

LANGUAGE EXCHANGE



SUPPORT GUIDE

The **LANGUAGE EXCHANGE SUPPORT GUIDE** is a university language service resource for practical language use and fostering interculturalism

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INDEX

| | |
|---|----------|
| Introduction | 4 |
| What is a language exchange? | 5 |
| Description | 5 |
| Practical tips | 5 |
| Linguistic guidelines | 6 |
| Intercultural guidelines | 6 |
| Suggestions and ideas for sessions | 7 |
| In your country: conversation topics and questions | 8 |
| Communication | 8 |
| Personal relationships | 10 |
| Gastronomy | 12 |
| Transport | 14 |
| Studies | 16 |
| Leaving home | 18 |
| Party time | 20 |
| Languages | 22 |
| Culture | 24 |
| Travel | 26 |
| Clothing | 28 |
| Personal information | 30 |





INTRODUCTION

The LANGUAGE EXCHANGE SUPPORT GUIDE is a resource for everyone involved in a Catalan university's language exchange programme.

A language exchange is an informal way for people to use or improve their language skills, be they newly or less recently acquired. In addition to encouraging interrelation between people of different nationalities, such exchanges contribute to broadening participants' perception of the world.

This guide aims to provide those taking part in a language exchange with a range of ideas, guidelines and suggestions, so that they can conduct their conversation sessions independently and get the greatest possible linguistic, cultural and personal benefit from them.

Published in PDF format and available in three languages (Catalan, Spanish and English), the guide comprises two sections. The first explains what a language exchange is, covering matters such as conversation session structure, duration, venue and activities. The second suggests topics to discuss, offering food for thought on the similarities and contrasts between ways of life and approaches to organisation in different cultures and countries.





WHAT IS A LANGUAGE EXCHANGE?

Description

- A language exchange is a medium for practical language use. It involves two people who speak different languages getting together for a pre-established number of sessions so that each of them can practise using the other's language.
- Language exchange sessions can be face-to-face or virtual, or a combination of both.
- Language exchanges complement formal language learning. They mainly serve for putting oral language skills into practice.
- Additionally, language exchanges constitute a good opportunity to experience and gain an insight into aspects of other cultures.
- Language exchanges are currently available in Catalan universities through various practical, linguistic reception and cultural exchange programmes (tandems, language volunteer initiatives, language partnership systems, conversation groups, etc.).

Practical tips

- With your partner, review your language exchange programme's participation rules.
- Establish a regular schedule for sessions, based on both partners' availability.
- Establish the duration of each session and the time for which each language is to be used (it is recommended that an equal amount of time be devoted to each language).
- Look for common interests on the basis of which you can plan activities conducive to practising using your languages. Possibilities include everyday activities (e.g. going shopping), cultural activities (e.g. visiting a museum) and obtaining information (e.g. in relation to services).
- Make a list of possible places to hold sessions (a bar, a library, a park, a cultural or sporting event, etc.). Bear in mind that using different venues can make sessions more appealing.
- Consider contacting other language exchange tandems with a view to carrying out joint activities.
- If you and your partner are unable to meet up face to face for a given session, use social networking resources (Skype, Facebook, Twitter, chat, email, WhatsApp, etc.) to keep to your planned schedule.





Linguistic guidelines

- Make sure you are well aware of the level of your partner's language skills and the level they hope to achieve in your language.
- In the case of an oral exchange, adapt the nature and speed of conversations to your partner's language skills.
- In the case of a written exchange, adapt texts to the required level.
- Take the formality, register and function of texts into account.
- Establish goals (be they linguistic, cultural or personal) for each session.
- Decide whether you want your partner to correct your errors and agree on a way for them to do so.
- Consult materials that facilitate learning and the use of language skills. Oral and written materials that you may find very useful are available on the internet (e.g. YouTube).
- Look for real situations in which you can put your skills into practice (going to the market, asking for information at the library, asking for the bill at a restaurant, buying a metro ticket, etc.).

Intercultural guidelines

- Take an interest in your partner's linguistic and cultural biography.
- Look for information on their country.
- Bear in mind that there may be sociocultural differences between you and your partner.
- Make the most of such diversity to broaden your cultural horizons and gain a first-hand insight into situations with which you might not be familiar.
- Remember that there may be differences in the ways you and your partner communicate (verbal language, non-verbal language, cultural references).
- Make an effort to find out about linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of your partner's language (number of speakers, where it is spoken, whether it is used in all contexts, etc.).
- Think about how to provide balanced information on life in your country. Be respectful towards other ways of doing things.





