

10 Ways To Learn English Fast



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Introduction

How much time do you have to learn English? Your answer is probably “Not very much”. We're all busy, and we're all looking for good ways to use our time. So here are TEN shortcuts to help you learn English fast.

You can do these ten things even if you only have a few minutes each day. These ideas will also take out some of the stress of learning English, which means it's more fun. (And if it's fun, it's more likely that you'll keep on learning!)

Enjoy!

Clare

1. Don't try to learn every new word

When you read a text, don't keep stopping to check the meaning of words you don't know. It will take you too long to read the text, and you'll feel bad that there are so many words you don't understand.

Instead, only check the meanings of words if:

- you need to know them to understand the sentence
- they appear often in the text

For the words you don't understand and don't check, you can try and guess their meaning, or even ignore them.

2. Use online dictionaries

I'm a big fan of paper dictionaries and I can spend hours looking at words, but doing this isn't an efficient use of your time.

The solution is to check words online. An easy way to do this is to type the new word or phrase in Google and then type "definition". For example:

recipe definition

kill two birds with one stone definition

You'll get results for a range of dictionaries, such as Merriam Webster, Cambridge, and other dictionaries.

Extra bonus: to find out which words you can use your new word with (this is useful if you have to write an email or prepare for a meeting), do a Google search for your word and then type "collocation":

exam collocation

process collocation

3. Learn fixed phrases and collocations

Did you know that up to 80% of our conversations are made up of fixed phrases and collocations? Fixed phrases and collocations are groups of words that we use automatically and naturally. Here are some examples:

Fixed phrases...

"By the way..." when we want to add some extra information

"If I were you..." when we want to give some advice

"You're welcome!" when someone thanks you

Collocations...

"an only child" = a child who doesn't have any brothers or sisters

"look for a job" = when you want to get a new job

Learning these fixed phrases and collocations makes you more fluent, because you don't have to spend time thinking of every single word. In fact, you only have to remember the phrase. They also make you sound more like a native speaker.

4. Actively watch and listen to English

There's a lot of English out there for you to watch or listen to. From on-demand streaming, satellite TV, YouTube... there are so many ways to find authentic English.

But what really helps you to learn English fast, is to pay attention when you watch (or listen to) it. Don't just have an English TV show playing in the background while you eat dinner or do the dishes. Your aim is to try to understand as much as you can.

It's tiring to pay close attention to anything, but even 5-10 minutes a day can really boost your English. If you find it hard to understand authentic English, try watching these:

- cartoons
- sports shows such as football matches
- news programmes (try the BBC)
- advertisements

5. Focus on understanding information words

Spoken English has a particular rhythm. We stress some words and sounds (we make them longer and louder) while other words and sounds are less important. So while you can often hear the stressed words and sounds, the others are more difficult to understand.

In general, the words we stress are information words – nouns, verbs and adjectives. Unstressed words are often grammatical words – articles, auxiliaries, prepositions, and so on.

To help you understand a native speaker conversation, focus on trying to understand the information words, rather than trying to hear and understand every sound. Here's an example, with the information words in **bold**:

I'm **going out** for **lunch**. Do you **want me** to **get** you **anything**?

You understand “going out lunch... want me get thing?” So it's relatively easy to understand the entire message - and even reply with something like, “Oh no thanks. I'm fine.”

6. Look for opportunities to speak English

There's no other alternative for improving your speaking than to practise it! Do anything you can to find ways of speaking. Here are some ideas for you:

- volunteer for international projects at work
- volunteer to speak in class
- find friends to speak with (real life or online via Skype)
- get involved in projects in your home town or city to help English-speaking tourists
- watch English-speaking films and take the role of an actor in a couple of scenes
(watch this video for tips: [Learn English With Films](#))

7. Check out apps, sites and online programs

Learning a language doesn't mean just using a textbook. There are plenty of apps and online programs that allow you to learn at times that suit you.

Here are six interesting ones to get you started:

[Voicetube](#) – listen to sentences in a video, take vocabulary notes, record yourself saying sentences, plus a mobile app for both Android and iOS

[Youglish](#) – search for a word or phrase, and you'll get taken to an example in a YouTube video so you can listen for the pronunciation.

[Quiz Your English App](#) – review grammar and vocabulary and challenge other learners worldwide (available for both Android and iOS)

[TubeQuizard](#) – use videos to learn English, with practice activities

[LyricsTraining](#) – watch and listen to the music videos, and fill in the gaps in the lyrics

[Word-booster](#) – type in the URL of a webpage, and the program will find the most difficult words on that page, then give you definitions and practice activities in PDF. (Great if you like reading newspapers online, for example.)

8. Read what you want

You don't have to read serious newspapers or books to practise your reading. Instead, choose something that you're interested in, as that means you're more likely to spend time reading and learning the vocabulary. So if you're interested in sports, read the sports papers online. If you have general interests, you can also try graded readers (books in simplified English) and simple newspapers (for example, local rather than national newspapers).

Reading is a great learning activity, as it helps you see new vocabulary in context.

9. Copy native speakers

Native speakers very often speak in incomplete sentences, which means you can also do the same!

Here's an example:

“My sister got a promotion at work.”

“**Oh yeah?**”

“I'm going to leave work for the day.”

“**Right, OK.**”

It's even easier to make incomplete questions, as that way you don't need to remember the auxiliaries, which can be difficult in English. Here are some examples for you:

“Want another coffee?” (instead of “Do you want another coffee?”)

“Doing anything good this weekend?” (instead of “Are you doing anything good this weekend?”)

“Good holiday?” (instead of “Did you have a good holiday?”)

Don't forget: your voice should rise at the end of the question to show it's a question.

10. Ask for repetition or clarification

When you are speaking with a native speaker, it's tempting to ask them to correct your English. But most native speakers don't study the grammar of English at school, so they're unlikely to be able to tell you why something is wrong. In fact, if a native speaker corrects you, it's probably to change the vocabulary or to tell you the correct pronunciation.

But what you can ask for is repetition or clarification. Ask someone to say something again with “Sorry, could you say that again?” or clarify that you have understood with “Sorry, do you mean...?”

Doing this type of quick check means that you can make sure you've understood important information, and it also means you can continue to take part in a conversation, giving you useful listening and speaking practice.

I hope you find these ideas helpful! Don't forget, I regularly send links to new English lessons and videos, so keep an eye on your inbox.

Speak soon!

Clare