

71 WAYS TO PRACTICE ENGLISH LISTENING



Tips for
ESL/EFL
Learners



JACKIE BOLEN + JENNIFER BOOKER SMITH

71 Ways to Practice English Listening: Tips for ESL/EFL Learners

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**Jackie Bolen +
Jennifer Booker Smith**

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About the Authors

Jackie Bolen

I taught English in South Korea for 10 years to every level and type of student. I've taught every age from kindergarten kids to adults. Most of my time has centered around teaching at two universities: five years at a science and engineering school in Cheonan, and four years at a major university in Busan where I taught high level classes for students majoring in English. In my spare time, you can usually find me outside surfing, biking, hiking, or snowshoeing. I now live in Vancouver, Canada.

In case you were wondering what my academic qualifications are, I hold a Master of Arts in Psychology. During my time in Korea I successfully completed both the Cambridge CELTA and DELTA certification programs. With the combination of almost ten years teaching ESL/EFL learners of all ages and levels, and the more formal teaching qualifications I've obtained, I have a solid foundation on which to offer advice to English learners. I truly hope that you find this book useful. I would love it if you sent me an email with any questions or feedback that you might have (jb.business.online@gmail.com).

Jackie Bolen around the Internet

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Jennifer Booker Smith

I have a Master of Education in TESOL and have spent fifteen years teaching students of all ages in Korea, from two-year-old preschoolers to businessmen and even a semester as a teacher trainer at an education university. When I'm not teaching, like Jackie, you can often find me hiking. I've taken up running recently and will soon be running my third half marathon. Teaching takes up a lot more "free" time than non-teachers

will ever realize, so it's important to recharge the batteries and being outside is my favorite way to do just that.

You can get in touch with me by emailing jenniferteacher@gmail.com. I'd love to hear from you and help you improve your English in any way that I can.

First Things First

First things first. Accept that you aren't going to understand everything. Relax! It's okay. Native speakers don't understand everything they hear. People don't speak loudly or clearly enough. They use vocabulary or slang the listener doesn't know. Some people have very strong regional accents that people from other areas don't understand. If you hear something you don't understand, don't panic. Keep listening, and you are likely to get the main points of what is being said. Understanding the main ideas is the most important thing anyway.

There are three important things you can do to improve your listening comprehension right now. First, stop translating in your head. Speech is too fast. If you try to translate what you hear as it is being said, then think of a response, then translate that in your head, and finally speak, the conversation will have moved on without you. Even if you are only listening, translating is too slow. It's difficult to stop translating, but it's important. Practice thinking in English when you aren't studying. This will make it easier when you have to use English.

Second, don't stop listening as soon as you hear something you don't understand. It's easy to get hung up and try to figure out what you missed, but then you'll miss everything else. Most people repeat themselves as they speak. This is especially true if what they are saying is important. So, keep listening and you are likely to catch up.

Third, listen actively. Having English radio or TV on in the background is a little bit helpful. You can get used to the sounds and rhythms of English. But, you have to focus on what you listen to in order to get the most out of it. This is active listening! How often do you have a TV show or the news playing in the background and how often can you remember what was said, even one minute later? Listening in English is no different.

Motivation and Goal Tips

Think about your Motivation

The best students I had during my time in Korea were those who had some sort of motivation beyond a grade in a class or a score on a TOIEC test. They were learning English because they wanted a job that required it (working for a trading company, flight attendant, fashion designer, etc.), they wanted to go backpacking around the world, or they had some English-speaking cousins or friends, etc. In my experience, a girlfriend or boyfriend who only speaks English is often the best motivation for studying!

Anything is better motivation for speaking a language than just getting a score on a test! Think about your motivation. What is it? Say it now! Write it down on a piece of paper. Put it on your bedroom wall or bathroom mirror. Remind yourself when things are difficult why you are studying English!

Think about your Goals

Your motivation is why you want to learn English. Your goals are what you want to do in English. Do you want to have a conversation with coworkers in English? Do you need to pass a test for work? Do you want to be accepted to a school or training program? In order to be smart about your language learning, you need SMART goals:

Specific- Focus on one single skill, for example, being able to understand a waitress in a foreign restaurant.

Measurable- Have a tool to assess your progress. If there is no way to measure your development, how will you know when you have reached your goal?

Attainable- Be realistic. While you should aim high, a goal of 100% fluency is unlikely for most people. There will probably always be a few things you don't understand. Attainable goals are realistic for both your

current level and the amount of time and resources you have to improve your English right now. If you have only one hour to study each week, set lower goals than if you have one hour per day!

Relevant- The goals should align with your needs and current language level. Focus on the areas where you are weak. Vocabulary? Grammar? Confidence in speaking? Listening?

Time-bound- Your goals need a deadline. Without a deadline, it will be too easy to procrastinate, or put off achieving them until you have more time, energy, the right study partner, etc.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself when you are setting your **SMART** goals:

1. Who, if anyone, will I study with? Will I work with a tutor, a friend, a conversation group, or alone?
2. What materials will I use? Books, apps, DVDs, pen and paper, a tutor, etc.
3. When will I study? Before work/ school, during breaks, before bed? Set a specific time of day and days of the week to study.
4. When won't I study? If you don't plan exceptions, you will give yourself a reason to quit. For example, if you have a project to complete for work or school, can you take a week off? A day? If you get sick and take a day or two off, will you make those lessons up later in the week?
5. Where will I study? Do you have a dedicated study or work area at home? If not, think about where you will study. If you will be studying outside of your home, choose a place that is comfortable, has good lighting, and is reasonably quiet. For example, if you will be reading, the library is an obvious choice, but not if you are meeting a speaking partner. A coffee shop is a better choice to meet a speaking partner than a bar.
6. Why is this a goal for me? Will it help you communicate with a specific person or group of people? Will it help you meet some requirement for school or work?

7. How will I work towards this goal? This puts together a few of the above elements. For example, “I will meet a conversation group once a week. I'll listen to one podcast and read the transcript at home on Mondays and Wednesdays after work. Then, I'll work through Conversation Strategies with a tutor for one hour on Saturday mornings.”

