

However, even with few resources and guidance, many people manage to learn a second language as adults, and we can learn from the strategies they use. While we have limited understanding of the mental processes that older children and adults use to learn a second language, we know it is possible to compensate for loss of childhood flexibility by bringing to bear mature skills and cognitive strategies. Mature learners are affected by a wide range of cultural and personal factors, and our goals vary more than they did when we were children, so as individuals we differ in the particular skills and strategies that we find most effective. Ultimately, success in learning a second language depends on motivation and opportunity. The following general strategies for language learning have been formulated based on the practices of effective learners:

develop self-confidence and a positive language learning attitude: don't make excuses; don't worry about your age or aptitude;

be self-directed and don't overly rely on teachers;

understand your own learning style, evaluate and take advantage of opportunities for learning: people, TV, radio, tapes, books, magazines, newspapers, etc.;

decide what level of commitment to make, then organise your learning and manage your time; set reasonable goals based on your preferences and opportunities; evaluate your progress regularly and reward yourself when you do well;

take calculated risks in using the language: be willing to make mistakes;

cooperate with others (e.g. form a support group); make conscious efforts to work or socialise with proficient users of the language;

monitor your speech and writing, and that of others: look for patterns in the language and make intelligent guesses;

pay attention to meaning, but be tolerant of yourself and others when you don't understand;

ask questions (for both clarification and correction), and don't pretend to understand when you really don't;

develop cultural understanding and become aware of the thoughts and feelings of others;

resist direct translation into your mother tongue;

practise as much as possible; use what you learn; teach someone else what you have learned;

memorise by creating mental links (e.g. apply images and sounds to words and concepts);

review and record new vocabulary and grammar (e.g. make flashcards and repeat aloud);

don't allow anxiety to defeat you: have fun and don't be too self-critical.

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