

The Complete Guide to Instant English Immersion

FluentU

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Introduction

Learning English is an exciting journey that can change your life by introducing you to new cultures, people and places. Also, speaking English will bring you so many more job opportunities.

But in order to have these benefits, first you need to learn the language.

So what's the best way to learn English in the shortest amount of time? Immersion.

Now, we know that not many people have the time and money to simply fly to the nearest country that speaks English, and that's exactly why we've made this guide for you.

There are so many useful ways, tools and tricks to immerse yourself in English *right now*, no matter where you currently live.

Let's get started—instant English immersion is just a page turn away!

[1]

9 Ways to Learn English at Home in Your Pajamas

Claire Bhandari



Want to study English in your pajamas?

Yes, pajamas are super comfortable—but there are plenty of other benefits to studying English at home.

For example, what if you adore learning English, but can't find time to practice?

What if your nearest English school is expensive or far away?

Then learning from home is for you!

You might think that it's hard to practice speaking at home. You're worried that nobody will be around to correct you when you make mistakes. How can you improve if you don't know what you're doing wrong?

All good concerns (worries), and there are even more things you might be wondering about.

You're concerned that your pronunciation won't improve. In fact, you may not even be sure where to start learning by yourself!

However, learning English doesn't necessarily mean sitting over a textbook. There's a whole lot of resources available to point you in the right direction.

If you study English from home with the right attitude and resources, you'll be on the path to fluency.

Just check out these great ways to practice!

9 Ways to Learn English at Home in Your Pajamas

1. Watch TV

"The Simpsons"

You know all about "The Simpsons" already, right? Who doesn't?

This long-running animated comedy is famous all over the world, and takes us through the ups and downs of a dysfunctional American family.

Not only is it hilariously funny and culturally important, but it deals with aspects of day-to-day life like school, work and socializing.

It's also fantastic for slang words and cultural references. The main characters are Homer Simpson, a rather clueless and fun-loving safety inspector in the local nuclear power plant; his wife, Marge; and their three children. There's also an enormous number of supporting characters!

“Friends”

You’ve probably heard of this popular American situation comedy about a group of six friends living in Manhattan.

Since the show went on for many years, it’s exciting to watch their lives and relationships with each other change. The friends themselves are all very different people. Rachel is trendy and fun, Ross is geeky and shy and Phoebe is sweet and slightly crazy!

Their English is very casual and relaxed, so watching this is a must if you want to practice sounding natural. It’s also available with subtitles and in other languages.

Still need inspiration for more video resources? Check out **FluentU**. FluentU has a huge collection of English video clips taken from real-world sources like music videos, TV shows, “The Hunger Games” trailers, news and inspiring talks.

These videos become unique English lessons for every user. **Choose videos that work with your learning style, English level and personal interests, and we’ll recommend more videos just for you!**

It’s a great way to figure out what kinds of English language videos help you learn best. Plus, FluentU provides plenty of tools to actively practice your English vocabulary and grammar, like interactive subtitles, flashcards, vocabulary lists and more.

2. Keep a Diary or Blog in English

Writing can be a very creative and relaxing activity. **Keeping a diary or blog in English is the best way to get regular writing practice.** As well as sharpening up your grammar skills, writing will also improve your ability to use everyday English.

You could be writing about your disappointing rainy vacation or the exciting baseball game you watched on TV—it’s up to you!

Of course, you can write entries as often as you want. Even writing one entry

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a week will give you a huge sense of satisfaction. However, try to write more every week. Set goals for yourself so that you need to write more, faster.

If you're a perfectionist who hates making mistakes, you can show your diary or blog to native speakers and ask them to correct it for you. Don't worry if you don't know any native speakers though, lang-8 is a great language exchange website where language learners can help each other with writing. Looking back at your previous writing work and seeing how you've improved over time will boost your confidence, too!

3. Host a Cultural Event at Home

It doesn't have to be a huge party, but hosting a cultural event is a fun way to learn about the culture of English-speaking countries.

Christmas, Halloween and Thanksgiving are well-known examples.

For Halloween, many people like to dress up as monsters, ghosts or their favorite movie characters. If you're hosting your own Halloween party, you can encourage your friends to bring their own ghost stories in English and read them by candlelight to create a spooky atmosphere.

A fun spring holiday is **Easter**. It's very popular with children, but who says adults can't enjoy games and candies too? You can have an Easter egg hunt by hiding chocolate Easter eggs around your home and writing out clues in English!

You aren't limited to these holidays either—you can have a historical movie night or cook traditional food from somewhere in the English-speaking world. **It doesn't matter what you decide to do, as long as you bring people together and enjoy yourselves while practicing English.**

4. Play Video Games in English

Most people don't think of video games when it comes to learning a language. However, **RPGs (role-playing games)** and **MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games)** are great ways to practice English reading, listening and even speaking.

Did you know that you can make English-speaking friends through video games? Keep reading!

RPGs usually (but not always) take place in a fantasy setting and involve using magic, killing monsters and being an awesome hero. Since there's a lot of dialogue in these games, playing one in English will really boost your vocabulary. You'll also feel motivated to learn, because reading and listening to the dialogue is the key to understanding the storyline and completing the game.

Don't worry about the new vocabulary too much—you'll get used to it very quickly as you play. Some of the most popular RPGs that are great for English learning are “**Final Fantasy**,” “**Legend of Zelda**” and “**Dragon Quest**.”

MMORPGs add even more to your experience by involving a huge community of online players. One of the most famous is “World of Warcraft.” You can simply create a character and complete quests to play the game. The best part is that you can team up and communicate with other players! Conversation is often informal, relaxed and typed into a conversation window on screen. This is a brilliant way to practice thinking quickly in English.

If you're feeling adventurous and have a headset, you can also try using **TeamSpeak**. This feature allows you to join conversations so you can chat with friends and meet new people too! Talking to your computer screen might feel weird at first, but it's a fun way to practice speaking. Be careful though, you may get hooked (addicted)!

5. Attend Online English Classes

Just imagine having all the benefits of conversations and school-style learning without actually having to go to a classroom!

Many online schools offer their own materials and packages and have teachers from all kinds of backgrounds. Often they're cheaper than conventional English conversation schools, which is a definite plus! Generally, you'll want to have a good internet connection to join in on such classes.

More often than not, you'll be provided with some kind of video conferencing software by the school itself.

Virtual English

Primarily for Japanese-speaking students, this award-winning and popular school offers a variety of different daily classes including group, one-on-one and pair classes. It also provides level checks, instructor feedback and a virtual room where students can practice conversation outside class time with teachers and other students. For Japanese English learners, there are also bilingual instructors available.

Englishtown

One of the best known online schools, Englishtown offers one-on-one and group classes daily and has won numerous awards. You can also take a level quiz to find out what kind of classes would be most suitable for you. As with most other online schools, there's an exam preparation package. It has been praised for the variety of learning tools it offers, including pronunciation practice and fun quizzes.

English Study Online

ESO is known for having good overall teaching quality and also offers different types of classes. These include one-on-one, business and exam preparation classes. It also provides homework so that you can learn even between lessons.

6. Study Grammar and Vocab Online

If you feel the need to brush up on the basics, there are plenty of helpful websites out there. Unlike textbooks, many of them are free!

English at Home

This site contains some excellent advice for beginners and is organized into sections on speaking, vocabulary and grammar. The speaking section is surprisingly useful as it tells you how to use phrases and idioms in conversation. There are also simple multiple choice exercises and puzzles to help you practice grammar, reading comprehension and vocabulary. Many of the articles are written with a sense of humor too!

Free English Study

Love or hate the vivid (very bright and colorful) color scheme, this site is a great resource. It has a huge section on grammar and is packed with conversational phrases. Another perk is that it's conveniently organized into levels, so you can easily find what you're looking for. There are also plenty of links to other useful sites.

British Council: Learn English

Appealing (pleasing) to children and adults alike, this is one of the best sites out there for free English study. The video clips are engaging and packed with useful slang words, and all video content comes with transcripts in case you miss anything. The games and jokes sections will also tickle your funny bone and are perfect for English beginners. It's also a very useful site if you're studying for your IELTS exam, since it has a variety of mock (practice) test papers to choose from.

7. Listen to the Radio

Since radio and TV programs are available online, you can sharpen your English listening skills anywhere! Whether you're washing up or sitting on a packed train you can still immerse yourself in English.

BBC Radio 4

Treat your ears to a wide variety of programs including “**The Archers**,” a radio soap opera about the lives of people who live in the British countryside. **Soap operas** are programs about normal daily life, so they're a great way to pick up natural English and perfect for advanced learners. Another popular program is “**Desert Island Discs**,” where famous or important people choose music, a book and an item which they'd take with them to a deserted island. This is a good way to listen to the rhythm and intonation of English conversation.

NHK World Radio

This is brilliant for people who live in or are interested in Japan. It features

programs about Japanese music, culture and food. The presenters are from different countries so it's a fantastic way to listen to different accents.

8. Books

Reading isn't just for improving your comprehension, it can also be a part of your private relaxation time! You can double your fun by reading about topics that appeal to you, especially your hobbies and interests. There are so many books available that you're bound to find one that you're passionate about.

If you're a fan of nonfiction, you might want to read a biography of a famous person, like a movie star or your favorite sports personality. One popular example is the biography of Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson, which contains advanced vocabulary and humorous quotes from Jobs himself. The writing is engaging and gets straight to the point, and it's an excellent way to learn business terms.

The "Harry Potter" Series by J.K. Rowling

An ideal series for ESL learners, since all seven books in the series have movie adaptations and have also been translated into other languages. Harry Potter books are aimed at children and young adults, and the books get progressively longer and more complicated as the series goes on. So, the first book is more of a simple children's book, and the seventh book is more of an intense young adult novel.

The series follows the adventures of young wizard Harry Potter, who is lucky enough to be chosen to go to Hogwarts, a school for witches and wizards. The books contain a great combination of modern day slang and also terms relating to mythology, which will make for interesting reading. You can also find a lot of great synonyms for words, which will build your vocabulary.

"Animal Farm" by George Orwell

This is a very well-known book that can be read in two ways.

On one level, it's a story about farm animals who overthrow their human masters and take over the Manor Farm. If you read it another way, it refers to the Russian Revolution, with the animals representing important political

figures and groups of people. The main antagonist (bad guy) is a pig called Napoleon, who is an allegory of Joseph Stalin.

The writing style is simple and easy to follow. It's very exciting and hard to put down! It's an essential read if you're interested in politics or history. The language level is perfect for learners and can be enjoyed by both children and adults.

“Charlie and the Chocolate Factory” by Roald Dahl

This is the perfect book for chocolate lovers and those with a sweet tooth! Like Harry Potter, it has also been translated into multiple languages. You might have seen the most recent movie starring Johnny Depp.

It's about a young boy, Charlie Bucket, who lives with his parents and grandparents in poverty. After he wins a tour of Wonka's world-renowned chocolate factory, his life changes dramatically. As well as using simple language and explanations of what's happening, it also uses some fantastic descriptive language.

9. Talk to Yourself

This doesn't necessarily mean you're crazy!

Part of learning a language is becoming more familiar with it and building up your confidence.

If you need to practice before a big event, like a parents' evening at school or a business presentation, practice always helps. You can rehearse the conversation in your head or front of a mirror.

But if you're feeling brave, why not record yourself? Making a short video of your conversation or presentation on your smartphone or computer is a great way to see how you really sound when speaking English. You can compare your pronunciation to that of native speakers on TV shows.

So, there you have it—some great ways to study English in the comfort of your own home. Curl up with a cup of tea and have a wonderful time learning!

[2]

Sweeten Up Your Vocab: 10 Fun and Effective Ways to Learn English Vocabulary

Yuliya Geikhman



Are you having trouble remembering the vocabulary words on your flashcards?

Do you feel ready to give up?

Well don't! Maybe you just need something different to help you learn English vocabulary—something colorful and fun!

Every year, people from all over the world compete in the World Memory Olympics. In one event, they sit down at small tables and spend an hour

memorizing the order of many decks of playing cards. That's hundreds of cards, in order, for an hour. Sounds incredible, doesn't it?

But these people don't just stare at the cards until they remember them. They use strategies (thought out plans) to help them memorize the cards.

Beyond Flashcards

Isn't it frustrating (troubling and unpleasant) when you can remember an unimportant fact you learned years ago—like words to a song—but you can't remember the word you just saw on a piece of paper two minutes ago?

Many people who want to learn new English vocabulary start with flashcards, but you might find that it isn't easy to remember new words this way. Why is that? Your brain has trouble remembering too many random things. And that's all flashcards are—random words.

Flashcards are great to remember words you already learned. **But to actually learn a new word, you have to see it in a sentence, use it in your daily speech, or in any other way that will give it some context.** Once you link the word with something bigger, it sticks better in your mind.

