



How to Study



How to Study: Introduction

The materials for each new week should be prepared prior to the conversation session for that week. Students should go to the first conversation session with Week 1 material already prepared. Work your way through the weekly assignment concentrating on vocabulary memorization, structural accuracy, and practice, practice, practice!

In order to succeed with this independent format, you will need to take quite a bit of creative initiative in terms of designing your own practice sessions:

- Talk to your coat rack.
- Speak in your head to everyone you meet as you cross campus.
- Make up imaginary conversations with the squirrels on the steps of the dining hall.

You can never have too much practice! Once you think you have mastered a concept – let's say "greetings" – push yourself to the next level:

- You can greet Jim and you can greet Maria.
- Can you greet Jim and Maria simultaneously? And what if they don't hear you?
- What if you thought it was Maria but it turns out to be Susan?

Continue to practice, pushing yourself to more and more difficult levels of conversing by introducing complications to the situation.

The first step is memorizing the vocabulary and structures, but that's only the beginning. Armed with that information, you have to imagine every possible situation that could include the week's vocabulary:

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- Can you handle x or y or z?

- What would x say to you in y situation, and how would you respond?

After you have thought about what situations could occur, work out the scenario out loud, and keep refining it until you can run through it flawlessly out loud. Then move on to a new scenario.

This section includes more important tips like these. Remember that the more time you practice, the better you will get!

Preparing for Studying

Before you make a plan to study, think about how much study time is expected of you. Find your syllabus and take a look at how much study time is expected of students during the week. When you know what is expected of you, it will be easier to come up with your study plan.

Planning When to Study

Next, make a plan for the timing of your study sessions. You definitely have other classes, meetings, practices, and rehearsals that you will need to work around, so think about:

- What are the chunks of time you know you have free that you could use for language study?
- **You will get the most out of a consistent study time, so once you decide on a schedule, block out those times and do not schedule any classes or meetings that conflict with them.** There will inevitably be weeks when you have to reschedule, but you have the best chance of achieving an uninterrupted study hour if you treat it like your other academic obligations.
- **If you are available at multiple times of day, think about when your brain works best.** In the morning, afternoon or evening? Before or after you eat?

Planning Study Space

During your study sessions, you will need to read, write, and speak aloud. It is essential that you study somewhere you can comfortably speak without distracting others or being distracted:

- If you usually study in a shared space with friends or roommates, **consider relocating for language study** so that you have the space to speak freely.
- If you like to have other study tools available, such as a whiteboard or a desktop computer, **plan accordingly.**
- **Find out if you can reserve a classroom or a room in the library.**

Study Materials

For your study sessions, **think of what you will need beyond pen, paper, and your textbook:**

- Will you need a box of index cards to store your flashcards?
- Do you need highlighters and small sticky notes/tabs to help you find information in your book?

Consider how you will do listening activities: Your listening materials are an essential

component of your studying.

- Are the audio files for your book on a CD or online? If your computer doesn't have a CD drive, you might want to invest in an external CD drive or use a different computer when you do listening exercises.
- Depending on the format of your CD, you could also try moving the files onto your computer.

If you use flashcards, take notes, or use other materials online or on your phone, **make a plan to keep your devices distraction-free while studying:**

- Turn off notifications on your phone. On your laptop, use a program that temporarily blocks access to websites that take your focus away from your work.
- **Make sure that the time, place, and materials for studying work well together.** If you plan to study in a location besides your room, you might need to bring your textbook, notebook, maybe your laptop, and anything else you need with you to other classes and commitments.
- You will need to make sure the location you plan to study in is free of distraction during the time of your studying. This is particularly important if you live with other people or if you want to study in a shared space.

Make a Plan

Before your study time, it's important to **make a plan of how exactly you will use your time.** Making a plan beforehand has many benefits:

- **It helps you remember** everything you need to do.
- **It reminds you of the different ways you need to interact with the language.**
- **It helps you avoid wasting time** by sitting at your desk thinking "What should I do next?"

Your study plan should include at least some of the following: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The skills you emphasize will depend on what is in your syllabus or study guide for that week, and the format of your course. For example, if your course includes a weekly written homework assignment, you will need to spend some of your study time writing out exercises and completing the written homework.

If your course is speaking-based and doesn't have written assignments, you will spend much less time on writing and more time on other skills.

How should you allocate your time?

You do not have to do the exact same activities for every study session. Create a list of potential activities that you can do to practice a particular skill (for help planning your study, refer to the articles under: [How to Study](#)). Select a variety of activities to do during the week so that you're covering everything present in the assigned material.

That said, it's beneficial to repeat some activities more than others.

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- **You should be speaking as much as possible throughout the week.** Speaking and

listening are the main skills you will use during your conversation sessions, and the skills you will rely on most in the target language country.

- You can also cycle through reading practice, writing practice, flashcards, and other activities depending on your needs.

Some examples of one-hour study session plans are below:

Example 1 (Beginner)

- Reading textbook chapter, taking notes, making new flashcards **(15 minutes)**
- Repeatedly listening to audio dialogues and examples from book, repeating them aloud **(15 minutes)**
- Speaking aloud: using new vocabulary words in a sentence **(15 minutes)**
- Reviewing flashcards of new and old vocabulary **(10 minutes)**
- Writing: writing multiple short sentences using material learned, practicing the script (if applicable) **(5 minutes)**

[Sample Study Plan for Beginners](#)

Example 2 (Intermediate)

- Reading textbook chapter, taking notes, making new flashcards **(15 minutes)**
- Writing: writing a short paragraph, writing out exercises from book **(10 minutes)**
- Speaking: reading written paragraph out loud, adding sentences to it orally **(20 minutes)**
- Listening to a radio or watching a TV show without subtitles, taking notes as you watch **(15 minutes)**

[Sample Study Plan for Intermediate](#)

Make a Plan - Video

Useful Study Techniques

Suggestions are in approximate order from easier to more challenging.

