

How to Quickly Master Conversational Fluency in Any Language

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Introduction

Are you interested in or currently learning a language? Are you struggling with improving your language skills because you do not have enough time or can't find the right resources (maybe you think they are too expensive)? Are you looking for motivation to keep learning your target language? If your answer is yes to at least one of these questions, then this manual is for you. In this manual, you can find tips on how to efficiently master conversational fluency in any language, some of which are more academic while others are more practical and suited for everyday use.

Why Are You Studying a Foreign Language?

Before digging into the list of tips to efficiently learn a foreign language, you need to identify your reason for learning this language. Whether it is for traveling purposes, to fulfill a job requirement or to deepen connections with friends or family members who speak a foreign language, you need to have a clear reason of why you are studying a new language. After all, you are committing to learn not just a language but also a new way of thinking! On the other side, if you do not have a clear reason of why should you study a foreign language, I encourage you to find one. You can ask friends and family who have experienced learning a second language, or research online to see which language would interest you the most. Do not be scared by the learning difficulties you will encounter, everyone is able to learn a new language. You already learned your native language, what stops you from learning another one?

Let's Get Started: Find a Textbook and Write a Self Introduction

Regardless of which language you chose, if you are aiming for at least a conversational level of fluency, I suggest you find a textbook. There is a great variety of textbooks available for learning any language, which you can find anywhere from internet to your favorite bookstore. The textbook you pick will be your starting point to learn the alphabet, basic grammar and structure of the language along with some vocabulary. After you have learned the basics, you can move to different materials and you may not need the textbook anymore.

In parallel of using a textbook as your starting point, write and practice your self-introduction in your target language. You can use your textbook as a reference, but you can also find great sources online. After you have written your first self-introduction, practice repeating it aloud. In this way, since you have started speaking since the beginning, you have already applied your language learning!

Master the Six Language Skills

If you have already started learning your target language by following the suggestion from the previous section, you may have noticed that the textbook you are using is teaching you different language learning skills. In fact, the process of learning a language can be broken down into six major language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar acquisition. Depending on what your goal is, you may focus more on a certain skill rather than another one, but do not forget to practice any of them, because they are all interconnected: if you practice one skill, you will improve on the other skills too.

1. Listening

To be fluent in a language means being able to understand and speak it; therefore, listening and speaking are the most important skills you need to master. Listening to podcasts and music in your target language are the most effective and fun methods to improve your listening skills.

You can find any language's podcasts on iTunes store, radio stations and blogs. Podcasts can be very short or long, and their topics vary. You will most likely find one genre that suits you the most! Podcasts are not all equally easy to understand; therefore, be sure to find the ones that align with your current language level. To enhance the effectiveness of learning from podcasts, listen to them repetitively, take notes as you find new words and read the translation of the sentences. If you commit yourself listening to one podcast a day for 15 minutes, you will be more comfortable with the sound of your target language and sentences will gradually become easier to understand. There are two podcasts websites, both with a free and paid version, which are specific for language learning: *Fluentu* and *[language name]Pod101* (for example *JapanesePod101*). These two websites are extremely useful as they will guide you to reach the level you desire.

If you like to listen to music in your native language, you will most likely find tunes you will like in your target language too. Learning through music is great because not only is it enjoyable, but also this method helps you to memorize words in context. Once you find the songs you enjoy, listen to them actively: repeat the songs multiple times, read the lyrics and

the translations in your native language. Lastly, try to sing along! In this way you will improve your pronunciation and memorize sentences more naturally.

2. Speaking

Speak, speak, and speak. Only if you take the initiative of speaking the language, you will be able to say: “I am fluent in [language name]”, because language is a means of communication. Do not be scared of making mistakes when you speak in a foreign language. In fact, making mistakes is part of learning. You are not tested for language correctness. If you think you will be judged for making mistakes, you should relax, since it is most likely not going to happen. Native speakers are usually appreciative if not overjoyed when you speak their language, regardless of how grammatically wrong it may be.

