

The Best Language-Learning Software

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Whether you're studying a new language, trying to pick up a few words before traveling, or brushing up on a tongue you spoke long ago, here are the best apps and software packages for learning a language at a range of prices.

Believe it or not, there is a magic bullet for learning a foreign language, and you don't even have to be a genius. The secret? Be younger than about six years old and have adequate exposure.

Kidding aside (though isn't it remarkable that children don't have to learn languages so much as simply acquire them?), language-learning takes considerable effort and time, and having access to the right program can make a huge difference, too. And what constitutes the "right" program changes based on one's previous exposure to the language being learned, as well as the personal preferences of the student.

Some people, like me, take better to learning a new language aurally rather than visually. Some people thrive when interaction is center stage. Others need a blended experience. And still others will get the most out of a program that includes connecting with human beings.

Put simply, when it comes to learning a new language, what works for some people might not work for others.

Fortunately, there are many great language learning programs and apps to choose from, each of which meets different needs and is better suited to students with different learning styles.

[RocketLanguages](#) , one of our **Editors' Choices**, works brilliantly for travelers who want to learn key phrases quickly. [Rosetta Stone version 4 TOTALE](#) , another **Editor's Choice**, makes for an excellent point of entry for new speakers, especially those who like a blend of reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Another language-learning program, [Tell Me More](#) , has an excellent focus on terminology used in business and more formal settings.

Some language-learning packages now have mobile apps, too, which help you squeeze in some extra study time while commuting, waiting in lines, or anywhere else you find yourself with a few minutes to spare. And still other programs, such as [Living Language Platinum](#) include in their prices live Web classes to get you speaking with other students and a real instructor.

If your budget is extremely tight, there are a few [free language-learning apps](#) that we recommend, but you will likely get a more rigorous experience with a paid product. With one exception, which is listed below, the free apps tend to supplement language-learning, rather than provide a full program.

No matter what learning objectives or preferences you have, there's a great way for you to study a new language. Below, in alphabetical order, you'll find a summary and links to full reviews of some of the best language-learning software on the market. The [slideshow of language-learning programs](#) will also give you a visual taste of all these different programs.

[Babbel](#)



From \$12.95 per month

For an inexpensive and little-known language-learning program, Babbel exceeds expectations, delivering high quality courses for anyone who doesn't mind an online-only program. I'd put it on par with Living Language

(see below) in many respects. I like Babbel's core content better, as well as the ability to pay per month and quit any time, but Babbel does not have real-time Web classes hosted by trained instructors, though Living Language does. For beginners who aren't ready to commit just yet, Babbel offers an inexpensive way to dive into great content in 11 languages.

Available Languages: Dutch, English, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, and Turkish. [Read the full review >>](#)

[Duolingo](#)



Free

Duolingo is by far the best free program for learning a language, but it is only offered in a few languages at the moment. Part crowd-sourcing project to translate the Web and part language-learning site, Duolingo has tremendous features that work surprisingly well at getting you to practice a language—but not necessarily master it. Mid-level or experienced speakers of other languages won't like that Duolingo does not easily let you skip ahead to the point in the program that's right for you. You can test out of sections one at a time, but doing so requires serious time. Babbel (see above) lets you skip around willy-nilly, while TELL ME MORE (see below) has a thorough adaptive assessment test that makes sure you start at the right point in the program.

Available Languages: French, German, Italian (beta), Portuguese (beta), Spanish. [Read the full review >>](#)

[Duolingo iPhone App](#)



Free

The Duolingo iPhone app syncs with the online Duolingo app to keep track of your progress seamlessly. This app is only available for iPhone at the moment and it requires an Internet connection to work, but it is 100 percent free. The Duolingo iPhone app handles special characters and some translations with greater ease than even the full Web version. It's an ideal way to practice Spanish, French, German, and Portuguese anywhere you have an Internet connection and a few minutes on your hands. Even though Duolingo offers Italian in its online program, that language is not yet in the iPhone app.

