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Centro Multilingue Bolzano
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Autonomous language learning

AUTONOME PROVINZ
BOZEN - SÜDTIROL
Abteilung Italienische Kultur



PROVINCIA AUTONOMA
DI BOLZANO - ALTO ADIGE
Ripartizione Cultura italiana

The Bilingualism and Foreign Languages Office of the Italian Culture Department coordinates the Bolzano Multilingual Centre and the Merano Multimedia Language Centre. Both aim to disseminate language skills, offering specific language resources and services designed to help learners plan their own learning trajectories autonomously.

The purpose of this leaflet is to examine certain aspects of the autonomous language learning process and supply suggestions and strategies to help learners make the best use of the resources offered by the two structures.

Learning languages autonomously

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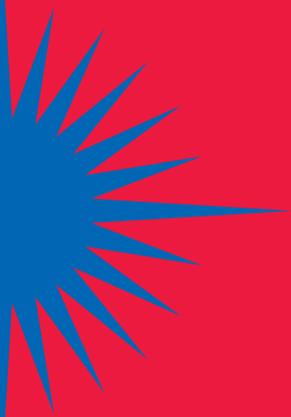
Two autonomous language learning centres. The Bolzano Multilingual Centre and the Merano Multimedia Language Centre

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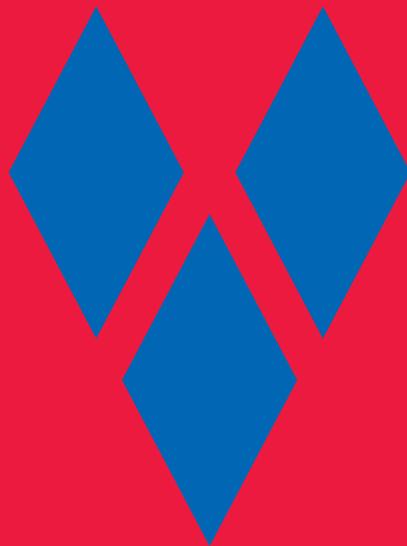
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Learning lang
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What is it?

“Autonomous learning is in some way inborn in human beings. Right from the first days of our lives, each one of us actively participates in learning processes, related both to languages and other skills. We are to some extent autonomous in this, since we turn to the subjects and activities which interest us, and to some extent dependent on our social interaction with those who know more than we do, from whom and with whom we learn. All autonomous learning is also social learning. It impacts on our identity and enables us to grow and evolve”.

Maria Giovanna Tassinari,
Director of the Centre for Independent Language Learning –
Freie Universität Berlin

Whilst during our compulsory education and in our working lives we are frequently used to following the instructions of teachers, parents, and employers, in autonomous study the whole learning process, including planning, following through and assessment is done by the learners themselves. It is the learners who set goals, choose contents, processes, time frames, settings, materials and learning styles freely, so identifying alternative, non-traditional trajectories.

Try autonomous learning because...

It gives us a sense of **responsibility** for both the decisions we make and the results we obtain, thereby reinforcing our feelings of personal gratification.

It gives us wide-ranging **freedom in time management** and the commitment required for study. In this way not only does it help us to perfect our language skills, but it also contributes to improving our **personal organisation and self-assessment abilities**, all of which are useful to us in all stages of our private, professional, and school lives.

It in no way conflicts with choosing a language course, in which the learning process is 'planned', but rather supplements it and this is even more the case if the course focuses on specific language skills such as grammar or conversation.

It is suitable for all age groups and **it's never too late to start!**

The importance of planning and how to put it into practice

Motivation, planning, and self-assessment are key to successful autonomous learning. In fact...

Thinking about **why** you want to learn a language is essential, as this enables you to define your **objectives** and **priorities** more concretely (work? a language certificate? travel abroad?).

Your **choice of tools** must naturally respond to the goals you have set yourself, but also be pleasant and stimulating. A **diversified** and **creative** use of resources keeps you motivated. Remember that **you learn everywhere** - in the street, at the supermarket, watching a film, chatting. It is important that your places of study are well-suited to the resources chosen (a few tips are provided from page 21 onwards)

Planning also means thinking about **how long** your learning process will take and **how often** you can study, taking account of the times of day best suited to your needs. However, it is essential to set **realistic goals!**

Awareness of your **knowledge level** (which may differ for each language skill) but also understanding your own learning style are key to more effective study.

