



Critical Languages Program STUDENT STUDY GUIDE

Learning a language in a modified self-instructional language program is probably unlike any other course you have taken before. In a traditional language course the instructor provides the organization, sets the pace and gives necessary guidance and explanations. In the Critical Languages Program, although the organization and the pace are set by NASILP and the Program Director, **the responsibility for learning falls directly on you, the student.** Due to the nature of this program, you will find that it requires a great deal of time, energy, and self-direction as well as self-discipline.

Over the years many students have achieved admirable success in self-instructional language programs at colleges and universities. Self-instructional language study really does work. Whether or not it works successfully for you, depends on how well you understand and adapt to the unique nature of the Critical Languages Program.

Three important facets of the Critical Languages Program should be kept constantly in mind:

1. You are your own teacher. Thus, successful language mastery depends critically on you - on your attitude and participation, and especially on your self-discipline and study habits.
2. The tutor in the Critical Languages Program is NOT a teacher. The practice session should not in any way be equated with a typical class. Do NOT assume, as you might in a traditional course, that you are coming to practice sessions to be taught. The tutoring session is for the practice and correction of activities that you have ALREADY done in audio material work.
3. Language learning with the Critical Languages Program is based on AUDIO MATERIAL WORK. The core of audio material learning is supported on one hand by the text, and on the other by the practice session and the native tutor, but these components should be treated as supplementary to the audio material work.

THE COURSE BOOK

Read the introduction of your textbook carefully. The text is a primer, the starting point for audio material work. The following steps will be useful for you in preparing for the audio material work:

- Read through the dialogues.
- Study the grammatical explanations.
- Note which patterns are being demonstrated in the dialogues.
- Note how the words are being used in the dialogues.
- Note what is being said with respect to the communication situation.
- Test yourself, verbally, in English, to see if you really understand the grammar, vocabulary usage, etc. For Example:
 - How do I form a question?

- What pattern do I use compare two things?
- What are the restrictions on using this word?
- How do I express an apology in this situation?
- Do not stop at that point! Proceed the audio material work on the dialogues.
- After dialogue work, go on to the drills in a similar manner.

If you have studied the text carefully and understand all the grammar rules and usage conventions, you cannot automatically count on a good grade in the course. You will not be tested on how well you know the grammar of the language, but rather on how well you can speak and comprehend it. KNOWING ABOUT the language and USING it are quite different. The latter involves skill acquisition with audio material work.

THE AUDIO MATERIAL

There is a tendency to misunderstand the function and use of the audio material work. They are often thought of as a poor substitute for the native tutor and something to be avoided if learning can be accomplished in any other way. However, remember: the audio material work is the core of the Critical Languages Program. ANY ATTEMPT TO SKIMP ON AUDIO MATERIAL TIME IS A FALSE ECONOMY and, in the Critical Languages Program, COULD WELL MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE.

The audio textbook supplement will repeat the same material over and over indefinitely without the slightest change in pronunciation or construction. This makes it possible to receive in a relatively short time the exposure to the countless repetitions you need to imprint a foreign language utterance in your mind.

From this point of view, it is almost impossible to overdo the audio material work. An hour every day should be thought of as a minimum. Do NOT concentrate the audio material work into a few long sessions a week. It will never work! Audio material work requires such intensive concentration that it can only be effectively sustained for short periods of time. Invariably, your attention span and concentration will waiver in marathon sessions. Find the limit of your own "tape attention span." It may be as short as 20 to 30 minutes at a given time.

REMEMBER:

Audio material work should be spread evenly over the entire week. Many short sessions, even on a given day, are preferable to one long session. Incidentally, experience has shown that "catching up" on audio material work, unlike doing so in reading, is *virtually impossible*. **So do not procrastinate!** Whatever you do, do *not* fall behind.

If you find that you are putting in a lot of audio material time, but nothing is sticking, the problem is undoubtedly that "putting in audio material time" meant that you became a sort of sponge and time was all that counted for you. Students often "put in time" by mindlessly repeating material while their attention drifts away. This is known as "*audio material hypnosis*," and often results from undirected, unfocused audio material work, or from trying to do too much at once. *The cure is short, sharply focused audio material sessions.*

As you do your audio material work, remember to repeat out loud. You cannot learn to speak just by listening. After all, you want to learn to *SPEAK* this language. Silently mouthing the language (or

mumbling it) to yourself or a native speaker will never work, unless he or she is an excellent lip reader. Learning to speak a language means speaking **aloud!** Repeat audio material in a strong voice, with vigor.

