



by ARCHITAMITTRA

The Secret Power of the 4 English Language Skills: Speak, Write, Listen and Read Better with 19 Tips

Do you want to hear a secret?

How about four?

Ready? Here are the four secrets to language learning:

Speaking, writing, listening and reading.

If you want to [become fluent in English](#), you'll need to work on all four skills:

- **Reading** will improve your grammar, expand your vocabulary and grow your knowledge.
- **Writing** will allow you to text or write to anyone in English, as well as send emails and prepare reports, which are essential in the workplace.
- **Speaking** with confidence will let you express your thoughts and communicate in conversations and presentations.
- **Listening** will help you better understand what's going on around you.

Yes, you'll need to improve *all* of these skills!

Because that's the real secret here. If you know how to speak well but your listening skills are low, you won't be able to have good conversations. Being a poor writer or reader shuts you out of most online communications and opportunities.

All four English language skills are incredibly important!

There's good news, too: You're probably already pretty good at one or two of the four skills.

Perhaps you're a good listener. Or you're confident when you speak about yourself. Maybe you're creative and full of stories. Or perhaps, you simply enjoy reading them.

Either way, you'll be better at some of the skills than others. And knowing what you're good at and where you need to improve is very important:

The quickest way to learn a language is to focus on your weaknesses and build on your strengths.

That's where this post comes in.

In this post, I'll discuss some tips, tricks and shortcuts that should help you **read, write, speak and listen better in English** in no time.

Read on and improve!

***Download:** This blog post is available as a convenient and portable PDF that you can take anywhere. [Click here to get a copy. \(Download\)](#)*

Improve Your English Language Skills: Getting Started

Learning a language takes a lot of courage and commitment, and the very fact that you're reading this is proof that you have it in you. So, congratulations!

Before we move on to how to develop certain skills, you need to do some basic "homework." You need to introspect—that is, think deeply about yourself, your skills and abilities, as well as what you hope to achieve by learning English.

So let's get started.

- **Identify your weak and strong spots:** Rank the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) in order of how difficult you find them, from easiest to most challenging. The skill that you find the hardest is the one that you'll need to work on the most.

- **Identify your English level proficiency:** You might already know some English or you may be still trying to learn the basics. Either way, it's always a good idea to take a [free level test](#) and find out where your skills are.
- **You need a basic understanding of grammar:** Memorizing grammar rules isn't a good or fun way to learn English, but having a [basic idea of sentence structure](#) is important. Once the foundation (base) is built, everything else becomes easier.
- **You need a basic vocabulary:** Similarly, you can't learn a language by memorizing the most-used words. Yet being familiar with the [common expressions](#) and knowing certain terms will help you a long way. In fact, keep a [dictionary](#) or a [thesaurus](#) on hand for quick reference.

The Secret Power of the 4 English Language Skills: Speak, Write, Listen and Read Better with 19 Tips

If you're reading this, I hope you've already done the little homework that I suggested in the previous section. If not, take five to 10 minutes to do it, especially the first two points that I mentioned.

By this time, you should know exactly what your strengths and weaknesses are and your English proficiency level. And it doesn't matter if you're an amateur (a beginner) or [an intermediate learner](#), because knowing where you already are is the best way to figure out where to go from here.

The tips below are sorted into four categories based on the four major English language skills: speaking, writing, reading and listening. Feel free to skip to the sections that apply most to you or read the entire post and make note of whatever advice you find useful.

Improve Every English Language Skill at Once!

Watch Authentic Videos on [FluentU](#)

The best way to learn a new language is to take an “immersive approach”—expose yourself as much as possible to the language and gradually figure things out on your own. FluentU is a learning app that’s exclusively designed around this idea.



FluentU takes real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—and turns them into personalized language learning lessons.

It introduces you to authentic videos with the help of interactive subtitles, video-enhanced flashcards and quizzes that learn as you do.

