



# **Before You Move** **OVERSEAS**

A Workbook to Help You Prepare for the Language Learning Journey

By Aaron G Myers

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# Let's Get Started

You have made your decision. You have your passports and will buy your tickets in the coming months. You're beginning to make plans to sell your stuff and are starting to wonder about starting over.

**You** are moving overseas.

There is a ton that goes into a move like this. I know, I've done it. I moved with my wife and two kids to Istanbul, Turkey back in 2008.

And while there is much that has been written about the logistics of a move overseas, with this short guide, I want to focus on just one aspect of that move: **language learning**.

**This guide is a blueprint for the weeks and months BEFORE you board the plane.**

In it you will find actions that, when implemented, will help you prepare for the language learning journey.

But like a map on which a good friend has marked off all the best sites to see along the way, **you** need to decide which ones you **want** to see, which ones you **can** see and which ones you **need** to see.

I begin the guide with a timeline. It will help add structure to the coming months so that you can maximize your time and more effectively prepare for the language learning journey.

**But it's not a rigid timeline. It's a guide.**

I've filled this guide with the actions I wish someone had encouraged me to take in that year before moving. The bulk of this guide then consists of ten actions you can take over the coming months before you move.

Each of these ten actions will include:

- **A how to make it happen section.**
- **A rationale for the action.**
- **A difficulty rating.**
- **An importance rating.**
- **A timeline indicator.**

## **Difficulty Ratings**

I've added a difficulty rating to each action to help you understand how much work each will require. The difficulty pertains both to the amount of time needed to complete the task as well as the overall difficulty that completing the task presents. The difficulty ratings are:

**Easy** - these can be accomplished with little effort in a short amount of time.

**Moderate** - these require more time and may be a bit more challenging.

**Difficult** - these require dedicated time commitments and a fair amount of hard work.

## **Importance Rating**

I have also categorized each of the actions by the relative importance that I feel each has for language learners in this pre-departure stage.

**Extra Curricular** - these are activities to be done if you'd like a little extra work. All of them will help you prepare, but none are critical to the journey.

**Moderate Importance** - these are important and helpful and should be done if possible.

**Very Important** - if you do nothing else, do these. They will give you the most bang for your buck.

## Timeline Indicator

I have also indicated when on the timeline you should consider beginning each of the actions. You'll learn more about the timeline in the next section.

I'll bring the guide to a close in the appendix with a few planning worksheets to help you prepare for the road ahead. **Print these out** so that you can actually use them.

That is a basic rundown of what you are about to read. I hope it will encourage and empower you to take control of the language aspect of this next season of your life.

## Blessings on your language learning journey!

# Timeline

## The Timeline

I have created the timeline as a sort of loose guideline to help you structure your time before you make your move overseas.

**Stop:** Print off the Timeline Planning Sheet before you read further [see appendix].

Outside of the launch phase of the last month, the amount of time you spend in *Research and Development* and *Building* depends on how much time you have before your move. You will need to adjust what you do, how much you do and when you do any of the ideas in this guide depending on your departure date.

For example, if you are leaving in a year, you may want to spend four months in Research and Development and seven months in Building, leaving the last month for the Launch phase. If you are moving in six months, you will need to adjust accordingly.

**This is not a hard and fast rule but rather a system to help you structure and maximize the time you have before you leave.**

## Research and Development Phase

This is the time to do your research. Spend time looking for resources. Develop systems to keep track of all of your resources and materials.

Life probably isn't crazy yet so take advantage of this time to do the research and get yourself ready for the language learning journey. This is also the time to begin listening to the language as much as you can.

## Building Phase

The Building Phase is the time to start using some of the resources you have found. Experiment with different programs. Find out what you like and what you don't like. Use this time to read and watch and learn.

## Launch Phase

Crazy.

If there is one word to describe the last month before you move overseas, it's the word crazy.

The goal of the timeline is to help you have everything in place at this point so that you can focus on quality goodbyes and last minute preparations for the move.

