

POLISH THROUGH STORIES

Mixed short stories
to learn Polish

Book 1

Learn Polish, one story at a time

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Introduction

Learning a new language, in many ways, is like a story. At the start, everything feels new and exciting. However, just like in any good tale, a complication inevitably arises—pronunciations that twist your tongue, grammar rules that confuse, or words that you keep on forgetting. But, as with all stories, these challenges are not forever. With the investment of time, you get better at the language.

You will be able to have conversations in the store, understand the news, and chat with colleagues or friends. Doors will open to new opportunities in your education, career, and personal life. But most of all, the real beauty that comes with getting proficient in a language is understanding the culture like never before. Seeing the world through different eyes, understanding the humour and feeling a deeper connection with the people you love.

But sadly, learning a language doesn't come easily. It's a journey. There will be twists and turns, moments of frustration mixed with moments of clarity. Luckily, this journey can be as enjoyable as sitting on the couch and reading a good story.

Learn better

In language acquisition theory, there are two main methods of learning: implicit and explicit learning. Most of our language education is focused on explicit learning, where we intensively study the language by analysing texts, memorising vocabulary, and learning grammar rules. Whereas implicit learning is more subtle and occurs unconsciously. It's absorbing the language through exposure like reading or focusing on a conversation. It's the way children learn their first language, almost effortlessly.

This second method, implicit learning, is an extremely effective way of learning. It has been found to boost your proficiency in a range of aspects: First, it helps you to get more natural language skills. You will sound more like a natural speaker and be more easily understood. Second, it supports long-term retention. It will be easier to remember the grammar and words you have studied. Third, it creates an intuition for the language. This is key for reaching fluency and doing well on tests. Lastly, it helps with understanding the structure of sentences like the syntax or word order, something which is hard to study by analysing every sentence. With implicit learning, getting better at a language occurs almost automatically while unaware of exactly what you are learning¹.

While explicit knowledge may be more beneficial at the early stages, from pre-intermediate level onwards, learners benefit more from implicit knowledge development through exposure to language

in use². Focusing too much on developing explicit language knowledge can lead to disappointment and feelings of frustration due to the feeling of lack of progress. However, learners spend too much time on explicit learning by focusing mostly on studying grammar and words and not reading and listening.

This is sadly understandable as native level content is often too difficult. Real conversations are too hard to follow and cause you to lose focus and not benefit from it. Normal books are still too difficult to enjoy and reading materials for advanced beginners or intermediate learners is often scarce, uninteresting or childish.

The goal of this series of books is to make a change to that—it provides you with plenty of content at the right difficulty level to stimulate implicit learning. The stories are told from various perspectives (first, second, and third person) and cover a range of tenses (past, present and future) to give you plenty of exposure. Most importantly, the stories are interesting and for grown-ups. So, sit down, relax, and enjoy a good story whilst progressing in your Polish.

¹VanPatten, B., & Smith, M. (2022). *Explicit and Implicit Learning in Second Language Acquisition*.

²Ellis, N. C. (2005). At the interface: dynamic interactions of explicit and implicit language knowledge. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 27(2), 305–352.

How to read this book

This is not your textbook—there is no need to overanalyse the grammar or translate every unfamiliar word. The strength in learning through stories lies in the constant flow of language in the natural context. This triggers the previously discussed implicit learning and all the benefits that come with it.

Approach this book with curiosity for the story and simply continue reading. If you find some parts challenging to understand, that's completely normal. In fact, it's beneficial to engage with content slightly above your current level to help you progress. So just keep on reading even if not everything is clear.

To make the most out of every story, you can follow either the 'Intermediate' or the 'Advanced beginner' step-by-step guides. To decide which of the two guides to follow, start by reading the first three paragraphs of a story. If you understand the storyline and context, follow the steps in 'Intermediate'. If you find it more difficult to understand, follow the steps in 'Advanced beginner'.

Advanced beginner

1. **Look at the illustration** to get an idea of the story.
2. **Read the summary** in detail so you understand the plot of the story.
3. **Study the 25 words** at the end of the chapter.
4. **Read the story fully** without translating words or overanalysing grammar structures. Skip sentences if you don't understand them on a second try.
5. **Read the story again** but translate unfamiliar words and carefully observe the grammar structures.
6. **Answer the True / False questions** at the end of the story and check your answers in the back of the book.
7. **Pick open-ended question(s)** and answer in writing or by speaking to someone. Try to use the newly learned words.

Intermediate

1. **Look at the illustration** to get an idea of the story.
2. **Read the story fully** without translating words or overanalysing grammar structures. Skip sentences if you don't understand them on a second try.
3. **Summarise** the story in your mind and then read the summary to see if you understood the story correctly.
4. **Answer the True / False questions** at the end of the story and check your answers in the back of the book.
5. **Study the 25 words** at the end of the chapter.
6. **Pick open-ended question(s)** and answer in writing or by speaking to someone. Try to use the newly learned words.
7. **Read the story again** but translate unfamiliar words and carefully observe the grammar structures.

Tips and tricks

Finally, before we get started with the stories, a couple of tips and tricks to make it easier and more effective.

- **Read out loud:** to practice speaking.
- **Set reading goals:** like reading one story a week.
- **Use it in your classes:** Tell your teacher you are using this book and suggest to use it for a lesson. The teacher can clarify things you didn't understand and give feedback on your answers to the open-ended questions.
- **Make notes in the book:** Underline grammar structures in the book that you recently learned and add the translation of words on the side of the text.
- **Leverage technology:**
 - **E-reader translation dictionary:** If you're reading this on your e-reader, consider downloading translation dictionaries. Select words to translate them on your e-reader.
 - **Camera function on translation apps:** Translation apps, like Google Translate, have a camera option with which you can point at text and see the translation on your screen.
 - **Flashcard apps:** Apps like Anki, Quizlet or Memrise help greatly in studying new words.
 - **Voice recognition tools:** If reading out loud, use the voice function of Google Translate or the dictation option of Microsoft Word. See which words the software didn't pick up and retry pronouncing those.

