How to learn a language in under 24 hours

1. Pronunciation
Learning the pronunciation and writing system of the target language is always the necessary first step before starting to speak. If the target language has an unfamiliar writing system, try to find resources that use a transliterated writing system, like 'pinyin' for Mandarin Chinese. Listening to audio can be helpful to learn accurate pronunciation.

2. Pronouns
Pronouns are used in almost every sentence. Learn the most important declensions, which are usually the nominative (subject pronouns), accusative (direct object pronouns), and dative (indirect object pronouns). To save time, focus on the most important pronouns, which are usually 'I', 'you', and 'it'.

3. Top Verbs
Mastering the most important verbs (auxiliary/modal/handle) will allow you to converse in any context.
TOP 10 VERBS IN ANY LANGUAGE:
to be, to have (to)*, to want*, to need*, to be able to*, to go*, to know*, to do, to understand, to think/believe

4. Important Irregulars
Learning all the exceptions to all the rules is not reasonable. Therefore, only learn the irregular conjugations for the most important verbs in the most important tenses. This principle also applies to other rules/exceptions. Do not learn them unless they will be used frequently.

5. Tenses / Moods
Only learn the most important tenses. Present tense is by far the most important. Other tenses may be learned quickly given the language. For example, some languages use the infinitive as the imperative, or use a single word to signify the future tense. Only focusing on the conjugations for 'I', 'you', and 'it' can save time. Other tenses/moods are not needed for basic speech.

6. Word Order
Learn the word order for the 3 most important simple sentences: declaratives, negations, and interrogatives. If it is different, learn the syntax for handle verbs, and using conjunctions like 'but' and 'because' to join two simple sentences.

7. Interrogatives
Learn the basics: who, what, where, when, why, 202how, how much. Some language may have other interrogatives – only choose the most relevant ones.

8. Articles and Nouns
Learn how to use nouns. This may require learning articles. Articles are more complicated in some languages than in others, but they are important omitting or misusing articles in a language that has articles can result in foreign-sounding speech. Ex. "I go to restaurant to eat sandwich."

9. Possessives
Possessive adjectives are very useful. Focusing only on "my" and "yours" can save time.

10. Demonstratives
Both demonstrative adjectives and pronouns are important. Learning these will enable useful sentences like "I want that" or "I want to go to this place".

11. Other Useful Words
These include the basic 'yes'/'no'; conjunctions like 'but' and 'because'; indispensable prepositions like 'to', 'in', 'for', and 'from'; adjectives like 'also', 'a lot', and 'very'; and the numbers.

12. Top Nouns
Learning nouns is the lowest priority because they are easy to learn. With a simple dictionary app, you can look up any noun you want. It is hard to generalize what the most important nouns are because this will depend greatly on the context and situation of the learner. For example, a student would want to learn words like 'university' and 'student', whereas a businessman would want to learn words like 'meeting' and 'business'.

This guide describes what I believe are the 12 most important areas of focus (ordered by importance) when attempting to learn a language in a short amount of time. Although most of the relevant information can be summarized on 1-2 pages, it is useful to learn about these 12 areas in a bit more detail from some language learning resource. Also, since such 1-2 page language guides that cover all 12 of these areas practically don't exist, you will almost definitely need to use different sources to learn about these topics.

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Pronunciation notes: 4 tones: flat high (1 - ā), rising (2 - á), like saying "huh?", flat low (3 - ǎ), falling (4 - à), like saying "hey!". [3rd tone-3rd tone] is pronounced as [2nd tone-3rd tone] (liǎojiě pronounced as liáojiě). Neutral tone is higher than 3rd tone, lower than 1st tone. Pinyin notes: curl your tongue for "ch", "sh", "zh". Letters with implied umlaut before 'u': "j", "q", "x", "y". https://chinese.yabla.com/chinese-pinyin-chart.php

Pronouns:

I	wǒ	**we**	wǒmen
you	nǐ	**you**	nǐmen
he, she, it	tā	**they**	tāmen

Interrogatives:

who	shéi	when	shénme shíhòu
what	shénme	why	weìshénme
where	nǎlǐ	how	zěnme(yàng)
how much	duōshǎo	how many	jǐ(ge)

Demonstratives:

this	zhè(ge)
these	zhèxiē
that	nà(ge)
those	nàxiē

Possessives:

Add 'de' after the pronoun/subject. Ex. my = wǒ de

Tenses:

No conjugations. Tenses are often indicated by using time words like 'tomorrow' (míngtiān), 'yesterday' (zuótiān), 'before' (yǐqián), 'after' (yǐhòu). Time words are usually placed right after the subject.

