

# Helping Learners with Common English Difficulties

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فارسی

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Farsi

## Introduction & Background

This guide is designed to support ESOL tutors, volunteers, and staff working with **Farsi**-speaking learners. It outlines the most common challenges these learners face when learning English and offers practical examples, explanations, and exercises to support more effective communication. The aim is to build understanding, patience, and confidence in supporting **Farsi** speakers on their learning journey.

### Farsi

Farsi, also known as **Persian**, is primarily spoken in the following countries:

1. **Iran** – It is the official language and is spoken by the vast majority of the population.
2. **Afghanistan** – Known locally as Dari, it is one of the two official languages.
3. **Tajikistan** – Known as Tajik, it is the official language.
4. **Parts of Iraq and the Persian Gulf states** – Especially among Iranian communities.

Farsi (Persian) and English differ significantly in **phonology, grammar, writing system, and vocabulary**, so Farsi speakers often face predictable challenges when learning English.

## Pronunciation & Phonology

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### 1. Sounds not in Farsi

- /θ/ (“think”) → often pronounced /s/ or /t\*
  - “think” → “tink” or “sink”
- /ð/ (“this”) → often pronounced /d\*
  - “this” → “dis”
- /v/ → sometimes pronounced as /w\*
  - “very” → “wery”
- /ʒ/ (as in measure) → may be unfamiliar, sometimes replaced with /z/ or /j/
- /ŋ/ (as in sing) → replaced with /n\*

### 2. Consonant clusters

- Farsi words often avoid complex clusters, so learners may insert vowels:
  - “street” → “istreet”, “school” → “eskool”

### 3. Final consonants

- Words ending in consonants can be tricky; learners may add a vowel:
  - “cat” → “cata”

### 4. Vowel differences

- English has more vowels than Farsi, leading to confusion:
  - /ɪ/ vs /iː/ (“ship” vs “sheep”)
  - /ʌ/ vs /ɑː/ (“luck” vs “lock”)



## Grammar & Syntax

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### 1. Articles (a/an/the)

- Farsi has no definite/indefinite articles. Learners often omit them:
  - “*I bought book*” → “*I bought a book.*”

### 2. Verb tenses

- Farsi verbs rely more on aspect and context; English perfect and continuous tenses can be confusing:
  - “*I have eaten*” or “*I am eating*” may be used incorrectly.

### 3. Word order

- Farsi generally uses SOV (Subject-Object-Verb); English uses SVO:
  - “*I the book read*” instead of “*I read the book.*”

### 4. Plural forms

- Irregular English plurals (*child* → *children*, *foot* → *feet*) can be confusing.

### 5. Prepositions

- Farsi uses postpositions differently, leading to mistakes with English prepositions:
  - “*I am waiting you*” → “*I am waiting for you.*”

## **Vocabulary & Expression**

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### **1. Literal translation**

- Farsi speakers may translate idioms word-for-word:
  - *“I am feeling bored” → “I feel boredom”*

### **2. Politeness & register**

- Formality in Farsi may cause learners to sound overly formal or stiff in casual English.

## **Writing System**

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### **1. Perso-Arabic script**

- Farsi is written right-to-left. Switching to English's Latin alphabet can slow reading/writing fluency.

### **2. Direction adjustment**

- Learners must write left-to-right in English, which can be challenging at first.

## Sociolinguistic Factors

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- Exposure to English varies: some learners have access through schools, media, or online resources, while others have limited contact.
- Dialectal differences within Farsi may slightly influence pronunciation in English.

## Summary

Farsi speakers typically struggle with:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tenses, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary & Expression:** literal translations, idioms, over-formality
- **Writing:** Latin alphabet, left-to-right orientation

# Common mistakes Farsi (Persian) speakers make in English

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## Pronunciation & Phonology

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1. /θ/ → /t/ or /s/

- “*think*” → “*tink*” or “*sink*”

2. /ð/ → /d/

- “*this*” → “*dis*”

3. /v/ → /w/

- “*very*” → “*wery*”

4. /ʒ/ → /z/ or /j/

- “*measure*” → “*mezure*”

5. **Consonant clusters**

- “*street*” → “*istreet*”, “*school*” → “*eskool*”

6. **Final consonant vowels added**

- “*cat*” → “*cata*”, “*desk*” → “*desku*”

