

NILES TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOLS
FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY SKILLS GUIDE

IMPROVING YOUR LISTENING SKILLS

IMPROVING YOUR SPEAKING SKILLS

IMPROVING YOUR READING SKILLS

STUDYING VOCABULARY

STUDYING GRAMMAR

IMPROVING YOUR LISTENING SKILLS

1. Concentrate very carefully on the content of the foreign language being used in class. Focus on your instructor's speech and intonation patterns; this will help you to improve your own foreign language speaking skills.
2. In order to increase comprehension, focus visually on the speaker. This will increase your power of concentration, an essential for listening comprehension.
3. Respect the rights of other students to listen both to the instructor and to fellow students. If you do not understand what has been said, raise your hand and wait until the teacher calls on you. Sometimes the teacher might not be able to call on you immediately; in this case, write your question down and ask the instructor afterward.
4. Don't ask the teacher to translate his/her speech into English; rather, ask the instructor to repeat his/her message in the foreign language.
5. Even though you may prefer to think about other matters, try your best to concentrate on the speaker's message only. Never speak to other students or engage in other work while listening to the instructor. Hearing the instructor is not the same as understanding. You must listen with the intent of understanding.
6. Listening comprehension is a gradual process; the more you listen, the more you understand. Therefore, even if you do not comprehend fully what is being said in the foreign language, do not give up: continue to listen attentively. Pick out whatever you possibly can from the instructor's message.
7. Listening also means decoding; that is, as you listen try to comprehend the speaker's general message, not necessarily individual words. (If you focus too much on individual words you might lose the meaning of the entire message.)
8. If you wish to improve your listening comprehension on your own, you may engage in the following activities: listen to tapes in the Foreign Language Resource Center; listen to foreign language radio, television stations and records; listen to conversations between native speakers whom you may encounter in your daily activities or trips through the Chicago area.

IMPROVING YOUR SPEAKING SKILLS

1. It is imperative that you know the sounds represented by each letter of the alphabet of the foreign language you are studying. Be certain to learn and to review constantly the specific rules of pronunciation. For example, be aware of silent letters and special clusters of consonants and vowels.
2. Participate fully in oral exercises presented in class. Be certain to repeat aloud imitating precisely the pronunciation modeled by your instructor. As you participate in these oral drills, do not repeat blindly, but concentrate on the meaning of what you are saying, as well as on pronunciation. Remember, that oral drills prepare you to speak on your own. Thus, concentration on these drills is of the utmost importance.
3. If you intend to improve your speaking ability, you must volunteer to participate in class. For example, when your instructor asks a question, formulate the answer and volunteer to respond aloud. The only way you will improve is to speak aloud frequently.
4. Whenever possible, go to the Foreign Language Resource Center and listen to available tapes; listen carefully to the native speaker and imitate his/her pronunciation when you speak.
5. From time to time tape yourself while reading, repeating, or speaking in the foreign language. Then check your pronunciation to be certain that it is as close as possible to the native pronunciation that you hear on foreign language tapes.
6. In addition, you should practice speaking
 - a. To your classmates outside of class.
 - b. With native speakers in social situations, as in restaurants, when traveling, or with your teacher outside of class.
 - c. To yourself, in front of a mirror in order to study the formulation of native speech patterns.
7. To achieve fluency of basic conversational patterns, memorize short dialogues or other material assigned by your instructor. After you have memorized this material, you will find that the vocabulary and phrases included in this material will help you to improve your own conversation.
8. Using the new vocabulary items that you have recently learned, select a classmate and create an original dialogue or speech to present in class.
9. Do not allow your personality to interfere with your ability to speak in a foreign language. That is, if you are a quiet individual, force yourself to pronounce the language and to use it as much as possible. Never fear being incorrect; your teacher will appreciate any effort that you make to participate orally in class.