A **learning diary** in which to note down what you've learnt, the progress you've made but also how you felt, acts as a learning leitmotif and gives you a clearer vision of the path taken.

Successful autonomous language learning is primarily a matter of **constancy**, the ability to **self-assess**, not being afraid of tackling difficulties and making mistakes but rather attempting to learn from these without being discouraged.

Diversifying an autonomous learning trajectory

Modern technologies allow for a new, more direct and diversified, **approach to foreign language learning** in which we ourselves seek out material and people to learn a language with. Learning autonomously certainly does not mean simply learning on your own. Quite the opposite. It can be a way of incorporating various learning methods - social, formal, informal - thanks to interaction with other learners, teachers, language consultants and native speakers.

To find out more

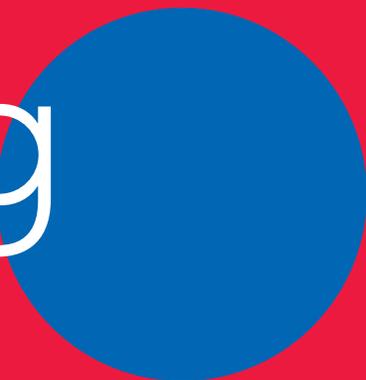
www.provincia.bz.it/autonomous-language-learning
www.youtube.com/user/CentroMultilingue/videos
www.provincia.bz.it/languages/bibliographies



Two autonomous language learning centres

The Bolzano Multilingual
and the Merano Multilingual
Language Centre

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These two unique autonomous learning and language teaching centres have a large collection of both paper and multi-media resources in over 20 languages, suitable for all age groups and knowledge levels.

Resources can be borrowed free of charge and also consulted on-site in rooms equipped with PCs for access to selected online resources.

What makes these structures unique is precisely this focus on new technologies, which contributes to making the autonomous language learning process more stimulating and to increasing motivation. To this end, staff constantly seek new and original resources and contents, while tutors provide study support.

What can you find here?

The material is divided up into
different areas:

“Language islands” comprising resources divided by type and level: language courses, grammar exercises and activities for the different skills, specialist language texts in the various professional contexts but also facilitated reading, comics, magazines, and fiction.

The **kids’ corner** is specially designed for children, containing books, cartoons, audiobooks and songs, while the **home video** section offers films in the original language.

The islands also have constantly updated **material for language certification exam preparation**.

There is a **specialist literature** section focusing on plurilingualism, autonomous and early language learning.

Online resources

A portal focusing entirely on languages supplements the material already present in the two language centres with innovative contents:

A large **sitography** with online resources divided up by language and content, ranging from grammar exercises to sites for children, podcasts and language apps.

A **five-language course access platform** on various levels which can be consulted at the centres. Access to a course of your choice is also possible from home.

Sheets containing original **suggestions** on how to use the various resources, preparing an exam and improving certain skills, make the learning experience more creative and stimulating.

A **Youtube channel** which brings together a great many language learning videos.

Media Library online gives users registered with one of the system's libraries access to newspapers and magazines in over 50 languages.

New acquisition lists, updated once a month, are also available online as are **themed bibliographies** on specific subjects, including specialist language for professional use, art and language, early plurilingualism, autonomous learning etc.

Personalised consultancy

Both centres offer a range of consultancy services, some by appointment.

Reference staff are qualified individuals who help learners identify the material best suited to their tastes, needs and language goals and supply information on the services and initiatives provided by the two centres.

Language tutoring consists in individual, free-of-charge sessions (booking is required) designed to help learners plan personalised study trajectories, taking account of their individual needs. Tutors also offer an overview of the possibilities and tools to use to practise the various language skills, including for the purposes of bilingualism or language certification exam preparation.

Information on studying abroad. Booking an individual session is a way of receiving information and advice helping you to identify the foreign study option best suited to your needs and organise it.

Other services

The services offered by the Multilingual Centre and the Multimedia Language Centre also include a **Conversation Club**, a chance to practise conversation in a foreign language in a pleasant, informal way with a native language speaker moderator tasked with encouraging discussion and ensuring the participation of those involved in a natural, spontaneous way.

The Merano Multimedia Language Centre also hosts a **Language Café**, a similar initiative, organised in conjunction with alpha beta, Urania Meran and KVW: each language is assigned a table and a moderator who manages the evening's conversation.

