

Skills 360 – 9 Habits of Highly Effective Language Learners (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. Do you find it quite easy or difficult to learn languages? Why?
2. What regular habits do you have that enhance your language learning?
3. Do you have specific goals regarding learning English? What are they?

Vocabulary

To pick up: to learn a new skill; “So, did you manage to pick up any German during your year working in Berlin?”

To get the hang of something: to learn how to do something through practice; “This app was built to be really user friendly, so you should get the hang of it in just a few minutes.”

Talent: natural ability; “Wow, Jamie really has a talent for public speaking. I was so impressed with his presentation.”

To have a knack for something: to have special or natural skill at something; “Good salespeople have a special knack for making people feel comfortable and trusting.”

Habit: something you do regularly or often; “My doctor told me it’s a good idea to develop the habit of getting up from my desk every 30 minutes and taking a short walk.”

In fits and spurts: irregularly, or stopping and starting again many times; “It’s hard to get any work done when the wireless connections only works in fits and spurts.”

To buckle down: to begin working very hard; “All right everyone, if we’re going to ship next month, we really need to buckle down and get this version built.”

A recipe for success: an effective way or method of achieving a goal; “My father always told me that the real recipe for success involves just two things: being kind and working hard.”

To put in: to spend a certain amount of time or effort doing something; “I put in 6 hours on that proposal, only to have Joanne go through and edit almost every sentence.”

Routine: a regular way of doing things in a certain order; "Since this is the first time you've done inventory, I'd like to walk you through the routine step by step."

Quick fix: an easy solution, but one that may not last a long time; "You can use the laptop speakers for a quick fix, but you really should get a better sound system."

To persist: to continue trying, even through difficulty; "I had a lot of trouble breaking into the financial planning business, but I persisted and now I have a ton of great clients."

To cram: to put many things into a space that can barely hold them all; "I think we need new offices, because we just can't cram any more desks into the space we've got."

To move on: to switch to the next topic, idea, or step in a process; "All right, if that's it for updates, let's move on to discuss the revised budget."

Flashcards: a small card with words or pictures that help us learn or review something; "For each training session, we've created a set of flashcards that participants can use to quiz each other."

Recall: the remembering of something; "Brenda, you need to take better notes, rather than just relying on your recall ability after the meeting."

Solidify: to make stronger or more solid; "The purchase of several smaller tire manufacturers has really solidified our position in the market."

To come in all shapes and sizes: used for saying that there are many different types of something; "Sure, we sell printers in all shapes and sizes... was there something in particular you were looking for?"

To override: to be more important than something else; "My mentor told me never to let my own ambition override my concern for my colleagues and the company overall."

Perfectionism: the tendency to want everything to be done perfectly; "Your perfectionism produces some great results Jeannie, but this website has to be done *quickly*, not perfectly."

To be well on your way to something: to have made a lot of progress toward a goal; "With amazing sales numbers in the first three quarters, Tad is well on his way to a new record for junior salespeople."

To take something to the next level: to make something that is already good or successful even better; "Dactyl Marketing can help take your social media campaign and your public exposure to the next level."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host Tim Simmons, and today I want to talk about the habits of highly effective language learners.

How is it that some people seem to **pick up** language easily, while others struggle for years and can't seem to **get the hang of** it? Well, you might think it's all about **talent**, that some people just **have a knack for** languages, while others don't. Talent is part of it, but only a *small* part of it. In fact, most people who do a good job of learning a language aren't necessarily smarter than everyone else, they just have good **habits**.

I'm using that word "habit" very deliberately. But what is a habit? ? [No, it's not related to a hobbit!] It's a behavior that is *regular*. And this is the very first and most important thing I want to talk about: regularity. It's hard to learn a language if you go in **fits and spurts** every once in a while. I'm sure you've seen people do this: they decide they need to **buckle down** and study hard, so they buy a big English book and spend an entire weekend going through it. Then they don't look at it again for the next two months.

