

# Language Notes: 1

I hope to write a note like this every so often, maybe every other month. I would like to pass on ideas to you that may be useful in language learning. I would like also to receive from you ideas that might be useful for others.

## ***Encouragement***

- Never give up. If you never give up, you will move forward. Start over as many times as you need to but never give up.
- You might be wasting your time. It is very possible to spend your time doing language study that leads nowhere. Just studying does not mean you are making progress.

I hope you do not think I am contradicting myself here. Both statements can be true. I have been there. For each of us, there is going to be some type of study approach that is useless. I have tried lots of useless strategies! It may be very helpful for you, if you have not already done so, to finally admit that what you are doing, or an element of what you are doing, is not working. I personally found that to be a relief. It is never too late to start over with a better strategy.

## ***Strategy***

There are as many different ways to learn a language. Each person is different and will accomplish this task differently. In upcoming update emails, I will share different strategies. Anyway, here is the big picture: You need good tools plus a wide foundation to build on in order to get all the way to the top (fluent). Here is an illustration: you have decided that since you have turned 35 or 40 you are going to get into and stay in shape. In order to do that, you need four elements: aerobic activity, weight bearing exercise, stretching activities, and 3 or 4 small balanced meals a day from all the food groups. If you don't, with age you rapidly lose the elasticity of your muscles and tendons, you lose the range of motion of your joints, you rapidly lose your lung capacity and your maximum heart rate drops, all this results in less and less blood flow to the brain and diminished cognitive abilities. Not a pretty picture. But the point is this; you need four necessary elements to stay in shape. Language wise, you need four elements to build a basis for making long-term progress: 1. regular phonetic practice during your first 2 levels of language study with lots of listening, 2. regular grammar review, 3. daily conversations, 4. daily recording and reviewing of new phrases and words. In Hungarian, the letters L, P, T, D, are not the same as in English. It has to be practiced again and in again to not sound like a foreigner. There is no way around it. I have used both individual sound drills and one-minute tape loops to work on phonetics.

If all you do is have conversations with friends about what you did yesterday, you will end up being able to speak very well, about a very limited number of things. You will not have a wide enough foundation in order to reach the top of language study. (This is a good technique, but all by itself it is not enough.)

How do you get a wide foundation?

Level One: Learning to talk about myself. Where I am from, what I do here, what I want in a store or restaurant, where I need to go, describe my family, how I decided to come to this country, what I think of this country. (These are memorized texts that you will use for years to come.)

Level Two: Learning to talk about my work and working effectively: This is the most important stage. It has to be very broad and firm in order to get to Level Three: Relatively few adults learning a foreign language get past level 2.

1. Power tools with your teacher.) *Let's go over that again.* (Speak only in your new language)
2. Talking with Children *Give that back to your brother.*

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3. Talking at the dinner table     *Please, help yourself.*
4. Shopping for food                 *This lettuce does not look fresh.*
5. Shopping for clothes               *Do you have anything else?*
6. Bus, trains, taxis and planes     *Would you like to sit here?*
7. Directions                           *Take a left at the corner.*
8. Bank, post office                   *What is my balance now?*
9. Talking on the phone               *When could I call back and talk with him?*
10. Weather                            *I heard it was supposed to rain!*
11. Restaurant                         *My son spilled his milk, could you get something to wipe it up?*
12. Intros and greetings               *I have heard a lot about you, nice to finally meet you.*
13. Sports and games                  *You are winning by two points...you meat-head.*
14. Asking for help or favors           *Could you help me get my car started?*
15. Personal questions to ask children, students, parents, adults, parents, or during holidays
16. Making appointments with doctors and medical complaints
17. Traffic, car, gas station, accidents, and police

When you have recorded, listened to, practiced, memorized, role-played and mastered talking about all these areas, plus learned the related grammar structures, mastered the phonetics, written down all your interesting experiences related to these areas, you begin to move into level 3

Level Three: *Learning to talk about my world:* I can talk about my profession, I have learned technical phrases and terms related to my profession, I can talk a little about the history of my home country and the history of my new “home” country, I can understand a little of the news and talk about current events, I have read some basic, classic books in my new language, etc.

### ***The Psychology of Learning and Change***

Having worked with 100’s of people who are attempting to manage their life better through dieting, I can tell you with great confidence that behavior management (trying to control yourself better), makes a lot of diet book authors and diet companies rich. Diet books and cook books are the two best selling types of books. Why? We are really terrible at controlling ourselves but great at trying to control others.

Now here you are trying to be self-disciplined, structured and learn a new language all on your own. If you have been training to compete in the Olympic Games, you may already have all the required personal stamina to do the work of self-guided language study. For the rest, it is probably hard to get a handle on how to organize yourself, keep consistent and keep yourself going day after day so that you see progress. Here is a tip: *Focus on a completing one project*, more than focusing on the number of minutes per day spent in an activity. Take one project, such as writing about your day in a journal, and work at that one project until it is a habit. (Do other study skills along with it.) At the end of the day, write down what happened, during your next lesson have the text corrected, retype the corrected entry, tell your neighbor what happened the day before, and re-read your journal entries. One habit and one project at time. You need to be able see at the end of a week or at the end of a month, something tangible that is getting accomplished. It is more important for me to ask you at the end of the month, “What do you have to show for your time?” rather than, “How many minutes did you spend?” Show progress! Pick a project and run with it. (Another option is that I could use eastern European shame-based motivation principles. We can post the picture and personal time-log sheets on a web-site of those who are turning in low numbers and make jokes about how bad they are doing. Let’s hope I do not become too “Hungarian” in my role.) Know that my thoughts are with you in all that you do. (Many of the ideas I am have came from others in SCE....use these people as sources of wisdom.)

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### *Review*

1. Never give up
2. Use four basic tools:
  - a. phonetics/listening
  - b. grammar,
  - c. talking
  - d. recording/reviewing
3. Build a wide foundation early on
4. Pick a project and see it through to the end
5. Never give up