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How to manage language anxiety

(5 steps to squash your language-learning worries and take control)

When it comes to managing language anxiety, “knowledge is power”! When you know yourself, know what is involved in a learning situation, and know how to make a plan, you’ll feel more in control over learning and less nervous!

So how can you take charge of your learning?
Complete the five steps outlined below!

Scroll to the end of this worksheet for a completed example.

1

Think of a scary situation

Let’s not beat around the bush: learning a new language pushes us out of our comfort zones, and that can be downright scary. So your first step is to **think of a language- learning situation that makes you anxious** and write it down in the space below. Maybe it’s giving a presentation in class, watching the news without subtitles, or understanding an announcement on the train. You’ll use this situation to complete the activities in the following steps.

I get anxious when I have to _____ in my second language.



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2

Know Yourself: Identify strengths and weaknesses

What are you good at and **what do you need to work on?**

Knowing our strengths helps us stay positive when things get hard, and knowing our weaknesses helps us identify how we can do better next time. Think about the situation you identified in #1, and fill out the table below.

I'm good at...	I need to work on...



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3 Know the Situation: Make Predictions

You rarely know exactly what to expect in any given language learning situation, but you may be able to predict more than you realize. Most situations happen in a particular context or environment, involve a certain set of vocabulary and expressions, and follow some general structure.

Knowing about what is involved in an anxiety-provoking situation will help you manage your expectations and plan what to do if things go awry. Think about the situation you identified in Step #1, and make predictions about the context, language, and structure of the situation.

Context	Language	Structure
Where? When? What/who is in my surroundings?	What vocabulary, expressions, and grammatical forms will I need to know?	What will happen first? Next? Last? Are there predictable patterns?



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4 Know the Plan: Prepare for action

Okay, so you've figured out your strengths and weaknesses and made some predictions about a language-learning situation. Now it's time to make an action plan!

A What are your goals?

- _____
- _____
- _____

B Knowing your weaknesses, what challenges do you expect to face?

- _____
- _____
- _____

C How can you use your strengths and knowledge of the situation to help yourself overcome these challenges and meet your goals?

- _____
- _____
- _____



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5 Try, then reflect

The last step is to go try your plan out in your anxiety-provoking language situation! We promise, it won't be as scary now that you're armed with some tools. Make sure you take some time to reflect once it's over. Reflecting on your performance helps you see the impact of your plan and reinforces your sense of control over your own learning. It doesn't matter whether you reflect in your head or on paper – just think about the following questions.

- How did your plan work out? Did you meet your goals?
- How did your strengths and weaknesses come into play? How did you deal with challenges?
- What did you learn about yourself and what would you do differently next time?

After you're done reflecting, go back to Step 1 and start the process all over again to prepare for the next time you're in this situation...or in any other language-learning situation that triggers your anxiety! We're sure that once you try it out a couple of times, you'll start to feel less anxious and more in charge of your learning.



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Completed Example

1

Think of a scary situation

I get anxious when I have to understand announcements in a train station in my second language.

2

Know Yourself: Identify strengths and weaknesses

I'm good at...	I need to work on...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focusing carefully on what is being said• Asking for help when I need it	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding words that blend together when spoken quickly



Completed Example

3

Know the Situation: Make Predictions

Context	Language	Structure
Where? When? What/who is in my surroundings?	What vocabulary, expressions, and grammatical forms will I need to know?	What will happen first? Next? Last? Are there predictable patterns?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Noisy, public environment• No opportunity to clarify or repeat• Visual aids (e.g., arrival/departure boards)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formal/polite language• Transportation-related vocabulary• Time-related phrases• Names of cities/train stations in the region• Directions/commands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three steps:<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Sound (e.g., bell) or common phrase to signal that travelers should pay attention/listen2. Announcement3. Announcement repeated



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Completed Example

4 Know the Plan: Prepare for action

A What are your goals?

- Figure out if the announcement is relevant to my trip
- Pick out a few keywords of the announcement
- Understand what to do based on the announcement

B Knowing your weaknesses, what challenges do you expect to face?

- Not understanding words because they are mashed together
- Not understanding the announcement because it's too noisy

C How can you use your strengths and knowledge of the situation to help yourself overcome these challenges and meet your goals?

- Focus on what I have understood to help me piece together what I didn't understand
- Ask a passerby to explain to me (slowly and clearly) what the announcement said
- Look for visual clues like posters or arrival/departure boards to help me understand the announcement



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Completed Example

5 Try, then reflect

- How did your plan work out? Did you meet your goals?

I heard the name of my train in the announcement and picked out a few key words, but I still didn't fully understand right away. However, I was able to understand the announcement in the end.

- How did your strengths and weaknesses come into play? How did you deal with challenges?

I became worried because I knew that the announcement was related to my train. I also heard numbers that I recognized, and realized that they said "9:20". I knew my train was supposed to leave at 9:00, so I guessed that it would be delayed. I asked at the information desk, and they confirmed that the train was delayed. Success!

- What did you learn about yourself and what would you do differently next time?

I learned that I should focus on what I do understand and not worry so much about what I didn't understand because there are a lot of ways I can fill in the meaning of what I missed.

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