

50 Tips to Speak English Better

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The majority of people who learn English declare that their main goal is to learn to speak the language. At the same time, speaking is the competence they tend to have most difficulties with. In this issue, *English Matters* decided to face up to the problem and presents 50 tips to improve your speaking skills.

1 Learn conversation fillers. Even the best speakers occasionally need a moment to collect their thoughts. In such situations, native speakers of English use conversational place holders such as:

- um...
- ah...
- well...
- Let me think.
- so,...
- I guess...
- er...
- I suppose...
- You mean...
- I mean...
- basically...
- like...
- You know...
- ok...
- literally...
- actually...
- right...
- I see
- hold on
- Let's see.
- To be honest
- As a matter of fact
- I was just thinking...



2 In order to be an effective speaker of English, you need to be an effective listener as well. Not understanding what your interlocutor is saying, will be simultaneously hindering your progress in speaking. You can improve your listening skills, for example, by watching TV, movies in the original version, listening to the radio

in English, listening to graded readers (nowadays the books are almost always sold with a CD), listening to podcasts and TED talks, as well as by using a variety of listening techniques such as listening for gist or listening for detail.

3 For 30 minutes a day try to think in English.

4 Be proud of your mistakes! Making mistakes is an indispensable and natural element of learning a foreign language.

5 Record your own mini-speeches. Nowadays, you can simply use the voice recorder in your smartphone. Then, try to self-correct. Self-correction increases your level of awareness of the mistakes you make.

6 Find yourself a speaking partner. Meet with them on a regular basis in order to have a chit-chat in English.

7 Learn words and phrases in context, not in isolation. Don't learn individual words as it is not productive, you won't be able to use them in a conversation. Try to memorise an example of a sentence with a particular word.

8 As often as possible, try to learn whole phrases rather than individual words. In order to broaden your knowledge of active vocabulary, learn groups of words or meaningful lexical phrases, collocations.

9 Learn routines and small talk phrases. Make sure you are able to start a conversation, to end a conversation, to ask about more details, to show interest and to pay a compliment. Small

tip | consejo

goal | objetivo

to face up to sth | encarar, afrontar

to improve sth | mejorar

conversation filler | muletillas

to collect one's thoughts | ordenar los pensamientos

actually | en realidad

hold on | espera

in order to | para

simultaneously | a la vez

to hinder sth | dificultar

skill | habilidad

graded readers | lecturas por niveles

nowadays | actualmente

listening for gist | escuchar para entender la idea principal

to increase sth | aumentar

level of awareness | nivel de conocimiento

on a regular basis | con frecuencia

to have a chit-chat | charlar

individual | de manera aislada

to broaden sth | ampliar

meaningful | significativo

to pay a compliment | hacer un cumplido

talk is based on routines. Learn them, and a short conversation will not cause any inconvenience on your side. Examples of routines and small talk phrases:

How about you? • That sounds interesting/nice. • Hi. I haven't seen you around here before. • Nice to meet you. • Where are you from? • This food looks delicious. • How's it going? • What's up? • Thanks so much. • My pleasure.

10 Expose yourself to numerous conversational contexts. Use English in a variety of situations: in language lessons, via Skype, on the phone, and in a variety of places: in a pub, at a conference, on holiday. In that way, your brain will become more flexible and will not associate speaking English with only one set of surroundings.

