

Tips for elementary school students:

Read, read, read! Read everything. Read all the time. Practice your reading. Read your cereal boxes, even the “boring” information on the sides of the box. Read the packages that your toys come in. Read signs everywhere you go. If you don’t understand something you are reading, ask an adult to explain it to you.

When you read, you are programming your brain like it is a computer. You will be training your brain to store a lot of information and process it and even remember it later. This is “exercising” your brain, just like an athlete does physical exercises to get stronger.

The most important skill you need in order to be a translator or an interpreter is the ability to take in a lot of information and process it and even remember it later. So, start practicing right now! Be a “Curious George” and program your brain with information all the time!

Also, practice your spelling! Does your school have a spelling bee? If so, sign up and participate! Start learning how to be a good speller and meet other kids who are good spellers and learn from them.

Tips for middle school students:

If you are able to start learning a foreign language in your school, then do it! Even if the language is not exactly your favorite one. That’s okay. Just get started learning what a foreign language is all about.

At the same time, pay very close attention in your grammar and writing classes. You must become very skilled in your own language. You must understand the rules of grammar like an expert. You also must become comfortable expressing yourself with language, by writing or speaking or both.

Tips for high school students:

If your school offers a class in Latin and Greek derivatives, I would strongly urge you to take it. You will gain an awareness of how common words have formed and of how to deduce the meaning of new words you have never seen before. This is excellent “brain training” for linguists. You will also gain an appreciation for the power of language. This will help you understand how valuable your work as a translator or interpreter will be.

Take classes outside of your “comfort zone” and apply your best effort. Do you hate math? Then take a math class and work hard at it. As a translator or interpreter, you will find yourself in situations in which you have to deal with information with which you are unfamiliar or with which you feel uncomfortable. Make certain that you already know how to handle yourself in situations like these! As a translator or interpreter, the work you do could be called “bilingual, multi-thematic, information processing”. Start practicing working with all types of information and learn how to “process” it.

By the way, you will be surprised to discover that you really will learn a lot in classes you thought you would “hate” or would not be good at. Have an open mind and become pleasantly surprised!

Pay attention to the detail in all your work. You must have a very good eye for detail when you work as a translator or interpreter. You must be able to notice small mistakes. This is one of the skills that makes a great translator or interpreter.

Tips for college/graduate students:

Learn like a polymath. That is, become “very good” at a lot of subjects. For translators and interpreters, it is usually more important that they be very good at a lot of subjects, rather than an expert in a single subject.

Start learning what it means to act like a professional. Attend academic gatherings at your university and interact with other professionals. When you eventually begin working as a translator or interpreter, simply being a polished professional will open a lot of doors for you that would not be opened otherwise.

Definitely study abroad. You must have a grasp of the culture associated with the foreign language(s) you are learning. This will enhance your credibility once you start working and it will deepen your understanding of the language and material you eventually work with. If at all possible, get a job in a foreign country. This will expose you to “regular people” in the foreign country, from whom you will learn some of the most valuable lessons you will ever learn about the foreign culture and the language. Hopefully you will also meet people on the job who will open business doors for you in the future. Also, having worked in a foreign country will give you great credibility and respect once you enter your professional field.