## Once Upon a Time

Let's start off with what we definitely know. There was a time, very very long back when there definitely were no languages. Around a few billion years back, there almost certainly were no languages. There were no humans, or animals, or even a planet Earth if you go back far enough. Don't ask me yet what was there a few billion years back. That's a topic and a question for later, and we'll get there eventually.

But then a whole bunch of incredible events transpired, our Earth formed, life came to be, animals were roaming around, being animals, and then human beings also showed up on the grand stage of the world. And at some stage, human beings developed and started using language to communicate with each other.

What's really cool is that animals also communicate with each other. And they have been doing this well before human beings came up with the concept of language. But if you have ever tried communicating with an animal you might have realised that language has some advantages to other styles of communication. So, we're pretty lucky that language finally came into existence.

## What is a Language?

Well to begin with, we have communication. When an animal hisses at you, they're communicating that they're angry or about to attack. In fact if anyone hisses at you, it's not usually a good sign. People can also communicate that they like you and enjoy your company. They might communicate this by hugging you, shaking your hand, smiling at you, or even just talking to you often. The tricky thing about communication is that it can mean different things to different people. You might think I'm waving hello to you, when I'm actually just shooing flies away.

And so, probably after many thousands of years of struggling with this communication thing, languages began to form. Languages have more rules to them. People agree on what certain noises, or signs, or scribbles mean. Because we agree on what these things mean, there's a lot less confusion.

The adjoining image from www.blog.alphatub.com has a few key definitions of what a language is. The precise definition doesn't matter too much to us right now. But hopefully we're on the same page broadly, in terms of what a language is. After all, that's the main point of a language, to ensure that the people using it are able to place ideas into each other's minds, without the ideas getting too muddled up.



## When did Language Start?

I'm going to be honest with you. I don't have most of the answers to any of the questions that I will ask. But that's the point of the learning process and the fun in it. I'm searching for answers, trying to understand them and putting them together, along with you.

## Hunting for information online

This article from www.theconversation.com seems to suggest that humans evolved to make some type of language sounds for the first time 70,000 years ago. And it is only 20,000 years ago that we managed to come up with enough different sounds to have a system of meaning and a way of putting them together into a language. Of course, we were communicating before this too, but probably not as effectively.

Other articles on the internet will have slightly different takes. For example this wikipedia page suggests that some form of language could have originated as early as 2.5 million years ago. This UCI school of sciences article says that humans could have started talking anytime in the 300,000 years since we evolved, but we started writing only around 5,000 years back.

There's a bunch of stuff that I have written about humans evolving and the timeline of human history. I'm sure you're curious, but we'll get to all of that in good time too. Right now, we're just focused on this language situation.

? So, what do we now know about when language began? Not very much with certainty. And that isn't too surprising. After all, no one who is alive today was there when it began. Documenting history would have been tough at the time that language started. After all, language evolved pretty gradually. First, just a few simple sounds to communicate those things that were most important. And then the range of possible sounds increased. We started combining those sounds together to form more complex words. At some stage we had so many sounds and words meaning different things that we even put in place rules for how they should be used together. We call these rules grammar. Okay, that's pretty much what the experts agree on in terms of when and how language began.