

Learning Something New

It's the start of the new year and time for making New Year's resolutions. This month our activities will focus on studying and learning new things. Our B2 First and C1 Advanced students will read about learning a foreign language. Our B1 Preliminary students will watch a video with tips on how to study more effectively. Finally, our young learners will practise their listening skills and vocabulary about school. Happy teaching!

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Learning a foreign language

Level: B2 First / C1 Advanced

Skills: Reading, Speaking and Writing

Interaction: Individual and whole class activity

Time: 70 mins



Warm up (10') – whole class activity

- Which languages are spoken in your country?
- Which languages are most commonly learnt?
- How many languages can you speak?
- What are the challenges when learning a language?
- What are the benefits of learning another language?
- What is the best age to start learning a new language? Why?

Reading (15') – individual activity

You are going to read an article about learning foreign languages. Read the text and answer the questions below:

Is younger always better when it comes to learning a foreign language?

“The conquest of learning is achieved through the knowledge of languages.” -Roger Bacon

The age at which children in Europe are learning a foreign language is getting younger. In 2002, the Barcelona European Council called for further action ‘teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age’ to improve the mastery of basic skills in education. The 2023 edition of *Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe* has found that, since then, around two thirds of education systems for which there are data have lowered the age at which children begin to learn a foreign language. Now, learning at least one foreign language is compulsory before the age of eight in most education systems, and even before the age of six in six education systems.

A common belief is that when it comes to foreign language learning, younger is better. But is this true in the context of European school education?

While young children have certain cognitive advantages linked to their age, such as a higher brain plasticity, there are other factors that also facilitate their acquisition of a foreign language. This is because younger children learn in a completely different manner to older children. They learn implicitly, through interaction, songs and play, listening and imitating sounds like with their native language. Young children also have fewer inhibitions and are more likely to take risks without worrying about being corrected. They are therefore driven by the desire to communicate and interact with people around them.

Learning languages at an early age does not only bring linguistic benefits. It can also enhance core cognitive skills, including reasoning, problem solving, and memory, along with improving communication and intercultural skills. Importantly, the songs and play that are a part of early language learning make classes fun, potentially cultivating a long-lasting interest for foreign languages, and motivating children to continue learning as they get older.

However, older children have their own cognitive advantages. They have greater linguistic experience and metalinguistic skills that young children do not possess. This means that they are more efficient learners of vocabulary and aspects of language structure.

In the context of a classroom, with explicit instruction in rules of a language, being older could therefore be better. Linguistic research has shown that older children from the age of 11 can outperform younger children from the age of eight when given instruction in a new foreign language for the same amount of time. Although young children eventually catch up and reach an even higher level of competence, this suggests that the greater cognitive maturity of older children helps them to make use of the limited input and explicit instruction.

As younger children learn through more implicit means, a much larger amount of quality exposure is required. In fact, children who are observed as learning a new language in a short amount of time are typically those who have been fully immersed, such as in families that immigrate to a new country. This is not usually possible in a school context, with a limited number of hours devoted to foreign language teaching.

When it comes to learning foreign languages at school, starting at different ages has different advantages. Learning from a very early age has a key role in foreign language education, but there are still conditions of success that should be considered.

Adapted from [Eurydice](#)

Questions

1. What do you understand by the quote at the beginning of the article?
2. According to the article, how is foreign language learning in Europe changing? Can you give an example of this?
3. Which factors facilitate foreign language acquisition in young children?
4. How can children benefit from learning a language at a young age?
5. What advantages do older children have when learning a language?
6. According to research, how do children of different ages perform when given instruction in a foreign language for the same length of time?
7. In which situation do children learn a new language in a short period of time?

Writing (45') – individual activity

You have recently attended an international conference about foreign language learning. The conference organisers are running a competition which offers participants the opportunity to win a one-month language course in the country of their choice. To enter the competition, you must write an essay on the advantages and challenges of learning a foreign language. Write your essay in 220-260 words.