In conjunction with Centro Studi A. Palladio, a weekly date with **languages at the cinema** is organised: original language films are introduced by a moderator who launches a discussion in the same language as that of the film, after the screening.

Language volunteering, also organised by Centro Studi A. Palladio, offers learners an additional opportunity to practise their conversation skills in German in a spontaneous and relaxed way, with a native-speaker volunteer willing to give up ten hours of his/her time.

www.infovol.it

Lastly, events designed to familiarise the public not only with **languages** but also with **cultures** are held, bringing together people who share similar interests and cultural sensibilities.

Language certification



The Multilingual Language Centre is an exam centre for international French language certification (in conjunction with Alliance Française).

How to achieve
successful res



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The following sheets contain advice on specific subjects which can be very useful in an autonomous learning context, such as improving the various language skills, preparing for an exam, or using the various Multilingual Centre and Multimedia Language Centre resources in a creative way.

These are also available online at the following link:

www.provincia.bz.it/languages/tips

And remember that if you want to learn a language, constancy is the name of the game! 15-20 minutes per day is all it takes!

Advice on improving your writing skills in another language

Learning how to write a foreign language well can be more complicated than speaking it. Your grammar needs to be correct and the words you use appropriate to the concept you want to express.

Here are a few suggestions, strategies and techniques to improve your writing skills in another language.

Read a lot

The more you read, the more you increase your passive language knowledge, use your memory and analytical thinking skills and extend your vocabulary. It is useful to read texts of various types - newspapers, novels, essays, scientific articles - in order to help you absorb new words and expressions and new ways of building sentences.

Newspapers and magazines offer a chance to choose the themes closest to your personal tastes. The international press is present online in a range of formats: the great variety of subjects dealt with and available sources will help you to learn the various linguistic registers.

<https://biblioweb.medialibrary.it>

Online there are many sites to suit all personal interests.

There are **various sorts of books**, including simplified books, to make reading truly a pleasure.

It is useful and fun to also watch films and TV series in the language you're learning, with **subtitles**.

Extend your vocabulary by creating a personal dictionary

Try **not to translate** from your native language: to express concepts clearly you must try to think up your sentences directly in the language you're learning.

It is also important to consult **reference sources (dictionaries and grammar books)** whenever you have doubts on spelling, grammar rules or syntax. In particular monolingual dictionaries are a great help in getting you thinking in a foreign language, finding synonyms, and improving your understanding of words in context. Using audio texts for dictation can also provide good spelling practice.

Request clarification from native speakers: if you don't know any native speakers there are language exchange communities where you can find people available to correct what you write and give you an opinion on the aspects in need of improvement.

While you're reading it is very useful to **note down particularly effective or unusual words and expressions** that you want to re-use.

You can assimilate **ten or so new words a day**, although you'll need to go over those you've already learnt every day.

Gather **examples of texts for various situations:** emails, info requests, complaints, etc.

And then...

practice all the time

Initially, it's best to use **simple, brief sentences** where the grammatical and syntactical accuracy is easier to check.

It is useful to prepare a **plan as a basis for the composition of your text**.

Making a **written summary** of a text you have read or listened to is a very useful exercise. It could be a book, a film, a newspaper article or even an account of your day (a personal diary, for example).

To practice a **range of styles** (formal, informal, etc.) try writing out the same contents in different ways.

Rereading what you have written after a while enables you to identify errors and improve your style.

Make a list of your most frequent errors to avoid repeating them.

Use every available opportunity to practice your writing: online chat helps you to practice a rapid, concise style, keeping or taking part in a blog enables you to write about themes of interest to you.

If you intend to sit a **language certification** exam it is very useful to consult previous exam papers.

Lastly, you need plenty of **creativity!** Let yourself be inspired by a word you've just learnt, an episode you've read about, a memory, a scene which triggered a particular feeling in you, a person whose story you can imagine... Happy writing!

Advice on improving your conversation skills in another language

Below are a few simple suggestions to help you gradually learn to speak fluently in another language. After a first reading and listening-based approach to language learning, it is advisable to start speaking, practising with students or children or native speakers you are familiar with, in order to avoid too much embarrassment.

What follows is a series of goals to start working on.

Goal 1

Pronunciation and intonation

Listening is very important so that you assimilate the pronunciation and intonation of the new language (radio, TV, native speakers' conversation, audiobooks, songs, podcasts, etc.).