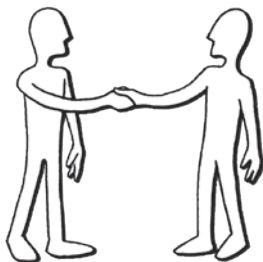
Suggestions and ideas for sessions

- Plan your sessions and decide what you want to talk about from one week to the next.
- Ask the meaning of words you do not understand.
- Take a pad or a piece of paper so that you can make a note of new words or use drawings to aid explanations.
- Use images when giving descriptions.
- Try to avoid resorting to translation.
- With your partner, find out about cultural events and activities in your city to see if there are any that interest you both.
- Remember that your sessions can take place outside university in a non-academic setting (over a drink or a meal, etc.).
- Recommend each other books, songs, series or films in your respective languages, and spend a while discussing your opinions of them.
- Keep in touch with your partner outside scheduled sessions via email or mobile (text messages, WhatsApp, etc.).





IN YOUR COUNTRY: CONVERSATION TOPICS AND QUESTIONS



Communication

Body language

- ✦ Are people in your country reserved or expressive in interpersonal relations?
- ✦ Do you use body language (placing your hand on someone's arm, patting their back, etc.) while talking?
- ✦ How do you greet someone you have just met for the first time?
- ✦ Do people tend to look at one another directly when walking along the street?
- ✦ Are public displays of affection frowned upon?

Body language: nothing but the truth

It is said that playing with your hair shows a lack of self-confidence, and that lightly touching your nose means you are lying. According to popular wisdom, “the eyes are the mirror of the soul”. Such is the significance of body language that good public speakers are fully aware that the way something is said is often more important than what is actually said. Some studies claim that when two people communicate, 70% of the information they transmit is conveyed by their bodies. Travellers should bear in mind that the thumbs-up sign is not an expression of approval but a reference to a person's backside in Turkey; that stroking your moustache is equivalent to embarking on an attempted seduction in many Arab countries; and that nodding your head means no and shaking it from side to side means yes in Bulgaria and northern India, in contrast to virtually everywhere else in the world.



Verbal language

- ✦ Are people in your country direct when they speak or do they tend to use a more ceremonious form of language?
- ✦ Do you make a distinction between a formal and an informal version of the pronoun “you”?
- ✦ Do you use informal expressions such as “mate” or “buddy”?
- ✦ How do you express gratitude?
- ✦ Is a certain degree of confidence required for someone to use the imperative or give orders directly?

Communication skills

- ✦ Do you tend to strike up conversations with strangers on the train or in the lift?
- ✦ Do you stay at the table and chat after a meal with a group of people?
- ✦ Do you routinely ask people for their telephone numbers?
- ✦ How do you feel when people ask you about your personal life?
- ✦ What do you talk about when having dinner with someone for the first time?

Chatting over a drink

According to the essayist George Steiner, cafés are one of the European identity’s main defining factors. Kierkegaard meditated in those of Copenhagen; Danton and Robespierre conspired in the Procope in Paris; and, between the two world wars, Freud, Robert Musil and Karl Kraus made three great Viennese cafés the ideal agora for debating anything they pleased. Steiner concludes that drawing a map of cafés will give you “the idea of Europe”. In England, during both world wars, protecting stocks of tea from German bombs was among the priorities of a government that knew that ensuring a plentiful supply of the drink was essential to keeping people’s spirits high. Tea is also China’s national beverage, and has been for over a thousand years. According to a Chinese proverb, a minute sitting in a teahouse is all it takes to find out about everything happening under the sun. Few things explain our respective natures better than what we drink while having a chat.





Personal relationships

Family

- ✦ How many surnames do people in your country have? If you have more than one, can you change their order?
- ✦ How often do you see your family?
- ✦ What role do grandparents play in families?
- ✦ At what age do people usually leave home?
- ✦ Is it common to have lunch with your family once a week when you have left home?