11 Study the table below and learn the right pronunciation of the following words. Although proper pronunciation may not be a main goal in the process of learning a language, there are certain lexical items which occur more frequently than others and pronouncing them badly will contribute to your language skills being assessed as worse than they actually are.

to cause sth | provocar
inconvenience | inconveniente
to associate sth | asociar, relacionar
surrounding | entorno
proper | correcto
lexical item | elementos léxicos
to occur | suceder, ocurrir
assessed | valorar, evaluar
to seem | parecer
step by step | poco a poco
to frame sth | formular

law /'lɔː/
 answer /'ɑːnsər/
 beard /'biəd/
 bird /bɜːd/
 comfortable /'kʌmfərtəbəl/
 'ch' e.g. chaos /'keɪɔs/
 technician /'tek'nɪʃən/
 au' e.g. autumn /'ɔːtəm/
 to launch /'lɔːntʃ/
 island /'aɪlənd/
 urgent /'ɜːrdʒənt/
 word /wɜːd/
 pear /'peər/

12 Very often, learners make mistakes when they need to build a question in English. Asking questions seems to be a little bit more difficult than building affirmative sentences. Step by step, you should learn how to frame questions in the right way. In the English language, there are several types of questions, for example indirect questions, questions with 'like', questions with prepositions at the end, questions with auxiliary verbs. In order to learn more on the topic, go to the article 'Question Master' from *English Matters*.

13 How about conversation classes with a native speaker of English? In *English Matters*, there's an article describing how to find such a teacher and what factors to pay attention to while choosing one.

14 Personalise the topics. Positive emotions facilitate the process of learning.

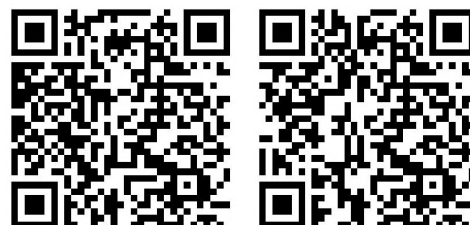
auxiliary verb | verbos auxiliares
in order to | para
to pay attention to sth | prestar atención a
to attend a course | asistir
previously arranged | programado previamente
to postpone sth | retrasar, posponer
consistent | aquí: constante
brief | corto, breve
instead of sth | en vez de
utterance | locución

15 If you attend a language course or learn English with a tutor, don't cancel your language lessons. Even if you cannot attend a lesson as it was previously arranged, try to postpone it to a different day or have a Skype lesson. Attend lessons regularly. Be consistent.

16 Remember that everyday conversations are brief. So being able to be brief and concise, instead of building long, complex utterances, may be the key to a successful conversation.

17 Don't try to directly translate from your native language into English. It's more than probable that the key to expressing the same thought in English is in fact saying it in a totally different way than in your mother tongue. For example, instead of using the active voice you should use the passive; instead of using a noun you should use a verb; the length of a sentence may be different; the syntax probably ought to be different and so on and so forth.

18 Beware of fossilisation (always making the same mistake e.g. saying 'I going' instead of 'I'm going'). Fossilised mistakes are your worst enemy. You need to combat them.



mother tongue | lengua materna
active voice | voz activa
passive voice | voz pasiva
length | longitud
syntax | sintaxis
to ought to be | debería ser
and so on and so forth | etcétera
beware of sth | tener cuidado con
to combat sth | combatir

19 While talking to a native speaker of English, remember about eye contact. Americans especially may regard a lack of it as either a lack of respect on your side, or may start to think that you cannot be trusted.

20 If you have difficulty in expressing what you want to say, you can first write it down and then say it.

21 Have you ever heard of shadow listening? First listen to a sentence, a text. Then, repeat it in order to improve, among other things, your pronunciation and intonation.

22 Expose yourself to a variety of accents. YouTube may be helpful in this.

23 Be pragmatic. Think of typical situations in which you are most likely to use English in the near future. Maybe it's your workplace, where you have to greet a CEO from abroad, or you're preparing yourself to pass a language exam. Prepare yourself to use English in such situations.

24 Define your goals and set yourself some small goals.

25 Think of computer assisted language learning. If you're a tech-savvy person, find a way in which you could make use of your computer or tablet to help you practise oral communication.

26 Imagine yourself in a situation in which you speak English. Think what you want to say, or how you'd like to say it. Practise the conversation in your mind.

27 Know your modality. Some of us learn with our ears, some with our eyes and some with our hands. Don't continue to pursue methods that are ineffective in your case.

