief becomes a deep conviction, things begin to happen. Muhammad Ali

STICK 'EM UP!

Buy a few pads of sticky notes in various sizes, shapes and colours. Low-cost, high-impact, flexible, easy to use, motivational. They are small so suggest some mini-learning and therefore feel do-able. They can be used in several ways.

Keep a pad of sticky notes and a pen in your pocket or bag. Stuck in traffic? Waiting in a queue, at the bank or the petrol station? Look around you. What language do you need to learn? Do you know the components of your car? Financial language and the layout of the bank? All the parts of your body? The clothes and accessories you're wearing?

Write it down in English on your sticky note, translate it later in your dictionary and add it to your notebook.

Look around your home and workplace. Can you name everything you use regularly? If not, write a sticky note and stick it on the item itself. Look at it when you walk past. Learn the spelling and pronunciation.

Choose a "Phrase for Today" or a good example of a challenging grammatical structure that you're working on right now. Write it on three sticky notes and place them where they're visible, maybe one in the kitchen, one on the bathroom mirror and one on your computer screen. Take a few seconds to read aloud and repeat until you're confident in using your new language. Then place this particular sticky note in your notebook for later revision and write your next one.

Write some motivational words on a sticky note and post them everywhere. Translate them into your target language. BELIEVE! REACH! ENERGY! PERSEVERANCE! INSPIRE! ACHIEVE! STRONG! SMILE! SUCCESS! DETERMINATION! Give yourself a BOOST! JUST DO IT!

RETAIL THERAPY

Need a loaf of bread, potatoes, postage stamps, petrol, a newspaper, socks?

Do you know this vocabulary in your target language? What's the currency in that country? Banknotes? Coins? Exchange rate?

Rich in vocabulary from the moment the automatic doors open, you grab your trolley and negotiate your way through the aisles, a shopping trip can be a mini-lesson:

Write your shopping list in your target language.

Repeat this language silently to yourself as you put these items into your trolley at the supermarket and again when you take them out.

Waiting in a queue? Look around you. Describe to yourself the people you can see; the weather outside; the smells and sounds; the items in your basket.

Once back home, unpack your bags and pronounce – loudly and with confidence – the items as you put them away.

A few more ideas:

Translate items in the "shopping" category:

trolley / basket / aisle / loyalty card / carrier bag / durable shopping bag / cashier / check-out / special offer / bargain / correct money / change / bank card

Research the shopping culture in your chosen country. Are there shopping centres; international high street chains; family-run businesses; street markets? Is there a queuing system? Do they have loyalty cards? Home delivery? What are the opening hours?

What are considered to be luxury goods? What goods are imported and exported? Who are the major retailers? Is there an online shopping culture? Can you subscribe to retailers' newsletters? In your target language, of course.

Whether you're a shopaholic or a reluctant shopper, this is a mini-lesson of everyday importance that we continue to do over and over again.

CURL UP WITH A GOOD READ

Collect authentic reading materials in your target language. Think about all the things we read regularly and automatically:

emails
Blogs
Timetables
Advertisements
Washing instructions
Dosage and side effects of medicines
Labels
Menus
Recipes
Cereal packets
Posters
TV and radio guides
Bank statements
Prices
Sports results
Weather forecasts
Recipes
Telephone directories
TV subtitles
Brochures
Leaflets
Statistics
Dictionaries
Reference books

We also read for pleasure or necessity:

Newspapers
Magazines
Reports
Fiction
Non-fiction
Travel guides
Autobiographies
Lyrics
Poetry

What are you reading at the moment?

Search for reading materials in your target language and at your particular level. Dual-language and parallel text books are great. The translation is there for you on the opposite page. You can put your feet up and have a nice read without the need for a dictionary. A lovely way to relax and learn at the

same time.

Think about your own favourite books. Are they also available in your chosen language? You can read them simultaneously and you already know the story.

Many magazines are printed in several languages. Buy the English copy and also the version in your target language. Some of the articles will be included in both editions. It can be interesting to see how the texts and advertisements differ from country to country.

Children's books and books for young adults are also worth a look. Not only fiction, but also there are some tremendous books for school kids on more serious topics such as politics and religion.

Read silently first. Read only for the sense of the passage. You DO NOT need to know the meaning of every word to understand the gist. Use any photographs or graphics to facilitate understanding.

Look for familiar vocabulary. Highlight it in yellow. You'll be amazed at how much you already know or can guess. A real confidence boost!

Now search for three unfamiliar words, especially words that you notice have been repeated in the passage. If this vocabulary is useful to you then copy it into your notebook.

Read paper copies as opposed to online versions. Scribble in the margins. Underline. Highlight. Translate. Make notes. Repeat and revise to help fix new terminology in your memory.

Place a sticky note on the side of the page where you finished reading so you can easily find your place again later. Don't waste time flicking through the pages trying to find where you left off.

Then read aloud. For beginners it can seem really weird to experience yourself speaking in another language! Practise the pronunciation, the sensation of this foreign language in your mouth. The sounds that are familiar and the ones that are not. Don't worry too much about the pronunciation at this stage.

If you are more advanced then choose challenging, unfamiliar content to practise reading aloud.

Re-read, revise, review. Above all, read as much as you can and read for pleasure.

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit. Aristotle

LISTEN UP!

Even if you are a complete beginner, just sit back and listen. An online search will quickly give you a list of radio stations in your target language. Find a station that broadcasts news; weather; current affairs; discussions; chat shows and maybe a little music.

Listen as often as possible. Understand that you're going to understand very little, maybe even nothing to begin with!

Go about your day with the radio playing in the background. Become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of the language. After a few weeks you may find that the speech appears a little slower, that you understand the topic of the commentary, some specific words and phrases. Eventually you will be able to follow the entire transmission.