Vocabulary

- Flashcards [Memory Systems](#)
- Create sentences on your own: When you learn new vocabulary, make up a sentence for each of your new words.
- Keep track of new vocabulary in a notebook: [Notebook Systems](#)

Grammar

- Use flashcards to learn grammar: [Flashcards for Grammar](#)
- Write out sentences that contain the new grammatical concept you are learning.
- Read sentences aloud that contain the grammar you want to learn. After reading out loud, close

the book for a few minutes and create several new sentences to say to yourself.

Conversational Fluency

- See our [Strategies for Conversations](#)
- Create sentences on your own: When you learn new vocabulary, make up a sentence for each of your new words.
- Act out a dialogue from your book. Prepare for a role play by acting out both parts.
- Pick a person, event, or topic and describe it out loud, without writing anything down.
- Improvise a role play or dialogue without using your book.
- While watching a TV show, choose a character to follow closely. Pause the show after they speak and reply to what they say, or comment on their actions.

Pronunciation

- [Using the IPA to Learn Sounds](#)
- [Introducing Yourself to Sounds](#)
- Listen carefully to the audio in your book and repeat the dialogues and exercises out loud.
- Record yourself on your phone or on a computer program saying something out loud (a word, a sentence, a dialogue). Compare your pronunciation to a recording of a native speaker.
- Use Forvo.com for recordings of words to that aren't in your textbook audio. Forvo.com has native speaker recordings of many words in various languages. (Not all languages offered at FCCSWL are available.)
- Backchaining is a pronunciation technique that involves sounding out each syllable of a word, starting with the last syllable. [This article](#) from Fluent Forever is a helpful guide.

Listening Comprehension

- See the articles under [Getting Input](#).
- Listen to your textbook audio.
- Make listening flashcards with digital flashcard apps, such as Anki. See [Resources for Making Flashcards](#).
- Watch a TV series in the target language. Watch first without, then with subtitles. If possible, try to find a version with subtitles in the language first, then use English subtitles.
- Listen to the radio in your target language.

Reading and Writing

- [What is Extensive Reading?](#)
 - [Introducing Yourself to a Script](#)
 - [Flashcards for Learning Combinations of Letters](#)
 - If you are comfortable writing in the language, start learning how to type.
 - If your course has written assignments, use the corrections you receive to practice concepts you struggle with.
 - Find basic reading material online, such as children's stories.
 - Read advertisements for products you're familiar with.
 - Read news articles you find online.
 - Write a paragraph of response or reflection on a cultural topic in your textbook.
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Sample Study Plan for Beginners

Day 1

- Read the week's lesson: highlight key points, take notes, write down questions. **(15 minutes)**
- Vocabulary: Pick 10 new words. Say one sentence aloud that includes each word. **(5 minutes)**
- Make flashcards for all new vocabulary words. **(20 minutes)**
- Listen to textbook audio files. Try to repeat each phrase or sentences out loud. **(15 minutes)**
- Practice saying short sentences based on the lesson. Imagine scenarios in which you could use the vocabulary, like greeting someone or going to the market, and think of all the things you might say in those situations. **(5 minutes)**

Day 2

- Practice flashcards made yesterday. Sound out each word as it comes up. **(15 minutes)**
- Grammar: Copy down examples of new grammar, then write sentences of your own. (If learning a new script: write down words in the script, and say full sentences aloud.) **(15 minutes)**
- Read a dialogue from the book aloud. Listen to the audio track of the dialogue. Read the dialogue aloud while recording yourself. Listen to the dialogue again. Repeat. **(15 minutes)**
- Take the dialogue and try to imagine it in different situations. Say it out loud with the differences. If it is about greetings, for example, say it out loud with changes for different scenarios, such as greeting older or younger people, or men and women. **(15 minutes)***

Day 3

- Practice all flashcards made so far. **(20 minutes)**
- Create your own dialogue. Write lines down first, then act it out without looking. **(15 minutes)**
- Find pronunciations of words not in your audio files. Use [Forvo.com](https://forvo.com) or Youtube. **(15 minutes)**
- Writing/script: Write sentences on this lesson or previous lesson topics. **(10 minutes)**

Day 4

- Listen to all audio files for the lesson. Repeat each phrase or sentence out loud. **(15 minutes)**
- Review flashcards. **(15 minutes)**
- Review grammar from the lesson, and make [Flashcards for Grammar](#) if desired. **(20 minutes)**
- Choose a few flashcards, and say several sentences aloud that include each word. **(10 minutes)**

Day 5

- Try to use the words and vocabulary you know to tell a story out loud. It can be very basic (something like "this is a man, his name is Tom, he is from Pennsylvania"). Try to tell as many stories as you can. **(15 minutes)**
- Use [backchaining](#) to pronounce the hardest words on your vocabulary list. **(15 minutes)**
- Choose any category (people, food, transportation, etc) and say all words you know in that category without looking at your notes or book. **(15 minutes)**
- Reread the dialogue you created on Day 3 and continue it in writing. **(15 minutes)**

Day 6

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- Review flashcards. **(15 minutes)**

- Record yourself speaking, listen, and record yourself again to hone pronunciation. **(15 minutes)**
- Watch a TV show or Youtube video. Listen for phrases such as “hello” and “how are you” and others that you can understand. Focus on the way the characters say them and try to imitate them. **(20 minutes)**
- Write down questions for your conversation partner. **(10 minutes)**

Sample Study Plan for Intermediate

Day 1

- Read the week’s lesson: highlight, take notes, write down questions. **(20 minutes)**
- Make flashcards for all new vocabulary words. **(20 minutes)**
- Choose several flashcards, and say a sentence aloud for each word. **(10 minutes)**
- Choose different flashcards, and write out a sentence for each word. **(10 minutes)**

Day 2

- Act out both parts of a dialogue from your book. Repeat at least once. **(15 minutes)**
- Listen to all audio and/or videos for the lesson, repeating as needed. **(15 minutes)**
- Browse a shopping website in the language. Look up any new words. **(15 minutes)**
- Make grammar flashcards if desired, or create sentences that use new grammar. **(15 minutes)**

