

The *Not To Do* List

for Successful Foreign Language Learners



Presented by *Foreign Language Mastery*
LanguageMastery.com

1

Do **not**...

...spend more than 5% of your study time on grammar, translation, vocabulary lists or any other overt information about the language.

Languages are “acquired,” not learned. And acquisition by its very definition happens subconsciously over time given proper input (e.g. lots of *interesting* listening and reading).



2

Do **not**...

...spend time on difficult, boring materials.

Motivation is one of the greatest keys to success in foreign language learning, and motivation's favorite fuel is interest. There is a wealth of free language content available today; you need simply look for it.



3

Do **not**...

...study in long, infrequent sessions.

Behind motivation, consistency is the most important factor in language learning. It is far better to lay down one brick each day rather than trying to build the entire wall in one day.



4

Do **not**...

...worry about speaking too soon.

Although oral fluency is certainly the goal of most language learners, it takes the brain some time to assimilate enough input to be able to produce meaningful output. This is perhaps the single greatest problem with formal language instruction: students are expected to speak long before they are ready, creating a great deal of anxiety and diminishing the student's motivation and interest.



5

Do **not**...

...memorize vocabulary out of context.

To have any chance of retaining or using new words, they must be heard or read many, many times within a meaningful situation. “Narrow listening” (i.e. listening to a variety of episodes on a similar topic) is a good way to increase the repetition of key words in a meaningful way.



6

Do **not**...

...try to learn new words, alphabets, ideographic characters or spelling using “rote” memory.

We have 5 senses at our disposal: *use them!* Integrate taste, touch, smell, sound and movement as much as possible. Use “imaginative memory” to visualize connections, stories, objects, etc. The crazier the story, the easier it will be to imprint in long term memory.



7

Do **not**...

...overly rely on the written word.

Whenever possible, try to listen to a piece of content first *before* reading it. This trains you to rely on your ears first, and better follows the natural order of acquisition. Remember, you learned to speak your first language long before you learned to read it!



8

Do **not**...

...look up words before making at least one full pass through each section of your reading or listening materials.

Only once you have gone through once or even twice, then go back and look up words you don't know. When you don't interrupt the "semantic flow," it's easier to get a feel for the big picture. And this also prevents us word-nerds from getting lost in unrelated vocabulary and new linguistic connections.



Do **not**...

...let the “affective filter” put a damper on your language learning.

The affective filter is a fancy word for a simple and intuitive concept: your emotions and psychological state significantly affect your performance in a foreign language (or any skill-based act for that matter.) If you are nervous, angry, hungry, tired, or preoccupied with the fight you had last night with your significant other, your ability to speak well in a foreign language will go down faster than the current stock market. If your teacher makes you feel nervous or stupid, fire their ass. You will never make any real progress if you are afraid to speak and are not free to make all the wonderfully logical—albeit incorrect—utterances that define both infant and adult language acquisition.

10

Do **not**...

...forget to have some fun!

Language learning *does* take time, but it needn't be difficult. If you follow the tips listed above and throughout the site, and approach language learning with a smile instead of a grimace, you too **WILL** succeed!



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