

STUDENT STUDY GUIDE

Self-Instructional Language Program

Davidson College

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I. INTRODUCTION

Learning a new language through a modified self-instructional language program (SILP) is unlikely to resemble your previous classroom experiences at Davidson. In a traditional language course, it is the instructor who creates the structure of the course, sets the pace of progress, administers tests, and provides explanations. In SILP courses, the organization and pace are largely determined by the National Association of Self-Instructional Language Programs (NASILP) in conjunction with the Davidson SILP Director. Most importantly, the responsibility for learning falls directly on you, the student. You must be prepared to commit a significant amount of time and energy to this learner-directed process.

Please read carefully the description of the SIL program contained in the Davidson College catalogue. SILP courses are only available to **motivated students who have satisfied the College language requirement, and who have a minimum overall GPA of 2.5. The Pass/Fail option is not available.** In addition, you will be assessed a fee of \$155.00 in 2019-2020 by the Controller's Office for each course taken. The fee changes annually based on the proportional increases in tuition.

You will submit a **weekly progress report** to the SILP director. These forms allow you to keep track of your work and communicate any concerns or problems you may be experiencing. Please turn in your reports at the end of each week rather than all at once. If you would prefer to submit your forms using campus mail, please notify the Director. **Failure to submit a complete set of reports by the last week of classes may well result in your final grade being reduced by one grading increment.**

Your success will largely depend on how well you grasp the nature of the SIL program. What follows is adapted from documents distributed by NASILP, and will help you to understand more clearly what is required of you.

II. BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE PROGRAM (SILP)

THE TEACHER. Take a look in the mirror -- you are your own teacher. Your primary materials are a textbook and accompanying **audio and/or video materials**. Plan to spend at least one hour each day, or an average of 8 – 10 hours per week, responding actively to your audio recordings. It is essential that you possess the self-discipline to work daily in order to make steady progress.

THE CONVERSATION PARTNER. Text and tape work is supported by small group work with a native speaker trainer/ conversation partner, with whom you will meet for 150 minutes a week. Your designated conversation partner may be another Davidson student who is a native speaker of the target language. Or you may be assigned to work with a member of the broader Davidson community.

THE SESSIONS. Your group will probably meet for two 75-minute sessions, or for three 50-minute meetings. **It is very important to meet at regularly-scheduled days and times.**

THE DEAL. Sessions are intended for the practice and correction of **material that you have already practiced and mastered on your own**. The session will not be conducted as a master class where you learn new material, as that is not the job of your conversation partner. Your mission is to arrive prepared and ready to work so that the entire group can benefit fully from each session.

THE IDEAL. Your conversation partner is your most precious resource, someone who will let you see how a native speaker might react to your efforts. S/he is there to model, to listen, to correct, to encourage, and, yes, even drill. Conversation partners demand accurate pronunciation and mastery of dialogues; they verify control of vocabulary and language patterns; they require a great deal of repetition, and speak at conversational speed. For optimal results, you will work largely in the target language, with your textbooks closed.

THE PITFALLS. Remember that conversation partners do not function as teachers in the traditional sense. They do not schedule quizzes, administer exams, or assign grades. They are neither trained nor expected to introduce new material, change material in the text, or offer grammar explanations in English. Please contact the Director if you find yourself talking **about** the target language during sessions rather communicating **in** the target language.

THE GRADE. Your final grade in the course will be determined primarily by a **final exam** administered by a qualified examiner normally invited from an institution other than Davidson College. Depending on the language and level involved, reading and writing components may be included. Final exams are typically given around Reading Day on the Davidson campus. ***In some courses, final exams are conducted over the Internet when the examiner is unable to travel. There will normally be NO makeup final exam.*** You will be notified as much in advance as possible, and must be prepared to make yourself available at the agreed-upon time.

III. PREPARING EFFECTIVELY

TEXTBOOK. Your text (available in the College bookstore) serves **as the starting point for listening work**. In order to facilitate your work, the Director has chosen texts whose explanations are in English and should be generally accessible to you. Take the time to read the introduction for basic information on the text's use. Then, as you prepare each lesson, be sure to:

- read through any dialogues presented.
- study grammatical explanations.
- observe language patterns being demonstrated in the dialogues/ exercises.
- note the context of vocabulary being used.
- be aware of the communication context in which dialogues take place.
- ask yourself questions about the lesson (a kind of self quiz) to make sure that you understand the grammar, vocabulary, usage, etc., being presented.

AUDIO/VIDEO MATERIALS. Once you understand the grammar rules and vocabulary presented, move on to the tape/CD/digitized sound files. Most materials are now available through the Language Resource Center web site (www3.davidson.edu/cms/x1618.xml) – and can be accessed from any computer with an Internet connection using your Davidson login info. Please note that you will need to have Real Player loaded on your computer in order to access audio and video files.

