

## Good Language Learners Must Be Good Language Teachers

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"But," you say, "I'm not a language teacher at all, much less a *good* language teacher. I'm in ... (chemistry, agriculture, accountancy, engineering, physics, etc.) Do I really have to be a good language teacher to be a good language learner?"

Yes.

Never mind your academic field. If you can read these words, you have been a language teacher. Who did you teach? You taught yourself!

Many students have the mistaken idea that their English teachers taught them English. They did not. Our formal language teachers presented language material to us, explained it, gave us opportunities to practice it, tested us, and graded us. They may have encouraged us, chided us, and prodded us. But they did not bring about our learning. What we learned we taught ourselves: We talked to ourselves; we drilled ourselves; we monitored ourselves; we corrected ourselves. That's how we learned.

Researchers have identified many characteristics of good language learners. But one of the most important features distinguishing a good language learner from a poor language learner is the amount of self-guided practice the learner does when alone. Good language learners practice by themselves and do it a lot. They are active, energetic self-teachers.

This activity of private self-tutoring is what we call **covert rehearsal**. It is the time we spend by ourselves each day talking to ourselves in the target language, participating in made-up conversations, listening closely to our articulations, critiquing the accuracy and fluency of our language use, examining our speech to see if it follows language rules we know and language examples we have heard. Our time spent in covert rehearsal is language-teaching and language-learning time. How much time do you spend in covert rehearsal? In terms of covert rehearsal, are you a good language learner?

Let us summarize some of the marks of a good language learner.

1. Good language learners take personal responsibility for their own language learning. They do not assume that their instructor determines their success or that learning "just happens." Instead, they take the position: "I'm in charge of my own progress. If language learning happens, it will happen because **I** make it happen."
2. Good language learners have a clear understanding of the three language learning/teaching roles: The facilitator, the teacher, and the learner. The facilitator is the person you have always called the teacher, but this person is really only a helper who supplies you with teaching materials, opportunities to speak, correction of errors, evaluation of progress, and encouragement. The learner, of course, is you. And, as we have pointed out, the **real** teacher is you, too.
3. Good language learners talk out loud to themselves. They give themselves something

to hear. Language that passes through the mind, out of the mouth, and into the air can be evaluated better. And the mouth can be adjusted to give more accurate results. Even if you are embarrassed at first to speak aloud when alone, you can overcome your discomfort or taboo with practice. You, as your own language teacher, will be much more effective if you are vocal than if you are silent.

4. Good language learners are always on the job, teaching themselves at every opportunity. When you are walking to and from classes, while you are doing your laundry, before you doze off at night, you should talk to yourself in English, judge the quality of what you say, make improvements, and practice your repairs. When you are your own teacher, every private moment is class-time.

So, are you a good language learner? If not, become a good language teacher! Use your private occasions for covert rehearsal in which you talk out loud to yourself and seriously critique the things you say. Remember: It's up to you and no one else.