

Ten Learning Tips for Foreign Languages in Professional Communication

Learning, and especially learning a foreign language, is an ongoing process; the same is true for technical vocabulary and professional language scenarios. While the following tips are primarily intended for teachers as a means of imparting appropriate strategies for continued learning in professional life, learners will also find them useful. The tips have been formulated independent of any single language and should be applied to a particular language when possible (such as in Learning Tip 1); therefore, the tips do not include general learning strategies and/or provide profession-specific advice. The learning tips do not differentiate between situations in which one lives where a foreign language is spoken (and the foreign language becomes one's second language) and situations in which one is confronted by the foreign language entirely on the phone, over the internet, with visitors, or communicating with international team members. You can discuss these learning tips and improve yourself at www.idial4p-center.org.

1 Create your foreign language requirements profile at the workplace!

Consider which typical language abilities and knowledge you should master in everyday professional work using the foreign language. What are you required to understand in concrete situations, or what must you accomplish with others in order to do your job? Categorize your learning goals based on the four language skills, listening/reading (receptive skills), and speaking/writing (productive skills).

Examples:

- explain how a device works to a colleague, and answer his/her questions (speaking/listening)
- forward a telephone call to the appropriate department (listening/speaking)
- describe how a wine tastes (speaking)
- fill out a delivery note (writing)
- understand a stock report in the press (reading)

2 Determine your strengths and weaknesses in professional situations!

As precisely as possible, create a list of your individual abilities communicating in your profession: "I am able to explain the emergency shutdown button on a milling machine, as well as why and when it should be used, and the consequences of an emergency shutdown" or perhaps simply "I can ask my colleagues to shut off the centrifuge immediately." On a second list, mark the related skills and knowledge which you must acquire or which you have not yet learned adequately

enough to avoid problems in daily work (ex. a colleague does not understand your explanation of a machine's function, and asks you for further explanation).

3 Request financial support!

When you can clearly state what your language deficits are, and when these are too great for you to overcome alone at work, ask your superiors, the personnel department, or works council for an individual professional development budget for the appropriate language course or for one-to-one lessons targeted to your profession on company costs.

4 Get Help!

Ask qualified and experienced bilingual colleagues or mother speakers of the language to explain new terms to you; ask them to explain how you can best express a given intention, or why someone does not understand you. Give yourself the chance to translate and try out useful phrases and expressions. Ask colleagues where they have difficulties with you in terms of communicating in the foreign language. Search for help on the internet, ex. in special learner forums.

5 Try to find a “foreign language communication coach”!

The regular interchange between explicit learning, transferring what has been learned to the workplace, reflecting on what has been learned, and perfected application of it in professional daily work is far more effective than taking lessons in a large, isolated block. For this reason, try to find a specialized communication coach: someone who assists your learning for an extended period of time, and with whom you can discuss your language deficits as well as your progress. The internet, your colleagues, or if you have regular lessons, your teacher, are all potential coaches!

6 Use electronic resources and/or the internet!

Technology offers a vast amount of resources which can assist your learning: electronic dictionaries, flexible vocabulary learning programs which keep track of words and phrases that have been learned, online exercises for free or for a fee, language learning software, self-tests, learning forums and online communities, as well as electronically managed learning diaries (so-called “portfolios”). With the spread of smartphones, these resources are always readily available in the workplace even if you do not regularly work at a computer workstation. Take advantage of all these learning resources to continue the learning process independently and to support it.

7 Make your workplace into a learning environment!

Professional language learning is not only a private matter which occurs outside of work: it requires the support of your entire working environment. Make clear to your employer that that improving your language knowledge is in his/her interests, and that it advances your and your colleagues' professional further qualifications. Talk to your superiors, personnel department, or works council, and ask for support and resources (devices, programs, courses, training sessions), for example, when programs are installed on company computers (the ever skeptical IT department must cooperate!), or when you know that you require freedom in order to learn during working hours; for instance, turn off your telephone so that you can work on your learning diary fifteen minutes each day.

8 Search for opportunities to try out what you have learned!

Don't wait for a stressful situation in which you are forced to make use of your new language knowledge and ability for the first time; actively choose the time and setting when you try out something new in a real communication situation at work. For example, go through a presentation or a negotiation with colleagues; put a follow-up question to a foreign partner when on the phone or write a short additional commentary in an email. Use the internet to write enquiries or obtain commentary on professional themes.

9 Verify your progress and discuss it!

Seeing your learning progress and demonstrating it, for example, with better results on language tests or with external certificates, increases your motivation, promotes acceptance of your language learning requirements and forwards your professional advancement. In conversations with colleagues and superiors, make clear what you can now do in foreign language communication that you could not do before; ask foreign partners whether they notice your progress.

10 Record technical vocabulary systematically!

Technical vocabulary is systematically constructed, especially when it is written. Note down new technical terms as well as phrases and expressions typical for your profession; order them logically in your notes! It makes no difference whether you note new technical words or specific expressions on cards, paper, or with a smartphone: the correct typography helps you to accurately understand, pronounce, and memorize a technical term even when you don't normally have to write it down. Ask colleagues about the correct spellings of words (cf. Learning Tip 5). Ideally, you should record technical terms systematically in a learning diary or by taking advantage of flexible software for individual-learning. Illustrations with graphics, on which you write the respective technical terms, are especially useful for this purpose.

For more information see:

www.idial4p-projekt.de
www.idial4p-center.org



For more information see:

www.idial4p-projekt.de
www.idial4p-center.org

