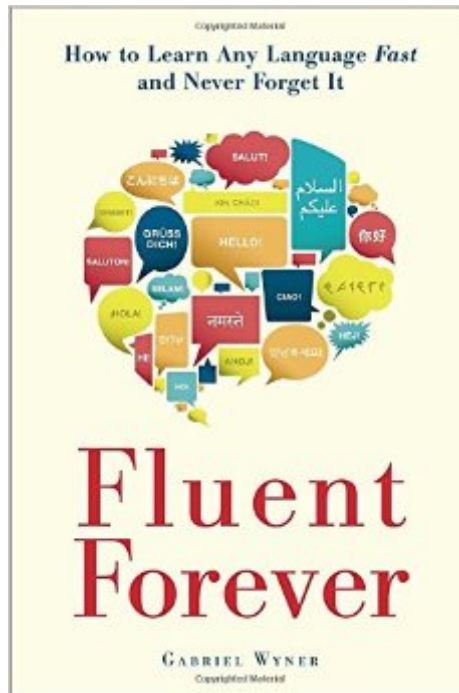


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Fluent Forever: How To Learn Any Language Fast And Never Forget It



Synopsis

The ultimate rapid language-learning guide! For those who've despaired of ever learning a foreign language, here, finally, is a book that will make the words stick. At thirty years old, Gabriel Wyner speaks six languages fluently. He didn't learn them in school -- who does? -- rather, he learned them in the past few years, working on his own and practicing on the subway, using simple techniques and free online resources. In *Fluent Forever* Wyner reveals what he's discovered. The greatest challenge to learning a foreign language is the challenge of memory; there are just too many words and too many rules. For every new word we learn, we seem to forget two old ones, and as a result, fluency can seem out of reach. *Fluent Forever* tackles this challenge head-on. With empathy for the language-challenged and abundant humor, Wyner deconstructs the learning process, revealing how to build a foreign language in your mind from the ground up. Starting with pronunciation, you'll learn how to rewire your ears and turn foreign sounds into familiar sounds. You'll retrain your tongue to produce those sounds accurately, using tricks from opera singers and actors. Next, you'll begin to tackle words, and connect sounds and spellings to imagery, rather than translations, which will enable you to think in a foreign language. And with the help of sophisticated spaced-repetition techniques, you'll be able to memorize hundreds of words a month in minutes every day. Soon, you'll gain the ability to learn grammar and more difficult abstract words--without the tedious drills and exercises of language classes and grammar books. This is brain hacking at its most exciting, taking what we know about neuroscience and linguistics and using it to create the most efficient and enjoyable way to learn a foreign language in the spare minutes of your day.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This review comes after I have finished the book as well as explored the author's website. The strong points:

1. an emphasis on starting off with correct pronunciation (he says otherwise you end up learning two languages rather than one). He has very good videos on the mechanics of pronunciation available. He also sells trainers for specific languages.
2. The use of minimal pairs (two words like cat and cut that differ by only one sound). He has a way of using these to train you to actually hear the differences, which can be very tricky in some foreign languages. You have to hear the differences before you can produce them, but understanding how they are produced gives you a leg up.
3. The use of IPA (international phonetic alphabet) to represent the actual sounds.
4. The use of pictures to associate with a new word. This is how you get the concept associated with the word you are acquiring. It is also how you avoid translation, which impedes thinking in the language.
5. The use of a spaced repetition system (ANKI) to integrate concept, sound, spelling and emotional connection with recall. Tricky issues like gender and grammatical problems are also addressed.
6. Frequency lists are discussed and often provided on his site.
7. Tremendous amount of info on web resources to practice conversation (and his website also gives info on picking topics).
8. The book is so rich in content that I have probably omitted something significant. OK, nobody is perfect, so what's missing?

1. The pronunciation material should help you master individual words. But an equally, if not more, important part of conversation is called prosody and concerns the rhythm and stress applied to a string of words.

There are a lot of books and web products lately that are designed to help anyone learn a language, even those of us who gave it a good try for several years in high school and barely came out of it knowing enough to ask how to find a toilet. I think the various methods are probably going to work best for different people, so I'm definitely not going to say anything like "This is the BEST method! Forget all that other stuff!" but I still say that this is an approach that's been carefully thought out, and planned, and the author clearly works extremely hard to make sure that he's explaining himself clearly. There are a few core principles to this approach that it's important to understand:

1. It puts a strong emphasis on sound and pronunciation.
2. It takes an immersion approach (where you attempt to go directly to thinking in the new language and developing associations in it, rather than trying to translate between two languages).
3. It puts a lot of emphasis on the use of flash cards.
4. You build your own learning materials, rather than using a premade solution. (Except, possibly, for the part

where you're learning the sounds). There's a lot of detail on how to do this, though, including resources on the web that you can use to help you. Flash cards are the core of the approach he's advocating. I know there are some people who just HATE the experience of using flash cards, so if that's you this is probably not the way to go. The short version of my feeling about this is that if you want a lot of control over your learning process, you're really serious about learning a language, and you like the idea of using techniques that have a lot of scientific and research backing behind them, this book is VERY much worth it.

UPDATE: see the conversation in the comments for the author's response to my query on Duolingo. Thanks everyone for the feedback! I'm updating this to 5-stars. Terrific! In high school I ripped my French book in half. Well, I tried to. The pages came out easily enough, but the hardbound cover was near impossible. I sure tried, though. If you are like me, you can probably relate to the feeling of that "wall" in learning a foreign language. For me, it was right around conjugating time, and it wasn't pretty. FLUENT FOREVER is all about making learning foreign languages fun, easy, and--hopefully--permanent. Some of the first things author Gabriel Wyner promotes are never to translate foreign words and to throw out (actually he says burn) books with English-y pronunciation guides (e.g. bawn-JURE). Wyner encourages fun, laziness, and multi-sensory involvement. He lists a TON of free resources online to build your learning repertoire. He talks about using spaced repetition systems (SRSs) and the IPA (international phonetic alphabet). And you know what? It all makes a ton of sense. Wyner explores scientific studies and shows case-by-case examples of why his methods work. His life is proof, as he can speak six languages fluently, having learned them all in a few years' time. A lot of these free resources have been catalogued on Wyner's site Fluent-Forever.com. Here's what Wyner never mentions: Duolingo. Maybe he's never heard of it, but at the beginning of 2014, it won a best educational start-up award and had 25 million users. It was also named as app of the year by Apple (the first ever educational app with that award).

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