Day 3

- Watch a TV show in the language without, then with, subtitles. **(15 minutes)**
- Review flashcards for all new vocabulary words. **(15 minutes)**
- Create a dialogue of your own. Write it out, then recite it without looking. **(20 minutes)**
- Review grammar flashcards or sentences from Day 2. Then, create new sentences orally without looking at notes. **(10 minutes)**

Day 4

- Review all flashcards from this week and previous weeks. **(20 minutes)**
- Watch the same TV show. Choose a character to follow closely. Pause the show after they speak and reply to what they say, or comment on their actions aloud. **(20 minutes)**
- Listen to several audio tracks. Record yourself saying the same thing, and compare with the native speaker. Repeat. **(20 minutes)**

Day 5

- Listen to all audio for the lesson, repeating after each section. **(15 minutes)**
- Find a short article online. Read it several times. Look up new words. **(20 minutes)**
- Act out the dialogue from Day 2 or 3. Add extra lines orally without using notes. **(15 minutes)**
- Practice handwriting by writing a short paragraph on a topic of your choice. **(10 minutes)**

Day 6

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- Review all flashcards. **(15 minutes)**
 - Watch a Youtube or other video. Note any new words or questions you have. **(15 minutes)**

- Choose one topic (person, event, cultural practice) and say everything you can about it without looking at notes. **(15 minutes)**
- Reread all materials for the lesson. Make sure you did not miss anything. **(5 minutes)**
- Compile questions for your conversation partner. **(10 minutes)**

Learning Grammar on Your Own

Learning the grammar of a new language can be one of the most challenging parts of acquiring it, but it is very necessary. **Essentially, a language's grammar is a connective framework that allows words to be combined and modified in ways that make meaningful speech.**

But there is a lot of difficult terminology related to grammar, and it can be hard to grapple with such abstract concepts. The following points will help you make sense of all the terminology and come to an understanding of your language's grammar, using real examples and online resources:

- **Whenever you encounter terms like these which you do not know the meanings of, you should look them up on [Simple English Wikipedia](#).** "Nouns, verbs, accusative, genitive, cases, adjectives..." You may be familiar with a few of these grammatical terms, depending on your educational background. Certainly, some of them will be used in your language textbook to describe the grammar of the language you are learning. (The regular Wikipedia website often defines these terms in more difficult ways, so Simple English Wikipedia is better, since it is designed for people who are learning English and gives very clear and easy to understand definitions of any term you might encounter.)
- **You should find examples of the new grammar** in sentences from your book and write them down to study them. Grammar, since it is abstract and connective, is hard to get a hold of when studied in isolation. It is a pattern that creates meanings that relate those words to one another. So seeing grammar in context will show much more clearly what its function is. See [Flashcards for Grammar](#) for a technique to memorize and study these examples.
- **Practice the grammar in speaking.** You should not do rote repetition, but instead think of some topic that you could address using the grammar you are learning and the vocabulary you know. For the future tense, for example, you could imagine what you will do the next weekend. You would then say out loud sentences using different verbs in the future tense to describe what you will do. If you are learning adjectives, you could imagine describing the appearance of things in your room (or the appearance of something that matches the adjectives you have learned).
- **Use the grammar in your written assignments.** Your textbook will have chapter-based exercises for practicing the new grammar you have learned. **Avoid those that are formulaic and just use substitutions of forms, or that are repetitive drills.** Find creative writing assignments so you can write a whole paragraph in which you make sure to use the new construction.

NOTE: If your book doesn't have any creative assignments like this, **think of the vocabulary and grammar you know so far and come up with a topic you could write about.** Use the new grammar in a short essay about that topic. For example, you could practice the past tense with a paragraph about your favorite weekend, or you could practice the verb "to be" by listing people and describing what they are.

Using Search Engines to Learn

One of the best tools to help you in your language learning is easily accessible – online search engines, like Google. You can use them in many ways to facilitate your study and find real, authentic language use to use as your own model. Here are several practical activities you can do with any search engine:

- **When you are learning new vocabulary words, you can use online image searches to help understand what they mean.** Put the word into a search engine, and see what images come up. You can see what kind of imagery is associated with the word. You can even use these pictures in your flashcards if you are using an electronic system (Also see [Resources for Making Flashcards](#) and [Flashcards for Vocabulary](#))
- **If you just do a regular text search, you can also see *how* a word is used in context.** You can take the examples and study them to inform your own use of a particular word. This can be particularly useful for learning grammatical words, since they have no meaning of their own but form patterns to connect individual words into larger units. Some methods of learning these examples can be seen at [Flashcards for Grammar](#) and [Learning Grammar on Your Own](#).
- **Google Translate can be helpful for translating individual words or phrases.** Go to [Google Translate](#) and select the appropriate input and output languages. When you translate from English to the language you're learning, or vice versa, you will often see a list of several words. You can print out this list and bring it to your conversation partner or mentor to discuss which one is appropriate. NOTE: Using Google Translate for whole sentences can work for languages more similar to English such as French or Spanish, but tends to produce very wrong results for languages that are more different.

Learning Professional Language Skills

Developing Professional Language Skills

You are probably excited to get to use your target language to advance your interests and career. But using a language in a professional context is a wholly different challenge from using it in the classroom, and requires training and preparation that can't be found in school. In fact, the only way to become very proficient in this way of speaking is to be in an actual professional space and model yourself on the language being used around you.

Still, that doesn't mean that you can't prepare before you have such an opportunity. We'll go over the importance of interning abroad and some resources, and also how to prepare before you go to work in a space where your target language is used.

Interning Abroad

If you are able to study abroad during your college career, or you are looking for work opportunities after graduation, consider an internship or job in the country or countries where your target language is spoken. There are a variety of scholarships and grants put out by institutions that could fund your travel and time abroad, such as the Fulbright program. You can find the study abroad programs that your campus offers at the appropriate link:

- [Amherst College: Office of Global Education](#)
- [Mt. Holyoke: McCulloch Center for Global Initiatives](#)
- [Smith College: Study Abroad](#)
- [University of Massachusetts Amherst: International Programs Office](#)
- [Hampshire College: Global Education Office](#)

Preparing for a Professional Environment

Even if you won't be able to perfect these skills outside of a professional environment, there are ways you can develop them without going abroad or in preparation for the opportunities you find there. In fact, doing this preparation will make it a lot easier when you are in an actual workplace or job interview situation. Let's cover a few important components of the professional experience to prepare yourself for.

