



Break Through 5 Challenges With **3 Secret Strategies**

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Cheat Sheet

Only got a few minutes? Here's a road map to choose what strikes your interest:

- ▶ [Chapter 2](#) presents **5 challenges** that you may not be aware of, but will likely relate to. Knowing these challenges, you'll read about how we help you tackle those in [Chapter 3](#).
- ▶ Jump to [Chapter 5](#) to discover in a few minutes **how Latudio is different**.
- ▶ Would you like to read the Co-Founder's **personal story behind the company**? It's in the [Afterword](#).
- ▶ Want to know more about **comprehensible listening and language acquisition**? Scan Krashen's quotes in [Chapter 1](#). He is cited quite often by language researchers, teachers, professors, polyglots and language enthusiasts.
- ▶ **Smart practice** is a new phrase we coined. It's about making progress with the time you spent. [Chapter 4](#) reviews the 6 principles to guide your smart practice to acquire a language.
- ▶ Acquiring a language requires endurance, so [Chapter 6](#) gives you some **tips regarding fatigue, memory and motivation**.

Introduction

Learning a language highlights how unique a person is. Your unique way is driven by your motivation, attitude, and expectations. Your effectiveness and efficiency are also unique because it all depends on how you practice and how much time you spend.

Your challenges and struggles are unique because of the circumstances you have been under, even though others might share similar challenges. How much exposure you get every day and your ability to develop fluency are a few factors that make your challenges unique.

To help you understand and acknowledge your uniqueness, this ebook shares some insights and research that can be personalized. We hope it inspires you to experiment, giving you a boost to do more and up your confidence in using a new language.

Chapter 1 reviews the difference between learning a language and acquiring a language. It's a fundamental shift that could change the way you study and practice a new language.

Sometimes, challenges might feel insurmountable because of the way we see them. In Chapter 2, we will discuss 5 prominent challenges of learning a new language. Finding a new way to see a challenge will be beneficial in addressing it in the next chapter.

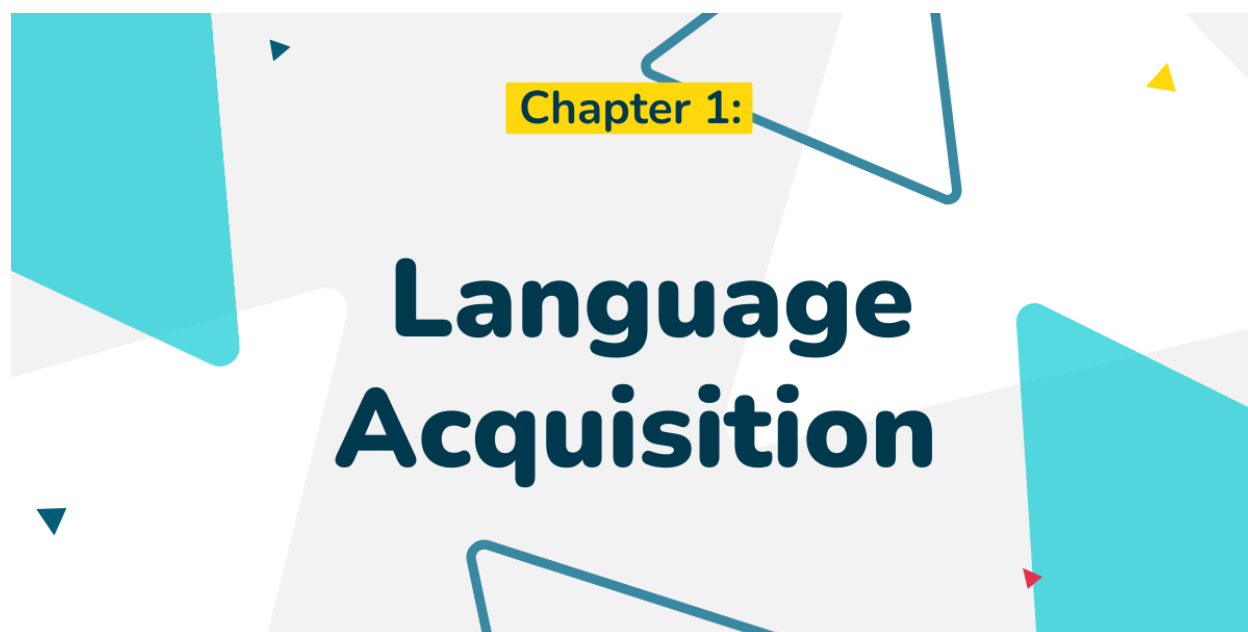
With so many resources available, it's easy to just hack stuff together and see what works. Chapter 3 encourages you to intentionally address how to acquire (and learn) a language and impact the 5 learning challenges. It also includes 3 secret challenges. Secret because they may not be so obvious!

Chapter 4 helps you explore the 6 principles of smart practice. It's an idea that gives you another lens to ensure that the time and effort you invest in something, really pays off eventually — sooner or later.

Based on all the previous chapters, we share the ways Latudio was designed to address language acquisition, comprehensible listening input, and learning strategies. In Chapter 5, you'll better understand the slogan: practice smartly with the all-in-one language app.