The importance of family

The first source of help for people facing the terrible hardships of unemployment, illness or problems obtaining housing is their family, more so now than ever. However, there are many different concepts of what constitutes a family, including some that would have been unimaginable in the not-too-distant past, such as single-parent families or same-sex parents. In Anglo-Saxon countries, where children are taught to be independent from an early age, families often only get together at Christmas and, in the USA, on Thanksgiving Day. In Mediterranean countries, where there is a greater tendency for family members to smother one another with kisses than in other cultures, children routinely live with their parents until ages that would be unthinkable in northern Europe. Families are particularly stable in Japan, where reduced pressure to marry has resulted in more and more children continuing to live with their parents. In Africa, meanwhile, the concept of family can encompass an entire village.





Friends and couples

- ✦ How important are friends?
- ✦ Is it common to have close, lifelong friendships?
- ✦ Is the concept of engagement outdated in your country?
- ✦ At what age do people usually get married or move in with their partner?
- ✦ Is it common for young people to have sporadic relationships?

Having children

- ✦ How many children do people in your country usually have?
- ✦ Does the “large family” concept exist? If so, how many children must a family have to be considered large?
- ✦ Do you get state benefits for having children?
- ✦ At what age do couples tend to have children?
- ✦ What activities do parents usually carry out with their children at weekends or during holidays?

Contraception

Despite the sexual freedom western women attained in the 1960s, when the use of contraceptives became commonplace, more than 222 million women around the world are presently unable to make their own decisions regarding how many children they want or when to become mothers. Despite governmental efforts to guarantee access to reproductive health services, the use of contraceptives remains unequal (the international average stands at around 63%), varying greatly between developed and developing countries. The practice is entirely common in the west (Norway’s rate is the highest, at 88%, while that of Catalonia and the rest of Spain is around 75%). In Africa, in contrast, continuous contraceptive use is rare (the lowest rate being that of Somalia, with 1%).





Gastronomy

Habits and customs

- ✈ How many meals do you eat in a day? At what times do you eat?
- ✈ Which is the largest meal of the day?
- ✈ Do people in your country drink much alcohol? How is alcohol regarded, culturally speaking?
- ✈ If someone invites you to dinner at their home, do you take them a gift?
- ✈ Is it usual to return the compliment if someone invites you to dinner?

Restaurants and bars

- ✈ How much might it cost to eat out?
- ✈ Is it common for people to take leftover food or wine home with them?
- ✈ Is smoking permitted in restaurants and bars?
- ✈ Do you tip?
- ✈ Are there environmentally-friendly restaurants in your country?

Tipping

To tip or not to tip? And if you do tip, how much should you leave to keep your waiter happy without breaking the bank? Such doubts are inevitable among travellers, and accepted practice differs from country to country. In Japan, simply saying “*gochisosamadeshita*” (“thank you for the meal”) is all it takes to be polite. In Mexico, where tips are a substantial part of employees’ wages in the hotel and catering industry, leaving anything less than 15-20% of your bill’s total is considered rude. In the USA, where percentages are similar and tipping is even legally regulated, bills often include a service charge to guard against unfamiliarity with the practice or plain stinginess. In most of Europe, tips are simply an expression of gratitude for good service. It may or may not be due to that custom that the Spanish, French and Italians are among the world’s least generous tippers.



Typical dishes

- ✦ What are your country's typical foods (first courses, second courses, desserts)?
- ✦ What do you traditionally eat at Christmas?
- ✦ Does people's diet vary between winter and summer?
- ✦ Do you eat anything that might be considered strange in other countries?
- ✦ Does your country's cuisine lean more towards sweet or savoury dishes? Why?

Eating insects

Some cultures have been eating insects for millennia. Nowadays, there are many countries where some (or lots!) of the thousand edible species of insect are consumed. Despite such creatures having a place in the finest delicatessens in London and Paris, it is still unusual for people to eat them in the west. The practice is more widespread in Asia, Africa and Latin America, however. There is no shortage of examples. Some of China's inhabitants recommend beetles with soy sauce and worms with ginger. Thailand's markets offer a wide variety of crickets and cicadas. Locusts (*chapulines*) get Mexicans' mouths watering. In Africa, almost ten billion mopane worms are harvested each year (to be eaten dry, fried, stewed or smoked), while roast ants are a greater hit than popcorn with cinema-goers in Colombia. Experts say that insects are rich in proteins, minerals and vitamins.