How to Make the Most of Your Vocabulary Building Activities

When you do any vocabulary building activities, there are a few things you can do to help yourself actually learn the definition. If the word you don't know is in a sentence, **use context clues.** This means you should read around the word to try and figure out what it means. For example, even if you don't know what the word "intricate" means, you might be able to understand it by looking at this sentence:

The plan was so *intricate*, it was *too complicated* to follow.

Reading that sentence, you might not get the word's full meaning, but you can understand that it might mean something like "too complicated." And you'd be right! Intricate means "complicated or complex, having many connected parts." See how using context clues can help you figure out what a word means?

Sometimes a sentence doesn't have enough information to figure out what a word means. If you still can't understand the word, look it up in a dictionary or ask somebody to explain it to you.

And if you're having trouble remembering words from flashcards, try some of these ideas instead:

10 Fun and Effective Ways to Learn English Vocabulary

1. Join Meetup.com

People don't always use words the way the dictionary tells them to. One of the best ways to learn real vocabulary that you would use in a conversation is by actually having conversations with other people. But talking to others can seem scary, especially if you're a beginner. You might get lost when people speak too fast, or be afraid of saying the wrong thing when you respond.

Don't worry! All you have to do is find the right group of people to speak with. Joining a Meetup group about something that you're interested in can help ease your fear about speaking to new people. Meetup.com is a website where people start groups about hobbies in their area.

They then get together and enjoy the hobby together. For example, if you live in New York and like playing the guitar, you might like to join the NYC Guitar Group. There's a meetup for everything, so you're sure to find something you'll enjoy.

You will all be talking about a topic that you like, so it will be fun! Don't be afraid to ask people to slow down—you will discover that most people are very sympathetic (understanding) and have no problem helping you learn. You might make a few new friends that way too.

2. Read, Read, Read

The more you read, the more you learn. You will pick up new words without even realizing it when you read. Reading lets you see how words are used in sentences, and lets you understand them through context clues.

There are even some books that are meant to teach vocabulary. These are

usually written for students studying for the SATs, but they make a great tool for anyone who wants to learn English because they have definitions of many of the words right there in the book. Books like “The Ring of McAllister” and “The Dropanchor Chronicles” are full of over 1,000 words and definitions, but are also as fun to read as a good fiction novel.

If these are too difficult for your English level, you can try reading comic books instead. Comics have a lot of dialogue, and their text is in smaller, easier-to-understand parts. Superman, Batman and the other well-known heroes are full of words for you to learn. If you don’t like superheroes, there are many other options out there, like Calvin and Hobbes or even Garfield.

3. Use FluentU to Learn Vocabulary in Real-world Contexts

I said earlier that new words need context for you to remember them. One of the best ways to get real-world context from home is with **FluentU**. FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons.

There are six levels, from beginner to native, and the videos are also in categories based on content. Every word comes with an in-context definition, image and multiple example sentences. You can even click on a word to see how it’s used in other videos across the site.

The most interesting part of FluentU could be its “learn mode.” Learn mode takes videos and turns them into English learning lessons. FluentU remembers what you’ve learned and which words are more difficult for you, and uses that information when making fun questions just for you. Since FluentU teaches you using what you already know, you will succeed, and you’ll be amazed at how much progress you make with these fascinating videos!

4. Play a Vocabulary Game That Helps End Hunger

What if you could learn new English vocabulary and make the world a better place at the same time? That’s the idea behind Free Rice, a free game you can play online. The game tests your vocabulary skills by giving you a word and letting you choose its definition. If you get the word wrong, you get an easier question. If you get it right, the questions become a bit more difficult.

Free Rice makes learning even more important though, because for every question you get right, Free Rice will donate 10 grains of rice through the World Food Programme. To date, almost 100 *billion* grains of rice have been donated thanks to people like you. You can study vocabulary words and help end world hunger! That gives you even more reason to get those questions right.

Some of the words here might be too advanced for a new learner, but there are a variety of topics to choose from, so you can view different kinds of words and find the category that best helps you. You can also try different subjects—not just “English vocabulary”—like math or geography, to learn new types of words!

5. Play Text-heavy Games

You probably already play games on your phone or computer, right? So why not play games that you can learn vocabulary from? There are many English learning apps and games that make learning fun.

Text-heavy games (games with lots of text) like Inkle’s 80 Days can introduce you to new words through simple phrases. Other games like *Elegy for a Dead World* can actually help you feel confident enough to write your own stories and poems. Games have a lot to teach us, and they remind us that studying doesn’t have to be boring.

6. Have Fun with Word Magnets

What’s one place you see every day? Yes—your fridge! Put some vocabulary words on your refrigerator so that every time you head to the kitchen for a snack or a drink, you’ll see the words right in front of you.

There are many different word magnet sets available to buy at stores and on Amazon, so pick the one that is the most interesting to you. It can have words about peace or words for making poetry on your fridge.

Whatever you choose, make sure it has words you don’t know yet! You can even make your own magnets, and paste words you want to learn on them. Then you can make sentences with them and get something to munch on. Fun and delicious.

7. Use New Words in Cowrite.net, an Online Community Writing Game

When you learn a new word, don't just try to remember it on its own. If you make a sentence with it, you'll remember it better. Good vocabulary sentences use the word correctly, and have the definition of the word within the sentence.

So a word like “respite” can become “I needed a *respite* from studying, so I took a break and had some tea.” Can you figure out what “respite” means from that sentence? Congratulations, you just learned a new word!

But instead of keeping these sentences to yourself, use them at **cowrite.net**, a fun writing game. In this game, you create a story with other users—in real time. You have a time limit during which everyone writes the next sentence to the story and then votes on their favorite. The sentence with the most votes at the end of the time limit becomes a part of the story, and then you move on to the next sentence!

You can see a real game of cowrite.net in this video.

8. Start a Blog in English

Reading isn't the only good way to learn new English vocabulary—you learn a lot through writing, too. Start a blog in English about a topic you enjoy. Write with a dictionary nearby, so that every time you can't think of the right word to use, you can look it up.

There are many free places to start your own blog. If you have a Google account, you can easily start a blog on Google's Blogger, or another popular option is WordPress.

Share your blog with your friends (maybe your new Meetup buddies would enjoy it!) and ask them to let you know if you used any words incorrectly. As you learn more words, you'll see that writing your blog will become easier and easier.

9. Find Ways to Use “Words of the Day”

Every day when you're having your morning coffee, choose two or three

words to be your “Words of the Day.” Remember them and write them down somewhere. During the rest of the day, make it a game to try and find ways to use these words in conversation. Saying the words out loud in sentences will help you remember what they mean, and your friends might enjoy playing along too.

Want a “Word of the Day” sent straight to your email? The dictionary Merriam-Webster has a “Word of the Day” specifically for English learners, in addition to their “Word of the Day for native speakers. You can receive the daily word via email by entering your email address in the “Subscribe” field.

10. Use Pictures

Are you an artist? Do you doodle (draw random pictures/designs) in your notebook all day? Use that artistic side to help you learn some new words. Find new vocabulary words and draw what they mean.

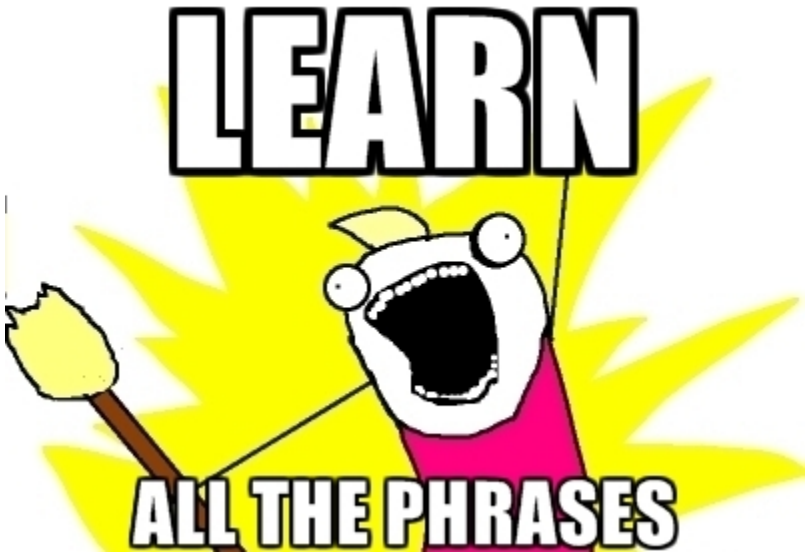
How would you draw something that means languid (tired, slow)? What about to laud (praise)? Drawing what the word means helps you see the definition in your mind whenever you hear it.

Learning new English vocabulary can be a fun part of your daily life. Just use the tips mentioned above and you might not become an expert Memory Olympics competitor, but you will learn many new words without the frustration of flashcards.

[3]

Learn Casual, Everyday English Phrases from These 8 Awesome Webcomics

Yuliya Geikhman



Learning English words is important.

But do you know how to put them together into phrases and sentences?

To speak English like a native, you need to learn how to use your words correctly. You need to learn **English phrases**.

There are lots of ways to learn: Many websites have long lists of useful phrases for you to memorize, like this one or this other one.

But there are so many things there, it's almost scary! How do you start?

We've told you before that reading, watching things and constantly practicing are great ways to learn.

But if you're looking for a more fun and colorful way to learn English phrases, try this one: **Read webcomics.**

How to Learn English Phrases from Webcomics

What *are* **webcomics**?

Webcomics are comics (cartoons) that are posted online. You don't need to pay for a full issue, and you don't need to have a book or a newspaper in front of you.

All you need is your computer, tablet or phone, and you can access some fantastic comics.

Webcomics are great for learning commonly used English phrases because they're almost completely made up of dialogue (people speaking to each other—or themselves).

Just reading a phrase in the comic is not enough though. Once you find a new phrase, try to listen for it in other conversations by the people around you, or even on TV.

Listen to how and when that phrase is used. Then try using it yourself.

Need a great resource for practicing your English phrases? Try **FluentU**.

FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons.

We've got videos that native English speakers *actually watch* every day, from commercials and nature documentaries to clips from “The Hunger Games.” That means you'll hear the English that natives listen to and use every day.

FluentU isn't just watching videos—it's about learning and actively practicing the language you hear in videos. Use the interactive subtitles, flashcards and vocabulary lists to learn English phrases better than ever!

Practice like this, and before you know it you'll be speaking like a native.

Learn Casual, Everyday English Phrases from These 8 Awesome Webcomics

1. Hyperbole and a Half

Hyperbole and a Half is a blog that uses silly illustrations to show the story that's going on. The blogs here are about many topics, from hilarious stories about the blogger's dumb dog to serious firsthand descriptions of issues like depression.

Even though there isn't as much dialogue here as in the other webcomics, the blog is written in a friendly and conversational way and uses many useful English phrases.

In case you're wondering, a *hyperbole* is a very big exaggeration, the kind you know isn't really true. For example, you might say a dog is big but if you use a hyperbole, "that dog was bigger than two school buses stacked on top of one another."

Sample phrase: "There was nothing I could do."

You use this phrase when you have no options or no choices. It's usually said in a sad tone, when you *want* to do something but can't. In this example, the young girl wants to save her favorite dinosaur costume but she can't, so she says, "there was nothing I could do."

Where else you can find it: The Leona Lewis song "The Best You Never Had" uses this phrase to say that the singer was in love and had no choice in this.

2. The Oatmeal

This comic is also a little different from other webcomics. It uses a similar art style as Hyperbole and a Half, but focuses more on art than writing blogs. There isn't as much dialogue here either, but it makes up for it with extremely colorful images and a huge variety of comics.

There are silly comics about cats and dinosaurs. There are interesting comics about cool animals like the Mantis Shrimp. There's even an entire section about grammar that provides easy-to-understand guides for difficult English topics like how to use an apostrophe and how to correctly use the word "literally" in a sentence.

A bit of a warning: This comic often discusses mature topics (topics appropriate for adults only) and uses crude (rude, vulgar) language. If this offends you, move on to the next comic! If you decide to use this one, you'll also learn how to curse (use swear words) like a professional.

Sample phrase: "Forget that guy."

This is usually said as "forget it" or "forget about it." It means don't worry about it. Listen to the tone of voice of whoever is saying this, though. "Forget it" can also mean that the person is angry and just doesn't want to talk about the topic anymore.

In this comic, "forget that guy" means that the guy they're talking about isn't very important. The person who said the phrase wants to ignore "that guy" because he is lame (boring, not cool).

Where else you can find it: The line "Forget it, Jake, it's Chinatown" is a famous ending line from the movie "Chinatown." It sums up, in one line, how terrible the state of the world is. They're saying that everything is so horrible that it's not even worth thinking about the bad things that happened.

3. Dinosaur Comics

Dinosaur Comics isn't about the art (as you'll see pretty soon).

It uses the same few drawings over and over again. The beauty of this comic is in the dialogue. The language can be a bit difficult to understand, and the topics can get pretty philosophical and thought-provoking.

The conversations in the comics are great for discovering interesting phrases and some more academic language, if you can understand the slightly more advanced English writing style.