Enjoy English

Learning another language can be fun! Of course, some things are not fun. For example, studying vocabulary lists, or figuring out a difficult grammar concept won't be easy. However, there are plenty of enjoyable things you can do too! For example:

- Watch an English movie or TV show
- Read an English book that you enjoy
- Talk to some friends in English
- Go out to a foreign restaurant where the waiter or waitress doesn't speak your native language
- Join a conversation club
- Practice singing some English songs

Remember to have fun while you learn! This is what will motivate you to keep going. And you'll end up learning more in the end.

Don't Give Up!

It's normal to get frustrated when learning. You WILL get frustrated when learning English. We guarantee it! You might feel bored, lonely, confused, tired, apathetic, etc. Everyone experiences this.

The important thing is to not give up. Take a short break for a few hours, or a day or two. Do something fun that you enjoy. Get some exercise. Eat some healthy food. Take a nap. Talk to a friend or family member. Relax with your pet. Then go back to studying. You'll feel refreshed and ready to

keep going. Remember: you are not a robot! Haha! People need brain breaks. Give yourself some.

Don't be Afraid of Mistakes

When you're learning something new, you're going to make a lot of mistakes. This is a fact! This is normal for anything and not just English! Remember the very first thing you cooked? It probably wasn't delicious and it took you a really long time. Your kitchen was probably a disaster. How about the first time you shot a basketball? It probably didn't go in! Or, the first time you picked up a guitar. You probably didn't even know how to tune it correctly. But, I'm sure you got better at these things with practice.

Learning a language is the same. You're not going to be good at it when you start. The key is to keep practicing and getting better. But it's hard to practice English listening if you're scared of mistakes. Try to overcome your fear. You won't understand every single thing. Of course you'll make lots of mistakes. However, the most important thing is that you keep trying. People won't laugh at you. They'll be kind and repeat something for you if you ask them.

You can say to your conversation partner:

“Could you please repeat that?”

“I'm sorry, I didn't understand you.”

“Would it be possible to speak a little more slowly?”

Practice Every Day

Those who are best at English practice every single day. This requires some serious commitment! However, if you want to be fluent in English listening, this is what it will take. The best results come from studying 1-2 hours a day, consistently for years. These are the people who eventually can understand almost everything in English. However, if you can't commit to this amount, it's better to do something small every single day than a lot only once a month.

For example, 20 minutes a day is better than once a month for 10 hours. If you study only once a month, you're going to forget almost everything you studied the previous month and have to relearn it. However, if you study a little bit every day, it will stay fresh in your head.

Immerse Yourself in English

In my experience, the best English speakers are those people who immerse themselves in it. By "immerse," I mean getting obsessed with English! These people practice English in many different ways-English speaking friends or a boyfriend/ girlfriend, reading, listening to podcasts, attending a conversation class, studying for an English test, watching movies or TV, studying vocabulary on the bus, etc. Think in English, dream in English, speak in English! Use English for everything!

Tell your Family and Friends about your Goal

Studies have shown that telling family members and friends about your goals can help you achieve them. Of course this makes sense. These people can support you in reaching your goal. You will also feel accountable to them if you give up and fail. So tell lots of people that you want to speak English well! Talk to them about your progress and how you practice. Maybe some of them will be inspired and join with you. Who knows!

Reward Yourself (Short and Long-Term Goals)

Here are a few tips for making goals:

1. Make some small ones. If you make one huge goal like, "Speak English fluently," it can take years to reach it. It will be easy to give up and get frustrated. Instead, make many small goals. Memorize _____ vocabulary words each week. Make one new English speaking friend this year. Go to one conversation club meeting each week. Sign up for and attend 90% of an English conversation class for one month. Get a score of _____ on the TOIEC listening test.

1. Reward yourself. Once you achieve your goal, reward yourself. Get yourself a small gift-a book, a nice journal, a new pair of socks. Or, go out for a movie or dinner with a friend.
2. Think about long-term goals too. Maybe you want to study in an English speaking university. Perhaps you want to get a job that requires a high level of English. Always keep this in mind when you're studying to help with motivation. But don't forget to set plenty of small goals for yourself along the way. Put the big picture and the small picture together!

Listening Tips

Listen to English Songs

Almost everybody likes music. Instead of listening to music in your own language, check out English music. If you don't understand what they're saying, look online and find the lyrics. Lots of YouTube videos have songs with lyrics. Sing along if you can and don't be shy! I recommend the following online radio stations:

Soma FM: Choose your genre and listen! *Lush* and *Folk Forward* are good ones for understanding the lyrics.

Itunes: They have many radio stations. Just find one you like! Apple is currently charging a subscription fee, so it may not be your first choice.

Pandora: Create your own ultimate music mix based on your preferences.

Iheart Radio: They are also free, and have music as well as podcasts.

Listen to Podcasts

I love podcasts! They are entertaining, informative and you can learn something new. There is a podcast for just about any topic you can imagine. The best place to find them is in the iTunes store. They're also usually (99% of the time) free! It's amazing. Some of the ones I recommend for English learners are:

Serial (Advanced). This is the most popular podcast in history. The story is extremely compelling and it's hard to stop listening. Season one is far more interesting than season two!

Business English Pod (Intermediate). If you want to learn business English, check out this popular podcast. The dialogues are made for English learners, but are very realistic.

The British Council (Beginner-advanced). Search on iTunes or the British Council Website for their podcasts. They have a wide variety for all levels.

Podcasts in English (Beginner-advanced). A nice variety of podcast for English learners. It's well organized by level.

This American Life (Intermediate-advanced). If you like stories, this is the podcast for you! There are usually three of them connected by a common theme.

The Rachel Maddow Show (Advanced). For those interested in American politics, check out the Rachel Maddow Show.

Radiolab (Intermediate). General interest stories about a certain theme.

Slow English (Each episode discusses one aspect of life in Australia. The website has a transcript and vocab list to accompany each episode. Listen once (or two or three times) without the transcript, then check your comprehension.