Download an audio book, a radio station or lessons in your target language onto a small listening device like an MP3 player or iPod. Plug in some small earphones and keep this device under your pillow so you can listen for a few minutes when you wake up and before you go to sleep.

Listen to the recordings over and over and over again.

Music is a powerful memory trigger and can play a major part in helping you learn your new language. If you remember vocabulary to a tune then you are more likely to recall it later. Music and catchy jingles can stay in our minds for years! It doesn't matter if you don't understand at first. You may start singing along without knowing what you're singing. That's OK, you're learning vocabulary and pronunciation.

Look and listen online for the most popular vocalists (consider both past and present) who sing in your target language.

Choose two or three songs you that like.

Download the lyrics. An English translation is always useful, if you can find one. Lyrics can be confusing even if you're an advanced learner.

Read the lyrics for the sense of the song. Look at the vocabulary, phrases, fixed expressions. Does it rhyme? Don't focus on the grammar, it's often not a priority for songwriters!

First of all, read the lyrics slowly and silently.

Then read the lyrics silently and simultaneously listen to the song.

Read the lyrics aloud.

Read the lyrics, play the song and sing along all at the same time.

Finally, sing along to the song without the lyrics. Many times.

Find the singer's website. Read about them. What is their background, their story? Are they touring at the moment? Subscribe to their newsletter.

Do you enjoy poetry? The same ideas apply. Read slowly and silently to understand the gist of the poem. Get an English translation if you need it. Then recite the poem slowly and with passion. Savour the pronunciation.

Listen to your audio book, music, radio or lesson for a few minutes before you go to sleep and again when you wake up in the morning.

Find a short meditation to listen to before bedtime, in moments of stress or if you wake during the night and can't get back to sleep.

In this way, your foreign language is the first and last thing in your daily life and this repetitive practice will help to build up a healthy learning habit.

Repetition is the mother of all learning!
Repetition is the mother of all learning!
Repetition is the mother of all learning!
Repetition is the mother of all learning!
Repetition is the mother of all learning!
Repetition is the mother of all learning!

WATCHING THE BOX

Watch some television in your target language. This is a passive activity and only works alongside your other learning. Initially, watch with subtitles also in that language (not your mother tongue). But be aware that real-life situations do not come with subtitles! Aim to watch the TV for as long as possible WITHOUT the subtitles and only glance down to use them as a last resort.

Use subtitles in English if you have to. If you are a beginner or you find the TV show is completely baffling then use the English subtitles if they are available. It's not the ideal situation but it's much better than struggling through a programme, not understanding it and feeling frustrated and stressed.

The acting provides visual clues which can help you to understand the sense of the scene.

Find something light-hearted. Soap operas are particularly useful because they use the recurring language of daily life, relationships, families, friends, work, leisure time, problems and humour. Furthermore they are usually short, broadcast almost every day, and will give you the language repetition you need.

Pay attention to the way people speak. Listen to their tone of voice, watch their body language and hand gestures. Notice their facial expressions.

Tune into the news. Newsreaders are trained (usually!) to speak clearly and to articulate their words precisely without the use of too much slang. You will be able to get the gist of some of the news reports through the images and video footage of events. Watch how they are speaking, listen to the vocabulary and intonation they use to describe what's happening on the screen. You'll learn new words without realizing because you're following a story line. Watch the world news in English first. This way you'll already know the context and will have a better understanding of what the news announcers are talking about.

This is authentic language, spoken by native speakers at a normal speed. It's not the same as having an real face to face conversation with a native speaker but it's good practice for you.

If you find a small, local TV news channel in your target language you will learn a great deal about the local community that will never be reported on the national news. If you have satellite or cable TV you should have more foreign language options. Check the TV listings for programmes and stations in your new language.

If you only have a little time then listen to and read the news headlines. Write down one new word on a sticky note and place it on the TV screen. One new word a day adds up to a very wide vocabulary at the end of a year.

Unless you are extremely proficient, avoid watching comedies because they tend to use more colloquial language and cultural references, making them very difficult to understand in a foreign language.

If you don't have time to sit in front of the TV, then switch it on anyway and let it play in the background. Your brain is still listening to the language and processing the rhythms and flow of the speech. We learn to listen before we speak.

Watch for a few minutes only to start with. It's challenging to watch, listen and read at the same time. Gradually build up until you can watch the entire programme.

This is a great way to relax after a long day. You can put your feet up and passively receive your target language. It doesn't feel like a lesson as such but you'll be absorbing new vocabulary and pronunciation and revisiting some old linguistic friends.

There is joy in repetition. Prince

FILM BUFF

Watching a film is not quite the same as watching TV in our chosen language. There are some disadvantages.

Films are long and the language level may be too advanced or subtle for you to follow what's happening.

It's difficult to focus for that length of time. You're also trying to enjoy the film and understand the plot.

There is no script like there is for a textbook CD where you can read and listen and repeat as many times as you want to a specific piece of discourse. You cannot do this in a two hour film without investing a great deal of time.

It's a one-off experience, not repetitive like a soap opera or TV series.

HOWEVER, you love film, you managed to do a load of language learning today and now you deserve a treat! Watch a film in your chosen language but choose wisely.

What's your all-time favourite mother tongue film? Is this film available in your target language? You already know the plot and maybe some of the script. Could be a good choice.

Look for the most popular films in your chosen language. Choose a film that interests you.

Watch the film (or a part of the film) a couple of times with subtitles in your target language. Use the subtitles only when you really need them to understand the sense of what's happening on the screen. Don't try to remember and don't think you need to understand every word.

Spend some time with this movie. You'll be able to listen to the sounds and the rhythm of the language. You'll hear certain expressions and phrases that often crop up. You'll notice particular cultural idiosyncrasies.

Any previous learning will be consolidated. For example if you've been studying a grammar point in a textbook and then you hear this in context during the film, it will help to fix it in your mind.