The concluding chapter, Chapter Six, wraps things up with 3 tips from psychology and neuroscience for endurance, resilience, and persistence. While how you learn is important, the nuts and bolts of your brain are equally as valuable.

Your uniqueness deserves the very best. Ready to discover what that could be?



When you take your first language class, you're not likely to hear about language acquisition. It has gotten popular over the recent years. You'll be surprised, perhaps, to learn how valuable it will be in so many ways, such as studying, practicing, and spending your time to "acquire" the language, and not just learning it.

Language acquisition was pioneered by *Stephen Krashen*, Professor Emeritus at the University of Southern California. He is widely quoted for his saying:

*"Language acquisition happens when you're listening and reading, you're acquiring the language. It's about the feeling for a language, not about grammar rules. What you learn in school is a monitor, it checks what you're going to say and you make corrections before you **actually** say it. The acquisition gives us fluency, learning gives us accuracy."*

Feeling for a language means that you naturally use grammar rules without analytical thinking. There's more to understand to see why it might be possible to acquire a language without studying grammar (so much).

In the past few years, many prominent linguists and organizations have spoken in favor of *Krashen's* theory, including *Steve Kauffman*, *Beniko Mason*, *Leonardo English*, *Matt vs. Japan*, and many others. In the 1980s, *Krashen* gave a (now) widely cited lecture on language acquisition. Below is an excerpt:

"We acquire language when we understand messages. When people talk to us, and we understand what they say, or when we read something and we

understand the message. It is called comprehensible input. Speaking and talking is not practicing, it is the result of acquiring it.

Students expect grammar, vocabulary lists, and exercises. When those aren't provided, they think it's a sign of professional incompetence." But with comprehensible input, "you can get the feel for a language rather quickly, even though it's not available for usage. Learning is concrete, acquisition is subtle. Learning is pleasant, we like it. When we repeat what we learned, we feel rewarded."

You may have several questions about the points raised in this quote. First, remember there are ways to understand a message other than using a bilingual dictionary that translates text from your target language into your native language. This is undoubtedly the most common and straightforward method, but it has the disadvantage of training your brain to only think in terms of your native language. As much as you can, try to gain understanding through other means, such as visuals, nonverbal elements, and context.

Second, how much comprehensible input do we need? And what kind? The first question is tricky because it's difficult to measure both comprehensible input and linguistic progress in absolute terms.

Steve Kauffman describes 3 "stages" of language learning, the first of which comprises 60 – 90 hours of frequent input. *Khatzumoto* of the AJATT Method encouraged learners to aim for 10,000 hours of listening (*Khatzumoto*). On a practical level, you should obtain as much input as is sustainable, given your circumstances.

As for what kind of input, the main point of debate is to what degree the input should be comprehensible. *Krashen* says 30%. *Kauffman* says 70–80%. *Matt* of *Matt vs. Japan* says 90%. While the numbers vary, most agree that it's best to have input that is slightly "above" your current level. This lets you leverage what you already know, allowing you to "anchor" new words among familiar ones.

Kauffman also emphasizes engagement — the more interesting the material is for YOU, the more likely you are to remember words.

Third, *Krashen* dispels the notion that to speak well, one must practice speaking a lot. Instead, he says that practicing listening is all the preparation one needs to speak. This is because listening and speaking are more related than we think. Indeed, some linguists go so far as to describe listening as "passive speech." (*Zhang and Wei*)

A common response to *Krashen's* comprehensible input theory is "what about grammar?" to which *Krashen* responds, "... with a great deal of comprehensible input, then all the grammar rules will be there, which are learned inductively. Messages need to be interesting and comprehensible, then grammar takes care of itself." (*Krashen*)

This is the difference between learning and acquiring. When one studies and learns the language with traditional methods, one can often describe the grammar very well but struggles to understand and produce grammatically correct sentences in practice.

Conversely, when one acquires a language through input and immersion, one might not necessarily be able to identify and describe the grammar but can produce grammatically acceptable sentences. One is not better than the other indeed, but knowing the inner workings of language can be of great use to linguists. But for most of us, it is more important to be able to converse and communicate (rather than describe grammatical features like different tenses and pronouns).

So, are you trying to learn a language or acquire it? Both? Whatever your goal is, just keep that question in mind as you continue.

By the way, if you are just beginning, We highly recommend watching this [video](#) by *Jeff Brown* starting at 42:33 to see how you can use the language acquisition approach when first starting.


 Chapter 2:

New Ways to See 5 Challenges

You probably already know what's difficult for you. But with a new point of view on the same challenge, you can find a new way to work on it. Instead of just doing what you used to do, you discover a new way that could accelerate your progress.

Below is our collection of challenges and some related research for finding a new view.

Then, in the next chapter, you'll take it a step further by considering 3 strategies that might not have been so obvious before.

First, read through the challenges and their research. You are encouraged to put a check on the ones that you identify with and can relate to. This will help you to get the most out of the next chapter.

Challenge #1: I don't spend enough time listening.