1. How to Describe Your Work in your Target Language

First you need to arm yourself with appropriate vocabulary. In your courses, you may have focused on learning the language in general. Learning to speak like a professional means mastering the specialized language of your chosen field.

You will need to know how to utilize online and media resources for learning (see the other articles under How to Study). You can start with a simple google search in your target language for the job you want. What kind of things come up? Are there any relevant articles or any media like movies and shows? Read about what people say about the work in the target language, recording and learning the vocabulary with your memory system ([Why You Need a Memory System](#)) as you go.

Any native speakers you know, such as friends, iTalki conversation partners, or teachers can help you find resources or tell you about the job and what sort of vocabulary might be useful. Someone who actually holds the job or a related one would be ideal, but may be hard to find. Also watch some of the media sources you find, and read any news articles that seem relevant (most search engines have a 'news' tab).

Once you've sat down for a few sessions and done this research, you should be getting familiar with the terminology used to describe your work. Now it's time for you to practice what you've learned.

Write a few short essays describing the work. Some topics could be: the typical day of someone who does this job, the different roles in the workplace and how people interact, and what roles you would find suitable or not suitable to your skills and interests. You want to get in the mindset of what it will be like to use your target language on the job.

If possible, after doing the written exercise, describe topics like these orally to an iTalki conversation partner or other native speaker you have access to. Have them ask you questions about the job and what the various duties are there. Don't worry, even if it's not convenient to talk to an actual person, you can at least practice speaking out loud. Any spoken practice will be good practice to prepare you to speak in that professional environment. You can come up with your own questions and try to answer them as best you can in your target language.

Once you've done this, you should have a basis to build on with real world language experience.

2. Preparing to Interview

Now create a resume for yourself in your target language, like you would in English. List the jobs and internships you have done in order, listing the things you did and any special achievements in those

roles. Also list where you studied, what you studied, and any special activities you took part in or awards you received. Be as comprehensive as you can. Collect any new vocab you have to look up for this and store it in your memory system.

Look at ads for the sort of opportunities you're seeking. What skills are they looking for? Note down the requirements and preferences, and put your skills and qualifications you wrote in your target language under each one to try to make them fit.

To prepare for an interview, you should lay out for yourself the process of getting a job or internship. Research the components of the hiring process in that country and the sort of etiquette in dress and manners that is expected. If you're having trouble finding this information, contact one of your old or current teachers to ask, or someone else familiar with the country. Based on all of this information, create a basic job interview script to practice with, on your own or with a native speaker if available.

The questions should be things like:

- What are your qualifications for this position?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What did x or y previous experience/job from your resume teach you that is relevant to this position?
- What would you consider your strengths and weaknesses?

Answer the questions in your target language. The first time, it might be hard, but keep at it. By repetition, you will find that it gets easier to talk about yourself and your achievements. Review any grammar you need to do this, if you're a bit rusty. You'll want to rehearse a few times, then take a break for a day or two and try again. Change the questions once you get used to the original set you were being asked or asking yourself, and keep doing it until talking about yourself and your achievements and relating them to your desired job becomes second nature.

Conclusion

We've gone over a couple of important ways you can prepare yourself for professional opportunities in your target language. With the skills you learn from online sources, available native speakers, and practicing giving interviews and talking about the job, you should be able to pursue jobs and internships with much more assurance in your proficiency in these topics. You will then be able to perfect your professional proficiency in your field of choice with hands-on experience.

Learning through Online News Sources

You probably are already well aware of the abundance of information you can find on the internet. One important resource among all this content is news in a huge number of languages. Chances are that even a less commonly taught language will have some news resources, since internet access has spread to almost every part of the world. This article will give you tips on how to make use of those news resources in your language learning.

First we should talk about some characteristics of the language used and news and why it is useful for learning a language. Consider news articles in English as an example. We'll look at an example from BBC news:

"Theresa May has refused to promise unconditional support for her successor's Brexit

plan.

Asked if she would back whichever Brexit outcome the next prime minister achieves, including a no-deal Brexit, she said that amounted to agreeing to "whatever happens in future".

Jeremy Hunt or Boris Johnson will be announced as the winner of the Tory Party leadership race on 23 July."

Let's note a couple of features of this kind of English. This will help us know what to expect from news in your target language.

1. The diction is impersonal, as if the journalist isn't present in the story despite being the writer.
2. The author uses formal diction, participles, and more complex phrases than usual in speaking, like "Asked if she would back whichever Brexit outcome the next prime minister chooses, including a no-deal Brexit, she said..." In more relaxed speech, you might say this like, "when they asked her if she'd back whatever plan the prime minister chose, even if it's no deal Brexit, she said..."¹

You should expect this kind of language in news you read in your target language, adjusting for the sorts of constructions and vocabulary that seems more formal in that language. It might occur to you that this is far from the language of daily conversation, and what really is the use of it? It's not an uncommon question from students reading news articles for the first time after learning in a more communicative way. If you can't speak this way, what's the point?

But news articles are very important for developing your proficiency. They will acquaint you with a more formal register of speech and vocabulary without the pressure of speaking (a 'register' is a way of speaking a language that is used in a particular context). Not being able to at least understand the type of language used in news articles means that you will be in the dark when hearing official announcements, doing paperwork, or listening to speeches given by important figures. You need the sort of language you find in the news to discuss the big topics of the day and to learn about the goings-on in the places where your target language is spoken. It is also important so you can have high level conversations or study areas of your interest in the language.

Now that we've talked about the what and the why of studying news in your target language, let's talk about how to find and target your news consumption for your needs.

