COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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The success of the Year led the Council of Europe to declare a *European Day of Languages* held each year on 26 September.

www.coe.int/edl

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How you can learn languages

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This Guide gives some tips on how to learn successfully.

LEARNING NEW LANGUAGES TAKES TIME AND EFFORT. BUT EVERYBODY CAN DO IT, AND IT'S WELL WORTH IT.

I like to make our guests feel welcome by saying a few words in their own language.

Even if it's only a few words, you'll get a warmer welcome when you travel on holiday or business.

And if you persevere, you'll find new doors opening all the time: you'll meet new people and new ways of thinking, perhaps improve your career prospects. And you'll get a real feeling of achievement.

What is more, Europe is a great place to learn languages, with so many language communities and so many cultures living close together.

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"I NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO LEARN LANGUAGES AND I'M TOO OLD NOW"

You're never too old to learn. People often say that only children can pick up languages quickly. Not true, adults also enjoy learning and are very successful.

"IT WOULD TAKE YEARS TO LEARN ALL THE WORDS AND GRAMMAR"

You don't need to learn it all – you can start communicating in a language with just a little knowledge, learning a bit at a time.

"I WAS HOPELESS AT LANGUAGES WHEN I WAS AT SCHOOL"

Lots of people who didn't do well at school learn languages later. Modern methods are enjoyable and help you communicate and enjoy using the language.

"I GET EMBARRASSED IF I MAKE A LOT OF MISTAKES"

There's no need to be. Making mistakes is part of learning a language and people will make allowances , so don't worry, just try.

Millions of ordinary people speak foreign languages. But lots of people think they couldn't do it themselves.

He was fantastic. I wanted to write to him in Portuguese. That's why I started a course.

"ENGLISH IS ALL YOU NEED THESE DAYS"

English can be helpful, but it's not enough. You'll understand people, and what is happening around you, much better if you know some of their own language.

"

"I don't know where to start"

Read on for some good advice!

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT TO BE ABLE TO DO

- Learn for personal satisfaction?
- Understand a different culture?
- Communicate at work (on the phone, at meetings, welcoming visitors)?
- Get a better job?
- Speak with friends or family?
- Get by on a short visit abroad?
- Read newspapers?
- Use the Internet?

Before you start

Remember that learning a new language also means learning to understand other ways of thinking and doing things.

I enjoy surfing the Internet. Now I can read Spanish as well as English, I get access to much more information.

PLAN YOUR LANGUAGE LEARNING IN A WAY THAT SUITS YOU AND YOUR DAILY ROUTINE. THAT WAY, YOU'LL DO BETTER.

Ask yourself:

- How much time can you devote each week?
- Can you organise a regular study timetable?
- What resources do you have - cassette recorder, computer, video etc.?
- Where can you get hold of learning materials – libraries, bookshops, news stands with foreign papers and magazines, internet sites, satellite television..?

HOW AND WHERE DO YOU WANT TO LEARN?

- Quickly and intensively **OR** over a longer period of time
- With friends / in a group **OR** on your own
- Self-study / distance learning **OR** with a teacher
- At work **OR** at home
- In your country of residence **OR** abroad

AND WHAT SORT OF METHODS AND MATERIALS WOULD SUIT YOU? FOR EXAMPLE:

- Conversation lessons with a native speaker
- Listening to tapes while travelling
- Using a textbook
- Reading newspapers and magazines
- Using the Internet
- Using CD ROMs
- Watching videos
- Concentrating on speaking practice
- Concentrating on grammar exercises

If you already have experience in language learning, think about the kind of learning activities that suit you best. This will help you choose a course or textbook that fits your needs.

Choose your approach to learning

There are plenty of different approaches to learning. Different options have different advantages and disadvantages and may suit you at different times.

Learning in your country of residence

In a group

Classes once or twice a week near home or work suit many people (though not everyone, of course):

- It can be fun learning in a group
- With a good teacher, there will be plenty of opportunities to practise the language
- You can find partners to study with outside class
- There is usually a fixed timetable (though there is often a choice of lunchtime, evening, weekend etc.)

