

UNCONVENTIONAL GIFTS

The gift of gab: an investment

The value of learning a foreign language goes beyond the practical. It also opens the door to understanding other cultures.

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Whether for yourself or your nearest and dearest, the gift of a foreign language can last a lifetime. Here's a look at some language programs and what they offer:

Beverly Hills Lingual Institute

My memories of high school and college French are mostly negative because I usually felt dimwitted anytime I tried to speak. So I was surprised to find that the Beverly Hills Lingual Institute felt like a social club, where learning a language isn't a chore.

The institute offers 20 to 25 languages for all levels of learners, from beginning through advanced. Some initial use of English helps students grasp the grammatical concepts more quickly, but "at least half the class is in the language from Day One," said director Karin Fallon.

Classes, which meet once a week, use college textbooks and are taught by native speakers. Because there is a maximum of 10 students in each class, there are ample opportunities for conversation. Students also use audio materials, podcasts, foreign films, museum tours and online resources such as YouTube to supplement their weekly session.

Beverly Hills Lingual Institute, 439 N. Canon Drive, Suite 207, Beverly Hills; (310) 858-0717. www.bhlingual.com. French, Spanish, Italian and English classes are \$225 for an eight-week session; other languages, \$275.

UCLA Extension

Most language teachers recommend taking a class because face-to-face interaction is critical to communication. Classes also provide opportunities for you to learn about the country's culture through its history, theater and film.

UCLA Extension offers beginning, intermediate and advanced immersion classes in Arabic, Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese and Spanish either online or at its Westwood campus. Sessions meet either twice a week, for 2 1/2 hours, or on Saturday for four hours.

UCLA Extension, 10995 Le Conte Ave., Los Angeles; (310) 825-1898, <http://www.uclaextension.edu> (to find the language section, look under "Fields of Study"). Online classes, limited to 20 students, are \$550 a quarter; on-campus classes, limited to 25 students, are \$480.



BY THE BOOK: Textbooks are a time-honored tool for learning a language, but programs in the LA area also use audio and online resources and more

Berlitz

Berlitz offers instruction in more than 50 languages, using a variety of methods from private and group lessons to online sessions with an instructor or self-study programs. In Berlitz's Virtual Classroom, students can use their computers to record online lessons for playback later. If money is no object, Berlitz Total Immersion guarantees that you'll attain basic language skills in one week for \$3,990.

"We believe that language is best taught in the target language. In a Berlitz learning environment, you learn by listening, repeating and speaking in real-life contexts," said Tom Godfrey, director of operations for Berlitz North America.

Although Berlitz emphasizes grammatical structures more than nitty-gritty grammar, instructor Valerie Schultz clarified several masculine and feminine nouns for me when I took a private German class at Berlitz in Santa Monica. I learned Katze is the feminine word for cat and Kater means "tomcat." But Kater is usually used to describe a hangover. On my next trip to Germany, if I have a hangover, I'll request Haar des Katers rather

than the hair-of-the-dog cure.

Berlitz, <http://www.berlitz.us>. Locations in Santa Monica, Beverly Hills, Pasadena, Torrance, Woodland Hills and Costa Mesa. Costs range from \$299, for self-study, to \$3,990 for the immersion course.

Pimsleur

The Pimsleur Method was developed in the 1960s using "applied memory techniques where you repeat a word or a structure over several lessons," says Robert Riger, Pimsleur's director.

Instruction is offered in more than 60 languages, with lessons broken into 30-minute audio sessions, using online CDs or downloaded Mp3 files, that are designed to be listened to at least once a day.

Each Pimsleur lesson begins with a conversation in the language you are studying, which is then broken down for you in English and the target language (in my case, German). On the first day, I found it daunting to say "Entschuldigen Sie" (Excuse me), but by the fourth day I found myself sprechen mit meinen zwei Katzen auf Deutsch ("speaking with my two cats in German").

Online language resources

OpenCulture.com: Free lessons or podcasts in 37 languages.

www.travlang.com: Online dictionaries and translation resources; travel items are also for sale.

AbroadLanguages.com: A list of schools for those interested in studying abroad and links to online lesson sites.

fsi-language-courses.org: Free online versions of language courses developed by the Foreign Service Institute.

www.ForeignServiceInstitute.com: Digitally remastered versions of the Foreign Service Institute audio training courses. Prices start at \$99.95 for an MP3 DVD and \$200 for audio CDs.

www.learner.org/resources/series83.html: French in Action immersion course offers 26 1/2 hour lessons on DVD for \$250. Also CDs, books and study guides.

oli.web.cmu.edu/openlearning: Carnegie Mellon's Open Learning Initiative offers free interactive video-based French lessons. Also, check YouTube for instructional language videos.

Pimsleur, (800) 831-5497, <http://www.pimsleur.com>. A free sample lesson is offered. A full course (100 half-hour lessons) is \$374 for a digital download. Its 2Go iPhone app is \$4.99.

Rosetta Stone

Rosetta Stone's new Version 4 TOTALE offers a mix of interactive computer software, with feedback on pronunciation, and online interaction in Rosetta Studio and Rosetta World. The 4 TOTALE package also includes audio CDs and a smart-phone app to help you study on the go. Rosetta Studio, its online classroom, provides sessions with a teacher; Rosetta World is an online community where students can converse and play games.

"Rosetta Stone is designed to teach language as it's taught when we're children, without reference to your native language — with images and sound because language always points to context. The meaning is in what it points to," said Rosetta Stone's director of learning, Duane Sider.

After several Rosetta Stone lessons in beginning German, I could count to 10, identify primary colors and knew words that describe a family.

Rosetta Stone, (800) 767-3882, www.rosstattstone.com. Thirty-one languages, with Level 1 (beginning) software for most languages priced from \$249 (discounts from \$40 to \$150 are offered through Dec. 25).

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