Targeting Your News

When reading news, it can seem daunting to decide what to read. Maybe you don't read much news in your own language, or you have trouble finding articles by just scrolling front pages. Here are some tips that can help you learn to enjoy and benefit from reading news in your target language:

1. Identify your interests: Write down the sorts of events you follow in English. Four or five topics will do, or less if that's all you can think of. Look up the relevant vocabulary to describe these events. It could be things like sports, politics, video games, or any other interest you have.
2. Use a search engine: do a keyword search in the language for the topic, using the 'news' tab available on many search engines.
3. Try to read some of the headlines, and choose a few articles to read.

Once you have some articles to read, you just need to work through them at your own pace, taking note of and learning new vocabulary as you go with [your memory system](#). You can also ask native speakers you know, such as a teacher or online conversation partner, to provide you with articles that you are interested in.

Understanding Bias/Slant in News Sources

Just like in English-language journalism, foreign news sites will have their own biases, especially related to controversial social or political issues. Usually these will go unstated and can be hard to detect without native-level cultural knowledge, but there are ways you can identify this bias. You don't have to avoid reading news sites because of this. You will find, though, that discovering these cultural fault lines will help improve your own cultural literacy.

Here's a couple of ways to explore bias and editorial slant:

1. Discuss the headlines of one of your sources with a native speaker. Ask what the reputation of the news source is, if any.
2. Read editorial opinion pieces. This is where the slant of the paper will come out the most, since there isn't a need to filter viewpoints through the same journalistic standard as news articles.

Conclusion

We've covered:

1. What to expect from the language in the news.
2. How to target and find news according to your interests and learning needs.
3. How to notice editorial slants in news to aid your reading and improve cultural literacy.

Hopefully, after this you will keep reading the news in your target language and make it a core part of your language learning as you reach higher levels of proficiency.

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-48787708>

Maintaining Proficiency Outside of the Classroom

It's easier to learn a language with the support of a classroom. Regular homework, the pressure of attendance and getting a good grade, as well as the physical presence of a teacher or tutor provide motivation to keep up regular practice. But what should you do when you don't have this support system? Here we'll discuss how to maintain your language proficiency, and even improve it, when you've left the classroom after graduation or for a long break.

1. Maintain your Memory System

(If you haven't checked out the articles under [Memory Systems](#) and figured out a way to track the vocabulary and grammar you learn, you might want to do that before reading ahead)

The most important thing you'll need to maintain what you've already learned is your memory system. Whichever one you've chosen and used to study throughout the year will be the greatest tool for you when class is gone. Unlike the textbook, which presents the author's view of the materials, your memory system will remind you of how *you* learned the material and organized it mentally.

Don't just forget about your flashcards or notebook after you're done with your semester. It's okay to take a week or two as a break, but you should get back to reviewing the material systematically over the course of each week. As little as thirty minutes a day or an hour every two days will help keep it all fresh in your mind.

2. Keep Studying

As alluded to above, you need to maintain a regular study plan to maintain your proficiency. The thought of doing homework or studying when you're out of school might sound stressful, but learning a language is hard work. If you leave it by the wayside for too long, you'll soon find you've forgotten what you already knew and have to go back to relearn, instead of maintaining a consistent level. Let's consider some things to factor into your study plan.

First, while it is very important to keep studying, you need to be realistic with how much time you can dedicate. If you mostly have free time, then you can keep up a study schedule like you did in school or even do more. If you're working a job part or full time, or have other obligations, you need to plan your study so that you'll be able to do it with consistency. Don't plan to study at times you'll be exhausted. This may mean you have to split your study into a few thirty minute to one hour blocks throughout the week, but that's fine. Keeping up a consistent study pattern is more important than studying every single day.

Also, don't just limit your study to review. You can expand your skills and knowledge and add to your memory system. Think of a particular topic you are interested in, or things you would like to talk about. Try to write short essays about it, looking up necessary vocabulary and phrases to add to your memory system. Then try to speak with a native speaker you know or a conversation partner on iTalki (see below for more information) about the topic, and ask the native speaker to offer correction. By adding new material to your repertoire, you will not only maintain your proficiency but expand it.

You should check out other articles in the Language Toolbox to see find ways to continue maintaining your proficiency in as well as learning more about your target language.

3. Benefits of Studying Outside the Classroom

We've mostly been discussing the challenges of maintaining and expanding proficiency outside of a formal academic environment, but the freedom from a strict course schedule also comes with a lot of advantages.

A great resource that has recently become widely available is a decent number of websites allowing you to find a conversation partner. Sites such as [iTalki](#) allow you to pay an hourly rate for a conversation partner. You can see their profile and determine if they can help you with specific subject areas you want to familiarize yourself with. Another important resource is the app [MeetUp](#). You can find local groups of enthusiasts for different hobbies, and these may include groups for languages. Another avenue could be working as an English conversation partner at a local organization that offers English lessons, and trading lessons with a native speaker. If you've studied abroad, you can Skype or use another videochat app to talk to a friend you made there to maintain your proficiency.

Also, being free from academic coursework means you can direct your language learning in the way that you want. If you want to just maintain your current level, you can do that. If you want to learn to talk about new things, or try to specialize and learn to speak and write about certain topics, it's totally possible to do so. Independence is a challenge, but you will also find it is empowering with diligent study and investment of time.

Conclusion

We've discussed how you can maintain, and even expand, your language proficiency. This article should have armed you with a plan and some techniques that will ensure that, even outside of the comfort of the classroom learning environment, you will be able to keep speaking your target language and not let all of what you learned go to waste.

Learning through Movies, TV, and Online Videos

Depending on your target language, there is probably visual media that you can use to help you learn it. Nowadays it's more common to find online video than to watch on DVD or VCR, and with the spread of streaming and sites like YouTube, there are videos available for many world languages. This article will be about the uses of these resources in learning, and also how to find and access them.

Finding Online Video

Some of the best resources, you may already be familiar with. [YouTube](#), for instance, is used by people worldwide and carries video in a huge number of languages. You won't go wrong if you do a keyword search for a topic you're interested in and the language you're learning on YouTube, for example "Sports Hindi".

Depending on the country and language, there may be online streaming services specializing in media from your target language. Just search 'movies in (your target language)' in a search engine and see what you find. If you know a native speaker, you can also consult with them about where to find video media for you to use.

