

Advice on improving your conversation skills in another language

Below are a few simple suggestions to help you gradually learn to speak fluently in another language. After a first reading and listening-based approach to language learning, it is advisable to start speaking, practising with students or children or native speakers you are familiar with, in order to avoid too much embarrassment.

What follows is a series of goals to start working on.

Goal 1

Pronunciation and intonation

Listening is very important so that you assimilate the pronunciation and intonation of the new language (radio, TV, native speakers' conversation, audiobooks, songs, podcasts, etc.).

Practise speaking: for example by listening to audiobooks and repeating the phrases you hear. This will help you to identify the rhythms, intonation and sound of the language. You can also use simplified texts with audio CDs: read the text out loud and compare your pronunciation with that of the narrator.

Listen to your favourite songs in the language you're learning and **sing** along to it.

Don't only concentrate on individual words but also, and above all, on **phrases and sayings**.

Practice **tongue-twisters** and try to say them as quickly as possible.

Goal 2

Speak fluently

Practice every day with a **2 minute monologue** on any subject or describe your day, a picture, etc..

Formulate **simple phrases using common words**.

Describe objects and ideas using different words, without saying their name, using games like 'Taboo' in the language you're learning.

Think out loud and comment on what is happening or what you're doing even if you're alone (for example making breakfast, what's happening in the street, how you're feeling, etc.).

Take part in conversations with native speakers, such as Language Cafés, language exchange arrangements (Tandem), in everyday situations like shops, etc..

Goal 3

Vocabulary and syntax

Memorise everyday life phrases to use in various situations and for a range of communication purposes (e.g. at the doctor, at a restaurant, on the phone) as well as expressions to use to ask for clarification, information, or a favour, or for thanking, apologising, expressing opinions, etc..

Practising everyday language (at the baker's, with comics or films, by taking part in a theatre group in the language you're learning, etc.).

Collect words and phrases on themes you talk about often, such as family, work, free time **from a range of sources** (books, lists of useful words, manuals, tourist guides, road signs, banners, etc.).

Goal 4

Self-assessment

It is very useful to **speak and record yourself**, both alone and in a pair, and then play the recording back and self-assess: how is your pronunciation? Are you speaking fluently? Are you expressing yourself clearly and appropriately?

Analysing problems: after speaking/ conversing it is useful to identify the difficulties you encountered (vocabulary, grammar, etc.), and to discuss them with your language partner, noting down possible solutions in your 'learning diary'.

If you have to speak about a specific subject it is useful to **prepare a written text**. Take the time you need to express what you have to say in different ways, extending your vocabulary with the help of dictionaries and a competent speaker. Take special care over syntax!

Then **repeat out loud the text you've prepared**, without reading it.

If you are saying it to other people, try to understand and assess their **reactions**: do they frequently ask you to repeat or explain things?



Examiners assess overall language skills much more positively when pronunciation is good.