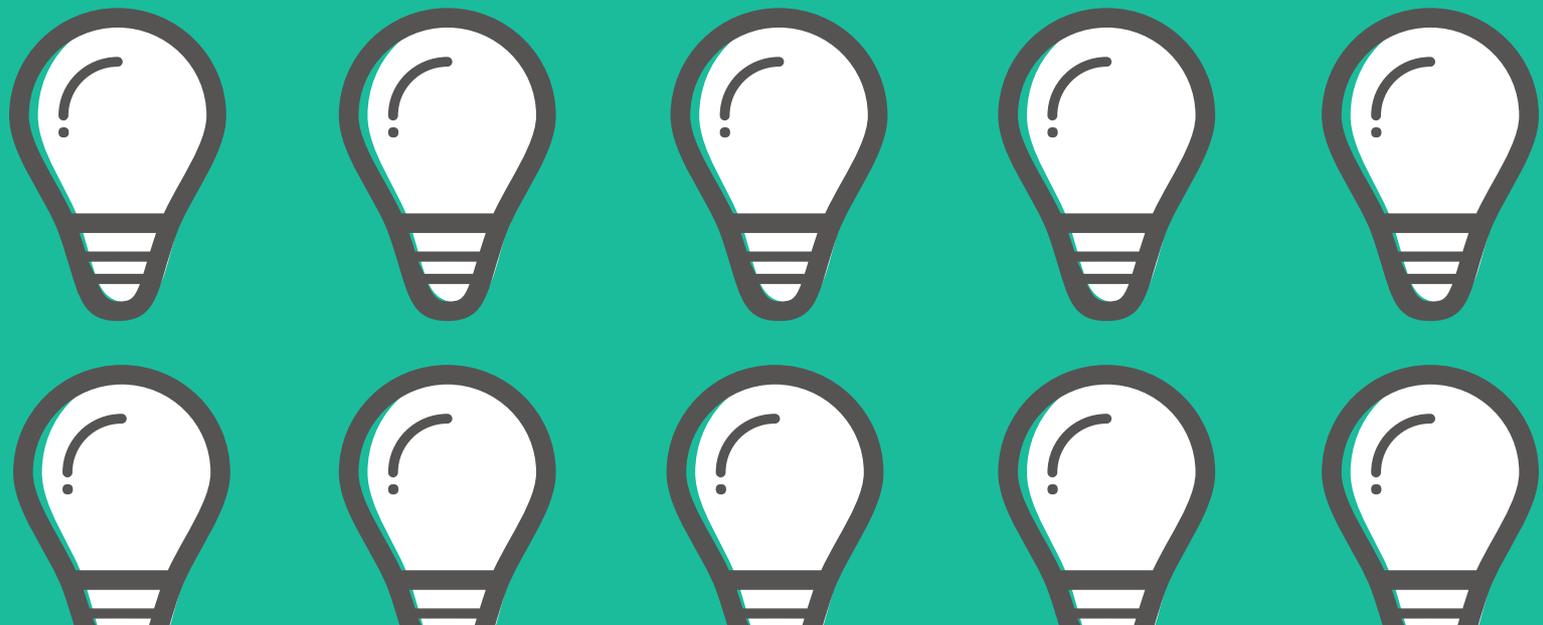


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# *HOW TO LEARN LANGUAGES FAST*

Proven Principles For Reaching  
Fluency In Less Time



# Introduction

How long do you think it would take you to achieve native level fluency in a new language? A long time, right? As much as I'd like to tell you that I have secrets that will allow you to reach a native level in less than a year...it just isn't possible. It takes many years of dedication to truly master a language. The good news is, you can achieve *conversational fluency* in a lot less time.

**Conversational fluency** means the ability to have conversations about normal, everyday things with a native speaker at a normal, conversational speed. This is what you need if your end goal is to be able to get to know foreign people, understand their culture, or successfully integrate into their country. Unless having a native level of fluency is key to your work (for example if you are an international spy), you should focus on achieving conversational fluency.