English Central

Check out English Central (www.Englishcentral.com). It's like Youtube for English language learners. Some of the site features are for paying subscribers only, but there is still plenty available for free. The videos are divided into beginner, intermediate, and advanced, then further categorized by subject (social, business, etc.) and skill (test preparation, etc.). It's easy to find videos at your level which are interesting to you.

The videos can be played at different speeds and the language has been divided into phrases which you can replay, or you can get definitions for unfamiliar words. You can even get pronunciation help by hovering the mouse over a specific word.

Watch English TV or Movies (no Subtitles)

You probably already watch English TV or movies, but with subtitles in your own language. This does not provide you with the maximum benefits.

It's better if you watch without subtitles. This is because your brain will be forced to work much harder.

When choosing a TV show or film, there are several points to consider.

1. Is it interesting to you? You can find lists of "Best Movies to Learn English" all over the internet, but if the films are in genres you don't like, you are less likely to get much out of it.
2. Is it something you could watch over and over? Unless your English is advanced, you will learn more each time you watch the same show. So, pick something you will enjoy re-watching as much as you enjoyed watching for the first time.
3. Accents. Some accents are easier to understand than others. For example, Tom Hanks speaks slowly and clearly, but Sylvester Stallone sounds tired or a little drunk and is more difficult to understand.
4. Genre. Action movies will be easier to understand, because you can use the visual cues (the action) help you understand. Dramas and romantic comedies will have more "sitting and talking" scenes and more difficult language.

You can take watching TV or movies to the next level by studying the transcripts. There is a large selection of movie scripts available to read online for free at IMSDB (www.imsdb.com) and TV scripts at Forever Dreaming (www.transcripts.foreverdreaming.org). This is a fan-created site with a large collection of Friends scripts.

I think watching a series is better than a movie, and watching reality TV is the best. The reason for this is you can get used to the characters' accents and speech, which makes comprehension easier. With reality TV, you can also hear how people really talk. A quick word of warning! Don't start pulling people's hair and throwing things when you are angry. Not everything you see on reality TV is true!

If you watch episodes on YouTube, you can turn on the subtitles. Keep in mind that the subtitles aren't always accurate. Challenge yourself to watch carefully and catch the mistakes. This will help you listen actively, even when there are no comprehension activities to complete.

Compare Reality TV to a Scripted TV Show

How people talk in a scripted TV show (example: Friends) and a reality TV show (example: Survivor) is quite different. Choose one show from each genre. Listen and take note of some phrases or words that you hear more than three times. Are they the same or different between the genres? Do this with a friend if possible. It will be more fun!

Background Listening

Have English on in the background when you're doing other things. For example, turn on an English TV show when you're cooking, doing chores around the house, or exercising. Even if you're not paying attention, you'll still be picking up some words and phrases here and there. However, remember that active listening is best. Set aside some time each day to *really listen* to what you're hearing.

Listen to Fluency MC

If you want to learn English online the fun way, check out Fluency MC (www.fluencymc.com). He's a great guy who really wants to help his students learn. Jason makes up songs that are really catchy so they'll help you remember what he's teaching you. There are practice exercises, classes you can join, and lots of other stuff too.

Slow it Down

By using the speed control on podcasts or YouTube, you can slow down the speech to make it easier to understand. If you slow it down too much, it will sound strange, but if you listen at half speed, you can hear each individual word much more easily.

Pause and Replay

Choose an audio or video clip and pause it after each sentence. Think about what you have heard, then play the same section again. Do this several times, until you think you clearly understand. Then, listen to the next sentence. Go slowly if you need to. That's okay when you're not an advanced level student.

Eavesdrop!

This may seem impolite, but these days, people have phone conversations everywhere. Listen to someone having a phone conversation and try to guess what the other person is saying. I do this all the time, just for fun!

You don't have to wait for a phone conversation to eavesdrop. When you are out and about, listen to the English conversations around you. Don't follow people around like a stalker, but when you are on the bus or waiting in line, you can spend your time studying the language you hear around you. This is the most difficult language to understand, because when we talk to friends, we leave out information and even words we don't consider necessary. The background noise in public also adds to the difficulty. On the other hand, listening to the juicy details of someone's personal life can be a lot of fun.

Keep your ears open for English! Listening opportunities may be all around you.

Listen with a Friend

If you have a friend whose English level is about the same as yours, get together to listen together. Then, discuss it in English (if possible). If you aren't comfortable with that yet, listen in English and discuss it in your first language. Talk about what you heard, then listen again to check your comprehension. You can also use the audio clip as a conversation starter, whether you are listening to a news clip on Breaking News English (www.breakingnewsenglish.com) a few pages of an audiobook, or watching a reality TV show.

Listen for one Specific Thing

Choose an audio that is over five minutes long and listen carefully for one specific aspect of the language.

- Sentence/ Word Stress
- Intonation
- Numbers
- Articles
- Tense
- Subject-verb agreement

If you find that five minutes is too long and your attention starts to wander, start shorter. Like exercising a muscle, you must build up endurance. Here is one activity you can use to practice any of the above with YouTube or any podcast with a transcript. Breaking News English would be perfect for this, if you don't look at the transcript first!

1. Choose a short video or audio clip.
2. Look at the title and think about what the topic is likely to be and what vocabulary you might hear.
3. Listen or watch (without subtitles or transcripts!) several times. Write down the words you are focusing on. For example, if you are focusing on stress, you will write down the stressed words. If you are focusing on articles, write down the noun phrases you hear (“a man” or “the storm”).
4. You can stop and check what you have written using the transcripts or subtitles.
5. If you are using BreakingNewsEnglish, you can continue listening a few more times, until you are ready to complete the listening activities for a more complete listening study session. Alternatively, you could use the dictation activity and listen very closely to extremely short segments of text.

Learn about your Job in English

Open Colleges (www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/free-online-courses-50-sites-to-get-educated-for-free) has a list of fifty websites which offer courses for free online. Some of the sites listed only have a few courses, but others have a wide variety of topics you can study. I've taken courses through Coursera (www.coursera.org) and the videos have transcripts which highlight the portion of text as it is being spoken. Homework was assigned and students were expected to interact in a forum, but students weren't removed from the course if they didn't participate. However, participation would be a great way to get feedback on your comprehension of the material.