- 5,100 people responded to a Reddit question about what is most difficult in learning a language. 54% said speaking was more difficult than listening (30%). But, there were more comments about listening (58%) than speaking (24%). (Reddit)
- There are two types of speech: active speech and passive speech. Active speech is "speaking" while passive speech is "listening." The latter is the base of the former and both of them are closely related. (*Zhang and Yuehong Wie*)
- Listening is more powerful than speaking, it's easier to arrange. It should be the prime focus of language learning. Listening is a **great** preparation for speaking. (*Krashen*)

Challenge #2: I listen a lot and I don't feel it helps much.

- Listening difficulties result from the native speaker's speed, accent, clarity, changes in stress and intonation, and the need for more repetition because of confusing sounds and the lack of knowledge about informal and colloquial expressions. (*Maslikah, Widiati & Wulyani*)
- There is evidence that not much language acquisition occurs when you don't understand what is on TV. (*Loschky*)
- ... you can't just read or listen to *anything* and improve your language. You have to read or listen to things *you can understand*. Language acquisition happens best when the input is just slightly more advanced than your **own** level. (*Budge*)
- You have to listen to things that you have a chance of understanding. Which can mean access to a transcript at the beginning until you get to understand 70%–80% of it. Make sure you have access to the transcript. Listen a lot to repetitious material, listen to them a lot, repeatedly, easy material. (*Kauffman*)

Listening challenges from the Reddit survey

- Can't follow a speaker
- Different speeds
- The speaker's pronunciation
- Swallowing or slurring words
- Subtle tones
- Not understanding a word
- The way sentences are parsed
- Differentiating words and accents
- It all just runs together, hard to pick out words
- They don't use simpler language for you
- Entangled in hearing sounds
- Can't translate what is being said and think of what to say next
- Every word merges into the next
- Hearing words that sound the same but have different meanings
- Imperfect use of vocabulary and grammar that I've studied
- Being exposed to unknown vocabulary
- Native pitch confusing in a target language
- Can't remember the surrounding words
- Miss understanding a word and it's gone for good
- Losing a sentence or two
- Overlapping voices in media sources
- Sensory overload
- Slang

Challenge #3: I thought that I could learn a language through immersion.

- Being immersed in a target language environment is not enough to guarantee the ideal input (interactions from native speakers and teachers) to acquire a language. Input problems result from incomprehensible input, a lack of interaction, limited topics and situations, and a lack of recurring situations. (*Wray*)
- Even though research indicates that immigrants' progress in the host country is affected when immigrants move into enclaves of earlier immigrants with the same ethnic and language background. (*Isphording*)
- It is problematic to acquire an arrangement of words (sentences and phrases) even when they are immersed in the language's natural setting. It seems there is a tendency to focus on individual words and miss the important information when words occur together. (*Su*)

Challenge #4: I know a lot of vocabulary, but still struggle.

- Some vocabulary apps lack translation of the text to a different language. (*Northrop*)
- There is an absence of being **able** to contextualize words in vocabulary learning tools or services. (*Godwin-Jones*)
- Students are unaware of other ways to learn vocabulary because of inefficient and outdated methodologies. (*Godwin-Jones*)
- More than 15 exposures are needed for learning vocabulary from listening. It is more likely to occur when the content is limited to repeated exposure to words, expressions, and phrases. (*Ivone & Renandya*)
- Researchers say that learning vocabulary more naturally depends on 6–20 exposures to establish a lasting connection between the word and its meaning. **Keeping** in mind that there are many factors **which affect** retention. (*Ellis*)

Challenge #5: I'm taking classes or have a tutor, but I am not making much progress.

- Formal instruction does not usually offer enough repeated exposure to grasp the language more inductively and naturally. (*Godwin-Jones*)

No matter how many learning challenges you checked, don't be discouraged. You're most likely addressing many of them already.

In the next chapter, you're invited to fine-tune what you're doing now with 3 strategies and the research that **address** all 5 challenges. Understanding the research behind the 3 strategies will set the stage for looking at an all-in-one solution in Chapter 6.



Chapter 3:

Boost Your Learning with 3 Strategies

By now, you might be asking yourself some questions. How do you **really** acquire a language? How do you find comprehensible input? Are there better ways to practice listening? And what can you do about those challenges?

*“Generally, it’s not learning a new language per se that’s difficult or easy. Nor does it have to do anything with the target language itself (although some are admittedly more complex than others). Instead, it has more to do with how you learn (the strategies), whether the approach you’ve chosen is effective and seems simple or, **alternatively**, insurmountable.” (MosaLingua)*

So, what is a learning strategy? A learning strategy is about the techniques, methods, approaches, or steps that you take to accomplish a learning result. It reflects your uniqueness because it’s based on your personal preferences and situation.

Personal learning strategies are your way of targeting resources to realize your progress. It’s more like a map and compass, setting the direction with the nuts and bolts for navigating and adjusting.

Before we get to some of the nuts and **bolts of how**, there are three principles to keep in mind as you think about what learning strategies to try.

1. Learning strategies are valuable when they’re intentional.

Learning strategies aren’t something most adults are accustomed to thinking about in their daily lives. Adults already know how to navigate most areas of their lives, so we’re a bit rusty

when it comes to learning something new. It's why most adults start by looking to language classes when attempting to learn a language; the teacher (or app) takes care of the strategy aspect. **Basically**, if you haven't had to learn something new in a while, be patient with yourself!

