Ordinary Ways to Learn a Language EXTRAORDINARILY FAST

The Rocket Languages Guide to Explosive Language Learning

Rocket Languages

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Introduction

Tongue-tied

There is a wonderful story of a Chinese girl who moves to the United States and goes to kindergarten for the first time in her new country. When it comes time for her turn to speak aloud in class, she freezes up, knowing that what little English she does know will sound very different to the ears of all those around her. Eventually, she finds some relief in reading exercises, because when reading aloud at least you don't have to make up what you're going to say. But even that relief is short-lived, for she has to stop for an awkward pause each time she sees the pronoun 'I.' It makes no sense to her. She thinks, in Chinese, when you write that first person pronoun, you have to use *seven* strokes. It's quite an intricate and important character. How come this 'I' only has three?

The story is in a collection called *Tongue Tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education*, and it offers up an appropriate point of departure for those about to embark on a language learning journey, or those who have found themselves stuck somewhere along the way. Whether you're baffled by word order in Japanese or bemused by cases in German, whether the notion of Chinese tones strikes a chord of fear in you, or you recoil at the thought of the rolling Italian 'R,' you too may have found yourself tongue-tied when learning a second language.

That might mean simply not understanding a rule or convention that has no easy equivalent in English, or tripping up on occasion when you're trying to string new words together out loud, or maybe even being so gripped with nerves that you’re unable to test your new phrases out loud, out there, in the real world.

The Rocket Languages Guide to Explosive Language Learning is designed to help those of you who are committed to learning a new language untie your tongue and get started. It's there to help you gain the direction and confidence you need to make the maximum amount of progress in the shortest possible time.

Most language learners can share a story or two about a less than successful attempt to learn a second language in school. Many of you simply had to take a second language in school, but even those who chose to pursue a language in high school or beyond often have horror stories about having to repeat obscure phrases in unison until you reached a state of near hypnosis, being drilled to death with grammar rules, or learning an entire conjugation table for a verb before you learned how to say… *Help!*

Statistics show that in the U.S. less than 5 percent of students who study a foreign language in classroom environments continue studying the language for more than two years (Asher, 9). There are many reasons for these dismal numbers, among them the fact that the United States is relatively resistant when it comes to developing a multilingual mindset.

Still, it would be unfair and incorrect to suggest that there's something inherently wrong with studying language in school. There's not. After all, just about anything can be treated as a subject of study, and there is much to be gained from studying language in an academic environment. School is more than just a building: it provides structure, resources, a group of peers, and - if you're fortunate - a passionate and competent instructor.

But language is so much more than a school subject. It's a process and it's a practice. It's a new way of seeing the world and a new way of participating in it. If that sounds like overstating the case, just ask any bilingual or multilingual speaker and they'll agree. No doubt.

That's why to learn a language you have to *start* by using it. Or, to paraphrase Barry Farber, one of the most legendary polyglots (multi-language speakers) with over a dozen languages to his name, it's not about learning the language *before* you use it - it's about using the language so you can learn it (5).

The rest will happen naturally, and if you're truly committed to the task, you'll be a student of the language in no time. But not before you begin using it to communicate with real people in real situations.

There's a common response to this sort of advice, which might go something like this: What if I live in a small town in, say, Idaho and I'm still three months away from my big trip to Europe? How do I use French when there are no French speaking people around? The answer remains the same. You still need to find occasions to use your target language, and if you can't find them, create them. Don't wait until you go to France to speak French. Waiting for 'the real thing' is not a viable excuse to keep your tongue tied until your flight lands on foreign soil.

This guide will be especially valuable for those who seek creative ways to get started. For now, I'll mention one of my all-time favorite solutions to this particular problem, a Spanish learner who decided to train his new puppy using commands in Spanish! Of course, when you're in Madrid you may not want to tell your Spanish waiter to 'fetch,' but the point is that every little bit counts, and lots of little solutions are just as good as one big one when it comes to confronting big challenges.

Is this Guide for Me?

Reasons for learning a second language differ depending on the situation. Many people who want to learn a language in a short time do so because they want to get more enjoyment out of their experience in a foreign country, and so that

practical communications become easier for them. It's also true that you gain a richer appreciation for the food and culture of a particular place when you're immersed in the language.

Others decide to learn out of a desire to talk to and relate to friends whose first language is not English. Finding a partner who speaks a foreign language is also always a great motivation to get fluent fast (it often helps you get in good with the parents too). For some, learning new languages increases their earning potential in the business world, and some employees are even required to do so (they're lucky - after all, they're typically supported financially and given the necessary time they need to learn and upskill!). Others are fascinated by language just for the sake of language, and they take great pleasure in learning a second language, and often a third and fourth as well…

Regardless of the reasons behind it, the result of acquiring a second language is the same: in a word, it's *rewarding*. It's genuinely a rewarding experience for you, but it is also a reward for all of the people you are now able to reach with your new ability. Remember, speaking someone else's first language, in their home country or simply in their home, is a mark of enormous respect. And this sort of respect goes a long way.

So this guide is for those who, in the most immediate sense, want to get started with learning a language or get past the frustration that they have encountered along the way. It offers direction, motivation, and creative ideas toward this end. But beyond that, it is for those who seek the reciprocal rewards that such an experience will bring, rewards that are long lasting and ongoing.

A Launch Pad

You've decided that you'd like to learn a second language. Well done for that. You may not have decided what tools and supplies you'll be taking on this most important mission, or even who'll join you along the way, but you can think of this guide as a launch pad.

The first section is all about busting myths. You'll be introduced to - or reminded of - some of the most common excuses people make for not learning a language. These are persistent beliefs - little stories that people often tell themselves that might on the surface seem like fairly convincing obstacles to foreign language acquisition. You'll find out once and for all why these self-commentaries are not only negative, but entirely false.

In section two, we talk about learning methods. We'll outline the most common and effective ways that successful language learners approach the learning process, then provide you with a step-by-step list that details, in order, exactly what you can do to start speaking your target language.

That's not all; we'll also help retrain your mind, and your mouth, so you sound natural when you do start speaking. After all, learning new vocabulary and phrases is only part of the game; you need to work on hitting the right rhythm and tone, and - in most cases - master sounds that you simply don't make in English.

Section three introduces you to a bounty of tools that you can use to make your language learning experience easier, faster, and more enjoyable! Count yourself lucky in this respect. After all, with digital multimedia the ability to learn a language has never been easier or more accessible. Digital technology brings huge advances in terms of audio recording, interactive learning resources (that can give you feedback in real-time), and social networking tools (which support

learning communities that can be as diverse culturally as they are geographically).

All of these resources have powerful implications for language learning. In addition, many digital language learning resources are available in downloadable form online, and audio materials are often portable - for use 'on the go' in car stereos and MP3 players. We'll show you how to harness the power of these tools selectively, choosing only what suits your needs and your preferences as a learner. That way, you can make smart choices and avoid getting overwhelmed.

Section four is our meditation on motivation - that is, we talk about making language learning a priority and setting up a mental framework that drives you to accomplish whatever goals you have when it comes to learning a second language. We'll reinforce the importance of *play* when it comes to learning languages, and having fun not despite the fact that you take your learning seriously, but *because* of it. On a broader level, this entire guide is about drive and motivation.

As you'll discover, the good news is that you don't need a certain genetic makeup or, for that matter, a second childhood in order to excel at foreign language learning; just the RIGHT ATTITUDE. It's true. It may take some work to get there, but your success will depend on whether or not you have adopted the right attitude to this experience. We'll talk in plenty of detail about *how* to get there, but if you had to break it down in a simple equation, the message might go something like this…

Take the language learning process very seriously.
Don't take yourself too seriously in the process.

The final section will share the Rocket Languages philosophy of learning with you, and explain how we have done our best to marry the most effective methods with the most effective tools while at the same time keep things lively, fun, and flexible. That's what self-guided learning is all about. The pressure is off, you're in control of your schedule, and you have the power to use whatever resources you want to use. Of course, even self-guided learners can do with a little guidance up front, so let's get going…

I. Dismantling the Myths

There is no shortage of myths around language-learning. And myth-busting is a popular pastime for some. You've got to be careful though. There are indeed at least two sides to every coin, and for every 'fact' someone throws at you there's likely to be another 'fact' to suggest the opposite. You have to be aware of who's actually busting the myth, what they ultimately want you to believe, and why.

For example, suppose someone tells you that it's myth that you can't get great abdominal muscles just by doing sit-ups and having a great diet. That's fine. They may even have 'facts' to 'prove' sit-ups and diet is simply not enough. But you should probably be suspicious if the same person is trying to sell you an expensive abdominal exercise machine.

Language learning is no different in this regard. Now a billion dollar industry, it’s vulnerable to the same kind of marketing and consumer manipulation. Some retailers want you to believe that you simply can't learn a new language unless you enroll in their program or buy their course. This is not only unfair, but it overlooks the fact that most successful language learners draw on a variety of different resources rather than search in vain for one silver bullet.
The most important thing for a new language learner to believe is that, first of all, you can learn a second language no matter who you are. You are in control of the process, and you will be the one to decide which strategies (yes, there should be several) will ultimately work for you.

What we've done in this section is pick a few hotly contested ideas on the topic of language learning. These are also misguided ideas that that are most likely to hold you back at the gates. So, let's find out how things just got easier…

Myth 1) It's impossible to learn a language fast.

FALSE… It is entirely possible that you have heard this exact line from one of your teachers when you took a language in school. Or you may have heard it from one of your friends who is living in a foreign country and making little headway in the native tongue. Fortunately, it's a myth.

It IS possible to learn a language fast. Granted, it may not be possible to *master* a language in a matter of weeks, or even months. But let's keep in mind that arguably most people have not mastered their own first language. 'Mastery' might be too tall a measure, so let's consider another one: fluency. Fluency is one of those things - everyone seems to think they know what it is but couldn't really explain it to you if you asked them to.

