

## Lingoda Review

I have been seeking to learn German for the past three years. I have always like challenges, having once bought a motorcycle because they scared me. After my safety course, the instructor told me I was "Parking lot ready". In other words, I should be cautious about actually getting this motorcycle out on the road. I have felt this way about my German skills, except for not ever fearing for my physical safety. After my first Pimsleur audio course I found one phrase especially useful the first time I came to Germany: "Ich verstehe nicht". Once, the native speaker tried to further explain in German what she was attempting to say, and her husband had to tell her. "No she really does not understand". That was fairly amusing for me, and disheartening at the same time. Will I ever understand?

I grew up in the country that went to the moon. We Americans can do anything, except perhaps, elect a woman president. So I persist in learning German. At least I will not kill myself. I have managed, albeit slowly, to advance. I bought the B1.1 books before coming home to the States in June, and since then they have sat so neatly on my coffee table. I felt guilty, looking at the pretty blue covers, but did nothing much but play vocabulary app games. And so, I was extremely delighted to learn I won the contest to try out Lingoda, which was new to me. This seemed to be a way to actually interact with people in a class while I am back home for 6 months in the States.

So what is Lingoda like? There are group and individual classes online. The group classes are conducted though Adobe Connect via the Lingoda website. The individual classes are though Skype. During an initial contact with a staff member, who becomes your adviser, you learn to navigate the site and schedule your initial classes. The adviser also assists in determining what level would be appropriate. This could be changed if your choice ends up being too challenging or too easy. Your class page lists all the classes for your level,. From there, you begin scheduling classes. It is possible to choose from classes already set up by other students on the calendar, right up to class time, or to schedule your own group class 7 days in advance. You can also schedule an individual class with 48 hours notice. Once you schedule, an instructor picks it up. This is a beautiful system when it works, and it almost always does.

The subject matter is in line with the European Common Framework. Lingoda offers certifications if students are participating at a certain level of frequency of classes each month. For example, there are 39 hour lessons in B1.1 vs spending 100 hours of time in an actual class at the local Volkshochschule in Deutschland, as a comparison. This option does not even exist for me at home. I wondered how this could be: so few hours of class per level. I believe it is the time one spends in preparation. I find that I spend an hour to two hours in preparing for each my classes. It is also possible to move forward and backwards in the level and pick up classes in areas where remedial work would be helpful or there is an area of particular interest a person would like to skip ahead to. I find the content interesting and useful.

In the group classes, there are generally 2 to 4 participants. This may be a function of when I am scheduling, but still this is great teacher/pupil ratio! I spend as much time actively interacting as I did in the three hours class in a physical class with 15 people in it. Until my first private session, I think I have not ever spent a whole hour only speaking German. With my German friends, I feel I am inflicting pain as I struggle, and so revert to English since they are relatively fluent. Even in my first private class, I winced and voiced distress about my efforts. My instructor smiled at me and said "Everyone struggles. Its my job". He since picked up two more of the classes I have scheduled so I must not be too horrible. Also the instructors will send you to additional resources or even be available to correct any homework you choose to complete, on lessons you have finished. You are asked to leave feedback for your instructors and you adviser will also give you feedback they leave for you.

What is the downside? I would say technical difficulties. Adobe Connect has had issues on multiple occasions when I have been coming into group classes. I have to clear my cache each time, and reboot my computer in order for the platform to work correctly. Thus I am late, as it is not possible to know if everything will work correctly until the class actually starts. The first weekend, I had also 2 classes which were not picked up. So I had set aside time for something that did not happen. However, my class credits were refunded and I was awarded an additional class hours to make up for this inconvenience. I felt this was fair and I appreciated this quite a bit. It has not happened again, so I believe this to be an exception. Also in group classes, there is not the interaction between pupils as you have in a physical classroom. Perhaps this would change if the same people were in my class repeatedly, but so far that has not been the case. I have had repeating instructors and it is quite pleasant to become familiar with them.

As I write, I have had 10 hours of classes, equally split between individual and group sessions. Overall, I feel delighted with this platform. It works very well for someone like me who needs the pressure of expectations from a class. Learning vocabulary through something like Memrise is great, and I get competitive with the game-like nature of the app. But what use is vocabulary if you never speak? Since I have begun these classes, I find I attempt more conversations with my friends as it is quite confidence building. The price is reasonable compared to the price of many online platforms. It is possible to have all groups, all individual, a mix and even to design your own class around any topic you choose. Bottom line, I will continue with it as a paid customer. Es ist lohnt sich!