

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR SPOKEN ENGLISH

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When you ask a language student what their goals are, almost everyone says “improve my speaking”. When learning a foreign language, you’ll find yourself talking with all kinds of native speakers – your teacher, servers in restaurants, taxi drivers and your landlord, so it’s vital that you feel comfortable. Just like improving your writing, listening or any other skill, there are techniques you can use to improve your spoken English in a targeted way. Here are eight of our favorites:

1. Speak, speak, speak

Let’s start right off by saying that there isn’t a magic pill for better speaking. That would be too easy, right? Basically, the best way to speak better is to, well – speak! Commit to practicing often and with as many different people as possible. Do you already live or study overseas? Take advantage of the thousands of native speakers in your immediate community, such as your friends, their families, your coworkers, classmates, employees at the coffee shops, supermarket, post-office and other places you visit. If you’re learning in your own country, increase your practice time by meeting your classmates after class, finding an language exchange partner or joining an online community of learners.

2. Reflect on your conversations

After your conversation is over, take a moment to reflect. How did it go? How much do you think you understood? How comfortable did you feel with that subject matter? Did you encounter any unknown words? The mere act of thinking about it in this way will increase your confidence for the next time you speak (and give you targeted things to work on, for example vocabulary you didn’t understand).

3. Listen and read

You need words in order to talk, right? Class time is great for learning vocabulary, but there are other ways you can increase yours: Watch movies, listen to music, the radio and to podcasts. Read books, magazines and blogs. When listening and reading, find new and interesting expressions, slang terms and synonyms, write down this new material and look up anything you’re not familiar with. All this will provide more “meat” for you to use next time you practice.

4. Prepare cheat sheets

Part of nervousness around speaking is the feeling of not knowing what to say. To combat this, prepare a cheat sheet. Are you going to the doctor’s? Before your appointment, research vocabulary relating to your condition and some common phrases you’ll probably need. Use the technique before going to pay a bill, eating at a restaurant, job interviews, making a complaint, or for any other situation that might make you anxious.

5. Pick up the phone

Most people find phone conversations particularly challenging. Why? Because on the phone, we can't see the other person's body language or watch their mouth move, both of which are tools that really help communication. To feel more confident on the phone, start small with phone conversations with friends – then move on to more challenging calls like making appointments or inquiries. (This is a great time to use tip 4, and prepare a list of questions and useful vocabulary to help you during your call!)

6. Record your voice

We know, we know – most people dislike hearing their voice recorded – but it's actually an extremely beneficial way to improve your speaking! Hearing yourself on tape shows you things you might not realize (maybe you tend to speak quickly when nervous, swallow your "s's" or mumble). On the other hand, you could be pleasantly surprised to hear that your speaking is far better than you thought! For bonus points, take your recording to your teacher or to a native speaker friend and have them give you feedback.

7. Learn phrases rather than single words

Another tip to increase your fluency is to speak using a variety of phrases rather than individual words. (You probably do this all the time in your native language.) Instead of automatically asking "Hello, how are you today?", mix it up by choosing other expressions like "What's up, man?" "Hey dude!" or "How ya going, mate?" (Be careful though: Some expressions will be very informal and not ideal for some situations!)

8. Have fun

Let's face it. It's far easier to learn something new when you're having fun. Inject silliness into your speaking practice by talking to yourself when you're alone, singing along with popular songs in English, doing tongue twisters (Try our top tongue twisters) or doing one-minute "impromptu speeches" on randomly-chosen topics (such as snakes, coffee, India or subjects such as "If I ruled the world, I would...", "Three surprising facts about me," or "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?"). Great practice and great, silly fun.