When you do audio material work, do it with the text *closed*, unless specifically requested on the audio material. The point of the audio material work is to train your mouth and ears! Of course reading along with the audio material is easy - you are letting your eyes do all the work. Unfortunately, you won't have access to a teleprompter when communicating with native speakers. As a rule, the text (dialogue or drill) should be read **BEFORE** the audio material work, *but should not be open during the audio material work*. Audio material work means weaning yourself from visual crutches.

If you seem to have trouble with comprehension in the audio material work, you will have to spend some extra time listening to utterances, and then stopping the audio material to check yourself closely on how well you really understood what was said. Did you get it the first time? Drills, exercises, dialogues--just about anything on the audio material--can be used for this sort of intensive comprehension work.

Never give up on audio material that you don't understand. Try listening to it and repeating it several times without the text in front of you. Then, if it is still unclear, refer to the text for an explanation. *Do not be put off by differences in pronunciation between the speech of your native tutor and that on the audio material.* They are both within the range of permissible variation, and you should be able to understand both. No matter what your first reaction may be, the audio material is not too fast, and you must be able to follow it at that speed.

If, while working with your audio material, you experience difficulty in mastering long sentences, you might try the "backward build-up" technique: Divide the sentence into short phrases, and begin drilling the final phrase. When you are comfortable with it, add the phrase (or few words) immediately preceding, until you have reached the words which started the sentence - at which point, you will be reciting the entire statement without error or hesitation. You may need to rely on visual material initially, but do not consider the job finished until you can say the entire utterance without any help.

When doing the audio material work, try to duplicate precisely the utterance on the audio material, and not merely to make a "reasonable" approximation in your own accent. Think of yourself as an actor learning to play a character role, and attempt to copy in every possible detail the utterances you hear on the audio material.

THE TUTOR

Remember that the tutor is not expected to function as a teacher in the strictest sense. The tutor does not give grammatical explanations, talk about the language, or introduce new material. The tutor **WILL** demand and check for thorough mastery of dialogues, check on mastery of vocabulary and patterns, conduct drills and exercises, constantly demand accurate pronunciation, demand fluent performance in oral work, and provide for a great deal of repetition at conversational speed, with constant correction. Your tutor will use only the target language in practice sessions. *Where else can you get such a wonderful gift?*

PLEASE NOTE: *Avoid the impulse to ask your tutor for grammatical explanations and linguistic insights. Explanations, which would have to be in English, take time away from the learning process, and all too often require the tutor to fulfill a role for which he or she is not prepared. For example, consider a*

situation in which an international student asks you why there is no plural "furnitures," and how s/he can tell when other English words take no plural. The chances are that you could not give a definitive explanation on the spot. You should expect the same from your tutor.

It is your responsibility to avoid time-consuming questions on grammar that STALL the practice sessions. You must do everything you can to keep the tutor speaking his or her own language, and correcting your attempts at it. If the tutor, for some reason, wants to speak English in class and spend time on grammar, it is up to you to discourage this as politely as possible, and to show that you want to continue the lesson in the foreign language. Be prepared to work through the material, even if there is an occasional point of grammar that you do not fully understand. A rule which might seem harsh but which is very effective is practice session ask questions only when you can both phrase the question and understand the answer in the foreign language. Anything else you must consider a waste of time for you, your tutor, and the other students in the group.

If you have a question about grammar, check your text carefully. Ask yourself if your question is really critical for mastering the material at hand. Most "Why..." questions are interesting but do nothing to help you speak the language. Many questions will be answered as you progress through the material. If you are not 100% clear on a grammatical rule, remember: for the purposes of the Critical Languages Program, you need not have an exhaustive intellectual understanding of every grammar rule to learn the material at hand or to speak the language. We learn a foreign language largely by DOING - by example and extension of example.