YouTube is another great option. You can find thousands of how-to videos on any topic, including your job or interests. These videos are sometimes less professionally made, but may be on a broader range of topics.

Find Topics that Interest You

There are a million and one ways to practice English listening. Find one that is interesting to you! Also find topics that are interesting to you as well. You'll do best at improving your listening skills if you have a reason to listen. By finding a topic that is interesting, you'll have a great reason to keep listening- you want to know what happens, or gain that bit of information. Get addicted to an English TV series. Have an English podcast that you wait anxiously for the next episode to come out.

Guess What Might Come Next

A common way that English teachers help their students with listening is to get them to predict what is coming next. Teachers give their students a little bit of information and then students have to make some guesses. Then they listen to the recording and see if their guess was correct. This is helpful because you have a reason to listen! Is your guess correct or incorrect?

You can do this by yourself as well. Find a conversation (Youtube, TV show, movie, etc.) Stop the video at some points and guess what the person is going to say next. Listen and see if you were correct. This can be fun to

do with a friend. Each of you can make a guess and see who is the closest. A little competition is a fun way to learn!

Listen to a Wide Range of Materials

If you only watch the TV show Friends for two years, you're going to be an expert at listening to that! But what about a university lecture? A doctor at the hospital? A news report? You probably won't do so well! Try to listen to a HUGE variety of things. Get used to a lot of different styles of speaking, accents, formal language, informal language, conversations, speeches, etc.

You can focus on one thing for a week. Then try something different the following week. And keep going! You'll challenge your brain and also feel more motivated to keep practicing. Mix it up. It will be more fun to learn English if you do different things.

Check out Ted Talks

Ted Talks (www.tedtalks.com) is an amazing resource! They have thousands of speeches on a huge variety of topics. The people giving the speeches are experts in their field. The speeches range in length from a couple of minutes to close to an hour. For advanced students, listen without subtitles. For beginner or intermediates, take advantage of the subtitles or transcripts. This website makes practicing listening easy and interesting!

Here are some questions you can ask yourself after listening:

1. What is the main idea? What is the speaker's thesis?
2. How does this talk relate to my life?
3. Does the speaker give a "call to action"? (Are you asked to do something after listening?)
4. How does the talk relate to my existing beliefs? Am I challenged to think about something differently? If so, what?
5. Did the speaker use facts and logic, or emotional appeals?
6. What is my opinion on this topic? Did it change as a result of this TED Talk?

Listen to a Wide Range of Accents

These days, English is spoken as a second, third, or fourth language more often than it is a first language. In business or travel, you'll speak English to people with a huge range of accents. So practice listening this way! It might be a bit more difficult at first to listen to an accent you're not used to. However, over time you'll get better. This will help you when you go out into the "real world" and have to speak with people.

One source for short audio clips in English is Audio Lingua (www.audio-lingua.eu). Unlike Ello (www.ello.org) it does not have transcripts or comprehension questions. But you can search for a specific word, if you want to hear it in context. Another way to get the exact audio text you want to hear is Rhino Spike (www.rhinospike.com). You upload a written text you would like to hear and someone records it for you, for free! The catch is, the way to move through the queue more quickly is to record something in your own language for another user.

Dictation Practice

If you've got a study buddy, this is a great activity to switch things up a bit. Take turns dictating and writing short texts. You can either read each text a set number of times or keep repeating it until your partner has written everything. By only repeating the text a set number of times, the listener/writer must work faster and (possibly) make some guesses about what information or words should be there.

If you don't have a study buddy, my favorite site is Breaking News English. Not only are you given a choice of accents, but you are also given a choice of listening speeds. The transcript and comprehension activities let you check your work. The dictation activity gives you the text in very short segments (with hints if you need them) which can be good for starting out. Over time though, it would be more useful to work with longer clips—just like listening in real life.

Listen to a Song and Write the Lyrics

This is a fun way to study, if you like the songs you are listening to. If you want to start with a worksheet and fill in the missing sections, there are thousands available for free online. Busy Teacher (www.busyteacher.org) has nearly 20,000 songs organized by level. If you really want to challenge yourself, pick a song and start writing. Many YouTube videos have subtitles, and there are plenty of lyric websites, so you can Google (Song Title)+lyrics.

Listen for Gist (Focus on the Main Ideas)

If you're listening to something that is a bit too hard for you, you won't be able to understand everything. That's okay! It's totally normal to only understand parts of a speech or conversation and not every single thing. The most important thing is to understand the main ideas. Listen and think about the big picture instead of focusing on the small details.

You've probably taken notes during a lecture before. You didn't write down every single word. You only wrote down the main ideas. Listening in English is the same! Only worry about the main ideas! Don't get stressed out if you miss a few words here and there. Keep on listening and don't worry.

Don't Translate Word for Word

I taught in South Korean universities for about 10 years. The best students were the ones who thought, talked, and wrote in English only. The weakest students were those that translated word for word between English and their first language. When you're listening, don't translate every single word into your first language. Listen to an entire sentence or paragraph, and then translate the main ideas, if necessary.

Take Control of the Conversation

If you are in the middle of a conversation (or lesson) and realize you no longer have any idea what the other person is saying, it's time to take control. You can do this in several ways.

1. Go back to something said earlier. The conversation may have turned to a topic you don't know much about or do not have the English vocabulary to discuss. So, take it back to a topic you can understand in English.
2. Ask a question. The question can be, "Would you please repeat that?" or, "What does _____ mean?" You can also ask a question to return the conversation to an earlier topic. For example, "How does this relate to _____?" For clarification, you can say, "You're talking about _____, right?" Another option is to ask a more general question to try to buy yourself some time, such as, "What do you think about that?"
3. Of course, if the conversation is happening during a language exchange or with a tutor, you can be much more direct. Simply tell them you want to talk about something else. Another option is to stop them, let them know you don't understand, and review the language they have been using, or get them to slow down and/ or speak more clearly.