No matter what level you are, FluentU lets you improve your English language skills:

- Subtitles and transcripts let you practice your reading skills (and have instant translations available).
- Your writing skills are tested by the quizzes, which ask you to write in the answers (make sure you get the spelling right!).
- Listening in English is made easier with the subtitles (keep up as you watch) and the ability to pause and restart any sentence.
- Want some speaking practice? Try [shadowing along with the native English speakers on FluentU](#).

Give FluentU a try by [downloading the app or checking it out in your browser](#). Try the free trial and enhance all four of the major English language skills!

Speak Better English Right from Home

Speaking fluently is one of the most useful skills, and if you're a beginner or just shy, it may seem like an impossible task. But it's not impossible! And with some practice, anyone can become a good speaker.

Having [a personal tutor](#) is a great idea if you're really struggling (having trouble) but there are many other ways to [improve your English speaking skills](#). Check out the tips below to get started!

Practice Asking and Answering Questions

Even native speakers can stumble when they're not prepared to speak. This isn't because we don't know what to say, but rather because we're unsure of *how* to say it.

Which is why understanding how sentences are formed is important, and you can start with the very basics: the order of words in a sentence.

And one easy way to practice basic sentence structure is by asking and answering questions.

As you may already know, questions in English usually begin with one of the 5 Ws: when, where, what, why, which (and sometimes, how). Questions also usually have part of the answer already in them.

For example, let's say that you see this question:

“Who walks the dogs?”

To answer, you can just fill in the “who”:

“Leila walks the dog.”

Once you know how to [form and answer questions](#), you can ask yourself questions and try answering them. Here are some ideas:

- What are some of the things I am proud of? (“I am proud of...”)
- Where do I want to go for a holiday? (“I want to go for a holiday to...”)
- How will I finish this task? (“I will finish this task by...”)
- Where do I want to be in five years? (“In five years, I want to be...”)
- What do I want for breakfast today? (“Today, I want ... for breakfast.”)

You’ll notice that the questions and answers get more complex as you go down our list. Asking and answering questions can get you used to the correct order of words that sounds natural.

For example, if you practice it enough times, you’ll start noticing that “In five years, I want to be a rockstar” (focus on “what”) has a slightly different meaning from “I want to be a rockstar in five years” (focus on “when”), and “I want to be in five years a rockstar” sounds just plain wrong and unnatural.

By memorizing the [format of asking and answering questions](#), you’ll improve your grammar skills and help get more confident with your English speaking.

Once you become good at asking and answering questions, you’ll realize that interacting with people is often just a series of questions and answers. You can even try this with your family members and friends.

Which brings us to my next point:

Find a Study Partner to Speak With

Finding an online study partner shouldn’t be difficult if you know where to look. There are apps like [HelloTalk](#) or [Tandem](#), where you can find native

and other English speakers and practice speaking with them. Many of the users are up for a language exchange so you can teach them your mother tongue in exchange for learning English.



You can also do a quick search on Facebook for groups about English language learning and study partners. Just remember to be polite and give timely replies and you'll soon find a lot of eager learners like you who might be willing to get on a Skype call and practice speaking in a safe, judgement-free environment.

Here are two links to get you started:

- [Grammar \(English\) Learning on Facebook](#)
- [Learn English with Friends](#)

Learn the Most Common Phrases and Expressions Used in English Conversations

I know I spoke against memorizing earlier, but memorizing some things (like math formulas!) will help you a lot when you're just getting started. Knowing [how to greet friends](#) and strangers, ask for help or any information—these are some things that you can learn in one sitting just by watching a video.

And memorizing [these basic expressions by watching a video](#), will help you when you move on to more complicated stuff.

...hrases You Need for Daily Conversations in English



Just watching isn't enough, though! Make sure you repeat the words out loud. Speak in front of a mirror. Record yourself. Practice with your new language partner.

The more you practice, the easier it'll get to speak English without worry!

Get Perfect Pronunciation with a Voice-recognition App Like **ELSA Speak**

If you're a non-native speaker, learning how to pronounce correctly using British or American English may not come naturally to you.

This is where an app like ELSA can be your best friend. ELSA uses the very best voice recognition technology to give instant feedback on your pronunciation. With over 1,200 lessons and an interactive dictionary, you can spend just 10 minutes a day on this app and see the results quickly.



