

Individual Language Plan

Goals	Internet Resources
Friends	Textbooks

An Open Letter to all Life Seekers, Mind Expanders, and Language Travelers

Welcome, friend, to your free individual language plan. It seems like you might want to learn a language. Scary. Usually foolhardy. But something about you must think it is possible, or you probably wouldn't be reading this. I'm glad. Did you know that studies in self-conception and [visualization](#) both suggest that if you haven't at least imagined it, you are already bound to fail!¹

So let's not fail, okay? And let's set our sights higher than avoiding failure. How can you be truly successful? Well, that's even trickier, and that is where a plan comes in. As a trained language professional, I often sit down and consult with clients to help them conceptualize success, much like a fitness trainer might sit down with someone and talk about fitness goals. I find that making a plan with language learners is a vital step on the road to success, and as I have watched over the years, I think there are several reasons these kinds of plans are so successful.

First of all, everyone knows the science of [writing things down](#), of turning dreams or wishful thinking into purposeful action. A language plan helps you to do this. As an added bonus, if you are willing to share your plan with a fellow language learner or a language supporter, it has the added effect of providing you a partner in crime, someone to help you go over your goals and talk through your successes and failures.

Second, language learning is so large that most people who want to do it are crushed by the very thought of beginning. As a result, most people fail right from the start. It is a bit like eating a whale, (check out this hilarious [poem](#) from the inimitable Shel Silverstein). As you can imagine, eating a whale can ONLY be done if you approach it a bite at a time. Language learning, like eating the whale, is best done by breaking your huge task into more bite-sized possibilities. This individual language plan will guide you through that by giving you four specific ways to think about language learning.

Finally, language learning is a social act. It requires support. It is essential to surround yourself with good ideas, good resources, good friends, and good books. And surrounding yourself with this "ecosystem" of resources is one of the best parts of the whole experience—in fact, it infuses the experience with purpose and fun. Which reminds me of the last ingredient: a good time. Make sure you have that, too. I can't think of anything more demotivating than giving yourself homework that you hate. So don't do that. Not ever. I mean, seriously, what kind of self-loathing issues do you have? Ha ha. I joke. But seriously, not ever.

In short, enjoy the journey, and thanks for letting me be a part of it.

Your language guide,



Dr. Shane Dixon

Arizona State University, December 2017

¹Freeman, D. and Freeman, Y. (2011). *Between worlds: Access to second language acquisition*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. ISBN 978-0-325-03088-3.

How to Use Your Individual Language Plan

Setting up an individual language plan is something that requires a certain amount of reflection, but where to reflect first? This simple template with its four quadrants should provide you with some insight. Let's look at each of four target areas and hopefully, soon, you will feel your very own language plan take shape.

Goals

Goals are important when you are running a marathon, trying to lose weight, or going for a dream job. The same is, no doubt, true for learning a language. When someone tells me that they want to learn a language, I generally press them to share how they wish to accomplish this. Often, people will reveal to me that they have no goals, no deadlines, and often don't have any ideas of how to get started. Well, that's a problem. Something like learning a language doesn't just happen on its own (no spontaneous bursting into another language unless you're near a tower called Babel). It requires commitment, and commitments require some goals, and some investment to boot.

Let's start small. Take time writing down at least one goal. As you do so, consider the fact that, when possible, language goals should have concrete deadlines and measurable outcomes. I especially prefer goals that show a commitment of time (I will learn 2,000 words in 3 months), money (I will travel to Japan in August), or social pressure (I will invite all my friends over for a Spanish-only Mexican dinner). One concrete and specific goal is all I ask. We can add to that later. Goals are often moving targets, and we can assess where you are and where you want to be another time.

Internet Network

In today's world, a support system is available at your fingertips. Using the internet as a resource is key to a modern approach to language learning success. Let's break down how you will create a network just a bit more by considering the following approach:

A good internet network for language learning has three basic components: a social media presence, online courses and resources, and entertainment.

- a. Social Media: Apps such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram should be used for meeting other language learners, posing and answering questions, and engaging in authentic language.
- b. Online courses: These should be used for weekly or daily personal study
- c. Entertainment might include streaming movies, music, and TV shows.

This may require some discussion or some research, but a strong internet network often makes the biggest difference. I include a small list of possible candidates a bit later on.

Friends

When finding suitable candidates for language learning, consider creating a list of possible language partners, moving from those you know most, to those you would like to know. To begin, a language friend is someone who may have the following characteristics: shares your interest in the language, is willing to hold you accountable weekly, and is willing to search for answers to questions with you. Want a GREAT language learning partner? Have a friend create their own individual language plan, and join forces by holding each other accountable each week.

Textbooks

Buy a textbook? Absolutely. But which one, and what are you looking for? Here are a few pointers. When deciding on a textbook, consider the bow principle:

B Bite size: a textbook should allow you to engage in small chunks of useful information. That means daily activities or exercises are an essential ingredient.

O Often: a textbook is a commitment. Make sure you could actually see yourself doing the exercises you see within its pages. An accountability partner often shares the same textbook and sets goals with you.

W Wonderful: textbooks are commonly seen as intrusive and boring, however there are techniques to make them interesting and fun. Consider, above all, that you are in charge of your curriculum, and not the book. Look carefully at the chapter themes in the front of the book and see if they interest you. While there are difficult parts of any serious language learning course, it is advisable to consistently move toward your interests.

Roadmap to Success or Autopsy Report?

Finally, while an individual language plan is a pretty awesome tool, when I do consulting, it sometimes serves as an autopsy report for those who are not successful. In other words, I can often find out why someone wasn't successful simply by asking about how he or she is doing in each of the four areas. If any of these four areas are neglected, you can bet that failure is the result. To avoid this failure, I recommend that you consistently review all four areas of your individual language plan, and then adjust if you see that you have slacked off in one or more of these essential areas. Don't let your plan, a roadmap to success, become your autopsy report!