Suggested answers

1. What do you understand by the quote at the beginning of the article?
Students' own ideas.
2. According to the article, how is foreign language learning in Europe changing? Can you give an example of this?
Children are learning a foreign language from a younger age. According to the data available, since 2002 the age for children to start learning a foreign language has been reduced in about two thirds of education systems. It is obligatory for children to learn at least one other language by the time they are eight years old in most school systems, and even by the time they are six in six education systems.
3. Which factors facilitate foreign language acquisition in young children?
They have higher brain plasticity. They learn implicitly through songs, play and interaction, listening and imitating sounds. They are less inhibited and take more risks.
4. How can children benefit from learning a language at a young age?
It improves communication, cognitive and intercultural skills. Fun language classes that involve songs and play can cultivate a long-term interest in languages.
5. What advantages do older children have when learning a language?
Older children have metalinguistic skills and more linguistic experience and they learn vocabulary and language structures more efficiently.
6. According to research, how do children of different ages perform when given instruction in a foreign language for the same length of time?
Children older than 11 perform better than younger children older than eight, but the younger children later catch up and reach a higher level of ability.
7. In which situation do children learn a new language in a short period of time?
This typically happens when they have been immersed in the language, for example after moving to another country.

Is younger always better when it comes to learning a foreign language?

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A common belief is that when it comes to foreign language learning, younger is better. But is this true in the context of European school education?

3. While young children have certain cognitive advantages linked to their age, such as a higher brain plasticity, there are other factors that also facilitate their acquisition of a foreign language. This is because younger children learn in a completely different manner to older children. 3. They learn implicitly, through interaction, songs and play, listening and imitating sounds like with their native language. Young children also have fewer inhibitions and are more likely to take risks without worrying about being corrected. They are therefore driven by the desire to communicate and interact with people around them.

Learning languages at an early age does not only bring linguistic benefits. 4. It can also enhance core cognitive skills, including reasoning, problem solving, and memory, along with improving communication and intercultural skills. Importantly, the songs and play that are a part of early language learning make classes fun, potentially cultivating a long-lasting interest for foreign languages, and motivating children to continue learning as they get older.

However, older children have their own cognitive advantages. 5. They have greater linguistic experience and metalinguistic skills that young children do not possess. This means that they are more efficient learners of vocabulary and aspects of language structure.

In the context of a classroom, with explicit instruction in rules of a language, being older could therefore be better. 6. Linguistic research has shown that older children from the age of 11 can outperform younger children from the age of eight when given instruction in a new foreign language for the same amount of time. Although young children eventually catch up and reach an even higher level of competence, this suggests that the greater cognitive maturity of older children helps them to make use of the limited input and explicit instruction.

As younger children learn through more implicit means, a much larger amount of quality exposure is required. 7. In fact, children who are observed as learning a new language in a short amount of time are typically those who have been fully immersed, such as in families that immigrate to a new country. This is not usually possible in a school context, with a limited number of hours devoted to foreign language teaching.

When it comes to learning foreign languages at school, starting at different ages has different advantages. Learning from a very early age has a key role in foreign language education, but there are still conditions of success that should be considered.

