



# INDIAN RIVER HIGH SCHOOL



[District](#) [Schools](#) [Departments](#) [Athletics](#) [Activities](#) [Staff](#) [Parents / Students](#) [Community](#)

## HIGH SCHOOL DEPARTMENTS

- [IRHS High School Home Page](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Calendar](#)
- [Clubs and Extracurricular Activities](#)
- [Dignity For All Students Act](#)
- [Guidance Department](#)
- [High School Departments](#)
  - [Agriscience / Indian River FFA](#)
  - [Art Department](#)
  - [English Department](#)
  - [Foreign Language](#)
    - [Why it is important to learn a foreign language?](#)
    - [What is involved with taking a foreign language at Indian River](#)
    - [Our teachers web pages!](#)
    - [When should a child start learning a foreign language](#)
    - [Spanish Class](#)
  - [IRHS Library](#)
  - [Physical Education Resource / Consultant](#)
  - [Science Department](#)
  - [Social Studies Department](#)
  - [Technology Department](#)
  - [Communications Center](#)
- [Important Files](#)
- [IRHS Newspaper](#)
- [IRHS Yearbook](#)
- [Library Media Center](#)
- [Links for Students](#)
- [Links For Teachers](#)
- [Lunch Menu](#)
- [School Report Card](#)
- [Staff E-Mail Contacts](#)
- [Teacher Web Pages](#)
- [Transcript Request Form](#)
- [Morning Announcements](#)
- [HS Bullying Survey Data](#)
- [Senior Class Website](#)

## SITE SEARCH

enter keyword

- [Site Map](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [School Home](#)
- [District Home](#)

[Indian River High School](#) » [High School Departments](#) » [Foreign Language](#) » [Why it is important to learn a foreign language?](#)

### Why it is important to learn a foreign language?

*The top 10 reason to learn one!*

**People don't think that it is really important to learn a foreign language but here are ten good reasons that a person should study one...read on:**

#### **1. To increase global understanding:**

**Learning another language gives the learner the ability to step inside the mind and context of that other culture. Without the ability to communicate and understand a culture on its own terms, true access to that culture is barred. Why is this important? In a world where nations and peoples are ever more dependent upon on another to supply goods and services, solve political disputes, and ensure international security, understanding other cultures is paramount. Lack of intercultural sensitivity can lead to mistrust and misunderstandings, to an inability to cooperate, negotiate, and compromise, and perhaps even to military confrontation. Intercultural understanding begins with individuals who have language abilities and who can thereby provide one's own nation or community with an insider's view into foreign cultures, who can understand foreign news sources, and give insights into other perspectives on international situations and current events. For survival in the global community, every nation needs such individuals. A person competent in other languages can bridge the gap between cultures, contribute to international diplomacy, promote national security and world peace, and successfully engage in international trade.**

**As globalization and mobility and communications are bring the world ever closer together, ever more urgent is the need for global citizens to be competent in other languages. The United States is the *only* industrialized country that routinely graduates students from high school who lack knowledge of a foreign language. Whereas 52.7% of Europeans are fluent in both their native tongue and at least one other language, only 9.3% of Americans are fluent in both their native tongue and another language. This statistic does not bode well for the future of America in a global society. The upward trend in language learning must accelerate if the U.S. is to continue to be a major participant on the international stage.**

#### **2. To improve employment potential**

**If businesses are to effectively compete in a global economy, they must learn to deal with other cultures on their own terms. Companies that plan to do business abroad therefore have a dire need for bilingual or multilingual employees. Businesses that intend to compete internationally need employees who can competently communicate in the locales where they do business. Employees who speak one language can communicate only with people who speak that same language.**

**Business is not the only area of employment where language competencies are needed, however. Multiple government agencies, the travel industry, engineering, communications, the field of education, international law, economics, public policy, publishing, advertising, entertainment, scientific research, and an broad array of service sectors all have needs for people with foreign language skills.**

Whatever your career goals, knowing a language certainly won't *hurt* your employability. Chances are that knowing languages will open up employment opportunities that you would not have had otherwise. And you will be able to command a greater salary in the workplace. All else being equal, knowing languages gives you an edge over monolingual applicants competing for the same jobs.

### **3. To increase native language ability**

Research shows that knowledge of other languages boosts students' understanding of languages in general and enables students to use their native language more effectively. This applies to specific language skills as well as overall linguistic abilities. Foreign language learners have stronger vocabulary skills in English, a better understanding of the language, and improved literacy in general. Higher reading achievement in the native language as well as enhanced listening skills and memory have been shown to correlate with extended foreign language study. These results are apparent in several studies as well as in test scores. With each additional year of foreign language instruction taken, a student's scores on college and graduate school entrance exams such as the SATs, ACTs, GREs, MCATs, and LSATs improve incrementally

### **4. To sharpen cognitive and life skills**

Because learning a language involves a variety of learning skills, studying a foreign language can enhance one's ability to learn and function in several other areas. Children who have studied a language at the elementary level score higher on tests in reading, language arts, and math. People who have learned foreign languages show greater cognitive development in areas such as mental flexibility, creativity, and higher order thinking skills, such as problem-solving, conceptualizing, and reasoning.

In addition to cognitive benefits, the study of foreign languages leads to the acquisition of some important life skills. Because language learners learn to deal with unfamiliar cultural ideas, they are much better equipped to adapt and cope in a fast-changing world. They also learn to effectively handle new situations. In addition, the encounter with cultures different from one's own leads to tolerance of diverse lifestyles and customs. And it improves the learner's ability to understand and communicate with people from different walks of life.

