

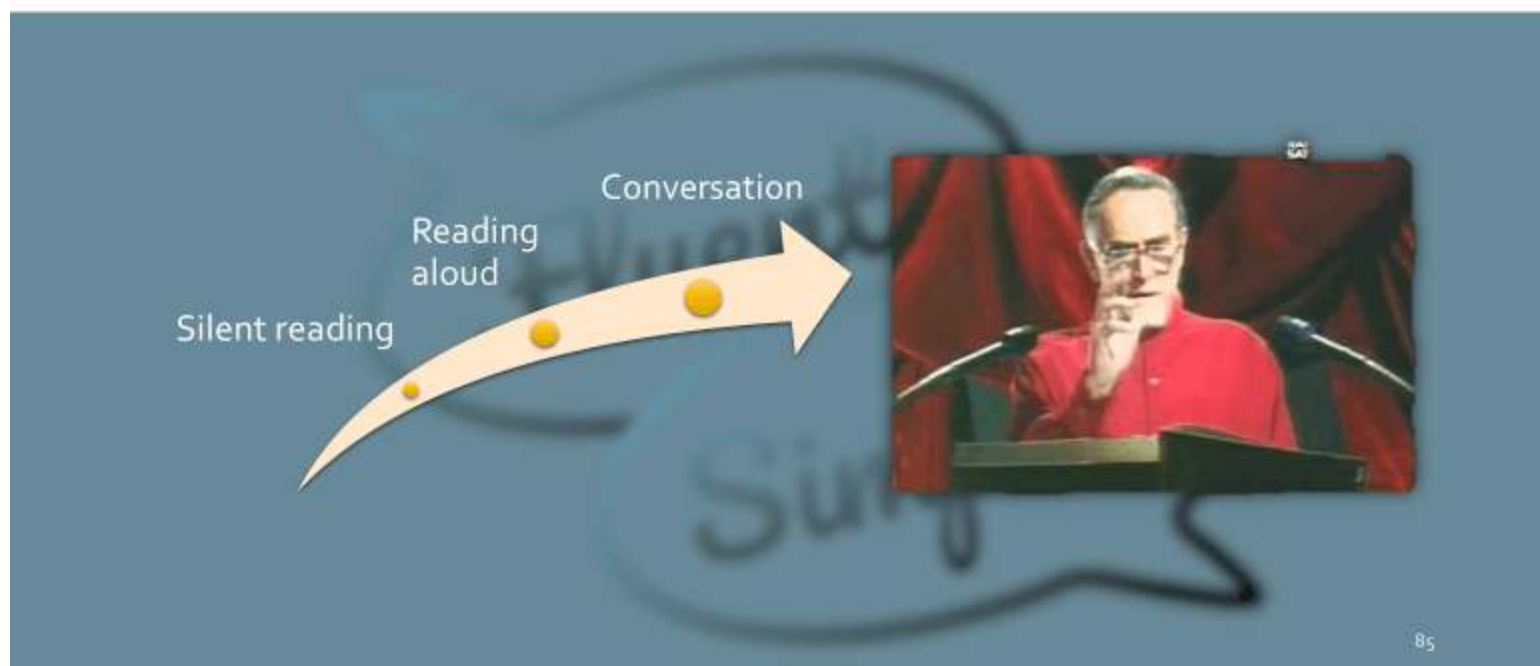
Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself

In this post, we'll teach you how to turn every foreign language task into speaking practice.

Let's find out!

Speaking practice: learn to communicate

READ IT ALOUD



If you don't have a conversation partner, talking with yourself still counts as speaking practice.

Most language learners want to be able to **communicate in a foreign language** in real life.

However, their study **time** is often skewed towards grammar and translation, with little or no speaking practice. Typically, speaking is the most overlooked skill in their **study schedule**, be it because of lack of time or money to take lessons or do language tandems, or because they fear that it's "too early to speak with people before I study up to a certain level".

If you study the Italian language, try this **study planner** to find the best schedule based on your time commitment and budget.

