

Transcript

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's episode is for pre-intermediate learners. The name of the episode is *How to Teach a Language*. You can find a transcript of the episode at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Teach. That's EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Teach. There, you can also download the episode as a PDF.

Before we start today, I'm just going to read some reviews from listeners! This is something I'm trying out at the moment, as a way to say thank you for your kind words.

Katya.K. from France says: *Thank you so much for your podcasts! It helps me a lot!* I'm glad to hear that, Katya! By the way, I love the name Katya.

Farah from Saudi Arabia says: *Thank you, keep going I have improved my English I was a newbie 🍌*. I'm really glad to hear the podcast is helping you improve, Farah. I love the word 'newbie'. I think it sounds really cute. But it sounds like you're far beyond being a newbie now, so good work!

And finally Will Kao from Taiwan says: *Really like your voice*. Thank you so much, Will! That's very kind of you. I definitely take better care of my voice now than when I started the podcast, which I recommend everyone do.

Anyway, if you'd like to hear your message read on the podcast, then leave a positive review on Apple Podcasts, and I might read it out! As long as it's nice.

Alright, let's get on with the episode!

How to Teach a Language

In a previous episode of the podcast, [How to Learn a Language](#), I explained Steven Krashen's Theory of Comprehensible Input, the idea that we learn languages by reading and listening to things we understand. If you haven't listened to that episode, I strongly advise you go back and listen to it first. You can find it at EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Learn. The information in this episode really builds upon that one – **builds upon** means that the information in this episode continues from the last episode. It's like when you build a house – you have to have a first floor to build a second floor on top!

So today I'm going to explain how you can *teach* a language. Now, this is mainly for people who want to teach their language to a partner or a friend. For example, I have a friend who is Latvian, but there aren't many resources for learning Latvian, so he's teaching his partner himself. But he's not a professional teacher.

And the advice I would give to teachers is a bit different to the advice I would give to someone teaching a partner or a friend. If you are a language teacher, you will still find this episode useful, but I would recommend looking for more detailed resources. Fortunately, there are lots of blogs, podcasts and Facebook groups for CI – **CI** means comprehensible input – for CI teaching and TPRS, the storytelling technique I talked about last time. If you're not sure where to start, I really recommend a podcast called [The Motivated Classroom by Liam Printer](#), a fantastic teacher and researcher into second language acquisition.

But I think I probably have more listeners who want to teach a partner or a friend than listeners who are teachers. And maybe the experience of teaching a partner or a friend will make you want to be a language teacher! That would make me very happy. But to make

sure I don't give advice that doesn't actually work, before recording this episode, I decided to teach a bit of Esperanto to my ex-girlfriend, Artoria.

If you don't know, Esperanto is a constructed language designed by a Polish man in the 19th century for international communication. I don't want to spend too much time explaining it here, as it doesn't affect the advice I'm giving so much. But if you're interested, I did a previous episode called [The Boy Who Hoped](#) where I talked all about it. You can listen to it at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Hope](#).

Also, if you come over to the transcript for this episode at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Teach](#), I will put pictures and videos in the transcript to show examples of the techniques I'm talking about.

The first and most important thing when teaching a language is: use the target language as much as possible. The **target language** is the language that you're teaching. So, when I taught Esperanto to Artoria, Esperanto was the target language. When we had classes, I tried to use Esperanto as much as possible. Yes, even though we lived together, we did *classes*. You might think it would be a good idea to do all your regular conversations, but in the target language instead. And when your student gets to a high enough level, you can definitely do this. But beginners will get tired very easily, and they can lose motivation if they never get a proper break. So I recommend either having specific 'language days' or set class times.

The reason we want to stay in the target language is to get as much comprehensible input as possible – and that is the key, it needs to be *comprehensible*. Speaking fluent Chinese to someone won't help if they don't understand a single word you're saying.

So how do you make yourself comprehensible? Well, there are three main ways: speaking slowly, grading your language, and using aids like translation, drawing or gestures. **Grading** your language means changing it so that it is at a certain level, and an **aid** is something that helps you do something.

These first two methods – speaking slowly and grading your language – are more difficult than you might think. When someone doesn't know a language at all, almost *everything* is new to them. They don't even know where the spaces between words are when you speak. So you need to talk *really* slowly, and try to make your sentences as simple as you can.

Think of how you might talk to a baby or a very young child. If a baby looks hungry, you don't say, 'Hey, what are you feeling like eating?' You say, 'Are you hungry? Do you want to eat? Do you want to eat pasta? Pizza? Maybe you want milk?'

Obviously, your student isn't a baby, and they will understand more than a baby would, but you should try to talk in a similar way. Ask lots of simple yes/no questions. Use obvious words that are **cognates** – words that sound similar to your shared language. For example, 'Pizza' in German sounds similar to the English word 'pizza', so if I was teaching someone German, I could probably say that and they would understand, as long as I was speaking slowly enough.