Cinema is a medium that can translate ideas. David Lynch

THE WRITING'S ON THE WALL

Buy an attractive notebook and pen or pencil, something you will enjoy using.

At the end of the day, settle down for a few minutes and write a minimum of three positive sentences. If you're a beginner then translate three new words.

Write about whatever comes to mind. What happened today? What made you smile a little, laugh out loud? What and who are you grateful for? Did you eat something delicious, bump into a friend, exchange some banter at the shop?

What are your plans for tomorrow? Next week? Next year? What book are you going to read next? What music will you listen to? When are you next going to your favourite restaurant?

How are you feeling now? Where are you at this moment? Describe your surroundings and your frame of mind.

Something different seems to happen to your brain when you put pen to paper as opposed to using a computer keyboard. There is no automatic spelling and grammar check! You have more time to pause and reflect. The marks that you make on the paper appear to have more meaning. They stay in your memory for longer. Take your time to complete a sentence. Enjoy the process.

Pay attention to your handwriting, make it legible. Focus a little on the grammar and spelling, especially the new and unfamiliar. Use these few moments to repeat any new language you came across today.

Make this an optimistic and encouraging text. Be upbeat. Finish the day in a constructive way!

www WARNING! LIMITED SURFING ALLOWED!

Technology cannot teach you a language! There is something about the physical act of writing with a pen or pencil on paper that helps many people to remember. And I have never found a time-saving app that is as quick as scribbling in my little notebook or on a sticky note.

On the other hand, alongside your other resources, technology can provide profitable possibilities. Online learning sites; blogs; videos; dictionaries and pronunciation guides; news; social network sites and language exchange partners. What do you prefer? It's very personal. Search for the most popular at this time and try the free ones first.

Choose an interactive learning website which offers the opportunity to progress and includes repetition and a reminder to participate daily.

Look for a dictionary with meanings, equivalent words, opposites, examples, translations and pronunciations.

Find the main news channel in your target language and make this the home page on your computer.

Change the language on your electronic devices, eg mobile phone, computer, TV etc to your chosen language. Make a note of essential vocabulary such as *Settings / Change language* so that you can change it back if you need to. DO NOT change the language on your GPS/SatNav device!

But BEWARE! You may find that the tangible act of using paper-based activities will aid your memory and recall. Doing something physical makes a huge difference when you're learning a language. You need paper-based activities that don't go away when you turn off your computer. So use web based tasks sparingly.

IT IS ESSENTIAL that you do not flit around the internet spending a few minutes here and there with many different sites. Have a plan and stick to it. More about this later.

Some sites you may find interesting:

www.yabla.com interactive videos at different levels and with assorted topics

www.duolingo.com learn and progress through writing, dictation, speaking and reading

www.lang-8.com your text can be corrected by a native speaker

www.rhinospike.com your text can be read aloud by a native speaker

www.ankisrs.net flash cards

www.memrise.com flash cards

www.memorista.com learn vocabulary through mental images

www.italki.com social network that connects language students and teachers

www.youtube.com for videos, music, news and short lessons in your target language

www.wordreference.com vast dictionary with translations, definitions, contexts and verb conjugations

There are many. Maybe too many! Set an alarm and give yourself 30 minutes to see what's out there in your target language. Something that suits you and your particular learning style.

Revise your PC Health and Safety:

Make sure that your chair is comfortable and supports your back.

Wrists and forearms horizontal and straight so that you can use the keyboard effectively and without strain.

Limit the amount of time you spend in front of the computer to no more than 50 minutes, then get up, move around and stretch. Give your eyes, muscles, joints and brain a rest. Don't wait until you ache!

Don't forget to blink or your eyes will be tired and sore.

Sit sideways to the light and adjust the brightness of the screen to suit the lighting in the room.

Do not sit with your laptop on your knees. It is believed that the heat generated from the computer can cause serious health problems.

Do not lean over to read papers next to your computer screen. Use a document holder instead.

Do not look at a PC screen in the late evening before bed-time. Some research indicates that the blue light can confuse the brain and affect sleep patterns.

Don't spend hours and hours on the internet, use it to enhance your REAL life!

A HOBBY A DAY KEEPS THE DOLDRUMS AWAY!

What are your hobbies? What do you enjoy doing in your spare time? Travel? Sport? Cinema? Arts and crafts? Reading? Cooking? Walking? Eating out?

Gather resources so that you can follow your hobby in your target language.

Look for books; magazines; instructions; DVDs; TV programmes; websites; blogs; clubs. Join and interact with others who follow the same interests as you do. The internet makes this an easy process and you may find a speaking partner who shares your pastime and can also help you learn their language.

What equipment do you need for your hobby? Make a list of the relevant vocabulary and translate it into your target language.

Do a little research. How do people spend their leisure time in the country of your chosen language? Is your particular hobby practised there? Is it expensive? What hobbies are most popular? Are there any particular hobbies, sports or games as yet unknown to you?

Whatever your hobby is, if you enjoy food and wine, or a particular kind of music or dance, then why not try doing that when you go abroad? It's an excellent way of making new friends and trying out your new language skills, whatever level they might be. Make some enquiries before you travel and see if there's a group where you can meet up with the locals. In my little town in Sicily there are dance troupes; car and motorbike clubs; trekking associations; crafts groups; a knitting circle; a theatre company; a wine-tasting association; a Bridge club and an athletics team. And I'm sure there are many more that I'm not aware of. This is a great way to repeat, revise and develop your language skills without stress as you're doing something that you know and enjoy.

Repetition is the mother of learning, the father of action, which makes it the architect of accomplishment. Zig Ziglar

WISH YOU WERE HERE?

Buy a big, colourful map of the country of your chosen language and give it pride of place on a wall in your home. Familiarise yourself with the major cities; regions; rivers; mountains; geographical features; roads, railways and airports.