Improve Your English Writing Skills with These Hacks

From my own experience, I can confirm that **writing is a skill that improves only with practice**. The more you write, the better you'll get. But if writing as an activity doesn't interest you much, maybe you can try one of the following approaches.

Keep a Diary

The surest way to build a writing habit is to keep a diary and write in it every day. Since a diary is personal, no one else will read it or judge you for your mistakes, so you can be completely free and write whatever you feel like.

You can write about what you did during the day, your favorite memories or something you're looking forward to. And on days when you feel too tired to write, you can skip the paragraphs and make a list or two, instead.

If you're still searching for ideas, check [Daring to Live Fully's journal prompts](#).

Use Grammarly

No one has perfect grammar (not even native speakers) and it's perfectly normal to make grammatical mistakes. But there are ways to minimize the grammar mistakes you make while you write, and **one of the best is Grammarly**. You can install Grammarly on your web browser or your laptop and get instant checks of your grammar and punctuation and even feedback about why you're wrong.



In short, you'll get two major benefits:

- You'll learn English grammar from your own mistakes.
- You won't have to worry about sending a grammatically incorrect email to your boss, ever again.

Use the Hemingway App

Good writing is more than just the absence of grammar mistakes. You need to make sure that your writing is lucid, or easy to read and understand.

The Hemingway App helps you to do just that by telling you how “readable” something is. The app highlights all the words and sentences you need to change or modify in order to clarify your writing.



For instance, a purple highlight means that you should try to use a shorter word (the app even suggests synonyms!). Green and blue highlights mean you're using passive voice and the too many adverbs, respectively. And a red highlight is a sign that your sentence is too dense and you should edit it for clarity.

It's a fun and educational experience, so give it a try.

Try Writing Your Own Stories

Stories aren't just entertainment—they help us make sense of the world. All of us have stories to tell, but we often don't know *how* to express them. The easiest way to fix that is to [read children's books](#) of fables and fairy tales and try writing your own.

You can use the same characters but change them in some way, or put them in a completely different situation. For example, what if Cinderella

was a boy? Or what if another animal joined the race of the hare and tortoise?

Again, the goal is to improve your imagination and get you writing, so you don't have to worry about how "correct" it all is. Besides, you won't even be publishing them.

Eventually, you'll be able to write your own stories and express your thoughts and views more clearly.

Fake It 'Til You Make It

If you've joined a workplace, you may have to do a fair bit of professional writing, such as writing emails, memos, reports and the like. And it's okay to be nervous if you don't have experience.

You can get some help by looking up a template online for whatever you're trying to write, and following the pattern to write your own. For example, [here's a template for an email](#)! With enough practice, you'll soon be able to start writing on your own without the templates.

Tune Your Ears for Listening to English

[Being a good listener](#) is a valuable skill because, unless we learn to listen well, we'll never be able to understand the person we're conversing with. The simplest method to test your listening skills is to listen to something, from a motivational talk to a catchy song, and then test how well you understood it.

There are a number of ways to do this. Here are some tips for learning to listen in English:

Solve Listening Comprehension Exercises

A reading comprehension exercise is one in which you read a passage and then answer questions that test your knowledge and understanding of what you've just read. In a [listening comprehension](#) exercise, as you might expect, you listen to the passage instead of reading it, which means you need to listen closely and remember the important details.

You can try the [listening comprehension exercises](#) at the British Council to get you started.

Or, any kind of English audio can help you improve your listening comprehension! How? Check out the next tip!

Listen to Podcasts and Watch Shows

The more English content you listen to or watch, the better. You'll improve your language skills and learn about the finer points of English culture that you won't ever find in a grammar textbook. It's both entertaining and informative.

However, here's a twist to make that activity even more interesting: Listen or watch something for 15-20 minutes, and then spend about five minutes summarizing it, either out loud or in writing.

If you're not sure where to start, here are lists of some [podcasts](#), [audiobooks](#) and [TV shows](#) that you can look into.

Be Aware of Pauses and Silences in Conversations

While you're listening, don't just listen to the words—pay attention to the pauses and silences in a conversation, too.