Practise speaking: for example by listening to audiobooks and repeating the phrases you hear. This will help you to identify the rhythms, intonation and sound of the language. You can also use simplified texts with audio CDs: read the text out loud and compare your pronunciation with that of the narrator.

Listen to your favourite songs in the language you're learning and **sing** along to it.

Don't only concentrate on individual words but also, and above all, on **phrases and sayings**.

Practice **tongue-twisters** and try to say them as quickly as possible.

Goal 2

Speak fluently

Practice every day with a **2 minute monologue** on any subject or describe your day, a picture, etc..

Formulate **simple phrases using common words**.

Describe objects and ideas using different words, without saying their name, using games like 'Taboo' in the language you're learning.

Think out loud and comment on what is happening or what you're doing even if you're alone (for example making breakfast, what's happening in the street, how you're feeling, etc.).

Take part in conversations with native speakers, such as Language Cafés, language exchange arrangements (Tandem), in everyday situations like shops, etc..

Goal 3

Vocabulary and syntax

Memorise everyday life phrases to use in various situations and for a range of communication purposes (e.g. at the doctor, at a restaurant, on the phone) as well as expressions to use to ask for clarification, information, or a favour, or for thanking, apologising, expressing opinions, etc..

Practising everyday language (at the baker's, with comics or films, by taking part in a theatre group in the language you're learning, etc.).

Collect words and phrases on themes you talk about often, such as family, work, free time **from a range of sources** (books, lists of useful words, manuals, tourist guides, road signs, banners, etc.).

Goal 4

Self-assessment

It is very useful to **speak and record yourself**, both alone and in a pair, and then play the recording back and self-assess: how is your pronunciation? Are you speaking fluently? Are you expressing yourself clearly and appropriately?

Analysing problems: after speaking/ conversing it is useful to identify the difficulties you encountered (vocabulary, grammar, etc.), and to discuss them with your language partner, noting down possible solutions in your 'learning diary'.

If you have to speak about a specific subject it is useful to **prepare a written text**. Take the time you need to express what you have to say in different ways, extending your vocabulary with the help of dictionaries and a competent speaker. Take special care over syntax!

Then **repeat out loud the text you've prepared**, without reading it.

If you are saying it to other people, try to understand and assess their **reactions**: do they frequently ask you to repeat or explain things?



Examiners assess overall language skills much more positively when pronunciation is good.

Advice on preparing for a language certification exam

A language certification is an internationally recognised document that certifies the holder's level of linguistic competence in a foreign language.

For some languages there are a variety of language certificates. When choosing your exam, remember to consider **how long your certificate will retain its validity** (some have a limited duration) and the **reason why you are taking it**: language certificates can be either general or specific to a professional sector (teaching, language of economics, etc.), or a prerequisite for a course of study or employment application. When applying to study at university, it is particularly important that you contact your chosen university well in advance in order to check which exam you need to take, and the level required for admission.

Advice on preparing for a language certification exam

Find out the location of your nearest exam centre and the dates of exam sessions well in advance. Some exams are held on fixed dates a few times a year, while for others the dates vary depending on the location.

Ask if you can **watch an oral test, sit a simulation exam** or attend an open day at the exam centre.

Once you have verified your starting level, set yourself a realistic goal and sit the exam when you feel ready. You can assess your level on your own by using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, doing an online test, or using the exam models available at the two centres. To pass an exam, remember to work on all four skills: **reading, listening, speaking, writing.**

Familiarise yourself with the structure of the exam. When preparing, it is advisable to use specific preparation material so that you can acquaint yourself with the structure and timing of the individual parts of the exam. This preparation will help you to be more relaxed and focused when your exam day comes.

Read newspaper and magazine articles in original language: authentic material is used in a good number of exams, particularly for reading comprehension tests. Reading also helps us to learn new words and use them in the right context.

Advice on preparing for a language certification exam

Listen to news, podcasts, interviews and train yourself to understand the different accents of a language.

Listening also improves your vocabulary and pronunciation.

Conversation:

the oral part of each exam always involves interaction with a native speaker. Therefore, it is important to overcome the fear of speaking and to gain fluency and confidence in the language. The best way to practice is to find someone to talk to, or to look for conversation events or **language exchange programmes** in your city. If this is not an option for you, you can also find numerous **online language platforms**. Alternatively, you can **record yourself** speaking while you summarise the plot of a book or film or describe a picture and analyse your performance with a critical ear when you listen back.