CLASS SESSIONS

Considerable effort has been expended to locate a native-speaking tutor so that the practice session can be a valuable opportunity to enter the world of the new language. Using English with the tutor, with each other, and even in whispered asides and comments, undermines the very purpose of the session.

REMEMBER: *English will not be used during practice session.* After all, since the tutor is not a teacher, since grammatical questions are out of place, since learning is dependent on your prior audio material work, WHY should you want to use English? You will find that not using English is easier than you think, IF YOU SIMPLY TRY! If you find that your tutor seems to have a slightly different accent from the voice on the audio material, remember that variations in language are to be expected. Even among your English-speaking classmates, it is unlikely that everyone speaks the same way. Any variation would be well within the range of your learning capabilities.

If you find that your tutor is speaking too fast for you, do *not* ask him or her to slow down. Your comprehension skills are developed through the audio material component, and you can stop your audio material and listen to an utterance, said exactly the same way, over and over until you understand it. If you do have problems understanding your tutor, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I spending a great deal of time studying the material *visually* rather than using the audio material?
- Am I using the audio material with my book open, so that my eyes are really doing the comprehension work, rather than my *ears*?
- Am I concentrating on learning *single words* rather than on conversational utterances?

You will be constantly corrected in practice sessions. The tutor will not be embarrassed in correcting you, and you should not be embarrassed in being corrected. You will be *very* embarrassed if native speakers cannot understand you after a semester or two of work in the language! The tutor will be *very* embarrassed if your poor abilities reflect on him or her. Try to develop a positive attitude about correction. It will be one of the tutor's key functions, and it is certainly in your best interest as a potential language user.

It will be important to CLOSE or put away your book during the practice session. In studying a language, many of us are much better in the visual mode than in the oral/aural mode. Our "eye memory" seems ever so much more reliable than our "mouth and ear memory." The idea is not to avoid or forego visual work, but rather to use it as a preparatory step for oral/aural work. Please do not use the visual crutch in audio material work and in practice session, since your goal is to speak and comprehend the language in face-to-face communication. *If you find that your first impulse, when called on in the practice session, is to open the book, you can be sure that you are not using the audio material component properly.*

Most of the practice session time will be devoted to pattern drills and exercises. There will be virtually no "free conversation," since this assumes full control of the very basics that you will be learning. Drills and language-use exercises are part of a learning design to insure that, at some point, you will be able to carry on a conversation.

You might feel limited at first because of the vocabulary. Textbooks purposely restrict vocabulary - the easiest thing to master in a foreign language--so that you can concentrate on the more difficult components of learning: pronunciation, sentence structure, and fluency. A massive vocabulary is of no purpose if you cannot use the words in a grammatical sentence with accurate pronunciation and smooth delivery. Additional vocabulary can be easily learned after you are over the major hurdles.

You will be asked to memorize, or more properly stated, "*over learn*" certain dialogues. You are not being asked to memorize because one day you will need to know how to ask for the 3:15 train to Gölarmara. You are asked to "*over learn*" dialogues for the following reasons:

1. To promote fluency and international accuracy
2. To allow you to internalize examples of patterns for later expansion through drills and exercises
3. To demonstrate how words are actually used in sentences and social contexts
4. To introduce formulaic and idiomatic expressions (e.g., salutations, introductions, apologies, etc.), and to show the appropriate usage of such expressions in communication situations.

EVALUATION

You will be evaluated once a semester by an outside examiner, i.e. a qualified instructor of the language in an established university level program. During your individual oral interview, you will be graded on the following criteria:

1. *Formulation time*: How long does it take you to express yourself? Are you consciously constructing utterances word by word and applying one rule after another, or can you express yourself smoothly and automatically?
2. *Fluency*: Once formulated, is the utterance fluent, or jerky and hesitant?
3. *Pronunciation*: Can you approximate the pronunciation of a native speaker?

4. *Comprehension*: How many times do you have to ask for repetitions? How long does it take for you to understand?
5. *Structured patterns*: Do you know how and when to use patterns properly?
6. *Usage*: Do you know the appropriate thing to say, depending on the communication?
7. *Vocabulary*: Can you use and understand the vocabulary studied?

