



equipping the church to make disciples from
everywhere to everywhere

BEFORE YOU MOVE OVERSEAS

A WORKBOOK TO HELP YOU PREPARE FOR THE LANGUAGE LEARNING JOURNEY

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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**.

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 is made up of ten actions you can take over the coming months before you move.

Each of these 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.

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 layout 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. Start by listening to the gospels.

Step Two: Download as much audio as you can.

Step Three: 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. This 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.

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 get 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 spent searching once you are in country and 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? How has language learning gone in the past for you?

Step Two: Choose appropriate steps to take in order to increase your level of knowledge and understanding of how to learn another language.

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 increase dramatically 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 10 Essentials for Every Language Learner's Tool Box (see appendix).

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 land marks 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: Read Finding a Language Helper and then make a list of possible ways to meet native speakers (see appendix).

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 books.

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*, *Expats Blog* or *Blog Expat*.

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 (Download Yours for Free).

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 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 or reading or doing a 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 time to spend time with them and to spend extra time considering life and in getting those last dates in with your spouse if you have one.

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.

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
What will I do?	What will I do?	What will I do?
Date Range:	Date Range:	Date Range:

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.

*The aim of this worksheet is to help you visualize the months ahead and to begin to plan for them.

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. You can learn more about learning through projects in *The Everyday Language Learner's Guide to Getting Started*.

Five Cultural Topics I would like to explore: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	Five Historical Topics I would like to explore: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	Five daily life topics I would like to explore: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
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A few of my hobbies and interests are: 	Other ideas I would like to explore:
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Appendix B

Books:

[Activities and Strategies for Everyday Language Learners](#)

[The Whole World Guide to Language Learning](#)

[How To Be a More Successful Language Learner](#)

The Everyday Language Learners Guide to Getting Started (Get yours free at the [E2E resource page](#))

[Peace Corps Language Learning Manual](#)

[Fluent in Three Months](#)

[Sustaining](#)

Training Centers:

[Mission Training International](#)

[Center For Intercultural Training](#)

[Culture Bound](#)

Helpful Resources:

[iTalki](#)

[Duolingo](#)

[LingQ](#)

[Anki App](#)

[Inovative Language Podcast](#)

Appendix C

The following articles are taken from Activities and Strategies for Everyday Language Learners. This book is a collection of blog posts from The Everyday Language Learner blog. You can download this compilation of 56 tips, ideas and activities that you can use to learn any language.

[Click Here to Get the Book](#) (free)

10 Essential Tools for Language Learners

My son and daughter have learned to speak Turkish without ever thinking about the learning process and without ever consulting a dictionary, reviewing a flashcard or reading articles like this one.

And while it hurts my pride to think that my five and seven year olds are not avid readers of The Everyday Language Learner, their learning Turkish without a single resource outside of their native speaking friends highlights the fact that there is little that we actually need to learn another language.

As adult learners though, we have cognitive abilities beyond those of children. We can create systems to discover, classify, and review new concepts. **We have better long term memory.**

And where kids are dependent on the cruel hand of chance for receiving comprehensible input, adults have the ability to be intentional about finding and exposing ourselves to high quality language learning opportunities.

I believe that if I as an adults were to have received as much input as my kids did – six hours a day, five days a week at pre-school – and if I were to have lived with the same lack of concern for what others think about me as my kids did – I would have learned Turkish much faster than they.

As it is, while I know a lot more Turkish words and expressions than either of them at this point, they speak it much better than I.

While we are all still working on figuring out how not to care what others think about us as we learn the language – something second language acquisition people call the “affective filter”, we can do more to affect both the quality and the quantity of the language we are hearing, reading and seeing. As adults we have the ability to take control of our learning

and the input we receive in ways that kids do not.

In today's post I want to introduce you to ten essential tools for the independent language learner. These are the tools and resources that have helped me maximize my language learning and are the ten things I would encourage all language learners to obtain as they begin to learn another language. There are other great online resources as well, but in this list I'll be focusing on those things which you'll need to either find or purchase.

My kids prove that you don't need anything on this list save for a native speaking friend, but as adults with the ability to take control of our learning, these resources can help us learn more effectively.

1. Pocket Dictionary

In today's Internet age and instant access to online dictionaries, it may seem strange to put the ubiquitous pocket dictionary at the top of the list. But the pocket dictionary is important for what it does for you as well as what it represents.

A pocket dictionary allows you to navigate your new language out in the community. It gives you access to concepts and conversations in the flip of a few pages and goes with you as a good friend who has your back wherever you might venture.

It also gives native speakers a tool to help you and you'll often find your trusty pocket dictionary being taken from your hands and then being thrust back, a pointing finger indicating a word your native speaking friend wants you to know.