Does that sound like **a recipe for success**? No, it doesn't. It's better to spend a shorter amount of time every single day than **putting in** long study sessions every once in a while. Language is a skill, and if you've learned any other skill – whether it's playing tennis or using Excel – you'll know that regular practice, repetition, and **routine** are the keys to improvement. There's no **quick fix**, no single book that will reveal the secret to fluency. Rather, it's about practice, practice, practice. Even when things get difficult, you have to **persist**.

Now if you make language learning a regular part of your daily routine, what does that learning involve? Does it mean trying to **cram** a bunch of new vocabulary into your brain and making it through 50 pages of a workbook? Well, it shouldn't. Some people get too focused on how much material they're covering and forget about the importance of *review*. I mean, why **move on** to new stuff when you're not even clear on the last stuff you learned?

So, just like I said practice, practice, practice, I advise you to review, review, review. That can mean going over lesson notes again and again, or testing yourself on vocabulary lists you've made, or making **flashcards** that will help you go through new words or concepts. You can also try blank **recall**, which is when you sit down and try to remember and write down everything you've learned in a session, or a day. This will help you **solidify** what you learn.

Reviewing and being regular are related to another habit of good language learners: they set goals. Goals help to give us direction. They motivate us when things get hard. And they show us if and how we're progressing.

Goals **come in all shapes and sizes**. A large goal might be to get a certain score on a test, like a 90 on the TOEFL. A small goal might be to learn 10 new words each week. Or you might decide to study 10 podcasts in a month. Or you might want to start a conversation with one native speaker each day. Whatever your goal is,

however, don't let it **override** the *quality* of learning. That is, if you want to learn 10 new words in a week, make sure you are learning them *well*. Don't cheat yourself by saying you've met your goal when you haven't actually learned much.

Okay, now if you ask my friend Abbass Abbass from Nazareth what the secret to improving your English is, he'll emphasize one very important habit: taking risks. That is, not being afraid to actually make mistakes, especially in speaking. Some of you might think that you need to speak perfectly all the time, that grammar mistakes are totally unacceptable, and that if you can't pronounce it, you shouldn't say it.

I'm sorry, but that kind of **perfectionism** isn't going to get you very far. You must be willing to be embarrassed, to feel awkward, and to laugh at yourself. I'm not saying that's easy, but I'm saying you'll need to deal with it. Mistakes help us learn. If you do something wrong, you have a chance to learn how to do it right. But if you *don't* take any risks, you won't have those opportunities to learn. You'll just practice what you already know perfectly, and you won't improve.

All right, I talked about four important habits. I'm sure most of you remember all four perfectly, but let's do a quick review just in case you're human. First, be regular and persistent. Second, review, review, review. Third, set some clear goals for yourself. And fourth, take risks. With just those four habits, you're **well on your way** to better language learning. But tune in next time for five more that will help **take you to the next level**.

That's all for today. So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. When it comes to learning a language, _____ is much more important than _____.
 - A Good habits . . . natural ability
 - B Talent . . . knowledge
 - C A good teacher . . . skill
 - D Support . . . technology

2. What is a habit?
 - A A behavior that is effective in achieving a goal.
 - B Something you do without even thinking about it.
 - C A behavior that is done regularly.
 - D A problem that must be corrected.

3. Because language is a *skill*, which of the following are important in language learning? [choose 2]
 - A repetition
 - B rules
 - C routine
 - D retesting

4. Which of the following are suggested as ways to help you review? [choose all that apply]
 - A blank recall
 - B workbooks
 - C flashcards
 - D previewing
 - E vocabulary lists

5. What is true about goals in language learning? [choose 2]
 - A They are more important than depth of learning.
 - B They can be small or large.
 - C They can motivate us.
 - D They should never be altered.

6. Making mistakes when speaking English is...
 - A ... an important part of the learning process.
 - B ... avoidable with diligent practice.
 - C ... dangerous in many social situations.
 - D ... considered a sign of poor language learning habits.

Review Answers

1. When it comes to learning a language, _____ is much more important than _____.

A Good habits . . . natural ability

2. What is a habit?

C A behavior that is done regularly.

3. Because language is a *skill*, which of the following are important in language learning? [choose 2]

A repetition

C routine

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C They can motivate us.

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A ... an important part of the learning process.