



LANGUAGE LEARNING FOUNDATIONS

Quickstart Guide

OLLY RICHARDS

PART 1

Welcome to day one of a special series dedicated to a very big problem:

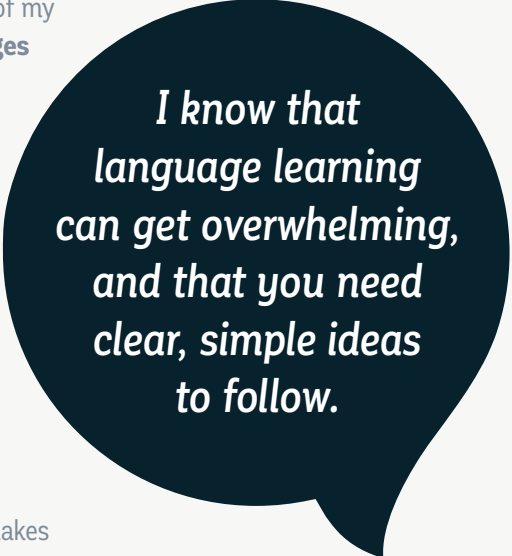
Exactly how should I study every day to become fluent in a new language quickly?

In this series you're going to hear about some of my **specific study techniques for the early stages of learning**.

I'll also talk about exactly how I plan my studying every week so that I keep improving.

In short, I want to make this really simple and practical, and **I want you to be able to take these ideas and apply them to your own language learning** so you can start making progress as quickly as possible.

If there's a single sentence in this series that makes you think "I couldn't do that myself", then I'll eat my hat.



I know that language learning can get overwhelming, and that you need clear, simple ideas to follow.

So here are some of the language learning problems I'm going to talk about:

- ✓ *I'm overwhelmed by different methods*
- ✓ *I don't know what materials are best*
- ✓ *I don't know what to do every day or how to make consistent progress*
- ✓ *How can I stay motivated?*
- ✓ *What should the first 6 months look like?*
- ✓ *How can I make the most of my time?*

I know that language learning can get overwhelming, and that you need clear, simple ideas to follow, so I wanted to give you some simple answers.

Core elements of learning a language

It will hardly be a surprise for you to hear that:

➔ **There's no best way to learn a language**

➔ **Everyone is different and learns differently**

When you drill down into all these different methods, they're not so different after all. They all cover certain common areas and focus on certain common skills.

You might agree with this and think that it's impossible to have any kind of "unifying method" to learning a language. Indeed, successful language learners all use different "methods".

However, when you drill down into all these different methods, they're not so different after all.

They all cover certain common areas and focus on certain common skills. For example, there are linguistic elements such as the mass learning of vocabulary, and meta elements such as a developing a smart, consistent routine that fits around your day-to-day life.

What I've been working on for the last few months is identifying the core elements of my own language learning style and breaking them down even further into specific activities so that others can adopt them too.

It's been quite exciting.

Building your foundation

When I learnt my first few languages, I didn't really understand the process I was going through.

It's only now, with the perspective of having 7 languages under my belt, that I can look back and understand what was actually going on.

You see, I've learnt languages in all kinds of different situations. For example, there was Spanish whilst living in London, and Japanese whilst living in Tokyo. Then after that, Cantonese in the Middle East... they're all very different and challenging situations.

But of course the fundamentals were the same.

I had to gain a strong foundation in each language, and for that, it didn't matter where I was, it was all about doing a few good things well, over a period of time.

When I learnt Cantonese last year in Qatar, I built up my basic knowledge through using a combination of textbooks and online courses. When I eventually came to speak, the foundation was there.

On the other hand, I learnt Spanish many years ago without ever really using textbooks! I was lucky enough to make a friend from Spain, who I used to play jazz with. (Him on the bass, me on the piano!) His English was pretty bad, and in time we came to speak nothing but Spanish. But before I got to that stage, I simply spent months and months hanging out with him, listening and asking questions, trying to say bits and pieces in Spanish – that was my foundation. I could have done it with a textbook, but instead I did it by just talking.

What you need to do is build up your foundation in your target language quickly, so you can move on to actually using it.

So there are lots of different ways to do it, and the right way is whatever works best for you in your situation.

What you need to do is build up your foundation in your target language quickly, so you can move on to actually using it.

The magical moment comes when, one day, you reach that critical mass of knowledge, and you realise that you can now have conversations and actually enjoy them – not necessarily totally accurately or fluently, but just enough.

After that, you just can't stop yourself speaking, because it becomes so much fun, and you start to learn more and more just from interacting with people.

But we're jumping the gun a bit here.

The focus of this series is getting you to that crucial stage.

So, when you start to learn a new language and begin building your foundation, what exactly should you expect?

What do the first six months look like?

This is the topic of the next part!

PART 2

In the first part, I talked about different ways of building a strong foundation in your target language.

It was important to start off by giving some general “perspective”, but as I said in the first part, this series is all about the detail.