7. **Vowel confusion**

- “*ship*” vs “*sheep*”, “*luck*” vs “*lock*”



## Grammar Mistakes

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### 1. Articles omitted

- Incorrect: “*I bought book.*”
- Correct: “*I bought a book.*”

### 2. Verb tense errors

- Incorrect: “*I go school yesterday.*”
- Correct: “*I went to school yesterday.*”
- Incorrect: “*I have eat lunch.*”
- Correct: “*I have eaten lunch.*”

### 3. Word order (SOV → SVO)

- Incorrect: “*I the book read.*”
- Correct: “*I read the book.*”

### 4. Plural errors

- Incorrect: “*Childs are playing.*”
- Correct: “*Children are playing.*”

### 5. Preposition mistakes

- Incorrect: “*I am waiting you.*”
- Correct: “*I am waiting for you.*”
- Incorrect: “*I go to home.*”
- Correct: “*I go home.*”

## **Vocabulary & Expression Mistakes**

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### **1. Literal translation from Farsi**

- Incorrect: “*I have hunger.*”
- Correct: “*I am hungry.*”
- Incorrect: “*I have thirst.*”
- Correct: “*I am thirsty.*”

### **2. Over-formal expressions in casual conversation**

- “I request you to help me in this matter.” → better: “Can you help me?”

### **3. Idioms / fixed phrases**

- Literal translation issues: “It rains heavily” may be translated word-for-word and sound unnatural.

## Writing Mistakes

### 1. Spelling influenced by phonetics

- “wery” for “very”
- “eskool” for “school”

### 2. Word order issues

- Literal SOV structure from Farsi: “*I homework did yesterday*” → “*I did homework yesterday.*”

### 3. Direction adjustment

- Beginners may mix left-to-right (English) and right-to-left (Farsi) writing

## Examples in Conversation

- **Farsi speaker:** “*I go school yesterday.*”  
→ Correct: “*I went to school yesterday.*”
- **Farsi speaker:** “*This book very interesting.*”  
→ Correct: “*This book is very interesting.*”
- **Farsi speaker:** “*I am waiting you.*”  
→ Correct: “*I am waiting for you.*”

## Summary

Farsi speakers' most common mistakes are:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, verb tense, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** literal translations, idioms, over-formality
- **Writing:** Latin alphabet, spelling, left-to-right orientation

# Teaching Strategies for Farsi Speakers Learning English

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## Pronunciation Strategies

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**Challenges:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /ʒ/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters, final consonants

### 1. Minimal Pairs Drills

- /θ/ vs /t/: *think – tink, three – tree*
- /ð/ vs /d/: *this – dis, that – dat*
- /v/ vs /w/: *very – wery, visit – wist*
- /ʒ/ vs /z/: *measure – mezure, pleasure – plezure*
- /ɪ/ vs /i:/: *ship – sheep, sit – seat*

### 2. Consonant Cluster Practice

- Start with added vowels: *eskool → skool → school*
- Gradually reduce inserted vowels: *istreet → street*

### 3. Final Consonant Awareness

- Drill words ending in consonants: *cat, desk, lamp*
- Emphasize not adding extra vowels: *cat ≠ cata*

### 4. Recording & Playback

- Students record themselves reading sentences, then compare with native speakers



## **Grammar Strategies**

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### **1. Articles (a/an/the)**

- Use visuals: *a cat* (any cat) vs. *the cat* (specific cat)
- Fill-in-the-blank exercises: *I saw \_\_\_ apple, \_\_\_ sun, \_\_\_ cat*

### **2. Verb Tense Awareness**

- Use timelines for past, present, future
- Storytelling activities: “*What did you do yesterday?*”
- Practice perfect and continuous tenses using real-life examples

### **3. Word Order (SOV → SVO)**

- Sentence rearrangement exercises: *I the book read* → *I read the book*
- Pair work to build correct sentence structures

### **4. Plural Forms**

- Drill irregular plurals: *child* → *children*, *man* → *men*
- Classroom games: memory match, “plural hunt”

### **5. Preposition Practice**

- Teach prepositions in chunks: *wait for someone*, *go to school*, *sit on the chair*
- Role-play exercises for reinforcement

