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# Bulletin

## DIY Chinese

In the UK people pride themselves on being able to do things for themselves. They even have a name for it

### Do It Yourself – DIY



And it's the same for languages. Why have a teacher or go to class when you can access everything you need? It used to be through tapes and then CDs. Now the learning tool of choice is multimedia platforms. And this is where Chinese for Europeans can really help.

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It breaks down content into manageable, bite sized chunks that allow you to get into the basics quickly and efficiently. By not covering too much in each section it gives you time to memorise key elements. Often self-taught language courses overwhelm with content and rules. Chinese 4 Europeans is more flexible. Knowing that some people like grammar, some prefer phrases, some prefer vocabulary learning, the material allows the student to learn as they want to, when they want to and how they want to. But even with that there are a few tips that might be worth mentioning to get the best out of the material. Some of these might appear obvious, but it is important not to lose sight of the obvious.

**1** **Firstly, listen to the recordings** – and then listen again. After that, listen some more. So much so that you can recite expressions in your head before you go to sleep. So much that the sound of the language becomes easy. Think about how often we repeat the same expressions to young children as they learn their mother tongue. This may sound like hard work, but it isn't. Today's language learners are busy people, always on the move. That is precisely why we have provided lessons in bite-sized chunks. You can listen in the car, on the train, in airports, walking or jogging, or over a coffee... It's about little and often – like exercise.

Half the problem with communicating in a language is that we learn the expressions we want to say – or we learn to point at them in phrase books – and then we don't understand the response. People speak too quickly. Listen to the recordings and they will give you the confidence to understand.

**2** **Secondly, rehearse.** Think about a child learning to do something – riding a bicycle for example. How many times do they fall over and then get back up again? And suddenly there is a moment when they can just do it. Think about when a child learns new words or expressions. How often do they repeat them? And not just words but phrases and expressions. Parents sometimes get surprised when children start using whole sentences from the TV or from what they've said. We can do the same. If we want to improve our pronunciation, if we want to have the confidence to say these strange new sounds (let's face it all languages have their own strange new sounds) then there is no substitute for rehearsal. This may sound like hours and hours of practice, sitting like some kind of machine repeating and repeating. No. We're back to little and often. Take a phrase, or a couple of phrases, at a time. Get used to the sound. Get used to hearing yourself saying them. Come back to the next day or after a couple of days. You can do this anywhere. In the street, in the office, on the way to work,



in a plane... To start with you need to hear yourself say new words and expressions out loud. Once you know what that sounds like, you can rehearse them inside your head. Kids have no problem walking down the street making noises, practicing new sounds. Adults do, but that doesn't mean we can't find time in the day to imagine ourselves saying stuff. If we are going to give a presentation or go for an interview, how much time do we spend rehearsing what we are going to say inside our head? We already have that skill – and we're good at it. All we are doing is moving it across to somewhere else.

**3** *Thirdly, play.* All of this so far could sound pretty serious. Listen lots, repeat lots... but perhaps the real challenge for the DIY language learner is making this real. If we simply learn the sentences and sounds but don't imagine ourselves actually saying them, then we are not giving ourselves enough information to help us recall them. This is also true if we only focus on translating meaning from our own language into Chinese. Of course we need to remember meanings, but we also need to link them to situations. Where would we say this? What do we imagine it looks like? What are the people like? What sort of things are important to them? What have we seen in the media? What have we heard from people who have been there?



This is where the short cultural briefing **Things To Know Before You Go** might be useful – not as a comprehensive guide, but as a tool to begin imagining ourselves actually communicating. This is what makes rehearsal more than just the monotonous repetition of vocabulary and grammar.

It's easy to say that Chinese is not as difficult as people believe, and once you get into it everything makes sense, but what anyone approaching it (especially on their own) needs to do is find the bit that interests them and find the bit that makes it a real, achievable goal. Something we can see ourselves doing. Then we have a reason not only to start, but also a reason to keep going.

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