



What to Do When You Don't Understand a Foreign Language

KS2

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Ages 10-14



3 min read

Stay Calm and Be Honest

When someone speaks to you in another language and you don't understand, the first thing to remember is that this happens to everyone—even people who speak that language fluently! The best thing you can do is be **honest and calm**. Don't pretend to understand when you don't, because that usually leads to confusion or embarrassment later.

Ask for Help in Simple Ways

The good news is you don't need to understand everything to ask for help. You can use **simple phrases** like "I don't understand" or "Can you repeat that?" in the language you're learning. Even if you say it imperfectly, most people will appreciate that you're trying. You can also raise your hand in class, ask your teacher, or ask a **bilingual friend** to help explain.

Think of it like playing a video game where you're stuck—asking for a hint from someone who knows the game is much better than wandering around lost and confused!

Use Your Body and Context Clues

You don't always need words to understand. People use **body language**, gestures, and **facial expressions** to communicate. If someone is pointing at something, smiling, or looking sad, you can understand their meaning without hearing every word. You can also look for **context clues**—things around you that help explain what's happening. If the teacher is holding up a picture of a cat while speaking, you'll understand they're talking about a cat even if you missed some words.

Ask Specific Questions

Instead of saying "I don't understand," try being more specific. You could ask "**Can you say that more slowly?**", "**Can you spell that word?**", or "**Can you use a**

different word?" These questions help the speaker know exactly what to do to help you. Writing things down, drawing pictures, or using a **dictionary or translation app** are also great tools.

Practice and Don't Give Up

Learning a language takes time, and confusion is part of the journey. Every time you ask for help, you're actually learning more about the language. The more you practice, the more you'll understand, and the fewer times you'll need to ask for help. Being brave enough to ask questions shows you're a confident learner!