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# Tip Sheet: How to Learn a Language Fast

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## ¿Cómo se dice...?

# How to Learn a Language Fast

by Jacqueline Lazú

**T**ime away from work or school is precious to us all, and we want to make the most of it. For some of us, the adventure of international travel awaits—that solo trip to France, a family vacation in Mexico or even revisiting that study abroad trip to Morocco with our college roommates. This kind of travel might also provoke a little anxiety: Why didn't I keep practicing my Spanish?! I should've taken that French class I kept thinking about! How do I say “How do I get to my hotel?” in Arabic?

Tranquilos ... relax. My colleagues and I in the Department of Modern Languages offer various levels of intensive language courses that can get you from “hello” to “Bonjour, comment allez-vous?” in just a few weeks. But the trip is next week? No worries! We're sharing a few of our most effective tips for boosting your second-language skills for your next international trip.

### Input is the key

Anything you can do to increase the quantity of input you receive is great, but it has to be *comprehensible* input. Here are some easy ways to get more input.

Consume media in the target language. You'll probably know the context of newspaper and magazine articles, which can help

make reading easier. Listen to one of the many free podcasts for language learners. We often suggest News in Slow Spanish or News in Slow French, which deliver the news at a slower pace for better comprehension.

If you have higher-level skills, find media that you'd be interested in consuming anyway. If you like comic books and are traveling to Japan, read some manga for beginners like よつばと (“Yotsuba!”). If you like TV and plan to visit Peru, watch a telenovela; Netflix has every episode of “María la del Barrio” available for streaming. Choose subtitles in the target language. That way you can read and hear at the same time, which may make the input more comprehensible. If you prefer music to inspire your Italian adventure, check out Lele's new video “L'ho voluto io” on YouTube. The key is finding something you're interested in.

Hang out at local places where your target language is spoken. Restaurants and ethnic festivals are great not only for language input but also for getting a handle on culinary specialties. TripAdvisor or Thrillist can help you plan your at-home activities and your destination to-do list.

If you crave the discipline of books and a classroom or are starting from scratch, you might consider working with a tutor or an

organization like the Alliance Française that is designed to promote a country's language and culture. Check your library or community centers for a meetup or conversation group for learners of your target language. Sometimes these groups bring together native and nonnative speakers for a language exchange.

Phone apps and online tools are also a good option. The free Duolingo app is worth checking out. It's not perfect, but because it's designed as a fun game, it can keep you coming back every day. Rosetta Stone is also a fine way to go, but it is more expensive. The main thing is to get more input in a way that is sustainable.

### On your trip

Once you arrive at the destination, refuse to speak in English. Use body language, polite gestures and the phrase “how do you say ... ?” in the target language rather than turning to English. Challenge yourself to interact with the locals at their favorite spots. ¡Buen viaje!

*Jacqueline Lazú is an associate professor in the Department of Modern Languages and associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. Lazú helped found Intercambio, DePaul's first language exchange program with Chicago community partners.*