Transport

Public transport

- ✦ Is public transport cheap or expensive in your country?
- ✦ Does it run on time?
- ✦ Can you buy tickets that cover various types of public transport?
- ✦ Do people generally leave the left side of the escalator free in metro stations?
- ✦ Are discounts available for students?

On two wheels

Urban congestion, cars' environmental impact and, more recently, the economic crisis have resulted in an increase in the use of two-wheeled vehicles in cities, more and more of which have cycle lanes and, in some cases (e.g. Paris, Barcelona, Seville, Vienna and Stockholm), public bicycle rental services. Central and northern Europe may not be blessed with great weather, but levels of environmental awareness are very high there and bikes are omnipresent. In Amsterdam, the unofficial world bicycle capital, 40% of residents use them to get about, twice the percentage corresponding to Beijing, a city that used to teem with bikes but where the automobile's democratisation has reduced the use of human-powered vehicles. Nonetheless, bicycle use is on the rise in the vast majority of cities, although Holland and Denmark, where each inhabitant cycles an average of 1,000 kilometres per year, remain a very long way ahead of Italy (200 kilometres) and Spain (30 kilometres).





Cycling

- ✦ Are bikes a popular means of transport in your country?
- ✦ Are there cycle lanes?
- ✦ Is it compulsory to wear a helmet?
- ✦ Are there parking facilities for bicycles?
- ✦ Do you use bike transport bags?

Cars

- ✦ Are people in your country in the habit of car sharing to get to work?
- ✦ How many cars does the average family have?
- ✦ Are there free parking areas?
- ✦ At what age can you obtain a driving licence?
- ✦ Are there often traffic jams at certain times or on certain days?

Water taxis

Venice may be the best known place in the world for getting around by boat, thanks to films and literature, but its highly romantic gondolas are by no means the only form of water-based transport. In Beirut, for example, water taxis are an alternative to the great volume of road traffic that thousands of drivers face every day. In Dubai, such taxis are used to cross Dubai Creek, thus connecting the two parts into which the city is divided. In New York and Paris, they are used for tourism (viewing Manhattan's skyscrapers or Notre Dame Cathedral from the water is a memorable experience), as well as for general mobility purposes. Lastly, it goes without saying that canoes are the most widely used means of transport in Peruvian and Brazilian jungles, due to dense vegetation preventing travel over land on foot or by vehicle.





Studies

School

- ✦ At what age are children required to start school?
- ✦ Up to what age is it compulsory to study?
- ✦ Do parents usually send their children to state or private schools?
- ✦ Do children usually have lunch in the school dining hall?
- ✦ Do schools run extracurricular activities? If so, what kind?

Student income

The challenge of university students following their courses on a full-time basis, one of the obsessions of the Bologna Process, has been a reality for decades in northern European countries, Great Britain, Australia and Japan, where students receive loans or grants from the state to ensure that a lack of resources does not prevent them from studying. That approach, which “professionalises” studying and generates inner conflict within students who want to study and work simultaneously, has its detractors. However, few Catalan or Italian students do not envy the situation of their Danish counterparts, for example, who receive a monthly wage of 700 euros from the state. At present, all European Union countries have systems for providing students with grants, loans and other types of aid, although the chances of obtaining such funding range from 100% in Denmark to 1% in Greece. In both those countries, however, university enrolment is free, as it is in Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Malta, Sweden and Norway.





University life

- ✦ At what age do people usually begin university studies?
- ✦ Is it common for students to take a gap year to travel and see the world before starting university or after completing their degree?
- ✦ Is it acceptable for students to address lecturers in an informal manner or to have a coffee with them at the bar?
- ✦ Do students have a choice of what to study within their particular programme or are all their subjects pre-established?
- ✦ Do you have a specific expression for not attending class?

Funding

- ✦ Are university studies free or do you have to pay an enrolment fee?
- ✦ Do you have a grant system?
- ✦ Do students receive any state aid for costs arising from their studies?
- ✦ Is it possible to work part-time while studying?
- ✦ Do universities have canteens where students can eat at reduced prices?

Gap year

Ever since the 1970s, it has been common for students from the USA, Australia and, in particular, the UK to take a gap year between finishing their secondary education and starting their university studies. Experts say that a gap year, whether spent backpacking on the other side of the world, working as a waiter while learning a language, or contributing to a charitable project, makes students better able to establish goals and helps them acquire personal and professional skills that are held in increasingly high regard in the job market. Despite numerous studies pointing to students achieving better results at university following a gap year (some academics have even suggested that taking a year out should be compulsory), students' families and society in general still look upon the practice with scepticism in countries such as Catalonia, although the tendency to do so is gradually decreasing. In other countries, such as France and Italy, taking a gap year is an increasingly popular option.