2. Intentional learning strategies raise the bar.

What if you need to modify the pace or content to fit your interests or goals? Maybe you need to increase the difficulty and frequency. Maybe you need to lower both or any combination of the two. Any of these are okay; what's important is that it is sustainable for you and your situation.

Consider this: one can get too comfortable and complacent with the learning activities that one's already doing. Comfort is good for sustaining motivation, but too much complacency can hinder you from exploring new, potentially more effective strategies. On the other hand, if you increase the intensity, your goals and motivation might increase to match it — or they might not. Practicing smart means challenging yourself just enough, but not too much. You're learning a new language, so in a way, you're getting to know a new version of yourself. Be as patient with your new self as you'd be with any other new person you'd meet.

3. Learning strategies are most valuable when they match your needs.

If you're reading this, you probably have access to the internet and with it the abundance of resources for learning strategies that the modern world offers: teachers, tutors, classes, conversation exchange partners, books, videos, memory cards, apps, websites, pictures, games and so much more.

With so many choices, it can be overwhelming to choose. **In fact**, it can create anxiety, making you feel paralyzed and like not trying anything.

No matter what others suggest, when you know what you need, you can discern learning strategies more accurately. Time spent considering whether a strategy is a good fit for you is time well spent.

To ensure that this chapter addresses your needs, which of those challenges in the previous chapter did you check? Know which one personalizes your learning strategy!

- Challenge #1: More emphasis on listening
- Challenge #2: More comprehensible listening
- Challenge #3: More comprehensible input opportunities that are repeatable
- Challenge #4: More context learning of vocabulary
- Challenge #5: More repeated exposure outside of the classroom

The rest of this chapter presents research excerpts about the three key strategies related to the challenges and also to language acquisition and comprehensible input.

Learning Strategy #1: More COMPREHENSIBLE listening (Challenges 1–3)

- “Extensive Listening (EL) is a teaching and learning approach where learners are exposed to a large number of comprehensible materials. Students with differing comprehension needs can be met through different EL activities like listening only, reading while listening, listening and viewing, and listening while viewing and reading. Very easy texts based on narrow topics ensure comprehension of vocabulary and grammar when they repeatedly listen to words and the forms of words.” (*Ivone & Renandya*)
- “But listening, when combined with reading a transcript or subtitles in English is when some of the most effective learning takes place.” (*Budge*)
- “Captions and subtitles enhance listening comprehension and vocabulary development. It is especially helpful if subtitles can be turned on or off. This lets learners view and **understand** without any assistance.” (*Godwin-Jones*)
- “When you’re searching for listening and reading resources, these criteria were defined for ideal input:
 - Comprehensible within the range of understanding
 - Authentically related to real life
 - Interactive either face-to-face or online
 - Abundant with lots of recurrences
 - Rich in situational variety” (*Su*)

Learning Strategy #2: Emphasize SENTENCES, not just vocabulary (Challenges 3–5).

- “The human brain learns grammar through pattern recognition.” (*Julian*)
- “Languages are acquired in prefabricated chunks – words, collocations, and expressions that we hear repeatedly. This is why kids go from babbling to speaking – to the amazement of their parents – seemingly overnight.” (*Nagel*)
- In the 10,000 sentences method of language learning, you assimilate enough sentence patterns and vocabulary to be able to produce new, original content. However, in the initial enthusiasm for 10,000 sentences ... (people) paid less attention to reading and listening.” (*Khatzumoto*)
- “Sentence mining is the act of learning a new language by understanding sentences instead of isolated words.” (*Funes*) They highlight that this approach lets you acquire vocabulary in a real-life context. They also note that while this method may be hard for

beginners, progress happens faster. But in this way, grammar is incorporated as you acquire the language.

- A graduate from the Foreign Language Center at the Defense Language Institute, where over 3,500 US military personnel intensively studying foreign languages noted that their approach emphasizes “learning whole sentences, you can learn grammar better by learning the whole then breaking it down.” (*Richards*)
- If you **really** want sentences to stick in your head, say the sentences and get used to listening to the audio whenever you can. (*Hooshmand*)

Learning Strategy #3: Practice comprehensible listening and sentences by yourself, then with another person. (Challenges 1-5)

- “When the same words are used repeatedly, it creates the opportunity to learn other, unfamiliar words.” (*Chang*)
- “Learners benefit from social interaction which includes input, negotiation, output, feedback, and attention. The usual language routines are overcome through learner attention when something needs to be clarified, there’s negative feedback, correction, structural form, or explicit instructions.” (*Ellis*)

In one’s excitement to acquire a language, one usually doesn’t take the time to think about how to learn. Learning happens so naturally and easily that it’s rare to be conscientious and intentional. Perhaps the research related to the learning challenges has raised your curiosity about the way you’re investing your time and effort.

In the next chapter, we explore the concept of smart practice and why it’s critical to your motivation and your investment of time and effort.