Warm Up

Before you begin a listening activity, warm up by thinking about what you are going to listen to. You don't need to take too much time, but give yourself a few minutes to get ready by asking yourself these questions:

1. What do you know about the topic?
2. What vocabulary are you likely to hear?
3. What type of text will you be listening to? A fiction audiobook and a news story on the radio will sound quite different.

Get Ready for Something Difficult

If you anticipate that something you're going to be listening to will be difficult, do some work ahead of time to get ready. For example, maybe you're studying at an English speaking university and you find one of your professors particularly difficult to understand. Try reading the chapter in the textbook that he or she will be lecturing on before you go to class. Or, search on YouTube and watch a few videos on the same topic. The material

and vocabulary will be fresh in your head that way. Don't be shy about asking your professor for help. Explain that English isn't your first language and you want to do some work before the lecture so it would be helpful to know what she is going to be covering each day.

Or, perhaps you are studying in an English conversation class but you find it quite difficult. Do 15-30 minutes of studying before you go. You can ask your teacher which chapters you will be covering in each class if you don't already have this information.

Wait a Second

If you're listening to something quite difficult, wait a second before responding. This is particularly true in a speaking and listening test. Take a breath. Think. Stay calm. Ask for clarification. Also make sure that you don't answer before the other person is finished talking. Listen to everything they're saying. You'll have a better chance to catch everything!

Take a Level Test

If you want to check your current level, you can take a free level test at Language Trainers. Of course, they want to sell you their services, but you don't have to buy anything. The test results can help you focus your current listening goals and create a realistic timeline for your progress. For example, if you are currently listening at the A2 (high beginner) level, you will need about 400 hours of study to get to the B2 (high intermediate) level. So, two months is an unrealistic time goal.

Mix it Up

One final tip for this section is to mix it up. It's better to do a little bit of everything than only one thing for listening. You'll hear a wide range of vocabulary and accents, as well as not get bored. Do whatever you need to do to stay consistent-study almost every day and you'll see results.

Grammar and Vocabulary Tips

Repetition

“Use it or lose it.” This is a popular English idiom. It means that you have to repeat something many times or you’ll forget it. This is the case when learning a language. You probably won’t remember if you study something only once. You have to use it many times before you’ll remember forever. So, learn new vocabulary or phrases and then use them! Try them out in your English diary, or when talking to a friend. Make some flashcards and quiz yourself. Write a few sentences with the word and check with a native speaker whether or not they’re correct. Do whatever you can to keep using the new grammar and vocabulary that you learn!

Here’s an example of what NOT to do. Listen to the news on BBC once and understand only 50% of it. Give up and never listen again! Instead, listen once and understand 50% of it. Listen again and understand more (70%). Listen one more time and understand almost all it (95%). Then, don’t worry about the rest! You understand the main ideas. This is the most important thing.

Study Vocabulary

Studies show that knowing 2000 of the most popular English words will enable you to understand 95% of what you hear or read. You’ll also be able to have a conversation about almost all general topics quite easily. The key is how you learn these 2000 words. Do it the smart way!

Many students love to do busy-work. They write down a million words on a piece of paper and then write those words over and over again. They then feel like they’ve accomplished something on the way to learning English. They haven’t. They’ve mostly just wasted their time! Keep in mind that busy and productive are two different things. Make your study time productive, rather than simply busy.

If you are serious about learning English vocabulary, you need to make flashcards. Put Korean on one side and English on the other. Then, start with 10 new words a day and make sure you know them 100%. Then, keep adding 10 more every single day. Mix them up randomly, forcing your brain to learn them independently from each other. Go from English—>Your Language, but also the much harder Your Language—>English every single day. You need to be thinking about these words in your sleep! Make sure you're using these words in your daily writing and conversations, as well as keeping your ears and eyes open for them in whatever you're listening to or reading.

Search on Google for “1000 (500, 2000, 5000, etc) most popular words in English” to find a list of words you need to know.

Websites like Word Hippo (www.wordhippo.com) make it easy for you to take your vocab study to the next level. You can quickly get definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and best of all, example sentences which show how the word is actually used.

Study Language “Chunks”

If you really want to become fluent in listening, you need to have a core of multi-word chunks that are easy for you to remember. The key is to get your brain to automatically think of them together. Some examples of chunks are:

Collocations: I want to buy two BARS OF SOAP please.

Phrasal verbs: blow up, break down, catch up.

Idioms: It's raining cats and dogs.

Sentence frames: Whales HAVE lungs, BUT fish HAVE gills.

Sentence starters: The first thing that happened was ... After that, ...
Finally, ...

Conversational routines: A: Thank you. B: You're welcome.

Consider this sentence: I left my book on the desk. There are three chunks of information: I left, my book, on the desk. Each chunk has one piece of information. So, longer subjects and phrasal verbs would be considered separate chunks. Pauses in your speech should occur between chunks. In order for these things to become automatic, you need targeted practice. Study some of these things and then use them! Use them in writing. Use them when speaking. Keep your eyes open for them when reading. Keep your ears open for them when listening.

Learning chunks is really one of the best shortcuts for your brain. In fact, one study in China showed focusing on chunks in listening activities led to much faster improvement by the experimental group compared to the control group. It really isn't that surprising, though, since listening is such a fast-paced activity that anything you can do to fill in the gaps between what was said and what you heard will help you out.

It can be helpful to focus on one of these areas of language for a period of time, then focus on another. For example, spend a month or two studying collocations (words that are frequently used together). Then spend the next month or two focusing on phrasal verbs (two-three word verbs). Combine the new language with the previous language so you don't forget what you have already learned. For example, "My son *tore up* ten PIECES OF PAPER and made a huge mess."

Study Irregular Verbs

There are a lot of irregular verbs in English. By irregular, I mean ones that don't end in "ed." For example, play-played-played is a regular verb. Eat-ate-eaten is an irregular verb.

Although you probably learned these irregular verbs years ago, they're easy to forget. Review them once in awhile so you can recognize them when listening.

Beginners: Start with Basic Grammar and Vocabulary First

If you're an absolute beginner to English, you're probably not reading this book! However, if you are, we recommend starting with basic grammar and vocabulary first. It doesn't make sense to listen to something and understand only 5 or 10% of it. This is a waste of time. You need a foundation of vocabulary and grammar so that you can understand at least 50% of what you're hearing.