Your pocket dictionary is also important for what it represents.

We learn a new language so we can speak it with people and the pocket dictionary is all about being with and speaking

with people, real people. Every time you see your pocket dictionary you should remember this, remember, and then get out and begin interacting with native speakers.

2. Pocket Phrasebook

Where the pocket dictionary opens up new words to language learners, the phrasebook opens up whole new opportunities.

A good phrase book will give you instant inroads into the culture so that you can quickly begin the adventure of exploring the country.

A good phrase book is also a great sampling of the language and can be a springboard for further learning. It is unfortunate that most phrasebooks lack the phrases necessary to unlock the language.

They will help you order a beer and help you find the toilet, but none that I know of help you access more language. A brief section of password phrases would be a welcome addition to the language phrasebooks that are out there.

3. Notebooks

One of the most important jobs of a language learner is to capture new material so that it can be reviewed and retained.

A small pocket sized notebook is a must then for language learners. Carry this with you at all times so that you can write down anything that you do not know or understand that you should know. These entries then can become to focus of study time and the topic of discussion with native speakers.

I also think that writing regularly in the language is an important part of a maximized language learning program and so a larger notebook is also an essential tool. I wrote extensively right away in Turkish and also see a notebook filled with your 'journals' in the language can be a great assessment tool and a real encouragement.

Finally, I always had a third notebook that I used exclusively for planning my lessons and my own personal language learning program as an independent language learner. By planning, I found that I used my time more effectively.

Having recorded my plans, I was also able to look back and review what I was doing and in the process, figure out what worked best for me.

4. Smartphone

Having the ability to carry hours and hours of listening material is one opportunity you do not want to miss. I am amazed to remember that twenty years ago most language learners were dealing with cassette players.

Some of you are too young to even remember cassette players, but if you do, you can appreciate the power of technology to store in an organized manner thousands of hours of audio.

Listening and listening often is an important part of a maximized language learning program and having the ability to do this is essential.

Today, smartphones have adequate recording abilities for the everyday language learner. Listening to audio files that others have created is good, but listening to audio that you have created – with the help of a native speaker – is the best. Making your own recordings will give you the very best chance to create comprehensible

input.

You can record answers to grand tour questions, create handcrafted audio with your own writing and can record all the password phrases you can think of.

5. Audio Bible

Your phone can hold thousands of hours of recorded material but the first thing you should download is an audio version of the Bible. Listening to the gospels over and over again will tune your ear to the sounds and intonations of the language you are learning and also begin to introduce you to the language that you most want to communicate: The word of God.

My encouragement would be to listen to the Gospel of Mark ten times in a row before you do anything else. You'll be amazed what that will do for your language learning journey.

6. Introductory Book

Another essential resource is an introductory book to the language. My favorite is the Teach Yourself Series.

A good book will explain the basics of grammar, offer insights into the culture and introduce important phrases and expressions used by native speakers. It should also have exercises you can work through and a good glossary of terms for easy reference.

7. Reading Material

Reading is an important part of learning another language.

Reading extensively allows the learner to take in large amounts of the language at your own rate and on your own time.

It is important then to find high quality reading material in the target language that will help you be a more effective language learner.

8. Assessment Tool

One of the great difficulties independent language learners face is in knowing how they are doing.

In the classroom, a teacher assesses progress and helps students know what they are doing well at and where they need improvement.

The ability to know how you are doing does much to help you to create a focused plan for your learning and helps sustain motivation.

As an independent language learner of Turkish, I was frustrated to no end wondering if what I was doing was working and if I was really progressing as quickly as I could.

I used a lot of different resources – the ACTFL and CEFR are both great self assessment tools to get started with.

In the end though I wanted something more and so I created a more robust tool I call The EDLL Guide to

Self-Assessment.

9. Training

While learning another language is not rocket science, it is something that as adults, most of us have never done before. Getting some training is an essential part of creating a more effective and efficient language learning journey.

Abraham Lincoln said, “*Given six hours to cut down a tree, I’d spend the first four sharpening my axe.*”

Getting some training then is a lot like sharpening the axe.

There are some fantastic pre-field training programs available at places like Mission Training International (MTI), Center for Intercultural Training (CIT) or Culture Bound.

Or you could read a book like *The Whole World Guide to Language Learning, How To Be a More Successful Language Learner* or my book, *The Everyday Language Learners Guide to Getting Started*. These books are designed to give you a firm foundation in independent, self- directed language learning.

Finally, if you want a more personal training experience, you could find a specialized program focusing on preparing learners for community based, independent language learning or you could consider finding a language coach.

10. Native Speaking Friends

I want to be clear here that I do not in any way see native speaking friends as a “tool” for language learning.