My aim is for you to walk away from this with specific, actionable ideas for improving the way you’re studying your target language right now.

So without further ado...!

You need words and phrases to communicate, and so your top priority is learning a lot of them.

You start learning a new language. You start to build your foundation.

But what should you expect? What exactly will the first 6 months look like?

Simply put, the first 6 months involve a deliberate process of learning a lot of vocabulary.

You need words and phrases to communicate, and so your top priority is learning a lot of them, along with bits of grammar to help you say exactly what you want to say.

Now this is all very well, but how do you actually do it?

A system you can have confidence in

If you’re new to language learning, **what you need is a system that you can have confidence in, without doubting all the time whether you’re doing the right thing.**

In fact, the biggest danger facing you when you’re starting out is that you’ll jump from method to method, go through “language crushes”, and not actually do the real work of growing your vocabulary.

For this reason, **one of the best ways to get started and stay focused is simply to choose a self-study textbook and begin to work through it systematically.**

Dialogues are great because they tell stories, and we remember stories very easily, so it's a very smart way to learn.

It doesn't really matter which one, but **the important thing is that it has lots of dialogues in the target language, along with audio recordings, so you can listen and read at the same time.**

Dialogues are great because they tell stories, and we remember stories very easily, so it's a very smart way to learn.

A textbook will have lots of extra information in it, such as grammar explanations, practice activities and cultural background. These can all be helpful, and you should look at them if you like.

But it's the dialogues that have what you really need: **examples of language actually being used.** So your study plan needs to concentrate on those.

Putting together a study plan

So that's "what to do", but now we need to talk about "how to do it".

In terms actually turning this into a study plan, I would set an initial target of **studying two new dialogues per week.**

Now if that doesn't sound like much, remember that we're only talking about new dialogues here. The secret to actually learning the most from them is to keep going back to the old dialogues and reviewing them.

"Repetition is the mother of learning, the father of action, which makes it the architect of accomplishment."

Z I G Z I G L A R

He was right. Most people keep moving on and doing new things. Your job is to **go back and revise old things.** The more you look at those old dialogues, the more the vocabulary will stick in your mind, and the more you will get used to the language and how it works.

This focus on textbook dialogues might sound too simple to be effective. But sometimes simple is best.

You can be sure that if you work through a good textbook from start to finish in this way, focusing on the dialogues all the way, **you'll have a really good understanding of the language by the end.**

Simple is best

So don't let simplicity fool you!

One of the biggest traps you can fall into is to look for a big, fancy, bells and whistles language learning method... whereas all the time you're ignoring the simple things right in front of you... like dialogues in textbooks.

One of the biggest traps you can fall into is to look for a big, fancy, bells and whistles language learning method.

I really like to focus on doing simple things that work, that get you results quickly in the language, rather than always trying to overthink things.

Now, I actually like to start learning a new language with a couple of different textbooks, or one textbook and one online course.

There are a couple of reasons for this. First of all, it gives you a bit of variety, so if you get bored with one, you've got something else to do. This is a huge help with staying motivated over the medium-term.

Secondly, most textbooks will cover similar things, so when you learn something in one textbook, you'll see it again in the other book later on. **This is more repetition, which as we just say, really helps to reinforce what you're learning.**

So what I've just described is one really systematic approach to building a vocabulary core in a language. It's not necessarily the sexiest way to do it, but... it works!

And that's why I've put together my new [Language Learning Foundations course](#) – to give you **a set of specific activities and guidelines to follow that are easy to understand and take action on**. Targeted activities that actually get you learning a language quickly and moving towards becoming fluent in months rather than years.

So my action point for you is this: *What resources do you currently have in your collection that contain dialogues – text and audio?*

Then ask yourself – *have you actually worked through them systematically and learnt everything there is to learn from those dialogues?*

If not, then stop looking for new methods or materials! You already have everything you need right there in front of you... **you just need to get to work!**

In the next part, we're going to talk about something that's really cool – how to stay focused and schedule your study time so that you keep improving all the time.

PART 3

In part 2, I talked about creating a study system that you can have confidence in.

I also gave a practical example of how I use textbook dialogues to start building my foundation in a new language.

But the best activities in the world are no good to you unless you actually do them!

So in this part I want to talk about staying focused and scheduling your study time so that you keep improving.

Focus, focus, focus

One of the things that I used to struggle with a lot was sitting down to study, and thinking: “What should I do today?”

Keen to get started, I would pick up a textbook, browse a language website, watch a YouTube video, and before I know it I would find myself confused, slightly overwhelmed, and with no idea what I should actually be doing.