28 Would you be able to talk in English about current events? Each time

something critical is happening in either your home country or abroad, ask yourself if you would be able to say at least three sentences about it, or if you know the necessary vocabulary. Check the necessary vocabulary in the dictionary. So, if it is election time, look up in the dictionary such words as 'ballot paper' or 'ballot box'. If a foreign director is about to direct a blockbuster in your city, look up words related to the topic of the film industry.

29 Look for a job in which you'll have to use English. Necessity is the mother of invention. Or, in this case, necessity could be the mother of language progress.

30 Create a vlog which will be documenting what you've just learnt to say in English. You'll help not only yourself, but maybe others as well.

31 How about a language audit? Visit a language school and ask for a language audit. It's a speaking test conducted by a competent person who will objectively assess your knowledge of spoken English. After the test, you'll receive a written report with the description of your strengths and weaknesses.

32 Don't avoid your foreign friends, or your future foreign friends. Visit places where you can meet and get to know foreigners.

33 This year spend your vacation in an English-speaking country.

34 Nope, the Present Simple is not enough if you want to talk about the past, present and future. Sooner or later you'll have to face the truth and start to use at least the Future Simple and Past Simple tenses. So, stop looking for excuses. Make or buy a set of flashcards with irregular verbs.

35 Strike a balance between accuracy and fluency. Both of them are

important. If you're fluent but not accurate, try to slow down. It will help you not to make so many mistakes. Think about what you want to say before you verbalise your thoughts. Control your utterances. If you're accurate but not fluent, you need to speak English more frequently. Try shadow listening or having lessons with a native speaker. When at home, describe in English every action you perform. Find a speaking partner.

to regard sth as sth | considerar

either...or... | o...o

you cannot be trusted | no ser de fiar

to write sth down | anotar, escribir

most likely | más probable

to greet sb | saludar

CEO = Chief Executive Officer | director

to pass an exam | aprobar un examen

to set oneself a goal | ponerse metas

tech-savvy | experto en tecnología

to make use of sth | usar

in your mind | mentalmente

modality | modo (de aprendizaje)

to pursue sth | seguir

current event | tema actual

to look up sth | buscar

ballot paper | papeleta

ballot box | urna

foreign director | director extranjero

blockbuster | éxito de taquilla

necessity is the mother of invention | la

necesidad agudiza el ingenio

conducted | llevado a cabo

to assess sb/sth | evaluar

strengths and weaknesses | fortalezas y

debilidades

to avoid sb | evitar

to get to know sb | conocer

to spend sth | pasar

nope | no (coloquial)

sooner or later | tarde o temprano

flashcard | ficha, tarjeta

to strike a balance between sth and sth

| encontrar el equilibrio

accuracy | exactitud

fluency | soltura

utterance | expresión, declaración

to perform sth | realizar

36 Don't say 'depend of'. The correct form is: 'DEPEND ON'.

37 Be patient. Rome was not built in a day. A day, a week, a month is not enough to learn to speak English fluently. Learning takes time, but it pays off.

38 Be a careful listener. Pay attention if your interlocutor asks you a question in the 1st or 2nd conditional, in the Present Perfect, or with the use of 'to be going to do sth'. Try to consciously decide what grammar structure should be used in your answer.

Native Speakers' TIP – it's usually the same tense as was used in the question!

39 Use an online dictionary to check the pronunciation and stress of the words or phrases you are learning now.

40 Develop your interests in English. If you're interested in theatre, check if there are any theatre performances in English in your home town. Create a music club in which you'll be listening to songs in English and discussing them in English with other members of the club.

41 Play board games with your family in English.

42 Don't ignore body language. Observe your interlocutor's posture, gestures and facial expression. Try to adjust to their body language so that you both feel comfortable.