Sample phrase: "This will blow your mind."

This phrase means that something is so crazy you'll have trouble believing it.

The comic is using this phrase to make fun of “clickbait” articles. These are articles you find online that have titles that tell you very little about the content so that you'll want to click and read more.

You can use this phrase for anything extraordinary or very awesome. Is this blog post *blowing your mind* with its awesome English learning tips?

Where else you can find it: Here's one of those article titles that the comic was joking about. 50 AMAZING Facts to Blow Your Mind. They're pretty cool facts, actually.

Here's another one with ideas that will blow your mind. This phrase isn't only used in online article and video titles, of course! Here's a song called “Blow Your Mind.”

4. Dr. McNinja

Meet the doctor...who's also a *ninja*!

Dr. McNinja has crazy action scenes and even crazier characters. The ninja doctor fights crazy bad guys—like, for instance, a giant lumberjack—with his friend, the Mexican guy with a mustache who rides a dinosaur. His medical office's receptionist is a gorilla. This is the kind of silliness you'll find in this comic.

It's beautifully drawn and takes you on a really fun, insane adventure.

Sample phrase: “Speak of the devil.”

If you were just talking about someone and then they walked into the room, you might say “speak of the devil.”

While it says “devil,” this isn't necessarily a negative statement. It's just another way of saying “Hey, we were just talking about you!”

Where else you can find it: “Speak of the Devil” is the name of a movie from 1991 that uses the original meaning of the phrase. What's the original meaning, you ask? The phrase refers to a myth (story, legend) that if you speak

of the devil, he will appear. This “English at the Movies” episode shows a clip from the movie “Easy A,” where the phrase is also used.

5. Doctor Cat

Dr. McNinja isn’t the only unusual doctor in webcomics. Meet Doctor Cat, the cutest doctor you’ll ever have.

He might not have thumbs, but he can still perform a difficult surgery while playing with his mouse toy. A doctor’s bad news is easier to handle when it comes from an adorable kitty.

Sample phrase: “Now that you mention it...”

When a person says something and it makes you remember something, you use the phrase, “Now that you mention it.”

It can mean that you weren’t thinking about the topic, but now you remember something about it because another person reminded you.

For example, if someone says “Have you seen my cat anywhere?” you might stop and think, then say “Now that you mention it, I haven’t seen him.”

Where else you can find it: Sometimes this phrase is used to make a joke, like in this image. In this case, the phrase is used *sarcastically*, pointing out something obvious (that the man is probably more bothered by his face peeling off than by wearing contacts).

6. Girls With Slingshots

Girls With Slingshots is what’s called a “slice of life” webcomic.

It shows the adventures of two young women as they struggle to make it (succeed) in the world after college, making many friends along the way. As the comic evolves, you get to see them grow up, little by little. In the later comics, you even get to see their friends grow up, have relationships and marry.

The comic uses a lot of sarcasm and talks about some serious life issues,

but it always does so with a humorous tone. The language here is very conversational, and the comics have a lot of English phrases in the dialogue.

Sample phrase: “Thanks for stepping up to bat.”

This phrase is a way to express your thanks when someone does something to help. By saying it, you’re telling the person that you appreciate their help. You can also say “Thanks for stepping up” and “Thanks for stepping up to the plate”—all phrases having to do with baseball. In this comic, Jameson is thanking Angel for helping him with his coffee shop while he’s gone.

Where else you can find it: Online, the phrase is used a lot to thank a group of people for helping a cause or a company by donating or contributing in some other way. This is just one example of the phrase in use.

7. Two Guys and Guy

This comic is about three friends who are “less than perfect people.” Wayne is a normal—but somewhat wimpy (weak)—guy, Frank might be an evil genius and Guy is a mean girl. The comics show them in situations that are typical—trying to write a book, getting along with others—and some that are much weirder, like robots and cloning.

Guy and Wayne speak in a conversational way and use a lot of English phrases, but Frank has a very *peculiar* (strange) way of talking. His speech might be a little harder to understand than that of the other two.

Sample phrase: “There is nothing to be concerned about.”

It means “Don’t worry!” Another, less formal way of saying the same thing is “Don’t sweat it.”

You’d use this phrase if you’re trying to keep somebody calm, or if you want them to know that everything is okay. In the comic, Frank tells Wayne that blood coming down the walls is “nothing to be concerned about” (because Frank is really strange, and things like this are normal when he’s around).

Where else you can find it: You can see this phrase in an excerpt from *See Jane Run* by Joy Fielding. Here it’s actually used as a way to deny that something is wrong. Sometimes when a person says “don’t worry,” the first thing you do is start to worry!

8. Stick in the Mud

Stick in the Mud is what everyone calls the main character's bar. Rod's bar is not a normal bar—some of the people who hang out there aren't really people at all. It's a comic about good drinks, strange monsters and a guy just trying to live his life and get over his ex-girlfriend.

Sample phrase: “Stick in the mud.”

Yes, the name of the comic is actually a phrase! A stick in the mud is someone who doesn't like trying new or exciting things. Rod might own a bar for monsters, but he's a stick in the mud for not wanting to actually have fun with it.

Where else you can find it: In the Disney movie “The Princess and the Frog,” the frog calls the princess a stick in the mud. He also calls her a killjoy. Both those terms are ways of saying that she doesn't know how to have fun, and that she ruins the fun for others because of this.

There are hundreds of other webcomics online (you can find a nice long list here) but these eight are a good place to start. Have fun!

[4]

8 Great Tips to Learn English Through Songs and Music

Alan Park



What's the key to learning English well?

Is it determination and persistence?

Or is it something that people are just born with?

I think it's neither of those things.

The key is to make learning English fun through the right tools and habits.

And one of the best tools was sitting right there all along, right inside your smartphone.

If you haven't already been doing it, it's not too late to start—to learn English through songs and music.

Why Learn English Through Songs and Music?

So what is it about songs that make them such effective English learning tools?

- **It works.** There is considerable scientific evidence that demonstrates how music can help second language learners acquire grammar and vocabulary and improve spelling.
- **Learn everyday language and colloquial speech.** Songs and music almost always contain a lot of useful vocabulary, phrases and expressions. And since the intended audience speaks English natively, songs and music include up-to-date language and slang. The language used in songs is casual and actually usable, if you pick the right music.
- **Become familiar with the sound of English.** Listening to songs will also allow you to focus on your pronunciation and understanding of the English language's rhythm, tone and beat.
- **Get English stuck inside your head.** Many of the words and sound patterns within a song are repetitive and this makes it easier for them to stick in your mind. You probably already know this. Music has an uncanny ability to get stuck in our heads. Tunes and lyrics will often infiltrate (take over) our thoughts and play over and over in our minds. And all of this will help you to learn English through songs as you easily memorize vocabulary and phrases. In fact, after a short period of time you will find it almost impossible to forget them.
- **Songs are emotional.** Our relationship with music is deep, powerful and hugely rewarding. It is a key that unlocks our emotions, influences our moods and enhances our mental and physical well-being. When something is emotional, then of course it is also easier to remember.

- **Music is an easy habit.** One reason people find language learning difficult is they don't have an extra minute in the day to devote to their studies. But when you're learning English through songs, you don't need to set aside too much time because you can take the music with you wherever you go. You can have English songs playing in the car, the kitchen and the shower. And by picking music you like, you can listen to the same material over and over again, without becoming bored.
- **Music teaches you English culture.** Music gives you insight into English-speaking culture and how English-speaking people think and feel. Familiarity with popular songs and artists gives you something to talk about with your English-speaking friends.

How to Learn English Through Songs and Music: 8 Great Tips

Before getting started you need to select the songs you will learn from. This is important because there are a lot of potential pitfalls. For example, avoid songs that:

- use difficult language that isn't commonly used
- aren't mainstream (nothing against niche artists, but if part of the goal is to connect with English speakers, it's probably more efficient to learn from music that would give you a common language)
- are too fast (hard to learn from)
- don't have lyrics readily available

Here are my eight tips to help you pick the right music for learning English:

1. Go to the right place to find songs.

You could search video sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo. They have vast libraries of music videos and some will also be subtitled with the song lyrics in English.

Spotify, a subscription service, is fantastic because they have a huge selection

which you can take on the go. It's also useful to see what's trending and popular.

FluentU is an awesome way to learn English with real-world videos. We've got all kinds of fun videos available now, like music videos and movie trailers. There are hundreds of videos for you to choose from, so you are sure to discover learning materials that are perfect for *you*.

There is something great in our collection for English language learners of any skill level from “newbie” (beginner) to native. Just take a look—while casually browsing our videos, you will see tons of diverse videos covering many different topics and areas of interest.

2. Select the right songs.

Pick music you love. There's no point to learning English through songs if you don't really enjoy the music. This is the fast track to boredom.

Find music that uses the right kind of language. This means language that's not too easy or too hard, and that's commonly used.

Another thing to watch out for is that sometimes singers won't pronounce the sound clearly. Perhaps heavy metal isn't the best place to start.

You might want songs that tell a story, which could make it easier to understand and visualize. If you are a real beginner, you might even want to learn children's songs or Disney songs.

Start with pop music and then branch out. Mainstream, pop music tends to be about love and romance, which is good because there is a lot of repeated vocabulary. When you are ready to branch out, you can try more diverse genres to pick up a wider range of vocabulary.

3. Get “scaffolding” and vocab support to digest the lyrics.

It would be nice if you could learn English purely by listening to the music. In practice, you will have to spend some time digesting the lyrics and their meanings so that you understand it first. This is what teachers often refer to as “scaffolding” (scaffolding is something that holds up and supports something that is being built, like training wheels for a bicycle.). Instead of trying to

figure out the lyrics on your own, you can use resources like the following to accelerate this:

- **Lyrics.com** and **Smartlyrics.com** both offer an extensive library of lyrics that you can use.
- **Music English** is a collection of music videos on YouTube that have captions.
- **FluentU**: In addition to having the best music videos for learning English, FluentU videos all have interactive subtitles. If you hover over a word, the video pauses and a pop-up provides a definition of the word. Every definition has multiple, easy-to-understand example sentences. You can easily add any word to your own personal vocabulary list.

4. Study the lyrics and vocab.

In addition to digesting the content, it's also important that you review the vocab on a regular basis. Break the song down, word by word, and try to master each word so that it's a part of your vocabulary. You can do this through a flashcard service like Anki, FluentU or Mental Case.

5. Sing along.

Unless you're singing in front of an audience, it doesn't matter if you're the worst vocalist in the world. So don't worry if you don't possess any musical ability. Regardless of your singing prowess, you should try singing out loud to the music. This forces your mouth to adopt the right shapes and move with the rhythm of the song.

6. Try to sing from memory.

After a while, you should find that you're starting to memorize the song. And then you're ready to take the next big leap—try singing the song without looking at the lyrics. By that point, you should be able to find that you can do a much better job including such words in your everyday speech.

Another fun way to test your memory is with the game Lyrics Training, where you fill in the blanks to the lyrics as a song's music video plays. Find your song (there's a huge selection), and then select your mode of play.

You can either fill in the blanks by typing the full word, or by multiple choice (choose the correct word from four options). You also choose the level of difficulty, from 25% missing words (beginner) to 100% missing words (expert).

7. Periodically review.

You don't have to complete learning one song before you move to the next. In fact, after you get comfortable with one song, you can move to the next. And then after enough time passes, you can go back to the first song. This is called "spaced repetition" and it's been proven to be more effective than trying to learn it perfectly all at once.

8. Find new music that builds on top of what you've learned.

This is perhaps the most difficult step. Each new song that you learn should have the right balance of totally new vocabulary and in-progress vocabulary. This right level of overlap keeps you motivated, and also naturally reinforces your previous learning for maximum benefit.

Have fun and enjoy! Music is a universal language and one that we can all enjoy and relate to. Listen to English songs every single day and you'll soon be surprised at how much of the English language you can pick up with relative ease. When you incorporate language learning into fun activities like listening and singing aloud to music, you won't even notice that you're picking up a second language.

[5]

How to Learn English by Speaking at Home: 10 Fun and Easy Ideas

Azalea Pena



Does your English speaking need some work?

Not quite ready to meet with a native speaker face to face?

And are online speaking lessons not for you?

I have just the solution for you.

You can learn to speak English at home—in your PJs if you want—while having tons of fun!

But before we get to these 10 easy ideas, let's take a look at the benefits of learning from home.

Why Learn English from Home?

One way to start fun learning is to do it right in the comfort of your own home. Your own home is a peaceful place where you can learn the way you want to.

Furthermore, there are five other reasons why learning to speak English from home is much more fun:

- **It's comfortable.** There's no place in the world where you can just completely relax. You don't need to worry about how you dress, if you're late to class or answering questions correctly. If you are comfortable, it produces successful learning.
- **It's convenient.** There's no need to leave the house and travel to a different place. You can study anytime you want.
- **It makes you productive.** Instead of not doing anything at home, you can use your free time to be productive. You'll be amazed at how quickly you will learn with all that free time on your hands.
- **It's pressure-free.** You study without any pressure from home. You get to follow your own learning pace without worrying if you'll keep up with your classmates or not. If there is no pressure, you'll feel more at ease with learning.
- **It's enjoyable.** It is actually surprising to know that there are tons of things you can do from home to learn to speak in English, and you will have a blast doing them. Not to mention, you'll also love the fact that you don't have to pay a cent.

