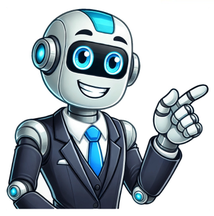
I'm not a bot



Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 2Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 3Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 4Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 5Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 6Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 7Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 8Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 9Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 10Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 11Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 12Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 13Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 14Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 15Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 16Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 17Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 18Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 19Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 20Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 21Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 22Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 23Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 24Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 25Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics).Page 26Here you'll find a full archive of all language learning articles on this site in chronological order. Use the search field to filter by language or topic (alternatively you can browse languages or topics). Affiliate DisclaimerLast updated: January 24th, 2024It's my pleasure to provide you with information to help you on this site free of charge, but I also need you to know that this is a for-profit business and I rely on affiliate programs to generate revenue.AutoLingual, among other affiliate programs, is a participant in the Amazon Services LLC Associates Program, an affiliate advertising program designed to provide a means for sites to earn advertising fees by advertising and linking to Amazon.com. When you click a link on my site to a product on Amazon, just assume that I am earning a small commission if you make a purchase on their site.Commissions earned by me do not affect the price you pay on anything. Toll Free- U.S. & Canada: 1-800-791-9386 Hong Kong: 800-930-623 Australia: 1-800-779-835 Singapore: 800-130-1652 United Kingdom: 0-800-086-8969 Germany: 0-800-180-0341 France: 0-805-080-689 Spain: 900-838-906 Live Teacher from China! Rss The Chinese writing system is known for having thousands of individual letters, a fact that is often used to illustrate how difficult the Chinese language would be to master if one had to learn all those letters. It's almost impossible to count all the Chinese "letters" that exist in the Chinese "alphabet". But estimates could easily go over 135,000 unique characters. That being said, you'll only need around 3500 characters to read a newspaper, and the knowledge of 2600 Chinese "letters" is enough to pass a Chinese language test. Chinese Letters Aren't Letters, But "Word-Parts" or "Morphemes" All this talk about letters is only a half-truth, though... In reality, the Chinese characters aren't letters, but rather symbols that each represent a morpheme of a word. What's A Morpheme? What's a morpheme? Let's take the word "unattractive" as an example. In English, this would consist of three morphemes; "un", "attract" and "ive". Each can be used separately to form another word, but sometimes it can function as an independent word in itself, life it's the case with "attract". Curiously, "attract" is actually written with two morphemes: 吸, meaning "suck" and 引 meaning "lead". So to attract, in Chinese, is to "suck-lead". It sort of makes sense, doesn't it? Is It Difficult To Learn All Chinese Characters? Now imagine having a symbol for each morpheme in the English language. There'd be thousands. Would they be difficult to learn? Well.. I don't really think so. Learning words in a language that uses the Latin Alphabet means learning a combination of letters for each morpheme. For Chinese, you just have to learn a drawing instead. (But I digress; To read more about the difficulty of Chinese, read my article on the subject). How Many Chinese Characters Exist In Total? But how many characters or "morphemes" exist in Chinese? The 2004 version of the Yitizi Zidian dictionary counts 106,230 characters! And this dictionary doesn't take the about 30.000 historical characters used by the Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese for writing their own languages into account. In reality, however, the total number of Chinese characters is hard to count, because new ones are constantly added and old ones aren't necessarily used anymore. Other sources say that there are about 50,000 Hanzi characters in the Chinese script (or 50,000 letters in the Chinese alphabet, if you will). While I'm certain that there are more, I think that you'd be hard-pressed to find a contemporary text that uses any characters other than those 50,000. How Many Chinese Characters Do I Need To Read A Chinese Newspaper? So to make things clear: You don't need to learn 106,000 characters or even 50,000 to become functional in Chinese. A much smaller number of characters are actually used in everyday life. Studies have found that you'll be able to read most Chinese newspapers fluently with around 3500 characters. And to pass the official Chinese language test (called HSK) at its highest level, you need to master just 2600 characters. So at 2600 characters, you'll be considered fluent in Chinese! So while it can seem intimidating to throw big numbers around like "106,000", it isn't really a useful number for someone who is learning Chinese. In reality, you need much less. So Doesn't Chinese Have An Alphabet? Enter: Pinyin So I've been telling you that there doesn't exist a Chinese alphabet and that the Hanzi characters constitute a morpheme-based writing system... And so on! Actually, there does exist a Chinese alphabet. It's called Pinyin. Pinyin is a modified version of the Latin