Chapter 4:

6 Principles of Smart Practice

Learning (and acquiring) a language is an undeniably personal affair, and, as such, we **ourselves** are the primary monitors and motivators of our progress. **Smart** practice is when you're making progress with the time you spend.

People may stop learning (and acquiring a language) because they aren't making enough progress. **Smart** practice is designed to work against that.

It is perhaps easier to understand smart practice by describing what it is not. It is not translating sentences repeatedly to and from your native language. It is not drilling grammar exercises beyond your ability level. It is not consulting a dictionary at the expense of considering the context.

To those who have studied a foreign language in a traditional classroom, drills are probably familiar. It is only natural when starting a language to default to these practices. But as you realize the limitations of inefficiencies and ineffectiveness to think like a native, you can resort to "hacking stuff together."

It is possible to achieve a high proficiency level by "hacking stuff together"; it just takes a long time. You have the risk of getting tired of it and giving up. Smart practice, on the other hand, is designed to make time work for you rather than against you. It is based on the following principles:

1. **Seek words in context.** Even if you memorize vocabulary lists, you'll still need to see words in context eventually if you want to use them correctly. Reducing or eliminating translation and memorization steps saves time.

2. **Activate your interests.** The more language you know, the easier it is to acquire even more. Leave the less interesting aspects for later, when you can leverage your higher language level and acquire them quicker (saving time).
3. **Practice active listening.** Listening is input, but it doesn't have to be passive. You'll get more out of listening hours if you engage with what you're listening to, which is easier to do if you're interested in or connected with the material.
4. **Limit and fix mistakes.** Mistakes are inevitable, but they should be a source of amusement rather than frustration. Make sure you're getting authentic, quality input, and you'll save time you would have spent fixing those mistakes.
5. **Reduce your anxiety.** There should be little to no anxiety for language acquisition to optimally proceed. (*Krashen*) As much as possible, reduce or remove those anxiety-producing factors.
6. **Monitor your progress in smaller moments.** No matter what your goal or aspiration is, language acquisition is a quest. Noticing smaller moments of improvement for smaller amounts of effort increases learning efficiency. It's important to develop the endurance to sustain yourself over a longer period.

If you adapt the 6 principles listed above, you'll find your frequent and sustained progress rewarding. Time is the purest form of currency. When you spend time on something, you are telling your brain, "this is important."

One last thing about practicing smartly. Startup founder and motivational speaker *Jason Shen* touches on research supporting this in his article *Why Practice **Actually** Makes Perfect*:

*In summary, in addition to the gray **matter** we're familiar with, a significant portion of the brain is composed of so-called "white matter." The key feature of white matter is that we can promote its growth through our **own** practice. Adults' brains are not as "set in stone" as once believed.*

The converse is also true, though. Shen writes:

"If we practice poorly and do not correct our mistakes, we will myelinate those axons, increasing the speed and strength of those signals – which does us no good." (Shen)

In this case, myelinating axons means creating new neural pathways, akin to water carving a path through **earth**; the more water that flows over a given portion, the more likely the water is going to continue flowing there. And there is no need to wait; practice smart from the start.

The earlier you train yourself to be mindful of your time and practice smartly, the more time you have to reap the rewards. It's important to keep this in mind by routinely asking yourself:

Are you being mindful of your time to practice smartly?

Bringing mindfulness to language acquisition is one of the best things you can do for yourself (if you are unfamiliar with mindfulness as a concept, you can consult the bibliography for additional resources we recommend).

Practicing smartly is the single most important thing you can do, no matter how you choose to acquire (and learn) a language.

Now that you see how language acquisition, comprehensible input, and learning challenges are all related to smart practice, there are just two more chapters.

The next chapter is about how we designed Latudio. Then, the last chapter will give you some extra research and tips from psychology and brain science to fine-tune your smart practice.

The graphic features a light gray background with several teal-colored geometric shapes, including triangles and rectangles. A yellow rectangular box contains the text 'Chapter 5:'. Below this, the title 'The Learning Design of Latudio' is written in a large, bold, dark blue font. There are also some teal lines and small triangles scattered around the text.

Chapter 5:

The Learning Design of Latudio

Given everything that you've read in this e-book, you might think it would be unlikely or impossible for one app to address so many challenges. But, as you'll hopefully see, we've **really** thoroughly considered a lot to offer you a simple, easy design.

Language acquisition and comprehensible input are at the heart of the design. Emphasis is given to tap-and-translate, making content comprehensible as you listen or read.

Comprehensible input is a very gradual process that takes consistency, perseverance, effort, and patience.

Motivation and efficiency benefit when you repeat content successively until you understand it without tapping.

Now, let's revisit those challenges and strategies so you can see why **Latudio** is an all-in-one app. Don't let the information below overwhelm you — it's **really** a very simple and enjoyable design.

For **more comprehensible listening** to address the challenges of not speaking well (#1), overcoming listening difficulties (#2), and immersion (#3), Latudio lets you:

- Practice listening as much as you want, more affordably, rather than being constrained on how much time you have or the challenges of scheduling with another person.
- Study words for audio texts before you listen so that listening is more comprehensible.
- Listen to many native amateur voices, just like the people you might meet on the street. Pause and repeat functions let you easily listen to it again.

