

ACE in Life: A Guided Reflection

A quiet exercise for language learners — roughly 15 minutes, alone or in a class

This isn't a grammar exercise. There's no answer key, and nothing here is marked. It's a short, guided reflection on why the difficulty of learning a language might be worth something, using a framework, ACE (Attitude, Creation, Experience), drawn from the psychiatrist Viktor Frankl's work on how people find meaning even in genuinely hard circumstances.

Find somewhere quiet. Read each section slowly. Pause after each question, longer than feels natural, before moving on. Write your answers if that helps, or simply sit with them.

Before you begin

Take a few slow breaths. Let your shoulders drop. Bring to mind, gently, one moment recently when speaking or writing in English felt difficult, not a disaster, just a moment of friction. You don't need to solve it or explain it away. Just let it be present.

[Pause. Thirty seconds, or longer.]

Attitude — the stance you choose

Frankl believed that even when a difficulty can't be removed, a person retains one freedom: the attitude they take toward it. Learning a language as an adult means being, repeatedly, imperfect in public. That discomfort isn't a flaw in your learning. It's the actual terrain the learning happens on.

What did that moment of friction mean to you, in the instant it happened?

[Pause.]

What would it mean instead if you chose to read it simply as evidence you were doing the work, rather than evidence you were failing at it?

[Pause. Sit with the difference between those two readings.]

Creation — what you are building

Not vocabulary for its own sake, but something real made with the language: an email that changed an outcome, a joke that landed, a piece of writing someone genuinely read and was moved or helped by.

Bring to mind one thing, however small, that you have actually built or accomplished using English.

[Pause. Let the specific memory form, not a general sense of progress, one real moment.]

What did that moment give to someone else, or to you, that would not have existed without the effort of learning?

[Pause.]

Experience — who you have met through this

For Frankl, meaning is also found in encounter: relationships, connection, being understood and understanding someone else. A friendship or working relationship conducted partly in a second language carries something a first-language relationship doesn't, evidence that real effort was spent to make the connection possible at all.

Bring to mind one person you have connected with, even briefly, because of your English.

[Pause.]

What was made possible in that connection that would not have existed otherwise?

[Pause. Let this sit for a moment before continuing.]

Closing

None of this makes the difficulty disappear. Language learning stays genuinely hard, and it will keep asking things of you that feel uncomfortable. But the discomfort, the thing you've built, and the people you've reached, are not separate from each other. They are, in Frankl's sense, where the meaning of the work actually lives, not waiting at the end of it, once fluency is achieved, but already present, right now, in the difficulty itself.

Take one slow breath before returning to whatever comes next.

The ACE framework (Attitude, Creation, Experience) is part of ThriveFul, an educational philosophy developed by Ian Springham, drawing on Viktor Frankl's logotherapy.

Ian Springham | CertTESOL, Trinity College London | ianspringham.co.uk

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