The only thing I'll encourage you to do during Launch Phase is to read through a few articles about

leaving well and then commit to making your last month one you will not regret.

I'll encourage you again to print off the Timeline Planning Sheet in the back before you go any further.

Use it to map out a way forward and take control of the next months of the language learning journey.

# Let's Get Started!

# Research and Development Phase

## Make It Happen

**Step One:** Page through this workbook and become familiar with its pace and sequence.

**Step Two:** Print off any of the worksheets that you will be needing from the appendix.

**Step Three:** Make a plan to accomplish your goals. Write down how you will complete the actions on the list in the coming months. Be as specific as you need to be, but determine in your mind to complete the actions you have decided on.

# ACTION

## Begin listening regularly to the target language.

Timeline - research and development / difficulty - moderate / Importance - very important

### Make It Happen

**Step One:** Search for target language listening material. It could be a radio station, a podcast, a Youtube video, or dedicated learning material created for language learners. There are two great resources in the appendix: Linq and The Innovative Language Learner's Podcast. The Bible is available in most languages and so consider starting with the gospels.

**Step Two:** Begin listening regularly to familiarize yourself with the sounds, rhythms and words of the language. Ten minutes a day, six days a week will give you twenty four hours of listening in six months.

### Rationale

Language is made up of sounds, rhythms, patterns, intonations and much more. By listening regularly, you begin to familiarize yourself to these - many of which will be new for you.

Top loading listening before you go will help you hear better once you arrive. You'll be training your ear which will increase your comprehension allowing you to progress faster. Dedicated listening can also help reduce accent.

You won't have this luxury to just listen once you arrive in-country, so spend the time now.

**Listen now and listen often.**

# ACTION

## Explore resources for learning the language.

Timeline - **research and development** / difficulty - **easy** / Importance - **very important**

## Make It Happen

**Step One:** Create a folder in your bookmarks bar called “Language Resources.” When you find a new resource online, save the link into this folder.

**Step Two:** Starting with the links in the appendix, begin to find language specific resources, general resources, information about the country via blogs, forums or Wikipedia and the offline resources that you will want to begin to purchase. Research options for language learning when you arrive in-country. Are there language schools? Tutors? What have others done?

**Step Three:** Keep exploring but also guard your time - the Internet can be a black hole.

## Rationale

The Internet is a vast ocean of resources for language learners. That said, you will want to begin now to find and familiarize yourself with some of the best.

Exploring resources now will also help you grow your excitement and motivation for learning the language and begin to remove some of the fear.

Creating a folder of resources now will help reduce the time and stress spent searching once you are in-country and will help you get started learning the language right away.

# ACTION

**Begin training to become an independent language learner.**

Timeline - research and development / difficulty - difficult / Importance - very important/moderate

## Make It Happen

**Step One:** Take some time to reflect on how prepared you are to learn another language. Are you an independent learner? Have you learned other languages on your own before?

**Step Two:** Choose appropriate steps to take in order to increase your level of knowledge and understanding of how to learn another language. Consider reading [The Everyday Language Learner's Guide to Getting Started](#), a book written to help you become an independent language learner.

**Step Three:** Begin at once to learn more about learning another language. Read books. Read blogs. Watch videos. Sign up for a class or program. Become a student of the language learning journey. (See Appendix for links and resources)

## Rationale

*"Give me six hours to cut down a tree and I'll spend the first four sharpening the axe."*

-Abraham Lincoln

Learning the language is one of the most important and rewarding aspects of any move overseas. Taking the time now to get some training in how to learn a language will dramatically increase your enjoyment and success on the language learning journey.

**Take the time now to sharpen your axe!**

# Building Phase

## Make It Happen

**Step One:** Reflect on the Research and Development Phase. What went well? What do you need/want to continue to work on even as you move into the Building Phase? Write these down on your Timeline Planning Worksheet.

**Step Two:** Using the Timeline Planning Worksheet, prioritize the actions you wish to work on in the upcoming months. Look through the following six actions and determine which you feel are essential and which you feel you can let go or work on if you find the time?

