

# Trilling Your r's

What follows is an email I received from an Italian professor I had in college. I emailed her asking for tips regarding trilled r's and here was her response:

Trilling the “r” can be challenging for some people. For others, it comes without any difficulty. There is no real reason for that - it just “is.” That being said, it doesn't mean that one can never learn it or acquire it as a skill. I think pretty much it takes practice. Probably most of all it takes “letting go” of any inhibition. There are actually a few Italians who cannot pronounce the trilled “r.” I am not really sure why- but clearly it is some kind of defect or inability. Every once in a while when I am in Italy I hear someone who fits this category. But in the end it doesn't really matter because one can still make oneself understood without trilling the r.

There should be slight “air” coming forth from your abdomen area, and the tip of your tongue should touch the roof of your mouth very rapidly. The rapidity comes with the burst of air which you control. The more you try to do it, it will eventually come. You'll “feel” it and then be able to do it.

There is a YouTube video you might find helpful:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9eN2B7Wj68>

**There are consonant-into-trill constructs in Na'vi (lrr, krr, trr, prr, mrr, srr, ngr, etc.) Be sure to practice that too!**

The speaker on the video suggests the word “three” to practice with. I think the Italian word “terra” works well- the double r is easy to practice by thinking of the “arriba” that the cartoon character Speedy Gonzales says. Now while that is Spanish, and we are talking about Italian here, the concept of trilling the r is the same.

There is another video here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O\\_3MIVwNf8o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_3MIVwNf8o)

These videos are okay, 😊 but I think really it just takes practice and an awareness of that burst of air that should hit your tongue, which makes it “vibrate” against the roof of your mouth.

One final word: don't ever underestimate the power of “mocking” or “imitating” someone you hear speaking the target language. The more you mock, the more you have fun (let go of inhibition), and thus the more chances you have of finally hitting that trilled double r. Once you actually do it, you'll feel it and can repeat.

The only thing I would like to add is that if you have a short enough tongue-tie, it may make it difficult to make the trilled r because your tongue cannot reach the roof of your mouth without tensing up. If so, it still shouldn't be impossible, just more difficult. It can also be corrected, but only do so if you feel it is necessary. I did exactly this correction, so if you are curious, send me a PM and I'll tell you how I started the process.

Hopefully this helps!

-Txawey

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P.S. One other way to practice is to say the phrase "Scotland is great!" as loud as you can in a Scottish accent. You'll have fun, let loose, and probably nail the r! ;)

Another great resource is native speakers of certain languages, like Italian or Spanish, in which the trilled r is prevalent. Speaking with these people can help you learn how the mechanics work at an innate level by pointing out small subtleties that you may be missing. This is how I (finally!) learned how to trill.

Another really good way to learn and practice is to say tongue twisters! This is the way that I learned with my native Italian friend.