Plan a holiday to a place where your target language is spoken. Visit a busy town or city and speak to everyone you meet! Go to the cafes; bars; restaurants; supermarkets; bookshops. Buy apples and newspapers. Get your hair cut. Use the public transport and the leisure centre. Go to the pharmacy and library. Carry your pocket phrase book, dictionary and a pen and notebook.

Smile. Speak. Communicate!

Tell the locals you are learning their beautiful language and that you would like to speak to them. Look for people who are strolling and not rushing, smiling and not frowning, choose wisely!

Ask them simple questions and thank them for their kind responses. Most people are benevolent and will want to help you. Thank those who don't want to chat and move on, try again.

Prepare sentences, write them down, read from your script if you need to. For example:

Hello, can you help me please?

Where is the bus stop / newspaper shop / museum?

Where is the best coffee in town?

Anticipate responses. In a supermarket, for example, you might hear the following:

Do you have a loyalty card?

Would you like a bag?

Do you need help with your packing?

Are you saving the points / stamps?

I'm sorry, this till is closed.

Do you have the correct money?

If you ask for directions you know you may hear *Turn left or right, go straight ahead, it's opposite the bank*.

Anticipate and be prepared for replies. On your first day in any country you can do everything you need to do with your phrasebook and dictionary, a can-do attitude, a little confidence and a big smile!

WHAT BIG TEETH YOU'VE GOT, GRAMMAR….!

Grammar is NOT your priority! Are you surprised? Do you feel that you must understand the grammar perfectly before you can speak? Do you have a terror or a dislike of grammar? Don't worry, I'm not going to hit you with the Grammar Stick!

I have worked with many students who can write beautifully in their second or even third language. Pages and pages of grammatically correct text on any topic under the sun. They read newspapers, magazines and novels. They watch TV without subtitles and listen to political debates on the radio. They are highly proficient students. But they find themselves in a beginner's class because their speaking skills need to be developed.

These students spend years in solitude, locked in their rooms, swotting away, working their socks off, cramming up on the grammar. They attend classes, sometimes at university level, but the language is taught in their mother tongue. So they never learn to speak and can't even order a coffee!

Think about why you are learning this foreign language. Surely it's to communicate with other people? Written language and spoken language are two very different things. If you speak using the written version of the language you will sound unnatural and stilted. However, when you speak in order to communicate then other people will respond to you – even if your grammar is not correct.

Compare these two sentences:

Excuse me, could you tell me where the train station is, please?

Train? Where? Please?

Obviously the first sentence is grammatically correct. However, the message is very clear in both examples.

I'm not suggesting that you go to your chosen country and speak like Tarzan! But the Art of Communication is far more important that the Science of the Grammar.

With a basic vocabulary, a pocket dictionary and a bit of determination you can communicate with the majority of people. Most of them will respond to your attempts to reach out to them.

All languages have grammar. Native speakers intuitively know the grammar of their own language. But you do NOT need a good understanding of the grammar of your target language to converse! Grammar does not help you to speak. You need confidence, some vocabulary and a few phrases to communicate with a native speaker.

However, if you want to speak *well*, then you need some understanding of how the language works.

DO NOT COMPARE YOUR TARGET LANGUAGE TO ENGLISH! See it as a separate entity altogether. Don't be tempted to regard it as *difficult*. See it as *different*.

The best time to study grammar in your new language is after you have been exposed to this language for a while. Then you will read about a particular grammar point and have an understanding of how things work in context.

Let me give you an example. One of the first things you learn in a new language is:

Hello, my name is Joan, I'm pleased to meet you!

You don't need to dissect it and pick out all of the grammar points. You simply learn it as a chunk of language. The grammar will come later.

Buy yourself a *textbook* appropriate for your level with cultural information, clear, concise explanations, lots of examples, exercises and a key so that you can check your own progress. A decent textbook will contain all the grammar you need for your particular level. Look for online reviews, ask your local bookshop or library for advice. This is a very personal choice. Choose a book that *you* like.

Make sure that the textbook contains plenty of dialogues with audio recordings and tapescripts so that you can read and listen at the same time. This is everyday language in use and very effective indeed for you. Listen to the dialogues as much as you can, download them onto your portable listening device, play them in the car, listen to them before you go to sleep or first thing in the morning. This repetition will fix the vocabulary into your mind and help you to remember.

Use the textbook! Set aside a few minutes every day to work slowly and systematically through the chapters. Take your time. Absorb each new theme before you move on to the next. Revise and repeat. See it as a bit of Brain Training, like a crossword or Sudoku.

Place a sticky note on the side of the page where you finished reading so you can easily find your place again later. Put another sticky note on any page containing the tapescripts and answers. Don't waste time flicking through any book trying to find where you left off.

Don't TRY to remember. Only REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT!

If you are grammar-resistant or find it difficult to get your head around grammatical structures then start slowly but have a plan. For as long as it takes, focus exclusively on one grammar point only. Give it your total attention, study it; think about it; write some great examples on sticky notes; use it when you write; look for the grammar in context when you read the newspaper; chat about it when you meet a speaking partner. This repetition will help you to grasp and master any grammar with confidence. A good understanding of the grammar rules will improve your ability to communicate effectively and accurately.

Let's eat Grandma…

Let's eat, Grandma!

Grammar can save lives!

HOW TO HAVE A MEMORY LIKE AN ELEPHANT

How do you build up a vocabulary and remember it? You can't go forward in any language if you don't know enough words. The vocabulary is vital. So what's the best way to learn it? As ever, repetition is the key.

One way is to get an A4 notebook and fold the pages in two vertically. Write the new vocabulary on the left and the translation into English on the left. Or prepare flashcards with your target word on one side and the English equivalent on the other.

For some people, visualisation works very well. Use different coloured pens or draw pictures or diagrams if this helps you.