***** *Please be aware that your teacher will correct your speaking errors to help you become a better speaker in your foreign language.*

ORAL PROFICIENCY EXERCISES

From time to time our instructor will have you working in pairs with your classmates on specific oral proficiency exercises. While you are working on these activities, be certain to pay close attention to the instructions that your teacher provides as he or she explains the exercise. Since it is the goal of the Foreign Language Department to have you actually use your grammar and vocabulary **ON YOUR OWN, IN THE SPOKEN FOREIGN LANGUAGE**, your participation in oral proficiency activities is crucial to your success in the class.

During oral proficiency class time, be certain to use every moment to practice the activity that has been assigned. If you have extra time, practice the same activity with you partner repeatedly until you have completely mastered the assignment. Since you will ultimately be graded on you oral proficiency, you will need to practice speaking as much as possible. Therefore, the oral proficiency class time will be very valuable to you. **DO NOT WASTE THIS IMPORTANT TIME!**

IMPROVING YOUR READING SKILLS

1. If your teacher has prepared a vocabulary list of words appearing in a reading assignment, become familiar with this vocabulary first. It will save you time of looking up key words in a dictionary.
2. You should read each assignment slowly, **A MINIMUM OF TWO TIMES**. First, read for overall comprehension without looking up words. From this initial reading you should be able to arrive at a general idea of the topic covered in the selection.
3. The second time you read the assignment, look up verbs so that you know the action of the story; also look up nouns that are repeated. If there are other words that you don't know, try to figure them out from the general context of the passage. Once you look up a word, plug it into the sentence. Then translate the entire sentence, making sure that you have selected the correct dictionary meaning.
4. When translating a sentence into English, do so phrase by phrase and not word by word. In this way, sentences will be more meaningful to you.
5. You may want to read with a friend. One of you should read the sentence aloud; the other can then, using the method discussed above, translate it into English. Then, reverse roles, so that each of you has practice in reading and translating.
6. If you are having trouble with a particular passage, ask your instructor for help before class discussion begins.
7. Read the assignment carefully before class so that you can participate in the discussion. Your grade for participation, in part, may be based on how well you have read the assignment and can participate in a discussion on the reading.
8. Take notes on what you have read, modifying them in class as the discussion develops. Also, include in your notes comments made by the teacher and your fellow students.
9. Summarize the content of your reading into a short foreign language paragraph. This will help you to review for the test. In addition, if your teacher instructs you to answer questions on the content of the reading, do so carefully, referring directly to the text. This exercise should be done immediately after you have completed the reading. The answers to these questions will also help you to review for the test.
10. Read carefully all foreign language signs that you might see in neighborhood stores or on public transportation.

STUDYING VOCABULARY

Prepare a set of flash cards for each new set of vocabulary words presented in class. On one side of an index card write the foreign language word; on the reverse side write the English word. Be certain that both words are spelled correctly. If you are studying verbs, you should also include the conjugation of present tense on the foreign language side. Write small so that you will have room to add other tenses as the semester progresses.

Successful students have found that they can remember more words when they pronounce them aloud, both in class, and as they study. Therefore, you must attempt to mimic accurately the pronunciation of the foreign language word that you hear in class from the teacher.

1. Use your flash cards to test yourself in the following way:
 - a. Look at the English side of the card and say to yourself the foreign language equivalent of that word. Spell the word to yourself; turn the card over and check your spelling. Place the card of any word that you missed in a separate pile and repeat the above steps with this pile of words until you have mastered each one. Be sure not to re-study the words that you have mastered, but to concentrate on those that you still have not learned. Repeat this process several times until you are certain that you know each word.
 - b. You may also have friends or parents test you whether or not they speak the language. For example, have the other person show you the English word, then pronounce and spell the word out loud. The other person will tell you if you have spelled the word correctly and will make a pile of words you do not know. Then on your own, take a few minutes to study the words that you have still not mastered. Finally, have your friend or parent repeat the above steps with you until you have shown that you know each word.
2. You may also find this method to be helpful. Fold a piece of lined paper lengthwise and with your book open, carefully copy the foreign language vocabulary words on the left side and their English equivalents on the right side. Be certain that this list is correct because you will be studying from this same list later.
 - a. Fold the paper in half so that you can see only the foreign language word. Then line up another piece of paper next to the foreign language word and write its English equivalent. For each word that you miss, make a separate list and repeat the above steps until you have mastered all of the words.
 - b. Next, repeat this procedure, but this time look at the English word and write the foreign language equivalent next to it. Then check your foreign language answer to make sure that it is spelled correctly.