For many language learners we have worked with, fluency implies an ease and fluidity of expression in the target language. And you would probably need to add to the mix ease in understanding everything said by others in the target language… Plus everything that you read… Plus perhaps everything you write in the new language too… The list could go on. We would agree that for most mortals it's just not possible to achieve fluency of this kind in a few weeks or months. **You CAN, however, achieve 'conversational fluency' in a matter of weeks or months.**

Conversational fluency is something you can measure in terms of your ability to communicate in the real world. It is definitely not a cop-out for grander visions of fluency, and if you are determined to learn as many verb conjugations or native proverbs that you possibly can, by all means, go for it. The point is simply to first recognize that the notion of fluency itself is extremely fluid, and that fluency comes in many forms.

For example, you may have no idea what the *-te* form is in Japanese but you're able to field every question you get in the native tongue during a typical day in Tokyo. You might speak with a perfect French accent and at the same time not be able to tell the difference between your *tête* and your *coude*.

Another problem with a fixed notion of fluency is that it can lead you to believe that there is a finish line somewhere out there, when there's not really. You may even wind up setting your goals too modestly and then give up on the whole thing after hitting your plateau.

So, in short, conversational fluency is what you have when you can engage in conversations, ask and answer questions, get and give help when necessary, and make people smile or laugh every now and then, all in the target language.

When you have conversational fluency, you may have internalized only a small percentage of vocabulary, but given that native speakers tend to utilize only a small percentage of vocabulary in their own day to day lives, you know more than enough.

When you have conversational fluency, you may not know how to change a verb you want to use into the future tense, but you know how to convey the right meaning at the right time. You find ways to say what you need to say with the core vocabulary you have at your disposal. 'I ski tomorrow' may not sound as nice as 'I'll go skiing tomorrow,' but the idea is just as clear. Chris Lonsdale puts it quite succinctly when he says: 'Communicate, don't grammarate' (51). **A focus on making meaning over and above getting it perfect is what conversational fluency is all about.**

Above all, when you have conversational fluency, you're not afraid to open your mouth when you want to speak. This should be your immediate goal, and

fortunately enough it is also the most practical and attainable goal you can have when it comes to learning a second language.

Unfortunately many learning systems, especially but not exclusively formal education classes, are simply not designed this way. They have contributed to a persistent belief that language learning and rapid progress are necessarily at odds. Take school proficiency levels as an example: it may be four years until you are considered 'Advanced.' But the truth is that the levels of Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced don't necessarily match up to how people interact in the real world; that is, these levels are not measuring how proficient you will be in a real conversation in the target language but instead how well you will score on an test.

As mentioned, there is nothing inherently wrong with studying language, but it might be a little like the difference between knowing how a car engine works and actually driving one, as the common analogy goes. You'll need a crash course in conversational fluency either way.

Myth 2) It's much easier to learn a language as a child.

FALSE... It's a familiar story and it goes something like this: you only have a limited window during your childhood to learn languages. During this time your child brain is much more capable of absorbing linguistic information. If you don't learn a second language then, your circuitry shuts off and this window slams shut on all of your aspirations to be bilingual. Or at least you are condemned to a much more difficult path should you even attempt try to try as an adult.

The logic follows: I am no longer a child; therefore I will not be able to learn another language easily, or at all. But try this logic on for size instead: this idea is a myth, therefore it's false!

This myth is so pervasive in part because it has a firm basis in the social sciences, namely psychology. An influential theory of learning arose in the late 1960s stating that there was a 'critical period' during which the developing mind was more receptive to acquiring certain skills, including those related to language acquisition. The same theory lingers on today, and provides way too many would-be polyglots a perfect excuse not to try.

But a lot has happened in the last half century, and there's been a substantial amount of new research that pokes big holes in the 'critical period' idea. It has fallen out of favor with psychologists and language specialists alike, which means you can no longer use your adulthood as an excuse not to learn a language. In fact, a number of studies have demonstrated the exact opposite: that when exposure time to a new language is controlled, adults actually learn FASTER than children!

This makes perfect sense. Think about it. Adults have a couple of obvious advantages over children who are learning their first language. Adults know infinitely more about the world; they understand that there are such things as 'rules' and 'conventions' and that these rules govern the way all languages work.

Grammar is a part of this but not all of it. Sure, it helps immensely to be able to know how words fit together to form statements and questions and commands. But even more generally, adults can take on new information and put it into context; children don't have a command of context and how it operates.

Recognizing any kind of pattern in one context and using it to understand something in another context is a skill that is developed over time. As a simple example, because you know that most cultures use different greetings at different points in the day, when you hear a Korean speaker greet you in the evening, you

can assume that what you have heard is an appropriate Korean greeting for the evening.

Furthermore, as an extension of all these faculties, adults know how to interpret complex symbols (read) and use these symbols to construct meaning (write)! There is no question that reading and writing in one or more languages makes it easier to learn more of them. You are way ahead of a child trying to learn his or first language in this regard.

The idea that we should learn a second language by attempting to 'mimic' the way we learned our first language, however, remains a popular one and is the driving philosophy behind the marketing campaign of more than one language learning software company. Of course it's understandable that a child's experience of language learning is held up as some sort of ideal to which we should all aspire - or at least return to - when we go out and try to learn a foreign language. After all, children are without question immersed in the experience; they have a safe place for trial and error, constant feedback, and an environment in which to make all the right and wrong sounds while learning.
But no matter how 'natural' it may seem, attempting to learn 'just like a child learning a first language' is not only unrealistic but also very misguided. Once you realize how many advantages you have as an adult learner, it only makes sense to use them, and to great effect!

But let's take a closer look at exactly why children *appear* to handle the language learning process better than adults. Then we can figure out what you can do to put your advantages to better use.

We can start with **exposure time**, which simply means the time one is actively involved in the language learning process. Clearly, from the minute they wake up to their bedtime, children are exposed to new words in their target language,

even just passively, overhearing a parent on the phone for instance, or watching a Disney movie. Think of an adult attending night classes for their language twice a week, or getting a word-a-day email each morning. The adult's exposure time pales in comparison.

The fact that children readily embrace a **sense of play** also makes the learning process easier for them. Playing with sounds and words is crucial to language learning, and the will to explore through play is an innate human capacity. The problem is that this capacity gets progressively stamped out as we grow older. Adulthood demands that we get serious, conform, and get our point across. For the same kind of reasons, children have very little pressure on them during language acquisition, or fear of social discouragement.

Another important factor is **motivation**. Children are motivated to learn their first language so that they can secure existing social bonds and create new ones. It's what we want and what evolution tells us we need. Children learning a second language similarly need to seek out new social connections in order for them to be accepted into new groups; simply put, making new friends is a lot more important for children than it is for most adults.

Highly related to motivation is **priority**. As adults, we may tell ourselves that we are passionate about learning a certain language. But then reality intervenes, and it becomes the top priority after all of the other priorities we have on a daily basis, and no one can blame you for that. By contrast, words can't describe how big of an investment children have in learning a language. From communicating basic needs such as hunger or cold to forging those all-important social bonds, language learning is always automatically top priority.

Again, here are the some of the main reasons why children can be thought to have it easier when it comes to language learning:

- more exposure time
- sense of play
- more motivation
- top priority

Fortunately, these are all things that, at least to some extent, you can control. And we'll show you how in the coming sections.

Myth 3) The best way to learn a language is to go to that foreign country and immerse, immerse, immerse…

FALSE… *Immersion* is a very fashionable word when it comes to concocting language learning catch-phrases; and for good reason. Surrounding yourself with other native speakers and being forced to communicate in the target language most if not all of the time is a powerful way to learn a second language.

But here's the thing: you don't need to go to Germany to immerse yourself in German, Italy to immerse yourself in Italian, Korea to immerse yourself in Korean, and so on. This belief just puts another obstacle in your path, and gives you an all-too-tidy excuse not to take your language learning seriously in the meantime.

There are several reasons that undo the foreign country immersion myth. First of all, there are plenty of ways in which you can recreate - or 'simulate' - a productive sense of immersion in the language. That's because you live in a digital culture where all kinds of resources from all kinds of places are available to you on your personal computer.

You also have the ability to simulate a sense of immersion in the target language using a variety of multimedia conversational tools, tools that simply did not exist 5

to 10 years ago (and we'll talk about them in more detail in section three). The convenience, flexibility, and affordability of these resources allow you to organize places and times for an immersive learning environment. Using interactive audio lessons in your car during a daily commute is a common and incredibly effective example of this practice.

In addition, there are a growing number of progressive and forward-thinking educational programs that use various forms of immersion. Some involve conducting an entire class or even an entire school day (every subject!) in the target language. Even though going back to high school is not an option for most of us, the point is that immersion as a learning strategy does not have to be in a foreign country, it simply has to be immersive.

Which leads to the final reason. Perhaps most importantly, it helps tremendously to realize that a big part of immersing yourself in any activity or task involves full **concentration**. When you are immersed, you can block out other concerns, and fix yourself on what you aim to accomplish. This is what we mean when we talk about one half of that magic formula and taking the learning process seriously. That requires immersing yourself completely in the task, whether you're far away in a foreign country or far away online.

One thing that bears mentioning: you DO need to use a foreign 'accent' to speak a foreign language. That doesn't at all mean you need to *lose* whatever accent you have and gain a new one. It means that you must be able to make the full range of sounds that are peculiar to a target language if you are to communicate fluidly in it. If you can't quite handle the soft 'F' sound in Japanese, the tricky 'X' in Mandarin Chinese, or the trilled consonants in Spanish, Italian, and French, your learning will only progress to a certain point, and eventually you may even run into trouble getting your message across.