2. How to study effectively

Level: B1 Preliminary

Skills: Listening and Speaking

Interaction: Individual, in pairs and whole class activity

Time: 35 minutes

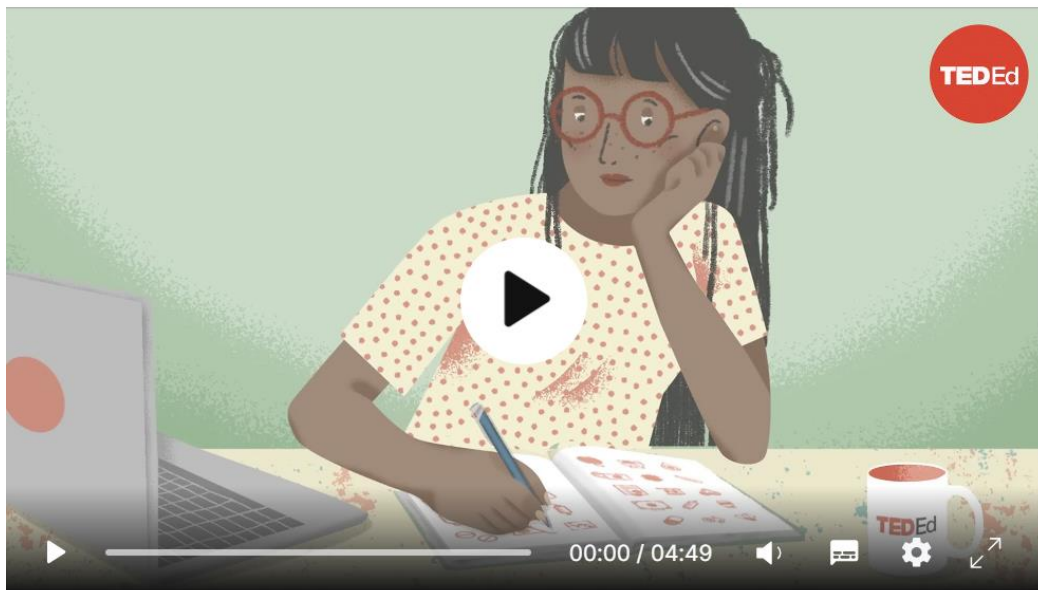


Warm up (10') – whole class activity

- How often do you study?
- How do you usually study?
- Does the way you study change depending on the topic? Why (not)?
- What conditions do you need to study effectively? Why?
- Do you think there is any way you could improve the way you study? If so, how?

Listening (15') – individual activity

You're going to watch a [video](#) about how to study more effectively. Read questions 1-5 and write an answer below. You will watch the video twice.



1. Which group of medical residents performed better in the 2006 research study?

2. When are memories passed from the short-term to the long-term memory?

3. Why should you test yourself with flashcards and quizzes?

4. Can you name one of the reasons why mixing flashcard topics is effective?

5. How long did each group of medical residents spend studying?

Useful Vocabulary

- **Cram** – to study quickly
- **Stick around** – to stay
- **Highlight** – to emphasise something important
- **Retrieve** – to recover something
- **Storage** – the act of keeping things in a safe place

Definitions adapted from Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2023)

Speaking (10') – in pairs

Read and complete the Speaking task below with your partner. Then look at the success criteria below and answer the questions.

I'd like each of you to talk on your own about something. I'm going to give each of you a photograph and I'd like you to talk about it.

Student A, here is your photograph. It shows a driving lesson. Please tell us what you can see in the photograph.

Student B, here is your photograph. It shows a guitar lesson. Please tell us what you can see in the photograph.



Student A



Student B

B1 Preliminary Speaking Success Criteria			
Discourse Management	Yes	No	Comments / Examples
Did your partner use longer sentences?			
Were there long pauses when your partner spoke?			
Did your partner talk about the task?			
Did your partner repeat their ideas?			
Did your partner use connectors such as <i>and</i> , <i>but</i> , <i>so</i> , <i>because</i> ?			

Key

Listening – suggested answers

1. Which group of medical residents performed better in the 2006 research study?
The group that made a small change in the way they studied the materials.
2. When are memories passed from the short-term to the long-term memory?
It is thought to happen when you sleep and between study sessions.
3. Why should you test yourself with flashcards and quizzes?
Because you have to actively retrieve knowledge, which updates the memory and makes it stronger.
4. Can you name one of the reasons why mixing flashcard topics is effective?
You have to temporarily forget information and then retrieve it, which strengthens the memory. / You might find connections between topics and better understand the differences.
5. How long did each group of medical residents spend studying?
One group's training was done in one day and the other was done over four weeks.