Write essays and letters or keep a diary. Keep in mind that in order to write an essay well, you need a good vocabulary and a thorough knowledge of **grammar rules and syntax**. Writing regularly helps you to improve your essay-drafting skills.

Read over what you have written at least twice, preferably with a break between each reading: when you return to your essay a second time with a 'fresh eye', it is easier to spot mistakes and **reorganise sentences**, so they flow more smoothly. Always learn new words together with the appropriate article, plural form and if necessary, the dependent preposition.

And most importantly of all...

Diversify, and have fun studying.

In addition to studying regularly, having fun while learning is one of the secrets to success. Be as creative as you can:

- If you are a sports fan, listen to sports commentaries in your target language.
- If you like music, try translating the words of the songs you love.
- If you have a hobby, look for topical web pages in your target language and so on...

Live and study abroad



Full immersion is the best way to improve your confidence. Whether it is a language study trip, volunteer experience or just a holiday, don't miss the chance to visit a place where people speak the language you're learning!

Using Internet
to learn a
language



The Internet provides great **freedom of choice**, offering a wide range of resources; however, it is advisable to identify the right strategy to make the most of these. The Internet, with its multimedia, interactive and interdisciplinary features, offers opportunities for combining study and leisure!

Here is some useful advice:

Alternate **grammar and vocabulary exercises** with time dedicated to “**edu-recreational**” activities such as:

listening to **audiobooks, audio-stories, audio-fairy tales**. Some sites allow you to **download free podcasts and mp3s**;

reading **newspapers and magazines online**; you may also find slowly read audio-newscasts, together with a transcript and glossary explaining recurring terms in the journalistic language used;

watching **films or news broadcasts**, choosing from the many **Web TVs** available on the network;

listening to the radio and songs: **songs** are useful for listening to pronunciation and rhythm. There are sites offering transcriptions of the lyrics and comprehension exercises. Try to transcribe the lyrics using the audio track as a dictation;

practicing by **trying out the recipe** for a typical dish from various culinary traditions by visiting the many cooking sites that offer video-recipes;

consulting **web pages featuring topics of personal interest** (e.g. sports, cinema, travel etc.)

Select and create your own **personal list of sites and apps** (many are free of charge) that best match your own needs and interests.

Try to understand your own personal learning style and why you want to learn the language. This will allow you to set yourself **realistic goals** and understand what is useful to study: you don't need to know everything!

Strive to **repeat phrases, words and expressions out loud**: this will improve your pronunciation and increase your confidence in the spoken language. The native **mother-tongue speakers** of TV broadcasts, films or clips on YouTube can serve as models to follow: pay particular attention to the gestures and to pronunciation as well as intonation.

Through the internet you will be able to connect with mother-tongue speaking people: **virtual language exchange partners** with whom to exchange **emails, chat via webcam or call on Skype**, as well as participate in discussions on topics of interest in virtual forums etc;

Almost all online courses offer **sample role play dialogues** for many of the typical situations one encounters in daily life, allowing you to learn useful expressions, (e.g. making a telephone call, asking for information at the post office or at the bank, etc.).

