

Benefits of language learning

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

Nelson Mandela

Languages taught at UCSC

Chinese
French
German
Hebrew
Italian
Japanese
Portuguese
Punjabi
Russian
Spanish
Spanish for Heritage Speakers
Yiddish

There are many tangible and intangible benefits of being proficient in more than one language:

- ▶ **Career opportunities:** Knowing another language makes you more marketable in many fields and can take you on a career path you may not be imagining right now.
- ▶ **Earning potential:** Bilingual workers make 5% to 20% more than those who speak only one language.
- ▶ **Graduate school:** Many graduate programs require proficiency in a second language.
- ▶ **Study abroad:** Many study abroad programs don't require language study, but it's a very different experience if you can interact with people in their language and involve yourself in the local culture.
- ▶ **Access information beyond our borders:** Being able to read in another language means you can access information from outside the U.S., which often presents a very different perspective on world events.
- ▶ **Brainpower:** Research has shown that bilingualism has cognitive benefits in terms of how your brain is able to switch between tasks and ignore distractions.
- ▶ **Increased understanding of your native language:** Learning a second language will lead to greater awareness of how things work in your native tongue and also increase your vocabulary.
- ▶ **Connect with your heritage:** If you grew up speaking a language other than English at home, formal study of that language will take your ability to another level.



Top myths about language study

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Myth 1. Take a language class because it's easy.

It's a mistake to assume that a language class will be easy, or to take it as a "filler" class when you already have a heavy load. Language classes generally require frequent homework assignments in order to reinforce grammar and vocabulary. There are more frequent tests/quizzes and an attendance policy to encourage participation. Finally, most adult learners have to dedicate a lot of time and consistent effort (including outside of class) to acquire a language.

Myth 2. Spanish is easy, Chinese must be really difficult!

The idea that some languages are "easy" and others are "hard" is a common myth based on how similar the language is to your native one. In reality, there are aspects of every language that are relatively simple to learn and others that are more difficult and take more time to acquire.

Myth 3. You already speak Spanish at home, so you don't need to take a Spanish class.

If you grew up speaking Spanish, chances are that you have very good pronunciation and oral conversation skills. However, these abilities are often limited to particular contexts and everyday topics. The language needed to do academic work in Spanish is very different. That's why we offer courses for heritage speakers of Spanish (SPHS), which are designed to build on the skills you already have, while strengthening your reading and writing skills.



The 5 most widely spoken Romance languages are Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, and Romanian.

Myth 4. If you speak Spanish, you can jump into a more advanced level of Italian, French, or Portuguese.

The fact is that these languages all belong to the same family, and thus they have some similarities. If you already speak Spanish, you will probably be able to make faster progress in Italian than someone who does not speak a Romance language. However, that doesn't mean you can skip a level. Also, keep in mind that appearances can be deceiving; aspects of two languages that are similar (yet slightly different) are actually more difficult to learn.

Myth 5. You can take a few quarters off (from language study) and get back on track.

It's not a good idea to take a break between language courses. The reason is that attrition (language loss or forgetting) sets in really quickly if you're not actively using the language. That's because speaking a language is a skill that requires constant exposure and practice—think of it as running or playing tennis. Would you take 6 months off from running and then run a marathon?