TALK THE TALK
A GUIDE TO MAXIMISING YOUR PROSPECTS USING LANGUAGES
GO FURTHER WITH LANGUAGES

Learning a language is a long-term investment – for you, your career and for society. Whether you picked up languages at home, school, online or travelling the world, your language skills are a great asset.

ENGLISH CAN GET YOU SO FAR

English is a global language, but in fact only about 6% of the world’s population are native English speakers and an estimated three quarters do not speak English at all.

A recent CBI survey found that 72% of UK firms say foreign languages benefit their business, and around 1 in 10 are concerned about missing out on opportunities due to language skills shortages. Meanwhile, the number of languages spoken in London alone stands at an estimated 233.

If I’m selling to you, I speak your language. But if I’m buying, dann müssen Sie Deutsch sprechen.

Willy Brandt, former German Chancellor

BUT LANGUAGES WILL TAKE YOU FURTHER

Every language you learn will open doors to a world of exciting opportunities, allow you to tap into new networks, and enrich your education. And each one you tackle will make learning the next easier.

For employers, European languages continue to be the most ‘useful’, but those geared towards working in China, Turkey, the Middle East and other emerging economies are likely to grow in demand over this century.

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

Nelson Mandela

KEY

The CV Snapshot reveals the steps our profiles have taken to using languages in their careers

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Nelson Mandela

= native  = good  = some

Between them, our profiles speak 22 different languages! These icons will show you which ones they know and how well.

ACCESS TO EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS BORDERS

CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

CLEAR AND CONFIDENT COMMUNICATION SKILLS

COMMUNICATION WITH HARD-TO-REACH GROUPS

GLOBAL OUTLOOK AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF OTHER LANGUAGES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN

DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF FOREIGN ENVIRONMENTS AND PRACTICES

ACCESS TO NEW INFORMATION SOURCES

WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION
I coached a team in Japan, and at first I didn’t know any Japanese, so I coached in English instead. They gave me a translator but we lost the first few games. One day the chairman summoned me and I expected the sack! He said ‘I have made a very big decision. I will sack the translator!’ Luckily I persuaded him not to and we began winning games. But it just shows you that when you’re abroad, you have to learn about the culture and how to communicate from the start. Learning the language helps you understand the people better.

Every time you learn a new language, the next one is easier to learn. When you speak Italian, Spanish becomes easier. With German, English gets easier.

I started using languages from the age of six. My family was rather nomadic and used to take off for four months a year, staying in Turkey, Poland, Romania, and Greece. I went to a village primary school in Greece and was motivated by the simple desire to communicate with other children. This has opened international doors for me, enabling me to act as a cultural ambassador for the UK and Europe within the international festival scene.

Language is a powerful tool for action and the imagination. Through different languages we can walk in other worlds – it gives us courage to try new things.

Every time you learn a new language, the next one is easier to learn. When you speak Italian, Spanish becomes easier. With German, English gets easier.
Rosie Goldsmith  
Broadcaster, BBC Radio  

For work and leisure, languages are key to my pleasure! In 20 years at the BBC I've travelled the world, taking in Libya, Japan and East Timor and covered events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of apartheid. I have presented flagship radio shows like *A World in Your Ear* and *Crossing Continents* and today I'm in demand at cultural festivals and events in the UK and abroad. 

German, Latin and French A Levels / French and German Degree / Reporter, Deutsche Welle and Deutschlandfunk, Cologne / Foreign Affairs Reporter and Producer, BBC / Chair, Judge and Curator of European Literature Night, British Library / Artistic Director of High Impact: Literature From The Low Countries Festival

Isabel Hilton OBE  
Founder & Editor, chinadialogue.net

When I started out it was difficult to get assigned to international stories. Having languages enabled me to land my first major newspaper piece (about China) and get sent to cover the Falklands War. The capacity to eavesdrop on casual conversations, form direct relationships, make jokes and speak to people at all levels of society – not just the upper classes who speak English – matters a great deal.

Latin, French, German and Spanish A Levels / Chinese MA / Post-graduate researcher in China / Reporter, Scottish Television / Latin America Editor, The Sunday Times / European Affairs Editor, The Independent / Presenter, The World Tonight, BBC / Staff Writer, New Yorker

Neela Mukherjee  
UK General Merchandise Director, Tesco PLC

Speaking languages has enabled me to work and study in five different countries. They can be difficult and at times embarrassing but languages are invaluable business skills. Communicating and connecting with people at all levels, whether they are the CEO or a cashier, becomes increasingly important the more senior you become.

Bengali, Spanish / French

Always look for ways to broaden your horizons. Developing your personality is just as important as developing your CV and you never know what an experience outside of your comfort zone may teach you.
Richard Hardie
Chair, UBS Ltd

Languages have counted for more the more senior I have become. When I was Chairman of our Italian subsidiary, I spoke to every member of the firm at one time or another. I believe I gained their confidence that way. My language ability and strong intercultural awareness has allowed me to grow with the firm as it has expanded from its Swiss and London bases to over 50 countries.

French and German exchange visits whilst at school / Italian summer course, Perugia / Modern History and French Degree / Year abroad in Dijon / Chartered Accountant / Chief Operating Officer for Europe, Middle East and Africa, UBS Investment Bank

Neil Bentley
Deputy Director-General & Chief Operating Officer, Confederation of British Industry

I represent the CBI to media, government and business-lobbyists overseas, particularly focussing on Brussels, Washington DC, Beijing and New Delhi. My knowledge of languages and sensitivity to new cultures has been essential: from the practicalities of conversing and reading documents or newspapers to successfully striking up working relations abroad.

French, German and English A Levels / Gap year working on French campsites / French, German and European Politics Degree / German Industrial Relations PhD / Researcher and Writer, European industrial relations magazine / Europe, Middle East and Africa HR Lead, EDS

Baroness Jean Coussins
Crossbench Peer & Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages

Though I haven’t used languages directly, they’ve been helpful on various projects over the years. Around the time of Pinochet’s coup, I helped establish the Chile Solidarity Campaign, involving a mass demonstration and acting as personal interpreter for President Allende’s widow. More recently, I went to Peru as a parliamentary volunteer, became acquainted with the local variety of Spanish and worked with NGOs. Languages are critical to our education, economy and international influence. I campaign passionately for this in Parliament.

French and Latin A Levels / Gap year au pairing in Madrid / Spanish and French Degree / Secretary, United Nations Association / Leadership roles in various third sector, corporate social responsibility and government organisations / CEO, The Portman Group / President, Peru Support Group / Vice-President, Chartered Institute of Linguists

Rt Hon Tom Brake MP
Deputy Leader of the House of Commons

We all operate in a global environment. Employers are crying out for people with good language skills and an international outlook to help them export. It is a skill that really shines out on a person’s CV.

French, German and English A Levels / Gap year working on French campsites / French, German and European Politics Degree / German Industrial Relations PhD / Researcher and Writer, European industrial relations magazine / Europe, Middle East and Africa HR Lead, EDS

Learning a language does require some hard slog at first, but it will be of great benefit later on, particularly should you need to learn another one!
Jean Lambert
Member of the European Parliament for London

French, Italian

When the Green Party began developing links with newer European Green parties, it was very useful to have someone who could speak French. Although the meetings were held in English, it helped break down barriers. In my work now, I am able to work with a wider range of colleagues and not only native French-speakers: colleagues from Poland, Hungary, Romania, Italy, Spain and other countries often have French as their preferred additional language.

English and French A Levels / Attended Anglo-French Summer Schools and an exchange trip to Paris / French and Italian Degree / PGCE / Secondary school teacher, taught English, French and Drama / Joined the Green Party / Became the first 'honorary' Green Group representative in the European Parliament

Learning languages has been life-changing. There are many parts of the world where it is perfectly normal for people to speak two or more languages.

Rushanara Ali MP
Member of Parliament & Shadow Minister for International Development

Bengali

As a bilingual person and MP to a diverse constituency, I know the importance of language education. I helped establish LanguageLine, which provides a national telephone interpreting service in over 100 languages to help organisations deal with emergencies and I am currently supporting projects teaching English as a second language.

Early childhood in Bangladesh / Philosophy, Politics and Economics Degree / Research Assistant, helping set up Futureversity and LanguageLine / Research Fellow, Institute for Public Policy Research / Civil Servant in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office / Associate Director, The Young Foundation / MP for Bethnal Green and Bow

Languages are essential tools to help people fulfil their potential. It’s critical to widening opportunities and promoting social and economic integration.

Jacqueline Minor
Head of UK Representation, European Commission

French, German, Portuguese, Dutch

When I arrived in Luxembourg, I could write a mean critique of Racine but was incapable of holding a conversation in the lift; I spent the first few months staring intently at my feet to avoid embarrassment. Total immersion in French at the Court made for very quick progress. Without it, I could not have pursued this fascinating career. Although English is now widely used, many water-cooler conversations still take place in French.

German and French at school / Law Degree / Masters thesis on European Law / Taught courses on European Law at University / Référendaire (Law Clerk) to several British Judges, European Court of Justice / Worked in the Directorate-General for the Internal Market, European Commission / Director for Consumer Affairs, European Commission

Speaking other languages not only gives you a literal understanding of what someone is saying; it can also help you to grasp how they approach an issue or how they would resolve a problem, which is crucial in any multicultural setting.

Meg Munn MP
Member of Parliament & Former Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

French, German, Spanish, Italian, Hindi, Arabic

Having language skills has opened the world to me. In my social work career they came in useful when working with families from overseas and my languages were one of the reasons I was appointed as a Foreign Office Minister. Languages enabled me to get a wider perspective on issues by comparing different countries’ responses first hand. I was able to make stronger links with European colleagues and give interviews to foreign journalists.