3. At School

Level: Pre A1 Starters & A1 Movers

Skills: Speaking and Listening

Interaction: in pairs and whole class

Time: 30 minutes



Warm up (10') – whole class activity

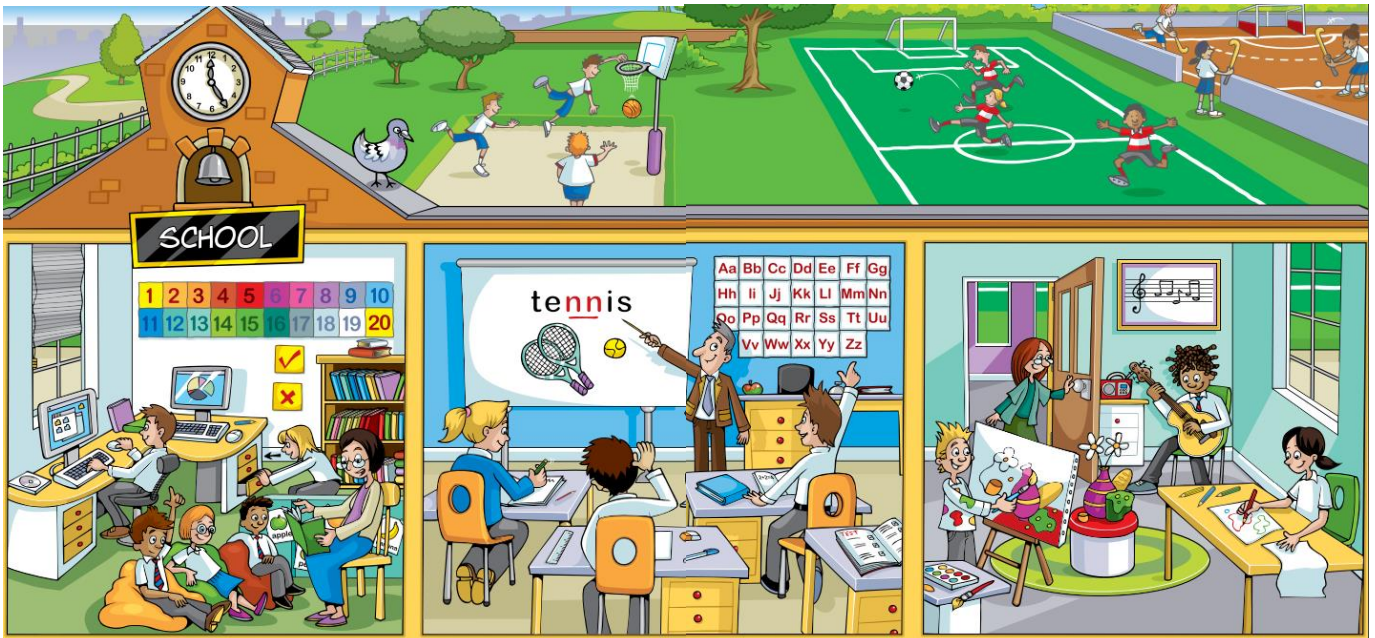
- Which subjects do you study at school?
- Which is your favourite subject?
- Which sports do you play at school?
- Do you play a musical instrument? Which one?
- Do you like drawing? What do you like to draw?

Look at the picture below.

- What can you see on the children's desks?
- What can you see on the classroom walls?
- Which sports are the children playing outside?

