

Second Language Acquisition Course

COMPREHENSION



This article expands on the ideas from my video in the series about building a language learning routine. If you watched the episode, you'll recognise the central theme: second language learning acquisition course: [comprehension](#) is driven by the input we understand. In this post I explain the practical steps I recommend for listening and reading input, outline resources I use, and give specific routines you can adopt today.

Understanding Concepts

People learn languages by understanding messages.- Krashen



Comprehensible Input

The input that a person understands.



Acquisition

When one truly understands the input to the extent that it becomes a language easily used and produced.



Language Plus One

The person who presents language makes it easy to understand, while adding new concepts to move the learner's skills forward



Language Submersion

Language beyond your knowledge or skill level. It is difficult to get anything out of it.

Why comprehension matters

At the heart of any second language learning acquisition course: comprehension is the concept that people learn languages by understanding messages. [Dr Stephen Krashen](#) put it simply: people learn languages by understanding messages. I believe this wholeheartedly. When input in the target language is understandable, learners naturally take in vocabulary, grammar and structures without forced memorisation. This process is often called acquisition, as opposed to deliberate learning.

“People learn languages by understanding messages.”

Key idea: language +1

Language plus one means presenting material that is slightly above the learner's current level. It requires a little problem solving from the learner, but not so much that the message becomes incomprehensible. For example, an intermediate learner benefits from magazines, quizzes and illustrated texts that challenge

comprehension without overwhelming it. Avoid language submersion—content that is far beyond your level—because it yields little learning.

Listening first: build the ear

Listening is the first skill to develop. Even if you already read well in your native language and can transfer literacy skills, listening should lead. Start with slow, comprehensible audio and progress to more natural speech.

Listening tools I recommend

- Audio courses (Pimsleur, Living Languages)
- Audiobooks and podcasts
- Language apps with audio (Duolingo, Babbel, Drops)
- Anki or Quizlet cards with sound
- Yabla and other subtitled video services



Listening Tools

- Programs like Living Languages and Pimsleur.
- Language learning apps (e.g. Duolingo, Babbel, and Memrise).
- Audio and exercises accompanying physical books.
- Computer immersion programs (e.g. EuroTalk Instant Immersion)
- Podcasts in Google Play or iTunes store.
- US government language programs
- Anki Flashcards
- Online free resources (e.g. Quizlet)
- Creating your own listening playlist

For intermediate and advanced learners, add native-speaker conversations via video calls. Platforms like [italki](#) or tutors on Skype/Zoom let you practise

comprehension in real time. I often [record lessons](#) so I can replay and mine them for new phrases.

Advanced Resources

- Sources of learning: audiobooks, news reports, lectures, and films spoken with the target language.
- One of the very best resources for developing listening comprehension is speaking to people who are native speakers of your target language.
 - Immersive video conferencing via Skype and Google App
 - Native speaking teacher on italki.

You can sign up and be online.



Reading to accelerate progress

Reading is one of the most powerful ways to increase intake. Once you have some basic listening familiarity with pronunciation and rhythm, reading helps consolidate grammar and vocabulary through repeated exposure.

Reading activities by level

- **Beginner:** flashcards, phrasebooks, dialogues, printed podcast transcripts
- **Intermediate:** easy readers, blogs, horoscopes, advertisements, graphic novels
- **Advanced:** novels, news reports, research, plays and specialised texts



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Intermediate

► You can practice by reading easy readers, blogs, and web content like horoscopes and advertisements.

► It is also a great time to start reading magazine articles, blogs, short stories, newspaper articles, magazine articles, websites for famous companies that you might be familiar with.

Practical reading tips: use [ReadLang](#) when reading online, print pages to annotate, highlight and write in the margins, and read the same material three to four times. Repetition helps turn input into acquisition—absorbing grammar and idioms naturally.



Reading Tips!

- Try Readlang for reading online
- Read for pleasure in your new language
- Print out webpages
- Use Post-it notes or somehow write vocabulary in the margins
- Read materials 3-4 times

Designing your input-output routine

In any second language learning acquisition course: comprehension you should plan input deliberately. Allocate time each day for listening and reading and aim for roughly twice as much input as output—remember we have two ears and two eyes, one mouth and one brain. That ratio encourages absorption before production.

1. Decide daily time blocks for listening and reading.
2. Choose materials at language +1.
3. Listen first; read the same content to reinforce sounds and structures.
4. Record and replay tutor conversations.
5. Repeat texts multiple times to deepen comprehension.



Written & Spoken Word

Invest a large part of language learning to reading and listening.

- Plan what you will listen and read.
- Allocate a certain amount of time in a day for these.
- Understand that this is different from reading and listening to your native language. There will be a learning curve.

Invest a large part of language learning

Common pitfalls and how to avoid them

- Avoid overreliance on songs for grammar—music is poetic and cultural but not always useful for everyday language.
- Don't jump into advanced materials too soon; aim for language +1 rather than immersion in incomprehensible content.
- Balance passive input with active output: listening and reading should be the foundation, speaking and writing the application.

Conclusion

Focused second language learning and acquisition: comprehension means prioritising understandable input, using [language +1](#), and building routines that combine listening and reading. Invest time in high-quality audio and enjoyable reading materials, replay lessons, annotate printed texts and get speaking practice with native speakers. If you commit to consistent input—twice as much as output—you'll find many grammatical patterns and vocabulary items come to you naturally.

5 Weeks of No and Low Prep Fun

Need quick, engaging activities for your class? This free guide includes **25 no-prep and low-prep ideas** to save time while keeping students excited about learning.

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