

How to Learn Czech



Kateřina Malec Houfková. Photo: Centre for Foreigners JMK

Czech language is just like us Czechs. My foreign students sometimes come to the same conclusion and say: “Czechs are a bit closed off and unavailable, but when you become closer with them and they open up their hearts to you, it’s worth it.” Or language is similar. Czech can also seem hard from the beginning, but if you give it time, it will reward you and show you all its beauties.

I have been teaching Czech for approximately seven years. What I like about my job is that I can re-discover my own country with my students. There are various reasons why foreigners come to the Czech Republic; work, love, need for change, “better opportunities”, or to escape from war or poverty. Those stories are the saddest, but thanks to them you may realize how good we have it in our country. I taught students from every corner of the world and it’s an adventure; I meet people of different nationalities every day, and I introduce them to the beauty that is my mother tongue.

Learning Czech may be difficult, but with the right approach it

is fun and enriching. Regardless of your motivation, whether you need to speak Czech with colleagues, your spouse, in the shop, or you just want to order a beer in Czech in the pub, here are a couple of tips that can help you on your journey to mastering a new language.

Create a Study Plan.

Learn frequently, even 20 minutes a day is enough. Divide your learning into smaller tasks so you feel your progress and you maintain your motivation.

Speak, Speak, Speak.

Speak Czech in a restaurant, shop, at the doctor’s, or find a speaking partner. You can use online platforms of applications (e.g., Tandem). The goal of learning a language is to be able to communicate, not to know grammar rules.

Look for Challenges.

For example, you can decide to read a whole book in Czech or to sign up for a conversation course. New challenges can help you maintain your motivation and move forward.

Include Czech in your Everyday Life.

Listen to music, watch films or TV shows, read books in Czech. Learning a language is not only about sitting and reading a textbook at the table. Listen to a Czech podcast when you go for a run. When outside, try to describe the things you see. Read billboards by the road or ads in the tram.

Don’t be afraid of making mistakes.

Don’t be afraid of making mistakes or not saying something correctly. Errors are your friends, because only thanks to them you improve. Czechs will gladly help you and they will appreciate you trying to speak their language.

Implement various senses into your learning.

The combination of a visual, auditory and kinesthetic perception can help you store information. Take notes, use colors and pictures to visually imagine words and sentences. Try to also record yourself when speaking to practice your pronunciation.

Believe in yourself.

Learning Czech can be sometimes frustrating, but don’t give up. If something is not working out, don’t be afraid to ask for help. A native speaker or teacher will gladly help and support you.

And the main thing, enjoy it.

Take it as an adventure and an opportunity to discover the world through language. Learning a language is a path that will open new doors to you and will enable a connection with Czechs and Czech Culture. Don’t be worried. The best time to start is today! ...

Learn Czech with a Smile

Kateřina Malec Houfková teaches Czech to foreigners. She works as a freelance lecturer (www.czechsmile.cz) and she also teaches Czech at the Centre for Foreigners JMK, which offers Czech language courses free of charge.

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