

Tips for Learning the Language of Your Host Country *BEFORE* You Arrive

District 5020 has made a deliberate choice not to exchange with other English speaking countries. We strongly believe that learning another language is one of the most valuable benefits of living in another country for a year.

You have between six and eight months between country placement and departure to study the language of your host country. You have ample time to acquire functional fluency in the language of your host country. It would be blatantly disrespectful to arrive in country with no solid grasp of the language. It reflects poorly on you, your country and culture, and District 5020. Many of our exchange partners are expecting that after three or four months in country, exchange students will be able to speak, read and write with fluency and have demonstrated considerable effort to acquire the language. Lack of effort and proficiency is a reason to send you home.

Some of you have been placed in a country that speaks a language that you can study in your school. Unless you have been involved in French Immersion, your school language studies will not provide you the level of proficiency that you will need before you depart. You will need to do study above and beyond your high school language classes. Our expectation is that you will make time in your busy schedules and make language study a priority. You will be amazed at how much you can learn setting aside thirty disciplined minutes every day.

We offer the following suggestions to help you acquire the keys that will open many doors in your wonderful host culture.

1. **Enroll in a class where you have made an academic or financial investment:** nothing like a little commitment or consequences to make you show up and do the work!
2. **Listen /watch radio and TV in your host language.**
3. **Watch movies in your host language.** Watch the first time with subtitles and the second and third time with the subtitles turned off. In the US, Netflix (netflix.com) has a HUGE selection of foreign language films. In Canada, try Canflix or Zip.ca for online DVD rentals with a large foreign language selection. Even if you only subscribe between now and when you go, it will be worth every penny. Movies are a great window into a culture. Get your ears used to the patterns, pace and rhythms of your host country language.
4. **Download (legally) popular and folk music from your host country.** Get the lyrics on line to your favorites- translate them. What are they actually singing about?
5. **Go to the library and check out children's books in your host country language.** They have simple vocabulary and lots of pictures. Children's music and nursery rhymes are helpful too.
6. **At the library look for periodicals like People and Time in your host language.**
7. **Get a self-paced language program like Berlitz, Rosetta Stone or Pimsleur.** Again, the financial commitment here may increase your follow through.
8. **If you already know the language somewhat- use a dictionary in your host country language.** You won't believe what a difference that will make in your vocabulary. Be sure you take one with you.
9. **Buy a "501 Verbs" book-** learn 3 verbs a day between now and when you leave.

10. **Learn two feeling words a day** (happy, confused, irritated, relaxed, hungry, sad, optimistic, excited etc.) It is when you can talk about what you are feeling that you can begin to deepen your relationships with people.
11. **Become a “Grammar Geek”**. You really do sound like a three year old when you can only speak in the present tense. Grammar gives language its structure and shape. Grammar is the word for the rules that people follow when they use a language. Clear and nuanced communication is all about knowing the rules. Pay attention to grammar in your own language. What is similar in your new language? What is different? Concentrate on the aspects of grammar that you find most difficult. Focus for a week at a time on that aspect. You will nail it in a week of concentrated effort. Read in your new language. Read out loud. Write in your new language. Your brain absorbs new information differently when you read, write and speak.
12. **Find some native or fluent speakers** in your community that you can converse with- perhaps you can trade language lessons if they are still learning English.