Before we start, here's a little background on me: I'm not someone who speaks numerous languages fluently. But before I launched the language platform, [lingoci.com](https://lingoci.com), I used to teach English. Consequently, over the last few years I've done a lot of research into effective language learning. Much of this research has focused on polyglots – people who speak several languages. If you have ever met a polyglot, probably your first thought was that they were superhuman. But they will be the first to tell you that they don't have any special powers. Instead, their success with languages is largely attributable to the principles they follow. In this short guide, I will explain these principles. If you follow them, you can reach conversational fluency in your target language within 12 months. So, let's begin...

# 1. Make language learning a daily habit

People complain that they can't learn a language because it is too difficult or they aren't "good" at languages. In reality, the number one reason for failure is that people can't get themselves to practice the language consistently.

To achieve this consistency, you need to develop **daily habits**. Habits are key to behaviour change because once you form them, you don't need to rely on willpower or motivation. As Maneesh Sethi puts it:

"Think about how it feels to go to bed without brushing your teeth. It feels wrong. You feel like your day isn't complete — and you'll even drag yourself out of bed to do it. Why? Because brushing is so deeply ingrained into your daily routine that it actually requires more willpower to NOT brush than just to brush! It's a deeply formed habit — and you rarely miss a day."

How much faster would you improve if you could form similar daily habits with language learning?

A habit is usually made up of three components: a cue, a routine and a reward...

The **cue** sets the behaviour into action. For language learning, I recommend simply setting daily reminders in your online calendar. The **routine** is the actual behaviour that you perform in response to the cue. When you start, make the routines easy – things like opening your language app, or revising 5 words from your last lesson. These routines may sound insufficient, but because they are so easy you will be making it almost impossible to fail, and you will find that you end up wanting to do a lot more than your initial task. Lastly, **reward** yourself in some way as the positive reinforcement will increase your chances of success.

This could mean treating yourself to something, but for many people just noticing their progress is enough of a reward to reinforce the habit.

You may be thinking: OK, this all sounds good - but I just don't have the time. The reality is you only need 15 minutes a day to make progress, and surely you have that! Consider your daily commute for example – thanks to technology, you can spend this time revising vocabulary or listening to foreign podcasts. So stop making excuses and start building those daily habits. During the rest of this guide, you will learn what some of these habits should be.

## 2. Learn the right words the right way

The most frequent reason people give for being unable to learn languages is that they have a bad memory. But the problem is less to do with their memory and more to do with their technique.

Here are 5 tips you can follow to increase your vocabulary in the most practical way:

- Learn **cognates**. These are words that are almost exactly the same in another language. For instance, *gratitud* in Spanish means the same as *gratitude* in English. Romance languages like Spanish, French and Italian have hundreds of words in common with English. You can easily find lists of these cognates online. The pronunciation will differ somewhat, so check it by using [Forvo](#), a brilliant, free site where you can listen to native speakers pronouncing specific words.
- Learn the **most commonly used words**. To achieve *native level fluency* in a language, you would typically need to know at least 50,000 words. But to achieve *conversational fluency* you only need to learn a fraction of that - 2000 to 3000 words. This is because in all languages, there is a

minority of words that make up the majority of the spoken language. Again, you can find lists of these words online. However, you will also come across them naturally whilst speaking and listening to the language. Write down and learn the commonly used words whilst ignoring the complex words that you don't hear so often.

- Learn words that are **relevant** to you. Do this by focusing on topics that interest you or that come up in your day to day life. These could be related to your work or to your leisure activities. By focusing on relevant language, you'll be more likely to actually use the words you learn in real life. You'll also find it easier to memorise these words.
- Use **flashcards** and **spaced repetition**. Flashcards are quite possibly the most effective way to memorise language. They apply a concept called *spaced repetition* – an algorithm learns how well you know each word/flashcard, then prioritises them so that you study the things you don't know, without wasting precious time on the things you already do. At Lingoci, we recommend that students create flashcards using the vocabulary they've come across during lessons. You can also use flashcard apps such as [Anki](#).
- Use a **notebook** and take it **everywhere**. Write down relevant vocabulary you come across whenever you are exposed to the language. Whilst you can use an online dictionary to find translations, I recommend writing the words down in a notebook rather than recording them on a device. [Studies](#) have demonstrated that when you write rather than type, your ability to recall information improves significantly. Researchers believe that this is because writing is slower and involves deeper mental processing.

## 3. Immerse yourself with free resources (at the right level)

It has never been easier to learn a language without actually travelling to a country where it is spoken. This is because there are now tons of free reading and listening resources that you can access online. Use them to immerse yourself in the language every day. If you go to [this page](#) of our website, you can find lists of the best free resources for each of the languages Lingoci offers.

Ideally, you should use language resources that are just one level above your own. In linguistics, resources at this level are known as *comprehensible input*. Put simply, this means that you should only just be able to understand whatever you are reading or listening to. You should be outside of your comfort zone, but you should know just enough of the language to enable you to understand and interpret new language.

In terms of format, radio and podcasts are great when you have at least an intermediate level, but TV and films are preferable at the start. This is because the images provide you with context that helps you understand the language. One thing I specifically recommend is watching the international news. News presenters speak very clearly, so you will have a better chance of understanding. Also, due to the international focus you will already know some of the news stories. The images, combined with the clear speech and your background knowledge, will help you follow along and pick up new words - even if your level is very basic.

The good thing about radio and podcasts is that you can listen whilst commuting or doing other things. If you're a beginner, you can listen to podcasts where they speak extra slowly and include transcripts, for example [Radio Sweden](#) has a super daily podcast for learning Swedish.

## 4. Speak from day one

As explained in the last section, all you need is access to the internet for improving your reading and listening skills. Speaking, on the other hand, is still best practiced with another human being.

There are three main options here. The free option is to find native speakers to converse with. Sites like Meetup.com often have language exchange meetings that you can attend. One downside of this is that it's not very efficient as you have to travel to the meet up and spend part of the time helping others with *your* native language.

Another option is to go to group classes. These can be nice from a social perspective, but if your goal is to practice speaking, they are not ideal as you will have to take it in turns with other learners. Also, classes often move as slowly as the slowest student.

However, the most efficient option is to take 1-on-1 lessons. The cost can be a little higher, but if you are taking the lessons online – such as with [Lingoci](#) - this isn't always the case. Moreover, you'll be able to get extensive speaking practice with an experienced, native tutor.

Educational research has highlighted the importance of *feedback* in mastering skills. To rapidly improve your speaking skills, you need to push yourself to make mistakes and receive accurate feedback so that you learn to make fewer mistakes. The person you're speaking with should therefore be a native speaker so that they have the ability to notice mistakes and provide accurate corrections. An exchange partner can provide some feedback, but because they usually only know their language implicitly, they may not be able to provide clear explanations. This is why having a personal tutor is the ideal way to improve your ability to speak a language.

If you're a beginner, you may read this section but still wait several months before starting to test your speaking skills. This is understandable as it takes confidence to try to speak a new language. But if your goal is to be able to speak at a conversational level, you should start practicing from day one. The more mistakes you make, the faster you will gain feedback and improve. Of

course, you need to feel 'safe' in making mistakes, which is why tutors need to create a relaxed and friendly learning environment.

Finally, the best language learners 'top up' their speaking practice by talking to themselves in the language they're learning from time to time. Give it a try to boost your confidence and help you improve your pronunciation. Just don't do it at the top of your voice in a crowded place - people might think you're a little crazy.

## 5. Enjoy the language learning journey

Earlier, I highlighted why it usually makes sense to focus on reaching conversational fluency, rather than native level fluency. This is because it is all most people need, and through immersive learning it can be attained within just 12 months. Whether you reach conversational fluency in 12 months or longer, it's going to be a journey that will require consistent motivation. All too often, people give up learning a language because they study boring textbooks and try to rely on their willpower to keep going. With language learning, you can't rely on willpower alone. This is why you need to enjoy yourself throughout. If you are having fun, you'll actually *want* to practice each day. So don't obsess over grammar practice – instead, do things you enjoy and focus on topics that interest you.

I hope you found this guide useful. If you did, put your new knowledge to use by taking action. Start building those daily learning habits. Know that you're getting closer to your goal each day, but enjoy the journey too. And of course, if you are serious about achieving conversational fluency as quickly as possible, try taking lessons with a native tutor via [Lingoci.com](https://lingoci.com).