Leaving home

Moving out and getting a job

- ✦ Do children tend to live with their parents for a long time or do they move out as soon as they can?
- ✦ What kind of relationship do they have with their family once they have left home?
- ✦ Do people usually get their first job upon completion of their higher education?
- ✦ Is finding a job easy?
- ✦ Do many people from your country go abroad to live and work?

Child labour

According to the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted in 1959 by the United Nations, “The child shall not be admitted to employment before an appropriate minimum age; he shall in no case be caused or permitted to engage in any occupation or employment which would prejudice his health or education”. Over half a century later, there are still 215 million children whose childhood is stolen from them, mainly in Africa, Asia and the Pacific region. Poverty is undoubtedly a factor in that, but so too are ideas related to gender, caste and religion, often in combination with a belief among families that working is good for children, a view that also existed in the modern world a little more than a century ago. The number of children affected is falling, but so slowly (just 3% in five years) that many wonder what benefit child labour entails for those who wield international economic power. The International Labour Organisation’s aim of having eradicated the worst forms of child labour by 2016 is already considered a lost cause.





Renting

- ✦ How much does it cost to rent a flat?
- ✦ What about a bedroom?
- ✦ Are there services that offer more accessibly priced accommodation for young people?
- ✦ Is it common for university students to share accommodation to save money?
- ✦ Does the government provide aid for renting accommodation?

Types of accommodation

- ✦ Do people generally live in houses or flats?
- ✦ Are rented flats usually furnished?
- ✦ Do the people who live in a block of flats hold meetings?
- ✦ Do flats have light wells?
- ✦ Do the people who live in a block of flats share a washing machine?

Aid for leaving home

With young people devoting more time to education and struggling to find work, the period they spend living with their parents has increased throughout western Europe. In southern European countries, the average age at which people leave home is 24 for males and 22-23 for females. In northern Europe, in contrast, few women over 20 and men over 22 still live with their parents. The difference between the two regions is mainly due to their respective labour, housing and education policies (rental social housing is extremely important in Holland, Germany and Sweden, whereas it has a minor role in Greece and Portugal), as well as to cultural factors. In Catalonia and Italy, many young people leave their parents' home to move in with a partner. In the rest of Europe, however, other forms of living together are more common, such as shared flats and student halls of residence.





Party time

Nightlife

- ✦ At what time do people generally meet up when they go out for the night?
- ✦ Are people allowed to drink alcohol in the street?
- ✦ When you go out with your friends, do you each buy a round of drinks for everyone or just pay for what you drink yourself?
- ✦ What about when you go out with your partner?
- ✦ At what time do bars and nightclubs close?

Alcohol

Alcohol has had a huge role in our culture since Neolithic times, and only countries where religion is immensely influential, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, have managed to prohibit it effectively. It can be said that the way people conduct themselves after consuming drinks such as wine and beer owes more to social and cultural factors than to the actual chemical effects of ethanol. In other words, while the problems directly attributable to alcohol are relatively moderate in countries such as Italy and France, where very few meals go by without a drop of wine and virtually all celebrations and business deals end with a toast, social traumas caused by strong spirits are among the major national concerns of Nordic countries such as Iceland and Finland. At present, the average level of consumption throughout the world stands at 6.1 litres of pure alcohol per person. In the case of Moldova, the country with the greatest alcohol intake per inhabitant, the corresponding figure is three times higher.





The calendar

- ✦ What calendar do you follow in your country?
- ✦ How many days of holiday do you have each year?
- ✦ Does the practice of taking days off between a public holiday and the weekend exist (e.g. if a public holiday falls on a Thursday, do you take the Friday off work too)?
- ✦ When do people generally go on their holidays?
- ✦ Do you take all your holidays from work at once or spread them out over the year?

Popular traditions and celebrations

- ✦ What are your country's popular celebrations or festivities?
- ✦ Do youngsters take part in such celebrations or are they regarded as old-fashioned?
- ✦ How do you celebrate Christmas?
- ✦ When is your country's national day and what does it mark?
- ✦ Do you have a tradition or ritual specific to New Year's Eve?