- Review words you tapped on, unlike trying to learn through immersion in public where it's hard to write down what you want to review.
- Get lots of comprehensible listening exposure at your convenience. Invest at least an hour a day for 2–3 months, and you'll be surprised how easier it gets to finally hear words and understand more and more.

For **emphasizing sentences, not just vocabulary** related to the challenges of immersion (#3), contextualizing vocabulary (#4), and getting more repeated exposures (#5), *Latudio* lets you:

- Comprehend words in context in whole sentences.
- Practice recording a sentence and hearing the reply from a native speaker. Using conversational texts gets you away from translating and helps speak more naturally like a native.
- Interactively repeat the same sentence **through** listening, rearranging words, writing missing words, and recording the sentence.
- Review and repeat sentences for the words you didn't understand in your personalized sentence bank. Seeing more sentences for a word also reveals sentence patterns to acquire grammatical patterns inductively (instead of just using grammar rules to make sentences).
- Discover the many different contexts for the use of words. It is a big treasure because learning the words that cannot be used in the same way in another context is not easy. With this feature at your fingertips, you can accelerate your understanding of vocabulary usage.

For **practicing comprehensible listening and sentences with another person** for all the challenges previously mentioned (#1—#5), *Latudio* lets:

- Your teacher or conversation partner use the app to look up a word you didn't understand and have sentences immediately available to help you
- Share pages of content or sentences with a teacher or conversation partner to practice in **real time**. It is a new feature in development as of May 2022

Based on all of the above, let's also review how exactly *Latudio* addresses the principles of smart practice.

1. **Seek words in context** through tap-to-translate words in sentences you hear or read and by studying sentences in different contexts for the same words.
2. **Activate your interests** with a foundational listening comprehension content library and your personalized sentence dictionary to explore more topics on your own.

3. **Practice active listening** for as long as you want and as often as you want to be more focused and get more for the time spent.
4. **Limit and fix mistakes** by getting authentic content that is more colloquial, so you don't try to speak like book texts.
5. **Reduce your anxiety** by practicing in private and naturally finding the confidence to take safer risks when you're ready.
6. **Monitor your progress in smaller moments** by reviewing and repeating to realize small gains, no matter how small.

We hope you see how much we've **really** tried to design something meaningful and useful for your language progress. Acquiring a language takes time, but when you discover ways to improve your progress and overcome challenges, time passes quickly — it becomes enjoyable.

In the next chapter, we review some essential tips regarding psychology and neuroscience to acquire a language.



Chapter 6:

3 Tips to Manage Your Brain

Practicing smartly is about improvement, endurance, resilience, and persistence. You'll need to be your **own** coach, cheerleader, and teammate to guide yourself, encourage yourself, and cheer yourself on.

But do you sometimes lack the motivation to continue? Feel tired and overwhelmed with so many new words and sentences? Do you have memory challenges?

If so, this will also be an important chapter for you. You've explored the nuts and bolts of language acquisition, challenges, strategies, and smart practice. Now, let's explore 3 tips about the nuts and bolts of your brain.

Tip #1: Be Prepared for Fatigue

Do you sometimes feel tired or overwhelmed? There are many types of fatigue in our modern world, but did you know that language fatigue is one of them?

Language fatigue occurs when, trying to use a second language constantly, you become physically and psychologically drained by speaking, listening, and finding meaning in, until now, a little-used 'new' language. (Brack)

There is no shortage of language learners on online platforms such as Reddit discussing the tiredness and exhaustion that comes with learning a new language. We're practicing smart here, so rather than just accept this exhaustion, we want to know the specific processes behind it. This allows us to practice self-assessment and chart our **own** path.

One cause of exhaustion is trying advanced materials too soon (*Kuźnicka*). Too much unfamiliar content can be overwhelming because it makes us feel like our language level is low or that we're not making progress. Some have found this to be personally true when watching a movie with a lot of slang, translating an article outside one's areas of expertise, or even just spending a long time at a family gathering where only their native language is spoken.

Neuroscience has demonstrated that when the brain is tired from mental or physical exertion, a chemical messenger in the brain called serotonin is activated (Forsythe and Carson). Those of us already familiar with serotonin probably know it as one of the "happy" hormones, the other ones being dopamine, endorphins, and oxytocin. Of these, serotonin is primarily responsible for stabilizing our mood, whereas dopamine gives us the "high" of success.

But there's another chemical collaborator in the brain called adenosine. With that mental or physical exertion, the adenosine level goes up, blocking the release of dopamine. Dopamine plays a big role in motivation and reward. If you've ever worked hard to reach a goal, the satisfaction you feel when you achieve it is partly due to a rush of dopamine. (Vandegriendt)

To avoid exhaustion, this means you need to frequently build small breaks into your language learning schedule.

