



Introducing the  
**language café**



## **What is a Language Café?**

A Language Café is a sociable and friendly way to practise languages without attending formal classes.

## **How and where are Language Cafés run?**

A Language Café provides a social space for people to meet, talk and learn languages together in an informal and sociable way. Language Cafes are run for and by the people who use them and can be found in all kinds of places such as cafés, libraries, cinemas, bookshops, schools, pubs and restaurants:

*"I have made a couple of new friends, gained confidence, learned and improved my French"*

## **How do I get involved?**

There are several ways in which you can get involved in a Language Café by participating in an existing café, setting up a new café or sponsoring a café in your local area. These are detailed in the three sections of this start-up guide.

- **Participating in a Language Café**
- **Setting up a Language Café**
- **Finding sponsorship for a Language Café**

Meet new people

Taste different cultures

Speak other languages

Experience the new café culture

# Join the Language Café Community

## Participating in a Language Café

### How to find a Language Café

If there are Language Cafés running in your area there are a number of ways to find out about them:

- Look on the Language Café website ([www.languagecafe.eu](http://www.languagecafe.eu))
- Ask at your local library or council
- Check for posters in places where Language Cafés are likely to take place, e.g. cafes, shops, restaurants etc.
- Look in the local press
- Ask around – one of the most common ways that information about Language Cafes spreads is through word of mouth.

### How to join a Language Café

Language Cafés are not clubs so you don't have to be a member in order to get involved. Simply turn up at the time and place advertised and join in the conversation. Here are a few tips to help you:

- Make sure that you have at least some ability to speak the language of the café you are attending as most are not suitable for beginners
- Introduce yourself, say who you are and why you have come
- Let the café organiser have your name and contact details so you can be kept in touch with Language Café activities
- Make sure you are aware of any Language Café rules or codes of conduct e.g. some cafes will ask you to buy a drink or pay a small contribution towards the café. You can ask for information about these when you turn up for the first time.
- Don't worry about making mistakes in your language - everyone will be at different levels
- Don't be afraid to have a go but it is also OK to just listen

*"Speaking in front of an audience (instead of speaking with someone in private) added something to my courage to speak"*

**Find out more about the Language Café experience by registering (for free) for the Language Café blog at [www.languagecafe.eu](http://www.languagecafe.eu)**

### Getting the most out of your Language Café

Café-goers will come from all walks of life and will have a wide variety of interests so to get the best out of the experience you need to be:

- Open-minded



- Interested in people and other cultures
- Able to listen as well as speak
- Willing to share responsibility for making the Language Café a success

*"The people who come here are all supportive"*

Language Cafés are not classrooms so there are never any lessons or tests as such, but on occasion café-goers might find themselves running out of ideas for things to talk about or things to do. A series of helpsheets for café-goers are available to download from the Language Café website [www.languagecafe.eu](http://www.languagecafe.eu)

### **The following helpsheets are available:**

1. Let's get started: something to do at the first Language Café meeting
2. Activities for a Language Café: some ideas for things to do
3. How are things going: questionnaire for café-goers

## **Setting up a Language Café**

Although the number of Language Cafés is growing you might not find one for the language you want in your local area. The good news is that it is easy to set up a new Language Café, and here are five steps to setting up a successful cafe. If after reading this you decide you don't have the time or commitment to do this you could try finding someone else to do it (see Finding sponsorship for a Language Café for more on this).

### **1. Place – find somewhere for your café to meet**

#### **What is needed?**

- People will need to be seated comfortably, perhaps around a table so that they can talk to each other and share materials e.g. books, newspapers etc.
- A regular time and day to meet (times or days when the venue is less busy or underused, you will need to negotiate those with the venue owner)
- A location that is easy to get to and visible to a wide public
- A quiet place that would still allow you to be able to talk
- A sympathetic 'host' e.g. the café owner, librarian etc.

## Examples of good places for Language Cafés

Café, bar, restaurant, pub	These already have the café atmosphere but <b>check</b> that they aren't too noisy or too busy
Libraries	These are places for the public so should be willing to host community activity such as a Language Café but <b>check</b> that they have a space that is suitable and separate from reading rooms that need to be quiet
Bookshops	Many bookshops already host social activities such as book clubs or readings and they may have foreign language books as well but <b>check</b> that they can supply a space and will accept refreshments
Shops	Some small food shops e.g. delicatessens will be interested in or run by people from the countries where the language you are interested in is spoken but <b>check</b> they have seating and that you will not be restricted by their opening hours
Community centres, church halls, village halls etc.	These spaces are ideal in small communities as they are used to hosting community groups and meetings but <b>check</b> who else is using the centre and who the keyholder is

**Note:** Language Cafés are often small so you won't need a large space. If the café becomes so popular that you outgrow the space you can always look for somewhere larger or meet in smaller groups at different times.

## 2. Pace – how often and when will the Language Café meet?

### What is needed?

- A time and day that suits the host
- A time and day when people are likely to come (this will influence the types of people who will come)



- Frequency of meetings – the time and frequency of the café should be fixed (but will need to be discussed with the host and café goers). Weekly or fortnightly is probably best with the meeting lasting about an hour.
- Regularity – people need to know that the Language Café will be where they expect it to be when they expect it to be!

