EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Language Difficulty Ranking

The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) has created a list to show the approximate time you need to learn a specific language as an English speaker. After this particular study time you will reach "Speaking 3: General Professional Proficiency in Speaking (S3)" and "Reading 3: General Professional Proficiency in Reading (R3)"

Please keep in mind that this ranking only shows the view of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and some language students or experts may disagree with the ranking.

If there is a language in this list you would like to learn and it is in a high difficult category, don't let this stop you from learning it. Even if they are ranked as difficult, it does not mean that they are impossible to learn and maybe it is not hard for you at all.



Category I: 23-24 weeks (575-600 hours) Languages closely related to English

Afrikaans Norwegian Danish **Portuguese** Dutch Romanian Italian Swedish

Category II: 30 weeks (750 hours) Languages similar to English

<u>German</u>

Category III: 36 weeks (900 hours)
Languages with linguistic and/or cultural differences from English

Swahili **Malaysian**

Category IV: 44 weeks (1100 hours)

Languages with significant linguistic and/or cultural differences from English

Albanian Lithuanian Amharic Macedonian *Mongolian **Armenian** <u>Azerbaijani</u> Nepali Pashto Bengali

Bosnian Bulgarian Persian (Dari, Farsi, Tajik) Polish

Burmese Russian Croatian <u>Serbian</u> Czech Sinhala *Estonian Slovak *Finnish Slovenian *Georgian <u>Tagalog</u> Greek *Thai <u>Hebrew</u> <u>Hindi</u> Turkish Ukrainian *Hungarian Urdu <u>Icelandic</u> Khmer *Vietnamese Xhosa Latvian Zulu

Category V: 88 weeks (2200 hours) Languages which are exceptionally difficult for native English speakers

Cantonese (Chinese)

* Languages preceded by asterisks are usually more difficult for native English speakers to learn than other languages in the same category.

*<u>Japanese</u>

Korean

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Language Guide

Basic:

- Language Definition
- Why Learn
- Language Family

Language Difficulty:

- o Language Difficulty Ranking
- <u>Differences in Difficulty</u>

Languages:

- o Afrikaans
- o Albanian
- o Amharic
- Arabic
- Armenian
- Azerbaijani
- o Bengali
- o Bosnian
- Bulgarian
- o Cantonese (Chinese)
- Croatian
- Czech
- o Danish
- Dutch
- o **English**
- o Estonian
- o <u>Finnish</u> French
- Georgian
- German
- Greek
- Hebrew
- o <u>Hindi</u>
- o <u>Hungarian</u> Icelandic
- o Italian o Japanese
- Khmer
- o Korean
- o <u>Latvian</u>
- Lithuanian
- Macedonian
- Malaysian
- o Mandarin (Chinese)
- <u>Mongolian</u>
- Nepal
- o Norwegian
- Pashto
- o Persian (Dari, Farsi, Tajik)
- Polish

45 Comments (and 9 trackbacks)

#1 by Anonymous Sender on January 27 - 8:41 am



I think Tagalog should be in category 2 because it isn't too hard even though the grammar I's difficult the speech is overly simplified.

#2 by Lotfi on February 3 - 6:27 pm



Hello everyone!

Well, it's quite rare to come across a "serious" yet very engaging thread. As a native speaker of Arabic who's achieved near-native mastery of English and French and has given go to: Italian, Spanish, German, Turkish, Japanese, and Chinese, I must say I fully agree with list above.

Romance languages are so easy for the English speaker. Chinese isn't as hard as people think it is and although the writing system IS a nightmare, the grammar couldn't be any simpler. Japanese is difficult in a "weird" kind of way. Every language has a certain essence of logic to it that you start to tap into as you progress gradually: didn't happen to me with Japanese. Even long after encountering many language items that I thought I understood, that lingering question of "Why is that so?" kept bugging me. Not that that takes away any of its charm. As a speaker of French, Italian was joke. A very melodic one. German is hard. Even with backdoor access through English and French it is still hard. Turkish is so sweet! But it also has a fluid quality that's extremely elegant. What's really funny is that I was struggling with and sulking about the concept of agglutination (words that merge together to make a single entity i.e. what appears in English as a simple sentence very often looks like a single word in Turkish) only to realize that my mother tongue, Arabic, is itself agglutinative. That didn't help much...

Onto Arabic. (Taking a deep breath). For a host of reasons, Arabic - as beautiful as it is to the native speaker - is a complete NIGHTMARE to the language learner. The grammar is so complex: for starters, how about 12 pronouns - that are very often used but not seen - instead of 7 in English? -ed and auxiliaries to form tenses? How about "El-wazn": a maze of prefixes, suffixes, infixes, all sprinkled with inflectional traps. Oh, and it's everywhere - Inflection that is - along the case system! Pronunciation is a whole other issue with sounds like 3 ન ક ન્ટ ન્ટ ન્ટ ન્ટ ન્ટ ના plus there are only about a hundred Arabic dialects, so you can either learn classical Arabic and never be able to communicate naturally with any Arabs, as ironic as that is, or learn a dialect that's specific to a certain region and never watch TV or read a newspaper, classical Arabic being the official medium of communication in the Media, educational institutions, government departments etc. I've taught English to Arab. French, and Chinese nationals. French to Arabs and Indians, hell even some German to Arabs without any major difficulties, but the only time I had to teach Arabic to a foreigner, I was like: "Whaaaaaat...?" It was only then that I started to realize how tough this language I'm so proud of is. All this however doesn't seem to prevent American ambassadors to Arab countries from speaking fluent classical Arabic along with a local dialect. Truly impressive, Whoever's trying to learn Arabic should ask THEM about their secret because I - the native speaker have no clue!!! LOL.

#3 by Niklas Kronlein on April 2 - 6:36 pm



Ferenc Zopcsák :Why isn't Hungarian in

Its in column 4 showing how hard it is to learn. Many linguistic studies have shown that Hungarian is in fact easier than Icelandic AND Bulgarian. Bulgarian involves a completely different alphabet and way of pronunciation, while Icelandic has an average word length of 8 letters. That combined with it's challenging pronunciation is enough to put Hungarian in its place. Hungarian is in fact hard to learn, but it is in the right position, and it is no where as hard as Icelandic and Bulgarian

#4 by <mark>morteza</mark> on April 4 – 3:14 pm



My mother language is Persian and I have to say we have the hardest language in the world because lots of slangs is invented every day and we even can't recognize the other cities speakers accent

And I think this text has been written from an western man vision Because Turkish and Arabic is so easy for us and my opinion is exactly against the writer from my vision

- o <u>Portuguese</u>
- Romanian
- o Russian
- o <u>Serbian</u>
- o Sinhala
- Slovak
- Slovenian
- Spanish
- o Swahili
- Swedish
- Tagalog
- o Thai
- Turkish
- o Ukrainian
- o Urdu
- Uzbek
- o <u>Vietnamese</u>
- o Xhosa
- o Zulu

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