

Advice on preparing for a language certification exam

A language certification is an internationally recognised document that certifies the holder's level of linguistic competence in a foreign language.

For some languages there are a variety of language certificates. When choosing your exam, remember to consider **how long your certificate will retain its validity** (some have a limited duration) and the **reason why you are taking it**: language certificates can be either general or specific to a professional sector (teaching, language of economics, etc.), or a prerequisite for a course of study or employment application. When applying to study at university, it is particularly important that you contact your chosen university well in advance in order to check which exam you need to take, and the level required for admission.

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Find out the location of your nearest exam centre and the dates of exam sessions well in advance. Some exams are held on fixed dates a few times a year, while for others the dates vary depending on the location.

Ask if you can **watch an oral test, sit a simulation exam** or attend an open day at the exam centre.

Once you have verified your starting level, set yourself a realistic goal and sit the exam when you feel ready. You can assess your level on your own by using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, doing an online test, or using the exam models available at the two centres. To pass an exam, remember to work on all four skills: **reading, listening, speaking, writing.**

Familiarise yourself with the structure of the exam. When preparing, it is advisable to use specific preparation material so that you can acquaint yourself with the structure and timing of the individual parts of the exam. This preparation will help you to be more relaxed and focused when your exam day comes.

Read newspaper and magazine articles in original language: authentic material is used in a good number of exams, particularly for reading comprehension tests. Reading also helps us to learn new words and use them in the right context.

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Listen to news, podcasts, interviews and train yourself to understand the different accents of a language.

Listening also improves your vocabulary and pronunciation.

Conversation:

the oral part of each exam always involves interaction with a native speaker. Therefore, it is important to overcome the fear of speaking and to gain fluency and confidence in the language. The best way to practice is to find someone to talk to, or to look for conversation events or **language exchange programmes** in your city. If this is not an option for you, you can also find numerous **online language platforms**. Alternatively, you can **record yourself** speaking while you summarise the plot of a book or film or describe a picture and analyse your performance with a critical ear when you listen back.

Write essays and letters or keep a diary. Keep in mind that in order to write an essay well, you need a good vocabulary and a thorough knowledge of **grammar rules and syntax**. Writing regularly helps you to improve your essay-drafting skills.

Read over what you have written at least twice, preferably with a break between each reading: when you return to your essay a second time with a 'fresh eye', it is easier to spot mistakes and **reorganise sentences**, so they flow more smoothly. Always learn new words together with the appropriate article, plural form and if necessary, the dependent preposition.

And most importantly of all...

Diversify, and have fun studying.

In addition to studying regularly, having fun while learning is one of the secrets to success. Be as creative as you can:

- If you are a sports fan, listen to sports commentaries in your target language.
- If you like music, try translating the words of the songs you love.
- If you have a hobby, look for topical web pages in your target language and so on...