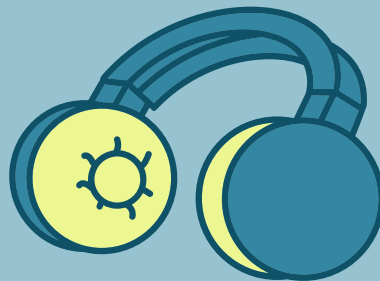




TOP TIPS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH



BY KATIE SALTER

Learn tips and tricks for improving your speaking, listening, reading and writing. Find advice for how to remember vocabulary and learn grammar.



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Top Tips for Learning English

Hello! I've been teaching English since the year 2000 and over the years I've thought a lot about the best ways for students to learn English. I've also tried some of these ideas myself in my attempts to learn French and Spanish! Here are my top tips!

General tips

1. Lessons

If possible, find a class or a teacher. You can learn on your own but most people find the routine of regular lessons helps them to stay motivated. Also a teacher can help you identify what you need to do in order to progress.

2. What do you enjoy?

You will be more motivated to learn if you enjoy it so find a way to make it fun or interesting. Talk to friends in English. Join a sports team. Watch films in English. Use social media. Listen to English songs. Do whatever you like doing but do it in English!

3. English everywhere

Surround yourself with as much English as possible. Visit English-speaking countries if you can. If you can't, buy an English newspaper, watch Netflix in English, listen to English music or use the internet in English. Turn the default language on your computer and phone into English.

4. A good dictionary

Find a good dictionary app or website. Ask your friends what they use. I like WordReference.com, macmillandictionary.com or dictionary.cambridge.org. Be careful with Google translate. It isn't always accurate!

5. Review, review, review

Don't expect to remember everything the first time. It's especially important to review vocabulary. Write the words down that you want to learn, study them again and test yourself. Review new grammar areas too.

6. Be realistic.

Be realistic about what you can achieve. You can't go from beginner to advanced level in three months, unfortunately. You can't learn 500 new words a day. If you put too much pressure on yourself, you will quickly feel disappointed and demotivated.

7. Little and often

Try to do something in English every day. Little and often is better than trying to do it all in one day a week. It's also easier to stay motivated and find the time if it's just a few minutes each day.

8. Read and listen

Read and listen at the same time. Watch a video with subtitles. Buy or borrow a graded reader with a CD. Use an app such as *beelinguapp*. If your reading is better than your listening, or the opposite way round, this is a good technique to use.

9. Don't just translate

When speaking and writing, try not to just translate word for word from your language but think more in English. There are many phrases which cannot be translated directly. Also, of course, don't just put your sentences into Google Translate! It's much better to work out how to say what you want to say by yourself.

10. Stay motivated

Remind yourself of the reasons you want to learn and this might help you to be more motivated. Set yourself a goal. For example, try to learn ten new words a day, or read three pages of your book, or study one grammar point every day. When you've done it, reward yourself. Give yourself small rewards like a cup of tea after half an hour of study, and bigger rewards like buying yourself something nice after you pass your exam.

11. Avoid distractions

Do you need to put your phone away before you study?! Don't look at your emails or Instagram first!

12. Use the Internet

The Internet is an enormous resource and it's free! You can find many things to practice reading and listening, both written for students and for native speakers. Use social media to practice communicating with friends in English. You can find teachers, online courses and study partners.

13. Don't stop

Keep practising or you will forget! Keep in touch with friends. Use the internet in English. If you've spent a lot of time (and possibly money) learning English, it would be very sad if you forgot it all!

How to improve your speaking

1. Speak a lot

Obviously the most important thing is to speak as much as you can! Find someone to speak to. Talk to native speakers, non-native speakers or even yourself! Talk to friends, find a language exchange partner online, or find a teacher, like me!

2. Pronunciation

Work on your pronunciation. There's no point having fluent English with perfect grammar if nobody can understand you! (There is more advice on pronunciation later.)

3. Try to sound natural

Use contractions to sound more natural. Say "I'm" instead of "I am", or "don't" instead of "do not". Learn a few idioms but don't overuse them as this sounds unnatural.

4. Record yourself

Find an app on your phone which can record your voice. Then find a video online and try to copy some phrases. Record yourself saying them and then listen to yourself. Compare your voice with the original.

