# Ideas for improving your English

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## GENERAL ENGLISH

### Generally useful websites and resources for self-study

* British Council’s ESOL Nexus website: <https://esol.britishcouncil.org/>
* British Council’s Learn English website: <http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/>
* Skills Workshop - <https://www.skillsworkshop.org/esol>
* BBC Learning English website - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/>

### Whole courses online

If you go to the FutureLearn website (<https://www.futurelearn.com>), you can check when the following courses will next run:

**Basic English 1: Elementary**

*King's College London*

Learn basic English for everyday situations and improve your listening skills with this online course.

**Basic English 2: Pre-Intermediate**

*King's College London*

Develop your English for use in different everyday situations and build more confidence in your listening skills.

**English Pronunciation in a Global World**

*Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*

In this course you will improve your English pronunciation skills and learn about speaking English in today's globalised world.

**Learn English**

Discover new work and study opportunities worldwide with a range of online English courses designed to improve your English speaking and writing skills.

**Exploring English: Language and Culture**

*British Council*

This course for learners of English looks at British culture and examines English in use to help you improve your language skills.

Whole online English language learning courses are also available on the following websites:

* <https://kiron.ngo/en/study-with-us/#chapter-4>
* <https://www.coursera.org/browse/language-learning>

### Speaking and pronunciation (general)

The best way to improve your speaking is: practice, practice, practice! Take every opportunity to speak. For example, you could:

* arrange regular times to talk (in English!) with friends/family/classmates outside class (e.g. over the phone, Zoom, WhatsApp call, etc)
* join a local group to meet people and practise your English (e.g. a local faith group or a walking group)
* volunteer in your local community. This is also a great way to meet people and practise your English while developing a skill and helping others
* record yourself talking for 1-2 minutes on a topic (e.g. summarising a film, giving your opinion on a newspaper article, talking about your favourite character from a book, etc). Afterwards, listen back tooth's recording and check your grammar, pronunciation, hesitations, etc. Think about how you can improve this talk, and then record it again. Analysing your speech like this should help you become more aware of what you need to improve
* speak English to a variety of people with different accents as often as you can. A good website for learning to recognise different accents is: [https://www.bl.uk/british-accents-and-dialects#](https://www.bl.uk/british-accents-and-dialects)
* work through the activities on these websites:
  + <https://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/learners/skills/speaking-0>
  + <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/webcast/tae_betterspeaking_archive.shtml>

For pronunciation, you could:

* listen to pronunciation on radio / TV / online dictionary and copy it. You could even record yourself copying it and compare the two recordings. A good online dictionary with audio is [www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com](http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com)
* listen to the TV whilst reading subtitles to help with pronunciation
* learn some useful pronunciation tips and work through the activities on these websites:
  + <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/>
  + <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcetZ6gSk96-ayXj5thbTpbh2vHWpP08o>
* you could also even do a whole pronunciation course on <https://www.futurelearn.com> . The details are: English Pronunciation in a Global World (by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

### Listening (general)

Here is some good advice to help you improve your listening:

* it is more helpful to listen actively than to listen passively. This helps your brain focus and understand more effectively. Active listening strategies include: thinking about what you know about the topic of the audio before you listen; reading the questions and thinking about possible answers before you listen; focusing on answering the questions; taking notes while you listen; analysing your answers carefully afterwards (e.g. thinking about why your answer is right or wrong)
* it is most helpful to listen to an audio which has a transcript. In this way, you will be able to check what was said using the transcript afterwards, and learn new words too. Some good websites for English language learners with audio and transcript are listed below
* listen with a purpose. This purpose might be: to answer comprehension questions; to write a short summary of the audio afterwards; to record yourself talking about the main points afterwards; to discuss the main points with a friend/classmate
* we learn a language most effectively through repetition. Therefore, it is more useful to listen to a short audio many times than to listen to a long audio just once.
* here is a useful strategy you can use when you listen to an audio which has comprehension exercises and a transcript:

1. Before you listen, think about the topic. What do you already know about it?
2. Read the questions and think about possible answers
3. Listen once and try to answer the questions
4. Listen again and fill in more answers
5. Listen a third time whilst reading the transcript, pausing if you need to. This is to check/confirm your answers.
6. Look at the transcript and highlight any useful or difficult words and phrases to add to your vocabulary book
7. Practise reading some sentences aloud from the transcript. Check your pronunciation by listening to that sentence again.
8. A few days later, try listening to this audio and answering the comprehension questions again. You should find that you can understand much more this time, and you will see that you are making progress :-)

* try doing dictations to improve your ability to listen for detail:

