

Script 1

I want to talk about learning languages. I've lived in many different countries, both in Western Europe, Middle East and now here in Hong Kong. And during all of that time, I've learned five or six different languages to one degree or another. I love learning languages. Not only are they important when you move to a country, I just find them fascinating.

Before I came to Hong Kong, I lived in Barcelona, Spain, for ten years. And when I first arrived, the most important thing was being able to communicate with people locally. I don't attend classes. I don't think I'm particularly good in classes. I prefer to learn by just talking to people, finding out what I need to say, by looking at dictionaries and listening carefully.

Other things that helped me when I first moved to Spain were watching the typical kinds of programmes we see every day on channels around the world, for example the weather. This is great, because they always say the same things, so you can really quickly hear the same words repeated again and again. And the pictures help of course.

Other types of programme that helped me learn Spanish quickly were things like game shows, where the same thing happens. They have a catchphrase or a slogan that they repeat endlessly when contestants win or when they are called to compete. As well as that, I used to pick up the Spanish newspapers. First of all, I just accepted there was no way I was going to understand anything but one or two words. But gradually, I found that I learned lots of new things about this. I was interested because I wanted to know what was happening in the country I lived in. But I also knew that I could learn a lot of language this way. So I'd take a dictionary with me sometimes, or I'd notice a word and I'd ask other people what ... it meant.

Anyway, by far the best practice I ever had was just talking to people in the street or in shops, where I'd rehearse in my head what I wanted to say beforehand, before I went in. Usually, I made a right mess of it first of all, but after you get over the embarrassment, it's quite funny really. And people are very sympathetic and supporting in most cases.

It took me a long time to develop a good level of Spanish. I lived there for ten years, and I think I'm very fluent now. But I think for the first two years that I was there it was quite a struggle to hold a decent conversation. There were always lots of words and expressions that I didn't pick up on. In particular with the colloquial expressions, idioms, that kind of thing, that people use in everyday talk, but you don't necessarily see written down. I didn't find those very easy to learn at all. But it was a lot of fun. And people, as I said, are really supporting when they know that you are genuinely interested in learning their language.

Answer Key to Listening 1 (2 points for the correct answers which are printed in bold type)

1. Which continent has the speaker NOT lived in?
a. Asia. b. Europe. **c. South America.**

2. How many different languages has the speaker learned?
a. Five or six. b. Three or four. c. One or two.
3. How long did the speaker live in Spain?
a. Two years. **b. Ten years.** c. Most of his life.
4. Which two things does the speaker do to learn a new language?
a. Go to classes and speak to people. **b. Speak to people and use a dictionary.** c. Watch TV and listen to the radio.
5. Why does the speaker think watching game shows is useful?
a. Because of the pictures. b. Because contestants are always winning. **c. Because the language is repetitive.**
6. What does the speaker say about using newspapers?
a. It was easy to learn a lot of new words quickly. b. A lot of things were happening in the country. **c. Other people sometimes explained new words to him.**
7. Which thing was the most useful in mastering the language?
a. Talking to people in public places. b. Writing things down. c. Reading books.
8. What does the speaker say about talking to people in the street?
a. Preparation was necessary. b. The embarrassment made it a failure. c. People reacted negatively.
9. How does the speaker assess his knowledge of Spanish now?
a. He still struggles a lot. **b. He can converse easily.** c. He can only write messages.
10. Why were colloquial expressions a problem for the speaker?
a. They took ten years to learn. **b. They were never written down.** c. They were often unnoticed.

Script 2

Curiosity allows us to embrace unfamiliar circumstances, brings excitement into our lives and opens up new possibilities. But how curious are we in the 21st century?

Perhaps you've heard the old saying that claims 'curiosity killed the cat'. It's a phrase that's often used to warn people - especially children - not to ask too many questions. Yet it's widely agreed that curiosity actually makes learning more enjoyable and effective. Indeed, research has shown that curiosity is just as important as intelligence in determining how well students do at school.

Curiosity also allows us to embrace unfamiliar circumstances, brings excitement into our lives and opens up new possibilities. Being curious requires us to be both humble enough to know we don't have all the answers, and confident enough to admit it. Asking the questions that help us bridge the gap between what we already know and what we'd like to know can lead us to make unexpected discoveries.

In science, basic curiosity-driven research - carried out without pressure to produce immediate practical results - can have unexpected and incredibly important benefits. For example, one day in 1831, Michael Faraday was playing around with a coil and a magnet when he suddenly saw how he could generate an electrical current. At first, it wasn't clear what use this would be, but it actually made electricity available for use in technology, and so changed the world.

Unsurprisingly, there are chemical and evolutionary theories to explain why humans are such curious creatures. When we become curious, our brains release a chemical called dopamine, which makes the process of learning more pleasurable and improves memory. It is still not known why learning gives us such pleasure, but one theory is that we may have developed a basic need to fight uncertainty — the more we understand about the world around us, the more likely we are to survive its many dangers!

However, curiosity is currently under threat like never before — and perhaps the biggest threat comes from technology! On one level, this is because technology has become so sophisticated that many of us are unable to think too deeply about how exactly things work anymore. While it may be possible for a curious teenager to take a toaster apart and get some sense of how it works, how far do you understand what happens when you type a website address into a browser? Where does your grasp of technology end and the magic begin for you?

In addition to this, there's the fact that we all now connect so deeply with technology, particularly our phones. The more we stare at our screens, the less we talk to other people directly. To make matters worse, all too often we accept the images of people that social media provides us with, and then feel we know enough about a person not to need to engage further with them.

The final — and perhaps most worrying — way in which technology stops us asking more is to do with algorithms, the processes followed by computers. As we increasingly get our news via social media, algorithms find out what we like and push more of the same back to us, meaning we end up inside our own little bubbles, and no longer meet ideas that challenge our pre-existing beliefs. Perhaps the real key to developing curiosity in the 21st century, then, is to rely less on the tech tools of our age.

Key to listening 2 (2 points for every correct answer)

1. Curiosity
2. intelligence
3. 1831
4. coil and magnet
5. chemical and evolutionary
6. memory
7. technology
8. social media
9. algorithms
10. tech tools