Calendars of the world

There are around 40 calendars in the world. Some are based on the solar cycle, others on the lunar cycle, and others still on both the sun and the moon. The best known of all is the Gregorian calendar, established in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII and used for official purposes throughout the world due to its great efficacy (it only needs to be corrected by a day every 3,300 years). In some countries and cultures, different parameters are used to measure time, including the Chinese and Hebrew calendars (both lunisolar) and the Muslim calendar (lunar). Over the course of history, there have been calendars that, for different reasons, have ceased to be used or become obsolete, such as the Egyptian, Hellenic and Roman calendars. Lastly, calendars have also arisen from certain major historical events, such as the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution.





Languages

Language

- ✦ How many speakers does your language have?
- ✦ What characteristic sounds does it have?
- ✦ Which language family does it belong to?
- ✦ What does it represent for the people of your country?
- ✦ Are any other languages spoken there?

Writing

Writing, the use of symbols to represent a language, is such an incredible achievement for humankind that its emergence marks the boundary between prehistory and history. At present, over 200 writing systems are known worldwide. The most commonly used, by some distance, is the Latin script, followed by the Cyrillic and Arabic scripts. Some are genuinely complex, as is the case of the Japanese writing system, which is based on ideograms (it is necessary to know at least 2,000 of them to be able to read the press properly, for example). Systems that have emerged more recently include one that is based on abbreviation and has been referred to as teenagers' Esperanto. It is the SMS writing system, or chatspeak, which has become one of youngsters' main hallmarks over the last decade, as well as a real acid test for language scholars.





Language learning

- ✦ What foreign languages are you taught at school?
- ✦ Are films shown in their original language?
- ✦ Which languages is it most common to learn in your country?
- ✦ Do people spend time in your country for language learning purposes?
- ✦ Are there language schools or academies for learning languages?

Curious language facts

- ✦ Can you think of a curious fact about or a very typical expression in your language?
- ✦ Do you have many idioms?
- ✦ Is there a particular word that people often pronounce, use or spell incorrectly?
- ✦ Are there any false friends between your language and Catalan?
- ✦ What words of your language do you think everybody should know?

False friends

Watch out! A patient with blocked bowels who tells a Catalan doctor they are suffering from a *constipat* will be prescribed treatment for a cold. And a woman who, feeling abashed for whatever reason, claims to be *embarassada* is more likely to be asked whether she is expecting a boy or a girl than to receive reassurance. These are examples of false friends, i.e. words (generally with common Latin roots) that look and sound very similar in two languages but have a radically different meaning in each. Given their great potential to lead to something getting lost in translation, false friends all too often cause ridiculous situations, an inevitable pitfall when learning a language. Some are inoffensive and amusing, but there are also quite a few that can leave you feeling utterly mortified.





Culture

Cinema

- ✦ How much does a ticket for the cinema cost?
- ✦ Is there a particular day of the week on which ticket prices are reduced?
- ✦ Is it possible to watch original versions of films with subtitles?
- ✦ What about films dubbed into your language?
- ✦ What is your favourite film?

Original version with subtitles

Is it preferable for films to be subtitled or dubbed? Some find reading a superimposed text on the screen distracting. Others say that dubbing is disrespectful to actors' work. With the emergence of sound films in the 1920s and 1930s (when, it is worth remembering, thousands of people were still unable to read in certain countries), every country chose one option or the other. Ever since, subtitled original versions of films have prevailed in Europe, although dubbing is the norm in Italy, Germany and Spain, countries that were looking to emphasise their identity back in what was a time of national assertion. A substantial proportion of the 30,000 people employed in Spain's dubbing industry work in Catalonia. However, the fact that the countries whose inhabitants boast the greatest foreign language skills (Denmark, Finland, Holland, Norway and Sweden) are those that opted for subtitling has prompted countries that habitually dub films to adopt various measures for promoting original versions with subtitles in cinemas and on television, with a view to nurturing plurilingualism.





Books

- ✦ Who are your country's best known writers at present?
- ✦ Has anyone from your country received a Nobel Prize in Literature?
- ✦ Is there a particular poem that you had to memorise at school?
- ✦ Are e-books widely used?
- ✦ How much does a book generally cost?