Working with the audio/video materials will help you move from possessing abstract knowledge of the target language to becoming an active user of the language. Be willing to repeat the same material **out loud, and more than once**. While you may not realize it, you are actually assimilating patterns and utterances of the target language in preparation for expansion later.

Work first on any dialogues, then on the drills. **Remember:** you will not be tested on how well you can explain rules, but on how well you can **speak and comprehend** the target language.

Effective tape work requires short, sharply focused sessions. Marathon listening sessions can produce the dreaded state known as "tape hypnosis" where concentration tends to waver. Therefore, don't attempt too much at one time. **Establish the limits of your personal attention span**, which may be as little as 15-20 minutes. Several short sessions with your materials are preferable to one long session. Whatever you do, don't procrastinate or fall behind.

When working with your audio and video materials, be sure to:

- repeat out loud what you hear (you don't just want to learn to listen to the target language, do you?).
- keep your text closed during tape work, unless the exercise asks you to do otherwise, in order to train your ears (remember, you won't have a teleprompter to read from in Florence!).
- listen and repeat a segment several times if you are having difficulty; you may refer to your text as a last resort; whatever you do, do not give up.
- use the "backward buildup" technique of mastering long sentences: divide the sentence into shorter phrases; drill the last phrase first; progressively add preceding elements as you master each new one; soon you will be drilling the entire sentence.
- try and duplicate the utterance on the tape as precisely as you can, accent and all (even if it is not identical to the pronunciation of your tutor).
- persevere, persevere, persevere!

It is virtually impossible to overdo listening/speaking work. Audio/video work encourages you to learn -- indeed to over-learn -- the material in preparation for your session. Don't become discouraged if the voices on the recording seem "too fast." By learning to keep up with the tapes, you are helping yourself learn to converse at native speed.

IV. SHINING IN YOUR SESSIONS

You won't have to wait until that trip to Cairo to find out whether people can understand what you are trying to say to them. To this end, your conversation partner is expected to use the target language during sessions. Please do not lose valuable session time by asking for explanations in English. **It is as much your responsibility as it is the conversation partner's to keep the session going in the target language.** If for some reason s/he wants to speak English or spend time discussing weekend activities, **it is up to you** to discourage this as politely as possible and demonstrate your desire to continue in the target language. If you cannot **both** phrase a question **and** understand the answer in the target language, you should probably keep it to yourself rather than disrupt the flow of the session. You may very well discover the answer to your question **by working through** the material during the session. Remember: you do not have to have an exhaustive intellectual understanding of the language's rules and structures in order to speak the language.

During sessions, **be sure** to:

- arrive on time and be ready to work.
- avoid speaking English.
- keep your text closed to avoid becoming dependent on visual cues.
- be prepared to give rapid-fire answers to rapid-fire questions.
- try and imitate all aspects that are part of communication: accent, intonation pronunciation, gestures, and facial expressions.
- understand that discrepancies between the conversation partner's voice and those on the recording reflect a normal range of variation.
- listen carefully to responses given by others in the group.
- keep a positive attitude about receiving correction; remember that conversation partners want to help you avoid later embarrassment.

If you have difficulty understanding your conversation partner, there's a very good chance that you are not using the materials in the most effective way. Don't ask the conversation partner to slow down or speak more clearly. Rather, ask yourself if you are spending too much time studying the material visually rather than with your ears. Try working with the recordings with your book closed. Another strategy is to concentrate on conversational clusters of words rather than individual ones.

You are expected to attend all scheduled sessions. **Students missing more than three hours of session time – for whatever reason – can expect to see their final grade reduced by one grading increment, e.g., B+ → B, for each absence beyond the three allowed.** Conversation partners are not required to give make up sessions. You will be expected to pay for any private sessions arranged following an absence.

If you are doing well in your sessions, there is every reason for you to expect to do just as well in your final exam. Your exam should not contain any grammar or vocabulary that you have not studied. If you have prepared thoroughly, the test will be a normal, natural extension of what you have been doing all along.

V. CONTACTING THE SILP DIRECTOR

Please feel free to contact the SILP director if you are experiencing difficulty establishing productive work habits. Sometimes a brief conference can produce some strategies for effective learning. Call, e-mail, or request an appointment with the SILP Director on your weekly progress report.

Please contact the SILP Director **immediately** if you believe that the sessions are not being conducted according to these guidelines. It is important for the director to be informed if the academic integrity of the course is threatened. Your comments will remain confidential.

Finally, if you have comments, questions, or problems of any kind concerning any aspect of Davidson College's SIL program, please feel free to contact Dr. Beschea at his office (Chambers 2009). Phone at 894-2923 or e-mail at [flbeschea@davidson.edu](mailto:flbeschea@ davidson.edu)

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