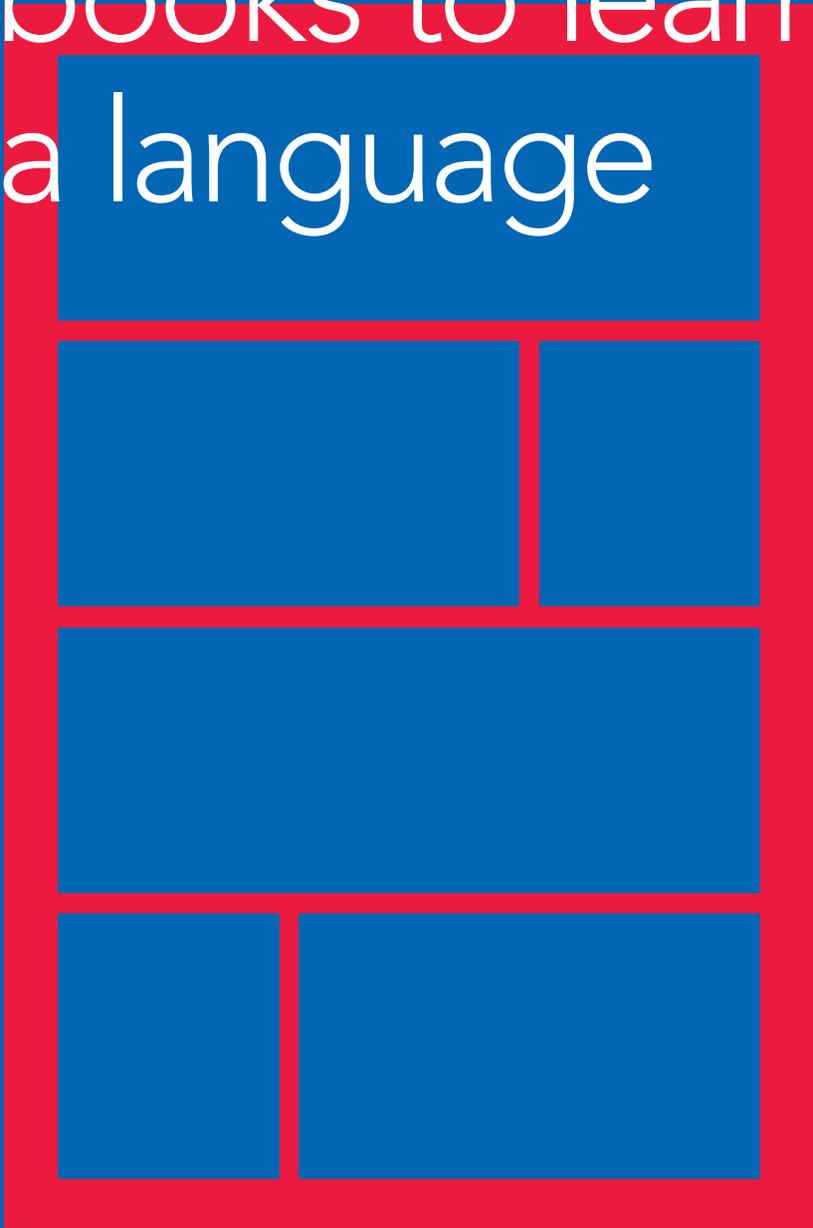
The Internet allows you to **repeat** the same exercise and reuse the same resource topics several times; in addition, it provides an opportunity for you to test your progress through on-line tests.

Our dedicated online resource page
www.provincia.bz.it/languages/online-resources
offers some useful suggestions for **learning through the internet**

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Using comic books to learn a language



To get started, it may be useful to choose a **comic you already know**.

At first concentrate on the **images and pictures**: what are your first impressions? What assumptions can you make on the content of the comic?

Read the comic once, without worrying about understanding everything. **Let yourself be transported** by the story and the images: they can help you get a general idea of the story.

Now try to **capture your first impressions** about the comic and what struck you most: the graphics, the characters, the story. Try to find keywords and then write them down.

Try covering up some of the cartoons and describe what happens **between one scene and the next**: this is a good exercise in oral expression!

Look carefully at the characters: each has a different personality, a different way of expressing themselves and unique gestures and expressions. In your own words, **try to describe the characters** (physical appearance, personality, role in the story) using adjectives, synonyms and opposites.

Now work on the **dialogues** between the characters: try to deduce the meaning of the words you don't know from the context, check them in a dictionary and make a note of new terms or words in a notebook, adding phrases and examples so you can remember them easily.

