

What is the secret to learning English?

The practical steps that a person must take to learn English very well are: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. “Ok Anna, we know that!” you might say. I am simply trying to emphasize that these must be done a lot, especially the listening and speaking. It’s not always possible to find a native speaker to practice with, so it is necessary to supplement your learning with lots of listening activities, like podcasts and songs. However, that is still not enough. Unless you practice with fluent English speakers, you will have to reproduce a scenario of ‘having to speak on the spot’, which means that you need to practice jumping from one idea to another, using idiomatic phrases, and expressing ideas that are important to you, all verbally. My experience of trying to learn French has taught me that I should really prepare hypothetical conversations in advance, practice them, and make them valid and practical. For example, I have a French friend who I don’t see very much. When I see her and start to speak French, I often feel ‘tongue tied’. I have plenty to say, but I feel unprepared. So, I benefit from preparing normal, useful sentences that are meaningful to me in advance. That way, when I see her the next time, I am more prepared. You can do this by simply writing down a list of ideas or whole sentences that you are likely to use. Add to this questions, expressions, responses to what others might say, and ideas that interest you, such as politics, sports, employment, entertainment or others. It adds to a person’s confidence to have a reliable base of well practiced sentences.

How do I become fluent?

There are so many available sources on the internet nowadays, and we should take advantage of them. Even listening to English songs or the news while you are doing something else will help

you. As you try these things, it is important to remember that language and conversation are fluid; there are often many ways to communicate an idea. You do not have to be perfect, but as you learn you will get closer to fluency. General conversation requires about 2000 words, at a simple level. Most of us who know a lot more vocabulary do not use it on a regular basis. So, you can start conversing in English before you are an expert in the vocabulary. Because conversation has someone else involved, you need to know enough to respond to that person. It is this practice of response that gives us pleasure and confidence.

How do I improve my accent?

Adopting the accent of an English speaking nation can be a real challenge. It isn't actually that necessary. As long as your spoken accent is clear, there is no problem showing your native accent through it. Lots of listening and speaking will always be the answer to improving your spoken English accent. The question you should ask yourself is: "Am I communicating clearly?" You might need to focus on slowing down, or finishing the endings of your sentences clearly, or even using less words. Try not to see language as mathematical; it isn't a practice filled with rights and wrongs. It is more complex, subtle, and permissive. So, when you learn English, be patient with yourself. Remember that any progress is a good thing. It is a goal that you have achieved, and something that you will not lose.