Look at your first word. Say the word aloud, practise the pronunciation. Spell it aloud two or three times. Then cover the word so you can't see it. Write the word on a separate piece of paper, spelling aloud as you go. Then turn the original paper over and check your spelling. If it's correct then move on to the next word. If it's not correct then start again. Write a short and simple sentence using these words IN CONTEXT and you're done!

This *LOOK / SAY / SPELL / COVER / WRITE / CHECK* system can be very effective to learn vocabulary and short phrases. Concentrate on a maximum of five in one study session.

IN CONTEXT is everything. Think about the situation in which a particular word is used, the words used before and after it. Let's use the word *take* as an example:

I'm going to take Jake to the airport. I'll take the car, it'll only take ten minutes. Shall I take the camera? I want to take a photo before the plane takes off. I told him to take warm clothes, it'll be cold. He never takes any notice of me but I don't take offence. He always takes the mickey.

If you try to memorize every single combination using the word *take* from a dictionary you would be there forever! Learn from a context. *Bye for now, take care of yourself.*

When you're confident about these new words, tick them off and move on to the next one. And every time you open your notebook, spend a minute or two revising the old vocabulary at random.

Choose your words carefully, words that are useful to you and this is very personal. Depending on your language goal you may need vocabulary to travel or to work. You may need technical or legal jargon. Focus on an appropriate category each week, say Food or Health vocabulary and learn connected words

Learn chunks of language such as *Have a nice day; I'm on my way; It's going to rain* and other common and predictable phrases. You'll build up a useful artillery of dialogue in this way.

Review is absolutely essential. Recycle, revisit, revise, repeat. These words and phrases will soon become familiar to you.

The Spaced Repetition System is a computerized learning technique that uses sophisticated timed intervals to help you learn a large number of items. You will be shown a word and then shown it again after a few minutes, a couple of days and then again after a few weeks. Search online, try it out

and make your own decision. It can be effective to learn when you're on the go. Use it alongside your other strategies.

Read as much as you can and really notice your new vocabulary in context. You may find graded readers in your language, designed specifically for language learning at all levels. Or read magazines with short articles and advertisements. They tend to use brief, everyday language and you'll be surprised how often the same words are used over and over again. I once read that 95% of common texts (newspapers, blogs) use a core of only 3,000 words. That's not such a great number to learn!

SPEAK UP!

This is where you really must invest the majority of your precious time. SPEAKING is by far the most important thing to create fluency in your target language.

Begin by reading aloud to yourself. Build up your confidence. Repeat a paragraph several times and notice how you start to improve and stumble less over unfamiliar vocabulary.

You must also create the opportunity to talk to native speakers. Even if you are a complete beginner with only a few basic sentences under your belt, it's enough to have a simple conversation.

Take into account that the vast majority of communication to express feelings and attitudes is determined by *non-verbal cues*. Think about intonation and volume of speech; shaking hands; eye contact; facial expressions; silence; laughter; frowning; nodding and shaking of heads; winking; hand gestures; rolling of eyes… We can infer a great deal of information from all of these. Even clothing can convey non-verbal cues about someone's personality; background; age; authority; confidence; religious beliefs and financial status! So don't be afraid, get ready to *communicate* your target language now!

Unfortunately most people want to study for a great deal of time before they feel ready to speak. This is the single, biggest mistake you can make. You simply MUST step outside of your comfort zone and SPEAK! It's exactly like sport. You have to work out – a lot! Persistently and consistently. And make lots and lots of mistakes. Nobody ever learned to ice skate without falling down and getting back up. Theory is all well and good but without the practice you will never be fluent.

Remember, attitude is everything.

You want to be fluent and I want you to be fluent. This is how it's done and it's NOT that difficult!

Find native speakers, NOT teachers, and set up regular sessions with them. Learn to speak by actually speaking, having a chat, talking about the weather and your plans for the weekend.

There are a couple of options. The first is a Language Exchange. For example, an English speaker who is learning Chinese will do a language exchange with a Chinese speaker who is learning English. This takes a longer time since you have to speak both languages. However, it doesn't cost you anything.

The second more preferable option is a native speaker who agrees to talk to you for a small payment. These are not qualified teachers, just regular people who want to make a little extra cash. This method is inexpensive when compared to professional teachers and you get individual attention.

How do you find people to help you speak?

ASK! Give it some thought. Where does your ideal language partner spend time? Ask your friends and family if they know anyone suitable. Ask colleagues; staff working in restaurants; bars and hotels; ask in your local library and bookshop; language school; local newspapers; clubs and associations, sports teams.

You can also find speaking partners online. Check these out:

www.meetup.com

www.craiglist.com

www.conversationexchange.com

www.italki.com

www.livemocha.com

www.wespeke.com

www.languageforexchange.com

www.tandemexchange.com

www.verbling.com

www.mylanguageexchange.com

Search online for *language exchange (your town/county)*.

These internet sites can be used anonymously, you don't have to give your real name or any personal details. *Observe internet safety. Do not disclose your full name, address or phone number to anyone online that you don't know or trust.*

There are lots of people out there. Find a good option for you and then approach them and ask them for help. They are usually flattered to be asked and keen to get involved.

In my experience, it's often NOT a good idea to ask friends or family members who speak your target language to help you with your speaking practice. It can put a strain on your relationship. It's like asking your parent or spouse to teach you to drive a car… It can be a bit fraught…!

Meet for a coffee. Cafes are a great place to practise speaking. The background noise helps you to feel more confident and it means you have to listen carefully to your native speaker.

Take a notebook, a pen and a bilingual dictionary.

Tell your speaking buddy EXACTLY what you want to do. You want to SPEAK in your target language. You want them to moderate the speed of their voice to match your level, whether you are a complete beginner or someone very advanced. Ask them to correct your pronunciation. Tell them when you don't understand. Ask them to repeat, to clarify. Make MISTAKES! In fact, make many, many mistakes! Correct them, learn from them and move on.