Having Fun With English Tips

Listen, Read or Watch English Before Sleeping

If done consistently, little bits add up. If you make a habit of studying English for just a few minutes each day before you go to sleep, you'll see results. Also, in my personal experience, if I study a foreign language just before bed, I'm more likely to dream in that language. Since I'm always more fluent in my dreams than in real life, it's a great boost of confidence!

Travel

Many people study English because they want to travel to other countries. It can be extremely motivating to your studies to know that you have a trip coming up! So plan for your vacation, and keep studying.

When you're traveling, it's best to go independently. If you go with a tour group filled with people from your home country, it won't be as interesting of an experience. My favourite part of traveling is meeting all the great people from around the world and sharing stories and a meal or beer with them. Of course, you can also use this as an opportunity to practice the English that you've been learning. Do people understand you? Great! Don't know what you're saying? Keep practicing your pronunciation. Can you understand them? Do you have a difficult time with British accents? If so, the best way to overcome that is to listen to a wide variety of accents.

Use YouTube

If you want to learn another language, then you need to seriously consider using YouTube! It's a wealth of free resources. Here are a few tips to have the best experience:

1. It's usually better to follow a set of lessons than just random ones. You can do this by finding a "channel." The best teachers on these channels start with easier lessons before moving on to harder ones.

2. If the teacher tells you, “Repeat after me,” then do it! This is how you’ll get better at speaking.
3. Most importantly, take what you learn in the video and use it in real life. This will help you not to forget what you’ve learned.
4. You can slow the video down to half or quarter speed. However, at half speed, the speech is slightly distorted (sounds a bit strange). Quarter speed is too slow and it will be difficult to understand what the people are saying.

Some of the best YouTube channels for learning English are:

1. [Espresso English](#). They have over 100,000 subscribers!
2. [English Lesson 4 U](#). More than 1 million subscribers, a huge number of teachers and many videos.
3. [Real English](#). They do interviews with real people on the street and then subtitle them in English. It’s an excellent way to see how English is used in the real world.
4. [Jennifer ESL](#). More than 400,000 subscribers and 400+ videos. They cover a huge range of topics.
5. [Go Natural English](#) Over 250,000 subscribers get language usage tips as well as cultural lessons. New videos are posted frequently.

Take up a Hobby

If you live in a country where English isn’t the commonly spoken language, there are probably expats who do speak English. Both of the authors of this book lived in South Korea for a number of years. In South Korea, you can find an expat group on Facebook for just about any hobby. For example, search on Facebook for, “Seoul + hiking” and you’ll find the Seoul Hiking Group with 10,000+ members. Or, search for “Seoul + board games” and you’ll find a few different groups that meet up regularly

In these expat groups, locals are always welcome and it’s how we met many of our best Korean friends. So join an expat group on Facebook and attend an event. You’re sure to meet some friends who speak English! And of course having some English-speaking friends means that your own English speaking and listening will improve!

Learning in a Classroom Tips

Join a Conversation Class

A formal English conversation is a good option if you want to improve your English listening skills. The best ones usually have a native English speaking teacher. We recommend this because it will (usually!) guarantee that the class is conducted entirely in English. This is best if you are not a beginner.

Ask your friends or coworkers for recommendations about the best classes in your city. Sign-up for one month and see what you think. Some places even let you try 1-2 classes for free. If you like it and think it's helping you, continue. If not, there are usually many different classes, so try another one. You'll eventually find a style of class and teacher that you enjoy!

Record English Classes with your Cell Phone

It's sometimes difficult to understand everything that is being said in English class. This is particularly true if your teacher speaks quickly, or is a native English speaker. Almost all cell phones come with an audio recorder. Record the class (with your teacher's permission) and then listen to it after. You should be able to catch everything you miss. Choose something to focus on such as intonation, or word stress, for example.

Learn from Non-Native Speakers Too

In my experience (Jackie) studying Korean, I often found it easier to learn from people who were non-native Korean speakers. Korean people often spoke too quickly for me to understand! And, they would sometimes use grammar and vocabulary that was too complicated and not at a beginner level.

I had better success learning from someone who knew what it was like to learn Korean themselves. They knew what was easy and what was difficult.

They spoke slowly enough. Try it out for yourself. Find a non-native English speaker to practice with or learn from. You might find it easier!

Jen here. My experience was a bit different from Jackie's. I actually found it easier to study with native Korean-speaking English teachers. They were used to speaking slowly and clearly for students and also knew the differences between the two languages that caused problems for learners.

So, try a few different types of situations such as a language exchange rather than only practicing English. Tip: You don't have to trade language lessons, if you have some other skill you can trade, like tutoring the other person in Photoshop. A neighbor once asked me for English conversation in exchange for violin lessons. I am not musical, but my co-worker was happy to make that trade.

Get a Private Tutor

If you would rather have a dedicated tutor than a language exchange, then there are plenty of online options. Of course, you can get a live tutor, but if you don't mind meeting over Skype, you will have more options.

Verbling (www.verbling.com) is a popular site. Available tutors are listed with their experience, user rating, hourly rate, location, and schedule. Tutors have self-introduction videos, so you can also hear their accent and rate of speech. Choose a tutor that you can understand easily! This will help you have the best experience.

Italki (www.italki.com/home) is a very popular site which offers both professional teachers and community tutors. Teachers are professionals and are expected to have lesson plans and conduct the class according to your individual needs. On the other hand, tutors are native (or near-native) speakers and their lesson is likely to be more like a language exchange, but without spending class time in your native language. Tutors cost much less than teachers, but you get what you pay for. If you are only interested in conversation practice, a tutor could be just what you need at a bargain rate!

On the iTalki platform, English is divided into US and UK. Otherwise, it is very similar to Verbling: teacher/ tutor listings have their experience, user

rating, hourly rate, schedule, and intro video. One downside of iTalki is the payment system. All fees are in ITC (iTalki Credits) which are 10 per US dollar, plus a transaction fee each time you buy credits.

