

Second Languages

Students should have the ability to recognize cues in language and extrapolate from them. They need to learn to be good guessers and to figure out meanings of words from context instead of constantly going to a dictionary. Faculty Viewpoint

Knowledge & Skills Foundations

The goal of second language study is to communicate effectively with speakers of another language in authentic cultural contexts. Learning another language involves much more than memorizing a system of grammatical rules. It requires learners to understand the cultures from which the language arises and in which it resides, use the language to communicate accurately and use their first language and culture as a model for comparison with the language and culture being learned. Second language proficiency can improve learning in other disciplines, such as English, history and art, and expand professional, personal and social opportunities.

The Basics

Successful students know the basics of grammar and vocabulary of both their first language and the second language they choose to study. They are able to recognize verb tenses and parts of speech, understand the linguistic functions these elements perform and compare them to their equivalents in their first language. This formal knowledge will help students learn and use a second language while giving them a deeper understanding of their first language.

Students in entry-level courses should have emerging competence in four areas: communication, culture, comparisons and learning strategies.

Communication. Successful students are able to read, write and converse at the Intermediate-Low proficiency level as defined by the American Council on the

Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines (see ACTFL at www.actfl.org). Essentially, this means that students can use the second language to express themselves in simple, full sentences. Students who are ready for entry-level courses have pronunciation that is comprehensible, but they are not expected to approach the quality or accuracy of a native language speaker.

Culture. Language is inseparable from culture. In order to communicate effectively in an authentic cultural context, students must be aware of the practices and perspectives of the culture. This involves knowledge of geography, holidays, lifestyles and material resources of the countries and peoples where the second language is customarily spoken. A student of Japanese might be expected to know that Japanese people bow when greeting each other and to understand the value of humility in Japanese culture that underlies this routine practice. The student should also be able to know what language is appropriate to particular cultural situations.

Comparisons. The ability to view facts from multiple perspectives is an important critical thinking skill developed through second language study. A solid knowledge of a first language and culture is a starting point for making comparisons and drawing contrasts with the second language and culture. For a native English speaker, a comparison of English to another language will deepen his or her understanding of English, of the second language and of the nature of languages in general. Similarly, a comparison of American cultural products, practices and perspectives to those of another culture will lead students to a more profound understanding of what it means

to be an American, what it means to be part of another culture, and the nature of social roles, values and customs.

Learning Strategies. Critical thinking is not only a by-product of second language learning, but also a powerful tool for enhancing language acquisition. Meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic knowledge, mnemonic devices, inference, critical reading, process writing and other strategies should be evident by the time a student begins an entry level course at a university.

The degree to which a student employs these strategies will be a critical factor in determining college success, regardless of second language proficiency level upon entrance. A student who knows how to enhance comprehension by effectively negotiating meaning, for example, may be more successful than a student with superior knowledge of the language itself who relies solely on studying the textbook.

Orientation Towards Learning

It is important that a student can tolerate both linguistic and cultural ambiguity. Successful students accept the linguistically ambiguous aspects of a language, such as grammatical exceptions or words with no exact translation. In studying culture, they understand that meaning is culturally constructed—few absolute rules of behavior exist in any society, and context determines both meaning and appropriate behavior. The particular strategies an individual student uses will vary, but common to all successful students are emotional engagement with the language and culture and openness to thinking about other ways of acting and communicating.

Judgmental attitudes towards other languages or cultures impede the acquisition of another language.

Faculty Viewpoint

Second Languages Standards

*= Items with an asterisk are those expected of students who plan to major in a second language.

I. Communication Skills

A. Successful students use a language other than their first language to exchange information and interact with others within realistic contexts. This is known as the interpersonal mode. They:

- A.1. are able to communicate in an on-demand interview at the Intermediate-Low level for European languages, or Novice-High level for non-European languages (see ACTFL).
- A.2. are able to use the target language to participate in communicative classroom activities and discussions with peers and teachers.

B. Successful students are able to express personal meaning in a language other than their first language in a variety of genre and formats. This is known as the presentational mode. They:

- B.1. use writing processes such as brainstorming, drafting, revising and proofing to produce short texts in the target language.
- B.2. use some basic cohesive devices in discourses in the target language.
- B.3. demonstrate a developing awareness of audience, context and genre throughout a prepared composition or speech in the target language.
- B.4.* are able to defend an opinion, argument or point of view regarding other cultures, academic disciplines or international topics in a prepared, edited text in the target language.



C. Successful students construct meaning from authentic spoken and written sources that are in a language other than their first language. This is known as the interpretive mode. They:

- C.1. are able to identify the genre of authentic texts written in the target language, for example, poems, news articles and essays.
- C.2. can ascertain meaning from context when they confront unfamiliar words and phrases in the target language.
- C.3. are able to distinguish main ideas from supporting details within a text written in the target language.
- C.4.* are able to identify literary devices such as point of view, narrative voice and others in texts written in the target language.
- C.5.* begin to analyze an author's use of language and literary devices within text written in the target language.

II. Culture

A. Successful students are aware of products, practices and perspectives of the target culture and are able to apply that knowledge in communicative contexts. They:

- A.1. are able to locate on a map and identify by name countries, continents and geophysical landmarks relevant to the target language.
- A.2. know basic historical facts and cultural traits of the target language country or countries, including the range of languages spoken.
- A.3. show knowledge of current events in the target language culture or cultures.
- A.4. are able to identify and articulate in their first language, if necessary, perspectives embodied in the culture that uses the target language.

- A.5.* are able to identify major physical artifacts and cultural practices of the target language culture or cultures expressed in the form of monuments, icons and customs, and how cultural practices influence daily life.

III. Structure

A. Successful students have a basic knowledge of English syntax, semantics and discourse structures and are able to compare these with analogous forms in the target language. They:

- A.1. recognize most common parts of speech, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, articles and adverbs in English and the target language.
- A.2. understand the role of grammar and context in various linguistic functions in English and the target language.
- A.3. understand and compare how simple clauses are formed in English and the target language.
- A.4. are able to identify and compare the coding of tense and aspect in English and the target language.
- A.5. apply writing conventions accurately in English and the target language.
- A.6. know that a second language cannot be thought of as a simple word-for-word translation of English.

IV. Learning Behaviors

A. Successful students demonstrate awareness of the process of learning a second language and are able to apply a variety of strategies to that learning process. They:

- A.1. apply personal discipline to the language-learning enterprise.

- A.2. work effectively in a group to help enhance language learning for themselves and for group members.
- A.3. are willing to speak in the target language in front of teachers, peers and those who are fluent in the target language.
- A.4. are willing to take risks with the target language as they practice new grammatical structures and vocabulary.
- A.5. know how to use the dictionary and other reference materials in English and the target language as tools to enhance understanding of the target language.
- A.6. have an interest in other cultures, possess curiosity and a willingness to learn about those cultures.
- A.7. use questions and other strategies to elicit responses from classmates as well as from fluent speakers of the target language.
- A.8. use mnemonic and memorization strategies to enhance the learning of the target language.
- A.9. employ knowledge of their first language to help form and test hypotheses regarding the target language.
- A.10.* recognize and cope with ambiguity and accept that more than one answer is possible, particularly when trying to understand the perspective of a different culture.
- A.11.* use meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic strategies to advance language learning and cultural awareness.



Students should understand their first language and be aware of its grammar and vocabulary. If students know parts of a sentence in their first language, it speeds up the process of learning a second language. We waste a lot less time if they know the grammar of their first language before they come to me to learn another one.

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