

Learning tip of the week

Everyone has their own way of learning. What works for you? Please send in your tips for learning Norwegian, however simple.

Tip 1: Pronunciation practice

Read out aloud the text(s) for your next lesson several times until you are satisfied with your pronunciation. This means loud as if you are addressing a room full of people, not muttering under your breath. If you can record yourself, do so and play it back. It won't sound as good as you thought, so you'll just have to read it out all over again!

Tip 2: Buy a good dictionary

Berlitz and Langenscheidt pocket dictionaries are the only ones readily available in UK bookshops. These are fine for absolute beginners and carrying in your pocket when visiting Norway. But before long, you realise their limitations as you come across more and more words that aren't listed. The Engelsk Lommeordbok is better, but you really need a good dictionary like Lingua or the more comprehensive Blåbok editions - see the Les page for details. You can order them from Grant & Cutler in London, but they are cheaper to buy when in Norway or online.

Tip 3: Lesson preparation

When you read a text for the first time, don't use your dictionary for the words you don't know. Read it through completely to get a general understanding of the whole passage first. You were reading it out aloud, weren't you? You'll probably find that you understand more than you thought you would. Then look up the words you don't know.

Tip 4: Making mistakes is good!

If you aren't sure of something - gender, word ending - always have a go; don't hold back. If you are wrong, think of it as an opportunity to be corrected and learn the right form. And you then remember it better.

Tip 5: Listening practice.

Listen to the CD tracks for the lesson over and over, first following the text, then without. Read the text aloud imitating the native speakers. Periodically, go back and listen to the dialogues from earlier lessons without looking at the text.

Tip 6: 10 minutes a day.

We don't read everything in the textbook in class - read the rest at home. We don't do all the exercises in the workbook in class - do the rest at home. Spending just 10 minutes doing some Norwegian every day makes a significant difference. If you have to miss a class, it keeps you going. Eventually you start to think in Norwegian and you can understand much of the texts you read without feeling the need to translate into English.

Tip 7: Learning words in context

Words have gender and/or endings and are often used in phrases, particularly with prepositions which are not always obvious to English speakers. I find it better to learn words in the context of the phrases where they are used, either as a verb, preposition and noun combination or as an adverbial phrase,

Tip 8: Grammar summary

How do you learn the grammar? I make notes in the form of tables for the different forms of nouns, adjectives, verb tenses and so on. Setting them down in a clear logical way needs thinking about if they are to be quick and easy to look up later, but this thought process and writing them down actually helps me learn them. I'm now on version 3 of my note book. The first, as a beginner, was very simple in a small notebook. When I realised there were spelling variations and exceptions to the rules, I rewrote my notes in a bigger exercise book, but then realised that I needed to leave lots of space as additional meanings and usages kept coming up. I've now rewritten them again in a thick pocket-sized notebook with expanded notes on time expressions, the many different meanings of prepositions, word order and also useful lists of words like professions/occupations, colours/patterns, parts of the body, furniture, kitchen utensils and so on (see Tip 9). The next (inevitable) edition will include much more in the way of idiomatic expressions and lists of verbs with the specific prepositions they use. I haven't quite thought out how I'm going to organise this yet, but it will be in a loose-leaf pocket book so that I can change individual pages when I need to.

Tip 9: Themed word lists

There are specific groups of words that are very useful in conversation when travelling in Norway, eg transport, accommodation and food, and others that help in reading or talking about specific subjects, eg sport, music, theatre. You can look these up in a dictionary or phrase book when needed but this is not always convenient and phrase books always seem to lack just the word I need. I find it better to collect my own themed lists of words and also common adjectives, adverbs and verbs. I write them down as I come across them while reading and I have gradually built up some really useful lists that are easy to look up as all the related words are together.

Tip 10: Prepositions

They all seem to have many different meanings that don't always correspond to English and, depending on context, på can mean just about anything! Some have very specific meanings in adverbial expressions of place and time. Others have a specific meaning when used with a particular verb. So, I write down examples of usage under headings of position, movement, time past, present and future, duration, degree, manner etc in my collection of adverbial expressions and I've started another list with specific verb uses. But don't just write them down and forget them. Review them each week for the following three or four weeks; make up and write down sentences that use them to help fix them in your memory.