Switch Conversation Partners (in Class or Real Life)

In conversation classes, I've found that students usually sit next to the same person every day. Or perhaps you only have one English speaking friend that you talk to all the time. Talking to only one or two people isn't the best way to practice speaking and listening! It's much better for you to talk to a wide variety of people. They will use different kinds of grammar and vocabulary. And of course your conversation topics will be more varied the more people you talk to.

So don't be shy! If your teacher doesn't make you switch partners in an English conversation class, do it yourself. If you have only 1 or 2 friends who you speak English with, make some more friends. Find lots of people to practice English with!

Study for a Listening Test (TOIEC or TOEFL)

If your goal is to get better at English conversation, it may surprise you that preparing for a TOEFL or TOIEC listening test can help you. When teaching these kinds of classes, I've found that:

- They help increase confidence. By practicing listening on a regular basis, students feel more confident about it!
- You have to memorize key phrases. For each kind of test, there are some key phrases that you have to remember for your answers. You will often hear these phrases in normal conversations.
- They are motivating. For some people, it can be quite motivating to study English when they know that they have to do a test. Maybe you are this person?

Don't Be Afraid to Ask Questions

If there is something you don't understand in class, it's likely other people also don't understand! Ask your teacher to repeat what they said. The worst thing you can do is not ask a question when you don't understand something! Don't worry. Teachers are happy to answer them.

If you're a little bit shy, you can ask a classmate to help you out. Just be sure to do it in a way that doesn't distract them from listening to the teacher!

Use the Learning Center

If you're a student, there's probably a learning center at your school. Each place offers different services, but there is likely someone who can help you with English for free! Go to the center and explain that you're trying to improve your listening skills. See what services the center offers. Perhaps there is a free class you can join. Or perhaps some private tutoring sessions?

If you're working at a company in a non English speaking company, they might have free English lessons. Ask and find out!

The World of People Tips

Make English Speaking Friends

One of the best ways to improve your English listening is to make English speaking friends. They don't have to be native speakers, but you could make a friend from a different country. For example, maybe you are from Korea, but you are friends with someone from France. Of course you'll need to speak English to communicate with each other.

Communicating with a friend over a beer, on a hike, or doing any other activity that you enjoy is far more motivating than sitting in a classroom. So don't be shy! Go out into the world, join some clubs or groups and then exchange phone numbers with people you think are interesting and kind. Send them a text message and invite them for lunch or a drink. Soon you'll have lots of friends from different countries and you can improve your English listening and speaking in a natural, fun way.

Meetup.com

[Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) is a great way to make some English speaking friends. It's more popular in some countries than in others (Canadians especially love it!), but there are some active groups in just about all countries around the world. Find a group that interests you, attend a Meetup group and get to know some people. It's an excellent way to meet a wide variety of people and make some new friends.

Find a Language Partner

An equally motivated language partner is a great way to improve your English skills. The key is to find someone who is as motivated as you are! It's best if you find a partner that does NOT speak your first language so you won't be tempted to chit-chat the whole time! But, if you do find someone who speaks your first language, make a rule about how much of

that language you'll speak during your time together (maybe only 5% or less?).

If you can't find a language partner in your area, consider finding one online. A site that I recommend is The Mixxer. The BBC lessons with discussion questions for you and your partner are excellent. Easy Language Exchange is also another good one that you can check out. Another, My Language Exchange allows you to browse by location or target language. You can chat by voice, text, or email, and there are lesson plans available. For voice or text sessions, the first half of the period is in one language and the second half in the other.

If you would rather use your phone than your computer to study with a language partner, there are apps for that! Tandem has over 1,000,000 users and 15 million monthly chats. There are lots of active users at this site. HelloTalk has similar functions as Tandem, but also allows you to call your language partner (for free) for better sound quality.

Host Couchsurfers

You've probably heard of Couchsurfing (www.couchsurfing.com) It's where travelers stay for free in people's homes. It might be in a separate bedroom, on the couch or on the floor. Travelers talk with their hosts and get to know each other. So if you have an extra spot in your house, sign up as a host on Couchsurfing. You'll be able to meet lots of travelers and make some new friends while showing them what's special about your city. The best part is that it will be some intensive English practice for you! English, outside the classroom is the best way to learn! But, safety first! We always recommend that you only host people of the same gender as yourself. And make sure that the people you host have some positive reviews from other people too.

Join Toastmasters

Toastmasters is an organization that helps people become better at public speaking and presentations. If you're a student, you're sure to have to do

presentations during your time at school. And if you're in a job such as teaching or business, then you'll benefit from Toastmasters as well.

Presentations and conversation are very different. Presentations require formal English, as well as a beginning, middle and end. Conversations often use very informal English, and are back and forth.

However, improving your skills in presentations and public speaking will most certainly help with conversation. You'll be much more confident in speaking! Plus, you'll get lots of listening practice at Toastmasters as well. A few hours of listening practice each week? Perfect! That sounds like exactly what you might need.

Study Abroad

Some of my students in Korea thought that studying abroad was the “magic pill” that would help them become fluent in English. The truth is that studying abroad is quite expensive and doesn't produce the results that some students are hoping for. The results often don't happen because they go with friends from their home country. These students didn't meet locals or students from other countries studying English.

However, for some students, studying abroad did produce some great results in terms of speaking English. These students were usually extremely motivated to speak English fluently. They used their time abroad really well and took their studies seriously. They took every opportunity to practice English in the real world by making friends and joining clubs or activities.

So, take a look at yourself and your motivation. Maybe studying abroad is for you. But, please remember that it's not a magic pill. It really depends on you! If you are shy and don't like to get out and meet new people in your own country, you aren't likely to suddenly change if you move abroad.

Reading and Writing Tips

Extensive Reading

It might seem a little bit strange that reading can help you with listening. But, studies have shown that doing extensive reading benefits all the other skills too. This means that by reading lots, you'll improve your speaking, writing, listening, grammar and vocabulary. It's awesome!

The best speakers and listeners of English are those that can read fluently. Extensive reading is an excellent way to learn a language the natural way. Extensive reading means reading for enjoyment. The goal is to develop general reading skills. It can be compared with intensive reading, which means reading in detail with specific learning aims and tasks.