To show you an example of how much speaking slowly and using cognates can do, I'm going to speak a bit of Japanese. I've deliberately written a few sentences with lots of English cognates. First, I'll speak quickly, and you see if you understand anything. Then, I'll say it at the speed I would use with a beginner learner.

コンピューターはクールなテクノロジーですね。ビデオゲームをプレイしたり、ドキュメントを編集したり、いろいろなことができます。ブライアンにクリスマスプレゼントとしてコンピューターをあげようと考えています。

Most likely, you didn't understand the full meaning of that, but you probably understood at least a few words the second time. The first time you might have felt stressed and nervous. Or maybe you understood so little that you didn't pay attention.

By the way, if you're curious, the meaning of the Japanese was:

'Computers are cool technology, huh? You can do all kinds of things like play video games and edit documents. I'm thinking of giving a computer to Brian as a Christmas present.'

OK, so what about other aids? Translation is very easy, but you shouldn't use it too much, because it takes time away from speaking the target language. Also, there is no such thing as a perfect translation between two languages. If a student gets used to translating all the time, it becomes very hard to understand more complicated language later on.

Gestures and pictures are both great aids, though, and I encourage you to use them as much as possible. If you say the word 'eat', mime eating something with your hands. **Miming** is when you pretend to do something. So if I mimed eating, I would pretend to pick up some food and put it in my mouth. You can be quite creative with gestures and miming. If you say the word 'where', you can look around the room, like you are looking for something. Or if you say 'basketball', you can mime playing basketball.

Another great method is to draw pictures to explain meaning, and this can make things really fun! If you don't enjoy drawing, finding pictures from the internet to explain the meaning of a word is fine, too. The only problem is, if you're going to download pictures then you might have to prepare them before talking about something, because it can be hard to find a picture that shows exactly what you mean. For example, let's say you want to explain the word 'car'. If you look up pictures of cars, they might have other things in them: roads, other cars, trees and so on. So the student might not understand if the picture means 'car' or 'driving' or 'road', and so on. This is why I prefer drawing and gestures.

It's also important to think about the physical space you are teaching in. **Physical** means something that is real, something that is solid. For example, a table is physical, but an idea or a dream is not physical. So when I talk about the 'physical space', I mean the real space inside your house – the rooms, the furniture and so on.

Classrooms are designed for teaching, but houses are not. Classrooms have blackboards or whiteboards, computers in useful locations, and the rooms are designed for one person to teach to a group of people.

Think about what things will be useful to you. Do you want to write lots of words down on a whiteboard? Do you want to create a '**word wall**' – a wall with posters that have useful common words written on them along with translations? Do you want to show your student songs and videos? Or do you want to mainly teach through activities, like cooking and cleaning?

You might not have space for a big whiteboard in your house, but you could sit on the sofa and write on paper, or type on your computer and use a projector to show it on the wall. A **projector** is a piece of technology that you connect to your computer, and it shows your computer screen on the wall as a large image. In cinemas, projectors are used to show films, to project them onto the screen.

When I taught Artoria, I made posters for a word wall – things like question words, common verbs and pronouns with translations and pictures – and pointed to them as I taught. Instead of using a projector, I connected my computer to our TV, so that I could type and Artoria could read words off the screen at the same time. I could also show her songs and videos this way.

You might also prefer to not do classes in this way. Maybe you have a part of the house where you only speak the target language, or maybe there are certain activities that you use to teach. For example, when you cook dinner with your partner, you ask them to find ingredients in the target language, and tell them what you are doing while you do it. You might say, 'I'm going to mix the flour into the eggs,' and then you mix together the flour and the eggs. There's a clear context to the language, which makes it easier to understand, and food is a very important part of human relationships, so it can be a great way to learn language, as well.

By the way, I want to add here that it's completely fine if your student takes a long time to start talking. I spoke about this a lot in the episode [How to Learn a Language](#) – having a silent period when learning a new language is completely normal. However, it can be hard when you're used to talking a lot in a different language, and suddenly you can't talk how you normally do.

One solution you could try is **crosstalk**. Crosstalk is when two people have a conversation, but they both speak in their native languages. That way, both people can say what they want to say, and they can focus on understanding the other person and making themselves easy to understand. Of course, you might not speak your native language with your partner normally, so it might be your shared language that they use instead. For example, if I did crosstalk with Artoria, I would speak Esperanto and she would speak English, although Esperanto isn't my native language.