Tip 11: Other resources

There are other Norwegian course books available to buy (or borrow from Birmingham Central Library) - see the list on this Lær page. They have CDs with more dialogues to listen to and differ in the way they tackle the language, but they complement what we do in class. There are books just on grammar which are very useful for understanding the logic of grammatical construction, the variations, the spelling rules and the irregular forms. Once in a blue moon, there's a Norwegian film on TV. Record it so you can watch it repeatedly. Or buy DVDs of films when visiting Norway. When in Norway, get the Norwegian version of brochures as well as the English ones from Tourist Information Offices. Bring back newspapers, magazines, children's comics and other reading material, so you can practice at home.

Tip 12: Typing

Not about learning ... this is a tip for typing in norsk. On a Mac, to type å, you use

(option+a) or (alt+a). Sometimes I do this and then type something else, only to find that I've pressed (command+a) by mistake, which means I've selected all my text and replaced it with the character I typed next, thus deleting everything!

Moral: Save (command+s) your work frequently ... whenever you pause for thought or more often.

PS: If you haven't found the Norwegian letters/punctuation on your Mac keyboard yet:

æ is (option+'), Æ is (shift+option+')

ø is (option+o), Ø is (shift+option+o)

å is (option+a), Å is (shift+option+a)

« is (option+\), » is (shift+option+\)

For Windows users (XP and Word 2003 and later), you need two keystrokes to enter the characters:

æ is (ctrl+& then a), Æ is (ctrl+& then A)

ø is (ctrl+ / then o), Ø is (ctrl+ / then O)

å is (ctrl+@ then a), Å is (ctrl+@ then A)

« is (ctrl+ ` then <), » is (ctrl+ ` then >); note that ` is the grave accent.

Tip 13: Learning new words

This needs a dictionary and a large exercise book. Whenever you come across a new word, make a note of it and the English meaning(s) together with its various forms, eg infinitive, present, past and past participle for verbs; indefinite and definite singular and plural for nouns; common, neuter, plural, comparative and superlative for adjectives; and so on. Prepare the exercise book by labelling pages with the letters of the alphabet and record the words under their initial letter (so it's easier to look them up again later). You won't need any pages for C, Q, W, X, Z. Look at the number of pages for each letter in your dictionary to decide how many pages to allocate to each letter – some like Y, Æ, Ø, Å need only one between them, others two or three, some need many more. I found that the letter L needed 50% more pages than I originally thought, F needed twice as many and S needed three times as many as the proportion in my dictionary indicated. Leaving some pages unallocated at the back gives room for any overflow. More on this in Tip 14.

This is only as useful as you make it. I think up and write out elsewhere some sentences which use these words. I review them every week for the next three or four weeks with more sentences using the different word forms - be imaginative! By then, I have most of them fixed in my memory.

About two-thirds of the way through Stein på stein, I found I was adding significantly fewer words to my list. Mastery? ... I wish!

Tip 14: Extending vocabulary

This is an alternative to Tip 13 and needs a good dictionary and a much thicker exercise book. When you look up a new word in your dictionary, also read through other words with the same stem, ie related verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, compound words and so on. This includes phrases and idioms with special meanings. Note down any that you think will definitely be useful in conversation or that you are likely to come across in any reading you do. Sometimes this will be only a few words out of the many in the dictionary, other times it may be many of many. I find that this gives me a much better understanding of words and their usage. It is much more time-consuming to do but extremely rewarding.

Health warning: This may mean less time spent with family and friends and a consequent deterioration in relationships!

Tip 15: Reading newspapers

Tackling a whole newspaper for the first time is daunting. Ignore all articles in nynorsk - they are just confusing. Many items have simple grammar, eg crime and accident reports, concert and theatre reviews, sports reports. Don't translate every word – read the whole

article to get the gist, then translate only those words that are obviously the vocabulary related to the article's theme. Eventually you notice that some words appear very often, eg adverbs and verbs quoting indirect speech like he said, he explained, he reported, he chuckled. You notice particular expressions, use of prepositions, use of passive -s and bli forms. Eventually I found that after a month of daily 10-minute reading sessions, I didn't need to translate much into English - I was thinking in Norwegian. Stick at it! Lykke til!

If I had to choose one of these as the best tip of all, it would be '10 minutes a day'. It enabled me to make progress that was quickly noticeable and boosted my confidence.

If you have any more tips, please send them in via the 'Kontakt oss' page on the web site.

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