Learning with Video

Now let's discuss how to actually learn with these materials. While you can just watch (with subtitles if available) and try to absorb, unless you already can understand almost an entire video or film, it's better to approach it as something to be studied and practiced. Visual media will be especially helpful for learning about cultural references and ideas associated with the target languages, body language, colloquial speech, and listening comprehension.

1. Tracking what you Learn

A useful thing about visual media is that you can stop and go back to watch what you've already seen to work on comprehension. Whenever you watch something and encounter new phrases or ways of saying things, or even things like body language, you should make sure to record it. That way you can enter it into your [memory system](#) and make use of it yourself later.

2. Learning about Culture

As mentioned above, visual media is an excellent way to learn about how many facets of the culture connect to your target language. Just learning the grammar and pronunciation of a language with vocabulary will never be enough to communicate correctly on its own, rather you need to combine it with cultural input, for which visual media is an excellent resource.

Body language is one of these facets. It can be hard to pick up on how you should be moving when you speak face-to-face with native speakers, when you're focused on a lot of other things going on. Through movies and videos, you can see how people with different identities and roles use their bodies to express while they speak. Studying and imitating this can be a way to help yourself seem more native and communicate better.

Another facet is sayings and metaphors. In movies and shows, people will speak in a way that sounds culturally appropriate to speakers of the language at the time they were produced, so you will hear expressions and sayings that you may commonly encounter with native speakers. You should learn these and use them yourself. Just be careful not to watch movies from more than a few decades ago and trying to imitate that way of speaking. You might end up sound like someone from a different era!

You can also find out about social structure and relations between different groups of people. Movies present an archetypal version of society, where often a single character will stand in for a cultural idea about a certain group of people. Pay close attention to differences of wealth, sex, gender, and place of origin. How do people address each other, what sort of body language do they use with one another? You can record your observations in your Memory System. Learning about these will help you navigate your own place in the culture and better communicate and understand with native speakers.

3. Developing Conversational Material

Another use of visual media, especially more current or classic movies and shows, is to have something to talk about with native speakers. Many languages are associated with strong theater-going cultures, often with attached film industries such as Bollywood (for Hindi movies), Nollywood (for Nigeria), and so on. Just like shows and movies in the languages you already know, people in different cultures discuss their own visual media all the time.

Let's think about how to implement this in conversation. If you've followed the points above, you've watched and studied some shows and movies in some depth. If you're trying to get to know someone, you can ask in your target languages simply, "what shows and movies do you like to watch?" You can listen to what they say, and comment on the ones that you've seen too. You can ask them about their favorite movie, or what actors they like or prefer. It's a great way to find something in common with someone from a different culture. People might also appreciate that you already know so much about popular culture and can talk about it with them.

Conclusion

We've gone over how to find visual media and how to use it to learn in your target language. We've gone over the uses for it, and why it's important. After reading this article, you should know how to:

- Look for visual media online
- Learn from it, making use of your memory system
- Deploy the knowledge you learned from it

Advanced Language Study

How to Select Topics and Materials

How to Select a Topic

Select one of the methods below to choose your topic. If you already have a topic you are strongly interested in, you can move on to finding materials.

- Follow one of these **sample course outlines**
 - [Current Events \(Dari\)](#) (Word doc)
 - [Literature \(Romanian\)](#) (Word doc)
- Use [lists & keywords](#)
- Use [Concept Mapping](#)
- **Consult with a Librarian or Writing Center**
 - *A librarian can also help you find materials about your topic and further research related to it.*
 - Libraries: Ask a librarian or make a research appointment with librarian:
 - [Amherst College](#)
 - [Hampshire College](#)
 - [Mount Holyoke College](#)
 - [Smith College](#)
 - [UMass](#)
 - Make a Writing Center appointment:
 - [Amherst College](#)
 - [Hampshire College](#)
 - [Mount Holyoke College](#)
 - [Smith College](#)
 - [UMass](#)

Finding Materials

There are many resources available online and through your campus library. Here are some options for where to find resources that fit your topic.

- **Library Resources:**
 - Search the Library:
 - **Library Catalogs:**
 - [Amherst College](#)
 - [Hampshire College](#)
 - [Mount Holyoke College](#)
 - [Smith College](#)
 - [UMass](#)
 - Search **Library resource/research guides** for the target language, region, country, topic of study:
 - [Amherst College](#)
 - [Hampshire College](#)
 - [Mount Holyoke College](#)
 - [Smith College](#)
 - [UMass](#)
-
- **Ask a librarian or make a research appointment with librarian:**
 - Share your topic and interest in finding resources in your target language

- *A research librarian can also help with your topic selection*
- [Amherst College](#)
- [Hampshire College](#)
- [Mount Holyoke College](#)
- [Smith College](#)
- [UMass](#)

- **Language-specific resource documents:**

- [Arabic \(MSA and dialects\)](#) (Word document)
- [Cantonese](#)
- [Danish](#)
- [Dutch](#)
- [Filipino](#)
- [Hindi](#) (Word document)
- [Irish](#)
- [Norwegian](#)
- [Turkish](#) (Word document)
- [Urdu](#) (Word document)
- We are updating and adding languages; if you don't see the language you're studying listed, ask us for any resources we do have.
 - If you have resources to add, please share them with us. You can email your course organizer, put it in your self-assessment, or tell us in the course evaluation at the end of the semester.