Listening (10') – whole class activity¹

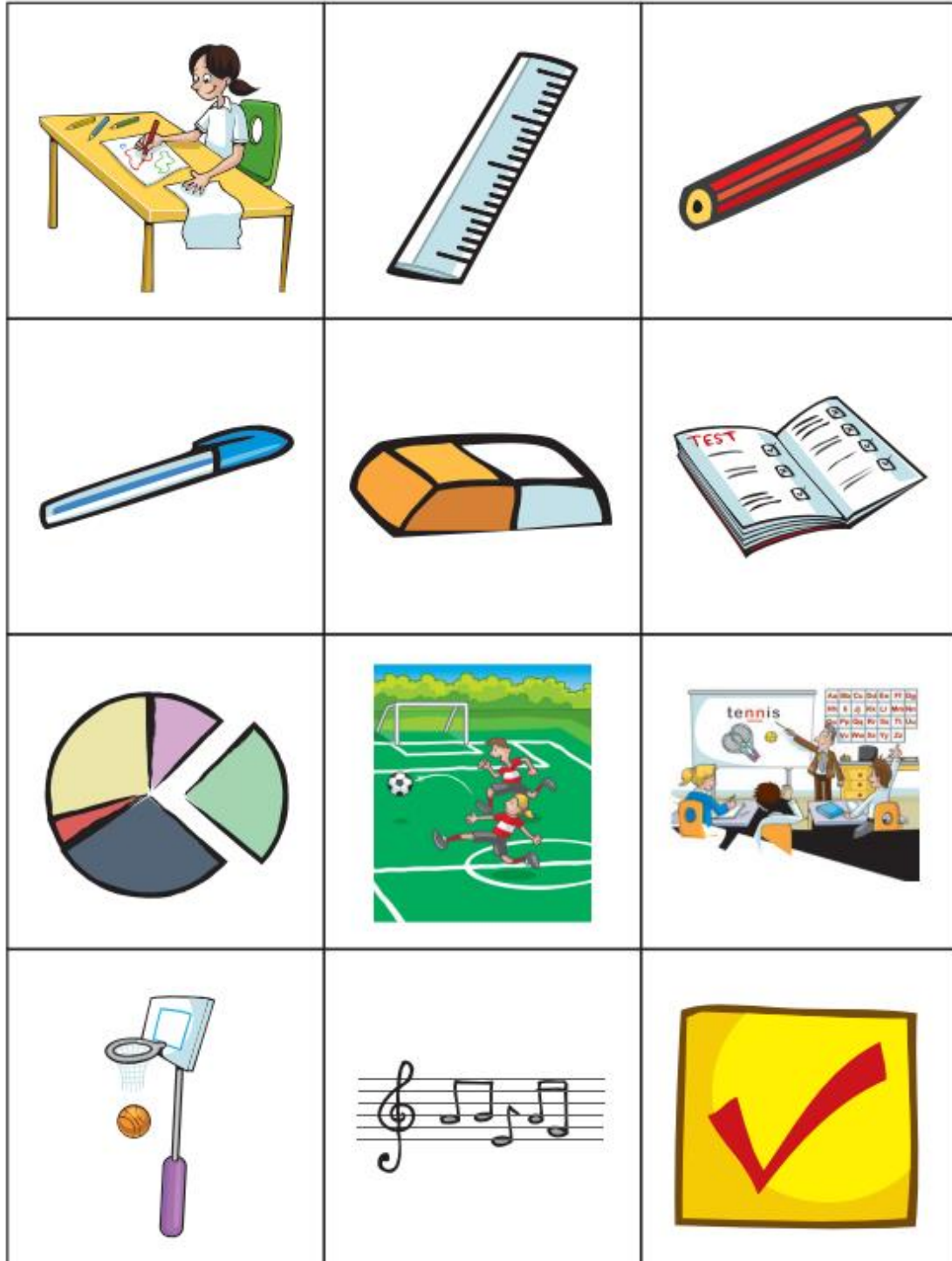
Your teacher will read some sentences about the picture. If the sentence is correct, stand by the 'yes' sign. If it is wrong, stand by the 'no' sign.



