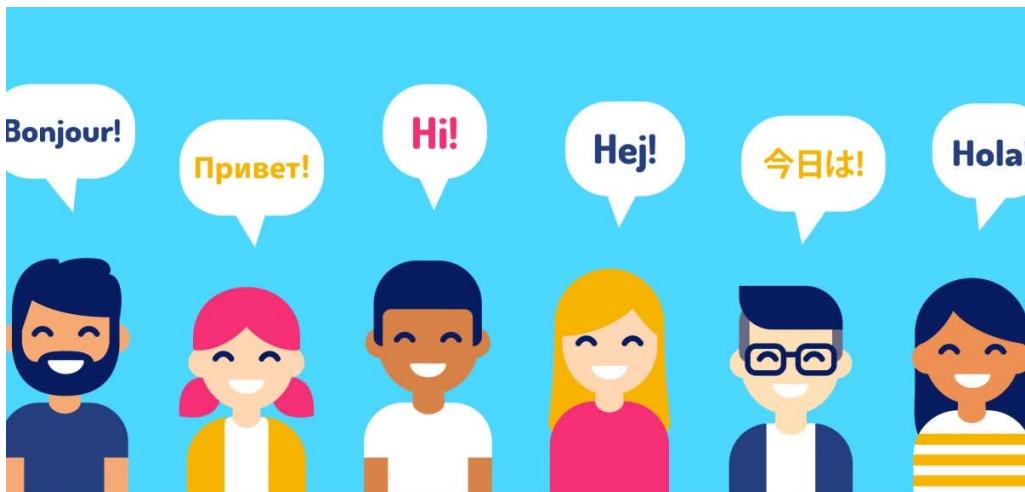


# How to learn a new language: 7 secrets from TED Translators



They say that children learn languages the best. But that doesn't mean that adults should give up. We asked some of the polyglots in TED's Open Translation Project to share their secrets to mastering a foreign language. Their best strategies distill into seven basic principles:

- A.** Decide on a simple, **attainable** goal to start with so that you don't feel **overwhelmed**. German translator Judith Matz suggests: "Pick up 50 words of a language and start using them on people — and then slowly start picking up grammar."
- B.** Elisabeth Buffard, who in her 27 years of teaching English has always seen consistency as what separates the most successful students from the rest. Find a language habit that you can follow even when you're tired, sick or madly in love.
- C.** The more you invite a foreign language into your daily life, the more your brain will consider it something useful and worth caring about. "Use every opportunity to get exposed to the new language," says Russian translator Olga Dmitrochenkova. Label every object in your house in this language, read kids' books written in it, watch subtitled TED and TEDx talks, or live-narrate parts of your day to an imaginary foreign friend.
- D.** Dmitrochenkova has a great idea: "A funny thing like resetting the language on your phone can help you learn new words right away," she says. Ditto for changing the language on your browser. Or you can seek out more structured learning opportunities online. Dutch translator Els De Keyser recommends Duolingo for its gamified approach to grammar, and Anki for memorizing vocabulary with its "intelligent" flashcards.
- E.** To Spanish translator Sebastián Betti, learning a language has always been about

focusing on the experiences that the new language would open up, from “visiting theme parks, attending air shows, enjoying cowboy poetry and folk-rock festivals, to learning about photo-essay techniques.” In other words, he thinks of fun things that he wanted to do anyway, and makes them into a language-learning opportunity. Many of our translators shared this advice. Italian and French translator Anna Minoli learned English by watching **undubbed** versions of her favorite movies, while Croatian translator Ivan Stamenković suddenly realized he could speak English in fifth grade, after years of watching the Cartoon Network without subtitles. So the next time you need a vegan carrot cake recipe, find one in the language you’re trying to learn.

**F.** Interacting in the new language is key — it will teach you to intuitively express your thoughts, instead of mentally translating each sentence before you say it. Find native speakers near you. Or search for foreign penpals or set up a language tandem online, where two volunteers help one another practice their respective languages.

**G.** One of the most common barriers to conversing in a new language is the fear of making mistakes. But native speakers are like **dating parents**: any attempt from you to communicate in their language is objective proof that you are a gifted genius. They’ll appreciate your effort and even help you. Nervous about holding a conversation with a peer? Try testing your language skills with someone a little younger. “I was stoked when I was chatting with an Italian toddler and realized we had the same level of Italian,” recalls German translator Judith Matz. And be patient. The more you speak, the closer you’ll get to the **elusive** ideal of “native-like fluency.” And to talking to people your own age.

#### ANSWER GRID

HEADINGS	Text letter
1. A gateway to new experiences	
2. Do not worry about making mistakes	
3. Get real	
4. Let technology help you out	
5. Make language learning a lifestyle change	
6. Make new friends	
7. Play house with the language	

Adapted from: <https://blog.ted.com/how-to-learn-a-new-language-7-secrets-from-ted-translators/>

#### Discussion

1. What do you think of these tips? Which one do you find the most practical/useful?
2. Do you use any of these strategies or any others to learn a foreign language? Which ones?

**KEY**

HEADINGS	Text letter
1. A gateway to new experiences	E
2. Do not worry about making mistakes	G
3. Get real	A
4. Let technology help you out	D
5. Make language learning a lifestyle change	B
6. Make new friends	F
7. Play house with the language	C