

10 Reasons to Learn a Foreign Language

taken from [Why You Need a Foreign Language and How to Learn One](#), by Edward Trimnell, (2005)
summarised on http://www.vistawide.com/languages/why_languages.htm.

1. To increase global understanding

"... [E]ffective communication and successful negotiations with a foreign partner--whether with a partner in peacekeeping, a strategic economic partner, a political adversary, or a non-English speaking contact in a critical law enforcement action--requires strong comprehension of the underlying cultural values and belief structures that are part of the life experience of the foreign partner." - *Dr. Dan Davidson, President of the American Councils on International Education*

Learning another language gives the learner the ability to step inside the mind and context of that other culture. Without the ability to communicate and understand a culture on its own terms, true access to that culture is barred. Why is this important? In a world where nations and peoples are ever more dependent upon on another to supply goods and services, solve political disputes, and ensure international security, understanding other cultures is paramount. Lack of intercultural sensitivity can lead to mistrust and misunderstandings, to an inability to cooperate, negotiate, and compromise, and perhaps even to military confrontation. As globalization and mobility and communications are bring the world ever closer together, ever more urgent is the need for global citizens to be competent in other languages. The United States and Australia are the *only* industrialized countries that routinely graduates students from high school who lack knowledge of a foreign language.

2. To improve employment potential

"[T]he English language alone is probably sufficient if all we need to do is buy our products abroad, if we need to purchase foreign goods and services. But when it comes to *selling* a product abroad, you have to understand the psychology and the belief structure of your client. If you are selling America abroad and telling America's story abroad [...] then you have to understand the value systems of that foreign public that you are speaking to." - *Dr. Dan Davidson, President of the American Councils on International Education*

If businesses are to effectively compete in a global economy, they must learn to deal with other cultures on their own terms.

Business is not the only area of employment where language competencies are needed, however. Multiple government agencies, the travel industry, engineering, communications, the field of education, international law, economics, public policy, publishing, advertising, entertainment, scientific research, and an broad array of service sectors all have needs for people with foreign language skills.

Whatever your career goals, knowing a language certainly won't *hurt* your employability. Chances are that knowing languages will open up employment opportunities that you would not have had otherwise. And you will be able to command a greater salary in the workplace. All else being equal, knowing languages gives you an edge over monolingual applicants competing for the same jobs.

3. To increase native language ability

"Those who know nothing of foreign languages, knows nothing of their own." - *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Research shows that knowledge of other languages boosts students' understanding of languages in general and enables students to use their native language more effectively. This applies to specific language skills as well as overall linguistic abilities. Foreign language learners have stronger vocabulary skills in English, a better understanding of the language, and improved literacy in general. Higher reading achievement in the native language as well as enhanced listening skills and memory have been shown to correlate with extended foreign language study. These results are apparent in several studies as well as in test scores. With each additional year of foreign language instruction taken, a student's scores on college and graduate school entrance exams such as the SATs, ACTs, GREs, MCATs, and LSATs improve incrementally.

4. To sharpen cognitive skills

"We have strong evidence today that studying a foreign language has a ripple effect, helping to improve student performance in other subjects." - *Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education under Bill Clinton*

Because learning a language involves a variety of learning skills, studying a foreign language can enhance one's ability to learn and function in several other areas. Children who have studied a language at the elementary level score higher on tests in reading, language arts, and math. People who have learned foreign languages show greater cognitive development in areas such as mental flexibility, creativity, and higher order thinking skills, such as problem-solving, conceptualizing, and reasoning.

5. To improve chances of entry into college or graduate school

Some colleges and universities require *a minimum* of two years of high school foreign language instruction for admission – they rightly consider knowledge of a foreign language and culture part of what every educated person should know. Many majors in the arts and humanities, in natural sciences and behavioral and social sciences, and in professional fields, also require the study of one or more languages to ensure success in the given field.

Even when an undergraduate or graduate institution doesn't require foreign language study, it's often recommended by programs. Knowing a language can't hurt your application, and is highly likely to make you a more competitive candidate in the admissions process.

6. To appreciate international literature, music, and film

"The many great gardens of the world, of literature and poetry, of painting and music, of religion and architecture, all make the point as clear as possible: The soul cannot thrive in the absence of a garden. If you don't want paradise, you are not human; and if you are not human, you don't have a soul." - *Thomas Moore, Irish poet, satirist, and composer*

Most of the world's literary and artistic works have been written in languages other than English. A translation of a text can never be fully true to the intent, beauty, style, and uniqueness of its original. A translation is always to a large degree subject to the interpretation of the translator, not least because some elements of languages simply don't have translations in other languages. Word plays, metaphors, innuendoes, cultural references and culturally loaded vocabulary words, and formulations unique to the original language often get lost in translation. To be able to fully appreciate literature, theater, music, and film in other languages, one must be able to access them in their original form.

7. To make travel more feasible and enjoyable

"Cold shredded children and sea blubber in spicy sauce." - *From a menu in China*

Though it's possible to travel to foreign countries without speaking the native language, your experience will be largely shaped by your ability or inability to see beyond the surface of the culture. When you lack the ability to communicate in the native language, you can not fully participate in day-to-day life, understand the culture, or communicate with the people. Your language ability will allow you to see and do things that many visitors cannot.

8. To expand study abroad options

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I - I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." - *Robert Frost, American poet*

Simply your willingness to learn a language can make you an apt candidate for many study abroad programs.

9. To increase understanding of oneself and one's own culture

"The individual's whole experience is built upon the plan of his language." - *Henri Delacroix, French painter and filmmaker*

"As the traveler who has once been from home is wiser than he who has never left his own doorstep, so a knowledge of one other culture should sharpen our ability to scrutinize more steadily, to appreciate more lovingly, our own." - *Margaret Mead, American anthropologist*

Knowing another language and culture affords you the unique opportunity of seeing yourself and your own culture from an outside perspective. Contact with other languages and cultures gives you the unique opportunity to step outside your familiar scope of existence and view your culture's customs, traditions, and norms as well as your own value system through the eyes of others. Conversely, a monolingual, monocultural view of the world severely limits your perspective. Intercultural experiences have a monumental influence on shaping your identity, heightening your self-awareness, and giving you a full appreciation of your life situation. These things can happen only with knowledge of cultures and languages other than your own.

10. To make lifelong friends

"The most important trip you may take in life is meeting people halfway." - *Henry Boye, author*