But, above all, tell them not to interrupt you when you are speaking. Ask them to wait until you've finished what you want to say and then give you some gentle feedback.

Go slowly. Take your time. Think things through before you speak. This thinking time feels like ages but in reality it's only a few seconds. Your new friend will understand and give you the time you need.

Your speaking partner must be someone you like to talk to and get on well with. This is not your *teacher*, they are there to stimulate conversation and answer your questions about the language or the culture. If your partner doesn't understand this and tries to teach you (this is normal, by the way) then politely tell them you don't want them to teach you. You want them to help you to speak and practise the language.

It's normal to be a little nervous when you schedule your first speaking session but go ahead anyway. Don't put pressure on yourself, this should be fun! Remember, you can always speak in English at the beginning to explain exactly what you want. Then you can slowly but surely start to speak your target language.

Plan what you want to talk about. Think about difficulties you have now with the language. Prepare a few questions about the country or the language that you can ask. What phrases or expressions would you like to know? Write them down. Take them with you and put them on the table in front of you.

Write a short script. Read it aloud a few times at home first, keep it in front of you when you meet your speaking partner and refer to it if you need to. Start with something simple, a little ice-breaker:

Hello! My name is _____. Pleased to meet you! How are you?

What would you like to drink?

Thank you very much. I hope to see you again soon. Goodbye.

There are some things you will find yourself saying over and over again. Write these down in your target language and learn them:

Can you repeat that please?

I'm sorry, I don't understand.

What does _____ mean?

How do you spell it?

Please give me an example.

How do you pronounce this word?

Pause the conversation to take notes if you need to but don't try to write beautiful, clear notes in different coloured pens! You're there to talk, not to write. Scribble your notes on a piece of scrap paper. Write them up neatly later at home and review them. This isn't a waste of time - the repetition will help you to remember.

You could also record the entire conversation (with the permission of your partner) and review it at a later date. Listening to yourself speaking another language is a revelation and you will understand which areas you need to develop. Bear in mind that you need a lot of time to do this.

If you are a lower level then I suggest you speak about everyday topics using high-frequency vocabulary. For example, family; food; transport; weather; health; hobbies; books and films; likes

and dislikes; daily routine; work; holidays.

If you are very advanced and have the ability to chat away for hours then you must structure your lessons. Prepare a list of topics, maybe current affairs or controversial issues. Talk about the pros and cons of global warming; healthcare and lifestyle matters; illiteracy; reliance on technology or genetically modified foods. Buy a newspaper and comment spontaneously on the articles. Simply discuss what's on your mind at this moment. The subjects you can talk about with your partner are endless.

Have a conversation, not a monologue. Include your partner, ask them questions, get their point of view.

Don't focus on the grammar. Your speaking partner is not a teacher and may not know the grammar rules anyway. Of course you must ask for a grammatically correct version of what you want to say but write it down and then check out the grammar at home later.

You will instinctively know if this is the right speaking partner for you. Are you enjoying yourself? Feeling relaxed? Having fun? Speaking at least 80% of the time in your target language?

A willingness and ability to communicate with other people is fundamental in our lives. To be capable of doing that in a different language will have a massive impact on your learning but also on you. It's an incredible feeling when you have a conversation with a native speaker in their language and you find that you can understand and be understood.

Here's the thing. You need to dedicate some time for speaking practice. Schedule regular meetings so that you're frequently speaking your target language. Three times a week for about an hour each time is absolutely perfect and you will quickly notice a huge difference in your ability to communicate. Three times a week for half an hour may be more manageable for you and will still produce decent results. Your speaking partner is your new pal, remember? So this practice time will become a pleasure and part of your social life!

If you genuinely cannot find this amount of time then I suggest that the absolute minimum you should aim for is half an hour a week, maybe on Skype. Speaking practice is essential if you want to learn any language.

Once you have eliminated distractions and time thieves from your life, look carefully at your diary and schedule in these speaking sessions. Consider weekends; evenings; early mornings; midday breaks; immediately before or after work.

When you're not talking to your native speaker then have a chat with your native speaker friends, your teacher, the dog or yourself in your target language!

Keep up a running commentary of your day, start with something insignificant, write it down if you're a beginner and read from the script:

Maybe I'll wear my blue shirt and my jeans today. Bacon and eggs for breakfast. Do I have enough money? I need to go to the bank. Let's listen to the radio in the kitchen. It's raining. Where is my umbrella?

Continue during the day, as much as your daily routine allows.

Record yourself and then listen carefully to the playback. Compare yourself to newsreaders and actors on TV. Ask yourself how you can improve.

Remember: If you want to speak in your new language then you must… SPEAK!

Use the pronunciation tool of an online dictionary and practise the exact pronunciation of one new word every day. Choose everyday vocabulary that is useful for you. Listen and repeat and listen and repeat and listen and repeat.

Search the internet for videos, find someone who speaks your new language clearly and fairly slowly. Newsreaders are usually spot on for this. Copy them. Say a couple of words aloud and mirror them. Pay close attention to the rise and fall of the language, watch their mouth movements when they talk, scrutinize their facial expressions, emulate their intonation.

Don't worry too much about your own pronunciation. This will naturally develop when you talk to a native speaker and listen to the radio, TV, music etc in your target language.

What to do if you're shy… Many students shut themselves away with an online course and study in silence because they're shy or they don't want to make mistakes. Many of my students have asked for individual lessons because they don't want to speak in front of others. I always gently tell them to GET OVER IT and insist they join a group. They find themselves way out of their comfort zone but after an hour in class with other people who are also shy and who also make many, many mistakes they realise that this is the way FORWARD! Meeting new people and communicating with them in another language is your ultimate goal, it's the whole point of learning a language! Step outside of your comfort zone and speak from today.