Rome was not built in a day | Roma no se construyó en un día
to pay off | compensar
consciously | conscientemente
stress | acento
board game | juego de mesa
to adjust to sth | adaptarse
to replace sth with sth | sustituir
on the screen | en la pantalla

43 Don't panic if you forget a word. Practise describing objects, places or activities so that if necessary you'd be able to replace a particular word with a description.

44 How about a film conversation? Stop the DVD and try to answer the question the character has just asked on the screen. Or watch a movie without the sound. Describe what is happening on the screen.

45 Become a volunteer. It has been scientifically demonstrated that we remember 90% of that which we've taught to others. Try to find a person at a level of language proficiency much lower than yours and teach them English.

46 If you attend a course, or you have a language tutor, ask your teacher to use a variety of teaching techniques enabling you to practise speaking.

Below you'll find a list of activities used for speaking practice:

- role-plays
- simulations
- improvisations
- dialogues
- mini-presentations
- drills
- quizzes
- board games
- tasks with information gap
- tasks with time limits
- finishing sentences and dialogues
- debates
- full-class discussions

language proficiency | dominio del idioma
much lower | mucho más bajo, muy inferior
to enable | permitir
role-play | representación
drills | ejercicios
quiz (pl. quizzes) | prueba, concurso
to break sth | romper
flow | flujo, fluidez
speech | discurso

- one-to-one speaking activities
- task-based and topic-based activities
- balloon debates
- interviews

47 Expect your teacher to correct the mistakes you make. The teacher does not have to correct each and every mistake in order not to break the flow of the speech, but some error correction must definitely be included.

48 Depending on your level of proficiency, either in your mother tongue or in English, make a list of 50 sentences you'd like to be able to say correctly in English. Then, bring the list to your teacher. At the end of the day, make sure that you have a complete list of correct utterances in English.

49 Don't even dare use your mother tongue during your language lessons. You have plenty of time to speak your mother tongue. There is no need to practise it during a language lesson.

50 Go to an intensive language course in an English-speaking country. Bear in mind, how much time you spend each day and each week speaking your native language. Choose your favourite tip out of the 50 presented in the article and reduce the time devoted to your mother tongue in favour of practising oral communication in English. At the end of the day, practice makes perfect.

to bring sth | llevar
to make sure | asegurarse
to dare | atreverse
plenty of time | tener mucho tiempo
to bear in mind | tener en cuenta
to devote sth | dedicar
in favour of sth | en favor de
practice makes perfect | la práctica hace al maestro

PRACTICE TIME

Subject: Lovin' According to Ed Sheeran



1. Listen to the song and fill in the gaps.

0. Thinking Out Loud
1. When your a)..... don't work like they used to before
2. And I can't sweep you off of your feet
3. Will your mouth still b)..... the taste of my love
4. Will your eyes still smile from your cheeks
5. Darlin I, will be lovin' you
6. Till we're c).....
7. And baby my heart
8. Could still feel as hard at twenty three
9. And I'm d)..... about how
10. People fall in love in mysterious ways
11. Maybe just the e)..... of a hand
12. Well me I fall in love with you every f)..... day
13. And I just wanna tell you I am
14. So honey now
15. g)..... me into your lovin' arms
16. Kiss me under the light of a thousand stars
17. Place your head on my beating h).....
18. I'm thinking out loud
19. Maybe we found love
20. Right where we i).....
21. When my hair's all but gone
22. And my memory fades
23. And the j)..... don't remember my name
24. When my hands don't play the strings the same way
25. I know you will still love me the k).....
26. Cos honey your soul
27. Could never l)..... old
28. It's evergreen
29. And baby your smiles
30. Forever in my m)..... and memory
31. I'm thinking about
32. People fall in love in mysterious ways
33. And maybe it's all part of a plan
34. I'll just keep on making the same n).....
35. Hoping that you'll underst
36. That baby
37. o)..... me into your lovin' a
38. Kiss me under the light of a thousand stars
39. Place your head on my beating p).....
40. Thinking out loud
41. Baby we found love
42. Right where we are