5. Study

You can't just magically learn to speak without some work. Remember, to speak better, you have to study grammar and vocabulary as well. You can't explain something easily if you don't know the words and people will find it difficult to understand you if there are too many grammar mistakes.

6. Mistakes

However, don't worry too much about mistakes. Don't be so worried about getting it wrong that you are afraid to speak. We all make mistakes and most people will be kind! Mistakes can even help you to learn!

7. Think in English

If you always think in your own language and then translate everything when you speak, it's going to make your speaking slow. It can also cause you to make more mistakes because not everything translates word for word.

How to improve your listening

1. The right level

Find listening that's the right level for you. If it's too difficult, you won't learn anything from it and you will lose confidence and motivation. When I lived in Poland, I listened to the radio and it didn't help me at all because I was a beginner and the radio was too hard.

2. Where to find online activities

Simpleenglishvideos.com is a great website which has videos at three different levels. Learningenglish.britishcouncil.org is also a good place to find listening activities and videos. There are also several British Council apps available. [Duolingo](https://www.duolingo.com) is good for low levels. BBC Learning English has lots of excellent videos for lower intermediate to upper intermediate students. They have a website, a YouTube channel and an app. [TED talks](https://www.ted.com/talks) are great for advanced learners.

3. TV and films

Watch TV shows and films. If you watch Netflix or DVDs, you can usually watch with subtitles, at first in your own language, then in English and eventually with no subtitles at all.

4. Songs

Listen to songs. You can find music videos on YouTube. Some of them include the lyrics (words) or you can use Google to find the words. I also recommend lyricstraining.com or their app. This turns listening to songs into a game.

5. Be an active listener

To get better at listening, you have to be active, not passive. Really try to understand the information, check new words that you don't know and maybe tell somebody what it was about.

6. Conversation

Don't forget that conversation is also 50% listening, or at least it should be! Try to find people to talk to and listen to.

How to improve your reading

1. Why read?

Reading gives you a good example of real language and it is the best way to learn new vocabulary. I think it works better than watching TV or films because you can go at your own pace and stop to check new language whenever you need to.

2. The right level

Find reading materials that are the right level for you. Some good websites with reading at different levels are learnenglish.britishcouncil.org, dreamreader.net and newsinlevels.com.

3. Shorter texts

The above point doesn't mean that you have to only read easy texts. At intermediate level, you could start to try some real texts but start small. Short newspaper and website articles will be easier than an English novel!

4. Advanced reading

If you are advanced, you can also read anything aimed at native speakers. Some places to start are bbc.co.uk/news, huffpost.com or huffingtonpost.co.uk, bbc.com/travel, bbc.com/future and digg.com.

5. Graded readers

Search in book shops or online for graded readers. These are books written in simplified English for specific levels. The right level for you is a book with some new words but not too many.

6. Don't like reading?

Remember that reading doesn't just mean books. You can read newspapers, magazines, websites, blogs, messages and social media. If books really don't interest you, try something else. Try to find a topic that interests you, such as sport or fashion. Also just start with a few minutes a day because that's an easy goal to reach.

7. New words

What do you do with new words? If you want to improve your reading skills or pass an exam, you shouldn't use the dictionary all the time. You should try to understand the overall meaning of the text and guess the meaning of new words from the context. However, if learning vocabulary is your aim, then you should use the dictionary. Even so, it's still a good idea to try to guess what a word means before you check.

How to improve your writing

1. Why write?

Don't ignore this skill. Maybe you need to be able to write for an exam or for work so the need to practise is obvious, but even if you don't have such a clear need, it will still help you. Writing gives you time to think about how to express yourself, to find the right words and grammar. Also, writing can show you where you have gaps in your knowledge and what mistakes you often make.

2. Don't be afraid

If you can say it, you can write it. At first, just write what you would say. You can learn about how to make your writing more formal later. Also, don't be afraid of mistakes. Mistakes can help you to learn.

3. Check carefully

Always, always, always check your work for mistakes. When you have finished, read through your work and check your spelling and grammar. For example, look at tenses, verb endings, prepositions and articles. Did you remember -s, -ed and -ing? Did you use the right prepositions? Did you use "the" and "a" correctly?