Where extensive reading helps is that you can see how grammar and vocabulary are used in the real world. You'll see all the stuff you've probably learned from a textbook in a natural context. The key is to choose something at a slightly lower level so you're able to read for pleasure. The key is to not stop and get out the dictionary every two seconds, which is way too frustrating.

I always suggest to my students that they start with teen fiction. The stories are quite interesting (I like reading them too!) and the language is less difficult. Once you've mastered that genre, it's time to start reading more difficult stuff like in-depth magazine articles, or adult fiction.

Some suggestions in the teen fiction genre you might enjoy are:

1. The Hunger Games Series
2. The Twilight Series
3. The Harry Potter Series
4. His Dark Materials Series
5. A Wrinkle in Time
6. Charlotte's Web
7. The Giver
8. To Kill a Mockingbird

9. The Anne of Green Gables Series
10. The Chronicles of Narnia

Some of these audiobooks are available on YouTube. You can find them by searching for the title+audiobook. LibriVox, and the YouTube channel Greatest AudioBooks have the audio versions of public domain (very old) books. Since those are free and legal, the links are not likely to change. If you don't mind paying for them, Audible is the place to go for nearly unlimited shopping.

Read English Newspapers and Magazines

Although you should challenge yourself once in awhile with something very difficult, it's best to read mostly easy things. English newspapers are often easy enough for English as a second language learners to understand. Magazines are often a bit more difficult.

Listen and Read Along

English sounds quite different than it looks on the page. So, reading and listening to the same text can help you associate the written words with the sounds of speech.

You can do this in a variety of ways.

1. Websites like Ello (English Listening Lab Online) have interviews with speakers from all over the world. The brief videos have transcripts and activities listeners can use to check their comprehension.
2. If you prefer a single accent and/ or to focus on current events, Breaking News English is updated several times per week. The audio is divided into seven levels and there is even a "speed listening" option for a different kind of challenge.
3. Some podcasts (unrelated to English language study) provide transcripts. So, look for podcasts on topics you are interested in. Transcripts are usually on the podcast website. For example, This

American Life is a popular show covering a variety of interesting topics with transcripts provided.

4. If you would rather focus on English language study podcasts, transcripts are often available for a subscription fee. One exception is Luke's English Podcast. He has a collection of episodes with free transcripts.
5. Read books with audiobooks. Many Kindle books have the option of downloading the audiobook for a very low price, if you buy both the print or electronic book and the audiobook at the same time. So, just choose a book you want to read (or have already read in your first language) and start listening!
6. Use the captions on video sites like YouTube and English Central. The ones on English Central are correct, but the captions on YouTube often have mistakes. On the other hand, there are millions more videos on YouTube, so you have much more choice and are sure to find something interesting to you.

Don't Forget the Other Skills Too (Reading, Writing, and Speaking)

When you're learning English, it's impossible to focus on only one skill. The four skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing) are all connected. If you want to be fluent in listening, then you'll also need to work on the other skills, particularly reading. A balanced approach is generally the best one. You can work on all four skills easily by taking a general English class.

Study Skills Tips

Pay Attention to your Body Clock

Everyone has a time of day that is best for them. For example, if I have some serious work to do, I'll get up early and work from about 7am to 11am. Then I'll take a break for lunch and some exercise. After that, I can work for a couple more hours in the late afternoon.

What time is best for you? If you're serious about improving your English skills, set aside this time to study. Don't waste it on watching TV, cleaning the house, exercising, or hanging out with friends. You can do that stuff any time!

Take Study Breaks

When you exercise, your muscles get tired. Then you have to take a break. Our brains are the same! When we're studying for a long time, they get tired. Take a brain break every 30 minutes or so. Get up and drink a glass of water. Eat an apple. Say hello to your mom or dog. Go for a walk around the block. Put in a load of laundry. Wash the dishes. Do 20 jumping jacks. Then sit back down and keep studying. You'll feel refreshed and able to study more effectively.

Keep Cool (Stay Relaxed)

When you're listening, you're probably not going to understand every single word. The key is to stay relaxed and not get stressed out about this. Take a deep breath, or five. Chill out! Keep cool. You'll always be able to understand more when you're feeling relaxed instead of stressed out.

Keep a Journal

Keeping an English journal is a very effective study tool! Carry it around with you everywhere. Write down some new phrases or words that you

hear. A new grammar point that you've recently learned. Review it every couple of days so those new things stay fresh. Over time, they'll become "old news!"

Take Advantage of Down Time

We all have those moments throughout the day when we're on our way somewhere, or in between doing something. Maybe it's when you commute to work or school. Or that time between getting ready for school and then actually going there. Take advantage of these quick moments in your day! Put on a podcast or YouTube video, or watch a clip of an English TV show. These quick listening sessions throughout your day can add up to a lot of minutes at the end of the week!

Take Responsibility for Improving your Listening Skills

YOU are the one who cares the most about your English ability. Not your teacher. Not your parents. Not your employer. It's your responsibility to study, practice and immerse yourself in English. You know your weaknesses. Work on improving them! You can do it! Your listening skills will get better over time. Keep practicing and don't give up!

Don't miss out!

Click the button below and you can sign up to receive emails whenever Jackie Bolen publishes a new book. There's no charge and no obligation.

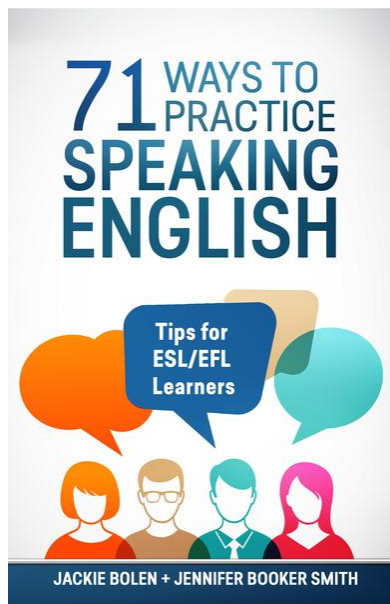
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