

10 ways to learn a new language for free

[Nicola Robinsonova](#) is a business English coach who, when not teaching (or learning Czech), spends her time researching and developing tools for language learners (such as [learn10](#)). She says:

'It's hard to comprehend how delightful it is to be able to speak a second language. I went to a typical comprehensive school in the UK and was completely turned off languages - so much so that I cheated on my option sheet to avoid taking any language qualification. The Internet and technology labelled 'web 2.0' have transformed language learning opportunities so that it can be a pleasure even for people who never thrived with classroom learning.'

Here is Nicola's guide to studying a foreign language for free:

1. Take the path of least resistance. Though there is no way round the fact that learning a language takes time, that doesn't mean it should be difficult. If you find a way of learning which is fun, you're far more likely to put in the time. Luckily there are loads of great, free resources now available on the Internet. So experiment with some of the different sites available and see what you enjoy most.
2. Explore. There are many different types of sites for language learners because [web 2.0 technology](#) is so [perfectly suited to helping you learn a new language](#). I have organised a [tour](#) of some of them here, and I've put together a directory of sites that might be useful on [learn10](#).
3. Label things. Post-it notes are your friends - use them wantonly. Use them to label things (nouns) around you. Our brains are pre-wired to learn languages. As babies we learn the words for the things around us first, then actions (verbs), and after this start putting words together to form sentences. Natural language acquisition just happens without us studying grammar.
4. Remember the 80:20 rule. To be time effective, you need to be a pragmatic learner. You will learn more in the end by concentrating on the easy 80% of content rather than spending 80% of your time on the things you find difficult. Those who speak English as a second language have to dedicate years of hard work to attain the high level of grammar which is natural to native English speakers, and even these 'experts' make mistakes.
5. Listen without worrying. I advise all my English students to listen to [BBC Radio 4](#) whenever they can. Right now I'm listening to [Cesky Rozhlas 2](#) - the talk radio channel in the Czech Republic. I don't understand every word, but it's helping me develop a sense of the rhythm and sound of the language. In time I'm comprehending more and more and recognising which words occur frequently. I met a student who hadn't studied English for years apart from listening to the BBC every day, she had perfect pronunciation and a great vocabulary.
6. Learn what's important - common phrases and the 1000 most frequently used words. Once you've got the first 1000 words and a few phrases you'll be able to make yourself understood - even though you might not understand everything that's said to you. If you [learn 10](#) words a day, you'll get to this stage in about 3 months.
7. Talk, talk, talk. Once you know a few words and phrases you can use sites like [italki.com](#) to meet native speakers of the language you are learning in order to do a language swap. However, if you can't meet in person, you can use video phone systems such as Skype or a Multi User Virtual Environments - such as [Second Life](#) - my current favourite place to hang out and speak Czech.
8. Remember how to remember. In order to retain new words you will need to review them. Our brains classify information by how important it appears to be. If we remembered everything we would not be able to function! The ideal time to review material is after 2, 10, 30 and 60 days - so that new learning goes from the 'temporary recall' draw in our brains to the 'permanent' section.
9. Make learning a habit. It takes less than a month to create a habit if you do something every day. I dedicate time to learning Czech when I first wake up in the morning (as this is my best learning time). I use learn10 on my iPhone to learn, test and revise a list of 10 words for the day. I then see the same vocabulary on my computer's screensaver. The daily email and Twitter posts helped me create the habit without having to really think about it.
10. Immerse yourself! The very best way to learn a language is to live in a country where that language is spoken and spend all of your time with it. This is not a realistic option for most people - however if you use the tools we've talked about above, you can immerse yourself in a new language no matter where you are in the world.

Good luck, and more importantly, enjoy!

ENDS

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