3. Use a mnemonic device; that is, a clue that will help you recall a specific vocabulary word. Many times mnemonic devices are personal and apply only to you. For example, the Spanish word for “to spend money” is **gastar**. Think of the following situation: You spend a lot of money on **gas**. Notice that the first three letters of the word **gastar** are the same as the mnemonic device “gas”. The word **disque** in French means a record; in order to remember this word, you might think of “**disc jockey**”, a person who plays records.

Reel free to let your imagination run wild in choosing a mnemonic; the important thing is to remember the correct foreign language word and to spell it correctly.

4. Use new vocabulary words in original sentences; for example, say that you are studying the word for “school.” Write a sentence using that word incorporating other words that you have already learned. For example, you may write the sentence “I do not go to school on Saturdays.”

STUDYING GRAMMAR

1. While the instructor is explaining a grammar point, be absolutely certain to take clear, neat, meaningful notes (on clean paper) that you will be able to use when studying for a test. In fact, you should keep all of your notes for our foreign language class in the same folder.
2. Memorize grammar rules.
 - a. Compare and contrast a specific foreign language grammar rule to an English one if it exists.
 - b. When you find that a foreign language structure does not have an exact English counterpart, translate that foreign language expression into English, no matter how awkward or strange it may sound. For example, the expression in English “to be hungry” is translated in French, Spanish and German as “to have hunger.”
3. After having listened carefully to your teacher’s explanation of a specific grammar point, be sure to complete the homework assignment on that topic. As part of your homework, read at least three times the grammar rule and its accompanying examples. You will correct your homework in class the next day. If you still have trouble applying the rule correctly, it is your responsibility to ask your instructor to clarify the point. **DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ASK YOUR INSTRUCTOR FOR HELP; YOU CAN BE CERTAIN THAT OTHER STUDENTS IN THE CLASS HAVE SIMILAR QUESTIONS.** You may also want to see your teacher outside of class in the Foreign Language Resource Center for extra help.
4. When you are given a worksheet or translation sheet, you may choose not to write your answers on the worksheet, but on another piece of paper. Thus, when you review for the test, you will have a clean worksheet and a complete set of correct answers. Then you can do the worksheet again for extra practice.
5. **THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE REQUIRES CONSTANT REVIEW OF GRAMMAR TOPICS PREVIOUSLY TAUGHT** because you will be using them constantly. That is, every test is cumulative and will require you to remember past material. Therefore, when studying for a grammar test, review each mistake that you have made on previous tests so that you avoid making the same error again. Also, review grammar rules that have already been taught. It is for this reason that you will need to have a notebook with each grammar rule clearly written for the purposes of continual review.

6. An important part of foreign language study deals with the verb system. Here are some suggestions for studying verb conjugations.
 - a. Construct a set of verb cards following the format previously stated for vocabulary cards. First, on the unruled side of the card write all possible English definitions of the verb. Then on the lined side (top red line) write the foreign language infinitive. Next, in the upper left hand portion of the lined side of the card, carefully print the entire present tense conjugation of the verb. Leave enough space on the side of the card to all additional verbal forms and tenses as your instructor presents them to you. It is important to keep these cards for the duration of your foreign language study, that is, for all four years.
 - b. As with the vocabulary cards, use these verb cards consistently to review for tests; you should be tested by a partner who may or may not know the foreign language. These cards will be of enormous value to you in preparing for the final examination.