There's a good argument for building breaks into your active learning, probably more frequently than you think. Given that the human mind can only pay attention for about 15 minutes before fatigue sets in, it becomes essential to find ways to take breaks, let your brain relax, then get back into focusing fully so that you **are able to** continue learning. The brain will continue its learning even during these short breaks but will avoid exhaustion or boredom. (Merit Club)

Rather than just push through the fatigue, one can also expose oneself gradually to small amounts of mental fatigue **with the goal of training** the brain. The brain will adapt, making it more efficient (*Hutchinson*). The comprehensible input hypothesis recommends content with a difficulty of "i+1", where "i" is your current level and "+1" is slightly harder than that. (*Tardos*).

Practicing smartly means recognizing when it's time to stop practicing. Learning a language is not a sprint. It is not intense weightlifting. It's a very long journey. Feed your brain with rewards and acknowledgments, and you'll be rewarded with sustainable, smart practice.

Additional Resources (Youtube Videos)

[Overcoming Procrastination & Burnout In Language Learning](#)

[How NOT to get tired when speaking a foreign language](#)

Tip #2: Help your Working Memory Help You

If you advance through the stages of language learning, you'll quickly hit a point where you cannot retain all of the grammar you know in your active memory. Even if you have a prodigious memory, it probably can't work fast enough to recall all the rules you need for all the sentences you want to construct.

Research shows that people have different abilities for conscious learning, like knowing grammar rules and vocabulary for concrete objects (*Stoltz*). But there is little variance among people **in regard to** the ability to absorb comprehensible input. The only difference is that those with greater working memory may be able to produce output more quickly.

What is working memory? Working memory could be described as a "sticky note in the brain," i.e., temporary. When people have trouble with working memory, the brain may store information in a jumbled way. Or it may not store it for the long term at all. (*Rosen*)

ADDitude, a website, provides some situations that may act as cues to knowing about your working memory (*Bailey*). (Warning: though these situations are sensitive to those with working memory deficits due to learning disability or attention disorder, we share this because they may to some extent be familiar for language learning.)

LANGUAGE-RELATED

- You want to join in a conversation, but by the time the other person stops talking, you forget what you wanted to say.
- You have trouble following a conversation because you forget what the other person has just said.
- You have to reread a paragraph several times to retain the information.

NON LANGUAGE-RELATED

- You consistently lose your keys, cell phone, or wallet.
- You get lost easily, even when you were just given directions.
- You have many unfinished projects because you become distracted and forget about the first project.
- You plan to do some work at home, but you forget to bring the needed items with you.
- You miss deadlines at work because of your disorganization and inability to follow through on projects.

Bailey's article and others also offer tips to improve working memory that I've modified for language acquisition (*Morin*). Try one or two ways and see if it makes a difference for you.

Study in small, bite-sized pieces. Focus on a handful of words in small sets of sentences. Watching an entire YouTube video or reading many pages may be useful to build

familiarity with structures and grammar, but to hold it in working memory is immensely difficult without breaking it into small chunks.

Make a checklist of your study routine(s). Dedicate the time to study and practice at the same time every day. It helps you focus and keeps it a priority, ensuring that you're not distracted (checking your phone, watching a clip, or other addictive behaviors).

Create your own working memory practice drills. Write down a small number of sentences that you didn't understand. Try to remember a few of the phrases, then add a few more each time, always trying to remember all the other ones, too. It's a drill to build up your working memory, so don't get discouraged if you don't always remember all of them every time.

Experiment with creative ways to remember information. Use phrases or sentences, create a poem, draw a picture for it as you're rehearsing it, or imagine you're in a play and you're acting it out.

Partner with someone more advanced than you. For conversation exchanges, find a learner who is more advanced than you. Both of you should bring phrases and sentences that you'd like to work on. Exchange your lists with each other to use the phrases and sentences in repetitive ways. Don't focus too much on speaking, but more on comprehension and understanding by asking what you didn't understand.

Actively reading out loud. Rewrite phrases or sentences and take notes, followed by immediately talking out loud with questions or repetitions of the phrases or sentences with words replaced.

Use multiple senses whenever possible. For the same phrase or sentence, write it down, say it, draw a picture of it, listen to it or say it again, or act it out in a task. Using multiple senses is providing your brain with multiple ways to encode the information to keep it in working memory.

Additional References (YouTube videos):

[What Everyone Should Know about Second Language Acquisition](#)

Tip #3: Reward Yourself Often

Here's the challenge: what happens when you're struggling? Or you don't feel like you're achieving your goal? So the question is: how do you stay motivated when acquiring a language?

It's important to feel that your efforts to acquire a language are getting somewhere. Especially at first, or even for a while, it can feel like you're not making any progress. And for many, the discouragement or unmet expectation results in lost interest or, worse yet, just quitting.

There's a popular YouTube video titled "[How I Tricked My Brain to Like Doing Hard Things](#)" that explains how social media and other technologies have affected our brains. We've gotten wired to the stimulating pleasure of watching videos, playing video games, replying to comments and emails, and just scrolling through menus, pages, and images.

