

Podcast 127 - My Language Learning Tips

by Rob McCormack - Sunday, March 21, 2021

<https://slowenglish.info/podcast-127-my-language-learning-tips/>

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 127 – My Language Learning Tips

<https://traffic.libsyn.com/secure/slowenglish/podcast127.mp3>

(This podcast is 14 minutes and 43 seconds long)

Hi,

This podcast is a little different. It's not so much about daily life in Australia, but rather the daily life of a language learner. I have had many emails from my listeners asking me for advice on how to improve their English language skills. In this podcast, I would like to give you a few ideas that might help.



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If you have listened to my Podcast 1 (<https://slowenglish.info/podcast-1-introduction/>), you will know that I have been learning German for several years now. Based on my own experience as a language learner and as a teacher, here are my tips for improving your language skills.

Firstly, I would like to make four general points about learning a language. The first point is that there are many different ways of learning a language. What works well for one person may not work well for another. As a result, I think it's important to try as many different approaches and learning activities as you can. That way you can explore which learning activities and approaches suit your style of learning. In addition, using a variety of approaches will help to maintain your interest.

The second point is about motivation. Sometimes I feel that I am not making any progress. Then I think to myself, it's hopeless, I have not improved at all. The fact is, improvement comes slowly. I just need to keep on practising. I remind myself that learning a language is a journey, not a destination. The more you practise, the more you keep on improving and progressing along your journey. Even native speakers have trouble with some aspects of their own language. They are on a journey too, just further along. Be confident that, if you practise, you will improve and so your journey will continue. By the way, having a good teacher will also help with motivation, because a good teacher will give you praise as you improve. When we get praised, we are motivated to continue.

My third point is about being afraid of making mistakes. This applies especially to speaking your new language in front of others, especially in front of native speakers. Let's face it, it is scary. You have to be brave. I once heard a wise saying about learning – *what you want is on the other side of fear*. In other words, only by overcoming your fear of making mistakes will you be able to learn. To learn to speak a new language, you have to speak it and that means making mistakes. Mistakes are not failures in language learning, they are learning opportunities.

My fourth general point is about practice. You have to practise regularly – ideally every day. Even if it is only a small amount of practice – do it regularly, so that it becomes a habit. My mother told me that it takes 21 days to make a habit. In other words, do something every day for 21 days in a row, and it will have become a habit and after that you will do it every day without even thinking about it. This is how you build practice into your day. For example, I like to practise my vocabulary using a smartphone app, every day, for at least 5 minutes.

Okay, so let's talk now about some of the learning approaches or methods you can use. The most common and most traditional method is by classroom instruction with a teacher and other students. This is great because you get to meet and speak with other students learning the same language. With a good teacher, you can make good progress using this technique. Most classroom courses will use a textbook. As a language student, I have attended many classroom courses and I can recommend them.

It is even better if you can visit the country where your new language is spoken and attend a classroom course there. I have been to overseas courses four times. Each time it was a two week course. In this approach, you get all the benefits of classroom instruction, plus you can use the language in the community before, after and between your classes. Some classroom courses allow you to stay with a host family, so you can practise your speaking skills with the host family. This is really a great advantage. I used Apple Languages to organise my overseas courses. (<https://www.applelanguages.com/>).

Of course, Podcasts, just like Slow English, are also useful. There are many other free podcasts which can help you with listening and speaking. You can also learn about the culture of the country where the language is spoken.

I have also used Pimsleur course materials. This is an audio or listening course where vocabulary and phrases are introduced to you gradually, in a series of 30 minute lessons downloaded to your smartphone. In this course you always repeat out loud the words and phrases and there is lots of revision and repetition. It teaches you how to speak and helps you with your pronunciation. The materials must be purchased and are not cheap, but I found them extremely useful when used together with a classroom course. (<https://www.pimsleur.com/>).

For learning vocabulary and phrases, I think a great option is to use smartphone apps. I have used Memrise, Babbel and Duolingo. Memrise is my favourite and I have been using it for a long time. Because a smartphone is so convenient to use, I can usually find at least 10 minutes during every day to practise my Memrise vocabulary. The app is clever enough to help me revise my most difficult words. It's like my personal set of flashcards. (<https://www.memrise.com/>).