*"I am looking forward to the next meeting. I cannot wait."*

### **3. People – the café-goers are the key ingredient of a Language Café and will come from all walks of life and will have a wide variety of interests**

#### **What is needed to be a good Language Café organiser?**

- Open-mindedness
- An interest in people
- The ability to listen as well as speak
- A willingness to take responsibility for making the Language Café a success
- Some basic skills in the language of the café (unless otherwise stated)

Once the café is up and running the organiser's role may include some or all of the following:

- Recruiting a café-goer to take over responsibility for the day-to-day running of the café
- Facilitating meetings e.g. keeping the conversation going, coming up with ideas for café activities
- Being the native/competent speaker of the language of the café
- Liaising with the venue owner
- Promoting the café in the local area

*"I am more prepared to risk speaking French"*

#### **Examples of Language Café-goers (based on real participants – names and languages have been changed):**

Mary is retired and is looking for a way of meeting people and sharing her interest in French	Caroline is a woman with a German husband and now that she has a baby would like to improve her German to communicate with her baby and her husband's relatives
Lotte is a student from	Martin is a freelance teacher of

Denmark who is keen to meet English people and to improve his Spanish	music and loves opera, he is keen to improve his French
Peter has a house in Italy and wants to improve his Italian	Sarah has disabilities that make it difficult to work or attend classes but she loves languages and has taught herself French, Spanish and Dutch
Jane lost her job recently and enjoys the chance to meet people as well as the opportunity to improve her job prospects	Tomasz is a Polish engineer, new to this country, who joined the Language Café in order to get to know people in his local community

**Note:** it is a good idea to have at least one person who speaks the language well or is a native speaker but you may have to search around for the latter and possibly pay them to help out.

*“Learning ‘real’ language from ‘real’ people”*

#### **4. Publicity – you don’t need to use expensive advertising but you will need some kind of publicity**

##### **What is needed?**

- A notice/poster advertising the details of the Language Café in the café venue. Templates for these are downloadable from [www.languagecafe.eu](http://www.languagecafe.eu)
- Information for adult learners following language courses (contact teachers or administrators in the first instance)
- Noticeboards in public spaces e.g. libraries, community centres, churches etc. (you will need to ask permission first)
- Access to community bulletins etc. which can provide free advertising or the local press

Download more advice on publicity: [www.languagecafe.eu](http://www.languagecafe.eu)

#### **5. Price – Language Cafés don’t really need to cost anything to run but there may be a few costs to consider**

##### **What is needed?**

- The venue: usually this will be for free but a café owner may request that café-goers buy food or drink in return for using the space
- If having a native speaker or person qualified in the language is important this may need to be paid for by



contributions from the café-goers or by a sponsor (see Finding sponsorship for a Language Café below)

- Some minor expenses for materials, e.g. photocopies and books or games

**Note:** Language Cafés are not commercial enterprises. They are run for and by the people who use them and financial contributions should be voluntary and agreed by the group.

## Finding sponsorship for a Language Café

To help set up a Language Café or to keep it going it is worth exploring the possibility of sponsorship. This does not necessarily involve the supply of funding or goods but can also be offered in the form of a venue, a facilitator or publicity. In addition it is not just commercial companies that should be approached and indeed there is often more likelihood that a public service will be interested in this type of activity so they are excellent potential sources of sponsorship.

Here are some ideas:

Who	How	Why
Public services such as schools, colleges, local councils, employment offices etc. e.g. Local authority education service organizing Language Cafés in libraries	Providing management and organization services Funding Publicity	Language Cafés provide opportunities for a wide range of people to engage in self-improvement particularly if they don't have access to other opportunities for reasons of cost, access and lifestyle
Language Café venues such as cafés, bars, cinemas etc. e.g. an Italian Delicatessen run by Italians	Organising and running the cafe Publicity Putting on special events	Many potential venues are run by people who either speak the language of the café or who are interested in the culture, food etc. It also gives great added appeal to their venue.
Commercial enterprises such as coffee companies, supermarkets, manufacturers	Providing food and drink Funding Publicity	Many businesses engage in charitable work and could support a Café that is of benefit to a particular group of people e.g.

		mothers and babies
Cultural associations, clubs and societies such as wine clubs, dance groups	Providing management and organization services Publicity Guest speakers	These societies etc. could work with a Language Café to put on a special event which would promote their area of activity e.g. a Tango class for a Spanish Language Café
Cultural Institutions such as embassies and cultural institutes e.g. the British Council has offices worldwide	Funding Links to the target culture Resources from the target language	These organisations may be able to provide resources to promote their language/culture through the Language Café network

See the Language Café website for more on sponsorship and to read some Language Café stories (examples of real cafés around the world).

*"I have met a lot of new friends from all around the world"*

[www.languagecafe.eu](http://www.languagecafe.eu)

The Language Café is funded by the European Community Socrates Lingua 1 programme. Sole responsibility for this publication lies with the author and the European Community is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.