### **5. To improve chances of entry into college or graduate school**

Today, most colleges and universities require a *minimum* of two years of high school foreign language instruction for admission. And once enrolled in an undergraduate program, students are likely to find that their college or university prescribes foreign language courses as requirement for the degree. The majority of universities rightly consider knowledge of a foreign language and culture part of what every educated person should know. Many majors in the arts and humanities, in natural sciences and behavioral and social sciences, and in professional fields, also require the study of one or more languages to ensure success in the given field.

For those planning to continue on to graduate study in most any field, knowledge of a second and sometimes even a third language is often a prerequisite for admission. From mathematics to anthropology, from biology to art history, you will find that many if not most graduate programs require some kind of foreign language knowledge of their applicants. In some programs, graduate students are required to gain a reading knowledge of other languages as a degree requirement, especially in doctoral programs. This is because important research is often published in non-English language books and professional journals.

Even when an undergraduate or graduate institution doesn't require foreign language study, it's often recommended by programs. Knowing a language can't hurt your application, and is highly likely to make you a more competitive candidate in the admissions process.

### **6. To appreciate international literature, music, and film**

Most of the world's literary and artistic works have been written in languages other than English. A translation of a text can never be fully true to the intent, beauty, style, and uniqueness of its original. A translation is always to a large degree subject to the interpretation of the translator, not least because some elements of languages simply don't have translations in other languages. Word plays, metaphors, innuendoes, cultural references and culturally loaded vocabulary words, and formulations unique to the original language often get lost in translation. To be able to fully appreciate literature, theater, music, and film in other languages, one must be able to access them in their original form.

### **7. To make travel more feasible and enjoyable**

Though it's possible to travel to foreign countries without speaking the native language, your experience will be largely shaped by your ability or inability to see beyond the surface of the culture. When you lack the ability to communicate in the native language, you can not fully participate in day-to-day life, understand the culture, or communicate with the people. The language barrier can be anywhere from frustrating to downright dangerous. When you know the language, you have the comfort of being able to successfully navigate all sorts of situations, like order meals in restaurants, ask for and understand directions, find accommodations and perhaps negotiate cheaper prices, and meet and talk with natives, to name only a few. In most countries, people will appreciate attempts to use their language. You will be able to communicate more completely and have a deeper, more satisfying travel experience.

It's true that in tourist areas English may be spoken. However, even if the natives know some English, many

are uncomfortable speaking it, particularly beyond their limited interactions with tourists. In addition, these well-beaten paths are not places where you will get to know the country you're visiting -- they cater to tourists and provide a watered-down and often stereotypical and commercialized version of the culture both to meet and profit from tourists' expectations. If you intend to stray from the tourist centers and explore the real country and really get to know it, you *must* know the language. Your language ability will allow you to see and do things that many visitors cannot.

### **8. To expand study abroad options**

Because relatively few Americans are competent in foreign languages, competition for study abroad programs in English-speaking countries is sometimes intense. Unfortunately, students often shy away from studying in countries where English is not the native language for all the wrong reasons. They mistakenly believe that their grades will suffer, that their language proficiency isn't adequate, or that they won't be able to fit in or understand the culture.

Simply your willingness to learn a language can make you an apt candidate for many study abroad programs. Some foreign programs require no prior language experience and offer an intensive immersion experience prior to the selected program of study. Other programs require only a few semesters of prior language instruction. Whatever program you choose, continued language study while in the foreign country is typical. The benefit is that students can leave the language classroom and immediately put into practice what they have learned in class. Because students can focus on their language development while learning about the culture, their daily experiences and courses complement one another, leading to comparable or even better grades than at the home institution, where students often take a myriad of courses that have little or no connection.

For advanced language students, the opportunities are even greater. Applicants at the advanced skill level can participate in programs that allow them to be fully immersed and integrated into the academic and social life of the country in which they are studying.

### **9. To increase understanding of oneself and one's own culture**

Knowing another language and culture affords you the unique opportunity of seeing yourself and your own culture from an outside perspective. There are aspects of your language, yourself, your life, and your own culture that you accept as absolute and universal or that you have never even considered until you encounter a culture and people who do things in a much different way than you're used to. Contact with other languages and cultures gives you the unique opportunity to step outside your familiar scope of existence and view your culture's customs, traditions, and norms as well as your own value system through the eyes of others. Conversely, a monolingual, monocultural view of the world severely limits your perspective. Intercultural experiences have a monumental influence on shaping your identity, heightening your self-awareness, and giving you a full appreciation of your life situation. These things can happen only with knowledge of cultures and languages other than your own.

### **10. To make lifelong friends**

Knowing other languages effectively increases the number of people on the globe with whom you can communicate. And people who speak other languages fully appreciate the effort and desire learners expend to get to know their culture and to communicate with them. Whether through meeting foreign exchange students on your campus or local immigrants in your community, whether getting to know natives or international students while studying abroad, or whether establishing a connection with a pen pal in another country, your ability to speak other languages and your interest in other cultures can connect you deeply with people around the globe.

In closing, anyone who has told you that learning another language is impractical, unrewarding, or simply a waste of your precious time is doing you a great disservice. Take advantage and enhance your life ... learn a language!

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