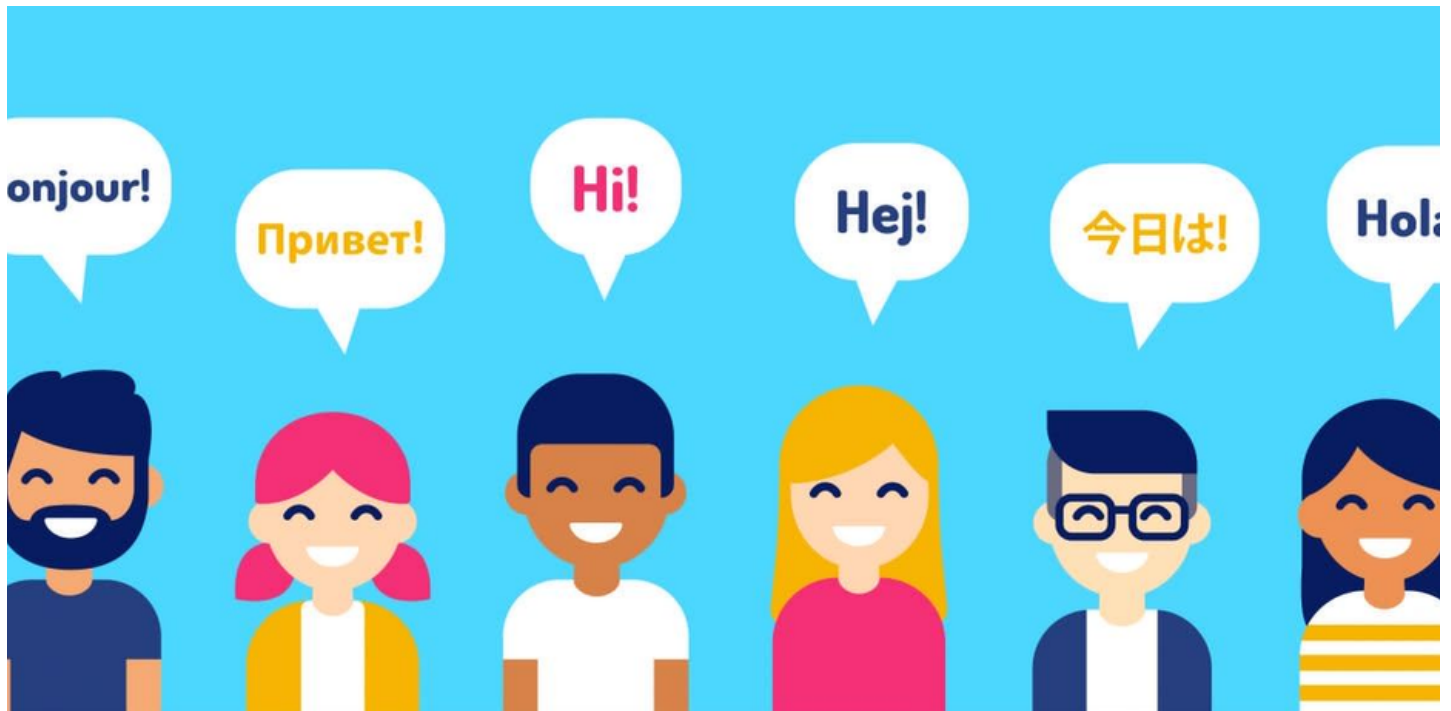


# PERSONAL ARTICLE

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(EN)

## APPROACHES TO LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE



L'image: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/arts-blog/are-modern-foreign-languages-exams-too-difficult>

At Maison de l'Europe Bordeaux-Aquitaine, all 12 volunteers are learning or improving their French or English. Each volunteer has a different approach to their learning journey. Despite this, it is worth looking at the findings of researchers and scholars on effective ways to learn a foreign language.

### Setting yourself up for success

A popular technique, for more than learning languages, is setting SMART goals. SMART is an acronym for the steps you need to take to make your steps concrete: you need to make them Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. For example, your SMART goal could be holding a 10-minute-long conversation with a native person in six months or reading and understanding your favourite book in your target language in three months.

Furthermore, it is important to feel comfortable with the setting in which you are learning a language, according to linguist Stephen Krashen. His affective filter hypothesis claims that you cannot learn a language if you are mentally blocking the learning process. We can differentiate between having a lower filter and a higher filter when learning a language. A lower filter means you are comfortable, permitting you to participate in the learning process and retain information. On the other hand, having a high filter blocks your ability to learn, signifying that you are uncomfortable or stressed. Therefore, you must find yourself in a setting where you feel at ease and are okay with making mistakes in order to learn a new language.

The level of the content you receive is also of importance. The content should be just above your level in the target language. This is Stephen Krashen's input hypothesis. The structure of the information you receive is thus slightly above your level ( $i + 1$ ), however, you should be able to comprehend the information due to the context. Building upon this, Krashen claims that the ability to speak fluently emerges over time, as comprehensible input is received.

## **Strategies to learn a new language**

An important part of learning a new language is practising through conversing. As stated in Micheal Long's Interaction Hypothesis, discussing with a native speaker or another non-native speaker permits you to learn through the 'negotiation of meaning'. The negotiation of meaning is a process you undergo to understand what someone is saying. This can, for example, be done by asking for the definition of a word or asking someone to repeat what they said at a slower pace. Long claims that only receiving information is not as effective as this process of interacting. Namaziandost and Nasri also emphasize that interaction between non-native speakers is advantageous, not exclusively conversing with a native speaker.

Maison de l'Europe hosts language cafés in and around Bordeaux where there is the opportunity to speak to native and non-native speakers in various languages. Similar activities are organised in most big cities, which is an interesting possibility if you are learning a language and do not personally know anyone who speaks the target language.

A commendable language learning strategy is language immersion, which means being surrounded by the language. Research shows that through language immersion, a more advanced command of the language can be attained, especially when matched with high motivation.

For example, a European Solidarity Corps project allows you to move to a different country and be fully immersed in a new language, which can facilitate plenty of conversations in your target language. However, it is not realistic for everyone to pack up their belongings and move to a different country. Despite this, it is still possible to immerse yourself in a language by consuming media in your target language, from the books you read to the news you watch.

Contrary to what Krashen's input hypothesis suggests, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) focuses on learning a new language and new content simultaneously. The new content, such as woodwork or history, is explained in a foreign language. As seen before, motivation plays a significant role in this too. If you are interested in the topic you are learning about, you will be more motivated to find the language to communicate.

In conclusion, there are many different approaches to language learning and what is effective is personal. Setting up a solid foundation for language learning, such as creating goals for yourself and identifying in what spaces you are comfortable with the inevitable trial and error of language learning, is a good first step. Next, there are many different techniques, such as language immersion and Content and Language Integrated Learning, which can be effective.