alphabet (that we use for writing English). Pinyin has a total of 26 letters and uses various diacritics (or symbols added on top of the letter) to indicate the tones used. While Pinyin is easy to learn and use, it's mostly something that you'll rely on as a learner of Chinese. The reason? The Chinese don't use it for writing in real life. For a quick introduction and walk-through of the Pinyin alphabet, watch the excellent video below. Contact AutoLingualWant to get in touch? I'd love to hear from you!Questions? Suggestions? Praise or Critique? Collaboration requests? A signed photo? (maybe not...)While I can't always respond to all emails I get, I do read and check everything, and it's a great encouragement to receive a comment from people who're reading my articles.Throw me a line in the form below, and I'll try getting back to you as quickly as I can.And please do not hesitate to write me if you have found a typo or some kind of incorrect information in an article! Chinese doesn't have letters, nor does it have an alphabet. Instead, it has characters which are called Hanzi in Chinese. It's also incorrect to describe Chinese characters as hieroglyphs (like ancient Egyptian). Rather, Chinese characters are what's called logograms. How many Chinese characters are there? It's not technically possible to give an exact Chinese character count, but most official sources number over 50,000 individual Chinese characters. The Zhonghua Zihai dictionary contains 85,568 Chinese characters, while the Yitizi Zidiǎn dictionary lists 106,230 characters. It's clearly not a settled issue as the number can't be agreed on. In addition to native counts, there also tens of thousands of characters used in neighboring languages like Japanese and Korean (who also make use of Chinese Hanzi). Like other languages, Chinese is evolving too so new characters are often finding their way into use. How many Chinese characters do you need to ace the HSK or read a piece of literature? Even though there are potentially hundreds of thousands of Chinese characters, you certainly don't need to learn that many. In fact, only a very small amount of characters are necessary to achieve fluency. Highly educated Chinese people generally know around 8,000 characters which is considered quite a lot. To ace the HSK proficiency test (highest level), you only need 2,600 characters. In order to read a newspaper (which contains advanced vocabulary), you need around 3,500 Chinese characters under your belt. As you can see, this is nowhere near the 50,000+ or 100,000+ mark. Think of Chinese characters as morphemes rather than letters A logogram is a written character that represents a single morpheme, or unit of meaning. What is a morpheme and how do they work in Chinese? A morpheme is the smallest meaningful lexical chunk in a language. This can be a complete word (e.g. 'dog') or part of a word (the 's' on the end of 'dogs'). The only criteria is that it has meaning on its own. For example, the word unfathomable contains 3 morphemes: un + fathom + able. An example in Chinese is the word for appetite. In Chinese, this word is 食欲. It's made up of 2 morphemes which are individual words: Are Chinese characters difficult to learn? Believe it or not, learning Chinese characters is no different to learning English letters. In both cases, you are simply learning to recognize an image or outline - a picture. The difference is that Chinese characters can get quite complex and can combine with other characters. The real challenge in learning Chinese Hanzi is the sheer number of them (rather than learning 26, you're learning thousands). Over time and through repeated exposure, you'll learn to recognize the pictures at immediate glance without even having to think about it. Chinese doesn't have an alphabet, but there is a romanized alphabet While there's no native Chinese alphabet per se (no a-z Chinese letters), there is a romanized alphabet used in its place by foreign students called pinyin. Pinyin uses the English alphabet with diacritics to represent Chinese tones. This is not used by Chinese people generally but is typically used as a learning device for new students of Chinese who are learning to read. Like English, Chinese pinyin contains 26 letters. Cite article Grab the link to this articleCopy Link My name's Mille and I'm from Denmark where I also currently live. I'm a language learning enthusiast (some call it "nerd"). I've been into language learning for over ten years now. Learning languages is a passion that keeps on giving. I enjoy the process and the opportunities and benefits that foreign languages provide are just invaluable. My goal with this website is to write insightful articles about languages and language learning. My articles all reflect my personal, subjective view. There are obviously other ways of going about language studies, but what I write here is my approach. I'm looking forward to connecting with other language enthusiasts as well as people who might want to pick up another language, but don't know how! My mother tongue is Danish, and I speak English and French too, as well as an intermediate level of Standard Arabic and some Algerian Derja. English is a language I learned in school. Or that's the official part. In reality the internet, films and TV got me to the level of English that I have now. I'm definitely not a native English speaker, but I consider my English good enough to write this blog. (I do, however, encourage my readers to correct any mistakes I might make). French is a self-taught language for me. It's something that I spent around 3 years working on before I started to consider myself "fluent". Regarding travel I'm learning these languages without traveling to the countries where they are spoken. In fact, in spite of how much I love to travel, I will never travel to a country where my target language is spoken during the year that I'm learning it — this way you can always know that I have had no unfair advantages. Of course I do like to travel to that country after I've learned the language, because that's the whole point of learning a language — using it! I love going to new places and experiencing new things, and even moreso when