- Present progressive: add 'zài' before verb
- Future: add 'huì' (will) or "yào" (going to) before verb
- Past: add 'le' at end of sentence for completed actions. Use time words for other cases

Top verbs:

to be	shì	to learn	xué
to be able	néng, kěyǐ, huì	to like	xǐhuān
to buy	mǎi	to live (in a place)	zhù
to come	lái	to need	xūyào
to do/to make	zuò	to say/to speak	shuō, jiǎng
to eat	chī	to see	kàndào
to give	geǐ	to start	kāishǐ
to go (to a place)	qù/zǒu (go/leave)	to tell	gàosù
to have	yǒu	to think	juéde
to have to/should	(yídìng)yào, yīnggāi	to understand	dǒng, míngbái, liǎojiě
to know	zhīdào	to want	xiǎng (verbs), yào(nouns/verbs)

Word order notes:

- <u>Declarative</u>: Subject + Verb + Object
- <u>Negations</u>: 'bù' (not) goes before the verb. "yǒu" is negated with 'méi'
- <u>Interrogatives</u>: For yes/no Qs, add 'ma' after the declarative form
- 'that' as a relative pronoun is 'de' and switches word order: The book that I like = wǒ xǐhuān de shū (I like that [rel. pronoun] book)

Measure words:

'a pair of pants', 'a cup of water'. 'pair' and 'cup' are measure words. All nouns require measure words. Most important is 'ge', (4th tone or neutral tone) the default for all general nouns. If you don't know the right measure word, use 'ge'.

Some important words:

a lot	hěnduō	**big/small**	dà/xiǎo	**good/bad**	hǎo/ bùhǎo	**so**	suǒyǐ
after	yǐhòu/zhīhòu	**but**	dànshì	**here**	zhèlǐ	**sorry**	duìbùqǐ
all	suǒyǒu			**hi/ bye**	nǐhǎo/zàijiàn	**still**	hái(shì)
already	yǐjīng	**China/Chinese (adj)**	zhōngguó	**home**	jiā	**thank you**	xièxiè
also	yě*, hái(yǒu)	**Chinese (language)**	zhōngwén	**(to be) in**	zaì	**that (much) (and) then…**	nàme
although	suīrán	**comparatively/pretty/quite**	bǐjiào/bǐ	**money**	qián		ránhòu
America/ American (adj.)	měiguó	**English (language)**	yīngwén	**mother**	māma	**there**	nàlǐ
and	hé (a **and** b)	**father**	bàba	**no**	bù	**this (much)**	zhème
bathroom	cèsuǒ	**food**	shíwù/fàn /cài	**only**	zhǐ	**time**	shíjiān
because	yīnweì	**friend**	péngyǒu	**or**	hùozhe/ háishì (question)	**very**	hěn
before	yǐqián/zhīqián	**from**	cóng	**person**	rén	**yes**	duì

Numbers: yī (1), èr (2), sān (3), sì (4), wǔ (5), liù (6), qī (7), bā (8), jiǔ (9), shí (10), baǐ (100)

Numbers > 10 are made like this: Ex. 35 = sān shí wǔ (3, 10, 5). When counting objects, put the measure word after the number. Ex. sānge rén (3 people). When counting 2 objects, use 'liǎngge', not 'èrge'.

NOTES: 'bù' changes to 'bú' in front of a 4th tone. 'yī' changes to 'yí' when used with 'gè'. 'Zǒu' means to leave or to go by foot. 'yě' goes after the subject and not the verb like in English. **To be able to:** 'huì' refers to knowledge-based ability, kěyǐ refers to permission, and néng refers to permission or physical ability. **Plural nouns** are the same as the singular form. **Adverbs:** Ex. He speaks very well = tā shuō de hěn hǎo [He speaks 'de' very good]. **Commands:** just use the infinitive.

