



## Put languages to work

If a recent [languages careers Q&A](#) on the forum was anything to go by, learning a language could be one of the best ways to get ahead in business and many other sectors too.

[guardian.co.uk](#), Thursday 18 June 2009 15.14 BST

The original of this document is available at <http://careers.guardian.co.uk/forums-languages-careers> and is reproduced with the kind permission of Guardian Careers.

---

*Anne Marie Graham, CILT (National Centre for Languages) skills and qualifications adviser:*

Anne Marie said:

**What does my languages degree qualify me for?** Other than a career in translation, interpreting and teaching, the answer is: take your pick. A recent CBI survey confirms European languages, in particular French and German, are highly sought after by employers, with Chinese, Spanish and Russian becoming increasingly popular. Some 74% of employers are looking for people with conversational competence because it helps their business to be able to communicate, even at a basic level, with customers and clients. Any business which trades abroad, whether based in the UK or overseas, can use a member of staff with language skills.

**Languages appeal to employers:** The Confederation of British Industry's recent education and skills survey reported 36% of employers recruit employees specifically for their language skills. Employers value language skills for their potential to open up new markets and the ability to communicate with customers and clients in their own language.

If you can demonstrate initiative, team working and interpersonal skills as well as organisational qualities - all transferable skills that employers rate highly - in addition to these languages you become an incredibly valuable recruit. Our research shows that all sectors of industry use language skills, so the world is your oyster.

It's never too late to learn. As long as you are keen to learn and are able to practise and develop your skills, there is no reason why you can't achieve a good level of language as an adult learner. You just need to choose the language you are most interested in and get started.

**How to use French, German and Chinese:** You have an excellent combination of languages for any line of work, including a career in the EU institutions. If you applied for a career in the translation or interpreting division at the European institutions, you would be working into English from German (or French, or Chinese). French and German is a combination in high demand in the EU.

**Translation:** Although there are many people who work as translators without a Masters, having one would definitely give you an advantage in the current market. Some employers may request them in addition to practical experience, and several Masters courses offer opportunities for work placements in the translation industry, enabling you to gain some practical experience.

**Freelance translation:** Most importantly you need to get your CV updated to list your experience and market yourself to agencies. You may want to do this across Europe as well as in the UK; after all, freelance translation is not location specific, you just need the appropriate IT equipment and software to link with your clients. You may find it useful to have a webpage to advertise your services or join one of the many translator forums about, such as [www.proz.com](http://www.proz.com)

Be honest about your experience and your knowledge when applying for work. It's not a good idea to take on a highly-technical or legal text if you do not know the subject well - you risk a very bad job and a very angry client. Lastly, freelance translation is a competitive market so you will need to be persistent.

**Teaching Spanish:** I would strongly advise you spend some time in Spain or another Spanish-speaking country before you embark on a teaching course. There's no substitute for experiencing the language in situ, and that's exactly why teaching courses request this. You have options to consider - you could do a short teaching course abroad and teach English in Spain or Latin America. This would give you both the practical teaching experience, a chance to improve your active language skills (which are highly valued by employers in both business and education) as well as a bit of time to consider your options. Tutoring is one way to gain teaching experience too, but you may find potential clients would be looking for someone with a bit more tutoring experience to start off with.

*[Teresa Tinsley](#), [CILT's](#), director of communications*

Teresa said:

**Maintaining language skills:** There are all sorts of ways you can keep up your language skills. To keep up my Spanish, I always make sure I have plenty of books and magazines, films and music in the language, plus I have a Spanish news website as my home page. If you aren't already in contact with friends or colleagues who speak the language, you could try to find some via a social networking site such as Facebook, or ask at your local college or university.

**The appeal of languages to employers:** I think you'll find that what the big firms want is languages combined with business or management skills - as the latest CBI survey shows, languages are becoming more and more valued by employers, but not necessarily as a skill on their own, you'd normally need to offer other areas of competence or experience as well. Employers really value the ability to work across cultures, so a period of time in a foreign country building up your experience is a good way of enhancing your CV.

**Selling your language skills:** The advice for language graduates is exactly the same as advice for anyone else - you need to know your own strengths and interests and be able to match them to what employers are looking for. However, the difference between languages and other subjects is languages are useful across the whole spectrum of career pathways - from journalism to engineering - so you need to focus in on what else you are good at, or interested in developing.

**Languages and journalism:** It would be a brilliant idea to improve your language skills to support a career in journalism. I know of someone who was turned down as a trainee at the FT, having got through a whole series of interviews, because all the other candidates had at least one other language besides English. Having said that, bear in mind you need to develop your profile as a journalist as well as your language skills, so anything you can do to combine the two would be ideal. What about spending some time in France or Germany doing work experience in a journalistic environment? Or, if you can't move from the UK, sign up to French or German news feeds and networks so that you're developing your professional profile in your second language as well as in English.

**Languages in the beauty industry:** The beauty industry is a good one for people who speak French - companies such as L'Oreal actively recruit linguists - plus there are all sorts of opportunities to work on cruise liners, in spa resorts, or even in due course to set up your own business developing a portfolio of international clients. Try to bring language and beauty therapy skills together. One way you might do this is to look for an internship or some other sort of relevant work experience abroad which will improve language skills as well as helping to develop a strong profile as a bilingual beauty industry professional

**Further information and discussions about careers with languages are available on the Guardian website: [guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk)**