As you can see, fun learning is indeed possible. And now, you can start feeling better knowing that you can learn through your own efforts.

So are you excited to get speaking in English? Here we go:

10 Fun and Easy Ways to Learn English by Speaking at Home

1. Sing Karaoke

Singing karaoke is when you sing along to a song that doesn't have the vocal track, only the background music—so you're the only one singing. It's really fun, but sometimes if you're with other people you can feel nervous and shy.

But at home, you can just relax and sing your favorite songs as loudly as you want! It doesn't matter if you prefer Frank Sinatra, Lady Gaga or One Direction—as long as you sing in English, you'll improve your speaking skills while having a good time.

Before you can sing karaoke, though, you will need to learn the lyrics and practice. Break down the song and learn the lyrics in an exciting way with **FluentU**. FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons.

Search through FluentU's music videos to find a song you enjoy at your level, and use its unique “learn mode” to understand the lyrics and learn new words.

Then, quiz yourself with the game Lyrics Training, where you fill in the missing words from the lyrics as the song plays. Next, sing along with the singer several times, and then finally you're ready for the ultimate test (and perhaps the most fun part): singing karaoke!

Luckily, you don't need an expensive karaoke machine to sing karaoke. You can easily find karaoke songs on YouTube. Simply type the name of the song and artist, plus the word “karaoke” into the search field. For example, if you want to sing the classic song “One Way or Another” by Blondie, just type “One way or another blondie karaoke” into the YouTube search bar, and you'll successfully find this video as the top result.

Try Adele's “Someone Like You,” Journey's “Don't Stop Believing” and “Summer Nights” from the musical “Grease” for some popular karaoke songs to start with.

2. Read Out Loud

Reading silently can help train your mind in the English language. However, reading out loud will train your tongue to speak English properly. You can pick any book, poem or short story you want and start reading the words out loud.

Start with easy English reading materials before moving on to these great must-read English books.

In the process of practicing to speak English, you should also know if you're saying the words correctly. At home, you can check if your pronunciation is correct by simply downloading apps from Google's Play Store.

You can try English Pronunciation by Kepham. Once the app is installed, type in the word you want to hear pronounced.

You can also try Sounds: Pronunciation App, where you can check the words in both British and American English pronunciation. Plus, this app has a practice and quiz tester too. Both of these apps are free to download.

3. Exercise with Workout Videos

How can that help you, you ask? If you choose to exercise, use English workout videos instead. It will be best if you have DVDs or Blu-Ray discs because these videos always have subtitles. When you work out, try and read those subtitles.

Among the best exercise videos are those from exercise expert Shaun T. You can try his classic "Hip Hop Abs" or "Insanity." Buy these videos on DVD or rent them from the library so you can use the subtitles.

Once the video starts, copy his movements and his words. So if he's counting, count along with him! Not only will your body get a good workout, your tongue will experience great English exercise too.

4. Host an English Night Dinner

Get your friends to join your English-speaking journey by hosting an English

Night dinner. Well, it could also be a breakfast or lunch, as long as the whole point is for everyone to speak English the entire time.

Be sure to plan some games in addition to the meal. What are some of the games you can try?

First, play **Continue the Story**. To play the game, someone should start a story by saying “Once upon a time.” Then, the next person will continue the story, perhaps saying, “There lived a princess and a prince.”

To make the game more exciting, you can add a specific number of words per answer. If a friend picks five, he or she should only say five words. If he or she uses the wrong number, the player is out of the game.

Another game you can try is **Question and Answer**. Have all your friends, including yourself, write a question on an index card. After all the questions are written, put them in a box or bowl and mix them up. Then just take turns picking a question and answering it.

5. Play Monopoly in English

Another fun thing you can do is to play games that require you to read or speak in English. A good example is Monopoly. The board and cards are all written in English, so read them out loud when you’re playing.

Monopoly is easily available in all toy stores. This board game will let you move around the board, buying, selling and renting out properties. The game concept is easy, but for non-English speakers, reading the text on the cards can be a challenge. So if you’re playing, reading the text out loud should prove to be helpful.

Just for added fun, read the text with some emotion. If you are the landlord, express a dominating tone when speaking. Maybe you’re a very nice banker, or perhaps the banker is mean. You decide!

6. Chat with Friends Online

What better way to learn to speak in English than learning with friends? Instead of chatting with them through your keyboard, why not just do a voice

or video call instead? This way, you can practice speaking in English in a conversational way. This will be good practice for you both.

One of the most useful video and voice chat apps is Skype. After downloading the free software, sign up for an account and start adding your friends to your contacts.

Another app you can use is Viber. Install the application, and then you can start talking to your friends in your phonebook.

Both apps can be used on desktop and mobile. You call a friend like how you usually make a call on your mobile phone.

7. Call a Customer Support Hotline

You don't need to have a real question or complaint in order to call customer service. But for the sake of learning to speak in English, pretend you have one. Most big, international companies will have English-speaking representatives. Think of it as a free English lesson.

One way to do this is to ask questions about their products. If you're calling a beauty product manufacturer, try Avon's Hotline at 1-800-FOR-AVON. Pretend that you bought a product, and tell them your problem with it. You might say:

Hi, I recently bought your anti-aging skin cream. I like it, but I find it too oily for my skin, would you recommend anything else?

Later, you can continue asking about the other products they have, and you can continue to share what products you are looking for.

For men, you can try calling Nordstrom's Hotline at 1-888-282-6060. If you don't feel like asking about products, you can always ask about their refund or return policy. In that case, you might start with:

I recently bought a shirt, but it doesn't fit right. What's your return policy?

From there, you have already started a conversation with the customer support representative.

8. Record Yourself

Recording yourself will help you know your pronunciation mistakes. To record yourself, you can use your smartphone, tablet or even your laptop.

Simply start by finding a piece that you'd like to read, and then open up your device's Audio Recorder and start recording yourself.

Now, recording your own voice is just the first step. The more important step is to check if you've pronounced the words correctly. Use the apps mentioned in #2 to check if you are pronouncing the words correctly.

Keep recording your English speaking sessions at home until you perfect the piece you are reading. After that, you can move on to a different piece and also challenge yourself with more advanced vocabulary.

9. Memorize Your Favorite Movie Lines

You probably have a couple of favorite movies that you like to watch over and over again. This time around, you can enjoy them better by speaking like you're a part of the movie too. Speak alongside the actors and don't forget to talk with emotion.

We suggest these classic American movies that you can watch later on if you have nothing else in mind. Also, if you're having a hard time identifying the words they are saying, you can always Google a movie's transcript.

A transcript is the entire script of a movie, so you can follow the dialogues from there. For example, if you want to say Tom Cruise's lines in "A Few Good Men," simply type "A Few Good Men transcript" into Google's search box.

10. Make an Audioblog

An audioblog is kind of like a blog of podcasts, where you record yourself for other people to hear. You can talk about whatever you want: movie reviews, share stories, give your opinion, etc. After you record them, you can upload it to your blog and let other people hear what you have to say.

If you have native English speaking friends, ask them for constructive

feedback. This means they'll give you pronunciation tips, praise and ways to improve.

To make an audioblog, start by making a free blog (Try Blogger or Tumblr). Then, use any audio recorder you have and record files of yourself speaking. Upload them to your blog and publish the post. Ta-da!

Any combination of these 10 ideas will guarantee an entertaining time with results. But there's one final tool that you will need to be successful.

A Positive Mind Will Help You Learn to Speak English at Home

If you want to speak English well, physical action alone is not enough.

You should have your eyes on the goal and **stay positive when learning**.

If you start feeling doubtful or feel like you won't be able to do it, chances are, that is exactly what will happen. So be positive and believe in yourself. Tell yourself encouraging things: You can do it! You're getting better! Great job!

In addition to being positive, you need to be persistent, dedicated and most of all, committed. These characteristics will bring you many learning successes.

As you can see, to be able to speak English, you'll need the physical, mental and emotional aspects. You need to practice with your tongue, but also keep the right mindset.

And most of all, you need to have fun. If you can do all of these things, you will surely be an awesome and fluent English speaker sooner than you thought!

[6]

How to Improve Your English Pronunciation to Talk Like a Native

Yuliya Geikhman



“What?”

“Can you say that again?”

How many times do you hear this when you're speaking? Even if your vocabulary and English grammar are perfect, it can still be difficult for people to understand you because of your pronunciation.

Learning to pronounce English words correctly can be one of the hardest parts of learning English.

The English language has some sounds that your native language might not, so you will have to learn how to make completely new sounds.

Plus, English vowels make it really tricky to know how to say a word. “Way,” “weigh” and “whey” are all said the same, for example, while “comb,” “bomb” and “tomb” are all pronounced differently.

Ah! Yeah, we know it can make you crazy.

So that’s why we have eight tips for you, to help you pronounce English words better.

How to Improve Your English Pronunciation: 8 Tips to Talk Like a Native

1. Learn to Listen

Before you learn how to speak, you’ll need to learn how to listen. Some sounds can be hard to tell apart when you’re listening. Did the speaker *sleep* or *slip*? Did he hurt his *chin* or his *shin*? If you can hear the difference, it will be easier to speak the difference.

There are many guides to get you started in learning to listen. We have some great articles here about learning to listen from movies, songs and music and podcasts. You can also find listening exercises online, like this one from Rong-chang.

The pronunciation practice at Many Things is really slick, especially its huge selection of lessons on **minimal pairs**. Minimal pairs are pairs words like *sleep* and *slip*, that are only different by one sound. You can click on each word to hear a complete sentence with each, then quiz yourself in the second box and click the correct answer.

When you want to listen to authentic English instead of pronunciation exercises, you can watch videos on FluentU. FluentU is an online immersion platform that takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons.

Every word comes with an in-context definition, image, audio and example sentences, so you have enough support to make native English accessible to you. FluentU’s “learn mode” takes your learning history into account,

and asks questions based on what you already know, which sets you up for success.

The better you get at hearing words, the better you will become at pronouncing them.

2. Notice How Your Mouth and Lips Move

When you speak, you move your mouth. *How* you move your mouth affects how you pronounce a word.

The first step to correcting your mouth shape is to notice it and pay attention. There are a few ways you can check that your mouth and lips are making the correct shape:

- **Use a mirror.** This is by far the simplest way to tell what your mouth is doing while you talk.
- **Put a finger in front of your lips (like you're saying "shh").** As you speak, don't move your finger. You should feel your lips moving away from or pushing against your finger.

Watch other people and notice the shape their mouth and lips make when they talk. Try following along with your favorite TV show or movie. Can you repeat the faces and sounds that the actors are making?

There are guides and pictures online that will help you learn how to move your mouth. Sounds of English has some good explanations for pronouncing specific words. This guide is for people making 3D animations, but the pictures are a great start to understanding how your mouth should look when you speak.

3. Pay Attention to Your Tongue

The main difference between *rice* and *lice* is in your tongue. When you speak, you move your tongue to make sounds. You probably didn't even notice that, since you do it without thinking. To improve your English pronunciation, it's a good idea to check what your tongue is doing.

Some difficult sounds for non-native speakers to make are the letters “L” and “R,” and the sound “TH.” Pronouncing them correctly is all in the tongue!

- **To make the “L” sound,** your tongue should touch the back of your front teeth and the top of your mouth, just behind your teeth.
 - **Try it now:** Say the word “light.” Say it a few times. Feel where your tongue is in your mouth. Make sure it touches the top of your mouth.
- **To make the “R” sound,** your tongue should *not* touch the top of your mouth. Pull your tongue back to the middle of your mouth, near where it naturally rests if you weren’t saying anything. As you say the sound, your lips should be a little rounded.
 - **Try it now:** Say the word “right” a few times. You should feel air blowing between your tongue and the top of your mouth as you speak. You should also feel your lips get a little rounder when you make the sound.
- **Now for the “TH” sound.** This one may seem strange if you don’t have a similar sound in your native language. To make this sound, put your tongue between your top and bottom teeth. Your tongue should stick out a little between your teeth, and as you push air out of your mouth, let some air escape between your tongue and teeth—that’s what makes the sound.
 - **Try it now:** Say the word “think.” Repeat it a few times. Make sure you push your tongue between your teeth.

Now that you know where to put your tongue, can you hear the difference?

For a more detailed explanation on how to make those three sounds correctly, watch this video from the Woosong University, this one from Club English, or any number of other pronunciation guides you can find on YouTube.

If you can’t figure out what to do with your tongue to make the right sound, try asking someone. Ask them to say a word with that sound, then tell you where they put their tongue. They probably never thought about it before either!

