

Successful language learners

Some people, it seems, are just good at languages. They manage to become fluent in a foreign language within just a few years, while others study it for far longer yet still **struggle** with the basics. The question on many people's lips is whether **mastery** of a foreign language is **reliant** on a learner's natural ability of language learning, or whether success can be achieved by other means.

Research has shown that successful language learners do indeed have certain practices in common. In some cases, these involve **undertaking** everyday activities in the target language, such as reading for pleasure or watching TV and movies. This develops receptive skills in a way that is familiar and relaxing. By choosing to, for instance, watch an English horror movie or read a French detective novel, the language learning experience becomes more personal and relevant to daily life. Furthermore, many successful learners know not to **get bogged down** in looking up every new word, as this would make it a less natural and enjoyable process.

Similarly, taking advantage of everyday opportunities to use a foreign language is important for developing the productive skills of speaking and writing. Successful language learners actively seek opportunities to talk in the target language – they start conversations and they ask questions. These conversations don't even need to be with a native speaker, for it can be just as useful holding a conversation with another learner. In fact, some learners feel less worried about making mistakes in front of a fellow learner, which leads to a more **fluid** – if less grammatically accurate – conversation. Meanwhile, making notes or lists in a foreign language is a simple way to improve one's writing skills and broaden one's vocabulary set.

It is important to remember that we learn languages in order to communicate. Understanding the rules and structures behind a language is extremely useful – some would say essential – but, ultimately, the aim is to be able to express ourselves as fluently as possible. So, give some of these practices a go and see if they work for you!

1 Look at the key words in bold in the text and match them to the definitions.

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|-------|
| a | continuing without pauses | _____ |
| b | to do something | _____ |
| c | great skill | _____ |
| d | to try hard to do something | _____ |

e to become overly involved in something _____

f depending on something _____

2 Talk to a partner and answer the questions.

a Which of the practices mentioned in the text do you already do? Do you find them useful?

b What other language learning practices can you think of?