Music

- ✦ Which are the most famous groups in your country?
- ✦ Does your country have, or has it had, internationally famous singers?
- ✦ Are there any major music festivals?
- ✦ At what time are concerts usually held?
- ✦ What languages do groups from your country sing in?

Music's social value

History has proven that music can influence humans biologically, physiologically, psychologically, intellectually, spiritually and, of course, socially. Ever since ancient Greek times, when it was already assumed that music could both cultivate social harmony and incite acts of aggression and disorder, music has been a crucial factor in the development of personal and collective identities. Executions such as those of the Chilean singer-songwriter Victor Jara (carried out by the Pinochet dictatorship in 1973) and the composer and labour activist Joe Hill (ordered by a Utah court in 1915) show that the powers that be have never underestimated songs' potential to bring about change. Today, the social responsibility that the most famous and, thus, most influential musicians ought to display is the subject of fierce debate.





Travel

Monuments and souvenirs

- ✦ Is your country considered a tourist destination?
- ✦ What do people who visit your country tend to go to see?
- ✦ From which countries do you receive most tourists?
- ✦ When is the height of the tourist season?
- ✦ What souvenir is a must for tourists visiting your country or city?

Low cost air travel

Having emerged in the USA in the 1970s and been widespread in Europe since the 1990s (as well as in Asia and Oceania since the turn of the century), low cost airlines have changed our travel habits in record time. In Europe's case, the creation of a single market, the aviation industry's deregulation and new lifestyles arising from the welfare state paved the way, for example, for 183 million passengers to take cheap flights in the continent last year. The *modus operandi* of low cost airlines is simple. The fewer services they have to offer (providing in-flight meals, printing out tickets and checking in luggage), the cheaper it is to travel with them. However, recent proposals, such as applying a surcharge to overweight passengers, charging to use the toilet and even offering cheaper tickets to those willing to travel standing up (ideas raised by the Irish airline Ryanair, basically), pose the question of where the limits of low cost culture lie.





Hotels

- ✈ Do hotels in your country include breakfast in their prices?
- ✈ Is it necessary to pay for hotels in advance?
- ✈ By what time do you have to vacate your room?
- ✈ Is it possible to use cooking or laundry facilities without charge?
- ✈ Is Wi-Fi usually available in bedrooms?

Sustainable tourism

- ✈ Do you think it is fair for governments to apply taxes to tourism?
- ✈ Do you know if such taxes exist in your country? What are their pros and cons, in your view?
- ✈ Is a low environmental impact (e.g. clean transport systems and responsible consumption) something you take into account when travelling?
- ✈ On your travels, do you try to familiarise yourself with the local culture by learning a few basic words of the language spoken in your destination, for example, or by taking an interest in people's customs, values and traditions?
- ✈ Have you ever considered staying in a local family's home rather than a hotel?

Alternative forms of accommodation

New forms of accommodation might seem to be passing fads arising from the economic crisis, but their proliferation points to a success story in terms of sustainable, personalised tourism. This is the era of couchsurfing (an online hospitality service offering close to a million sofas where tourists can sleep without charge in people's homes in 200 countries), as well as of the more "traditional" home exchange. The latter, a form of tourism governed by the principle that exchanging homes with someone also means putting your trust in one another, and which has a yearly growth rate of 30% in Catalonia, enables you to sleep in a flat in the Marais in Paris or on the Avenida de Mayo in Buenos Aires while its owners spend the night in your home. There are many more possibilities though, including farmhouses that offer accommodation in return for a little help with farm work, and people who invite travellers not to stay in their home but to enjoy a decent meal in their dining room. Taking things to extremes, postcrossing communities for exchanging postcards with people from all over the world make it possible to "travel" without actually going anywhere.



Clothing

Clothes and fashion

- ✦ Which are the best known brands of clothing in your country?
- ✦ How are tattoos and piercings regarded?
- ✦ Are there certain jobs in which having tattoos or piercings is frowned upon?
- ✦ Do you wear hats in winter?
- ✦ How do teenagers dress?