- [CultureTalk](#)

- [GLOSS - Global Language Online Support System](#)

- **Language Courses**

- Many of these have language basics; some have more extensive resources for some languages
- [Beelinguapp](#)
- [HeadStart2](#)
- Live Lingua Project (public domain courses)
 - [Foreign Service Institute Language Courses](#)
 - [Peace Corps Language Courses](#)
 - [Defense Language Institute Language Courses](#)
- [MyLanguages](#)
- [OmniGlot](#) (look at the resource lists at bottom)
- [Open Culture](#)

- **News/Radio**

- [BBC News](#) (scroll over title to see language name in URL)
- [Media Landscapes](#)
- [4 International Media & Newspapers](#)
- [Learning through online news sources](#)
- [All You Can Read](#)

- **Podcasts**

- Depending on the app you are using, you can try the following:
 - Search for the name of the language
 - Change the language setting or add a preferred language
 - Change the country location

- **Tedx**

- Search for the target language
- Search YouTube as a whole 'Tedx' AND a location where the language is spoken (major cities work best, but try also: country, region, universities)

- E.g. Tedx Beirut ; Tedx Bangkok ; Tedx Oslo
- **YouTube**
 - Change your country location to see trending videos
 - Change your language setting
 - Search for the language or country or a specific region, city or university
 - Search using the term in the target language
 - Use a language captioning service:
 - [Language Reactor](#)
- **Streaming services** (such as Netflix, Hulu, Mubi, Magnolia)
 - [Rakuten Viki](#): Asian TV shows
 - Use a language captioning service:
 - [Language Reactor](#)
- **Encyclopedia/Wikipedia** in other languages
 - Select your language from [the Wikipedia homepage](#).
 - Find a topically relevant article and click the Languages drop down to see if your language is present.
 - Compare and contrast the English and target language articles.
 - Follow references or external links for additional information.

How to Study at the Advanced Level

[According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages](#), reaching advanced language proficiency can lead to cognitive, psychological, employment, and societal benefits. When you choose and study material for your Advanced Topics course (or as a language learner out in the world in general), you may be asking yourself: How do I learn from real world language content that isn't *made* for learning?

This guide aims to answer that question. Below, we provide a menu of pointers and activities, arranged so that you can move from just going over authentic materials to internalizing, using, reviewing, and expanding on them.

These are just a starting point. You can change, repeat, skip, or add your own activities as necessary. Still, whatever activities or topics you choose, the core steps of independent learning will almost always be getting authentic input, studying and using that input, and then effectively reviewing it all.

Study for Comprehension

- **Expect to work with new material for an extended period of time:**
 - Read, watch, or listen to the media multiple times. YouTube and podcast/music apps often have an option to slow down the audio, which you can use as needed.
 - First try to understand as much as you can without consulting a dictionary or other resource.
 - Then consult other resources as needed.
-

- **Check your comprehension:**

- Create a reverse outline of the material: What is the main idea or message? What are the supporting details?

Study Vocabulary, Expressions, and Grammar

- **Reread or re-listen to the material, focusing on the areas that are unclear.**

- What is most difficult about that portion?
- Is the language too advanced?
- Is the speech too quick or in an unfamiliar accent or dialect?
- Is there not enough context?
- Is there anything that doesn't make sense if translated literally?

- **Look up new vocabulary in a dictionary, encyclopedia, or concordance (e.g. [Netspeak](#)) and add it to your [memory system](#).**

- **Look up unfamiliar grammar or constructions in a textbook, grammar, or online resource and add it to your [memory system](#).**

- You may also be able to understand the meaning from context without referring to an outside resource. If so, still record what you have learned.

- **Practice using the new vocabulary and constructions in writing and out loud.**

- **Make note of anything you would like further clarification on.**

- For example, if you know another word with a similar meaning, do you know the distinctions, context, etymology, level of formality, etc.?

Practice Out Loud

- **Read the material or a portion of it out loud.**

- If audio or video, practice talking along with it and imitating the speakers.
-

- **Practice verbally summarizing the material:**

- Use the [4-3-2 technique](#):
 - Describe the material for 4 minutes, pause, then do it again for 3 minutes, pause, then do it again for 2 minutes.
 - Each time, try to ensure you are still sharing the essential points and getting clearer and clearer in your explanations as you go.
- Practice giving a presentation about the subject to different audiences:
 - Friends
 - Small children – how would you need to simplify the language?
 - A classroom or office – how would you make your language more formal?

- **Write questions about the selection and practice asking and answering them.**

- **Think about alternative positions or perspectives on the material and practice representing them as though you are in a debate.**

- **Record yourself doing one of the above activities:**

- Listen to your recording and critique yourself:
- Do you need to fix grammatical, pronunciation, or vocabulary issues? How is your intonation and emphasis?
- Re-record yourself and see if you've improved.

- **Practice with a partner:**

- Choose a [conversation preparation guide](#) and complete the roleplays.
- Go to a zoo or museum and talk about what you see in the target language.
- Choose an issue you're passionate about and try to convince the other person to support your cause.

Create with the Language

- **Keep a journal in the target language:**

- Write a paragraph or dialog using the new vocabulary/expressions/grammar you found in your listening and reading that week.
 - Write out a detailed description of characters or speakers from the material.
 - What can you say about their physical appearance, their clothing, the way they speak or move?
 - What words can you use to talk about their personality, mood, emotions? If you know basic words like sad/angry/happy, challenge yourself to learn new words: is the person agitated, anxious, ebullient?
 - Compare and contrast one character or speaker to another.
-

- **Create a reference guide for the material(s):**

- Create a flow chart:
 - On the left side of a piece of paper or digital document, list the sections of the material as they occur one after the other. You may also include how long these sections are (1 paragraph, 2:30 minutes, etc.)
 - On the right side, list what happens or is said/written in those sections, as well as anything else you find notable.
 - This is an excellent way to understand the structure of different types of spoken and written material.
- Draw a timeline of events.
- Create a family tree or a similarly structured graph showing the people involved in the material and their relationships to one another. Use arrows and labels.
- Create a map or floor plan related to the material and label it.
- Practice presenting the reference guide to someone.
 - What are the major landmarks? Can you give directions between them?
 - What is the historical significance of the events?
 - Who are the main characters? What is the nature of their relationships?

- **Build on the material:**

- Write your own recipe using similar ingredients to a food you read about. Record yourself narrating the preparation and cooking process.
- Imagine yourself taking the same trip as a character in the media you studied. Where would you go? What would you like to see? Where would you sleep or eat? Who would you meet? What tickets will you buy?
- Imagine what happens next in the media you studied. Write out a dialogue or scene where the characters decide what to do. This can be a complex reaction to a difficult situation, or it can be as simple as planning where to go for coffee. Use as much future-oriented grammar as you know (e.g., future tenses, conditional clauses).