I have the benefit of the language to help me. This also gives me a sink-or-swim test to find out just how well I've learned the language. Is it as good as I want? Am I really fluent? I'll share those results with you too. (As you know, I have been in Italy for the past few weeks, using the language I spent the last year learning. I've already given a brief update on that, and I'm looking forward to making a more detailed report on my experiences when I return home.) Regarding methods I'm not selling a method. I'm not promoting a method. In fact, I don't even have a method. Each language is different, and trying to learn one language based on the rules of another is a silly idea. I believe the idea of a method is the single most obvious flaw in products like Rosetta Stone, Pimsleur, etc. Even more organic products like Busuu suffer from this major flaw. The moment you try to fit Mandarin into the mold of what worked in Spanish, you have failed. I do have some things I always do, but I do not have a formula or a schedule, and I approach each language differently. And with this blog, I have taken on the role of guinea pig, allowing myself to be a test subject for any idea — even if it's crazy — so that hopefully my readers can benefit from my experiences. As you have already seen, this year is no exception. Regarding polyglots I do not think that learning languages makes a person "cool", or interesting, or makes a person any better than anyone else. In fact, I think it's quite the opposite — if you're a socially awkward geek or nerd, learning another language is only going to make you a bigger geek, who is even more socially awkward. If you're uninteresting, or irritating, learning another language is only going to make you uninteresting to more people, and give you the ability to irritate more people. In photography, we often say "nice camera, now show me your photos," and in language, I feel the same way. I don't care how many languages you speak, I only care about what interesting things you have to say. I don't have any interest whatsoever in the "polyglot community" or having any status therein. Aspiring to be a polyglot is stupid. Learn a language to use it, not to show it off. I learn languages because I have a desire to use them. If you look around the language blogs, you see several different blogs by several different people with different attitudes toward language and learning, but the ones that rise to the top all have one thing in common: they're people who are using the languages they learn. And that's perhaps the most important thing I have to say: I like your languages... now use them to tell me something interesting. I hope you'll enjoy reading my articles. I've put a lot of work into them (and continue to do so) so I'd appreciate any comments, opinions, shares and shout-outs! Get in touch on me through my contact page or through social media (click the icons below) We use cookies to give you the best experience on our website. You can opt out of your preference by clicking a button.Manage consent Here you'll find my top recommendations for language learning at home.On this page you'll find my personal favorites as far as language courses, books and other resources go. Obviously, I can't cover every language in the world but what I've listed here covers the main ones (plus a few less popular languages).Over time as I discover new courses and products, I may edit or add to this list.Extensive language course that covers everything from beginner to advancedRocket Languages: These guys have been around for decades and their courses are quite famous (for good reason). They cover all the major languages (the Italian and Russian editions are excellent). There are millions of users and thousands of verified success stories. I can't recommend their courses enough.Language courses for people who love to readUncovered series: This is an incredibly popular and expanding series by I Will Teach You A Language (Olly Richards). Olly's really become known as the "story guy" in the polyglot community as he emphasizes learning through story.The Uncovered series has become a hit since its inception. Well worth it.Best language courses for self-learners and autodidactsInnovative Series: As opposed to Rocket (see above) which is very structured in its approach, Innovative is a little more "liberal" with its course content. This makes it perfect for autodidacts (people who learn alone) or advanced learners who don't need much help moving through lesson material.Tip: It's actually a great supplement to a Rocket course if you can afford both.Best books for learning languages (self and class study)Language Books: It's impossible to recommend books for every language but what I do want to do is recommend some of my all-time personal favorites.Here they are (links to Amazon):Best way to find cheap online language teachers and tutorsitalki: The number one site in the world for finding people to practice languages with (or find qualified tutors/teachers online). Teachers on here are unbelievably inexpensive - as low as $4 in many cases.Note: This is an offer via The Mezzofanti Guild that gives an extra free lesson if you sign up:More best language courses and resourcesBabbel: Basically a much more thorough and comprehensive alternative to Duolingo for European languages. It's affordable and very effective.Mondly: One of the most well-designed apps (web and mobile) around that covers almost language you can think of. I had great progress using it for some European languages.Pimsleur: How can I not mention Pimsleur? Pimsleur is one of the most well-known and universally respected language courses available. It's now available online for many languages. I highly recommend it.That's it for now (check back later).Learning Spanish? See my list of online Spanish courses.Also make sure to subscribe for language-specific insider content.If you want to get in contact with me, please shoot me an email and say hi.Disclosure: I do earn from affiliate revenue and the links to my preferred resources may give me commissions (at no cost to you). These commissions help me maintain and improve this site as a helpful resource for language learners.