4. Break Down Words into Sounds

Words are made up of **syllables**, or parts. The word “syllable,” for example, has three syllables: syl-la-ble. Turning words into parts can make them easier to pronounce.

To check how many syllables a word has, place your hand flat just under your chin. Say the word slowly. Each time your chin touches your hand, that’s a syllable.

You can even write the word down in parts. Leave a space or draw a line between each syllable (every syllable should have at least one vowel: a, e, i, o, u, y). Now try saying the word. Say it slowly and pause after each syllable. Isn’t that easier?

If you’re having trouble with syllables, you can check out [How Many Syllables](#). This website shows you the syllables in any word you look up, and even shows you how to pronounce it.

5. Add Stress to Sounds and Words

English is a stressed language. That means some words and sounds are more important than others. You can hear this when you say a word out loud. For example, the word “introduce” is pronounced with a stress at the end, so it sounds like this: “in-tro-**DUCE**.”

Sometimes where you put the stress in a word can change the word’s meaning. Say this word out loud: “present.” If you said “**PRE**sent,” you are talking about a noun that means either “right this moment” or “a gift.” If you said “pre**SENT**,” you are talking about a verb that means “to give or show.”

There are rules for where the stress goes in each word. Here’s one rule:

- Most two-syllable nouns are stressed on the first syllable, and most two-syllable verbs are stressed on the second syllable.

That’s just like the word “present.” Here’s another example: The noun “**AD**dress” is the place where you live, and the verb “add**RESS**” is to speak to someone.

If this all sounds too complicated, don't worry about memorizing all these rules—the best way to learn is by listening and practicing. Remember that most native English speakers don't know the rules either, they just say what “sounds right.” With enough practice, you can get what sounds right too.

Sentences have stresses too; some words are more important, and are said with more clarity and strength than the rest of the sentence. Try reading this sentence aloud: “I ate some toast with butter in the morning.”

The sentence should have sounded like this (the bold words are the stressed ones): “I **ate** some **toast** with **butter** in the **morning**.” Notice how you slow down every time you get to an important word, and quickly pass over the less important ones?

Keep practicing by reading out loud, having conversations and listening well to where others place stress when they speak.

6. Use Pronunciation Podcasts and Videos

There are some excellent video and audio guides on English pronunciations that you can use to improve. The English Language Club has videos that show how to make different sounds in English. Rachel's English has friendly videos on how to speak and pronounce American English in everyday conversations.

If you like podcasts better, Pronuncian has over 200 audio files that help with everything from pronunciation to stress and pitch (how you raise and lower your voice while you speak).

If none of these are what you're looking for, there are many more to choose from. Find the one that's right for you.

7. Record Yourself

One way to tell if all your practice is working is to record yourself with a camera. Use a camera and not just a sound recorder because it's important to *see* how you speak, not only hear it.

You don't need to download any special software to record yourself; most computers and mobile devices have built-in video recorders. You can use

PhotoBooth on a Mac or Movie Moments on a Windows computer. Your phone or mobile device also has a video capturing app, usually as part of the camera app.

Compare your recording to someone else saying the same words or sounds. Find a video of your favorite part from a movie, like this clip from “Earth to Echo.” Choose one or two sentences and record yourself trying to match the stress, tone and pronunciation of the video. Then you can compare the two and see what you did differently, and try again.

Ask a friend or watch a video to check. If your pronunciation doesn’t sound the same, ask yourself some questions: Are you moving your mouth the right way? Is your tongue in the right place? Are you stressing the right part of the word? Use everything you learned in this article!

8. Practice with a Buddy

As always, “Practice makes perfect!” And it’s easier to practice with a friend. Find someone to practice pronunciation with, either in person or through online communities like Language Exchange or InterPals.

Practicing with a buddy (friend) will give you a chance to try everything you learned, and learn new things from each other. Plus, it’s fun!

Pronunciation is as important to learning English as vocabulary and grammar. Thanks to these eight tips, you’ll soon be on your way to pronouncing English like a native.

[7]

9 Simple Strategies for Real-world English Conversation Practice

Pinar Tarhan



Do you get nervous when you have to talk to people face-to-face?

Even if you love to talk in your native language, speaking English can make a simple conversation much more challenging.

Far too often, English students do not look for opportunities to practice speaking their new language outside the classroom.

There are a *million* ways you can improve your English conversational skills—even if you don't live in an English-speaking country.

Here, we're going to share nine of the best ways to make this happen.

Get Real-world English Conversation Practice with 9 Simple Strategies

In this modern age, you only need to go online to discover tons of great opportunities!

The best thing about English is its popularity. Most people speak it at one level or another. All you need to do is look around and take advantage of the resources you already have to carry your speaking to the next level.

1. Talk to your friends and fellow students in English.

Think about the people you have a good relationship with. This includes your friends, colleagues and family members.

How many of them speak English better than you? How many have a similar fluency level?

If there are cool people in your life who speak English, ask them to practice with you. Set up coffee dates and Skype appointments. Chances are, they'll be eager to talk to you since this benefits them as well.

As an ESL teacher, I've discovered that most of my students have at least one family member or close friend who speaks English more fluently than they do. Yet they never practice together.

Chatting (talking casually), even if it's just typing, can help with your conversation skills. If you decide to chat in English online, be sure to use good grammar and spellings instead of using online slang.

Here's the thing about the internet: While chatting, you usually don't want to make the other person wait. This means that you'll try to come up with answers fast. Internet connections are fast these days, so you can still look up words you don't know and answer your chat buddies swiftly (fast). This assists (helps) you to think in English, making you a faster speaker in the long run.

If you're using Skype, you can actually speak too. You don't even have to turn on your camera if you don't want to. The important thing is that you're practicing your conversation skills!

2. Don't worry too much about accuracy, but don't completely ignore it either.

Worried about speaking correctly in your new language? Too much concern (worry) about speaking correctly might stop you from engaging in conversations, so you'll need to relax a little. However, being too laid-back (relaxed) about this won't help you in the future.

I had one student who was a lot more confident in his speaking than all his fellow students, but he never paid attention to his mistakes. At the end of the term, his confidence was still high but his accuracy hadn't improved.

Why is this bad? He had the grammar of an intermediate-level student and the speaking skill level of an elementary-level student. He was so confident that he did not care when he messed up (made mistakes). This meant that he would never figure out (learn) the right way to say things. If you want to speak English casually and not use it in your professional life, and you don't care about advancing to a higher level of English, this is okay. But you'll need to really consider (think about) what your goals are with English.

3. Stay in an English-speaking country whenever you can.

If you have the time and money, it's a great idea to go on vacation in an English-speaking country. You'll have to practice English for the length of your stay.

However, not every country, city or town filled with English-speaking people is a great place to practice English.

Go to towns and cities that have very few people from your country and other tourists. This way, you won't pick the easy way out when you feel uninspired, shy or lazy. If there are many people speaking your native language (not English) in your destination, try to avoid these foreign communities and interact with locals instead. When speaking with other people from your home country, insist that you both speak in English if possible.

Picking cheaper destinations means your money will last longer and you can spend more time abroad. So, maybe you should avoid London or New York if money for travel is limited. The pricier (more expensive) places also tend to be more touristy, so that's one more reason to avoid them. It's a win-win!

4. Talk back to the television.

While you're watching movies or television shows in English, you'll have some great chances to practice English listening and speaking skills.

Because most TV shows rely on continuity, they're bound to repeat certain things. Pick a TV show or a movie you already love and don't tire of watching. Since you already know what's going to happen and what everyone will say, you won't have to worry about understanding anything. Watch once and just practice paying attention to dialogue (conversations) and how people speak. Pause at regular intervals to emulate (match, typically by imitation) their tone and pronunciation. Repeating what people say will help you sound more natural.

Do this regularly. You can even record your own voice to catch any mistakes you make while practicing.

But there is one problem with using movies and TV shows to learn English. They can be *really* hard.

Luckily, there's a solution: FluentU.

FluentU takes fun videos like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks, and it turns them into English lessons. FluentU does this in two ways. First, you can watch videos with helpful captions. When you click on the captions, you can see images, definitions, example sentences and even examples of the word in other videos.

Second, there is a "learn mode." It's a quiz, but it uses the video examples to create questions.

The best part?

FluentU knows what you're learning, and it uses that to deliver a personalized experience for you.

5. Don't shy away from speaking English during your trips.

You don't need to be in a country whose first language is English to practice speaking. Even if you're traveling in your own country, chances are good that you'll run into many tourists.

Many native speakers actually like and respect the fact that you're making the effort to speak their language. Non-native speakers tend to appreciate the chance to practice.

If you're looking for common ground (things you have in common), why don't you start by asking each other about places you have been to?

6. Chat with strangers online.

With so many social networking sites and active online forums, you can find at least a couple of websites that focus on your interests. Just pick a website you like, create a free account and start chatting with like-minded people.

If you notice other users are being strict about grammar and use of language, start by saying that English isn't your native tongue. They'll be friendlier and more understanding about your mistakes. And while you shouldn't worry too much about being 100% accurate, it won't hurt to read what you have typed before sending it out there. This self-editing practice will help you in the professional world as well.

7. Use Meetup and Facebook groups to find others who are practicing English.

I use the international networking site Meetup. I get alerts in my inbox when someone creates a Meetup group in an area I'm interested in, like Italian conversation practice.

There are usually several English language practice groups in any major city, so all you have to do is look around. Joining any Meetup group is free. You only have to pay a small fee if you form one yourself.

8. Never miss an opportunity to talk to strangers.

This is especially true when you're spending time in international coffee shop chains or pubs where speaking to strangers is more or less expected.

Coffee shops are great places to meet with friends, have a cup of coffee and unwind (relax). They've become so popular that nowadays they're frequented by several different demographics (particular groups of a population), so you'll probably see many people about your age.

People usually go to coffee shops to work (or play) on their laptops and use the wireless internet connection, so it's easy to start a conversation by asking how it works (if you're new there) or helping newcomers with their questions.

You don't have to be best friends, but when you spot a foreigner you can offer friendly advice and take it from there. Sometimes people will talk to you first.

9. Take classes in English, especially in areas you're passionate about.

If there's a college or institution nearby that offers classes in English and you can afford them, give them a try. As long as the students are encouraged to speak in English, even a cooking or dancing class will make it possible for you to practice your conversation skills.

Integrating English into your everyday life might sound like a difficult task when you don't have much free time, but it'll be worth it. Even 15 extra minutes every week will enhance your confidence and fluency. Just make sure you don't completely let go of accuracy, or focus too much on it that it prevents you from conversing freely. Remember, learning English is supposed to be fun!

[8]

Picture Perfect: 7 Awesome Ideas for Learning English with Pictures

Claire Bhandari



As chefs often say when cooking beautiful food, “You eat with your eyes.”

Well, we can *learn* with our eyes as well!

You probably use your eyes all the time while studying English—probably too much.

So don’t those hardworking eyeballs deserve a vacation from textbooks?

Try learning English with pictures instead.

Haven’t thought about learning through pictures since kindergarten? No

problem. We've got some stellar advice to help you learn more effectively through all kinds of readily available images.

Picture Perfect: 7 Awesome Ideas for Learning English with Pictures

Think back to your school days.

Some people could remember everything the teacher said to them. Others could perform a dance skit perfectly after doing it only once. However, some of your classmates might have had a photographic memory—able to remember pictures, people and places down to the smallest detail.

These lucky people were probably **visual learners**, preferring to look at diagrams, read books or watch movies to help them study. If that sounds familiar, you could be a visual learner! Visual learners explore the world with their eyes, so the way information is presented is vitally important.

Even if your natural learning style isn't visual learning, it's always good to shake things up. When learning a language, it's important to exercise your brain as much as possible and try learning things with new methods. Approaching the same topics and ideas from different perspectives will help them stick in your brain.

So, with all that in mind, here are some of our favorite ideas for adding visual learning to your study routine:

1. Illustrated Books

Illustrated books aren't just for kids, although children's books are a great place to start.

“Clarice Bean, That’s Me” by **Lauren Child** is an award-winning book about Clarice Bean and her large, noisy family. The pictures are simple and eye-catching. The text is fun and casual. Not only is it a perfect book for beginners, but it also teaches plenty of English idioms.

Another classic is **“Oh the Places You’ll Go”** by **Dr. Seuss**. The imaginative illustrations and quirky sense of humor will draw the reader into this

inspirational book. The rhymes will also help with pronunciation—knowing that “day” rhymes with “O’Shea,” for example.

2. Recipe Books

These are very visual and you can pick any cuisine that tickles your taste buds. Even if you aren’t a master chef, recipe books are fantastic for grammar practice! They contain plenty of food vocabulary and great examples of how to use conjunctions in sentences.

“**Heston Blumenthal at Home**” by **Heston Blumenthal** is wonderful in that it’s both methodical and easy to follow. The recipes are explained in a simple yet scientific way and the gorgeous, glossy photos will give you an idea of what your finished dish should look like. For a cheaper alternative to a cookbook, you can also find recipes in magazines, apps and online. The **Cookpad** app, available for both iPhone and Android devices, contains over 1 million recipes from users themselves. With photos accompanying the directions, it’s easy to see what to do next.