1. choose a short audio (or a part of a longer audio) - about 1-2 minutes long
2. listen to a sentence of the audio and then pause the audio and write down the exact words that you heard
3. repeat this process a few times (as many times as you want to)
4. when you have finished writing down as many sentences as you want to, check whether your sentences are correct by comparing them with the transcript
5. identify your errors. Which words did you get wrong (e.g. missing prepositions, incorrect verb tenses, new words, etc)?
6. try to work out why you got them wrong (e.g. you couldn’t hear the word / you didn’t know the word / you have a problem with that area of grammar, etc). This gives you very useful information about what you need to work on to improve your English.
7. listen again, perhaps after a few days, and repeat this activity. See how much more you can understand now

* listen to interviews, reports and talks on websites such as:
  + [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)
  + [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)
  + [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)
  + <https://soundcloud.com/user-375778598> - ESOL Podcast
  + <https://bigthink.com/videos/>

You could take notes while you listen, then summarise the main points afterwards (in writing or by telling a friend)

* Do listening comprehension exercises. Here are some good websites for this:
  + [www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/)
  + <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/listening>
  + <http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/listen-and-watch>
  + <http://www.esl-lab.com/>
  + <http://www.elllo.org/>
  + <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/general/sixminute/> - short audios with vocabulary exercises

### Reading (general)

Here are some tips to help you improve your reading:

* it is more helpful to read actively than to read passively. This helps your brain focus and understand more effectively. Active reading strategies include: thinking about what you know about the topic of the text before you read it; reading the questions and thinking about possible answers before you read the text; focusing on answering the questions; taking notes while you read (or highlighting important parts); analysing your answers carefully afterwards (e.g. thinking about why your answer is right or wrong)
* read many different types of texts – web pages, newspapers, leaflets, posters, signs, etc.
* read with a purpose. This purpose might be: to answer comprehension questions; to write a short summary of the text afterwards or maybe a book review; to record yourself talking about the main points afterwards; to discuss the main points with a friend/classmate
* your reading purpose will affect which reading strategies you use. Remember, you don't always need to understand every word. Sometimes you may want to skim a text for the main ideas (e.g. reading the title, subheadings, key words, topic sentences, introduction, conclusion, etc). At other times you may need to scan a text for specific information (e.g. a price, a country, a name, etc)
* choose texts which have some reading comprehension exercises (so that you can read and then check your understanding). Good websites with reading comprehension exercises include:
  + <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/general-english/magazine>
  + <https://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/learners/skills/reading-3>
  + <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/learning-english/activities-for-learners/?skill=reading>
* read graded readers (books written for your level) when you read for pleasure (e.g. <https://www.eligradedreaders.com/en/free-eli-readers/english-elt.html> ). To improve your reading fluency, try to read as much as you can without stopping. Try to understand the main meaning even if you don’t understand every word (you can use a dictionary to check new words later). Make sure that you don't keep stopping to check the meanings of words. That will not help you become a better reader
* if you want to increase your reading speed, you could try this website: <http://esl.fis.edu/learners/read/speed1.htm> . You could also try seeing how many words you can read in one minute (mark where you got to in the text). Then, read the same text again, and see if you can push yourself to read more words. Keep repeating this until you can see that you are getting faster

### Writing (general)

Here are some tips for improving your writing:

* practise your writing skills in different genres (types of text). The following websites are helpful:
  + <https://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/learners/skills/writing-1>
  + <https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/skills/writing>
  + <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/skillswise/writing/z73747h>
* remember that writing is a process. When you write, it is helpful to:
  + Brainstorm ideas
  + Organise ideas into a plan
  + Write a draft
  + Review / edit your draft
  + Re-write and re-edit, if necessary, until you produce a final version
* writing a diary regularly is a good way to improve your writing fluency
* use social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) to comment (in English!) on things that interest you. You could also change your language settings to English to help you improve your reading
* write a summary about things that you read or watch (e.g. books, articles, films, programmes, news stories, etc)

Here are some resources to help you improve your spelling:

* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/skillswise/spelling/z6c6d6f>
* <http://www.uefap.com/vocab/vocfram.htm>

### Vocabulary (general)

Useful strategies for learning new words / vocabulary:

* it is best to use an English-English dictionary as much as possible, because the definitions are usually more accurate than bi-lingual dictionaries. Also, try to use a dictionary from a well-known publisher (e.g. Oxford University Press), because this will probably be more accurate/reliable. Good dictionaries for learners are:
  + <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>
  + <http://www.ozdic.com> – this one will help you find collocations of a word (which words are often used with a word)
  + <http://www.just-the-word.com> – this website is also good for collocations
* keep a vocabulary book of new words. You could record the following information for each word:
  + meaning / definition (from an English-English dictionary)
  + spelling
  + pronunciation
  + word family (other words with the same root)
  + example sentences which are personal to you. This will help you remember the word better
  + collocations (which words are often used with your word)
* work through a text book such as:
  + English Vocabulary in Use (Cambridge University Press)
  + English Idioms in Use (Cambridge University Press)
* improve your spelling: [www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/topic-group/spelling](http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/topic-group/spelling)
* the following website shows you how words are built: [www.uefap.com/vocab/vocfram.htm](http://www.uefap.com/vocab/vocfram.htm) . You will learn how to add prefixes to change the meaning, and suffixes to change the word form (e.g. to change a verb to a noun)
* this website is good for idioms: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/theteacher/>
* if you need to improve your academic vocabulary, look at the Academic English section on this website: <http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/general-vocabulary/index.html>