They are the reason for learning a language, not a means to an end and I want to caution all learners to take care not to ‘use’ people to reach your goals.

One of the concerns I have with most language exchange programs is that the focus is too often on learning the language and not on building relationships.

That said, if we are serious about learning another language we need to have friendships with native speakers. They will be an important resource, will be someone with whom we can practice regularly and will help us sustain motivation when the road gets tough.

But if we approach this with the right attitude and the right focus, all of these things will help our friendship become deeper and more intimate and lead to a lifetime of great memories.

Are There More?

Certainly there could be and there could also be fewer than I have listed above. Each person will have their own list.

You need to take a look at your situation, your learning style and personality and at the goals you have for learning the language and decide what is best for you.

Finding a Language Helper

I have written about using language helpers in the past but today I wanted to look a bit at how to go about finding a good one.

I want to be careful here lest I talk about language helpers as some sort of commodity – they're not of course. They are people like us with real needs, real personalities and real lives.

But as language learners, we do want to find people with whom we can work that understand how to help us grow as speakers of their language. Finding a language helper can be a task that is not easy. As well, there are two different situations and we are all in one or the other.

You are either an expat living abroad or you are living in your home country where your native language is the lingua franca.

So I want to write a bit about finding helpers in both places. Here are a few of my ideas:

Home Country

So you let's say you live in Wichita Kansas. Where do you find a language helper? Here are a few places to start:

Local Organizations: Most immigrant groups like to keep track of one another and tend to form organizations or clubs. These can be a great place to find native speakers. Here is how I would approach finding a language helper from a local language community. First – google “French speakers in Wichita” (or whatever language you are wanting to learn.) This will probably lead you to a few different groups. Second – Find the names of a few of the group's leaders to email. Write a general letter expressing your desire to learn their language and to find speakers of the language with whom to practice. These groups may also have classified sections or list serves on which you may post a request for help.

Craig's List: It may be possible to find a language helper using Craig's list. Write a short description of what you are looking for and be clear that you are looking for a native speaker to practice with and that you are not looking for a teacher or tutor.

Local Ethnic Stores: Most cities will have ethnic communities and most of these communities are quite entrepreneurial. So there is also a good chance that small stores will open up, owned and run by new immigrants who of course speak the language. These can be a great place to build relationships with native speakers.

Local Universities: Universities draw students from all over the world. Checking with your local university's foreign student offices can be a great place to start.

These are just a few of the places you can begin to look to find a language helper. I would encourage you to think about a fair hourly wage to pay and to think about how you can be of service to the local native speakers – especially in the new immigrant communities. I would also suggest that you begin with a two week trial. This allows you and the native speaker a way out if it's not working.

Abroad as an Expat

Finding a language helper in the country of the language would at first seem an easier task. Everyone you see is a native speaker. At the beginning however there can be some very real challenges.

First of all you don't speak their language (YET) and they may not speak any of yours. This makes explaining what you are looking for a bit of a challenge.

Secondly, the idea of a language helper – as opposed to a tutor or teacher – may not be an idea with which they are at all familiar. Few will think they are “qualified” but everyone is qualified – the only thing they have to do is supply the language – no planning, no need for grammar instruction, no teaching.

And finally, the cultural norms for hiring or helping may be ambiguous at first. That's a hefty list of challenges, but not one to fear. Finding a seasoned expat or an English speaking national to help can be a big benefit to getting set up.

Here are a few ideas of where to look to find a language helper:

Expats Forums: Every country I know of has forums on line where expats can connect. They are also places where people can place classified ads and ask for advice. Posting to a forum that you are looking for a language helper will catch the eye of other expats who have used language helpers as well as nationals who are looking for work.

Cafe's Around Universities: University students can be some of the best helpers. They also have fairly flexible schedules and are looking for part time – not full time – opportunities to make a little extra cash. I find that it is seldom difficult to strike up conversations with local students in these settings.

Classified Ads in Online English Language Newspapers: These are read not only by expats, but also by nationals wanting to improve their English.

Neighbors: In general I think it is good to keep business and neighbors away from one another. If something goes wrong, it can hurt a relationship that you have to live with. But neighbors could be great language helpers. Perhaps especially on an informal basis. I think about moms too. Staying at home with the kids can give you a great opportunity to rub shoulders with the other moms in the neighborhood – all of whom can act as informal language helpers.

Word of Mouth: Perhaps the most reliable way to find a good language helper is by word of mouth. Ask other expats who they know who might be able to help.

Well there is the list. I hope it is helpful.

Word of Caution: At first your language helper will be a stranger and you will be a stranger to them. You don't know them and they don't know you. Protect yourself and them by getting to know them a bit through email or phone calls. Choose to meet in public places first. This is as much for them as for you