Too early to practice speaking?

Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself



Eat your veggies

A piece of common advice you hear from polyglots is that you should practice speaking from day 1. **This** is the one that separates successful from unsuccessful learners.

You **HAVE** to speak from day 1. You can't wait until you're 'ready' because that ready day will never come.

Traditionally, we imagine learning a language for years and then finally being 'ready' after learning so many words and rules. That day will never come.

On the contrary, it is by practicing speaking that you learn how to speak. And it also improves other important skills like listening, reading, and writing.

If you have been studying a language for longer than a year and you haven't gotten around speaking with a native yet (because of fear, insecurity, shyness, or else), I would thoroughly encourage you to make the small step necessary to make it happen.

As in a healthy diet, you should eat plenty of vegetables, so should you base your study routine on speaking.

Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself

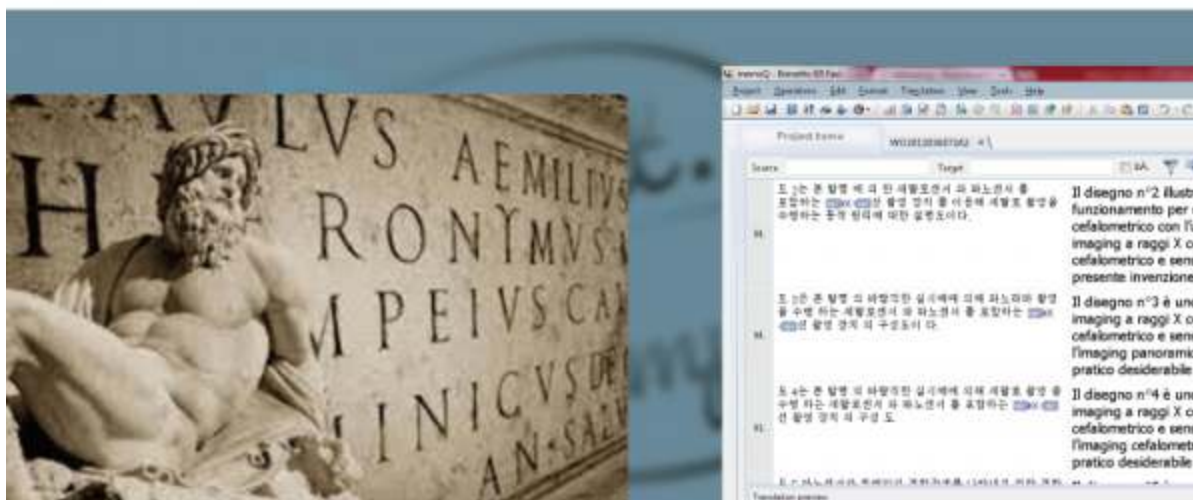
THE LANGUAGE DIET



Practice your speaking

Speaking practice? Can't I just read and listen silently?

I'M EMBARRASSED BECAUSE
I CAN'T SPEAK!



Uh? What did I just translate?

I told you that I do translations. Well, I confess that I rarely remember the new words that I find in the documents I translate. I save them in the termbase of the software I use to translate, but I don't memorize them myself.

Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself

That's because I'm not reading them aloud (and also because they're very boring documents). **Reading aloud** requires more involvement than silent reading and activates your brain in a way that silent reading doesn't.

Likewise, passive activities like listening or watching only are much less effective than speaking practice in becoming fluent. If I am to read to **learn a language**, I always read aloud, even if it's not required in the exercise or in the situation (tip: speaking to someone works even better. Go and pest someone with your new words to practice speaking! 😊)

For this reason, you should always study where you're allowed to talk. That's why I'd never study a language in a library or in a common study room at school. For the same reason, I rarely listen to music or watch movies with the purpose of learning a language unless I can repeat what I hear.

Okay, but whom should I practice speaking with?



Find teachers and language exchange partners on in Italki for your speaking practice

Even if you can't find people to practice your target language around you, you can still Skype a native speaker and speak to them to practice your language from the comfort of your **home**. You can actually learn to speak Italian or any other language very well by **doing** it entirely via Skype.

