

Persian Language Learning Guide

Introduction

Congratulations on your interest in a federal career that uses your Persian skills! Persian is a critically important language that holds strategic political value for the United States while representing a rich literary and historical tradition. Persian is the native language of over 60 million people, with the greatest concentration of speakers in Central Asia. Persian-speaking countries include (but are not limited to) Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and Persian speakers have been a crucial bridge between these countries and the U.S. throughout a history of both conflict and cooperation.

As you prepare for the workforce, you may have language-specific questions about the opportunities available to you. This guide will present an overview of language learning opportunities, including scholarships, summer learning programs, and university classes, and guidance for further developing your Persian language skills through independent study to help you prepare to use these skills in a federal job. The links here reflect high-quality government and university resources, which you may use as a starting point for doing your own research to find the resources that work best for you.

As you continue to learn the language, you may find it helpful to consult the [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines](#) to track your progress. You may also want to refer to the government's [Persian Roadmap](#) to find a list of resources grouped by level.

Language Learning Opportunities

Scholarships

There are many scholarships available for Persian study, including scholarships for study abroad. You can even begin in high school with the [National Security Language Initiative for Youth](#) program, which awards scholarships to high school students to participate in summer and academic year immersion programs. Undergraduate and graduate students can apply for the [Boren Awards](#) to help fund study abroad with an intensive language study component. If you are specifically interested in summer language study abroad, consider the [Critical Language Scholarship Program](#). College seniors, graduate students, and young professionals can apply for [Fulbright U.S. Student Program](#) grants to pursue graduate study, conduct research, or teach English abroad in countries where Persian is spoken. In addition to these government-sponsored scholarships, there are many private and school-specific scholarships, so be sure to search for other funding opportunities.

Pell Grant recipients can apply for the [Gilman Scholarship](#) to fund study or internships abroad, and you can enhance this scholarship with a [Critical Need Language Award](#) for Persian. ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) students can apply to [Project GO](#) to enhance your language and intercultural communications skills. Your school may also have specific scholarships for language or area studies, so it may be helpful to talk to professors or financial aid officers to see what opportunities are available.

Additional Opportunities

Approximately 70 colleges and universities in the United States offered Persian classes as of [2016](#). Even if your school doesn't offer classes, you can explore [summer learning opportunities](#) and the individual learning resources listed in this guide. If you are in high school through sophomore year of college, you may want to participate in a [STARTALK](#) program.

If you are still thinking about where to apply to college, you may want to consider the University of Maryland, which hosts the only [Persian Flagship program](#). The Flagship program offers students from various majors the opportunity to pursue advanced level language study, including an overseas study and internship experience, culminating in certification as a Flagship Certified Professional. Other colleges offer specific tracks for heritage learners, so be sure to look for these programs, too.

Guidance for Developing Your Skills

As a heritage speaker, you may want to focus on practicing your reading and writing skills to help your literacy skills match your speaking and listening skills. You may also want to study Persian vocabulary for a specialized field, such as your major, to help you apply your language skills more broadly.

There are three major dialects of Persian: Farsi, Dari, and Tajiki (also called Tajik). Although they have some differences, each spoken dialect can usually be understood by speakers of another dialect. Farsi and Dari are both written using the Persian alphabet, while Tajiki is usually written with the Cyrillic alphabet. Different language programs and scholarships focus on different dialects, and federal agencies may award different language bonuses for each, so make sure to do your research before applying.

The internet is full of resources that can help you practice Persian. The Middle East Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank, provides resources for [Persian \(Farsi\)](#) and [Dari](#). The [Persian Flagship Program](#) also provides [learning resources](#), including links to various websites and resources created by prior students. The [National Foreign Language Center](#) at the University of Maryland offers a [portal](#) with higher level reading and listening materials, which you can select based on their level on the ILR (Interagency Language Roundtable) scale, the language proficiency scale used by the U.S. government, as well as [Lectia](#), a free language learning app.

Several Language Resource Centers (federally funded programs at universities that provide language-learning research and resources) also offer materials for practicing Persian. The [Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region](#) at Indiana University Bloomington has a [list of language materials](#), and the [Center for the Open Educational Resources and Language Teaching](#) at the University of Texas at Austin has a [page](#) dedicated to Persian language and culture resources. The [National Heritage Language Resource Center](#) at the University of California, Los Angeles offers [workbooks and a script tutorial](#) for Persian. If you are in search of advanced Tajiki readings, try the [Open Educational Resources \(OER\)](#) from the [Open Language Resource Center](#) at the University of Kansas.

Many other universities provide lists of resources for practicing your Persian skills. A small sample includes resources from [Duke University](#), the [University of Chicago](#), the [University of Arizona](#), and [San Diego State University](#). Some of these websites include links for Persian media, such as newspapers and TV channels. You may enjoy consuming Persian-language entertainment as well, such as literature, music, and movies.