True, a native Chinese speaker can speak perfectly acceptable English with a noticeable Chinese accent, and conversely an English speaker can speak wonderful Chinese with a noticeable American accent. But all too often learners will shy away from this goal because they believe they can get by without trying to sound like a native. The same learners fail to fully realize that the accent of a language is an inextricable *part* of language.

As a common defense for not working on pronunciation, we have heard many learners cite the fact that 'some people can do it naturally, and I can't.' To be fair, research has determined that some people do indeed have more talent than others in making new and unfamiliar sounds. Of course it is difficult to say to what extent their willingness to experiment and play (the ability to take themselves less seriously) contributes to their success.

Nevertheless, there are concrete steps that you can take to get around this. For making those foreign sounds sound foreign, you will have great success with straight mimicry, formal speech exercises, and plain old practice. And there is no shortage of memory techniques to help you with remembering words (more on that in section four on Motivation). Again, there is nothing in your genetic make-up or your age that is preventing you from learning any language that you want to learn.

With regard to immersion, then, that means you need to surround yourself with the speech patterns of genuine native speakers, and practice those sounds yourself, aloud. That might involve asking your chatty waiter for clarification in pronouncing your order at the Mexican restaurant using your best possible Spanish accent, or pausing a DVD of a Spanish film you're watching to try to practice a few lines that you understand but have trouble saying.

But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves. Before a full bodily immersion in your target language, let's find out how to test the waters by outlining a proven method for your mission.

II. First Steps for the Self-guided Learner

Many language learners fall into a trap of thinking that you simply go out and buy a language learning course and start with lesson one. This might work in the end, but it is definitely not the best and easiest way to go. There are several first steps you can take to ensure that your language learning process will be productive and pain-free, no matter what tools you decide to use. What you find outlined here is not an exhaustive list, but it is what we consider to be the essentials when getting started.

Where do I start?

STEP 1. Review your own native language.

Your native language has become transparent to you. You've been swimming in it for so long you no longer see it. Chances are you've not studied the basics of English language structure and grammar since, well, grammar school.

Now we're not going to tell you to hit the books and do a comprehensive top to bottom review of grammatical concepts and principles. In fact, we're about to tell you to stay away from high-powered grammar points for the time being when learning your target language. You do, however, need to refresh yourself when it comes to the BASICS. You need to know about the subject and predicate and the basic anatomy of a sentence, how it fits together and in what order. We're talking nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Then maybe some direct and indirect objects, a few pronouns, prepositions, and then you might call it a day.

The reason for this review is that it will make learning a new language much much easier. You will continually look for similarities to English when you are trying to understand and remember new words and parts of speech in your target language. We call these similarities 'analogues' because it's possible to say that

a word or phrase has an analogous function between the two languages. For instance, prepositional phrases ('locator' words such as *in, around, over, under*) in Italian are in most ways analogous to the way prepositions work in English. The exceptions are that Italian prepositions often have multiple meanings, and sometimes different prepositions are used in different situations. In Japanese, things are a little more different: there are parts of speech called 'particles' that glue other parts of a sentence together, and often these particles can function in a way that allows us to understand them as analogues for English prepositions. Of course, if you are unclear on what a preposition is in English, these similarities will be lost on you, and you'll have a much tougher time with prepositions (or particles, as it may be) in your target language.

In addition, you will come across many words in your vocabulary that will bring you great joy - they will seem almost identical to ones that you already know and love in English… But before you jump too high, curb your joy with the cold hard fact that many of these seemingly identical words MEAN something totally different in your target language. They are called 'false cognates' and are known to mislead many a casual learner.

Have a look at these three Spanish words, and their English translation:

derelicto	=	derelict
dialecto	=	dialect
directo	=	direct

The Spanish words mean exactly the same thing as their 'cognate' term in English. Now look at these three Spanish words, and their rather unexpected translations:

sensible	=	sensitive
éxito	=	success
embarazada	=	pregnant

In French, these misleading words are called *faux amis*, or 'false friends,' and they are just as common in that language. Because of their common linguistic roots, you will also find plenty more examples in German, Italian, Portuguese, and Dutch, along with Spanish and French. **So, take comfort in cognates, but beware of false friends.**

Which brings us to the next point: sometimes you'll find that not everything you learn in the target language has an analogue in English. This will throw off many learners, who get stuck trying to make sense of something by using the rules and concepts that they already know from English. What is required is simply opening one's mind to new concepts and accepting a new set of rules, at times for no other apparent reason than 'that's just the way it is.' To put it in another way, you have to resist the idea that you can continue comparing apples with apples when you delve into the mechanics of the new language. If you don't, you won't be able to truly savor the oranges - and you'll find plenty of them along the way!

Let's list some of the best examples of potentially jarring moments when you are left without an analogue:

- **Word Order:** one thing you'll notice right away when you learn just about any new language is that the order of the words is different. We say 'white house' in English but in Spanish, it's literally 'house white' = *casa blanca*. The change is even more pronounced in Asian languages. In Japanese and Korean, for example, the verb often comes at the end. This difference causes grief for new learners who want to translate everything in order. Even when you can put the words back in order, so to speak, you'll find that some words don't translate cleanly and others not at all. For this reason, you should always think of translation in a dual sense: yielding both a *literal* translation (which can sound jumbled and awkward in English)

AND a *natural* one (which will sound better to the English ear but probably loses something of the original in translation).

- **Gendered Language:** you will also need to come to terms with the idea that 'masculine' and 'feminine' words are a fact of life in most languages, and they do not carry any of the same social or political baggage that our (increasingly limited) gendered terms do in English. For example, mailman, fireman, and policeman, is now: mail carrier, firefighter, and police officer, because these older words carry a certain cultural weight in our society that makes them seem exclusive to men and offensive to women. It doesn't work the same way in other languages, where words are either 'masculine' or 'feminine' by convention, and their status as such is reflected in their spelling. In Italian, 'a beer' (= *una birra*) is feminine, and you can see this both from the feminine 'a' ending on the word itself and the feminine article in front. There is, however, nothing about an Italian beer that suggests it is somehow more womanlike than, say, an English or a German beer.

- **Using Articles:** Notice in the last example we mentioned the Italian article *una*. Articles in English include 'the,' 'a,' and 'an.' Fairly uncomplicated. But in many foreign languages, the article changes to agree with the noun that follows it. That's why in Italian we say *UN libro* for 'a book' and *UNA birra* for 'a beer.' And we say *IL libro* for 'THE book' and *LA birra* for 'THE beer.' The book is masculine and the beer is feminine and that's just the way it is in many of the Romance languages. But there are even more words for articles, depending on singular and plural…

- **Singular & Plural:** Singular refers to one of something, whereas plural refers to many. In English, we typically make things plural by adding 'S' -

'plane,' 'train,' and 'automobile' becomes: 'planes,' 'trains,' and 'automobiles.' There are exceptions, like 'child' to 'children.' Some foreign languages are quite similar to English when it comes to making things plural. For both French and Spanish, it's often a matter of adding the 'S.' But not so for German, where both the article and the ending of the noun change, or for Japanese and Chinese, which rarely ever use the plural form at all. Instead, these languages employ an elaborate system of 'counters' that specify number in context depending on what kind of item is being counted!

- **Verbs:** verbs are the action words that animate any language and set it in motion. Learning verbs in a new language is a mixed bag. On the one hand - just like in English - there are a lot of patterns that you'll recognize when it comes to using verbs in different ways to express different tenses (like past, present, future) or for different subjects (like I, you, him/her/it). On the other hand - just like in English - there are a handful of verbs that don't follow the pattern. It's true that you need to learn the patterns and memorize the rest. But at the same time, it helps not to get too carried away with trying to master difficult tenses early on. Often you'll make a lot more progress if you learn useful everyday phrases in isolation; these phrases may include advanced tenses (such as the conditional or subjunctive) but you can concentrate on internalizing the phrase first and figure out the rule down the road.

There are a couple more points that apply to Asian and Middle Eastern languages in particular:

- **Asian Scripts:** Most 'foreign' languages use what is called the Roman (or Latin) alphabet - the same one used for English. Of course, we'll notice new (or absent) letters, some totally unfamiliar and some with accent

marks. But for the most part we can see some a, b, c's in each of these foreign writing systems, and they seem at least a little less foreign for this. However, this is not the case for Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, or Hindi, which have writing systems all of their own. Seeing these scripts for the first time will be like looking at a form of picture code at best, and at worst at a bunch of random squiggles. Thankfully, these languages are typically 'romanized' as well, which means the Roman alphabet is used to represent the sounds of the language to the best possible degree. Remember, some of the sounds in these languages do not have clear analogues in English, so using our alphabet is always an imprecise science. When you're getting started, using the romanized writing is a perfectly acceptable way to get your head (and mouth) around the language. Eventually, though, you will have to negotiate a reliance on the Romanized alphabet with a desire to achieve greater proficiency and appreciation of the language by learning its special writing system.

- **Formal & Honorific Speech:** Another major difference between English and many other languages is the degree to which formal and polite forms of speech play into the culture. It is crucially important to use the appropriate forms when addressing people depending on their position in the social hierarchy. Simply put, there's more than one way to say 'I' or 'you' in these languages. Asian languages are the most complex in this regard. Japanese has at least five ways to address someone depending on who it is and what situation you are in. In addition, Japanese verbs change according to formality. Typically, the more formal you make your address for someone else, the more humbly you address yourself. At times, such as in certain business situations, the customary speech involves referring *to ourselves* with what we might consider language that would be demeaning or insulting!

STEP 2. Listen to and speak the target language in comfort & 'safety.'
So now that you have done a review of the basics in your own native language, and fully come to terms with the fact that there will be plenty of occasions in which you'll be comparing apples & oranges, you're ready for the next step.

You need to start listening to and speaking your target language, and we suggest you do so in a safe, quiet place so that you don't even have to think about the outside world - yet.

These days you will find your target language in recorded audio format from lots of different sources. We suggest taking a two-track approach to developing your listening skills that involves a fast lane and a slow one as well. For the slow one, get your hands on a beginner audio course that you can download online or get on CD. You can find some recorded audio on common words and phrases online, but usually this will often be a limited sample. Also, ideally you will find a resource that gives you the option of having *only* audio so you don't get hung up on the writing. We will talk about language learning tools in more detail in the next section, but **choosing a fun, flexible, multimedia language course** is an important part of this step!

At the same time as you're enjoying your gentle and steady introduction to the language, you should be trying out the listening 'fast lane.' Get a few movies out in the target language. While you should be starting the imitation game straight away with the basic audio material, you should listen to the foreign language movies (even without subtitles) just to get a feel for the pace and pronunciation. Foreign language radio or television channels work just as well if they're an option for you. You will likely understand less than 5 percent of what you hear. But you are tuning your ears 100 percent of the time as you listen.

Back to the basic material… Start trying to say the words and phrases immediately. Pause to practice anything and everything that you want to. Try to find a recording of the alphabet in the target language (if that's an option). Say it. Sing it. Notice how it's similar to English. Notice how it's different. Commit those differences to memory. Compose a slightly different alphabet song if you must!

The point is not to worry about how the language looks just yet, instead focus on how it sounds. This includes not just the pronunciation, but also where the accent and emphasis fall, and how the intonation and rhythm shape the speech. This is why a fast track is necessary. You may never talk as fast as, say, the sportscaster on the Mexican soccer channel, but you'll get a natural feel for the language and all of its ebb and flow. You'll discover lots of fun stuff in the process - like the fact that there's different ways to say 'umm' in different languages!

Video is even more powerful in that you can also notice gestures, body language, and many of the non-verbal cues that are so important to the texture of any language (Italians are perhaps singled out as the supreme example here). It may be a little while before you can recreate these non-verbal gestures yourself without looking like a parody of them, but you can't underestimate the importance of facial gestures and body language in communication.

During this step, you should also be building a 'house' of words. A *house* is better than a *list* for several reasons. A list is long, unwieldy, and lacks obvious organization. A house implies structure - it has walls, rooms, and comes with a certain logic attached to it. Scholars of memory remind us that we remember things much better when we organize them spatially in our minds. The idea of walking through a house and retrieving an idea (or, in this case, a word group) in each room as you go is a memory device that goes back to the Ancient Greeks. They had to remember long speeches, and the house of memory was an effective method toward this end.

When it comes to your language learning, you can build your house however you like. But here are some design tips:

- Words fall naturally into **categories**. Put them into rooms according to logical categories (colors, numbers, days of the week, etc.)
- Remember that every language has a **'core' vocabulary**, a limited set of common words that are used frequently in everyday situations. You should start with these words.
- You can have more than one house. One might be grammatical in organization. Verbs in the kitchen, nouns in the lounge, and so on. It's no problem if the same words are housed in more than one room when they happen to fall into more than one category. In fact, this **'redundancy'** is a good thing in terms of helping you learn and remember.
- It is likely that you will have **unique interests** that motivate you to learn a vocabulary set that is not necessarily part of the culture's core vocabulary. Set aside a special area in your 'house of words' to safely keep this set. (There was a German language learner who was also an avid tennis player: he had a large set of shelves in his imaginary garage where he kept all of his words for that sport in German!).
- Be sure to make room right away for **question words**: HOW? WHAT? WHO? WHERE? WHEN? These are incredibly useful and common words that will feature regularly in your conversational fluency.
- Next to the question words, make another room for **imperatives** - words that allow you to give commands or instructions or warnings: LOOK! COME! GO! HELP! EAT! WAIT! SIT! STAY! (yes, you might save those last few for your dog). These are super handy words in an emergency. Not only that, they imply a full sentence with just one word!

This is a start, but before long you'll be ready to move beyond the notion of building a core vocabulary, and begin to assemble a core of phrases that you can use over and over again. You'll notice that words you already know are repeating across phrases, sometimes in slightly different ways. Repetition is your friend. It will not only help you get your pronunciation right in the shower, it will also allow you to notice patterns emerge across the language. The more information you can take in, the more patterns you will recognize.

All in all, enjoy this step. There's no one looking or listening over your shoulder. It's all about you giving yourself a private and self-paced introduction to new words and sounds. But work at it. The more times you can say *bon jour* to your house plants each morning and have it sound like it does in your foreign language films, the easier it will be to say it to the French guy at the bakery down the road when it comes time for Step 3…

STEP 3. Make conversation (real or simulated).

You're ready to participate in short, simple conversations. Really! Even if you are saying nothing other than, 'hello how are you I'm fine thanks goodbye…' you need to take this step at the beginning of your language learning.

If you wait until some perpetually deferred end, or even worse, until you 'get there,' you will fall flat. You risk being one of those learners who knows the complete conjugation table for dozens of Spanish verbs but can't open your mouth to order a burrito. It can be awkward, but it's time to embrace the awkwardness and use it to your advantage. All you have to do is simply communicate - with a smile - that you are learning. You are likely to be rewarded with a new Spanish phrase or two along with your burrito.

Survival Phrases

Don't go anywhere without your survival phrases. They will allow you to get what you need above all else from your audience: patience. Survival phrases include:

'Excuse me.'

'I'm sorry.'

'I'm just learning.'

'Could you repeat that please?'

'I understand.' / I don't understand'

'Do you speak English?'

'Where is the bathroom?'

Most people will be happy to clarify for you what they said, so you should never hesitate to ask. Also, you should have a funny one up your sleeve. Humor always disarms: Something like: 'I'm sorry, my German is bad. And my memory is worse.'

…Be sure to smile.

Language Companions & Communities

Another essential step toward conversational fluency involves finding the right people to help you along the way. In the most general sense, this step amounts to forming social relationships that will not only help your language learning progress, but also contribute greatly to the gratification it will bring. This task is mentioned outside of our strict step-by-step chronology because it can occur at any time, and for successful learners, it is something that will continue in an ongoing and open-ended fashion.

Lucky learners will have a **conversation companion** who is much more advanced in the target language than they are, possibly fluent, and in the best case, a native speaker. This companion will have enough patience to talk to you in the target language and at the same time resist the urge to correct you outright.

We say outright because this friend may - and, ideally, *should* - be guiding you along the way. But they will do so not by interrupting every one of your sentences and critiquing your pronunciation or word choice. Instead, they may simply respond to one of your questions using as many of the same words you used in your question - albeit pronounced to perfection.

This form of guidance has much in common with the way a parent guides a child learning his or her first language. A parent is always focusing on communication and meaning above all else, and is unconditionally supportive. For the same reasons, Chris Lonsdale refers to this type of learning companion as a 'language parent':

> A language parent is someone who will engage you in conversation in the language you are learning, but who will not try to be your teacher. This is an important distinction. A teacher will tell you you've made a mistake, often very frequently. A language parent will choose to understand you, even when you are miles away from what a native speaker would usually be able to understand. This acceptance, of course, coupled with immediate feedback on how to say what you want to say provides you with the ideal environment in which to learn. (178)

As Lonsdale suggests, finding a language parent can be very hit or miss, and you will need someone who is patient, open-minded, and of course talkative!

In terms of finding people to enhance your learning experience, finding a **language community** is just as important as finding a language parent. If you are visiting or have recently moved to an area where your target language is spoken, then in some ways the world is your oyster. You have a ready-made language community that will force you to get up to speed. But you might also be

better off finding a community of learners who are at the same or similar stage in their ability. You're much more likely to get the peer support that you need in this sort of community, because they too will know exactly what it's like trying to go from newbie to natural in the shortest possible time. They will often get stuck on the same points that you do, and you will be able to help each other get it right - and swap success stories at the end of the day!

The community of learners that you find might be a group of exchange students or travelers you meet in the native country of your target language. Many of them may not have English as their own first language, which is a plus. The target language effectively becomes your only common tongue. Or your language community may be a local club in your town or city that meets for social occasions. Barry Farber is renowned for starting language club dinners in New York City in the 1990s, which he describes in his book *How To Learn Any Language: Quickly, Easily, Inexpensively, Enjoyably and on Your Own*. Language enthusiasts would arrive at a restaurant and sit down at one of the many tables, each organized by language. It didn't matter what your ability level was, the only rule was simply that all communication took place in the language designated for that table!

Of course, these days it is just as common to join a community in which you never actually meet the members face to face. Online forums and other social networking environments have done wonders for language learning, connecting people easily, quickly, and affordably without having to worry about geography. These digital environments are increasingly making it easier to communicate not only textually, but using audio and video as well.

Whatever your situation may be, don't skip this step. We can't emphasize enough how important contact with your peers is when you set your sights on conversational fluency in the fastest possible way.

What about WRITING?

It's awfully tempting to try reading and writing in your target language right from the start. After all, many prefer having a visual component to their learning - and they report having a much easier time if they can see stuff written down. Writing IS a valuable learning aid indeed, but all in good time.

One risk of focusing on reading and writing too early on is tricking your mind into *pronouncing* from the written form. You wind up wrongly adding your native accent to the symbols you see, rather than learning the range of unique sounds in the language and modeling those directly. You also risk simply getting hung up on rules and grammar. While these are necessary, they are not essential for tuning your ears and untying your tongue in the very beginning. Hearing and speaking must come before writing for this reason.

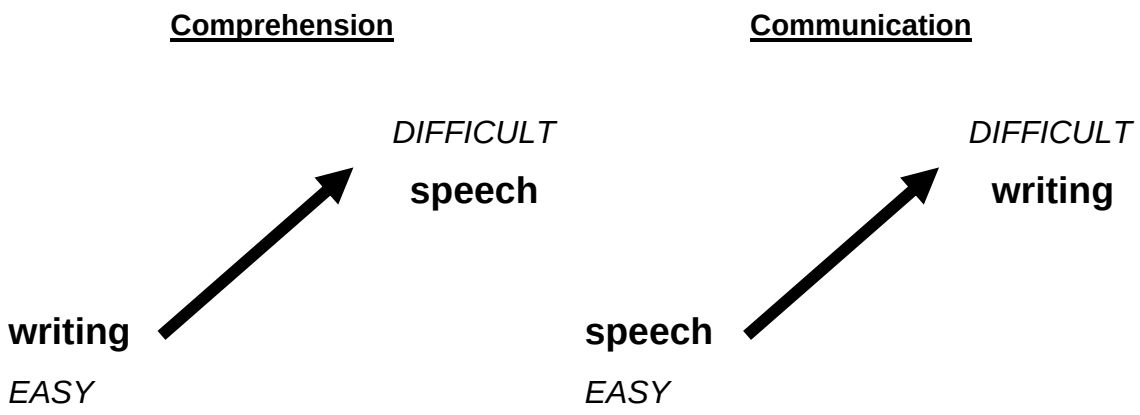
In an article about learning language, educator Phil Bartle writes,

> The best strategy is to wait until after your first three months before doing any reading or writing in the new language. At that time, you may find a few delightful and amusing facts, as in English when you learned how to write and discovered that what you thought was, *A napple*, turned out to be, *An apple*. (n.p.)

Bartle's method is based on a 3-month path to conversational fluency. But it's not necessary to put an exact time limit on starting your reading and writing practice, especially given that self-guided learning is all about setting your own pace. Either way, good language learning courses will ease you into this side of things, and only after you have made real progress toward conversational fluency.

It is well accepted that some languages are easier to learn than others, and often the need to learn a new writing script is a big reason for a high degree of difficulty. Among the easiest languages to learn are Spanish, Italian, and Indonesian, while Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Arabic are among the most difficult.

But as a general rule across the European-based languages, reading is easier than writing, and speaking is easier than understanding (Trimnell 158). This is because when reading you have the added benefit of being able to pause, go back, look up something, and basically take as long as you want to figure it out. The words are fixed on the page or on the screen. In speech, not only do they fly by, you can't *see* what you are hearing. A diagram of showing degree of difficulty in second language comprehension and communication might look like this:



Some languages are also very similar to one another. Spanish and Italian, for example, share over 80 percent of basic vocabulary with only slight variation. Some good news is, once you learn one foreign language, it becomes much easier to learn more of them. This a result of being able to apply your new pattern recognition skills across contexts and reawakening the language center of your brain. But first things first…

By the time you get through these essential steps you will have acquainted yourself with the native pronunciation of your target language, imitated and practiced the way it sounds, and built a house of vocabulary words. You'll have your arsenal of survival phrases ready, and be happily having short exchanges in the target language out there, in the real world.

III. Language Tools for Those in the Now

Digital media have revolutionized language learning. Indeed, we've come a long way since Barry Farber remarked that 'the invention of the handy portable cassette player catapults language learners from the ox cart to the supersonic jet' (35).

Many of the language learning tools that had already made use of technology, such as pre-recorded audio, were reinvented with digital media. For example, audio-based courses, which began their life on cassette tapes in the 1970s and 1980s, have migrated to CD or digital sound files. They can be incorporated much more easily into computer-based courses as a result.

The World Wide Web has also had dramatic implications for language learning, both as a delivery mechanism for downloadable material and as a virtual learning environment in itself. There are countless websites devoted to language learning ranging from personal websites to the language learning sites that house the U.S. Government's Foreign Services Institute (FSI) Language Course materials, developed in the 1950s for diplomats and now in the public domain. There are also translation sites (such as Babel Fish), online foreign language dictionaries, and an array of foreign language newspapers, online magazines, and websites, which are all potential language learning resources.

The Web also enables us to participate in a host of computer-mediated communications. These include communication tools such as instant text messaging or video-conferencing tools, which are referred to as *synchronous* because they allow us to correspond with others at the 'same time.' And there are *asynchronous* communication tools, so named because they allow us to correspond out of sync, so to speak. Online forums, discussion boards, and email would all fall into this category.

Today, there are even virtual learning environments that make use of synchronous communication in three dimensions, in the form of multi-user role-playing games. Such games combine the networking capability of the Internet with the graphical and interactive capability of contemporary game engines. They create opportunities for both formal and informal language learning. In the popular virtual world of *Second Life*, for example, one can pay tuition and enroll in a virtual language course that spans several weeks or even months. Or, in the same game, one can simply arrange to chat with another player in their target language. If that language is Spanish, they might be speaking to a bilingual person located in the same state, or a Spanish person living in Spain - the idea is the same.

Computers and multimedia have made learning faster and easier in many ways. Multimedia language learning materials are often also multi-*linear* language learning materials: they allow the learner to pursue multiple pathways through the course. This might involve anything from the presence of a hyperlink that allows users to seek additional help or gloss certain verb changes, or the ability to do certain lessons before or instead of others, or it might simply mean that the learner can move seamlessly from one component of a course to another. They can go from an interactive quiz, for instance, to a forum thread where peers are discussing some of the finer points of the quiz questions. Interlinking resources is a great benefit to the self-guided learner.

Today there's a wide range of courses available for self-guided learners. One or more of the language learning courses on offer that incorporate audio lessons in their program will be a vital resource for you.

In general, the best courses will be able to combine:

1) The power of multimedia technology

2) A clear and up-to-date method of instruction

3) A sense of enjoyment and play…

The best courses will also provide you with a suggested learning path, but at the same time be flexible enough to allow you to do things your own way. They will be invaluable in giving you simulated conversational practice when the real thing is not within earshot.

IV. Motivation

We all know that one of the greatest challenges of learning a new language is getting motivated to do it. You've cleared that hurdle already. But just as challenging is the ability to stay motivated and actually use what you learn. And of course the ability to remember what you learn goes along with that.

So we'd like to offer what we've found to be a few vital suggestions for keeping your motivation at the highest possible level. Here are three important motivational tips:

1) Learn according to your interests…

It is well established that people learn more and learn better if they focus on topics and material that is directly related to them - from their hobbies to their passions. Try to align at least some of your language learning experience with the sort of things you really like and really care about.

If you're learning French and you like to draw or paint, for example, 'adopt' a famous French painter (or several). Find out about their well-known paintings, their style, and their time period. Learn the basic vocabulary associated with your interest, starting with 'painter,' 'painting,' and 'paint,' and all the colors you can think of! If you're learning Italian and you like to play soccer, find out how to say your position in Italian, along with 'pass,' 'shoot,' 'score!', then use these terms when you play with your family and friends. You get the idea.

You'll find that aligning your learning with your interests is a truly rewarding way to make it work...

2) Learn from everyday sources…

We live in a digital world. You can say that this is both for better and for worse, but when it comes to learning a language, there is no doubt that we've got it

much easier than learners in past generations. The Web has opened the floodgates on all sorts of language learning resources that were unavailable just years ago.

You can listen to foreign language radio online, watch clips of foreign language television on YouTube, and even read online newspapers in tons of different languages. These are three things previous generations of learners did not have easy access to. They will give you a great challenge when it comes to understanding what can be pacy conversations in the target language. Try reading foreign language newspapers online, even if you only try to read the headlines. You used to have to wait until you got to a foreign country to try and make sense of these 'everyday' resources. But now they are waiting for you on your computer screen!

3) Use creative memory devices...

We tend to forget the ordinary. Only the extraordinary is memorable. The same goes for language learning. Lots of people have heard of 'mnemonic devices' - little linguistic tricks that help us commit something to memory. These can involve anything from acronyms ('Roy G. Biv' for the colors in the rainbow) to a short narrative that gets stuck in your head. The point is that we can remember the rainbow colors with this device precisely because it does not make a lot of sense. I don't know anyone named Mr. Biv and neither do you. It's out of the ordinary, and therefore it's more memorable.

Using memory devices to build your target language vocabulary is a fantastic idea. And if you want very clear instructions on how to do this effectively and creatively, you can always follow in the footsteps of Barry Farber. In his book Farber gives at least some of the credit for his learning over a dozen languages to what he calls 'Harry Loryane's Magic Memory Aid,' a reference to a famous

memory magician who wowed audiences all over the globe with his amazing feats of memory.

The technique involves concocting an out-of-the-ordinary mental image plus a short narrative to go along with each new word you acquire. Now, this is a very personal and subjective process, but we are going to give you an example based on a younger student of Italian who was learning vocabulary for sports. The student wanted to learn the word for 'basketball.' Her instructor told her it was *pallacanestro*. The instructor repeated it a few times for her, then asked the student what it sounded like, and what it made her think of.

With some prodding from her instructor, the student came up with 'pelican-nest' for the first few syllables, then tacked on 'throw' at the end... that's 'pelican-nest-throw'.... perfect! For the technique to work, of course the pronunciation does not have to match, and in this case it really doesn't. The point is to seize that initial association, rather than dismiss it.

Next comes the little story to go with the image: they pictured a pelican chick falling out of a tree nest, and suddenly turning into a basketball; you catch it, and try to throw it back into the nest, which suddenly turns into a basketball hoop. Remember, it's supposed to be strange, and it does not have to sound exactly like the word in the target language, which will often have a very dissimilar pronunciation. It just needs to be an association. The idea is that this story-image will eventually fade and fall out of memory, but the new vocabulary word will remain. Get it? If not, at least you'll never forget the word *pallacanestro*!

Refusing Obstacles & Accepting Mistakes

When people have trouble making progress with their foreign language learning, we have found that in the overwhelming number of cases it tends to reflect shyness and self-doubt that goes beyond the realm of their language learning. In

other words, the same people struggle with confidence and a fear of social awkwardness or embarrassment even in their native language.

But the great thing is, if you insist on seeing language learning as adding to your frustration, fear, or anxiety, then you should take comfort in this: learning a second language is, ironically, the best way to overcome it… That's right - the cause is the same as the cure!

As we've said already, learning a language is always much more than learning just the language. It's a powerful and attractive form of self-improvement across the board that will automatically bring about social confidence with your success. We have countless stories on our Rocket Languages web pages that attest to this surge in self-confidence from learners reveling in a whole new form of expression. Some language learners find that they are even able to express themselves *more* freely in their target language. For example, one student (who declined to be named) remarked that since learning Spanish she's 'never felt sexier'!

You don't have to pretend to be someone you're not (the right accent will come in time). But you *do* have to present yourself as someone open to new experiences. You will also need to develop a healthy attitude toward making mistakes, one that skips over the embarrassing part straight to the beneficial part. What's the beneficial part you say? Well, **making mistakes makes you remember things** - our wiring is rigged in such a way that makes us determined to get it right the next time.

That's why another good tip is preparing yourself to accept correction and criticism. Sometimes criticism won't happen when you need it most (like when you are trying to tell someone in Spanish that you are 'embarrassed' [*avergonzado*] but not 'pregnant' [*embarazada*]). Other times it will happen non-

stop when you really don't need it at all (like when you're trying to catch a bus and there is a line of people waiting behind you).

When it's possible and appropriate, you should **make it clear that you *welcome* correction and guidance** in your day to day exchanges. You can almost always tell from someone's facial expression if you have said something that has missed the mark. In fact, here's where two more survival phrase can save the day:

- 'Please, correct me if I said this wrong.'
- 'Thank you for helping me learn.'

It will be a huge help to you if you can casually invite impromptu mini-lessons like this during ordinary conversations.

As Edward Trimnell explains:

> When someone stops you mid-sentence, points out your mistake, and then indicates what you should have said, she is handing you the language learner's equivalent of a five dollar bill. The lessons that you learn in such moments will stick to you like superglue. (154)

To clarify, this is not the sort of help and support you are getting from your 'language parent,' who is someone you already know, and someone with whom you can enjoy a more relaxed free-flowing dialogue. When you are corrected by a native speaker it can be much more intense because it is often in public and you might be afraid that you are annoying someone or wasting their time. But just keep the smile on, have a couple survival phrases to suit, and you'll be absolutely fine.

It pays to say it again, you should worry about the mechanics of a language only if they are jamming your transmission - and then only after the fact. With a little

work by way of clarification and simplification, maybe even a pantomime or two, you're bound to get your point across.

Again, consider the advantages children have when learning language; this is where we can take a cue from them. They are not afraid to make mistakes, and they are always prone to play. When they play with sounds and play with meaning, they are playing with language.

In general, so much of your success will come down to a self-confident mindset that starts with a positive self-belief in which you understand every moment as moving toward your inevitable goals.

Remember: you take the language learning process very seriously, but you don't take yourself too seriously in the process. And remember the double-whammy effect: you'll need to find ways to top up your confidence levels in order to learn your new language. But once you do your confidence in your newfound bilingual abilities will multiply 100-fold!

V. Learning with ROCKET LANGUAGES…

Rocket Languages is a developer of language learning courses that offer a wealth of learning resources in a single Web-based interface.

Our courses include:

- Interactive Audio Lessons
- Language and Culture Lessons
- Language-Master games (for vocabularly and phrases)
- The Hear It Say It! Write It! and Know It! testing and self-rating system
- The Rocket Record voice comparison system for pronunciation
- My Forum, the Rocket Languages 24/7 language forum.

And more

Plus, many of these materials are also available 'offline' in the form of CD-based packages, which allow learners to use the audio lessons without a computer, with the same audio material available in MP3 format for added portability.

Based on the award-winning *Rocket Express Learning System*® Rocket Languages courses ensures that material is presented in a way that will **1) accommodate a wide range of learners** with their own individual learning preferences and **2) allow for genuine interactivity** that promotes active learning. The goal is to enable 'conversational fluency' in the target language in the shortest possible time.

The *Rocket Express Learning System*®

If you want to learn to express yourself a new language, and do it at express pace, then the *Rocket Express Learning System*® is just what you need.

By combining **three scientifically proven theories** of learning, and taking advantage of advances in e-learning and technology, the team at Rocket Languages have a developed an effective way for you to **speak and understand the language you've always loved, and retain it forever**.

The *Rocket Express Learning System*® focuses directly on the three crucial ingredients for learning anything:

- **The content**
- **The environment**
- **The learner.**

It begins with George A. Miller's idea of **'chunking'**, breaking down big difficult content into small easy parts. The *Rocket Express Learning System*® gives you short 30 minute audio lessons focused on key vocabulary and relevant modern conversations, and separates the language into manageable pieces, **so you don't get overwhelmed.**

Then the system ensures that you're in the best place to learn. Dr Stephen Krashen found that the best way to learn a language is in **a low pressure environment with supportive native speakers who are prepared to give honest accurate feedback**. The *Rocket Express Learning System*® uses native hosts and fun conversations as well as clear explanations to make sure you understand exactly what's going on. And **the power of Rocket Record**, Rocket Languages' voice comparison technology, means you get accurate feedback every time.

Finally, Rocket Language recognizes that **everyone learns a little differently**. Neil Fleming discovered **the VARK model**, and found that there are four main ways that people learn:

- Visually - they see it
- Aurally - they hear it
- Reading/writing
- Kinesthetically - they do it

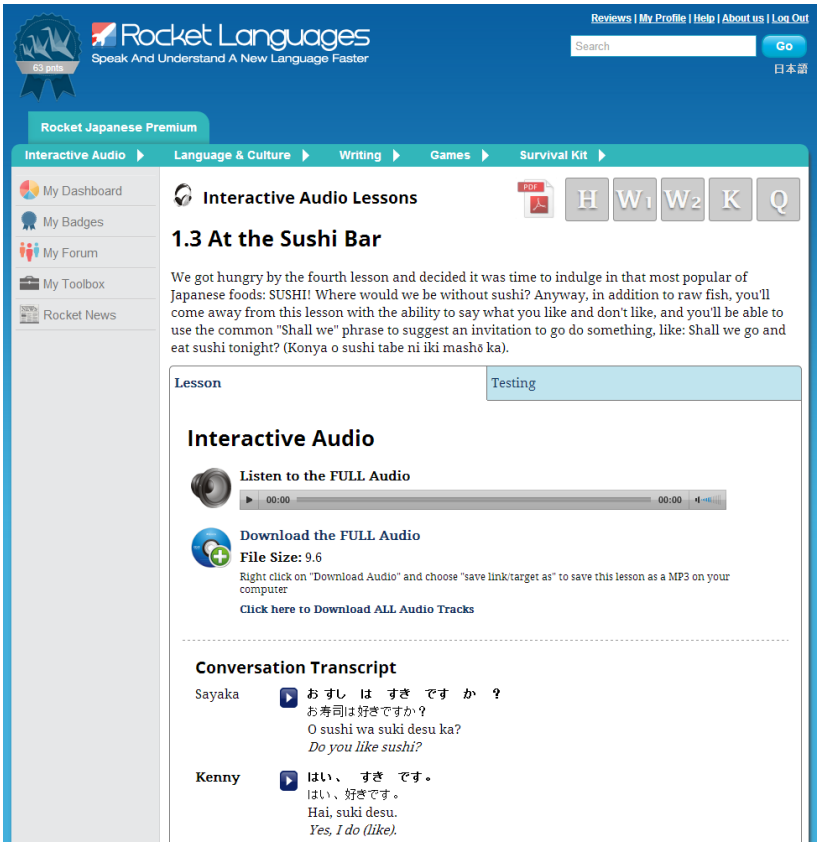
To be effective any learning system **must include all four**. The *Rocket Express Learning System*® does just that, giving you learning activities that can be accessed by different learners in different ways.

When you combine these three complementary theories with a team that is at the cutting edge of e-learning technology, you get a system that is **guaranteed to have you speaking and understanding your new favorite language in no time at all.**

Interactive Audio Lessons

A popular appeal of language learning software is the ability to deliver audio material that is playable in portable media, which allows users to learn 'on the go' (while we commute, jog, or wait in line). Short of an intensive language immersion holiday, audio material is an ideal resource in that it allows learners to hear the target language spoken by native speakers and, in turn, practice it in a comfortable (private) and convenient (portable) manner.

Some courses present audio material in a very restricted way that forces the listener to become involved in a repetitive cycle of 'listen and repeat.' The material is divorced from its context, and users are often bored by the 'drill-and-kill' method in audio form.



Screen shot of a Rocket Japanese Interactive Audio Lesson.

Rocket Languages recognizes that the best way to learn how to speak a new language is to actually speak it. For this reason, interactive audio lessons form the cornerstone of our learning programs and are the first step on a recommended learning path through the course materials for all users.

Audio material can be presented in many ways. But in order to be effective, engaging, and enjoyable, it should incorporate several important criteria in its design.

Wherever possible, audio material should involve **realistic, context-based learning**. The interactive audio lessons included in Rocket Languages courses are based around realistic conversations between the host and one or more

native speakers. The host is fluent in the target language, but it is not his or her native language. The conversations are organized into a governing narrative that moves from very basic interactions (greetings and survival phrases) to more advanced exchanges (booking a room, talking about sports, and dinner conversation). In doing so, the structure of the audio course draws on the appeal of both *dialogue* and *narrative* material for language learning.