**Step Three:** Again, make a plan to accomplish your goals. Write down how you will complete the actions on the list in the coming months. Be as specific as you need to be, but determine in your mind to complete the actions you have decided on.

In Turkish there is a proverb:

*Damlaya, damlaya göl olur.* - Drop by drop a lake is formed.

# ACTION

## Assemble your language learning toolbox.

Timeline - **building** / difficulty - **moderate** / Importance - **very important**

### Make It Happen

**Step One:** Read [Essential Tools for Language Learners](#).

**Step Two:** Write down your own list of essential language learning tools and resources.

**Step Three:** Acquire those resources.

**Step Four:** Familiarize yourself with your new resources. Play around with them. Figure out the special features. Practice using them now.

### Rationale

These essential resources are the tools with which you will work to learn the language. They are an important part of the language learning journey.

Find them now, before life gets crazy so that you don't miss getting them and so that you have some time to figure out how some of them work.

Also, some may be difficult to find overseas or much more expensive. Find them while you are in your own country and can work in your own language.

# ACTION

## Identify and memorize key password phrases.

Timeline - **building** / difficulty - **moderate** / Importance - **very important**

## Make It Happen

**Step One:** Find a resource for survival phrases in the language. This could be a traditional phrasebook, an online resource or an audio series for travelers.

**Step Two:** Identify 10 - 20 of the most important phrases that you would like to memorize before getting on the plane.

**Step Three:** Make a plan to memorize them. Use flashcards. Use audio. Make it a family game. Make sure you find a way to hear these phrases too so that you can learn the pronunciation.

**Step Four:** Implement your plan.

## Rationale

Knowing a good handful of phrases to help you navigate the first weeks in-country will do much to reduce stress, increase confidence and help you get started learning the language in-country on the right foot.

Learning these will also more quickly establish yourself as a serious language learner in the eyes of the locals, an important distinction and one that will lead to better feedback and help from native speakers.

By learning phrases, you will also begin to train your mouth for the new sounds it will need to produce. For this reason it is important to get audio to listen to and mimic.

# ACTION

## Read a summary of the language.

Timeline - **building** / difficulty - **easy** / Importance - **very important**

## Make It Happen

**Step One:** Find a simple summary of the basic structures and features of the language you are learning. Wikipedia is often a good source as is the introductory chapter to any of the Teach Yourself Series of language texts.

**Step Two:** Read the summary so that you can have a basic understanding of how this language works, how it is different from your native language and to become aware of any elements that might be confusing.

**Step Three:** File this summary away somewhere for later reference.

## Rationale

Having a basic understanding of some of the major features of a language can help you more quickly identify and understand the language once you really start to dive in and learn it.

At this point, you are just looking for a basic understanding. You don't need to 'study' this summary or memorize it.

Think of this more like taking a look at a road map before a long trip in order to know what direction you're going to be heading, to take note of any major landmarks along the way and to get the general feel for the route.

# ACTION

## Make a native speaking friend.

Timeline - **building** / difficulty - **difficult** / Importance - **very important**

### Make It Happen

**Step One:** Determine if there are native speakers in your city or at a local university. If not, check out [HelloTalk](#) and make a friend online.

**Step Two:** Reach out! Write an email, visit a restaurant, go to a meeting, make a phone call. Do something to reach out and begin to establish a relationship with a native speaker.

**Step Three:** Work toward friendship. I want to caution you against viewing any native speaker as a 'resource'.

### Rationale

If we are to learn the language, we need to speak the language and while we may not be speaking a lot at first, you will be developing a relationship with a native speaker with whom you will one day be able to speak.

Perhaps more important at this point though is that building a friendship with a native speaker will do much to fuel your motivation to learn the language.

None of your co-workers or friends care much if you are learning another language, but a native speaker cares immensely and will be a support and an encouragement on the journey.