4. Clarity vs complexity

You have to find the right balance between clarity and complexity. If you write in very simple sentences, you won't make so many mistakes but your work might sound childish. If you try to use too many complex sentences, you might be able to show what you know about the language but you might make more mistakes. Too many mistakes make your writing difficult to read and understand.

5. Get feedback

If you don't have a teacher or a friend to check your writing for you, there are websites where you can post your work and get feedback from native speakers. Two of these are italki.com and lang-8.com.

Remembering vocabulary

1. Write new words down

For me, just writing a word on paper seems to help me to get it into my brain. Use a vocabulary notebook and divide the page in two. Write the English word on the left and an explanation or a translation in your language on the right. If you prefer, you can use a computer to record new words or an app like "My Dictionary" by Kataykin or "Quizlet".

2. Review new words regularly

If you look at new words once, you might only remember 10% of them. If you study them again, you might get up to 50%. If you review them a few times, then you can get up to 100%! So study the words again and test yourself.

3. Set a target

Decide how many words you want to learn each day and set yourself a realistic target. I would suggest 10 or 20 a day. You can't learn 100 words every day!! I can't anyway! Decide which words are most important or useful to remember.

4. Learn the pronunciation

Don't forget to learn the spelling and pronunciation as well. You can listen to the correct pronunciation if you use an online dictionary. The Cambridge and Longman (ldoceonline.com) dictionaries give both the British and American pronunciation. Learn the correct sounds and where the word stress goes.

5. Phrases and collocations

Don't just learn single words. Learn which words go together (collocations), such as "take a photo", not "make". Learn useful phrases such as "in my opinion" or "love at first sight".

Learning grammar

1. Buy a grammar book

One of the most well-known and useful books is “English Grammar in Use”. This is good for most levels but there is also “Essential Grammar in Use” for beginners and elementary students, and “Advanced Grammar in Use”. Make sure you buy a book with the answers in the back!

2. Websites and apps

If you prefer using technology to books, there are many good websites, including perfect-english-grammar.com and learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/. The British Council also has a grammar app. You could search for a particular topic on YouTube. Alternatively, look for “6-minute Grammar” or “Grammar Gameshow” on the BBC Learning English YouTube channel.

3. Basic building blocks

There are different kinds of words, such as noun, verb, adjective and adverb. When you learn a new word, it can be very helpful to try to understand what kind of word it is and then you can use it correctly in a sentence. Also, remember that most English sentences follow the same pattern: subject - verb - object. This might be different from your language.

4. Tenses

After learning the basic blocks, probably the next most important thing to study is the tenses. English has a lot of different verbs tenses such as present perfect and past continuous. It's important to learn these in order to sound natural and to be understood easily.

5. Read

I know I'm repeating myself but you should read! If you read a lot, it helps you to get a natural feel for grammar without you even realising it! You'll get to know what sounds right. Reading also strengthens your understanding of what you have studied in grammar lessons, especially if you try to consciously notice how sentences are made as well as reading for information.

6. Practise

It's no good just studying grammar rules. You have to practise using it. Speak and write as much as you can and your accuracy will improve. If you feel that there is too much grammar to think about all at the same time, then just focus on one thing, such as using the right tenses or remembering to put “s” on the end of verbs in the third person singular (he/she/it).

A final word

Thank you for reading my book! I'm sure you do some of these things already but I hope you've found some new ideas to try as well. Let me know if you have any ideas that you think I should have included!

One final tip. Remember that it's all connected. Reading will help you to learn more vocabulary. Vocabulary will help you to speak and write better. So rather than focusing on just one area, try to do a bit of everything.

A lot of the ideas in this book are things that you can do on your own but I would also recommend trying to find a class or a teacher. Regular lessons help you to make faster progress and stay motivated. A teacher can help you to identify where you have difficulties and give you advice on how to overcome them.

I teach one-to-one lessons online. In conversation lessons, we discuss a different topic each time. I help students to speak more confidently and more fluently. I help them to identify and correct mistakes in order to speak more accurately. I also offer general English lessons, which include speaking practice but focus on other areas too such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, or maybe reading, listening and writing skills. Finally, I can also help students to prepare for exams such as FCE, CAE or IELTS.

Visit my website learnenglishwithkatie.co.uk for some free learning materials or to book a one-to-one lesson with me. You can also find me on social media - just search for Learn English with Katie on Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest or Tumblr.