

Prepping for an Immersion Program

Whether you know ZERO vocabulary or you are an advanced speaker in your target language, a little preparation can help you get the most out of your immersion program. One book that we recommend is How to Be a More Successful Language Learner, by Joan Rubin and Irene Thompson, which is a full of good advice. Below are some pointers from AmeriSpan.

1. Set Realistic Goals

Learning another language isn't easy (for most of us); it takes time, practice and many mistakes. Go into a program with the goal of increasing your communication skills! Never assume that you are going to perfect the language in so many weeks or months, it's too much pressure!

2. Bolster Your Vocabulary

If you are an absolute beginner, get a phrase book (preferably with a tape to accompany it) and learn some basics like : "Please", "Thank you", "Where is . . .", "How much. . .", etc. Knowing these phrases and some hand gestures will get you by in a crunch. For intermediate or advanced speakers, we recommend learning as much vocabulary as possible before you go, including common idioms. Your language instruction will focus mainly on grammar, conversation and listening. The more vocabulary you have going into the program, the more ways you will get to apply the language. All participants should bring a comprehensive dictionary (not only a pocket dictionary) and may want to consider a guide book that has a section listing local colloquialisms.

3. Be Able to Conjugate Important Verbs

Learn to conjugate, COLD, those really important verbs like to wish/want, to be able/can, to be and to go. These kinds of verbs conjugated in the present or past combined with infinitives instantly increase your ability to communicate. If you are an absolute beginner focus on the "I" and "you" forms of the really important verbs.

4. Think The Language

Don't try and translate everything word for word. It doesn't work! You will drive your self crazy looking for a word that may not exist in the target language. Recognize the fact that grammar rules will be different. Learn the differences along with the similarities and your understanding of *how* the language works will increase ten fold!

5. When In Doubt, "Literature-ize"

This means try to use "larger" words. For example, in Spanish, *need* doesn't translate but *necessity* turns into "necesidad", *requisite* becomes "requisito" and *exigency* blossoms into "exigencia". Since these words sound very similar, you will be understood. There are examples like these in all languages.

6. Romance Languages Are Similar

If you know another romance language, you have a leg up on learning Spanish or Portuguese. You already know the concept of masculine and feminine words, accent marks, etc. Many words ending in Y like liberty will end with: "ad" in Spanish, "e" in French, "ade" in Portuguese or "à" in Italian. Similarly, words ending in "ion" in English often sound alike, and mean the same thing in Spanish.

7. Stay Open Minded

The best tool for learning a language at any level is a good attitude. Understanding the culture helps language acquisition. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, they are great to learn from and can be funny too! A sense of humor really helps.