3. Maps

Something you might not have thought of—at least if you’re not lost—is using **maps**! These are awesome for group activities, too. You can use street maps, orienteering maps or even sketch one out yourself. Hop right on to **Google Maps** and start clicking around in English-speaking countries. Look at all the sign posts, street signs, billboards and storefronts. Write down all the new phrases you see.

Maps of tourist spots make your vacation stories more realistic. You can tell everyone exactly *where* you were stuck in traffic and how your GPS sent you the wrong way. Another tried and tested activity is **map reading**—one person giving directions to a place on the map and the other following them. You can spice things up a little by organizing a “**treasure hunt**,” giving each member of the group a map and some directions which lead to a hidden object. This activity is brilliant for kids!

4. Comics

We're not just talking about traditional print comic books; there's a wealth of online comics too.

Luckily, *Calvin and Hobbes* by **Bill Watterson** comes in both formats, and you can also read it on **Go Comics**. Despite the heroes of the series being a 6-year-old and his toy tiger, it still appeals to adults. The topics tackled are also quite advanced: Politics, the environment and abstract art are just a few recurring topics of discussion. This is a recommended read if you already have a fairly solid understanding of English and a good sense of humor!

Blindsprings by **Kadi Fedoruk** is a beautifully drawn online comic that's suitable for just about anyone! It follows the magical adventures of a young girl named Tamaura as she leaves the forest and goes to the big city. The language used is simple and the art has a real storybook-like quality to it. If you enjoy reading fantasy comics, then this is for you!

The *Abominable Charles Christopher* by **Karl Kerschl** is about the adventures of an adorable and slightly goofy abominable snowman. Even though he's a silent protagonist, the other animals in the forest have a lot to say for themselves! The dialogue is a great way to learn conversational phrases and the illustrations fit it perfectly. This will appeal to lovers of anything cute who want to brush up on casual English.

5. Flashcards

Flashcards will probably bring back memories of cramming for exams! There are heaps of advantages to using them though—they're portable, quick, effective and inexpensive. You can use them on the train or in bed. You can pin them on the fridge to help you memorize vocabulary, grammar or even presentations.

Many websites like **Inside Story Flashcards** offer printable flashcards in sets to help you remember tricky vocabulary. Their flashcard sets give sample sentences so you can see how certain words are used in context.

Another great tip is to be creative and make your own cards! You don't necessarily have to be able to draw like Walt Disney either. The **Exam Time**

website lets you create cards from scratch, so you can simply upload photos or images to use on the front of your own *personalized* cards!

6. Photographs

Most people use a dictionary when looking up a word they don't know. However, online search engines are also brilliant for this! If you type “ravioli” into **Google Images**, you'll instantly be rewarded with countless pictures of delicious ravioli, which you'll then associate with the word itself.

Photos can also be used for fun activities so that you can practice speaking! If you have native English-speaking friends or friends who are fellow learners, you can sit down together and describe your holiday photos or pictures of fashionable people—whatever piques your interest.

You can also play a **taboo** style game. For this, one person describes a chosen photo without saying certain words. For example, you have to describe a soccer ball without saying “soccer,” “ball” or “sport.” Your friends will then try to guess what you're talking about. Games like these can be enjoyed by children and adults alike!

7. Useful Websites

We all know that the internet is an indispensable learning tool. Here are some awesome websites for the visually oriented!

FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news, cartoons and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons. Watching video gives you context to help your listening comprehension. Plus, FluentU has interactive subtitles. If you miss a word, simply move your cursor over the subtitled word to pause the video and see its definition and usage.

The best part is that FluentU turns the videos into a flashcard quiz that lets you learn through real examples from the videos. It'll help you learn English the way that people speak it in real life.

Visuwords is another fantastic place to expand your vocabulary. The vivid colors and great system of organization will appeal to visually stimulated

learners. You don't even need an account— just type in the word you'd like to know about and it'll generate a kind of concept map. Concept maps are useful diagrams that resemble bubbles of related concepts connected by lines. In this case, they'll show how a word is related to other similar words.

Visual Dictionary Online presents you with full-color scientific diagrams including cross sections of buildings and fully-labelled pictures of vehicles. This dictionary is ideal for those who want to learn technical terms in English. It's also great for those who like to go into topics in great detail.

Those are just a few examples of the many resources out there for people who learn with their eyes. Above all, remember to pick activities that suit your learning style and enjoy!

[9]

How to Learn English with Audiobooks: The Ultimate Guide

Yuliya Geikhman



Is it hard to find time to read books in English?

Or if you do read sometimes, do you ever wish you could hear someone saying the sentences aloud while you read?

It would help your English pronunciation so much—and your listening!

Well guess what? You can have a native English speaker read books to you whenever and wherever you want!

How? Through audiobooks, that's how.

Audiobooks are recorded readings of your favorite books.

Life is fast, and many people don't always have time to sit down and read books. Audiobooks make it possible to listen to someone reading a book while you do something else, like wash dishes or drive to work.

They are also a great way to learn English. Using audiobooks as part of your English studies will get you the practice you need to become a better English speaker.

How to Learn English with Audiobooks: The Ultimate Guide

The Benefits of Using Audiobooks to Learn English

Why would you want to practice using audiobooks?

There are many reasons:

- **You can repeat any part of the book as many times as you want.** You might be afraid or embarrassed to ask people to repeat themselves, but you can repeat an audiobook over and over (and it will never get annoyed).
- **You can “read” the book as slow or fast as you want.** Listen to only one paragraph a day, or read an entire book in a few hours. When you're talking with a real person, you can't really tell them to share only half of their story today and the rest tomorrow—but you can stop an audiobook wherever you want to.
- **You can choose any accent, gender or speed that you want to listen to.** Do you have trouble understanding people with British accents? You can listen to an audiobook read by a British person to practice. Want to understand New Yorkers better before moving there? You can find that, too. Audiobooks have so many different kinds of voices to choose from.
- **You can listen to audiobooks any time.** You can listen on your way to work or school, during breaks or even right before bed. It's like having somebody read you a bedtime story!

Now that you're interested in audiobooks, where do you start?

Choosing the Best Audiobooks for You

There are many audiobooks to choose from, on every topic you can imagine. You can find classic literature in audiobook form, English learning books or modern literature. You can listen to someone talk about dinosaurs, airports or 16th century Italy—whatever you're interested in, there's an audiobook for that.

When you're choosing an audiobook, look for something you would enjoy reading. If you already own the book or e-book version of the audio, that's even better because you can read along if just listening is too difficult.

To find your reading level, try listening to **adult fiction**. If it's too hard to understand, read **young adult fiction** instead. Still can't follow along? Try a **children's book**. Children's audiobooks are wonderful learning tools because they are meant to be understood by listeners who might not know all the words.

Where to Find Audiobooks

You can find audiobooks all over the internet, some even for free. Here are just a few places to start with:

Audible: This is one of the largest audiobook websites. It's owned by Amazon, and has over 150,000 books for you to listen to. It's not free, but it does have a free 30-day free trial, and if you discover that you love audiobooks, it might be worth getting a subscription.

Project Gutenberg: If you'd rather not pay for audiobooks yet, you can look around Project Gutenberg. This website is known for its collection of free e-books, but it also has a nice selection of audiobooks.

Librivox: This is website of free audiobooks exists thanks to volunteers from around the world who read books aloud for the site, thus recording audiobooks. It has some great books to choose from.

Local Libraries: Many libraries in the USA now have “digital libraries,” where you can check out e-books and audiobooks for free, just like regular books at a library! Ask your local library, or check online to see if you have access to a digital library.

Tips for Actively Listening to English Audiobooks

If you just listen to audiobooks, you will learn something. But to really learn the most that you can, try using these tips:

Take notes

One mistake you can make when taking notes is writing too much. So instead, write down only things that will help you later when you look at your notes. Write words and expressions that you don't know.

If you are trying to understand the story, write important events or names of characters. If you're stopping your audiobook every couple of words to write, you are writing too much. Listen, learn and only write the most important things.

Read along

If you own a copy of the book you are listening to, read along with the audio. Reading along makes you concentrate completely on the words. To practice pronunciation, stop the recording once in a while and read what you just heard out loud. Try to match the pronunciation of what you just heard. Can you do it?

Discuss

How well did you understand the book you just listened to? The best way to find out is to talk to other people about it. You can do that by joining online communities where you can talk about your books, like Goodreads or Online Book Club.

You can also join a local book club and talk with people in person about the books you read. You can use Reader's Circle or Meetup to find a book club near you.

Listen again

The first time you listen, you are listening to understand the story and the

words. After you listen once, put the audiobook away and look over your notes. Look up the words you didn't know.

Now you're ready to listen again, and this time you're listening to learn. Now that you understand what the words are saying, you can listen more closely to things you didn't notice the first time, like how to use a word in a sentence or how the reader's voice sounds when they use a phrase.

Use what you learn

By now you should have a few new words, phrases, pronunciations and more that you learned from the audiobook. So practice using what you learned! Use your new vocabulary words in conversations. Talk about what you just read with a friend. You'll be surprised at how much you learned from just listening to someone read a book to you!

4 Audiobooks Recommended for English Learners

There are thousands of audiobooks to choose from, so if you're having trouble picking a good book to listen to, here are some recommendations:

1. "Oh the Places You'll Go" by Dr. Seuss, read by John Lithgow

Dr. Seuss might be a children's book writer, but this book has been read to high school and college students at graduation many times! It's a simple book for beginners that's loved by everyone.

2. "Because of Winn-Dixie" by Kate DiCamillo, read by Cherry Jones

This book tells the story of Opal as she moves to a new city. Opal learns how to get over her fear and loneliness thanks to a dog named Winn-Dixie. This is a heart-warming story for young adults, and is perfect for intermediate English learners.

3. "The Picture of Dorian Gray" by Oscar Wilde, read by various

What would you do if you could stay young forever? The story of Dorian

Gray tells what happens when a picture of you grows old instead of you. The dramatic reading of this book has a different person reading the different parts, which makes it an excellent audiobook to practice listening and understanding different voices and accents.

4. “The Hitchhikers’s Guide to the Galaxy” by Douglas Adams, read by Stephen Fry

Even if you aren’t a fan of science fiction, you will love the crazy adventures of Arthur Dent, a man who goes hitchhiking (getting rides from strangers) through outer space. Narrated perfectly by UK star and comedian Stephen Fry, this book is very funny, but may be difficult to understand. It’s well worth a try if you want a challenge!

Of course these are only suggestions. Everyone has different tastes in books, so be sure to find the books that you’re interested in. For more ideas you can check Audible’s recommendations page, or look through AudioFile Magazine’s audiobook articles and reviews.

Enjoy listening and learning!

[10]

10 Great and Easy English Books You Must Read

Victoria Z.



Reading can open your mind to brilliant new worlds and take you to a new level of English language learning.

It may feel like a slow process, but it is effective.

Adopting English books as learning tools can help you reach English fluency faster than ever before.

Take a trip to your local library and see what a difference a few good books can make!

The Benefits of Reading English Books

“The more that you read, the more that you’ll know. The more that you know, the more places you’ll go.” – Dr. Seuss.

As any English-speaking child can tell you, there is no denying Dr. Seuss. If you love to read, but you’re a little afraid of reading a full-on novel in English, don’t worry. We’re going to help you get there, step by step. With every book you read, the more you’ll improve.

Here are some benefits of reading in English:

Reading is rewarding.

Being able to read a novel in another language and understand it is a huge achievement. You’ll feel accomplished the moment you read that final page, close the book, and reflect on the experience. You might find yourself at the last page faster than you thought—once you begin reading these books, you won’t be able to put them down.

Reading is an exercise in language learning.

Reading English novels will help improve your vocabulary, general understanding and in some cases it may even give you more knowledge into different countries and their cultures. You also get to move at your own pace.

While listening to podcasts and radio, you have to keep up with whoever is speaking. Sure, watching movies to learn English can be a lot of fun, but doesn’t it get tiring to have to read subtitles or pause and rewind? While reading a book, you can read as slowly or as quickly as you desire. If you didn’t understand something, simply look at the paragraph again!

Reading opens the mind.

Reading educates. It opens you up to new experiences and perspectives. What better way is there to understand someone’s way of thinking? You may learn new information about language, culture, society and history that you never knew before.

Reading is fun!

It is, overall, an enjoyable and relaxing way to learn English without any stress whatsoever. People get frustrated when they choose books that go above their reading levels. By choosing your first English books wisely, you should have a very positive experience.

Check out some of the following well-known novels. If you've got a basic level of understanding and comprehension, these novels aren't going to be a problem. Set yourself a reading challenge. How many of these books can you read?