As you may have noticed, speaking is strictly related to listening. In fact, if you actively apply the tips given in the previous section, you will notice that your speaking skills will increase too. Many people believe they can't speak the language they are learning because they do not know anyone that speaks that language or they are not in a country where the foreign language is spoken. This is a myth! There are many ways you can be in touch with native speakers even by staying at home. Applications such as *HelloTalk* facilitate connecting with language learners from all over the world, while websites such as *Italki* provide platforms on which you can find tutors and teachers willing to prepare lessons through Skype at a relatively cheap price. Find people to talk to!

3. Reading

Even if reading is not important to you because you may want to focus on the conversational language level, it is suggested to still practice some reading skills. Reading will overall improve your vocabulary in context and your overall use of the language. It is essential to know that reading is a more advanced skill that comes after you have mastered at least the basics. Once you are ready, pick some articles or books you are able to read. Do not worry about not being able to understand every single word. Sometimes, it is more useful to be able to deduce the meaning of the words from the context, as long as you have enough vocabulary to understand most of the other words. As a beginner, children's books are highly recommended, with many pictures that help visualizing the scenes in the stories.

4. Writing

Similarly to reading, writing is fundamental to learn new vocabulary and practice sentence construction. Through writing, you will apply all the language knowledge you have learned by taking longer time to reflect on what you want to express. Write about your thoughts, about topics that interest you or rewrite song lyrics you enjoy.

5. Vocabulary

We all know that every language has a ton of vocabulary to memorize. Are you scared of forgetting words all the time? SRS is here to help. Have you ever heard of SRS (Spaced Repetition System)? SRS is a learning technique based on the idea of recalling a certain word or concept immediately before it is forgotten by reviewing the word or concept at increasing intervals of time. There are many applications such as *Anki* and *Memrise* which are based on SRS. Regardless on which application you use, find a set of vocabulary of your target language, and practice it daily. Do not practice too many words at a time, it will be exhausting and ineffective. Instead, commit yourself to less than 10 words, 5-15 minutes for a couple times a day.

6. Grammar

The last language skill covered is grammar. Why is it the last? Because, contrarily to what school has taught us, grammar is the least important skill when your goal is to be conversational fluent in a new language. Especially when you are in the beginner phase of learning a language, you shouldn't focus too much on grammar rules other than the understanding the basic structures of a sentence. In fact, before learning the more complex structures, you need to be confident listening and speaking to native speakers.

How to Plan Your Weeks and Days to Learn Faster

Now that you know about the six language skills, create a plan to practice all of those skills in order to keep track of the learning time.

Example 1: *How to plan two months of learning by setting specific goals each week*

Week	Goal	Action / How to
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Read and write the alphabet- Introduce myself to a native speaker- Learn greetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Use textbook and online sources- Practice your introduction speech with a language partner or tutor on Skype
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Learn basic grammar structure- Learn about how to ask questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Use textbook and online sources
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Learn about how to order at a restaurant- Learn about food related topics- Read one children's story	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Find podcasts that cover these topics- Imagine yourself being in a restaurant with your language partner or tutor- Find a story that interest you that has a translation in your native language
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Learn about how to ask for indications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Find podcasts that cover these topics- Write a paragraph for each topic and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe favorite hobbies and daily activities - Listen to three songs and write their lyrics by ear 	<p>discuss about it with your language partner or tutor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen repetitively the songs until you get used to the sound of the words
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe places you visited - Describe a feature you enjoy about your country of origin - Watch a movie / tv series with original subtitles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Same as above - Watch the movie first with with your native language's subtitles, then rewatch it with original subtitles
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learn about how to ask for permissions and requests politely - Learn about how to state reasons and opinions - Read an online article 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research online these specific grammar structures - Find an online article suited to your level. If the article has many images, it should be relatively easier to read.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe your family and friends - Explain your reason for learning this language - State your future plans and dreams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Try to write about these topics without translating from your native language, consulting your language partner or tutor when needed
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review the topics covered in the previous weeks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Go over all the materials covered previously and perfectionate them with your improved language skills