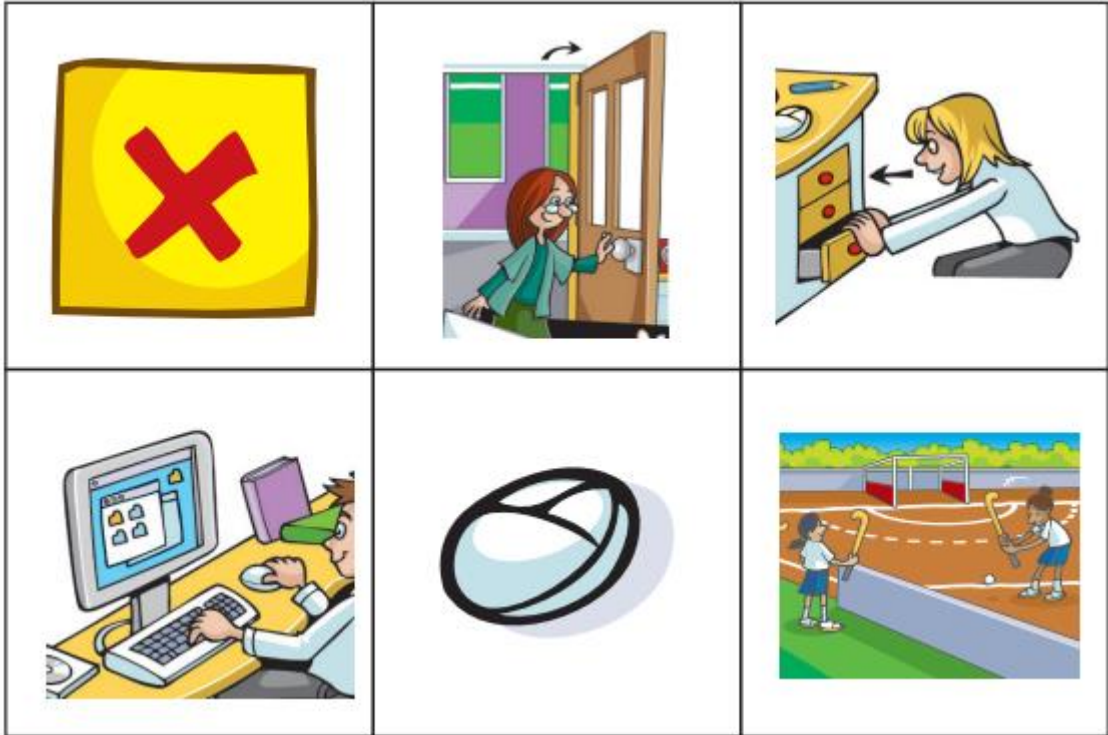
¹Please see the instructions and transcript below.

Speaking (10') - in pairs or small groups²

Turn over two cards to find the word that matches the picture. When you find a pair, make a sentence using the word (for example, classroom. The children are in the classroom). If your sentence is correct, keep the cards and take another turn. If the cards don't match, put them back on the table face down.



² Cut out and mix up the flashcards below for your students and lay them on the table face down.



draw/do a drawing	ruler	pencil
pen	eraser/ rubber	page
part	football/ soccer	classroom
basketball	music	tick

cross	open	close
computer	mouse	hockey

Warm-up suggested answers

- What can you see on the children's desks?
A pen, a pencil, a rubber, a ruler, crayons, books, paper.
- What can you see on the classroom walls?
Numbers, letters, music notes, a tick, a cross.
- Which sports are the children playing outside?
Basketball, football, hockey.

Listening instructions and transcript

Write 'yes' on one piece of card and 'no' on another and place them on different sides of the room. Ask the students to stand in the middle of the classroom. Read the following phrases for them to listen to. The children should look at the picture and go to the 'yes' sign if the sentence is true and to the 'no' sign if the sentence is false.

1. Some of the children are playing tennis outside. (No)
2. There is a boy playing the guitar in the classroom. (Yes)
3. The girl with blonde hair in a ponytail is writing. (Yes)
4. One of the teachers is playing the piano. (No)
5. The teacher with the brown jacket and grey tie is talking about tennis. (Yes)
6. There is an apple in one of the classrooms. (Yes)
7. There is a cat on the roof of the school. (No)
8. One of the students is painting a picture of some flowers. (Yes)
9. Some of the children are playing football. (Yes)
10. One of the teachers is opening the window. (No)
11. Four children are playing basketball outside. (No)
12. One of the students is using the computer. (Yes)

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