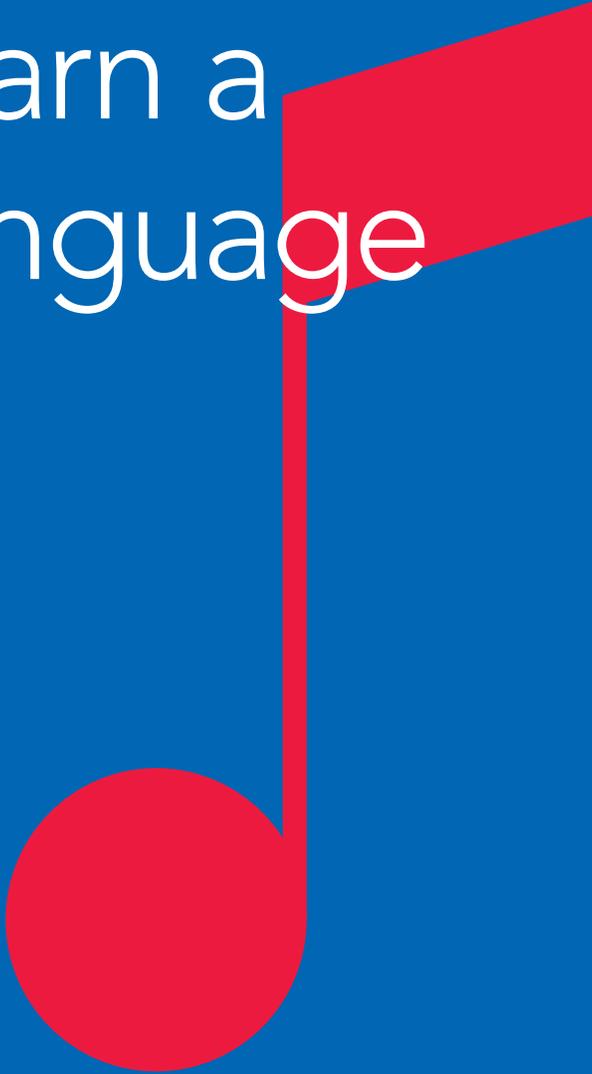
The language used in comics is that of everyday speech, made up of exclamations, broken sentences, onomatopoeia and so on. Its main characteristic is the use of **direct speech**. Try to transform the comic into a story by using **indirect speech** instead.

Try to attribute an **adjective** to the moods expressed by the characters in the comic by means of interjections such as 'ahh', 'grr', 'oh dear'...

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Using songs
and music to
learn a
language



Music is an excellent and effective tool for learning languages in a fun way.

Song lyrics are an inexhaustible source of words, phrases and expressions. Listening to music in a language other than our own makes it easier to learn the correct **pronunciation**.

To start with, choose songs you already know and like: the music you like listening to is very useful for memorising words due to **repeated listening**. Each song has repetitive words and refrains that are easily imprinted in the mind.

Write the song title on a sheet of paper before you listen to it. What could it be about? What words or expressions come to your mind in the foreign language?

Play and **listen to the song for the first time**. What emotions does the song convey? Take notes about this, if possible, in the language of the song.

Listen to the song a second time, paying attention to the rhythm of the sentences, the pronunciation, and the intonation of the words. What did you understand? Make a note of the subject of the song, any key words and phrases you understand. Does the song tell a story? What does it describe?

Listen to the song again and read the **lyrics** on the Internet. Reading what you hear enables you to give written form to sounds and understand the spelling. Is the text clearer to you now that you have read the words? Do your initial notes make sense?

Repeat or sing the words **aloud**. Recite the song as if it were a poem, trying to reproduce exactly the sounds and the rhythm you heard before. Record your voice while you do this exercise and then listen to it again and compare it with the original.

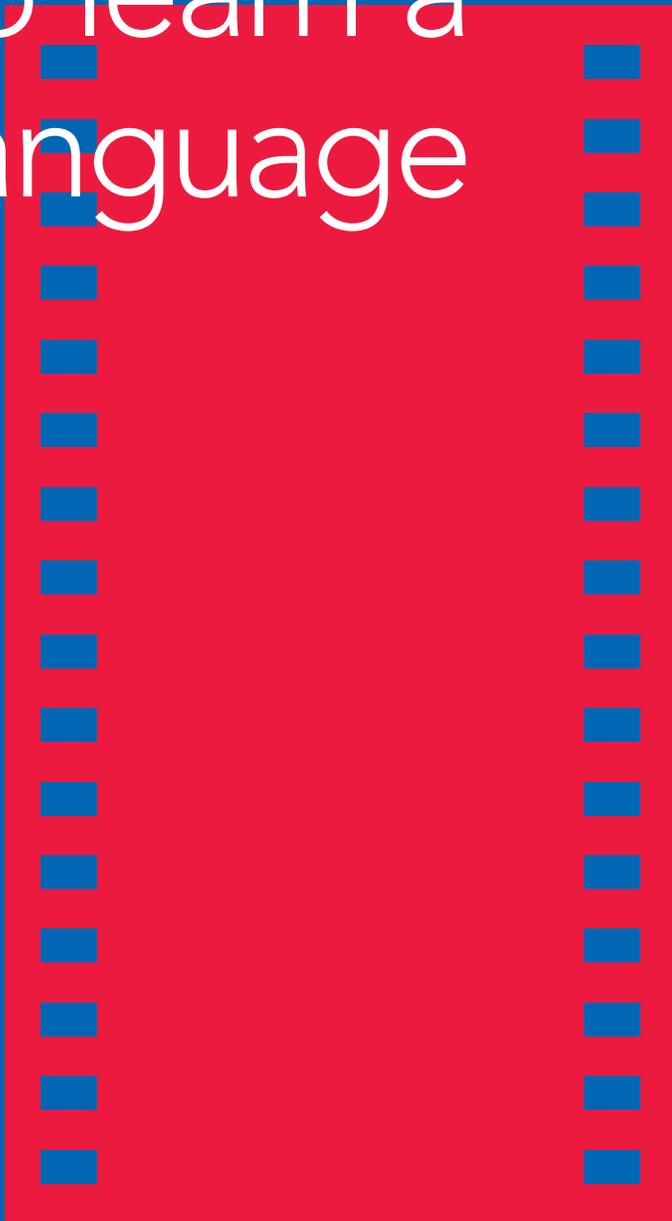
You can also search for subtitled video clips, or even use karaoke!