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Sentences using information only from previous sheet

I am Mike.	wǒ shì Mike	Are you Mary?	nǐ shì Mary ma?
I am American.	wǒ shì měi guó rén	I don't have money.	wǒ méiyǒu qián
He has a Chinese friend.	tā yǒu yí gè zhōng guó péngyǒu	The food that I want to eat...	wǒ xiǎng chī de shí wù...
I want Chinese food.	wǒ yào zhōng guó cài	Who is that?	nà shì sheí？
We want to go to China.	wǒ men xiǎng qù zhōng guó	What is that?	nà shì shénme？
They need to learn English.	tā men xū yào xué yīng wén	Where are you?	nǐ zài nǎ lǐ？
We can't speak Chinese.	wǒ men bú huì shuō zhōng wén	I am in China.	wǒ zài zhōng guó
I can't do it.	wǒ bú huì zuò	How much is this?	zhè gè duō shǎo qián？
I don't know.	wǒ bù zhīdào	How many do you want?	nǐ yào jǐ ge？
I like America.	wǒ xǐ huān měi guó	Why are you here?	nǐ weì shénme zài zhè lǐ？
We eat a lot.	wǒ men chī hěn duō	When are you going?	nǐ shénme shí hòu zǒu？
I don't understand.	wǒ bù míngbái	How are you?	nǐ hǎo ma？ / nǐ zěnme yàng?
I don't know how to do it.	wǒ bù zhīdào zěnme zuò	I am taller than you.	wǒ bǐ nǐ gāo
I only want to buy this.	wǒ zhǐ xiǎng mǎi zhè ge	Five books, three people...	wǔ běn shū，sān ge rén . . .
I think they are Chinese.	wǒ juéde tā mén shì zhōng guó rén	Those books are good.	nà xiē shū hěn hǎo*
There are a lot of people here.	zhèlǐ yǒu hěn duō rén	A very big book...	yī běn hěn dà de shū...
You should do it.	nǐ yīng gāi zuò*	All the people...	suǒ yǒu de rén ...
I am doing it.	wǒ zài zuò	All of my friends...	wǒ suǒ yǒu de péngyǒu . . .
I will do it.	wǒ huì zuò	I don't have that many friends.	wǒ méiyǒu nà me duō péngyǒu
I am going to do it.	wǒ yào zuò	I don't have this much money.	wǒ méiyǒu zhè me duō qián
Before/after I eat...	wǒ chī fàn zhīqián/zhīhòù*	When I eat...	wǒ chī fàn de shíhòu...*
He did it.	tā zuò le	He doesn't speak Chinese well.	tā zhōng wén shuō de bù hǎo
He is taller.	tā bǐjiào gāo	This (one) is better.	zhè ge bǐjiào hǎo

I want to learn Chinese because I am going to China tomorrow.	wǒ xiǎng xué zhōng wén yīnweì wǒ míngtiān yào qù zhōng guó
Even though I don't speak Chinese, I want to go to China.	Suīrán wǒ bù shuō zhōng wén，dànshì* wǒ xiǎng qù zhōng guó
He doesn't have a lot of money, but she has a lot of money because she can speak Chinese.	Tā méiyǒu hěnduō qián，dàn tā yǒu hěnduō qián yīnweì tā huì shuō zhōng wén

*Chinese add "but" after "although". They also often add the object "food/rice" after saying the verb "to eat". Chinese sometimes omit the object "it". Chinese also add "very" before most adjectives and often use "very" instead of the verb "to be". To say "there is/are" use the verb "to have".

How to use this guide

This guide provides the vocab and grammar fundamentals needed to start speaking. Now you need to train your muscle memory and creative ability to form sentences: Take any one of the sample sentence structures from above (or make your own), and repeat out loud until it sounds fluent. Then gradually substitute in different nouns, verbs, and pronouns to develop your creative ability and functional understanding of syntax, all while repeating each sentence until it sounds fluent. Using just the information on this sheet, you can create hundreds of sentences by substituting words and combining sentence structures. Look up other nouns, adjectives, and verbs on your own and substitute into the sentence structures from above to make even more sentences. In the example below, the bolded text develops muscle memory through repetition while the underlined parts develop your syntax understanding and ability to form sentences on your own. Don't read from the paper (except the 1st time), and aim for fluid speech without pauses or hesitations. **If what you say doesn't sound fluent, say it again and again until it does.**

I want to go to the store.	I need to **go to the store.**	I don't **want to go.**
I want to go to the bank.	I have to **go to the store.**	She doesn't **want to go.**
I want to go to the restaurant.	I should **go to the store.**	We don't **want to go.**

Notes