10 Great and Easy English Books You Must Read

1. "Charlotte's Web" by E.B. White

This is a lovely novel that all age groups can understand. Aimed at native English speaking children, there are many adults who still say this famous book is their favorite. This is part of the national curriculum in many schools around the world, so it's quite possible this book will also come up in conversation. You can almost guarantee that the majority of native English speakers have read this book at least once.

Plot Summary

A baby pig is almost killed because of his status—he is the smallest pig that was born and he is considered to be useless and of no value. The pig is saved by a little girl named Fern Arable. She adopts the pig and takes care of it. She gives him the name Wilbur.

Fern grows sad when Wilbur grows up and has to be sent away to a farm owned by her uncle. She has a strong relationship with Wilbur. When Wilbur goes to the farm, all the other farm animals ignore him and he's left crying for his human friend. One day he hears a voice, but he can't see anything. This voice promises to become friends with him.

The voice belongs to a small spider called Charlotte. Charlotte the spider knows that the farmers are planning to kill Wilbur. She promises to make a plan to save his life. The farmers are surprised the next day when they see

the words “some pig” written in the spider web Charlotte has made. Charlotte asked for the other animals’ help over the day to write messages everywhere.

Wilbur is sad when Charlotte disappears. But in the end, her baby spiders turn out to be great company for the pig. They continue to protect each other and the story ends well.

2. “Mieko and the Fifth Treasure” by Eleanor Coerr

This book is not really so famous, but it is on the recommended book list. What’s great about “Mieko and the Fifth Treasure” is that it’s short. At only 77 pages long, this will be an easy read. Again this book is aimed at young native English speakers, so if you’re learning English, the level won’t be so difficult. This book will keep you interested as you’ll learn many interesting things about Japan and its culture.

Plot Summary

This is an emotional story about Mieko. Mieko is a talented artist and calligrapher (handwriting artist). Her hand is badly hurt during the bombings of the war. The scared little girl is sent to live with her grandparents in the countryside where it is safer.

Mieko is worried and afraid that she’s lost her 5th treasure—the “beauty in her heart.” This treasure is the key to her happiness and her beautiful art.

Mieko starts a new school. Her new classmates are mean. They constantly laugh at her and tease her which just makes her angrier. Her grandparents eventually manage to lift her darkness through their patience and wisdom. She also finds a good friend in Yoshi. Yoshi is one classmate who is really kind.

Mieko also grows close to Yoshi’s aunt. Her friend’s aunt is strict, but kind and encourages Mieko to pick up her paintbrushes again.

3. “The Outsiders” by S.E. Hinton

This short novel is perfect for EFL learners. It has modern themes and typical teenage issues that people around the world have experienced. There are very few cultural notes in this, which means you don’t need much background

information. The sentences are short and easy to understand. The vocabulary is also very easy. You should be able to read this book without difficulty.

Plot Summary

Ponyboy Curtis is one of the main characters. He is a part of a gang of teenagers called the Greasers. After he leaves the movie theater one day, he's attacked by a rival (enemy) gang. Ponyboy's friends chase the group away and he is saved.

The next evening, Ponyboy and his friends go to watch a movie again. They sit behind a few pretty girls from the other gang. They end up sitting together with the girls. Ponyboy and Cherry learn that they have a lot of things in common even though they are from different gangs. The boys begin to walk the girls home, but on the way they meet the girls' boyfriends. The girls have to leave so a fight does not begin.

Because Ponyboy arrives late at home his brother becomes angry. This causes them to fight. As a result Ponyboy tries to run away from home. They meet up with the rival gang again and yet another fight begins. This time one of the enemies is killed.

Ponyboy is really scared. They hide in a church and try to hide their appearance by dyeing (coloring) their hair. A number of different fights break out between the two gangs. Eventually Ponyboy wakes up in the hospital.

A trial is set in the courtroom and the judge has to decide Ponyboy's fate (future). Is he guilty or not guilty?

4. "The House On Mango Street" by Sandra Cisneros

The great thing about "The House On Mango Street" is that it's an interesting read. It's written from the point of view of the writer. You can really feel what the protagonist (the main character) feels. The sentences are really short so it's also easy to understand. There are a few challenging words and a little bit of descriptive language, but you can usually understand them with the context. Another great thing about this is book is that it gives you a deep understanding of a different culture.

Plot Summary

This book follows the life of Esperanza, a Mexican girl. The novel takes place over the period of one year. Esperanza moves into a new home on Mango Street. The house is much better than her old one. It is the first house her parents have ever owned—all their other houses have been rented. Esperanza is not very happy because she had been dreaming of a different home—a bigger one. Their new house is old and small. The house is located in a busy Latino area of Chicago. In the new home, Esperanza feels like she has no time to be alone. She promises herself that one day she will leave and have her own home.

Throughout the novel the young girl grows up a lot. The story follows her life as she makes friends, her body changes and she begins to have feelings for a boy. With her new friends, she has many adventures. When she goes back to school after the vacation Esperanza is embarrassed about her family being poor. She writes poetry secretly to make her feel better.

There is a lot of focus on other women in the community and Esperanza hopes never to be like them. Through watching the older women and how they are stuck, she knows that she wants to leave.

5. “Thirteen Reasons Why” by Jay Asher

This story takes place in the present, which means the writer uses simple grammar. All sentences are short and the vocabulary is relatively easy. The interesting grammar and short paragraphs make this a quick and easy book for ESL learners. This is an award-winning book and on the NY Times best books list, so it’s worth a read. This book deals with some heavy issues. If you’re looking for something light and happy to read over the summer vacation, you should not read this book.

Plot Summary

The man character is Clay Jensen, a quiet high school student. He comes home from school to find a package at his front door. He does not know who sent it. He opens it and discovers seven cassette tapes. These tapes are from Hannah Baker, his previous classmate. She had emotional problems and has committed suicide (killed herself).

The tapes came with instructions. The paper stated that they should pass the tapes from one student to another student. There are 12 people in total. In the

paper, she explains to these people that they helped her die—she gives them 13 reasons. Hannah also sends another set of tapes to a different person. She gives them a strong warning that if they don't pass the first set of tapes onto the next person, the whole school will know how they were a part of her death.

We hear about her pain. She talks about her first kiss, people who lied to her and stole from her. Everything started with gossip. The gossip then grew and became out of control. The book follows each person's story and the reason why she felt hurt including her English teacher who didn't take her seriously.

6. "Peter Pan" by J.M. Barrie

Almost everyone knows the story of "Peter Pan," which is why this is an easy read. Being familiar with a story already helps the reader to understand the text better. This book is aimed at children, but it continues to be enjoyed by adults around the world too.

Plot Summary

Every night Peter visits the Darling family house and listens to Mrs. Darling tell bedtime stories. He sits on the window listening. One evening, they see Peter trying to escape. As he tries to run away, he loses his shadow. He goes back to get his shadow. He wakes up the daughter of the house, Wendy Darling. Wendy helps him attach his shadow to his body again. Wendy tells him she knows a lot of bedtime stories too.

Peter invites Wendy to return to Neverland with him. He wants her to be the mother of the Lost Boys. Wendy agrees to the mission and asks for her brothers Michael and John to join them.

They have a magical flight as they travel to Neverland and have many adventures along the way. Wendy is nearly killed and the boys build her a house in the trees to recover. After Wendy is okay, she takes the role of the mother.

After all their adventures and fun, Wendy decides that her place is at home with their mother. Wendy helps all the Lost Boys return to London. But Peter doesn't want her to go. Instead he tries to trick her. He tells her that their mother doesn't want them anymore. However, he understands how sad their mother must be. In the end, he decides to let them go home.

7. "The Old Man and the Sea" by Ernest Hemmingway

This is a famous classic. Almost all native English speakers will have read this book at some point in school. So, if you ever find yourself in a conversation about literature and books, this is a good one to talk about. At some points it has a little bit of difficult vocabulary, however, it is short and you won't have too much trouble being able to finish it.

Plot Summary

This is a story of a long fight between an old, experienced fisherman and the best fish he ever caught. Santiago has returned to the village without any fish for 84 days. The young boy who helps Santiago is told by his parents to join another boat. But the young boy continues to help the fisherman at night.

On the eighty-fifth day, his luck changes and so does his life. Santiago sails his boat further away. He drops his fishing lines. At 12 p.m., a huge fish (a marlin) takes the bait (the food used to attract fish). The man tries to pull the fish up, but the fish is too big and strong. Instead, the fish begins to pull the boat. The old man continues to fight and hold on to the line. The fish pulls the boat around the sea for two days.

On the third day, the fish gets tired. Santiago is able to pull the fish closer and kill it. It's the biggest fish he has seen in his life. He begins to sail back to the village, but the blood of the fish attracts sharks. The boat is attacked by a Mako shark, but Santiago is able to kill it. He kills most of the sharks, but there is a problem. They have eaten the meat of the fish and now only the skeleton (bones) is left. He returns back to his home and falls asleep.

All the people of the village are amazed at the size of the fish skeleton. The young boy agrees to be the fishing partner of Santiago once more.

8. "The Giver" by Lois Lowry

"The Giver" begins in a very interesting way and catches the attention of the readers from the start. It has easy-to-understand grammar. Most of the grammar is just past simple and past perfect. All of the sentences are short and there is no confusion in the story. This is a longer book. It's really easy though, so you'll finish it quickly.

Plot Summary

Jonas is a young boy. He lives a very safe life with a lot of order and rules. There are many rules and everyone follows them. The citizens' lives are planned for them and they don't often make decisions by themselves.

They try not to say anything different. One rule is that you must never say anything that will make another person uncomfortable. Every husband and wife is matched by a special committee. Each family has two children, one boy and one girl.

When Jonas and the rest of his group become the "Twelves" in December, they get special jobs. Because Jonas is smart and respected, he is given an extra special job. His new job is to become the Receiver of Memories. The Receiver of Memories is the only person in the group who can see all of the memories in the past. He must keep these memories secret until he trains another person to take his place. This job is really difficult. This person knows things that others do not, and they also have to deal with all of the sadness from the past.

At first Jonas is really excited. But he soon learns some truths about the people in the community. He comes to understand that this kind of life is unfair. He wants to allow people to make their own choices. Jonas comes up with an interesting plan to change the community. He decides he needs to move the community to another place. In his plan, they will get their memories back and be able to live a good and fair life.

9. "Number the Stars" by Lois Lowry

This is a realistic novel. It's based on history. Unlike other historical literature, it's easy to understand. If you already know a lot of information about World War II, this might be an interesting book for you. It's not recommended if you don't know too much about the World Wars. In this case, you will be focusing on trying to understand the facts too much so you will not enjoy the book as much.

Plot Summary

This is a story of hope and courage. The year is 1943 in Copenhagen, Denmark. The area has been taken over by Hitler's army. There are soldiers

everywhere. The life of 10-year-old Annemarie has changed a lot. There is little food and everyone is very scared. There is talk about moving all of the Jewish people to another place. This is difficult for Annemarie because her best friend, Ellen, is Jewish.

This is a different book about the war. It shows it was not only the Jewish people who suffered during the war. Annemarie's family lost their eldest daughter, Lise, a few weeks before her wedding.

Annemarie will later do what her sister, Lise, did. She will join the resistance party to fight against the Nazis. She ends up being a heroine (a female hero) for a few reasons (which I will not tell you because I don't want to ruin the story).

10. "A Wrinkle In Time" by Madeline L'engle

This book has a mix of shorter and longer sentences. The short sentences allow the readers to relax a little bit more. They also create the scene well and let you know what is happening through simple words. There is a lot of vocabulary to learn. It is a good book if you've already got experience reading novels in English. Make sure you have your vocabulary notebook with you, just in case there are any cool words that you'd like to learn. This book has many!

Plot Summary

Meg is 14 years old. Everyone sees her as a troublemaker (a person who makes/causes trouble). They think she's a bad student. Everyone in her family seems to be perfect. Her mom is a very beautiful scientist. Her twin brothers are very athletic. And her little 5-year-old brother, Charles Wallace Murry, is a child genius and can often read the mind of Meg.

One night Meg can't sleep. She goes downstairs to find her young brother sitting at the kitchen table drinking milk. Later their mom joins them. A strange neighbor called Mrs. Whatsit joins them. Mrs. Whatsit is talking a lot and says that the "tesseract" is real. We (the readers) don't know what this means, but Mrs. Murry knows what it is. She looks like she is going to faint (fall down from sickness or fear).

Meg and her brother meet a friend the next day. Calvin O'Keefe is a high

school junior student. Together, the three of them go to visit an old haunted house which belongs to Mrs. Whatsit. While going there they meet Mrs. Whatsit's friend, Mrs. Who. Mrs. Who is also very strange. Meg and Calvin begin to like each other. Charles suddenly announces that they should focus on finding their father who is lost somewhere in the universe.

Strange things happen and the older women turn into supernatural (not from Earth) beings. They transport the kids to the universe by the "tesseract." They stop and visit different planets on the way. The women tell the children that the universe is being attacked by the "Black thing" (the devil).

