Continuous Improvement

EAE Learning objectives for this lesson

Practice using Dependent Prepositions and phrasal verbs to talk about continuous Improvement. Learn and use some new idiomatic expressions. Comprehension and discussion activities.



1. Is it important to you to improve continuously?
2. How do you measure your progression?
3. Are you involved in any processes at work or school which are designed to secure continuous improvement?
4. Do you try to measure your progression in English? How?
5. Do you feel that you have reached a plateau with your learning?
6. Are you the kind of person who has to improve constantly, or are
7. you happy to give yourself time to slowly progress through life?



Activity Two - Progression in Language Learning.

Let's read an article about language learning. We sometimes worry that we are no longer improving, because we expect to continue learning at a regular pace. In fact it's not so simple…

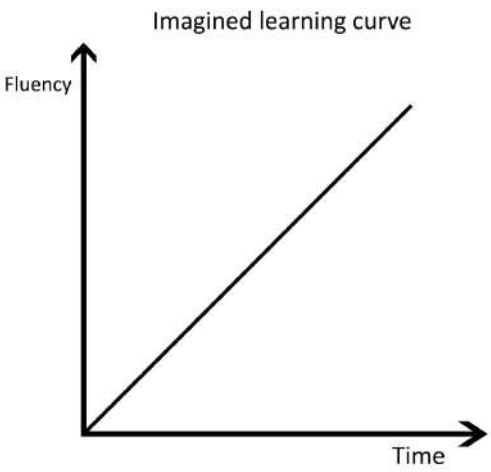
Marginal utility and language learning

Source: https://www.lingholic.com/reaching-a-plateau-in-language-learning-how-to-get-out-of-it/

The law of diminishing returns is actually taken from the field of economics, but when applied to language learning it means something like this: the more effort you put into learning a language over time, the smaller your increases in fluency become. The more time you invest, the smaller your returns on investment become.

A vocabulary of around 3000 words provides coverage for around 95% of common texts (such as news items, blogs, etc.). The remaining 5% of the vocabulary you need to know to really fully understand common texts is in the magnitude of tens of thousands of words (the average active vocabulary of an adult English speaker is of around 20,000 words, with a passive one of around 40,000 words). Knowing 3000 words puts you in the intermediate stage of language learning, after which learning words doesn't seem like it makes that big of a difference anymore.

So here's the problem: once you are at an intermediate level you simply progress at a much slower pace. You feel like they have reached a plateau because of how you view language learning. If we were to draw a graph, this would be the imagined learning curve of a language learner:

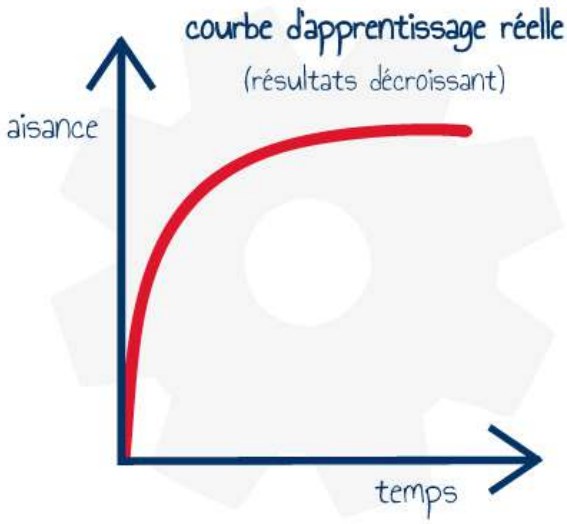


Imagined linear learning curve

In the minds of many people who undertake the study of a foreign language, putting more study time should necessarily equal to gaining proportional increases in fluency. However, this is clearly not how things work.

Here is another graph, which shows something that might be slightly closer to the truth.

Actual learning curve in language learning

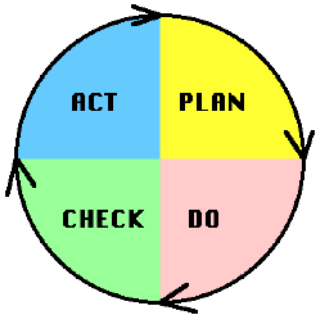


As you can see, in the beginning stage, there is a rapid increase in fluency over a rather short period of time. This is because, as stated earlier, a relatively few number of words keep showing up all the time and so learning these words provides a huge return on investment. Not only that, because you started from a "blank slate," so to speak (you had no knowledge of the foreign language before starting to learn it), you can clearly see and feel the progress you are making since it's easy to compare your current level of fluency to what it was just a few weeks ago.

By changing the way you think, then, or in other words by changing the way you see how your learning curve really works, you will probably understand that in most cases, what you have reached is not a plateau, but simply an intermediate phase where it will take more and more time to get similar gains in fluency to what you got before.

Activity Three - **Improving systems and processes**. Read the article and find the correct dependent prepositions to fill the gaps.
First answer the questions:

1. Are you familiar with the Deming Cycle, or the Deming wheel?
2. Do you use it in your work?
3. Do you think it's useful?



W. Edwards Deming in the 1950's proposed …. business processes should be analysed and measured to identify sources of variations that cause products **....** deviate from customer requirements. He recommended **....** business processes be placed in a continuous feedback loop so that managers can identify and change the parts of the process to improve. Deming created a diagram to illustrate this continuous process, commonly known …. the PDCA cycle for Plan, Do, Check, Act:

- **PLAN**: Design or revise business process components to improve results
- **DO**: Implement the plan and measure its performance
- **CHECK**: Assess the measurements and report the results …. decision makers
- **ACT**: Decide …. changes needed to improve the process

This was helpful for managers to know how what they needed to concentrate **....** and what the issues really consisted **.....** They could deal **....** urgent changes quickly. In the 'do' phase employees can warn a manager **....** potential issues they need to attend **....** and prevent them **....** becoming a serious problem.

Activity Four: Discuss with your partner and present to the class.
With your partner discuss the concept of continuous improvement. Then tell the class what methods, if any, you use in your work to secure continuous improvement.

Activity Five: Read the quotations and discuss which you prefer and why.

- Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better. *Maya Angelou*
- Man cannot really improve himself without improving others. *Charles Dickens*
- Continuous improvement is better than delayed perfection. *Mark Twain*
- He who stops being better stops being good. *Oliver Cromwell*
- There is always one more thing to learn. *Steve Jobs*
- There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self. *Aldous Huxley*

Activity Six: With a new partner… **As fast as you can**, write some sentences about the importance of continuous improvement using the following phrasal verbs. Your aim is to use them all before the other people in the group..

- Add up to
- To clean up
- Do away with
- Figure out
- Go over
- Keep on doing
- Look into
- Make up for
- Put together
- Sort out
- Work out

Activity Seven: ***Idiomatic expressions.***
With a new partner try to give a definition for each of the following idiomatic expressions:

- There's room for improvement.
- If at first you don't succeed try try again.
- Practice makes perfect.
- Nothing succeeds like success.
- From rags to riches.
- I've never been better.
- It's taken a turn for the better.
- It's a change for the better.



Activity Eight: ***Role plays.***
With one or more partners act out one of the following scenes and try to use as many of the idiomatic expressions from above as possible.

1. You are the manager of a team and you want to inspire your co-workers to make more of an effort to improve their performance.

2. You are the parents of a teenage boy and you want to encourage him to work harder and succeed at his studies.