The video explains how dopamine is released in the brain every time something pleasurable is experienced. Compared to all of those rewarding pleasures, when it's something more difficult that's not rewarding, the dopamine isn't released. This is what makes hard things more difficult. The trick is to break down difficult tasks into more manageable pieces. The following techniques can help when a language task is too difficult:

1. Give yourself some credit for the time and effort you spend. Our lives can get **really** busy. Even 15 minutes a day helps.
2. Give yourself credit for the little wins! Remember your long-term goals, but don't think about them all the time. Did you surprise yourself when you understood something? Give yourself credit (and a pat on the back).
3. Notice the words and phrases that you hear and understand easily. Don't focus too much on what you didn't understand. That will come. But make sure you have comprehensible listening practice to make progress.
4. If you struggle with speaking, listen and read more, especially listen! This is counter-intuitive, but many polyglots and linguists concur with it.

Activities like these are not about vocabulary lists and **fill in the blank** exercises. It's more personal. But rewards like this will make your practice smarter. Because you'll keep putting in the time and effort when your perseverance is rewarded.

Let's look at some examples of what's rewarding in the effort to acquire a language:

1. When you have a teacher, you might perceive the reward of doing well. So, you make the effort and study a lot.
2. If a teacher's recognition or grades aren't so important, find another source for your reward. Maybe it's how other students see you.
3. If you're studying on your own with an app, there's no shortage of those little bells and whistles rewarding you for your efforts and progress.

In spite of these types of rewards, the real reward is when you use the language in real life. But if it doesn't go well and you don't know how to improve, motivation goes down because the reward doesn't seem attainable. So, what do you do?

We usually don't hear about all the failures, attempts, and persistence that many have gone through. And **there are all those polyglots who make** it seem so easy. Where are the stories about people who struggled with a new language and still made it?

Let me introduce you to Benny Lewis. Benny struggled to learn Spanish. At one point, he felt destined to only speak English for the rest of his life. Seven years later, he now speaks many languages and claims to run the world's largest learning blog called Fluentin3months.com. Benny's writing speaks directly to discovering what's rewarding in the process:

*"One of the biggest issues with a traditional approach to language learning is that the benefits of picking up a new language are constantly postponed. Study this and study that, and then, if you're lucky, in a few **years' time**, you'll eventually understand the language. As well as being far from the truth, this approach removes the fun and the life from the process (Lewis).*

How can you make your language acquisition process rewarding? What will give you the kind of rewards that you get through social media? **Smart** practice is when you are rewarded for your effort. Reward yourself. Be your biggest fan and cheerleader.

To conclude, perhaps at this point, you could try a few of the ideas presented. Sometimes, it's not until we stop and reflect that we don't realize that we have had moments feeling unmotivated, overwhelmed, fatigued, and sluggish. You'd probably be surprised how many, even polyglots, have had moments like these.

Here's a gentle reminder!

The best thing you can do for yourself is to recognize how you're feeling along the way and act accordingly. Think of your mind as an internal gyroscope that can shift your orientation or change your pace. Orientation here refers to the type of language material, maybe to stop a movie or text because it's too hard to understand, or perhaps to reward yourself after a longer than usual period of trying to think like a native. Pace refers to the frequency and duration of the time you spend, which includes breaks, pauses, and even practice vacations. Get into a rhythm, then switch it up. Spend more time, sometimes, or do short bursts of effort frequently. Trust yourself to figure out what really works.

Cultivating your endurance, resilience, and persistence are essential to practicing smartly. You can't separate it from the techniques you use. But just giving your attention to how you're feeling to activate your internal gyroscope could be the discovery that gives you more encouragement, self-motivation, and confidence. That's worth a speck of your curiosity to practice smartly.

Afterword

As a cofounder of *Latudio*, I purposefully wanted to write something for you that was not just based on my personal experiences. I've tried to weave in research and experiences from others.

I don't consider myself gifted in languages. I'm a native English speaker who has been living in the Czech Republic and trying to acquire the Czech language. By the time I feel like I'm finally able to use Czech well, I'll probably start suffering from memory loss!

Trying to acquire Czech was not an easy transition. I couldn't understand Czech theater. I couldn't volunteer in a Czech hospice. I didn't have the confidence to share my business experience. More importantly, I couldn't understand what Czechs were saying socially at home, at a restaurant, cafe, or bar.

I was an invisible observer, someone who wasn't directly participating.

But being an observer proved to be incredibly valuable. As an English conversation teacher, I was sensitive to my students. I observed their blank stares of not understanding what I said. It was a familiar feeling that motivated me to try to let each student have some hope and encouragement with what they could say and understand.

Years before I started to acquire Czech, I began a meditation practice called zazen associated with Zen Buddhism. Through zazen, I learned to be tuned in to my thoughts and feelings all the time, whenever possible. Meditation has had a profound influence on me.

I don't know when, or maybe it's always been who I am, I have always felt an undercurrent of wanting to support others. That, in the context of trying to acquire a new language, has resulted in *Latudio*. It was a very natural, unforced, and unexpected expression to create something of benefit to others.

And guess what? In November 2021, after the Czech version launched, I immediately started using *Latudio* for at least an hour a day. I would have liked to have done more, but I was quite busy with the company. After about two months, I noticed I could understand others more. And with that increased understanding, I felt, and still feel, better than I ever have about acquiring Czech.

Isn't how you feel about yourself the most important thing after all? You are your best inspiration! I hope that Latudio becomes a part of your story. Let me know so we can get smarter — so you can continue to practice smartly!

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