They find out where Meg's father is being kept. Charles tries to use his psychic (in his mind) powers to see where their dad is. Eventually they find their dad, but not without drama. Along the way, Meg learns to love. She uses this new love to help them escape.

There are so many cool and fun books to read. It's always better to find books that are for middle school readers in the United States so the language and ideas will never be too difficult to understand.

Reading is a wonderful way to improve your English. It's an awesome way to learn new vocabulary. It's a great way to learn how to guess what things mean and at the same time enjoy English in another way. Reading opens your mind.

So what are you waiting for? Jump on Amazon or head to your local library and start reading today!

[11]

A Useful Guide to Practice English Listening Online

Whit Altizer



Wanna open your mouth and effortlessly speak fluent English?

Getting to that level is always a challenge.

Many English learners think the way to get there is to talk constantly.

Talking helps, but listening can help you even more.

You probably don't remember, but listening is the first language skill you honed as a baby. It's how we all first learn our native language. Because of the way we develop as humans, it's the only thing we can do for the first year or so of our lives. Sure, we can make little sounds, but we're nowhere close to fluency. Then, suddenly, after a long time of absorbing the language, we start talking.

And some of us never stop.

Remembering to take some quiet time and absorb the language is incredibly important in your language acquisition.

English Listening Practice: The Complete Toolkit

Students who are outgoing tend to be some of the best English speakers, but may struggle to understand the rhythms of English. Not all English speakers stress and link words in the same way. A word may sound one way in America and not sound the same in Britain. So it's important to hear how different countries speak English. How can you engage in a conversation if you don't understand what's being said to you?

Immersing yourself in your second language by interacting with others is extremely beneficial to language learning, but it isn't always possible. Lucky for you, there's an overwhelming amount of resources on the internet for improving your listening.

So, don't disregard the importance or ease of sitting back and soaking in the language. While in your homeland, dive into listening and take some time to learn sentence structure, intonations and nuances with your ears to become a better English student!

A Step-by-step Guide of How to Practice Listening

As adults we don't take the time to sit back and listen because we want to be more proactive and speedy in our learning. We may feel that we should be doing something with eyes, mouths or hands. Be proactive while you listen. Even a little bit of skill in reading, writing and speaking our second language can help with listening practice. Here's how:

1. Find an audio track that also comes with the transcript. First, listen to the track without reading the transcript. Train your ears and brain to hear the words and visualize them at the same time.
2. Now read the text out loud to see what you missed.
3. Listen to the audio again, this time reading the transcript out loud while it plays. This'll help you recognize words you didn't quite hear the first time and see how words sometimes blend together.

4. Next, put the transcript away and grab a blank sheet of paper. Listen to the audio again. This time, try to write down the transcript as you hear it. Listen a couple of times if you need to.
5. Finally, fill in the gaps of your writing with one more listening and reading of the transcript. The more you listen and recognize the words, the more they'll be committed to memory and hearing them won't sound so new to you.

5 Great Websites for Listening

Not sure where to go for listening help? Here are some great sites to start with that'll allow you to follow the above five steps.

1. Breaking News English

It's free, it's printable, it's interactive and it accommodates many levels. This site's full of short audio tracks about current events, weird news and worldwide issues. In the 26-page lessons you can do word-fill activities, vocabulary exercises, true and false questions and multiple choice quizzes along with other activities that prompt conversation and critical thinking on the subject. Then you can check your answers. This gives you all the tools to follow our guide to listening.

2. Ted Talks

This offers a wide range of speeches on as many different subjects as you can think of, all for free. If you can't find a talk that sounds interesting to you, then you aren't looking hard enough! Furthermore, you can find talks with subtitles in 105 languages. One hundred and five!

There's a good chance that, after you first watch the talk with English subtitles, then you can watch it in your native language to help clear up anything you didn't understand.

You can also find an interactive transcript or a printable one that you can read at your leisure or along with the talk. TED allows you to learn more about an interesting topic, learn new words and even get tips on how to give a good

presentation. This is ideal for advanced learners, but there are plenty of talks for all skill levels.

3. Eillo.org

This site is great because of its variety in exercises and accents. You can get news, situational dialogues, video blogs from other English learners around the world, and audio tracks called “mixers” where six different speakers respond to the same question and other helpful audio. These also all come with transcripts that you can use to read along with the audio.

This is especially fun and interesting because the content is made by people from all over the world. Not only is language learned here, but also different accents and cultures. Here you can connect with other learners and participate in the language learning journey together, and if you feel inclined you can upgrade your account (\$19.95) to have access to more language exercises.

4. The British Council

Like Eillo, the British Council offers some great audio and four different levels to choose from. They also provide questions and gap fills that you can do as you listen to the audio track. If you want to study it even further, they also offer PDF downloads with more questions and exercises. Below the online exercises there’s also an active chat board where you can answer a question posed by a moderator and vote on other people’s responses, getting you involved in a language community.

5. FluentU

All right, since you want to improve your English listening skills, I absolutely have to tell you about FluentU. It doesn’t matter whether you’re a beginner or near fluency—our philosophy is that you’ll learn better if you listen to *real-world* English.

At FluentU, we take reality shows, music videos, interviews, Disney movies and more, and turn them into English learning experiences. Not only can you read along with subtitles and look up definitions along the way, but we also have an interactive learning mode that teaches you new vocabulary by using

questions generated from the videos themselves. The best part? All prompts are personalized based on your history on FluentU.

Be Entertained: Watch, Listen, Laugh, Cry, Dance and Learn

These days there are also lots of great podcasts to listen to for free! A few weeks ago, I was at a conference with Hyunwoo Sun from Talk To Me in Korean (TTMK). He mentioned that many non-English speakers are improving their English while learning Korean on his site. Perhaps you're a multitasker and could find an English language podcast that teaches another language of interest like TTMK!

Though podcasts and audio tracks are incredible for the English learner, there's nothing quite like watching television or movies and listening to music.

Sitcoms, movies and music from countries where English is the native language can teach you about the culture, frequently used idioms, slang, common body language (don't underestimate the importance of body language!) and the rhythm of the language without having to actually live in that country.

There are countless stories of people crediting cheesy American sitcoms for helping with their English skills. Fortunately, there are also some incredible TV shows being made these days that are offered around the world that appeal to everyone.

And now the internet, iTunes and YouTube offer an endless library of TV and movie resources for you. There's plenty to choose from.

Overwhelmed? Need a recommendation? Check out the videos in FluentU's library for television, movies and music that'll help you practice and feel confident with your listening. It's extensive, user-friendly and has been organized and created with you, the English student, in mind!

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6 Great TV Shows to Improve English Listening Comprehension

Pinar Tarhan



It's cool that your English textbook came with a CD full of listening activities.

But after a while you're going to get bored.

Tired of hearing the same accents, vocabulary and conversation topics?

I can't blame you.

No matter how authentic they try to be when they make CDs for English learners, it's just not *real* English.

It's too clean, too easy and too clear.

But that's not the only problem with audio (just sound) made for English students.

You don't see the speakers, so it's harder to understand what they're saying. There's nothing to see to hold your attention and keep you focused. If you want to improve your listening comprehension skills without getting bored or annoyed, watching a TV series is the way to go.

Perhaps you've already tried watching English news broadcasts and full-length English movies. If so, you're definitely going in the right direction — you're already familiar with some super fun ways to learn English!

However, there are many unique benefits that only television shows have to offer English learners.

Read on to find out more about English language television shows and how they can improve your English skills.

How to Select the Right TV Show to Improve Your Listening Comprehension

Most of us enjoy watching a fun TV show to relax, but not all shows are equally helpful. For instance, “Game of Thrones” is a terrific (or in my opinion, *excellent*) show, but its characters use many words people don't use in daily life.

Medical drama “House” would be another bad choice. Even though it's a gripping (holds your attention) show, it's full of medical jargon (job-related vocabulary).

It's better to watch shows with characters in different professions. And it's much more useful if they don't live in the Middle Ages. Below are some of the best shows you can watch to boost (improve) your listening skills.

6 Great TV Shows to Improve Listening Comprehension and Vocabulary

1. “MTV Cribs” (2000-present)

What it is: “MTV Cribs” is a 30-minute MTV program where several famous guests in each episode give tours around their glamorous (fancy) houses. The

show displays general information about the house on the screen, like the size and number of rooms.

Cameras follow celebrities as they show off their houses, talking about how they've decorated, giving details about the furniture and more.

Why it's helpful: They use informal, everyday language. Different celebrities have different accents and vocabulary. Often you can watch them pointing to the items they're mentioning (talking about) on-screen.

2. "Saturday Night Live" (1975-present)

What it is: "Saturday Night Live" (SNL) is a weekly live sketch comedy show (has lots of different short comedic acts) that lasts about 60 minutes without commercials. Often a famous actor or singer hosts the show, also making appearances in the sketches.

Why it's helpful: Because the sketches are over-the-top and there's a lot of physical comedy, you'll be able to understand most of what's happening just by watching. SNL makes fun of advertisements, music videos, TV shows, movies, politics and more.

You might not like all of their work, but there will be at least numerous (many) skits (acts) that will make you laugh.

A lot of hosts' speeches and sketches are available on YouTube, so you can choose according to topic or your favorite actors. SNL might not always be the best choice for grammar, but it's priceless for improving your speaking and listening.

3. "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver" (2014-present)

What it is: It's a satirical (making fun sarcastically and critically) news program where hilarious John Oliver presents the most popular news story from the previous week. This can be anything from lost space geckos (a type of lizard) to the enormous student debt in the United States, from Scottish independence to the death penalty.

Why it's helpful: The presenter has a clear English accent and he often uses visual aids like pictures and graphs. Episodes cover a wide range of topics,

adding to your vocabulary in spades (large quantities). He also uses pieces of recent interviews and news shows which will introduce you to different English accents from all over the world.

His shows are available on YouTube, and episodes last about 15-16 minutes. He sometimes interviews guests from other countries as well.

It's a short and really entertaining (fun) way to learn more about what's going on in America as well as the world at large. At the same time, you'll be building your listening skills. If you enjoy politics and humor, subscribe to John Oliver's YouTube channel.

4. "Friends" (1994-2004)

What it is: "Friends" is a popular American sitcom. It centers on the lives of six friends in their '20s who live in New York. What makes "Friends" so appealing (interesting) is its sense of humor, as well as its universal themes.

Why it's helpful: Now, catching up with the dialogue in "Friends" might not be easy. The characters often speak fast. But there is also a lot of physical comedy and repetition (using the same words and jokes)—even if you don't understand everything you'll get what's going on. If you're not confident in your listening skills, you might want to watch several episodes with English subtitles.

The characters have diverse (very different) backgrounds, personalities and jobs. There are also some funny grammar and pronunciation lessons as they make fun of each other's shortcomings (faults, failures to meet a certain standard), like how Ross corrects people when they say "who" instead of "whom," or how Joey buys the "V" issue of an encyclopedia set (series of informational books) to improve his vocabulary.

A real life example of how "Friends" can boost (improve) your listening skills is my best friend. She got her job at an educational consultancy firm (she gives advice to educational projects) mostly because of her ability to understand native speakers. She can also speak almost like a native speaker herself. She has seen each "Friends" episode more than three times. Is that a coincidence (a matter of chance)? I think not.

5. “Coupling” (2000-2004)

What it is: Like “Friends,” “Coupling” is about six young adults and their relationships. But unlike “Friends” and its 238 episodes, “Coupling” has only 28. Because there are fewer episodes, it’s easier to finish the series and watch once more from the beginning.

Why it’s helpful: Many scenes from “Coupling” are on YouTube, so you can enjoy your favorite scenes in parts online during short breaks or on your way to school or work.

“Coupling” features English characters as well as a Welsh one. While “Friends” varies in its story lines, “Coupling” focuses on the romantic relationships of its characters. So it’ll take less time for you to start understanding what’s going on even though the characters speak fast.

It also has lots of physical comedy, so you don’t have to worry much about missing a lot of action or words.

While “Coupling” and “Friends” have a lot of fans in common, “Coupling” can be the better choice if you prefer (like better) British humor.

6. “Lie to Me” (2009-2011)

What it is: “Lie to Me” is an American crime drama that lasted for three seasons. The main character is talented psychiatrist Cal Lightman (partly based on real life psychiatrist Paul Ekman) whose specialty is catching liars (people who lie).

He works with his partner psychologist Gillian Foster. Together, they help different organizations to catch criminals. Of course working with Lightman is frustrating, because it’s impossible to lie to him.

Why it’s helpful: Unlike other crime-of-the-week shows, “Lie to Me” doesn’t follow a typical formula (story structure). One episode can be about preventing (stopping from happening) a crime and the next can be about finding out if there *was* a crime. You never know where or how the next episode is going to start.

“Lie to Me” offers a very broad range of vocabulary as they deal with miners, firefighters, the police—so there’s a lot of variety.

The show also helps with learning different English accents. The main character, Cal Lightman, is British and other characters are American.

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