You can also find intensive and specialised courses if you need them

Alone

With self-study courses or radio and TV programmes:

- Contents and rhythm are tailored to your own needs and aims
- There is no fixed timetable, you learn as and when you can
- You are on your own and need to motivate yourself

Some self-study courses also provide support from tutors, either face-to-face or at distance

We did a Greek course this spring. It made such a difference to our holidays.

Learning abroad

On a language course abroad:

- It's usually intensive, so you can learn a lot in a short time
- You're surrounded by the language and culture
- You make contact with local people and experience their way of life
- It may be expensive
- It may be difficult to find the time.

You can also learn abroad through holidays– if you make an effort – or by working abroad

Virtual language learning

Nowadays, there are also more and more opportunities for using the Internet for contact with people from all over the world.

Slovenia is just across the border and we go there a lot more now we can understand the language a bit.

Finding courses

Contact details for private language schools are usually listed in the telephone directory.

But there are many other possibilities, sometimes cheaper. Most urban centres have adult education institutions offering language courses. Some schools and universities provide courses of a few hours a week for local residents. Local authorities – ask at the town hall – and Chambers of Commerce often either run courses themselves or know who does. Information can sometimes be found at public libraries. National or regional Education Ministries may be able to help, or give details of professional organisations that can advise you.

You can also try an Internet search using key words such as “language courses” and the name of the place where you live. Internet access is often available cheaply in “Internet cafés”.

For those who do not live near a good language school or prefer to work alone, distance learning opportunities are often available, either from a regional adult education institute or university, or (in some countries) from a national provider.

Most large bookshops have a good range of self-study courses.

The children have just started French at school. We’re going to classes, too, so we can help with homework.

Our company landed a really big contract; our receptionist speaks Russian and that helped a lot in the initial contacts.

Choosing a good course

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU CHOOSE:

- Always ask to be shown round the school: or if it’s abroad, get as many details as you can, for example on accommodation and social activities
- Does the school give you clear information about its programmes, the size of groups, the level you will be in?
- Is the staff suitably qualified?
- Has the school got good resources and facilities?
- Is the school approved by a recognised authority? Is it regularly inspected e.g. by the Education Ministry or an external association?
- Can it provide references from satisfied students?
- Can you prepare for examinations if you want to take one?

Once you have started

Learning a language is enjoyable, but if you want to succeed you need to be motivated. The more active you are, the more successful you will be.

If you feel discouraged or frustrated – most people do sometimes – don’t give up. But talk to a teacher or someone you are learning with. And take a break – this will help you to begin again with new energy.

Practical tips

- Don't try to learn everything at once. Set clear and realistic targets and go at your own pace.
- Be open to new ways of learning– new methods and new technology can help you.
- Use every opportunity to communicate in the language.
- Don't be afraid of making mistakes. You can work gradually on reducing them. What matters is getting your meaning across.
- Revise what you have learnt and review your progress regularly.

Reading and listening

- Reading and listening a lot is very important. The more you listen, the better you'll speak. Reading will help you to write better.
- Read and listen to texts where the language is used naturally (newspaper, TV, radio).
- Remember you don't have to understand every word to get the gist.
- Check your progress. Go back to things you have worked on already. Do they seem easier?

Teachers teach, but only learners can learn. In the end, you are responsible for your own progress.

Writing

- Try to find opportunities to communicate in writing – e-mails, postcards, letters, etc.
- Read through what you have written: when you write there's more time to check and correct mistakes...

Speaking

- Practise speaking as much as you can (talk to your fellow students, to foreigners you meet, even to yourself!)
- If you go to a country where the language you are learning is spoken, but people speak to you in your language, or English, explain that you would prefer to speak their language.
- Memorise the things you need to say most often – when meeting people, shopping, buying things etc.
- Most people never achieve a perfect accent in another language. That does not matter as long as people understand.

Vocabulary

- Learning new words is easier if you group them according to their meaning.

So the best method is whatever works best for you.