To become really good at anything, you have to practice and repeat, practice and repeat, until the technique becomes intuitive. Paolo Coelho

A NOTE OF CAUTION

Meeting new people should always be fun and your new speaking partner may become your best mate! But there are certain risks involved in meeting someone who you don't really know yet. So please be careful. Observe the usual safety rules when you arrange to meet someone new:

Always meet in a public place where there are lots of people.

Tell friends or family members where you are, who you are with and what time you will be home.

Don't give out personal details like your full name, address or place of work.

Watch your alcohol intake.

Use your own transport to get to and from the meeting.

Make an excuse and leave immediately if you feel uncomfortable.

Bring your fully-charged mobile phone with you.

Keep your purse, wallet, phone and keys on you or next to you and in a closed bag.

Arrange to call or meet a friend as soon as the meeting is over.

Meet your speaking partner a few times under these circumstances until you are really certain that they are genuine and worthy of your trust.

Since there is nothing so well worth having as friends, never lose a chance to make them.
Francesco Guicciardini

TESTING! TESTING!

You have to put in a lot of work to learn a new language. Maybe you should consider sitting an exam?

There are some great resources available online to practise for exams in foreign languages. Why not have a look at them? Do some past papers and check your answers? If you get some great results then maybe you should do the exam…? It's entirely up to you.

Either way, you get to do some more practice so you can't lose.

If you decide you want to sit an exam then it is absolutely essential that you are totally familiar with the exam format.

Research the most widely-recognised and respected exams in your target language. Where can you sit this exam? How much does it cost? How long does it take? Some exams take place over a number of weeks depending on the availability of examiners and assessors. Research the exam centres carefully before you pay for your exam. Choose an accredited centre with a good reputation. Check online reviews for this.

Plan your study time carefully.

Schedule time to develop your skills in speaking, listening, reading, writing and grammar.

Complete as many past exam papers as possible.

Work under exam conditions as much as you can, aim to complete the paper within the time allowed.

Choose resources with answer keys attached so that you can check your own progress and build up any areas of weakness.

Find out the percentage you will need to pass your exam. When you consistently achieve this in your practice tests then schedule your exam for the next possible date.

A few general hints and tips to prepare yourself for any exam:

Remember that this is your opportunity to demonstrate how good you are! You may feel a little nervous. That is normal and healthy and will sharpen your performance on the day.

If you are totally terrified then try to relax. Take a few deep breaths, remind yourself that this is only an exam and that you are prepared for it. You've been consistently getting good results in your practice so now you are ready to wow them!

The week before the exam, check the date, time and venue. Send a written message via email to the exam centre and make sure that the exam has not been cancelled or postponed. Double-check that they have your application to sit the exam and your payment and that you have an email to prove it.

On the day before your exam it's a very good idea to prepare everything for the following day. Pack your bag with pens; pencils; erasers; paper; water; sweets; tissues; your reading glasses; any medication you may need; your receipt for payment and candidate conformation for the exam;

directions to the exam centre and anything else that you may need.

Finalize your plans for getting to the exam centre, put petrol in the car, double check the bus times, book the taxi, confirm that your friend will pick you up.

Set out your clothes for the following morning. Decide what you will eat for breakfast. Find your lucky mascot or your watch or whatever else you cannot do without.

Have a relaxing evening at home, read a little or watch a short TV programme in your target language then get an early night. Set TWO alarms for the exam day!

Allow more than enough time to find the exam centre and the nearest coffee shop. Get there early. Have a drink and a snack before the exam. Never sit an exam on an empty stomach, you need to be fuelled up!

Arrive at the exam centre in plenty of time to register, use the toilet, find your seat and check that your name has been spelt correctly on any paperwork.

Listen CAREFULLY to any instructions you are given. If you have any problems at all then raise your hand and explain your issues. Make sure that you are comfortable, that the sun is not shining in your eyes, that you can hear well, that your desk doesn't wobble and drive you mad!

If required to do so, remember to write your name on the exam paper! You wouldn't believe how many people forget to do this.

When you open an exam paper, always make sure that all parts of the exam are there and that there are no pages missing.

FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS TO THE LETTER! Stick to the word count for writing tasks. Try to leave a few minutes at the end of written exams to look over your work for any silly mistakes with capital letters or punctuation.

Answer every question. Leave any questions you are not sure about to the end. Don't waste time thinking and re-thinking, come back to it later. Don't forget!

If you don't know the answer then guess – you might be lucky! Check the exam rules first – your particular exam board may penalize you for an incorrect answer.

Look on the back of every piece of paper, there may be further questions there that you didn't notice.

If there is a separate answer sheet then complete this AS YOU GO, do not wait until the end of the exam. You may run out of time, your hard work will be wasted and you will fail the exam.

Ask the examiner if there is something that you need clarifying.

Keep a close eye on the time. Use all of the time allowed, never, ever leave an exam before the end. If you finish before the allocated time, make sure you haven't missed anything, and then check and double-check your answers.

After the exam, walk away. Resist the urge to ask others how they answered a particular question.

The exam is finished, give yourself a pat on the back, sit back and wait for your results.

Good luck!

LINE YOUR POCKETS

Carry something in your target language with you at all times.

Think of the time you waste waiting for something to load on your computer; sitting on a bus; kicking your heels at the bank or Post Office; waiting for a lift; wandering aimlessly around the airport; on hold to a call centre; coffee breaks; lunch hour.

A lot of the time you might actually be on your own. What do you usually do? Stare into space? Twiddle your thumbs? These little pockets of time can add up to hours and hours every week so let's use them productively.

Collect lots of portable study material, such as:

phrasebook

newspaper or magazine in your target language

dual-language book

notebook and sticky notes and pen

mobile device with apps for learning

listening device so you can listen to the radio, a podcast or some music

print-out of the grammar point you are studying at this moment

Train yourself to recognise when you're going to have a few minutes spare and do something constructive in that time.