Audio material should also promote **active learning** through techniques that prompt the listener for responses rather than simply instructing them to repeat words and phrases.

One of those techniques involves 'challenge and response,' which prompts the learner to actively recall a word or phrase that they have previously learned. A simple yet vital technique for retention of new vocabulary, this process can be carried out over the course of a single lesson, or can be a matter of bringing material learned in a previous lesson back into play in the context of a current lesson.

Rocket Languages audio lessons do both. The challenge and response format is used to review and reinforce material within each lesson. As well as introducing new vocabulary, each lesson includes elements from previous lessons that are combined with the new words and phrases. Rocket Record prompts the learner to say the newly created phrases accurately. Then the various self-tests let you rate how well you understand the way the language works.

For an example of reviewing material across lessons, suppose in lesson 5 one learns how to say, in the target language, 'I walked to the store' and lesson 10, a lesson about reading, introduces the word for 'library.' At some point in lesson 10 the host would combine both elements and ask the learner how to say, 'I walked to the library.'

A final aspect of effective audio course design is using the audio-format to promote **engaged learning** - namely staged participation in realistic conversations. Granted, nothing beats having a face-to-face conversation with a native speaker to steer the learner toward conversational fluency. But it is possible to exploit the audio format to stage 'simulated' conversations between the learner and the characters who deliver the lessons. Rocket Languages interactive audio courses conclude with an All Conversations track, and two Role-playing tracks. In these tracks, all of the conversations that appear in the previous lessons are assembled together and presented in three ways.

The first track includes both voices in the same way as they are presented in each lesson. During these recordings, the learner only listens.

In the second track, the voice of the non-native speaker is removed from all of the conversations, and a pause is left for the learner to play the part of this speaker.

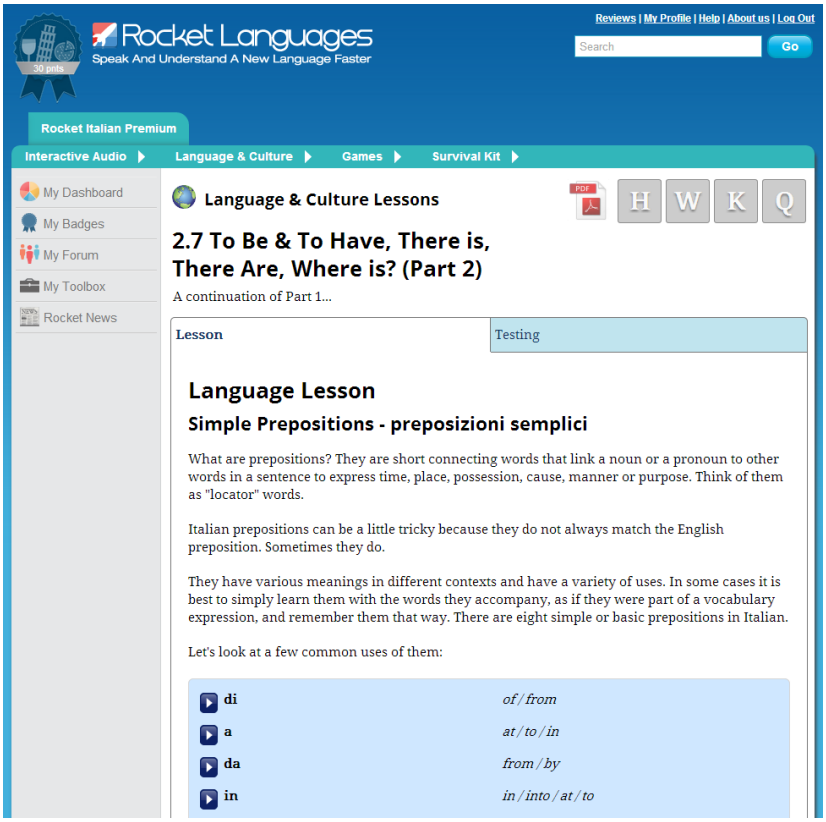
The third track, then, gives the learner an opportunity to play the role of the native speaker, who typically has longer and more challenging lines.

Users are able to refer to written transcripts of the conversation if they prefer, which are included as PDFs for all of the conversational dialogues and new vocabulary in each lesson. In fact, the extensive supplementary written material included with the audio lessons sets Rocket Languages courses apart from other audio courses. In these courses, learning without textbooks, written exercises, or drills is a selling point. But given that many learners prefer to learn with this material, there appears to be no reason why they should not be given this option.

Language & Culture Lessons

The Interactive Audio Lessons are complemented by corresponding ‘Language and Culture' lessons, which allow learners to explore the mechanics behind the spoken language and the culture that it springs from. Like the Interactive Audio Lessons, these lessons are Web-based and access via the members’ area: they include photos, illustrations, and Rocket Record’s voice comparison audio.

In addition, they are interactive. The Language Lessons engage the learner with exercises on grammar and vocabulary, and provide the facility for learners to test their progress before they move on. Because the exercises are a key part of every member’s Rocket Languages Dashboard, the exercises are repeatable, and the results are recorded, allowing learners to track their progress.



Screen shot of Rocket Italian Language & Culture Lesson.

The cultural component of these lessons is a valuable one, as learning any new language inevitably entails learning something of a new culture. For example, learning the elaborate system of Japanese honorifics is only really useful if you learn exactly when, where, and with whom to use them, and the cultural etiquette that accompanies formal conversations and exchanges cannot be separated from the words.

There is general debate about if or when grammar should be learned when learning a new language, and as we've made clear already, when a learner is trying to attain conversational fluency the grammar will be secondary.

Still, it is a cold hard fact of language that there are concrete rules that we call grammar, and knowing and understanding these rules - in time - can make the learning process easier. The trick is to find a resource that will convey challenging grammatical concepts in plain English, so to speak, even when there are no equivalent grammatical concepts in English for certain rules of the target language.

In the audio lessons, Rocket Languages courses always introduce grammatical concepts on a need-to-know, context-based, and non-technical manner. For some learners, the Language & Culture lessons that follow are a language learning panacea; for others, they are, in a word, optional.

Writing Lessons

As well as the Language Lessons and the Culture section, the Japanese and Mandarin Chinese courses include video lessons on writing their character-based scripts. In these writing sections, instructions on stroke order and helpful mnemonics are provided:

Screenshot of a Rocket Chinese Writing Lesson.

Language-Master Games

Web-based language learning games are another major component of the Rocket Languages product package, one that supports self-paced learning and varied learning preferences in significant ways.

There are two games included in each course: one for words, and one for phrases. All are self-paced and can be repeated again and again so that learners can improve their score.

Just like so many other of the best things in life, these games appear simple. But when you have a go, and really start learning, you'll find that they're not quite as easy as you thought.

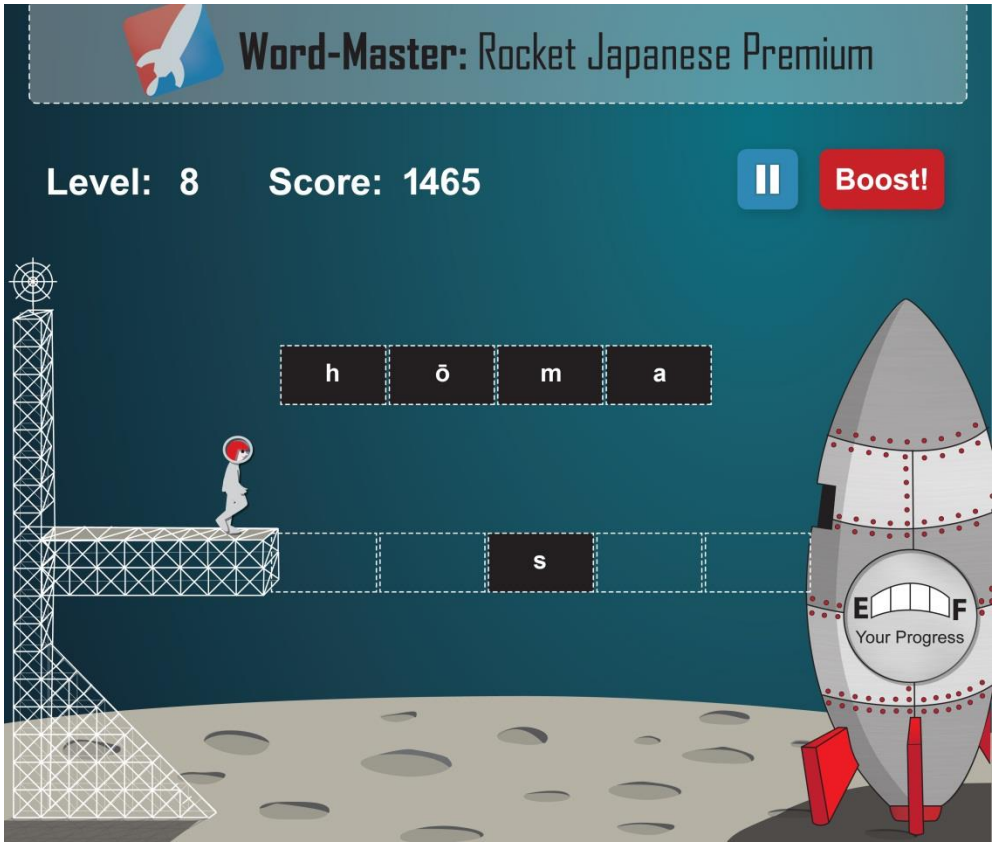
It all comes down to where you're at with your Spanish learning. You might find that you breeze through the first level, and complete the second level with no problems at all. But there are 25 levels in each game, and pretty soon you'll find that things are moving quickly, words and phrases are getting longer, and you're working hard to keep up!