While this may seem a bit demanding, it is the best way to evaluate your mastery. The entire course has been focused on speaking and comprehension - learning to use the language for communication. The test will be fair and to the point. If you have understood the goals of the Critical Languages Program, and if you have practiced appropriately, the test is simply a normal, natural extension of what you have been doing all along.

However, it is natural that you might be a bit nervous. Your examiner will be well aware of this, and every effort will be made to make you feel as comfortable as possible. The examiner's role is to let you know where you stand as far as your language mastery is concerned. He or she will not use grammar or vocabulary that you have not studied. Even if you are a bit nervous, you must realize the importance of professional feedback on your progress in the language.

CONCLUSION

Make sure to *master* all material in the lesson being studied.

Merely reading the dialogues, exercises, and grammar explanations will not accomplish the goal. In order for the language that you are studying to come automatic or instinctive, *you must repeat all audio material numerous times, until you reach the point at which the dialogue, exercise, or drill is overlearned.*

When you can understand and respond properly to all such text/audio material without hesitation, error, or prompting, you have begun to internalize the material. Your ability to control and manipulate grammatical structure and vocabulary will become automatic, and will not require conscious encoding and decoding. Learning a new language is similar to the development of such skills as driving a car or playing a musical instrument: performance and proficiency are directly dependent on regularity and frequency of practice.

The number of hours per week devoted to language practice will determine your success. However, it is important to devote time to your language practice on a daily basis - especially including actively drilling the audio material, practicing the material with another student in a different setting, or even going through the material aloud to yourself at different times during the day. Even if you cannot give more than a half-hour per day to *concentrated* practice, it is nonetheless necessary to work with the language on a *daily* basis. Under absolutely no circumstances should you let yourself fall behind, relegate your language practice to weekends, or try to cram before the exam.

Remember that constant and regular practice requires one final and most important element in language learning: perseverance. In spite of all the obstacles inherent in learning a language self-instructionally, be patient and persistent. Do not expect to be able to carry on a sophisticated conversation after a few weeks or months, or even after a semester or two. But with much patience and constant practice for automatic, smooth and comprehensible mastery, you will be able to attain your objective of building a solid oral/aural foundation in your chosen language.

CRITICAL LANGUAGES PROGRAM GUIDELINES

- You are expected to attend all class sessions and be properly prepared for the exam. If, for any reason, you have to miss a class session, please contact your tutor in advance. Please do not assume that you can schedule makeup sessions to suit your change in plans. Your tutor may also be a student and need time for his or her own studies.
- You will have one final oral and written evaluation with an outside examiner. Because the outside examiners may come from out of town or out of state, scheduling is done a semester in advance. Please refer to the Critical Languages Calendar for the semester in which you are enrolled. There should be no schedule conflicts. Consequently, there will be NO makeup finals. Please refer to the "*Syllabus*" and the "*Contract*" signed upon enrolling in the course.
- Your tutor will keep a record of your absences and your performance in class session. You may ask to see your record at any time.
- Your final grade for the course will be based on your performance on the final oral and written evaluations. Each class session is like a mini final exam. If you do well in the practice sessions, there is every reason to expect that you will do equally as well on the final.
- The Student's Weekly Progress Report is filled out and returned to the program coordinator every two weeks by the tutor.
- If you have comments, suggestions, or problems of any kind concerning any aspect of the Critical Languages Program, please contact the Department of Foreign Languages.

CLASS SESSION CHECKLIST

The following is what you should expect in your practice session. If your class session is not conducted this way, I need to know immediately, so that your practice session will be productive and the academic integrity of the course can be protected.

- Students' books were closed during the drill session.
- Tutor avoided the use of English.
- Tutor was well prepared for the session.
- Students had mastered the material to be covered.
- Tutor used visual aids whenever possible.
- Tutor encouraged active participation.
- Tutor kept drill moving rapidly and varied activities to keep students interested.
- Tutor checked student comprehension.
- Tutor maintained good eye contact with students.
- Tutor's voice was clear and loud enough for easy listening.
- Students were required to pay careful attention and to participate throughout the session.
- Responsibility for studying grammatical explanations was clearly delegated to the students.
- Assignments were clear and understandable and followed the Syllabus.
- The Tutor was in control of the practice session at all times.