### Grammar (general)

Here are some tips for improving your grammar:

* try to work out what your specific problems are with grammar so you know what to focus on in your learning (e.g. past simple verbs, or prepositions, or uncountable nouns, etc). You could find out from your teacher, or from asking a friend for feedback, or by doing grammar exercises online, or by testing your level of English using an online test (see the section above called Self Study Advice > Test Yourself)
* look at the useful websites below for grammar explanations and exercises
  + <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/grammar/intermediate-to-upper-intermediate>
  + <https://www.ihbristol.com/free-english-exercises/grammar-vocabulary-sayings>
  + <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/internet-grammar/home.htm>
  + <https://www.ef.com/wwen/english-resources/english-grammar/>
  + <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/skillswise/word-grammar/zfwfmfr>
  + <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/skillswise/sentence-grammar/zbmgpg8>
  + <https://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/>
  + <https://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/learners/grammar-and-vocabulary/english-grammar>
  + <https://www.eslcafe.com/resources/grammar-lessons>
* if you prefer grammar books, a good one is English Grammar in Use by Raymond Murphy (Cambridge University Press). This book is available in different levels, so make sure you choose the level which is suitable for you
* practise your grammar in your writing and speaking. For example:
* you can record yourself having a conversation, or describing a photograph, or summarising a film. Then, listen to the recording and find any errors. You can then re-record it, trying to correct your errors.
* if you feel comfortable doing this, ask your conversation partner to correct your main mistakes when you are speaking. This will help you become more aware when you are making a mistake
* you can write a diary entry about your day. Then, find any errors and correct them. You can then try writing it again without looking at the original one.
* when you are learning an aspect of grammar (e.g. past simple verbs), try to find examples of it in your everyday life and keep a record of how it is used to help you understand and remember it better.

## ACADEMIC ENGLISH

### Generally useful websites and resources for self-study

* Using English for Academic Purposes website: <http://www.uefap.com>
* A YouTube series on academic English: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLN3kZ8bfmMJOVkfav2CcDLJpm3PFUoD75>
* <https://www.eapfoundation.com>

### Whole courses online

If you go to the FutureLearn website (<https://www.futurelearn.com>), you can check when the following courses will next run:

**English for Academic Study**

*Coventry University*

Prepare to study at university, explore the qualities of a successful student, and learn key vocabulary in an academic context.

**Writing in English for University Study**

*University of Reading*

Develop English writing skills to help you succeed at university with this flexible program of online courses.

**A Beginner's Guide to Writing in English for University Study**

*University of Reading*

Learn how to use English for study at university or college and develop your writing skills, vocabulary and grammar.

**An Intermediate Guide to Writing in English for University Study**

*University of Reading*

Improve your academic English skills further, learning about critical analysis, using sources, avoiding plagiarism and more.

**English for Academic Purposes: a MOVE-ME Project Course**

*Università per Stranieri di Siena (UniStraSi)*

Develop the language skills you need to study in English and make the most of European student mobility programmes.

**Research Writing: How to Do a Literature Review**

*University of Wollongong*

Learn how to write a strong literature review with this course designed for research students, at any level, in any discipline.

**Learning English for Academic Purposes: First Steps**

*The Open University*

Develop the academic language and study skills you need to learn in English at university.

**Listening and Presenting: Learning English for Academic Purposes**

*The Open University*

Improve your listening and note-taking skills, plus your understanding of academic vocabulary, then create your own presentation.

**Writing an Academic Essay: Learning English for Academic Purposes**

*The Open University*

Improve your academic reading, vocabulary and study skills and gain confidence in writing academic essays in English.

**Study UK: Prepare to Study and Live in the UK**

*British Council*

Be prepared for university study in the UK by familiarising yourself with UK culture and higher education.

**Study Skills for International Students**

*UEA (University of East Anglia)*

A course looking at key skills that international students need in order to be successful at a UK university.