That's it. That's the point that the real learning begins. And that's how these Language-Master Games fit in with the Rocket Languages philosophy of chunking.

Chunking refers to breaking big goals down into small achievable tasks. The Language-Master Games challenge you to complete small tasks faster and faster until you do them almost automatically.

That's when you get generalization, the ability to transfer ideas and concepts across contexts and situations!

The Rocket Spanish Language-Master Games are a great way to get you generalizing your Spanish learning.



Screen shot of the Rocket Japanese Word-Master game.

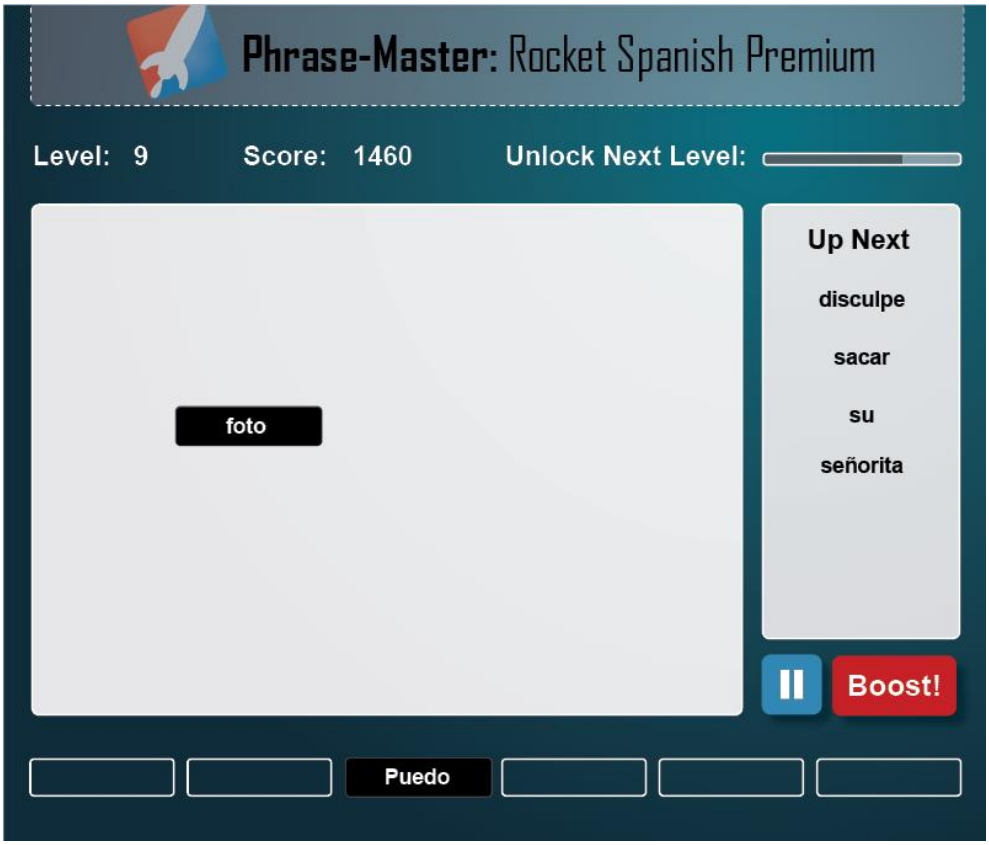
Word-Master lets you practice your listening comprehension by listening to each word in Spanish then challenging you to unscramble letters to create the correct word.

Sounds simple...

The trick is to do it before your time runs out! The more words you get right the higher your score, and the higher level you reach!

And each time you get one right you'll be reminded of the meaning of the words. That means you're going to quickly build up a great vocabulary and have fun while you're at it.

Then there's Phrase-Master.



Screen shot of the Rocket Spanish Phrase-Master game.

This game works in a similar way but you're building up whole phrases, not just words.

Again, you listen to the Spanish speaker saying the phrase, and then try to arrange the individual words into the right order to match the phrase.

But you'd better watch out, these games might seem simple to start with, but the longer you play them the more challenging they become!

Online Learners' Forums

All Rocket Languages' courses include membership of My Forum, the place to go 24/7 if you have any language questions. Organized around key user-generated topics, My Forum involves tutors, native speakers, and fellow learners of all

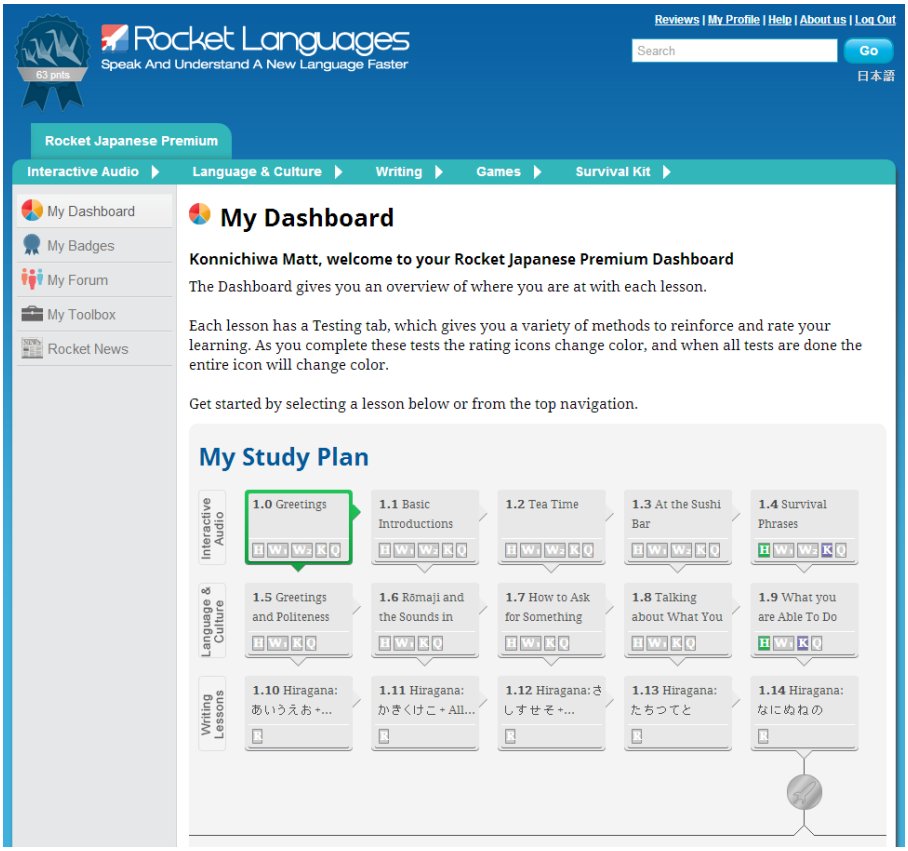
levels, so you know you'll always get all the help you need. My Forum also plays a practical role in updating community members on Rocket Languages news or product updates, and includes a section devoted to customer feedback and suggestions.

My Forum makes the most of state-of-the-art technologies – personalizing your language learning journey rather than simply delivering content. Through these networking tools, learners are not only able to participate in a community that shares the same language-learning goals, but they are also able to see a transfer of their language skills in genuine real-world communications.

Plus you can keep track of what's new, and share your language-learning experiences, by checking out the Rocket Languages blog, subscribing to our Facebook page, or joining the conversation on Twitter.

The Dashboard

All of the tools and materials available in the course package are integrated online into a single Dashboard developed especially to let you manage your own Rocket Languages learning.



Screen shot of the Rocket Japanese Dashboard

The dashboard gives learners a single entry point to a range of varied resources and offers all the tools to they need to pursue their learning in their own time, on their own terms. It also allows users to several easy ways to keep track of their learning and mark their progress.

Rocket Languages has taken a proactive approach toward understanding the needs of learners in today's digital culture and aims to offer an intelligent choice in the field of online and media-rich language learning tools.

Lift Off…

All in all, Rocket Languages is committed to creating an environment where language learning is:

- **REALISTIC** - with all of the learning material tied to common, everyday conversations, that places language learning in the real world

- **ENGAGING** - by incorporating active learning strategies and staging immersive conversations with native speakers

- **FLEXIBLE** - through multiple learning resources and learning paths

- **MOTIVATIONAL** - with relevant and up to date material, with peer-driven learning environments, and with tools that make the learning experience more dynamic and more enjoyable…

It's always a challenge to try to build 'fun' into any process, but that's exactly what Rocket Languages strives for every day.

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About Rocket Languages

Rocket Languages is a leader in downloadable language-learning products. Beginning with Spanish in 2004, Rocket Languages has grown steadily and now also offers courses in French, Italian, German, Chinese (Mandarin), Japanese, Arabic, Hindi, Korean, Portuguese, and American Sign Language as well as English courses for speakers of Spanish (Rocket Ingles) and Japanese (Rocket Eigo). By placing a strong emphasis on conversational learning, our dynamic learning courses have you speaking the language in realistic and contemporary contexts right from the very first lesson. The Rocket Languages learning community now includes active members in all 196 countries worldwide, and we average over 30,000 unique visits to our websites each day.

Our comprehensive language courses offer:

- Interactive Audio Lessons
- Language Lessons
- Culture Lessons
- Writing Lessons
- Beginner, intermediate, and advanced content
- Rocket Record for Pronunciation
- My Level for self-rating
- My Community online language forums
- Language-Master word and phrase games

And more…

Web based to make learning more convenient, inclusive, and enjoyable; all of our Audio Lessons are also available in MP3 format, and My Level, our community forum is open for business 24 hours a day.

To find out more about learning a language with Rocket Languages contact us at:

http://www.rocketlanguages.com/contact.php