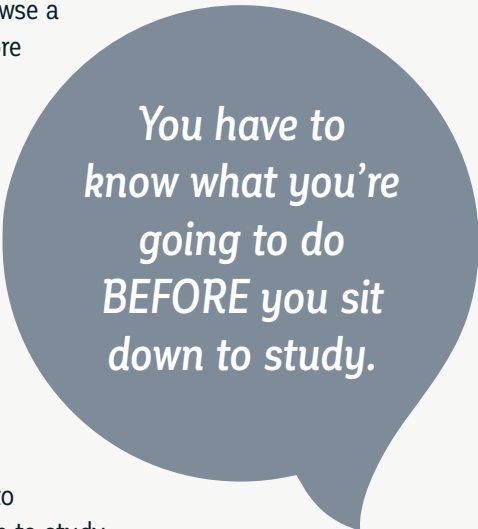
Sound familiar?

I would waste huge amounts of time because **I didn't have a clear idea what to do.**

To avoid this problem, you need to have a strategy.

It doesn't have to be a complex one, but you have to know what you're going to do **BEFORE** you sit down to study.

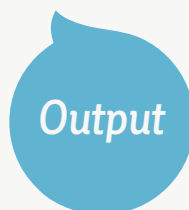
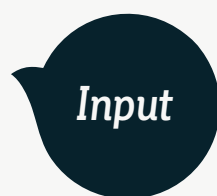
So I want to do right now is give you a clear system for how to do that.



*You have to
know what you're
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down to study.*

The three pillars of daily study

There are three “pillars” of language learning that you have to cover on a regular basis with your studying. They are:



We don't have the space to go into detail about all of these here, but to over-simplify:

→ **Input** is when stuff goes in – “learning”. You could be listening to a dialogue on a podcast, studying a chapter from a textbook, or reading a book.

→ **Output** is when you use the language for something – “practice”. This could be writing a diary or speaking with a language partner.

→ **Revision** is consolidation – “learning x2”. This is when you set aside dedicated time to go back and look again at what you've been learning. You might go back to a textbook chapter you studied last week, or review vocabulary on flashcards.

(Part 2 was all about input)

Now the important thing about the 3 pillars is that you've got to make sure you cover all of them. Not occasionally, but consistently.

But which one of the three do you think is most likely NOT to get done?

***For most people it's output – specifically:
regular speaking.***

The simple reason that this gets left by the wayside is that it involves arranging a dedicated time with another person.

You know what it's like! Speaking just gets put off. You tell yourself: “I'll just study a bit more first with the textbook – it's easier. I can do it on my own.”

...and then speaking never happens.

...and sure enough, your speaking never improves!

Plan the difficult stuff first

So when I set about planning my week, the very first thing I do is to schedule my speaking sessions **in advance**, for the whole week.

I recommend you have at least two speaking sessions during the week (ideally three or four), but even if you can only manage the one session... **it's vital that you schedule it in to ensure it happens.**

I recommend you have at least two speaking sessions during the week (ideally three or four), but even if you can only manage the one session... it's vital that you schedule it in to ensure it happens.

If you don't schedule it, it won't happen. (It's a concept called pre-commitment that [I wrote about in a blog post recently.](#))

So once you've scheduled your speaking sessions, your week already has structure, and you've taken care of one of the three pillars: **output**.

All you have to do then is fill in the gaps during the week, using activities that touch on the other two pillars – **input** and **revision**.

A great place to start would be to take the textbook dialogues that I wrote about in Day 2 and work on those after work on your non-speaking days (**input**).

You could also set aside 10 minutes every lunchtime to study flashcards, or go back and review dialogues from earlier in the textbook (**revision**).

Hopefully, you can see how approaching your study in this way can form the basis of a sensible language learning system that you can have confidence in.

Many people report having huge difficulty scheduling activities in this way. But that's because they have no system to follow, no principled way to decide what to actually do. Overwhelm and confusion isn't far behind.

But with a simple system like this, based on the three pillars, you can remove the confusion and the stress altogether, because all you've got to do is make sure you're covering each of the pillars consistently.

If you like this simplified approach to language learning, my new [Language Learning Foundations course](#) might be for you.

The aim is dead simple – to show you exactly

***how to study a new language in the early stages
to make fast progress and become fluent as
quickly as possible.***

It's the same proven system that I follow myself when I learn a new language, and that has helped many others to learn too.

But don't take my word for it:

“There have been so many mornings that I found myself confused as to how to proceed with my study, but your suggestions always put me right on track. I try to apply all of the techniques that you recommend, and I’ve noticed significant gains in my language acquisition.”

O R R E N T .

[Language Learning Foundations](#) is a video course in 10 parts, with over 2.5 hours of beautifully simple, practical training.

There are also some fantastic bonuses, like **2 hours of expert video interviews** where I grill some well-known polyglots on **exactly what they do** when they start learning a new language.

(These are great, because I really make them go into more detail than ever before about the early stages of language learning.)

For more information [click here](#) or visit the link below:

<http://www.iwillteachyoualanguage.com/llf-root/llf-main-order-page/>

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I hope you've enjoyed this quickstart guide!
Best of luck with your language learning,
and see you around!

Best wishes,

O L L Y

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