That's what I usually do myself. The vast majority of my lessons were with teachers I've found via Italki, in the largest pool of teachers possible. You'll find that all the major languages are covered with a lot of teachers and exchange partners to choose between, and some minor ones have a couple of teachers.

Check out my [review of Italki](#).

Paid lessons or language tandem?

If you have money to spend, go for professional paid classes on Skype. Else, you can still find a native speaker in the language you're studying who learns your native language and teach each other on Skype. Either way makes good speaking practice.

Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself

The best place to find native speakers and teachers is Italki. Italki is an online language learning website that connects language learners and teachers through video chat. The site allows students to find online teachers for 1-on-1 tutoring, and teachers to earn money as freelance tutors. Italki connects over 2 million language learners and teachers worldwide for 1-on-1 lessons in any language, anytime, anywhere. With over 1000 teachers and 2000 community tutors teaching over 75 languages including Italian, Italki makes becoming fluent in any language easy, fun, and personal!

Once you find those people to practice with and learn from via Skype, then you have no excuse to not make progress as quickly as possible, with your speed depending on how many spoken sessions you get and how intensively you are learning.

There's also plenty of online language schools like [Bric](#). Personally, I prefer those that specialize in one language.

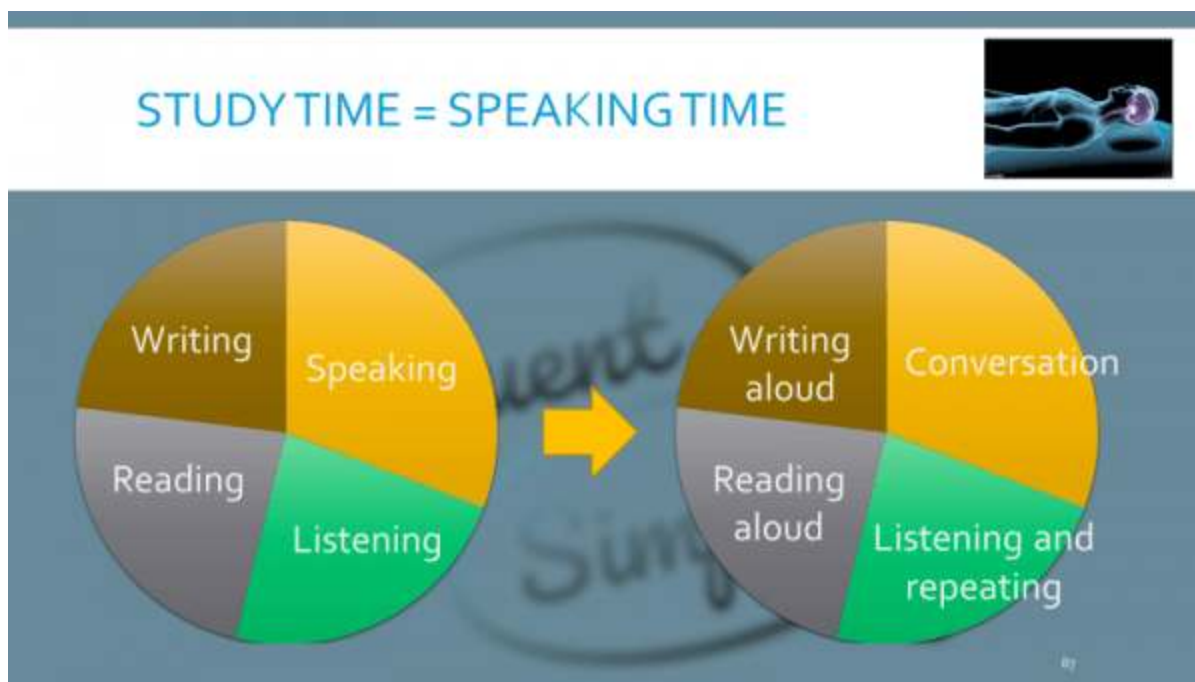
To take a live lesson online, you need the following equipment:

- A quality [webcam](#)
- A noise-canceling [headset](#)
- Skype

To keep your focus and motivation you need:

- A [mug](#)
- A [t-shirt](#)

How can I practice speaking if I'm alone?



Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself

Turn all your study time into speaking practice

In order to practice speaking even without a teacher or a conversation partner, I suggest that you turn virtually any study time into speaking practice. For example, by reading aloud everything you read, write, or hear.

Turn reading into speaking

Reading. Whether you're reading an article online, a novel, a [textbook](#), or your own homework, read everything aloud. Some [language learning apps](#) like Duolingo or Babbel show you sample sentences but don't prompt you to read them aloud, so people silently go through the drills and end up complaining that they forgot everything. The fault lies not in the learning resource, but in how they use it.

Turn writing into speaking

Writing. Making sentences and short essays in your target language is very useful to elaborate on the words and grammar patterns you studied and reflect on the language in general. However, to get the most out of it, never fail to read aloud while you're writing, and read everything after you're done the writing. If you have a chance to have your homework corrected, also read aloud the correct version.

Turn listening into speaking

Listening. Whenever you listen to music or the news in Italian, watch a documentary or a movie, make new words stick to your mind by repeating after the speaker, and possibly taking notes. Take your time to pause the music/video/audio if necessary. Don't let those words come in from one ear and go out from the other. A Korean [friend](#) of mine would turn on the radio on an English-speaking channel and do stuff in the house. I've never heard her utter a sentence in English, and she has never made any progress. I experimented that myself.

“Turn all your study time into speaking practice”

You should also understand most of what you read or hear. When I was in Italy, while driving, I'd listen to a CD of children's [songs](#) in Chinese that I bought in Taiwan. I realized that didn't improve my Chinese at all, because I couldn't understand most of it. I could remember the melody, but not the lyrics. I had to read the lyrics, understand them and sing along to finally learn and remember. That's because speaking practice (even alone) works much better than silent reading/watching by activating different areas of your brain. So, enjoy your audio/video entertainment, but if you want those lyrics/scripts to stick into your brain, understand most of what they say and sing/speak along.

With the right audio material, you can also [learn Italian in the car](#).

Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself



Listening to Chinese children songs on the highway in Italy

Since the act of speaking gives a deeper impulse to your brain, adding speech to every study activity (reading, writing, and listening) also boosts the other skills involved, for example helping to memorize new vocabulary.

Can I seriously improve my speaking skills with no guidance?

Even if you're alone, you can still have guidance to practice speaking! In fact, there's plenty of audio [courses](#) that train your speaking skills. I personally recommend three courses that share a focus on speaking practice and teach through listening and repeating sample sentences: [Ripeti Con Me](#) (the best!), [Pimsleur](#), and [Glossika](#).

These courses are all based more or less loosely on the principle of [spaced repetition](#), which means that you're prompted to listen and repeat certain words and patterns at certain intervals. They're all very intuitive, even too simple to be true: they [show you how to say](#) things. Linguists call this "[comprehensible input](#)".

All you need is comprehensible input

A hilarious example of learning through comprehensible input comes from a video game from the 90's called Monkey Island. At one stage of the game, the main character, a young pirate, faces various veteran pirates in a singular duel. You win your opponent not by fencing, but by insulting him in a witty way and answering their insults in an even wittier way.

In the beginning, you're just at a loss as what to say and quickly lose the first fights. However, once you heard a witty line, you can use it against your next opponent. If he answers correctly you still lose, but at the same time, you also learn how you should answer next time.

Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself

This way, you rapidly expand your repertoire until you're able to outwit all your opponents. Replace insults with normal words in a foreign language, and pirates with native speakers, and you get the game of learning Italian or any other language.

COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT



Pirate's wit

Conclusion 1: be crazy, talk to yourself

In conclusion, by broadening the meaning of “speaking practice” from “conversation with someone” to “just saying something in the target language”, we find out that there's actually plenty of chances to [practice speaking](#).

So, don't care about what people might think of you talking to yourself in your room, in the street, or in the subway. [Yes](#), you're crazy, but only about languages.

By the way, to [enhance your brain power](#), I can recommend the [best nootropics for studying languages](#).



What is language immersion?

In class, language immersion is a technique used in bilingual language education in which two languages are used for instruction in a variety of topics, including math, science, or social studies.

While traditional language teaching programs deal with the language simply as a subject to be learned, language immersion focuses more on the second language being a tool which is used to immerse the student completely within the subject.

In the real world, it's you doing all the things you normally do in your own language; living life as you normally do only through another language (not necessarily in another place though, of course, it's better to be).

Rent a dive in the city, buy food and toilet paper from the shop downstairs, ride the metro, workout, meet friends for coffee... with the only difference that you do all that in a foreign language (Italian, for example).

Note that language immersion is not just being passively surrounded by the language. You can surround yourself with something without ever interacting with it. You could be immersed in a language audio course while you're sleeping and would still learn nothing.

You could be immersed in TV or radio programs that you don't understand and still learn nothing. Travel – even living long-term – doesn't bring automatic results. I personally know many expats living in places for many years who haven't learned the local languages. Just being there does not make you immersed.



Benefits of language immersion for speaking practice

Here are some educational benefits of language immersion:

- An immersion program is an excellent way to learn a new language as it allows for students to achieve high speaking and literacy skills
- Classrooms are not just language immersion but cultural immersion as well, giving them a greater appreciation for different traditions and perspectives
- Students with an immersion education score as well as or better than their non-immersion peers on standardized tests

Here are some cognitive benefits of language immersion:

Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself

- Students in an immersion environment become more flexible thinkers and excel at critical thinking and problem-solving. **When** presented with a problem, they are able to look for more than one solution. These skills gained through an immersion education make students more appealing to prospective employers when entering the workforce
- The mental stretch students receive in an immersion classroom helps develop their executive function (cognitive control), allowing them to have better focus, juggle multiple tasks, and adapt to changing conditions
- Bilinguals are better able to analyze their knowledge of the language. They learn that there are at least two ways of saying the same thing (how many **ways to say please in Italian** are there?) and understand the relationship between words and their meaning. They are able to focus more on meaning and consider only relevant features when there is distractive information.
- Students with two well-developed **languages are more sensitive to communication**. They are better able to understand the needs of others and to respond appropriately. Through exposure to cultural differences, they may become more respectful of differences between people and their cultures and may be able to **communicate** with a large variety of people.
- Bilinguals demonstrate more mental flexibility and perform better on tasks requiring mental manipulation. They are original in verbal expression, demonstrate non-verbal intelligence and can answer open-ended questions more freely than monolinguals.

Language immersion: online and offline, at home and abroad

You don't really need to go abroad to learn Italian or any other language. With the internet, there's plenty of ways to expose yourself to it. Not enough money or time to travel is not a good excuse. **But** it still makes sense to "live" in that language abroad.

Socially speaking, virtual immersion is easier, less risky, and more convenient. You can practice your language with a native speaker in your bed in your pajamas if you wanted to. You can also connect with speakers from around the world. You can literally pick and choose what country you want to meet people from. Virtual immersion is also more anonymous. You can always delete a skype contact or end a chat.

Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself

You don't want to learn a language just talk to people on the internet, right?

When you are surrounded in real life by native speakers you have much less control. You're likely to meet all kinds of people in any number of situations, and you can't just exit out of a chat window if something goes wrong. It's also a lot harder to put yourself out there in the physical world versus the virtual one.

On the internet, you can be sure that the other person is a language learner and will be forgiving and understanding if you struggle. In real life, you don't have that guarantee. Before you initiate a conversation, you have no way of knowing for sure whether or not the other person will be patient or receptive.