### Speaking and pronunciation (academic)

Useful websites for academic speaking:

* <http://www.uefap.com/speaking/spkfram.htm>
* <https://www.coursera.org/specializations/speaklistenenglish>
* <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLN3kZ8bfmMJOVkfav2CcDLJpm3PFUoD75> – search for the academic speaking videos on this English for Academic Purposes playlist
* <https://www.eapfoundation.com/speaking/>

### Listening (academic)

Useful websites for academic listening:

* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/general/talkaboutenglish/2009/04/090427_tae_al.shtml>
* <http://www.reading.ac.uk/SACLL/UniversityofReadingLectures/SACLL-UniofReadingLectures.aspx>
* <http://www.uefap.com/listen/listfram.htm>
* <https://academicearth.org/playlists/>
* <https://www.ted.com>
* <https://bigthink.com/videos/>

### Reading (academic)

Useful websites for academic reading:

* <http://www.uefap.com/reading/readfram.htm>
* <https://help.open.ac.uk/critical-reading-techniques>
* <https://aso-resources.une.edu.au/academic-reading/academic-reading-introduction/>
* <https://www.monash.edu/rlo/study-skills/reading-and-note-taking>

### Writing (academic)

Useful websites for academic writing:

* <https://getready.napier.ac.uk/pages/how-to-succeed.php#topic>
* <https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk>
* <https://student.unsw.edu.au/writing>
* <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html>
* <https://elc.polyu.edu.hk/CILL/topics/reports.aspx>
* <https://canvas.sydney.edu.au/courses/12076>
* <http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>
* <https://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/writing-skills>
* <https://transitiontoacademicwriting.wordpress.com>
* <https://www.monash.edu/rlo>
* <http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb.html>
* <https://library.aru.ac.uk/referencing/harvard.htm>
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/gothedistance/academicwriting>
* <https://www.coursera.org/specializations/academic-english>

### Vocabulary (academic)

If you want to improve your academic vocabulary, here are some tips:

* It's a good idea to start with the Academic Word List: <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/publications/awlsublists1.pdf>. There are 10 lists of general academic words that you can learn. Sublist 1 contains the most common academic words. Sublist 10 contains less common academic words. Each word is listed in its word family, so it's a good idea to learn the different forms of each word together. There are a lot of words on this list, so I would suggest choosing to learn words which you think will be most useful to you (rather than learning all of them). Start with Sublist 1, as these words will be most common/useful, and work your way through the lists in order. On the English Vocabulary Exercises website you can test yourself on the words from each sub-list (<http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/academic-word-list/index.html>). You could also try using the Academic Word List Highlighter to check your writing for academic words from the list (<https://www.eapfoundation.com/vocab/academic/highlighter/> )
* you could use Just the Word to check how to use a word in a sentence (<http://www.just-the-word.com>). This website is a database of many English-language texts. When you search for a word, it will show you common patterns/ways in which this word is used with example sentences
* here is a useful list of academic collocations (words which are frequently used together): <https://pearsonpte.com/organizations/researchers/academic-collocation-list/>
* the UEfAP website is also very useful (<http://www.uefap.com/vocab/vocfram.htm>). Here you can learn about how to build words in English, and you can do exercises to check your understanding too
* it's a good idea to build up a set of words for your academic/professional specialism if you want to study in the future. The Academic Word List only lists more general (non-specialist) academic words
* take a look at the Vocabulary (General) section above for more vocabulary learning tips

### Critical Thinking (academic)

Critical thinking is a vital skill for university study. The following links will tell you more about what critical thinking means in practice:

* <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/1/1710/Critical_Thinking.pdf>
* <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/skillshub/?id=277>
* <https://student.unsw.edu.au/critical-thinking>

### Preparing for University in the UK

* <https://www.prepareforsuccess.org.uk>
* <https://www.uel.ac.uk/research/olive/our-resources/refugees-into-higher-education>
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJsfYO6KMes> – a presentation/workshop with a lot of advice about applying to university as a refugee-background student
* <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/aim-higher> - a FutureLearn course to help refugee-background students get the information they need to apply for a university in the UK

## IELTS

### Generally useful websites and resources for self-study

* <https://www.ielts.org>
* <https://www.examenglish.com/index.php>
* <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/ielts>
* <https://www.flo-joe.co.uk>
* <https://www.e2language.com>

### Whole courses online

**Understanding IELTS: Techniques for English Language Tests**

*British Council*

Improve your English and prepare for tests, such as IELTS reading, writing, speaking and listening, with this free online course.

**Inside IELTS: Preparing for the Test with the Experts**

*Cambridge Assessment English*

Learn about the skills you need for IELTS Academic on this free course from Cambridge Assessment English, the makers of the test.

## OCCUPATIONAL ENGLISH TEST

If you are a qualified medic (e.g. doctor, nurse, vet, physiotherapist, etc) based in the UK who already has a good level of English, you may wish to requalify to practise your profession in the UK. OET is one of the exams which the NMC and GMC accept as proof of your English language level.

### Generally useful websites and resources for self-study

* <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org>
* <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org/preparation-portal/>
* <https://www.e2language.com>
* <https://www.tedmed.com>
* <https://www.channel5.com/show/gps-behind-closed-doors/>
* <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8gQK5jHSrVzDXeOFY5Lk_g>