# ACTION

**Begin reading books and blogs about the country.**

Timeline - **building** / difficulty - **difficult** / Importance - **very important**

## Make It Happen

**Step One:** Stop by your local library or bookstore or go online and search for books about the country where you will be moving. Consider starting with a simple kids book.

**Step Two:** Search the Internet for blogs written by other expats living in the country. Find online forums for expats and begin asking questions. Try starting at *Inter Nations*, *Expatriate Blog* or *Blog Expatriate*.

**Step Three:** Begin reading about the country and her people in your spare time. Find a book or two - or a National Geographic - and put it on the coffee table for easy access. Subscribe to a few favorite blogs.

## Rationale

Learning more about the history, political climate, economy, culture, people and daily life of the country will do two things:

**First** it will help you build excitement. Knowing more should give you a better vision for the life you will have in your new country and this will in turn increase motivation for learning the language.

**Second**, by learning more, you will minimize frustration and stress once you do arrive, allowing you to have more energy for learning the language and diving into the culture.

# ACTION

## Create a list of language projects to work on.

Timeline - **building** / difficulty - **easy** / Importance - **extra curricular**

## Make It Happen

**Step One:** Using the Language Projects Worksheet at the back, make a list of possible language projects for later reference (you will need to print it off).

**Step Two:** Familiarize yourself with the language learning activities in [Activities and Strategies for Everyday Language Learners](#). This will be an excellent resource now and especially in the future.

**Step Three:** File the Language Projects worksheet somewhere where you will be able to pull it out and add more projects as you think of them and where you will not lose it during the move. You will want to use this once you have moved to your new home.

## Rationale

My father-in-law is a farmer who often uses the expression, “*An hour in summer is worth two in winter.*”

The meaning is this: Whatever you can do now will save you time, energy and effort in the future.

Preparing a list of possible language learning projects to work on will give you a clear place to begin in the language when you don't know what to study.

# Launch Phase

## Make It Happen

**Step One:** Reflect on the last months. Hopefully you are feeling more prepared than ever to get started really learning the language once your plane touches down. Taking into consideration that this is going to be a crazy last month, are there any one or two things that you would like to continue to try and do during the Launch Phase? Write these down on the Timeline Planning Worksheet.

**Step Two:** Create space for good goodbyes, for intentional time with family and friends and for creating as smooth a transition as you can for you and your family.

**Step Three:** Create one or two anchor activities that you try and do everyday. An anchor activity is one that you do every day at the beginning or the end of your day - they “anchor” your day.

# ACTION

**Do what you can, but leave well.**

Timeline - **launching** / difficulty - **easy** / Importance - **important**

## Make It Happen

**Step One:** Your last month is going to be crazy. You'll have lots of goodbyes, lots of last minute packing and perhaps some final training to take care of before you board the plane. Prioritize leaving well.

**Step Two:** If you have time and if you feel emotionally up for it, create some anchor activities to keep you in the language everyday. Whether it be listening, reviewing flashcards or doing a duolingo lesson - do something everyday. Make it an anchor - either every morning or in the evening before you go to bed.

## Rationale

The last month before leaving and the first month after arriving are probably two of the craziest months of a person's life. Everything is topsy-turvy and new and exciting and stressful. And there will be a TON to do.

But you only get one goodbye. And you only get one last month with family and friends.

Take advantage of this month to spend time with them but add an anchor activity or two to create some stability amidst all the transition and to keep you rooted to learning the language.

**Make sure you leave well so that you can land well.**

# Final Thoughts

You miss 100% of the shots that you never take.

-Wayne Gretsky

**My hope** with this short guide is to give you a roadmap for preparing to be an effective language learner once you move to your destination country.

Many believe they can just wait until they get there - and they will indeed get there and they will most likely learn the language.

I believe you can do better though if you are **proactive in preparing**. And so I hope the actions I have given here can help you do just that. If you don't take the shot, you'll certainly miss. But if you apply the ideas in this guide, you'll be better prepared and have more confidence that you can learn the language when you do get settled into your new country.

