



Mastering English: some facts, tips, and strategies for effective language learning

Learning English is easy, right? After all, English is spoken worldwide. English-language pop music is popular across many countries, and a majority of scientific research articles is published in English. As the "lingua franca" of multinational companies, English is often the language used for communication, with many companies offering language training for their staff. Although many language learners start with good intentions, some give up after a while. Let's have a look at why this might be and, importantly, how to learn successfully.

Common myths & questions about learning English and tips to avoid them:

"I'll be fluent in a few months."

Many learners believe they can achieve fluency in English quickly but language acquisition is a gradual, long-term process. Fluency means you can speak easily without much pausing and this comes with practice. This involves mastering grammar, vocabulary including idiomatic phrases and expressions, and pronunciation, all skills students build up over time.

"Language learning is overwhelming, I don't know where to start!"

How should learners approach studying a language? Focus on incremental progress and set yourself realistic goals and milestones! Ensure you have a good foundation in grammar and vocabulary. Identify your level (do a level test), then gradually increase complexity. Aim for consistent practice, ideally in focused sessions, and celebrate wins and milestones you set yourself. An English teacher provides feedback on your language production and, together with the learner, helps with setting realistic goals and structuring the learning process.

"Verbs in English are mostly irregular"

Irregular verbs only make up about 3% of verbs in English but they are most commonly used in everyday speech. We also need them for forming tenses such as the Past Simple, Present Perfect, Past Perfect, and for the Passive. Consequently, you will have to learn the irregular verbs. Tip: Use rote learning until you know the irregular verbs by heart. To do this, print out the irregular verbs table and learn the verbs line by line in small, manageable chunks. Ten to 15 min per day is enough. Keep repeating until you remember all of them! Don't forget to look up new verbs in the dictionary and write down their translation on the table if you need to. Make sure you learn the infinitive and its Past Simple and the Past Participle forms together in one go.

“English is easy”

The way how people commonly express themselves in one language can be different from how native language speakers would express themselves in another so that a 1:1 translation may be difficult to understand. Common pitfalls are: wrong lexical choice or expressions (natives wouldn't put it like that), 'false friends' (similar looking words with however different meanings across languages), or inappropriate levels of formality. What helps here is knowing how native speakers actually express themselves. You can get this by watching films and the news, listening to the radio or podcasts, reading newspapers and books, and practising speaking and interacting with people in English.

“I only need to attend the lessons to learn English”

It is not enough to only go to language lessons and assume you're making progress. Revise between lessons so that you remember and reactivate what you learnt in previous lessons. Revision will significantly improve your learning so use the time between lessons to consolidate, practice, and work on questions to ask your teacher. *Cambridge English* and the British Council guidance align with the *Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR).

Cambridge English suggests the following estimated study hours:

- Lower Intermediate: ~300–400 hours
- Mid-Intermediate: ~500–600 hours
- Upper Intermediate: ~700–800 hours
- Advanced: ~1000+ hours

For more detailed information on recommended hours and learning pathways, refer to:

- Cambridge English's [Guide to Language Levels and Learning Hours](#), which aligns with CEFR standards for estimating study time for English proficiency.
- The British Council's CEFR Overview (<https://www.britishcouncil.pt/en/our-levels-and-cefr>),

which offers additional context on language levels and proficiency.

“Grammar is everything.”

A common belief is that learning English revolves around mastering grammar. However, relying solely on grammar can lead to difficulty with natural conversations. Instead, focus on learning and practising complete sentences that naturally integrate correct grammar. This way, learners internalize grammar through meaningful, contextualized language. Immerse yourself in conversation with native speakers to build familiarity with everyday expressions. Repeating sentences with correct grammar helps learners recognize patterns, leading to more natural language use without necessarily consciously thinking about rules. By practising whole sentences, you achieve better fluency and accuracy, since you're using the language in specific contexts.

“I can just watch films with subtitles and learn English that way.”

Watching films with subtitles in English is a great way to internalize grammar structures, build vocabulary, and tune your ear to English pronunciation. Seeing written words alongside spoken dialogue can help you connect spelling with sound and contextualise the use of language. However, this passive learning alone won't give you the active speaking practice needed to become confident in conversation and produce grammar knowingly. To fully master English, combine passive exposure like films with active practice through speaking and writing.

“I can just read books and learn English that way.”

Reading is a great way to build vocabulary and improve comprehension, but it neither gives you how English sounds nor essential speaking practice. English has many irregular spellings. Words like *cough*, *through*, and *though* look similar but sound completely different. So relying only on text can easily lead to incorrect assumptions about pronunciation. To truly master the language, combine reading with listening, speaking and writing practice.

“English pronunciation is so irregular, it's confusing.”

English has borrowed extensively from languages like Old Norse, Latin, and French (England had a French king in 1066 so some legal and court-related lexis derives from French for historic reasons). Also, English continues to adopt terms from modern languages such as Italian (e.g., *piano*,

allegro), German (e.g., *kindergarten*, *zeitgeist*), and Japanese (e.g., *karaoke*, *emoji*). This blend makes English especially rich in vocabulary but tricky to predict in pronunciation and meaning. French for example has consistent and predictable spelling rules and once learners can understand the letter-sound rules, they can often pronounce new words accurately even if they've never heard them before. In contrast, English has a weaker link between the written letters and sounds. English has multiple pronunciations for the same letters (e.g., "ough" in *though*, *through*, and *thought*) and different spellings for the same sounds (e.g., the sound /f/ in *fun* and *phone*). Rather than trying to predict pronunciation from text, a good learning strategy is to listen to and remember the correct pronunciation of words.

"I haven't got much time to study. What do I do?"

You will need to put in the time for studying in and between lessons to learn successfully, so see what time you have available in your weekly schedule. This may be in the morning, afternoon or evening. Ensure it's at a time when you have the energy and can focus on studying. This may be 20 min on the train in the morning. Use that time to revise and study and stick to it. Remember: language acquisition is faster with consistent, regular practice than with infrequent practice.

"I feel overwhelmed. How can I stay motivated?"

Learning any language including English is a journey best approached with a balance of structure, context, and realistic goals. Be clear about what you want to achieve and why. Set yourself realistic goals. Break down large goals into small, achievable targets. Aim for gradual growth. An English teacher helps with setting realistic goals and structuring your learning. Rotate between reading, listening, speaking, and writing to stay motivated. And make learning relevant and fun! Engage with entertainment: binge on your favourite series, talk shows or podcasts. Practice through hobbies like watching cooking tutorials or travel shows. Read good books. Write to a friend.

The long-term payoff: investing in your future

Learning English is an investment in your personal and professional growth. Mastering the language builds confidence in communication, opens doors to new career opportunities and advancement, and enables you to forge connections across cultures. While the journey takes time, the skills and confidence gained in fluent English aren't just tools for work; they're lifelong assets that can enrich your future.