Get More Input

- **Find material in the target language about the topic, such as YouTube videos, podcasts, music, or Instagram reels.**

- You can do this by searching online using a format like "<keywords in target language> <type of media, such as video, music, etc>".
- Listen or watch, and then follow this process:
 - Note down any moments that were difficult for you, including their time stamp.
 - Write out what you understand after your first listen or viewing. Then listen again and see if you can add more or make corrections to your first effort.
 - Look up any unfamiliar words or constructions.

- **Learn about the background of the material:**

- Who made it? Are they famous? In what context? Who would recognize their names?
 - What are their biographical details? Who were their contemporaries?
 - What are other seminal or popular examples of that genre?
-

- What are other historical or contemporary works in the genre?
- See if you can find other works in the same genre.
- **Interact with social media conversations in the target language about the material or related topics.**
 - You can find them by searching online using a format like: “<keywords in target language> <name of social media site>”.
 - Try to find out what social media services are popular for speakers of the target language.
 - Find hashtags, popular pages, or influencers posting about the topic.
 - Draft a post about the topic in the target language, your own or a response to someone else’s.
 - Find and write captions for images related to the material.
- **Explore language-learning apps like DuoLingo or Mango Languages.**
 - Even app content intended for a beginning-level learner may help you review or learn vocab and grammar; and the audio may help reinforce accurate pronunciation, accent, and intonation.

Review

- **Read/watch/listen to the material again:**
 - Are you able to understand the material better?
 - Do you have new questions or insights?
 - **Summarize the material out loud:**
 - Can you quickly summarize the material? Can you expand on or add to its content?
 - **Review your vocabulary and grammar flashcards. Make sure to use both new and old flashcards.**
 - **If there are other students in your session, read through their contributions in the Collaborative Outline.**
 - Practice responding to their discussion prompts.
 - What new questions do their contributions raise for you?
 - Look up the grammar or vocab they want to review.
 - **After your session, repeat some of the activities you did this week. See where you have improved.**
-

How to Use Conversation Preparation Guides

1. Picking a Guide

Find the Conversation Preparation Guide with a theme that fits most closely with the material you are studying this week. If you have trouble finding a directly relevant theme, think about other aspects of what you're studying this week:

- Are there [interpersonal issues](#) to explore?
- Is the setting [academic, personal, professional](#)?
- Where does this [tie into the culture](#) of the language you are studying?
- [What is the setting](#) of the material?

2. Studying the Guide

Think: What thoughts and ideas come up while you're reading the Preparation Guide? Is there additional vocabulary or information you will need to practice with it?

- Search for resources. Can you locate the following in the language you are studying?
 - Dictionary
 - Encyclopedia
 - Grammar reference
 - Concordance
 - [Search Engine](#)
 - CultureTalk videos or videos from TikTok, YouTube, other social media
- Look up and internalize this new information.
 - Make flashcards if appropriate.
 - Add to the Collaborative Document if relevant.
- If you have questions, write them down for your Conversation Partner.

3. Making Use of the “Practice On Your Own” Section

If the prompt directs you to write something out, use the script/alphabet of the language you are studying and write it out by hand.

- **Example:** In [Interview for Work: Languages You Speak](#), you are directed first to imagine that you speak at least 6 languages and to write them out along with the countries that speak that language. Be sure to use the word for each language or country in the language you are studying.
- Try to write these out without looking them up. What can you do from memory? Check your work. Make corrections as needed. Look up words or spellings you cannot remember.
- Make flashcards for new words or grammar.
- Once you have written out the material from the prompt, say them out loud.

If the prompt directs you to research, look up the information that it directs you to find. If you have trouble finding the information in one resource, try a different resource.

- Search for audio sources to hear pronunciation and intonation where possible.
 1. Listen to the audio multiple times and repeat it out loud.

If the prompt directs you to create sentences, questions, dialogues, or lists, write them down in the script you are studying.

- Work from memory as much as you are able to.
- Then, check your work and make corrections as necessary. This may be spelling, word order, grammar, or other things.
- Next, practice saying these out loud, either by yourself or with a friend or study partner.

If the prompt suggests you review a subject or vocabulary before you proceed, check your memory and understanding of that.

- Review old flashcards.
- If you have a textbook, find the chapter(s) that covers the topic. Work through exercises. How challenging does the material seem?
- Find a short article or video on the topic (on CultureTalk, GLOSS or on social media) and check your comprehension.

If the prompt asks you to cover a topic more complicated than you are able to, break it down into multiple smaller assignments.

- **Example:** [Interviews for Work: Job Interview](#). This topic assumes knowledge of job interviews and workplaces.
 1. What vocabulary do you already know about this topic? Read through Policies and Rules: Personnel Policies for ideas of what kinds of vocabulary you might want to study.
 - Look for other relevant Conversation Preparation Guides for review and context.
 2. Look up job ads, resumes, and companies in the language/country you are studying.
 - Use a dictionary or search engine to define or give additional context to words or abbreviations you don't know.
 3. Find a short article or video on the topic (on CultureTalk, GLOSS or on social media) to expand your knowledge.
 4. Repeat the above with any additional prompts under Practice on Your Own.

4. Preparing for Conversation Sessions

Whether you are using this for individual studies or in preparation for meeting with a Conversation Partner, it is helpful to use both the Practice on Your Own **and** the Practice in Conversation Session sections of the guide.

Approaches to preparation:

- Practice the activities under Practice in Conversation Session out loud. If you are practicing alone, play both parts when asking questions and answering or when acting out a role play. If you have trouble spontaneously creating the back-and-forth of these scenarios, write out a dialog, a set of questions and answers, or a role play first.
 1. Practice the written scenario out loud.
 2. Try to practice the scenario without reading off of the paper.
 3. ~~Take a break. When you return to one of these scenarios, can you change a response~~ without writing it out? Can you extend the conversation without writing out the next

piece?

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