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052154663X - Achieving Success in Second Language Acquisition

Betty Lou Leaver, Madeline Ehrman, and Boris Shekhtman

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## Achieving Success in Second Language Acquisition

This clear and informative textbook is designed to help the student achieve optimal success as a language learner and user. Aimed at beginning to intermediate undergraduates and above, it teaches students to understand their own preferences in learning, to develop individual learning plans and approaches, and to select appropriate learning strategies. The authors – all leading experts in language teaching – base their advice on theories of learning, cognition, and memory, concepts which they explain in simple and accessible terms. The book is divided into three parts, on learning, language, and communication, and provides students with communicative strategies for use in real-life interaction with native speakers. Each chapter contains an overview and review section, with learning activities that students can carry out by themselves, in groups, or in the classroom. Equally suitable for use both by individuals and as a class text, this book will become an invaluable resource for all language learners.

A learning styles test to accompany this book can be found at <http://www.cambridge.org/052154663X>

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BETTY LOU LEAVER,  
MADELINE EHRMAN, AND  
BORIS SHEKHTMAN



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Any errors or omissions are, of course, those of the authors alone. In the case of one of the authors, who works for the US Department of State, the material in this book represents the opinions of the author and not the US government.



## Note to the reader

### For whom is this book intended?

This book was prepared especially for the undergraduate university *student* with some experience in language learning. If you are such a student, then this book is for you. The goal of the book is to help you improve learning strategies and maximize your strategic competence in ways that will allow you not only to improve your language-learning efficiency but also to interact with native speakers in communicative ways, using what you already know to its fullest advantage.

This book is additionally recommended to current and future foreign language *teachers* to help them take into consideration their current uses of language-teaching methodology from the viewpoint of their student-learners and to assist them in enhancing/developing reflective practice in teaching that takes into consideration the specific nature of their educational setting and its individual learners.

### How did this book come into being?

This book has come into being through two evolutions. It is the third revision and expansion of the research compiled for (and used in) a previous government multimedia program on learner success and, later, in a book for beginning-level high school and college students. The information has been adapted in this book for the university student who already has some experience in language learning; in addition, much new information has been added.

In the mid-1990s, the first author of this book collaborated with a team of course developers in the preparation of a multimedia course intended to increase student success at US government language schools. The course was prepared by the American Global Studies Institute in cooperation with Litton/PRC and under the direction of the Defense Language Institute.

Following the completion of the multimedia materials, many of the authors of those materials developed a book that could be used by a wider audience, including their own students. That book was called *Passport to the World: Learning to Communicate in a Foreign Language* (Leaver, Dubinsky, and Champine, 1999). *Passport to the World* was intended as a general book for those just starting out in language study, regardless of age and school grade, and, indeed, it has been used

by high-school and college students and teachers. That book has also been widely shared with language learners around the world through three guest appearances by one or more of its editors on the “Talk to America Show,” hosted by the Voice of America.

It was the suggestion of Katharina Brett of Cambridge University Press that this book be transformed (with a great many changes – additions and adaptations) into the current volume. She saw the potential of *Passport to the World* to become applicable to the university and experienced learner. As a result of her vision and that of unidentified readers of the proposal to revise *Passport to the World* for a different audience, many new topics have been included. Further, since the audience is intended to be learners who already have some experience in language learning, all topics are explored in significantly greater depth than the topics were treated in the earlier versions.

**How to use this book**

This book may be used in a number of ways. Some teachers might want to use it as a textbook in a course about language learning or as a supplemental textbook in a foreign language classroom. Other teachers might want to assign some chapters as homework or recommend it for additional reading. Still others might like to use it as a framework for building their own courses or materials designed to help students become better language learners. As a student, you might find yourself using this book in any one of these situations. If you have just found this book on your own, you might like to read it as a guide to becoming more effective in your language-learning work. For those using the book in class, the preview, summary, and activities built into each chapter can guide teachers and their students in the most efficient use of the book.

Each chapter also includes several topics. These topics are interrelated, but teachers and/or their students could easily select some, and not necessarily all, topics. Each topic is described in some detail, followed by the presentation of a concrete application (sample problem and solution). Additional reading suggestions for the topic can be found at the end of the chapter. Also at the end of each chapter, there is a review, pulling together all the information into a “big picture.”

Following the summary, you can find a set of activities intended to give you practice in the concepts presented in the chapter. Your teacher might have you work these activities out in class, or he or she may assign them as homework. Some of them can engender much discussion. Others are simple exercises meant to develop habits. Answers, where they are obvious and specific, are provided at the back of the book.

At the very end of each chapter is a list of further readings. These are books and articles on the various topics presented in the chapter. They are not the reference list of citations used in the chapter; that reference list is at the end of the book.