Spend your time wisely, even if it's only a few minutes. It's another valuable mini-lesson. Repeat, revisit, revise.

The price you have to pay to be great at something is – repetition. Andrew Brown

GET ORGANISED – HAVE A *SIMPLE* PLAN

I have given you loads of ideas on how you can fit learning a language into your everyday routine. You must choose what is the most useful for you at this moment in your life. I can't tell you what you should do, this is your decision. I don't know you and you are quite unique, made up of your own circumstances, experiences, ideas, skills, hobbies, needs and dreams.

There are so many great resources for learning a language that we often end up feeling confused and overwhelmed. Consider those times when you have a few spare minutes to spend at your desk with your target language. You might find that you end up flitting between the internet, your textbook, a newspaper and an online video without any real focus. At the end of your precious study time you feel no further forward. So keep things really simple.

You need only **One** textbook and **One** online course from the thousands that are available.

You should build up a great store of resources but for today you need only **One** book, magazine or newspaper to read.

Use only **One** notebook to make notes and practise your writing.

Choose **One** radio station and / or **One** TV programme or podcast for today.

Your study plan is also very simple. There are only **Three** steps:

1. Learning – take in information by **reading** and **listening**. This is *receptive* learning where you take new items on board in a passive way and work towards understanding them. You could listen to the radio or a podcast, read a textbook or a novel.

2. Practice – use the new language in context by **speaking** and **writing**. This is *productive* learning. Now you have to be active and do something! This could be scheduling a chat with your speaking partner and using the language you've just learned, speaking to yourself or writing your diary.

3. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Review and revise. Revisit all of your notes from time to time. Have a little look at the last topic in your textbook before you move onto the next page. Use this new language TODAY. Write it down; speak it. Don't *try* to remember. It leads to tension and where there is tension there is no FUN and little learning!

THE VALUE OF REPETITION CANNOT BE OVERSTATED. Repetition is the key to mastering your chosen language. Repeat, repeat, repeat and it will become automatic.

The relationship between receptive learning and active practice is an interesting and complex one. For example, developing your reading skills can contribute to the improvement in writing skills. Listening to the radio can play a key role in boosting speaking and pronunciation performance. You need a mix of speaking, listening, reading, writing and grammar and you'll find that they all *feed* each other. A speaking partner and a high-quality textbook will give you the basics that you need.

LEARNING

PRACTICE

REPEAT

It's most important that these **Three** points form the basis of every study session even if it's only for a few minutes. Give those few minutes your complete attention. Simple!

LEARNING

PRACTICE

REPEAT

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

This is an example of how I fit my Italian learning into my daily routine:

I lie in bed for a few minutes thinking happy thoughts (or otherwise – it depends!) before I get up in the morning.

I learn five new words or a new phrase in the shower. I prepare the words the night before and stick them on the shower door. I speak aloud and repeat, repeat, repeat to try to fix them in my mind before I leave the cubicle.

I read aloud for 3 minutes after breakfast, 3 minutes after lunch and 3 minutes after dinner. This tiny amount of time has tremendous results. Try it for one week and note your progress.

I write vocabulary, a phrase or some grammar on a sticky note, put it in a prominent place and read it when I walk past.

I have a conversation with myself, a friend or the cat. Don't expect purrfect pronunciation from the puss though!

The radio is always on in the background.

My books, newspapers and magazines are on the table, I pick one at random, read a paragraph silently and then aloud. This takes no time at all.

I write my shopping list or To Do list. I speak aloud as I write it, spelling the items.

I listen to some music when I exercise. Sing along when I know the words and there's nobody to listen to my caterwauling.

I read the news headlines online silently and then aloud.

I spend a few minutes with my textbook after dinner.

I write three sentences in my notebook, using the grammar I'm learning at the moment.

I keep an old MP3 player under my pillow and listen to a download before I go to sleep.

The secret is to have prompts everywhere. Put a book on your bedside table so you'll see it when you wake up. Put the radio on the kitchen table where you normally have your toast and coffee. Put a CD on the car seat so you have to move it to get in. Divide your shopping list into two columns to remind you to use your target language alongside your first language. You get the idea.

Say you spend only three or four minutes on each of the above tasks, that will add up to an impressive hour or so every day. THREE OR FOUR MINUTES! You can do it. This is enough for you to see some **dramatic progression** in your ability to think, speak, listen, read and write your target language. Daily practise leads to a habit and it is this daily habit that leads to the learning.

If you have a spare hour here and there, then so much the better. Plan your hour carefully, don't jump from task to task. Focus totally for the full hour and then stop and give yourself a break. Allow a

little time for your brain to absorb the new information.

Can you imagine how good you're going to feel when you make some of these small changes and you really start to produce your new language? When all your hard work starts to pay off? When you understand what everyone's saying? When words roll easily off your tongue? It's only a matter of good attitude, belief in yourself and persistent practice.

This is not about the necessity to *study* the language. This is about enjoying the process, immersing yourself in the language, challenging yourself and, above all, about having fun!

If you are not willing to learn then no-one can help you. If you are determined to learn then NO-ONE CAN STOP YOU!

So that's all for now, folks. Thank you so much for reading my very first book. I hope you found it useful and that you have some ideas for your new language journey.

If you have any queries or comments, suggestions or gripes about my book then please drop me an email. Let me know what works for you in your language learning. And what doesn't work. I'd love to hear from you.

Finally I would like to ask you a favour. If you have the time and feel like doing so, then I would really appreciate it if you would leave a review of this book on Amazon. Please tell me and everyone else what you think. This is my first book and your feedback will be most welcome. I want to improve!

I wish you the very best of luck!

In gratitude

Joan Pattison

joanpattisonbooks@gmail.com