Look up the words you don't know in a dictionary. Make a note of them with their meaning and study their context. How and when are these words used? Search for derived or related words, synonyms and opposites.

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Using films to learn a language



It's hard to say which films are the easiest to understand... Choosing a **familiar film** and using subtitles in the language of the film can be a great help.

To **prepare** for watching a film, you can search for information about the plot, the director, etc. On the Internet you will find sites both in your own language and in the one you are learning.

Watch the film and don't worry if you don't understand everything. **Try to lose yourself** in the images and the story: the intonation, the facial mimicry and the gestures of the actors will be of great help in the general understanding of the story.

As you watch the film, write down the **words and expressions** that strike you or that you want to learn more about later. It can easily be paused to read or copy part of the subtitle.

To focus on the individual **phrases** and on the **pronunciation** of the words, we suggest you follow a scene with your eyes closed. Or watch a scene with the volume turned off and try to recite the dialogue between the characters. Then compare your version with the original!

If the film does not have subtitles, look for a section you like and try to **write the subtitles yourself**. This exercise is very useful for improving listening skills, understanding and producing written text.

Watching the film **with another person** can be an opportunity to exchange views, ask questions and help each other understand the content.

Another exercise could be **describing** a character or the setting of the film orally or in writing.

Films are a **window on the world**, able to show us distant people, places, cultures and traditions up close. They will bring you closer to authentic customs, colours, and sounds, to the everyday language used in the places they are set in and even to dialect expressions.

Languages at the Cinema:

this is a free initiative that presents films in original language with subtitles, introduced by an expert in languages and cinema. The language information for the films presented are available online: www.provincia.bz.it/languages/cinema

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Using audio-
books to learn
a language



The choice of audiobooks ranges from children's stories and literature to easy-to-follow audiobooks in CD format and online (podcasts). To get started, you can search for a **story you already know or an easy-to-follow audiobook**.

Listen to the story for the first time, without worrying about understanding each individual word; try to engage with the **rhythm** of the story: in many cases the intonation and the context help to understand what is being said.

Listening to it a second time will enable you to pick up more elements, enter the plot, **imagine** the characters and **visualise** the setting that forms the backdrop for the story.

Language is absorbed through two channels: the visual and auditory channels. The audiobook text can assist you in listening: **reading what you hear** allows you to give written form to sounds and to understand how a word is pronounced.

Now that you know the content of the story, try to read a passage aloud while listening to the audio. This is called **simultaneous reading**. Occasionally you may find the text runs ahead of you, but with practice you'll be able to keep up!

Pausing the CD allows you to make a note of **key words and expressions** and use them to recount the content of the audiobook out loud or to another person.

Another exercise is to stop the audio playback and try to complete it **in your own words**.

Listening to the audiobook with another person or in a group gives you the opportunity to discuss your understanding of the story, clarify any doubts, ask each other questions, if possible, in the language of the audiobook.

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If you've found this advice helpful and you're looking for materials to put it into practice with, reference staff and tutors can advise you.

Ask for a free appointment at the front office of the Multilingual Centre or Multimedia Language Centre !

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