Languages Available: French, German, Portuguese, Spanish. [Read the full review >>](#)

[Fluenz](#)



\$218 for Disc 1; \$519 for 1+2+3 package; \$677 for 1+2+3+4+5 package

Shrink-wrapped language-learning software Fluenz guides new learners through a rigorous and thorough program, adding ample context in English to help the new language not only stick, but also make sense. Fluenz's signature feature is that every program comes with an English-speaking Sherpa who, through videos that play at the beginning and end of every lesson, guides you into the new language. It's quite similar in that respect to Rocket Languages (see below), except that in Rocket 1) the guides share personal reflections and ideas, and 2) they present themselves through audio and forum discussion boards only—no video (except American Sign Language). The guides in Fluenz do mitigate some of the anxiety and apprehension some learners may feel about trying to master a new language. Experienced learners can jump ahead to discs 3 or 4 of the set, but it's a bit of a gamble trying to figure out the best starting point. TELL ME MORE (see below) has an adaptive placement test to find your level.

Languages Available: Latin American Spanish, European Spanish, French, Italian, German, Mandarin (Pinyin writing only). [Read the full review >>](#)

[Hello-Hello World \(for iPad\)](#)



free for app, subscriptions from \$9.99 per month

Hello-Hello World iPad app aims to get you learning a new language through reading, listening, and speaking both with the software and with other learners around the world. The program takes a hybrid approach by blending typical language software content, like flashcards and fill-in-the-blank exercises, with crowd-sourced interaction. The crowd, made up of language enthusiasts around the world, upload voice recordings of them practicing their new language, and if you happen to speak that language, you can give them feedback. And vice versa. The Hello-Hello World iPad app is not an ideal way to learn a new language through and through, but it does serve as a good way to study and practice words and phrases on the go.

Available Languages: Spanish, French, Italian, German, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Dutch, Russian, Indonesian, English. [Read the full review >>](#)

[Living Language Platinum](#)



\$179 for one-year membership

The online program Living Language has the best live online classes, which it refers to as "e-tutoring." You can take as many of the 30-minute classes as you like during your membership, which makes Living Language an outstanding value if you take advantage of this feature. When it comes to the primary course material, however, other software provides a better way to learn, so Living Language is the best option if what you need are live classes with other students (up to three per class) and a trained instructor.

Available Languages: Spanish, French, Italian, German, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Arabic. [Read the full review >>](#)

[Living Language \(for iPad\)](#)



\$19.99 in-app purchase; mobile app content free for Platinum members

I recommend using the Living Language iPad app in conjunction with another, more rigorous program. It offers compact lessons that work best when used as a study aid or supplemental practice to more comprehensive language learning. The app falls short of being a full learning program on its own. If you buy a Living Language Platinum account (\$179 for one year), the iPad content is included at no extra charge.

Available Languages: French, Spanish, German, Italian, Chinese, Japanese. [Read the full review >>](#)

[Mango Passport](#)



\$79 for Journey 1; \$132 for Journeys 1-2; \$176 for Journeys 1-2-3

The Mango Passport language-learning program teaches solid content for travelers. The downloadable software is mature, with a polished interface and clear audio recordings. It lacks most of the interactive goodies found in other installed software programs for language learning, making Mango a pretty modest product, although it's less expensive than some of the big-name products, like Rosetta Stone. The selection of languages is more than decent though, and the software comes with MP3s that you can load into your music player for on-the-go learning. Free companion iPhone and Android apps can extend where and how you learn with Mango Passport as well.

Languages Available: Brazilian Portuguese, English (for speakers of 13 different languages), Farsi, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Russian, Spanish, Thai, Turkish, Vietnamese. [Read the full review >>](#)

[Pimsleur Comprehensive \(digital download\)](#)



\$119 direct

Simon & Schuster's Pimsleur Comprehensive (digital download) is one of the most accurate and effective programs for learning to speak and hear a new language. Visual learners may have a hard time with the audio-intensive program, especially at the early stages, but audio learners will love it. Pimsleur's products consist only of audio files and sometimes a companion book or PDF booklet. There are with no interactive flash cards, voice recognition systems, or learning games. However, in testing, I found that more is not necessarily better. Pimsleur holds up quite well against the competition.