These actions are not prescriptions for success but they will empower you to be more effective, more efficient and have more fun on the language learning journey.

**And so my final encouragement to you is this:**

**Get Started, Don't Stop.**

## Appendix A

The following worksheets have been created to help you more effectively plan for the journey ahead. They will be most useful if you print them off and then keep them with your language learning materials for later reference.

**Timeline Planning Sheet:** This worksheet is to help you plan the next months leading up to your departure date. It will help you be intentional about taking action and help you know how to better schedule the days, weeks and months ahead.

**Language Projects Worksheet:** Making a comprehensive list of ideas now will help you more quickly begin to dive into language study once you have embarked on the expat life of living in another country.

# Timeline Planning Worksheet

Today's Date:

Departure Date:

Research and Development Phase	Building Phase	Launch Phase
Date Range:	Date Range:	Date Range:
What will I do?	What will I do?	What will I do?

Use the worksheet above to make a rough plan for the coming months. Start by writing down today's date and your departure date. If you do not yet know your departure date, write as close an approximation as you can. Next you will want to fill in the date ranges for each section. The Launch Phase is the easiest. Its date range will be the one month prior to departure. You will then want to divide the other two phases into roughly  $\frac{1}{3}$  time for Research and Development and  $\frac{2}{3}$  time for the Building phase. Now fill in the actions you would like to try and accomplish for each stage.

## Language Learning Projects

Make a list of topics through which you would like to learn the language once you are in-country. You can use these as the content through which you learn the words, phrases and grammar necessary for speaking well.

<p><b>Five Cultural Topics I would like to explore:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.</li><li>2.</li><li>3.</li><li>4.</li><li>5.</li></ol>	<p><b>Five Historical Topics I would like to explore:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.</li><li>2.</li><li>3.</li><li>4.</li><li>5.</li></ol>	<p><b>Five daily life topics I would like to explore:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.</li><li>2.</li><li>3.</li><li>4.</li><li>5.</li></ol>
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<p><b>A few of my hobbies and interests are:</b></p>	<p><b>Other ideas I would like to explore:</b></p>
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## Appendix B

### Books:

[\*The Everyday Language Learners Guide to Getting Started\*](#) - This book maps out a path toward becoming an independent language learner. It will help you take control of your learning so that you can get the very most out of any method you use to learn another language. It will make the language learning journey more effective, more efficient and a lot more fun! (Available on Kindle at this time)

[\*Activities and Strategies for Everyday Language Learners\*](#) - This book is a collection of language learning activities, strategies, tips and inspiration that will help you make the most of your language learning. It gives you practical tools for the day to day. (Available on Kindle at this time)

[\*The Everyday Language Learner's Guide to Self-Assessment\*](#) - This guide will help empower language learner's to take control of their language learning journey by providing easy to use, time considerate evaluation tools.

[\*Sustaining\*](#) - This is a short booklet to help you sustain your motivation for the language learning journey. It is focused on keeping you encouraged, motivated and on the road to success. (Available on Kindle at this time)

[\*The Whole World Guide to Language Learning\*](#)  
[\*How To Be a More Successful Language Learner\*](#)  
[\*Peace Corps Language Learning Manual\*](#)  
[\*Fluent in Three Months\*](#)

**Training Centers:** (These centers focus on training Christians going overseas)

[Mission Training International](#)

[Center For Intercultural Training](#)  
[Culture Bound](#)

### **Helpful Resources:**

[Hello Talk](#) - Find a native speaker to begin practicing with before you go.

[Duolingo](#) - Five to ten minutes a day will help you grow your vocabulary.

[LingQ](#) - Robust resource for accessing reading and listening activities in the language you are learning.

[Anki App](#) - The best app for creating and reviewing flashcards.

[Innovative Language Podcast](#) - Podcast for language learners.

### **In Ministry:**

If you are going overseas as a Christian ministry assignment, I want to encourage you to read this article from Thomas and Elizabeth Brewster: [Language Learning is Communication – Is Ministry!](#)