Another option that I know is popular with multilingual families is to have language days. For example, you speak Swahili on Mondays and Tuesdays, and English on other days. To be honest, I don't know how well this would work for teaching a friend or a partner. When two parents can both use a language around their children, it works a bit differently. Ideally, the student should see and hear the language often. Also, adults are a lot more independent than children, so there's less 'need' to use difficult language in an everyday environment. You might create a situation where your student just doesn't talk to you as much on the target language days, or they find ways to solve problems without really understanding the language. So you'd have to experiment with this, I think.

If you're feeling really confident about teaching, you should try TPRS, which stands for 'Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling'. I talked about it in the last episode. Basically, TPRS means writing stories together. As long as the stories are comprehensible – graded to the student's level – you can write about whatever you want, and if it's a friend or a partner, you probably have lots of shared jokes and hobbies, so it can get really fun and creative. Then you can write and read the stories together, and that creates material for the student to read outside of class as well.

There's also TPR – which sounds similar to TPRS, but is quite different! TPR stands for 'Total Physical Response'. Basically, you give commands in the target language.

Commands are when you tell someone to do something, like, 'Jump in the air!' or 'Sit down and then stand up!' Many children's games use commands a lot. TPR works great for things like dancing and cooking, and it can be a really fun activity in general, as it helps make a very physical link between the language and the body.

Clip chats is another really fun activity that's easy to use. Basically, you take a short film and play it without sound. You pause the video after a few seconds and talk about what is happening. It is clear what the language means, because the student can see what is happening. This works really well if it is a video that they know and like. But try to keep the language very simple at the beginning. It can be easy to try and explain *everything* that is happening, but it's important to grade it to your student's level!

Or you could try a **story listening**, where you tell a fairy tale or a folk tale, and draw pictures to explain what is happening in the story. Again, it's really important to grade the story to your student, and it's better to use fairy tales that everyone knows, like Cinderella or Snow White.

After doing a clip chat or story listening, you can write a summary of the story together. I like to do this by asking my student questions: 'What was the name of the girl?', 'Where did she go?' This helps me understand how well they understood the story. If they didn't understand something, I can explain it. Then, after writing the summary, they have something they can read outside of class to keep building the language in their head.

This is a good time to talk about understanding in general. Many teachers say 'teach to the eyes', which means you should look at your students' eyes and faces closely to make sure they understand what you are saying. It's the same with a friend or a partner. You might know them very well, but that doesn't mean they'll understand you perfectly, and they might hide it when they don't understand because they don't want you to be sad, or to make you think you're a bad teacher. Tell them to be really honest with you and tell you when they don't understand, or ask them to use a gesture when they don't understand.

As I mentioned before, you can use questions to check for understanding. But remember that, at a low level, a student can't give complicated answers. So if I ask you, 'What activities have I talked about in this episode?', that's a very difficult question. But if I say, 'Did I talk about word walls earlier? Did I use word walls when teaching Artoria? Can you use word walls at home?' these questions are easier to answer for beginners. They are yes/no questions, but they still would give me an idea of how much you understood and didn't understand.

You might find that teaching your friend or partner is stressful, and you prefer to make resources that they can use by themselves. For example, maybe you write little stories for them, or you make videos that they can watch later. I did this a bit while teaching Artoria, so she had something to read outside of class. It's still very important to remember to grade your language, but this is easier in a lot of ways because the student can look up words in the dictionary and watch a video multiple times.

And generally, I think that's a good note to end on, a good place to finish this episode: *teaching a language is hard*. Teaching a language to someone you know very well is *very* hard. Your student might think you're bad at teaching, and that could hurt your feelings. You might think your student is a bad language learner, and that could hurt their feelings. We're often 'different people' when we speak one language versus another, and sharing your culture with someone can feel very strange if you're used to speaking another language with them.

So remember to listen to your feelings, and if the teaching is too stressful, spend less time on it, or find ways to set clear boundaries, to make the beginning and end of class time very clear. For example, maybe there are certain phrases you say at the start and end of class. Or maybe you end class by having a hug. Make sure to talk with your student in your usual shared language and ask them how they are finding the classes.

Once again, I'd like to remind you that you can find lots of pictures and videos in the transcript at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Teach](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Teach), and there is a full list of resources at the end of the episode [How to Learn a Language](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/How-to-Learn-a-Language), which you can find at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Learn](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Learn).

So, go out there and teach your language! And remember that languages are a *human* thing. Teaching your language might be more emotional than you expect, and you might find you don't get far with a partner or a friend. But that's OK! Learning a bit of a language is still

a valuable experience, because it teaches you a lot about someone else's perspective and their culture. Happy teaching and happy learning!

Did you know that you can find all the stories from the podcast sorted by level? That way, you can listen to all the beginner episodes, or all the intermediate episodes, for example. Just go to [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com](https://www.easystoriesinenglish.com) and use the tab 'Stories' at the top to choose the level you're interested in. Then you'll get a list of all the stories from that level. Happy listening!