Available Languages: Albanian, Eastern Arabic, Egyptian Arabic, Eastern Armenian, Western Armenian, Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dari Persian, Dutch, Farsi Persian, French, German, Greek, Haitian Creole, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Ojibwe, Pashto, Polish, Brazilian Portuguese, European Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Castilian Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Swiss German, Tagalog, Thai, Turkish, Twi, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese; and English as a Second Language for speakers of Arabic, Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, Farsi Persian, French, German, Haitian, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese. [Read the full review >>](#)

[Pimsleur Unlimited](#)



\$150 for level 1, \$350 for levels 1-3

Learning a new language isn't easy, and it takes real commitment. To be successful, you have to find educational material that keeps you coming back, day after day, year after year. The Pimsleur line of language-learning tools, made by Simon & Schuster, is far and away the one I've used the most over the years. Although its origins are firmly rooted in the old days of audio cassettes and workbooks, Pimsleur has finally dipped its toe into the high-tech pool with Pimsleur Unlimited (\$150 for level 1, \$350 for levels 1-3). While most of the program is rock solid, the package needs to make a few more leaps forward into the digital age to be considered a real contender among language-learning software.

Available Languages: French, German, Spanish, Italian. [Read the full review >>](#)

[Rocket Languages Premium](#)



\$99.95 online-only access, direct

For beginners and travelers, Rocket Languages, one of our Editors' Choices, is among the most useful language-learning software on the market. The 2012 update has improved the website experience significantly and optimized it for tablet use as well. Daily practice is of the utmost importance when learning a language and a program that compels users to return again and again has definitely done something right. Rocket Languages is primarily a web-based system (with some additional downloadable content), giving users the ability to get into their program anywhere they have an Internet connection.

Available languages: English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Hindi, and American Sign Language. Brazilian Portuguese coming soon. [Read the full review >>](#)

[Rosetta Stone version 4 TOTALe](#)



\$249 for Level 1, direct

Rosetta Stone version 4 TOTALe, also earned our Editors' Choice distinction for providing an excellent blended experience. High learning engagement comes from users hearing, reading, speaking, and touching (virtually) simultaneously. TOTALe also offers hour-long virtual classroom sessions, guided by an instructor on a live video feed.

Available languages: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Dutch, American English, British English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Persian (Iran), Polish, Brazilian Portuguese, Russian, Latin American Spanish, Spanish (Spain), Swedish, Tagalog, Turkish, Vietnamese. (Additional languages available for earlier versions of Rosetta Stone.) [Read the full review >>](#)

[Tell Me More](#)



\$199 for three-month Web pass, direct

Tell Me More provides a highly customizable language-learning experience that gives students a lot of tools, but not a lot of support. Intermediate- to advanced-level speakers will find it a valuable resource, especially because it lets them choose the kinds of scenarios they'd like to practice, such as business and politics. While the speech-recognition technology in Tell Me More is extremely advanced, the average user will find it's mostly bells and whistles, rather than providing feedback they can really use. For Spanish, French, and English, the program includes two "Initiation" levels to help mitigate the slightly advanced nature of the programs.

Available Languages: Spanish, French, German, Italian, English, Dutch, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic. Note: Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic have only one (three-level DVD-ROM pack for \$299). [Read the full review >>](#)

[Transparent Language Complete Edition](#)



\$179.95, direct

If non-linear learning is your thing, and you don't mind a dated interface, Transparent Language Complete Edition gives you enough language-learning hoops to keep you jumping for months. More linear thinkers may find the modular approach breaks concentration and engagement.

Available Languages: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish. (Additional languages available for other versions of Transparent Languages.) [Read the full review >>](#)

[Yabla](#)



from \$9.95 per month

Videos are Yabla's signature feature. This online-only language-learning program gives students of other languages a neat way to practice listening to native speakers talk by watching videos, with excellent subtitles in two languages. The site as a whole feels unfinished, especially in light of the subscription price, and it is not a good option for a brand-new student of a language. Some neat features include the ability to see which accent will be used in a video, like European Spanish versus Argentine Spanish, and a quiz that has you fill in missing words from the video on a second viewing. It's good for practicing your listening and comprehension skills, but not for core learning content.

Available Languages: Chinese, French, German, Italian, Spanish, English for Spanish speakers. [Read the full review >>](#)