Because virtual immersion is less risky and more controlled the rewards don't go as far. Yes, you get real spoken practice one on one with a real person, but you don't get the cultural experience or relationship of in-person interaction.

It's likely that your main motivation for language learning is to make friends and interact with real people from around the world. You don't want to learn Italian or any other language just to **practice speaking** with people on the internet, right?



Language immersion: the earlier, the merrier?

Generally speaking, the earlier you're exposed to the language (Italian, for example) in a native environment, the better. Think of babies. Total immersion from day one. That's 24/7 speaking practice!

That said, if you're still at an elementary level, the native environment can be tricky. It might be difficult to motivate locals to have a conversation with you, especially if you're in international cities and everybody speaks English or if they have no particular interest in you, your country or your culture.

When I was in the Far-East, I felt like a superstar: at international gatherings, everybody wanted to talk with me and I would get out of the party more fluent than I was when I got in. But when I was in Berlin to study German after only two months of study, I hardly had a decent conversation because an Italian in Germany is not exotic at all and actually occasionally scoffed at. That demotivated me and I eventually gave up German.

Don't use your native language

Language immersion means that, on one side, you should use your target language (Italian, etc.) **as much as possible**. On the other side, you should use your native language as little as possible.

I avoid using my native language. That includes taking notes and reading the news.

I'm a label geek: I read the ingredient list of every food, cosmetic or drug I use. If the label comes in more than one language, I always read it in a foreign language. Only if I don't understand and I don't feel like dying, I read the label of the drug in Italian.

I set up all software in the language I'm learning (computer, phone...). When I don't understand, I just click haphazardly. It's not going to blow up anyway!

Learn every day, and not alone

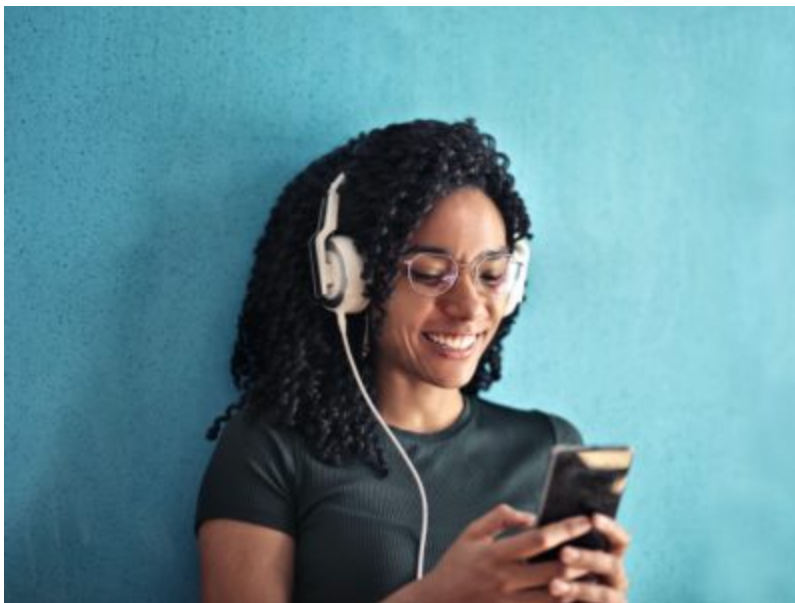
Learning Italian or any other language is like a sport: you need persistence. Don't sleep for 6 days and then wake up on Sunday craving for new words and study the whole day, but rather find the time (30-60 minutes is already enough) to learn that language every day. Don't let a day pass without using that language.

I try to spend more than **half** of my study time speaking with someone, either exchanging to taking lessons.

Conclusion 2: language immersion works under the right conditions

In the end, it comes down to your language learning needs. Are you working to become fluent or just functional? Are you a world-traveling polyglot, or working a 9-5 job? Everyone has different goals and constraints on their language learning. So incorporate the real world and the internet in a way that makes sense for you.

Speaking Practice: Talk to Yourself



Are you serious about learning Italian? Check out our premium resources to become fluent fast!