Recycled clothes

Nowadays, a simple piece of clothing can have more lives than a cat. Like the increasingly widespread practice of making clothes from recycled materials, enthusiasm for reusing trousers, shirts and jackets is alive and well thanks to a combination of various environmental, economic and fashion-related factors. Second-hand shops (establishments with a long-standing tradition in the UK and the USA, where there is now even a specific word, *thrifting*, for rummaging through charity shops) have been invaded by trendy people. More and more Facebook and Twitter users sell their used t-shirts by posting photos of them on their accounts. Meanwhile, designers such as Gary Harvey are calling for “an ethical fashion revolution”, involving clothes made using tins, plastic and cardboard. Statistics such as that of middle class women in the USA using just a quarter of the clothes in their wardrobe persist, but there can be no doubt that sustainability has made its presence felt in the fashion sector and many people are once again finding forgotten gems among their grandmother’s garments.





Groups of young people

- ✦ Do you think there are urban tribes in your country?
- ✦ If so, could you name any of them?
- ✦ Are there places where they meet up?
- ✦ Are there people who dress like manga characters? Are there manga fairs?
- ✦ Do you have a particular name for people who are very keen on IT, like the characters from *Big Bang Theory*, for example?

Shops

- ✦ Are there second-hand markets in your country?
- ✦ Do people tend to haggle or is there no budging on price?
- ✦ Do sales take place at a specific time of year?
- ✦ Are people in the habit of buying from shopping centres?
- ✦ Is there a particular day of the week that people tend to devote to shopping?

Urban tribes

Metalheads, punks, Goths, preps, emos, hippies, hipsters, skins and mods are all examples of groups of young people whose behavioural patterns and aesthetic styles set them aside from the mainstream. Such groups have been anthropologically and sociologically important since the middle of the last century, and have been known as urban tribes since 1990, on the basis of Michel Maffesoli's book *The Time of the Tribes*. Decades after the height of the beatnik and hippie movements, and iconic films such as *West Side Story* and *Quadrophenia*, video games and the emergence of social networks have brought about a subculture revival. In addition to the aforementioned tribes, there are now pokemones (a subculture that surfaced in Latin America, involving a positive, complex-free outlook on life), floggers (devotees of online meeting places such as Fotolog) and *frikis* (new technology addicts). They are all part of youngsters' constant search for lost identity.





Personal information

Biography

- ✦ Where do you live and how many places have you lived in?
- ✦ Where are your parents from?
- ✦ Which countries have you visited?
- ✦ Where do your best friends live and what are they doing at present?
- ✦ Would you like to have children one day?

The one-child policy

In China, the state allows families to have just one child. Those who fail to adhere to that birth control policy are heavily penalised and do not receive the same social benefits as other families. The measure, which allows for certain exceptions (in rural areas, for example, a second child is permitted if the first is a girl), was introduced in 1979 to stabilise the population of the vast Asian country and prevent a demographic explosion that might have seen its number of inhabitants rise to up to 1.8 billion. The policy has been so heavily criticised in recent years, both in and outside the country, that more and more Chinese people oppose it and the government has begun to contemplate changes. With 1.3 billion inhabitants, China remains the world's most populous country.





Studies

- ✦ What aspect of what you study do you like best?
- ✦ What would you like to do when you finish studying?
- ✦ Do you think finding a job when you leave university will be easy?
- ✦ Do you prefer studying at home or in the library?
- ✦ How many hours a week do you spend studying?

Pastimes

- ✦ Do you play any particular sport?
- ✦ What do you usually do at the weekend?
- ✦ What kind of places do you like to go to for a night out?
- ✦ What do you use a computer for?
- ✦ Do you often go to the cinema, the theatre or exhibitions?

Different lives

At the end of 2011, an application called The Lottery of Life, designed by the NGO Save the Children, made hundreds of thousands of internet users aware that if they were to be born again, the chances of them beginning their life in the same place would be very remote indeed. Simply spinning a wheel revealed that, for example, someone born in India would have a 39% chance of being illiterate and a 47% chance of being forced to marry while still a child. A person coming into the world in Burma, Uganda or the Congo, on the other hand, would be at risk of being recruited as a child soldier. Across the planet, 360,000 babies are born each day. The initiative's report concluded that the most fortunate are born in Sweden, where almost everyone enjoys good health and education. The least fortunate are born in Somalia, where one child in six dies before the age of five, 70% do not have access to drinking water and only one in three attend school.



“Just as the diversity of languages is proof of their strength, knowing how to speak more than one language enriches individuals who have that ability. It means that they have a foot in each world, because learning another language introduces them to another way of thinking, different experiences and another perception of reality.”

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former president of Iceland
(*Avui* newspaper , 14 June 2010)

Language services of the following universities