## **Vocabulary & Expression Strategies**

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**Challenges:** Literal translation, idioms, over-formality

### **1. Idioms & Fixed Expressions**

- Introduce gradually, with visuals or stories
- Encourage simplified equivalents initially:  
*“It’s raining heavily”*

### **2. Politeness & Register**

- Teach casual vs. formal English:
  - Casual: *“Can you help me?”*
  - Formal: *“I request your assistance”*
- Role-play everyday situations: asking directions, ordering food, shopping

### **3. Avoid Direct Translation**

- Encourage thinking in English structures rather than translating word-for-word from Farsi

## Writing Strategies

**Challenges:** Latin alphabet, spelling, SOV → SVO transfer

### 1. Spelling Practice

- Focus on tricky consonants and vowels: *very, school, desk*
- Dictation exercises using minimal pairs

### 2. Guided Writing

- Start with sentence frames: *I went to \_\_\_\_ yesterday*
- Build up to paragraphs with word banks

### 3. Direction Awareness

- Highlight left-to-right writing orientation
- Use lined paper to guide placement of letters



## Speaking & Listening Strategies

### 1. Dialogues & Role Play

- Everyday scenarios: shopping, traveling, asking questions
- Encourage peer correction and self-correction

### 2. Stress & Intonation

- Clap or tap syllables to practice stress patterns
- Show meaning differences through stress: I didn't say he stole the money

### 3. Listening Exposure

- Short videos, songs, or podcasts with repetition
- Shadowing exercises: repeat immediately after native speaker

## Cultural & Confidence-Building

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### 1. Acknowledge Dialect Influence

- Dialectal variations may affect pronunciation
- Use familiar vocabulary to ease learning

### 2. Safe Speaking Environment

- Peer groups, pair work, and games reduce anxiety
- Correct gently, focusing on communication first

### 3. Celebrate Multilingual Skills

- Farsi speakers often know multiple languages (e.g., Kurdish, Arabic, English), which is an advantage

## Summary

For Farsi speakers, focus on:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, vowels, clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tense, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** idioms, literal translations, register
- **Writing:** spelling, Latin alphabet, direction
- **Interactive practice** is key – role-play, drills, and listening exercises are essential

# Common Farsi (Persian) phrases

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## Greetings & Basics

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- سلام (Salam) → Hello / Hi
- حال شما چگونه؟ (Hâl-e shomâ chetore?) → How are you? (formal)
- حال تو چگونه؟ (Hâl-e to chetore?) → How are you? (informal)
- خوبم، ممنون (Khoobam, mamnoon) → I'm fine, thank you
- خداحافظ (Khodâhâfez) → Goodbye

## Introductions

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- اسم شما چیست؟ (Esm-e shomâ chist?) → What is your name?
- اسم من ... است (Esm-e man ... ast) → My name is ...
- خوشبختم (Khoshbakhtam) → Nice to meet you



## Politeness

- ممنون (Mamnoon) → Thank you
- خیلی ممنون (Kheyli mamnoon) → Thank you very much
- لطفاً (Lotfan) → Please
- ببخشید (Bebakhshid) → Excuse me / Sorry



## Food & Drink

- آب (Âb) → Water
- چای (Chây) → Tea
- قهوه (Qahve) → Coffee
- من گرسنه‌ام (Man gorsneh-am) → I'm hungry
- من تشنه‌ام (Man teshneh-am) → I'm thirsty



## Getting Around

- ... کجاست؟ (... kojâst?) → Where is ...?
- قیمتش چنده؟ (Gheymat-esh chande?) → How much does it cost?
- راست (Râst) → Right
- چپ (Chap) → Left



## Polite Closings

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- **خداحافظ** (Khodâhâfez) → Goodbye
- **روز خوبی داشته باشید** (Rooz-e khoobi dâshteh bâshid) → Have a good day
- **صبح بخیر** (Sobh bekheir) → Good morning
- **عصر بخیر** (Asr bekheir) → Good evening
- **شب بخیر** (Shab bekheir) → Good night

## Notes:

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- Farsi uses the **Perso-Arabic script** and is read right-to-left.
- Politeness words like **“Lotfan” (please)** and **“Bebakhshid”** (sorry/excuse me) are frequently used in daily conversation.
- Pronunciation may vary slightly in different regions of Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan.