

THE THIRD AGE TRUST



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

Languages

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SO YOU WANT TO START A LANGUAGE GROUP?

TAKE A LOOK HERE – IT MIGHT HELP

I'm sure you'll have a few questions to ask and then of course there will be decisions to make. I hope this leaflet will help.

1 WHICH LANGUAGE?

This decision will depend on demand, needs, enthusiasm and personnel

2 WHO?

You will need

- A keen group of at least three prospective learners (essential)
- At least one person with enthusiasm and flair who will co-ordinate or organise
- Preferably a member with some teaching or managerial experience (not necessarily in languages)
- Ideally but not necessarily, a fluent or a native speaker (could visit occasionally)

3 WHEN?

Will meetings be

- weekly, fortnightly, monthly or other ?
- Infrequent meetings mean slower progress.
- To meet weekly needs greater commitment

4 WHERE?

- In a private house - this could limit your numbers but is cheaper and more conducive to conversation. Essential electronic equipment may be more readily at hand eg TV, CD player, DVD player or computer.
- In a rented hall or large room - this could be expensive and would mean obtaining equipment, carrying or storing it
- Several groups in one large room can
 - study a variety of languages
 - study at different levels :
 - share equipment:
 - share tutors and ideas
 - get to know more people

5 WHY?

Get the prospective members to discuss their reasons for learning

People learn better and are more enthusiastic if they have a reason for learning.

They might be learning

- Because they want to talk to their grandchildren
- Because they like travelling
- Because they own property abroad
- Because language fascinates them
- Because they want to keep their brains active

Knowing your motives gives you an aim and makes you more enthusiastic

Now you should all discuss and decide

- What are your aims of the group? Do most people want to do speaking, reading, translation, studying grammar, improving vocabulary, looking at the culture of the country?
- What is the level of the learners? Are there very varied levels of language competence?

It is very important to be aware of the above and to know that people are prepared to compromise on what they want if the needs and levels vary greatly. Some mixed groups function well with patience, co-operation and humour. Others find difficulties. Remember if the level varies greatly, there may be another u3a language group nearby which could take new members if they have space and if the level is appropriate. Contact the Language Adviser to know how to find a nearby language group....

6 HOW?

Start with an informal meeting where all the issues mentioned in 5 can be discussed.

- It is sometimes better to start with a specific numbers of weeks, eg. Six or ten or one term and to try and get members to commit to coming for that number of weeks. At the end of that time, discuss with the group if you want to continue for another limited period and talk about any changes the group might like to make.
- Try to get people to understand that doing homework or some preparation is vital to the success of the next lesson and will be expected.
- Make sure all materials are colourful, up to date, user friendly, accompanied by a good CD and preferably suitable for adults although some groups very much enjoy the humour of language books for children and find the pictures very helpful..:
- A course book is especially recommended if you have an inexperienced leader
- Some courses are just on CD with no book, especially useful if you have no experienced tutor or native speaker
- At higher levels you can also use authentic materials like newspapers, leaflets, brochures, magazines
- Watch films: Use schools/adult education broadcasts or TV programmes: play games: do puzzles
- Use the internet, there is a wealth of material available there, some of it for free!

Remember! Beginners or near beginners are very easily discouraged, especially by those who know some language already, even if they learned it 50 years ago! Beginners need well-structured lessons and sympathetic teaching which give them time to think and to make their contribution to the group.

Those with a knowledge of language structure ie who have learned any foreign language before, preferably in their youth, will normally progress more quickly.

For a **conversation group**, learners should have some previous knowledge of the language and feel fairly confident, even if they don't speak much at first

- Once established everyone in the group should be encouraged gently to speak. The leader must be aware of the group dynamics and be careful not to embarrass anyone by expecting too much too quickly. Insist on simple everyday topics at low levels and try to allow beginners to work at their own pace and be patient when they struggle to speak.
- Make sure you always have something to talk about! Eg a newspaper article, a prepared topic (or at least one decided on before hand)
- Conversation groups, with the right mix of people, are easier to run and often more fun

Everything you do must be interesting, enjoyable or at least obviously beneficial to learning.

Repetition is essential hence the value of children's games eg Snap, Bingo, Happy Families etc. Puzzles and crosswords enforce learning and help memory.

8 WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ?

Learning materials and advice are of course available in libraries and book shops and on line.

Leaflets are available from the Language Advisers on:

- A general guide to language learning materials
- A short guide to books and materials for French
- A general guide to books and materials for Italian
- Ideas for conversation (Joyce Gibson 2010)
- Advice on learning languages (Joyce Gibson 2010)
- Suggestions for books and materials (Joyce Gibson 2010)

The U3A Resource Centre lends copies of many courses (only those with CD's or DVD's) in all language and at different levels. They also lend out foreign films.

Contact: Susan Radford Tel:0208 315 0199

Their catalogue is on line at: www.u3a.org.uk

email: resource.centre@u3a.org.uk You can borrow these for free for three weeks if you want to evaluate a course before buying. You only have to pay return postage.

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