Even though I have used classroom courses a lot, I find that online tutoring is a great alternative. There are many websites where you can find an online tutor or teacher who is a native speaker, for example Verbling (<https://www.verbling.com/>) and Preply (<https://preply.com/>). Prices vary, but I think the price is worth it, because you are in a class of one student – you get all the teacher's attention! The teacher will tailor your activities based on your needs and you will get the maximum chance to speak the language. This is the ideal learning situation. I can highly recommend this method of learning. The trick is to select a good teacher. For example, with Verbling you can watch a video where the teacher explains their approach, and then you can have a trial lesson to find out if the teacher is a good match for you.

Learning a language is all about speaking. That's why I look for opportunities to practise my speaking skills. I have a couple of fellow students also learning German who live nearby, so once a week we meet at a local café and, for one hour, we speak only in our new language (in our case German) and enjoy a coffee. We know we are making some mistakes but that doesn't matter. Sometimes we get stuck, but that doesn't matter either. We find a way to get the meaning across. We find it is good fun, builds our confidence and helps our speaking skills a lot.

Social media can also help with your language learning. On Facebook, Twitter and Instagram I follow many people and organisations who publish their posts in my new language. It helps me to read in the new language and it helps to build my vocabulary. I look for accounts which talk about things of interest to me. For example, I like to follow Facebook accounts which talk about my favourite places in Germany or Austria which I have visited.

I also try to watch as many films, videos and television programs as I can in my new language. It's amazing how many You Tube channels (<https://www.youtube.com/>) there are in different languages. Some are live. For example, you can watch the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) live news channel, hear English and learn about current events in Australia. <https://www.youtube.com/user/NewsOnABC>. You can do the same for American and British news networks. Netflix is another great language learning resource. Watch famous movies and select English as your audio language with your native language as the subtitles.

Of course there are other approaches and activities which I have not listed here. However, I hope this podcast has given you some ideas for making your English learning a little more interesting and effective. There is no magic bullet, only practice. The more you practise, the better you become. Enjoy your language learning journey!

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

[WpProQuiz 130]

Vocabulary

= things to do

= the benefit, something which is good

= when someone tells you how to do something

= a different way of doing something

= when something is so good it is hard to believe

= ways of doing things

= parts of something, not the whole thing

= to go to an event or course

= the sound, what you can hear

= the advantages, the good things about something

= when you do something even though you are afraid

= the people who you live in a town or city

= when you believe you can do something

= the common things people do in a particular country

- = things happening in the news
- = the place where you are going on a trip or journey
- = to find out
- = ideas which are high level
- = when you can't think of the solution or the answer
- = slowly, in small steps
- = something you do every day
- = someone who provides something to you, looks after you
- = in the best case
- = making something or someone better
- = as well as
- = the process of learning something from a teacher
- = shown or explained to you
- = a trip
- = (here) happening as you watch it
- = things needed in order to do something
- = when something is done wrong or is incorrect
- = your desire to do something, how much you want to do something
- = (here) the language which you learn from birth
- = people who have spoken a language from birth
- = an online service where you can watch films and television programs
- = times when you can choose to do something you want to do
- = to arrange things, to put things in their place

= in another country or nation

= parts of a sentence

= when you do something over and over in order to improve (note: practice = the noun, practise = the verb)

= when someone tells you that you have done well

= how much you are going forward or improving

= how you say something, the sounds you make when speaking

= when something you have written is shown to many other people

= bought (by paying money)

= on the contrary, by contrast

= to tell another person that something is good

= when you do something often

= to recall or remember something

= to do something again and again

= something which is useful

= to review something you have learnt before

= it makes you scared or afraid

= choose

= more than 4 of something

= when you can do something special which not everyone can do

= the way you do something

= printing along the bottom of a video screen which translates the language

= (here) fit

= (here) to make something fit your needs

= a way of doing something

= a book used by students to learn about a subject

= advice, good ideas on how to do something

= has been used for a long time

= to try something out, to see if you like it

= many, different

= a statement that gives us guidance or advice

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