French and German A Levels / French, Hindi and Linguistics Degree / Social Work Masters / Social Worker at various councils / Assistant Director for Children’s Services, City of York Council / MP for Sheffield Heeley

Speaking languages shows respect, builds bridges and allows you to make friendships around the world. Most people are really pleased when someone makes the effort to speak their language and will want to help you use it more.
Studying languages gives you a wonderful rounded education. There are not many jobs where written and oral communication, clear thinking, and persuasive arguments are not core requirements! You can do the applied learning later.

Dr Judith Smith
Director of Policy, Nuffield Trust

▶ French ▶ German

Apart from spending my trainee elective placement in a French hospital and organising an NHS study tour to France (where we learnt as much about the NHS – seen from the perspective of abroad – as we did about the French system), I have not used languages in my work. However, the broader skills of analysis, research, writing and presentation are the bread and butter of my job today.

French and German A levels / French Degree / Year abroad in Dijon / NHS Management Trainee / Diploma in Health Services Management / MBA / Health Services Management PhD / Academic Director of the NHS Management Training Scheme

We are living in a completely new Europe. There is never-ending opportunity out there and learning languages can help you become what you want to be.

Daniel Kempf
Special Constable, Durham Constabulary Police Force

▶ Polish ▶ German

Since coming to England I’ve had one aim – to become a top Police Officer! I use my language skills daily and am glad to be the main point of contact between the Polish community and the police. I helped them handle the murder of a Polish woman a few years ago by liaising between local and Polish police teams. It’s very rewarding to be able to communicate with others and help when nobody else can.

English at school in Poland / Taxi driver in Darlington – where I got up to speed in English very quickly! / ESOL English course / Volunteer Police Officer / Winner of County Durham Special Constable of the Year, 2011 and 2012

Lizzie Fane
Founder, ThirdYearAbroad.com

▶ Italian, French ▶ Mandarin

You’ll impress with your personal year abroad formula. You spent the summer volunteering in Mexico, your first semester working for a Parisian law firm, the second interning for a Spanish startup and the next summer au pairing? An employer could teach you how their business works in a fortnight, but they can’t teach you a new language in that time.

You’ve got three years after graduating. I’ve run three different businesses. I use my German skills regularly – almost all business has an international element. I hope to use them even more as my business expands abroad.

Nick Holzherr
Founder, Whisk.com & The Apprentice Runner-up

▶ German, Swiss German

I speak both traditional High-German and a Swiss-German dialect as my mother is Swiss. While studying German, I spent a year in Frankfurt. I loved it – working in a different culture, meeting people from around the world and having lots of travel opportunities within reach. Languages definitely give you an edge over other job applicants, even if employers don’t explicitly ask for them.

International Business and German Degree / Year abroad working at Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt / Birmingham Young Professional of the Year, 2011 Winner
Toni Lorenzo
Partner, Lewis Silkin

I have no doubt that my languages influenced the decision to hire me here. I have many overseas clients with interests in the UK and regularly advise in Spanish and Italian. One of my most interesting recent professional experiences was being asked to be an expert witness on English employment law in the Spanish courts where I was cross-examined in Spanish.

Rachel Nicholson
Human Rights Officer for Advocacy and Research, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

I struggled with French at school and got some of my worst marks in it! But after a while, something clicked. I never expected to study French further, but having worked at it, I realised a year abroad would help me become really fluent. Since graduating I have needed French in every single job and internship I've done. Professionally, it has been invaluable and has allowed me to work in fascinating places.

Noa Epstein
CEO, Middle East Education through Technology

At 14 I joined a peace organization that brings together Arab and Israeli youth and wanted to be able to speak to the families of my Palestinian friends. Languages have been a huge plus. They enable me to build stronger professional relationships, manage investor relations and make a strong lasting impression on people.

Tiziana Oliva
Director of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean Group, VSO

Languages, travelling and exposure to different cultures broaden your horizons both practically and personally. They open doors on the person you are going to be tomorrow.

Practise speaking to native speakers – there is nothing more frustrating than not being fluent in conversation. Even if the particular professional direction you end up taking is currently unclear, learning another language is a must.
In 2011 the British Academy launched a four-year programme to support Languages in the humanities and social sciences. The Academy’s programme is committed to a range of research support, partnerships and other activities, seeking to demonstrate the value and importance of languages for the health and wellbeing of education, research, individuals and society at large. The British Academy for the humanities and social sciences has been supporting the best in UK and international academic research for over a century. Established by Royal Charter in 1902, the Academy is a Fellowship of over 900 leading UK scholars and social scientists which works to further our understanding of the past, present and future through research, policy reports, publications and public events.

The European Commission Representation in the UK is the voice of the European Commission in the UK and ensures that political, social and cultural life in the UK is understood at the European Commission’s headquarters. The Representation provides information about the European Union across the UK through outlets such as public libraries, business advice centres and education services. The Representation works with teachers, schools, universities, cultural and other organisations on a wide range of projects and initiatives to promote the importance of learning foreign languages, which can help improve young people’s employability and lead to increased mobility in today’s global labour market, as good language skills allow people to seize professional opportunities abroad and find work in businesses and organisations operating internationally. The Representation has offices in London, Belfast, Cardiff, and Edinburgh.