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# Practice Makes Perfect

These old adage states an obvious truth – the more you do something, the better you get at doing it. This is true for just about everything. The most obvious examples are sports. Anyone who has done a sport knows that much practice is required to become good at it. Not many beginners are “naturals”, which means individuals to whom the sport comes naturally. As such, most beginners need assistance and guidance. Coaches provide that and instruct athletes on how to perfect certain techniques. Eventually, after much practice, the techniques become natural and can be performed intuitively and unconsciously.

All of this is true for learning a foreign language. Usually it is easier to learn how to read and write a foreign language than it is to speak it. There are some basic rules, called grammar, which provide the building blocks for establishing a foundation on which to build the new language. These are easier to acquire because they can be done visually. We can see the words, whether they are spelled or written correctly or not, and whether they are correctly aligned in sentences. That is called comprehension. The next step in the learning process is aural comprehension which means understanding what you hear spoken. This is where pronunciation becomes important. Recognizing the sounds and pitch of the foreign language when it is spoken provides us with examples we need to emulate. The last step in becoming fluent in a foreign language is being able to speak it well and that is the hardest part.

Speaking is more than just saying words in a grammatically correct sentence or statement. If the pronunciation is not good, then more likely than not what you say is incomprehensible to the native listener. For that reason I believe good pronunciation is most important and should be perfected even before grammar. Secondly, smooth delivery is important; again, even more important than grammar. Speaking without unnatural pauses or repetitions is very important. You don’t need to speak in complete grammatically correct sentences; words and phrases are sufficient if properly pronounced and delivered natural. Why? Because if your body language is also good, then the meaning you intend to convey will certainly be understood by the native listener.

So, how can you practice conversation? By doing it as you would a sport. First practice sounds you have trouble with, sounds not in your native language, but are in the foreign language. Practice until you can say them like a native. Next, practice speaking words and short phrases. In you like foreign music, listen and imitate it. Watch videos made in that foreign language, perhaps initially with subtitles and then later without. Imitation is important as is repeated practice. The more you do it, the better you will become.

Practice makes perfect.