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How to Succeed

What do I need to do to be successful in a Spoken Arabic course? Is this course a good fit for my needs?

Do you have enough time to devote to the course?

You need to be able to spend 4-5 hours per week practicing the language on your own and attend a weekly 60-minute conversation session. Daily practice is more effective than cramming your practice into one or two sessions.

Approach Language Study as a Training/Practice Regimen

Language study is a serious commitment. You need to think of language study as similar to athletic training, musical training, or practice in dance or theater. It takes sustained practice and study every day in order to make noticeable progress. Simply completing a set of exercises will not produce tangible results. You need to prepare and practice communicating regularly.

Study Where You Can Talk to Yourself

You need to practice where you can comfortably repeat and imitate the speakers in audio and video materials. You also need to spend time improvising out loud, thinking through the various types of scenarios and speaking tasks you will do in your conversation sessions. You need to pretend you are part of a role play or real situation in which you need to address and respond to people. Imagine how you would handle certain situations and practice the speech involved out loud.

Review Constantly

Language courses are cumulative. It is easy to forget the vocabulary and forms learned in earlier weeks if you do not continually review. It is also easy to find yourself feeling lost and overwhelmed half-way through the semester, if you have not been systematically reviewing as you go. Include time for review every day.

Submit Your Weekly Self-Assessment Report

Self-assessment reports are an important part of your course and 10% of your final grade. The reports are designed to help you think about the effectiveness of your language learning strategies and to let program staff members know how things are going. Self-assessments are graded based on the timeliness of submission. You do not need to write a lot. Short, simple responses are fine. The key is

that you have taken a few minutes to think about your progress and to pay attention to key factors that may affect the success of your learning. Having multiple missing or late self-assessments will result in a lower final grade, while a strong record of on-time self-assessments makes a significant positive contribution to the final grade assigned.

Read Your E-Mail, Stay in Touch with Questions and Concerns, Respond to Queries Promptly

Organizing a language program based on small group and individual sessions is a complex process. You will be one of 100-150 students in 60 different courses working with over 30 different mentors and conversation partners. Conversation partners help you with learning the language; the FCCSWL staff helps you deal with logistical issues related to your course. Each language has a staff member who serves as the course organizer for all courses in that language. Theo Hull is the course organizer for all Spoken Arabic courses. You can reach them at fcmlp2@hfa.umass.edu or 413-542-5264. Your course organizer is your first contact about logistical issues. If for some reason, your course organizer is not available, another staff member will help you. You will be introduced via email to your course organizer at the start of the course.

In this context, your success in the course requires you to take the initiative in communicating with your course organizer and in responding promptly to e-mail queries. Here are some situations that require PROMPT e-mails or calls to your course organizer:

- **Textbooks unavailable or any online materials you can't access:** Contact your course organizer right away if you find a textbook is unavailable or you are waiting for one that is on order. Do not wait until your session with your conversation partner to explain there is an access problem. The FCCSWL staff is here to help with logistical issues. They will help assess the situation and make sure that you get access to the materials you need so that you do not get behind in your assignments. The same goes for online materials, whether on LangMedia or elsewhere. This is a problem for the FCCSWL staff to deal with, not your conversation partner. Remember: Conversation partners help you learn the language; your course organizer and other FCCSWL staff members deal with logistical issues.
- **Scheduling or location confusions:** If you do not find your session at the time and place you expected, contact the office immediately so we can sort out the confusion. During the day, you can call 413-542-5264. If it is evening, e-mail. Campuses sometimes change room assignments, buses break down, or someone gets ill. As soon as you let us know the problem, we will work on sorting it out.
- **Provide your schedule accurately and promptly for oral evaluation scheduling:** At mid-semester time, you will receive an e-mail from your course organizer asking you to provide your schedule for the oral evaluation period. Respond PROMPTLY and ACCURATELY. The evaluation scheduler is looking for a single time block that works for the outside evaluator and every single student needing an individual oral in that language. Given the very tight schedules of outside evaluators, possible time blocks are usually few and far between. "Oops, I goofed" is not a good response if you neglected to write a course on your schedule and everything is all scheduled. It is not possible to change your oral evaluation time slot once it has been scheduled.

FINAL WORD: Practice Proactive Communication Skills

In order to successfully manage the logistical side of this course, you need to practice proactive communication skills similar to those required in a professional internship or work environment. To do this successfully, you need to:

- check email at least twice per day (once in the am and once in the pm);
- keep the email and phone number of the Center in your contact list and promptly contact the office if logistical questions or issues come up (for something that needs a quick response during business hours, please call; we may not see your email in time);
- read emails carefully, note how the information applies to your situation, and promptly take whatever next step or response is necessary;
- take a proactive approach to problem solving if something is confused or amiss by actively seeking solutions, information, or persons that can help sort out the situation.

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