Example 2: How to plan a regular week by studying only two to three hours a day

Weekday	Activities	Time required
Everyday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practice new and old vocabulary (in two or three sessions) - Listen to one podcast actively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - total 30 min - 15 min
Sun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write and practice a paragraph about any topic - Read one article 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1.5 hour - 30 min
Mon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practice the paragraph written on Sunday with your language partner or tutor on Skype - Listen to a song and write its lyrics by ear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 hour - 1 hour
Tue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learn one more grammar concept and practice using it - Read one article 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 hour - 30 min
Wed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write and practice a paragraph about any topic - Watch to fun videos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1.5 hour - 30 min
Thu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practice the paragraph written on Wednesday with your language partner or tutor on Skype - Read one article 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 hour - 30 min
Fri	Watch a movie / TV series	2 hours

Sat	- Learn one more grammar concept and practice using it - Listen to a song and write its lyrics by ear	- 1 hour - 1 hour
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FAQs

1. How long does it take to learn a foreign language?

The Foreign Service Institute has estimated that if you are a native English speaker it will take you from a range of 575 to 2200 class hours to learn a foreign language, depending on how similar the language is to English. In reality, the amount of hours is not relevant as it depends on your motivation to learn, your learning methods and goals. Many people learn a foreign language at school for many years, but how many of them are confident speaking it with a native speaker? On the other side, it is also very possible to be interactive on a basic level with a native speaker even after one week of intense learning. It is totally up to you!

2. What is the most common habit and technique successful learners adopt when learning a language?

Successful learners set aside at least an hour everyday and follow a regular learning schedule. These learners do not study for too many hours everyday, because this method would be highly exhausting and would the learners lose motivation easily. On the other side, they will create an easy-to-follow plan, which they would commit to everyday. If you spend even an hour to learn your target language daily, your fluency level will increase constantly.

3. How to stay motivated all the time?

If you find yourself not having enough or losing motivation learning your target language, it is suggested to keep a progress journal. A progress journal is a notebook on which you write your learning progress over time by quantifying the skills you have learned. The journal will help you to see the difference between your starting level and your current level, and can be a great motivation booster when your desire to study has decreased. Another tip many language learners suggest is to constantly remind yourself your original reason for studying this certain foreign language by saying it loud.

List of Useful websites mentioned earlier

Throughout this manual, many websites and language learning tools were mentioned. In this section, these websites and tools are listed, followed by what language skill they reinforce and a short description about them.

1. *Duolingo* and *Memrise*: mobile apps and websites, vocabulary. These two mobile apps and websites are helpful to memorize set of vocabulary that are already created by experienced language learners or teachers. They are both based on SRS and are known for rewarding the learner with a point system whenever the words are chosen correctly. The learner can compete with his/her friends by studying more, earning more points and surpassing them on a ranking board.

Links: <https://www.duolingo.com/> and <https://www.memrise.com/>

2. *Anki*: mobile app and computer program, vocabulary. This mobile app and computer program is a highly recommended system on which you can create your own vocabulary set in a digital flashcard format. It is based on SRS too and you can personalize it by inserting images or words translated in your native language to facilitate memorizing foreign words.

Link: <https://apps.ankiweb.net/>

3. *Italki*: online community, speaking and writing. This website provides an inspiring community of language learners and teachers willing to help each other to improve their language skills. In the forum section, learners can post sentences or paragraphs and native speakers will correct them. In the tutoring session, qualified professional teachers and community tutors offer lessons for relatively low prices at anytime of the day. Most lessons are taught through Skype.

Link: <https://www.italki.com>

4. *Hello;Talk*: mobile app, speaking, writing, reading. This mobile app provides a community of language learners who interact with each other by exchanging their native language skills.

Link: <https://www.hellotalk.com/>

5. *FluentU*, *Fluentin3months*: online blogs, personal development. These are among the most inspiring websites on which you can read about tips on how to improve your language skills from other language learners.

Links: <http://www.fluentu.com/> and <https://www.fluentin3months.com/>

6. *[Language]Pod101*: podcast website, listening. This series of websites has a great library of podcasts for a great variety of languages, divided into the different fluency level.

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