Appendices include a glossary of terms, self-evaluations, and other optional forms of assistance for students who wish to improve their language learning efficiency and increase their success. Additional help is also available on the Internet.

**Description of contents**

*Part I Learning*

**Chapter 1. Planning foreign-language study**

This chapter explores the many reasons for studying a foreign language. It can help teachers and students understand the scope and requirements of language acquisition and guide readers in planning both short-term language learning goals, as well as lifelong language learning activities. Among the factors discussed are various options (including Internet assists, independent learning, use of a native speaker, classroom study, study abroad, etc.), anticipated difficulties, time factors, and other elements that typically appear over the life of a learner who stage by stage improves his or her language ability.

**Chapter 2. Understanding the role of cognition in the learning process**

Your language-learning experience will differ, depending on whether this is your first, second, or third language. (By the time you are into a third language, cognitive processes used for language learning will be much closer to instinctive.) Regardless, though, of how many languages you have studied, you will fare better in language learning activities if you understand such concepts as decoding and encoding and the difference between knowledge and proficiency if you do not already. Topics covered in this chapter include cognition (thinking processes), memory (storing and recalling what has been studied), aptitude (ability to learn languages), and metacognition (thinking about thinking).

**Chapter 3. Learning styles and learning strategies**

This chapter helps you understand your own learning styles. The scales used are sensory preferences (kinesthetic-visual-auditory) and cognitive styles (the E&L Construct). The E&L subscales are introduced and used throughout the chapter and the remainder of the book. This chapter also discusses the relationship between learning styles and learning strategies, as well as presenting some common taxonomies of learning strategies.

**Chapter 4. Understanding feelings and personality in language learning**

A variety of affective (emotional) variables are presented in this chapter, including foreign-language anxiety, test anxiety, motivation, self-efficacy, personality, ego boundaries, and defense mechanisms. In this chapter, you will find strategies for better managing the emotional aspects of foreign-language learning.

Chapter 5. Interpersonal dynamics in the learning process

This chapter considers student–student relationships, teacher–student relationships, and student–group relationships. Topics include levels of interaction, the importance of group cohesion, individual differences and group dynamics, teachers, teacher–student relations, and student–student relations.

*Part 2 Language*

Chapter 6. Verbal language

This chapter has three sections. The first addresses the nature of linguistic structure. Examples are given from languages belonging to a variety of linguistic categories and comparisons are made with English. Exercises are based on an artificial language, providing an opportunity to practice learning aspects of morphology, syntax, and other linguistic characteristics that differ from English. Next, this chapter examines pronunciation, including individual pronunciation, elision, and accent reduction, and other aspects of oral language production are also discussed. Finally, this chapter looks at strategies that help students develop their vocabulary reserve.

Chapter 7. Sociolinguistics: the right expression

This chapter introduces students to concepts of sociolinguistic competence. It provides specific examples of tailoring language, understanding register (style level), knowing the rules of turn-taking, and strategies for acquiring this kind of competence.

Chapter 8. Unspoken communication

This chapter looks at the kinds of communication that occur without words. Topics include gestures, cultural behaviors, taboos, personal space, and body language.

*Part 3 Independence*

Chapter 9. Self-regulation and learner autonomy

This chapter discusses the student’s role in the learning process and how students can take control of their own learning. Topics include cognition in self-regulation, affect in self-regulation, interpersonal dimensions of learner autonomy, and the teacher’s role in self-regulated learning. In addition, the chapter discusses – and dispels – some common myths about independent learning.

Chapter 10. Controlling spoken and written communication

This chapter addresses topics that are more common outside the classroom than inside. It explains the linguistic interrelationship between participants in a conversation and provides suggestions on how to handle the unevenness in linguistic ability in these situations successfully through tactics for managing speech. This

can immensely benefit continuing students who have already developed some language ability but do not necessarily know how to use that ability to greatest advantage.

Epilogue: from here to there: attaining near-native proficiency

Most students will be taking a language for university requirements or general interest. Few are likely to make a career based exclusively on language skill. For those of you who do, however, the typical level of language proficiency attained in a university foreign-language program is insufficient for professional use of the foreign language. This chapter describes what you will need to do to bridge the gap from very good proficiency to near-native proficiency, based on the limited current research and teaching programs available at this level.

Appendix A. Answers to “practicing what you have learned”

Appendix A contains suggested responses to the practical exercises. In cases where there are no concrete answers, discussions are included.

Appendix B. Learning strategies taxonomies

Appendix B provides a listing of the more common learning strategies taxonomies. Students and teachers interested in these taxonomies can explore them further if they so desire.

Reference list

The reference list contains all the works cited in this book. In addition, each chapter contains a list of pertinent books, articles, and websites for readers who would like to explore the chapter topics in greater depth.