



EIGHT GREAT WAYS TO LEARN CHINESE

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It is hard to find someone who will argue that China WILL NOT be a major factor in world business for at least another decade or so... and one way to learn more about China and how to do business with China, is to learn spoken Chinese (also known as "Mandarin"—the official language of China).

I am often asked what the best way to learn Chinese is, and I have to say that there is no quick fix. Like learning any language, learning Chinese takes time. To make sure your time is well-spent, however, here are eight things that have helped others accelerate their studies. Note that these tips are coming to you from a Mandarin-speaking *wai guo ren* (also known as non-Chinese or "foreigner"). The perspective of a native Chinese speaker would certainly be different.

Listed in no particular order:

1. **Live in China or Taiwan.** Being immersed in the environment is a sure fire way to train your ear to "hear" the language more quickly and provides lots of opportunities for practice. If you live in one of these places, you have a great advantage in learning.
2. **Have a Chinese-speaking spouse, partner or friend.** Proximity again...being around a (native) speaker increases your chances of learning the language, especially if you are trying to do so and if this is someone you spend a lot of time with.
3. **Watch Chinese-language movies.** If you have some basis in Chinese, you can learn a lot from watching Chinese-language movies and reading the Chinese (or English) subtitles. If you can read Chinese... watch English-language movies in English and read Chinese subtitles to see how everything translates. (Of course, you need to FIND those Chinese-subtitled movies... much easier when you are in China)
4. **Subscribe to "learn Chinese" podcasts.** Even if you have absolutely no access to other materials and live far, far away from any other Chinese-language speakers, there are "learn Chinese" programs available on the internet. Some offer free lessons for beginning students. *Chinesepod* is a good one.
5. **Take a Chinese class that has few English speakers.** When there is little or no translation done in the class, it is harder at the beginning but you will learn "better." I was once in a class where all the other students were Korean. All explanations had to be given in Chinese... even at the basic level.
6. **Work in a Chinese restaurant.** Or be in another environment where people do not speak your language, but do speak Chinese. You will have to learn some Mandarin in order to survive. Here in Texas, some of my Texan-speaking friends have picked up more Spanish working in restaurants or



blue heron
holdings, LLC

www.BlueHeron8.com

USA PO Box 301374, Austin, TX 78703 | Tel 1-512-565-4909 | Fax 1-512-828-6138

CHINA 500 Xiangyang S Road, Ste 304, Shanghai 200031 | Tel 86-138-1780-5491 | Fax 86-21-6466-9879
Room 515/517 Resource Plaza, No. 151 Zhongguancun North Road, Haidian District, Beijing 100080
Tel 86-10-5887-6336 | Fax 86-10-5887-6338

other places with Spanish-only colleagues than they have in six to ten years of school training. It works for Chinese, too.

7. **Teach English to Chinese speakers.** Especially when you are working with students who have very little English ability, you will learn some Chinese by default. You can also practice what Chinese you know. Another good avenue is teaching English to Chinese children.
8. **Repeat, repeat, repeat.** Like all languages, learning Mandarin requires mucho repetition... maybe even more than other *romance* languages because you have to work on getting the word right, then the tone right. Just keep trying and practicing. It helps to have a very healthy self-image and not being afraid to make a mistake, because you WILL make mistakes!

The study of Chinese is a major undertaking, but is a big factor in being successful in China. Though things can be done in English, you have much more insight into what is going on, into the thought process of your partners, and will be much more effective with even an elementary grounding in Mandarin.

There are more ways to learn the language, and I will offer more later. Look for future postings on this topic, or contribute what has worked for you!

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