

Why should I take a World Language?

1. Most discussions of why Americans need to study a world language, understandably begin with a recognition of the demands of the 21st-century global economy, of US international security concerns, and may go on to include acknowledgment of the cognitive benefits of bilingualism and the increasingly multilingual nature of US society today.

The final U.S. Commission on Languages Report presents current research findings: Why is language important for Americans today:

1. The cognitive benefits of knowing two or more languages for people of all ages, as evidenced now in a large body of research findings of clinical and cognitive psychologists and cognitive linguists in various parts of the world.
2. Equally well-documented national security needs, especially in the US defense, intelligence, and international diplomatic communities, for language-qualified officers, analysts and other professionals.
3. The economic mandate for language in business and industry, e.g., 93 percent of HR Directors in the most recent MSU national survey of business hiring reported looking to recruit employees with the ability to work effectively in international teams.
4. The social integration mandate and the importance of languages in America today for the normal functioning of our own society, including US law enforcement, delivery of health care and social services, the smooth operation of the court system, the huge and expanding hospitality and customer service industry, again, to name only the most obvious examples.

In addition, global understanding, professional success, personal growth: In today's global environment, the knowledge of other languages and cultures is an absolute necessity. The study of a world language has always been an integral part of what it means to be educated, yet this is even more urgent today. You often hear that English is becoming the *lingua franca* in much of the world, and that especially in Europe, most educated people speak English. So why should you bother to learn another language? Well, here are just a few reasons.

1. Today, contrary to popular belief, not everybody speaks English. Even if this were true, unless you can speak another language with some degree of fluency, you will always be at a decided disadvantage. For one, your monolingual, monocultural view of the world will limit your perspective, your ability to really understand global events and interactions, even if you never leave the United States.
2. You will never truly be on equal footing with people from another culture if you know nothing of their language.
3. Perhaps the most important reason to study another language is for your own growth as a person. Most people who have had the opportunity to live in another culture and learn another language will tell you that the experience changed their lives profoundly. Speaking another language challenges who we are, involves us in a process of becoming, and this is what growth is all about.