Often, silence can have a lot of meaning. Also, body language and facial expressions are just as important in showing meaning, almost as much as the words themselves.

In short, try to be more observant, attentive and patient whenever you're listening.

Play Memory Games

There's a lot to remember when you're learning a new language. Memory games can help you remember important things by making the learning process fun!

For example, if you're learning a list of words related to food, you can have a friend read out that list while you pay careful attention. Then, see how many items from the list you can remember—and gain a point for each correct item.

Alternatively, you (or you and a friend) can select a topic and come up with a word chain of related terms. For instance, if the topic is “clothes” and you begin with “dress,” you can follow it with “dress, jacket,” then “dress, jacket, gown” and so on.

Try Your Hand at Transcribing

Transcribing is where you listen to something and write it down, exactly as you heard it.

You can take any audio/video material and transcribe it. Or, you can even try taking notes while you're listening to it—making you focus on both your writing and listening skills at the same time.

These exercises will also help you recognize the “keywords” or the main ideas, and that'll help you understand the material better.

The Secret to Reading Faster and Understanding More

Getting into a regular habit of reading will help you for your entire life. You won't only have a great vocabulary for any context, but you'll also be a

more knowledgeable and understanding human being. Here are some ways to make reading a habit.

Read the Newspaper Every Day

No, you don't have to read the whole paper (although it's amazing if you can do so), but do skim the headlines and try to read at least one or two full articles.

As you read the articles, underline unknown words and look up their meanings online or in a dictionary.

By reading the newspaper, you'll be learning some new words but you'll also be learning about current events (things that are happening right now in the world), culture and the issues that English-speaking readers find important.

Read Short Stories or Stories for Children

Reading an entire novel in English might seem scary, but you can always start with something small, like a story.

[Children's stories](#) or [short stories](#) in general are usually fun, teach a lesson or two and are written using simple vocabulary, so even beginners can find a story that they can understand.

In fact, one of the best children's stories for learning English is the worldwide bestselling book series "Harry Potter."

...nguages with Movies: Harry Potter (4 ways to use it



As shown by the above video from [FluentU's YouTube channel](#), “Harry Potter” can be used to learn many different languages. “Harry Potter” was originally written in English, so you can use it to help you master the language.

This is because “Harry Potter” is available in many formats. For reading practice, simply pick up a copy of “Harry Potter” in English from your local bookstore or online. If you want listening practice, “Harry Potter” also has audiobooks. What about watching “Harry Potter?” Well, you can watch all eight movies with English subtitles or subtitles in your native language!

Check out the video for more “[Harry Potter](#)” [learning hacks](#), and don't forget to subscribe to the [FluentU YouTube channel](#) for more insightful language learning videos.

Try Speed Reading

This tip is especially for advanced learners who already have a good grasp on the English language but are keen to improve further. Once

you're comfortable with reading at your regular speed, you can challenge yourself to read faster.

Sometimes you need to read a lot in a short span of time. Speed-reading allows you to do that, but you need lots of practice to perfect it. By reading and understanding faster, you save yourself a lot of time and increase your focus. It also helps you pick out the most important information from whatever you're reading, instead of focusing on small details or stopping to look up every word you don't know.

There are many techniques for this. The simplest is to set a timer and skim over the text. You can also use your finger or a pointer (like a pen) to drag over the text as you read. Or, you can focus on the headings, the beginning and the ending of a body of text, since those areas cover the main points.

Here's a quick hint: Try to silence the voice in your head that reads along with you and you'll find yourself reading a lot faster!

To get an introduction to the topic as well as some links to the techniques I've mentioned, [Life Hacker's post about speed reading](#) is a good place to start.

Solve Comprehension Exercises

Finally, to check if your reading and understanding skills have improved, try [solving a few comprehension exercises](#) online. Just choose the difficulty level and get going.

Solving a short comprehension exercise or two each week is a great way to watch your skills improve.

The secret is out! You now know the four major English language skills you should be targeting in your studies, and plenty of tips to help you do so.

We're not saying it's going to be easy. Learning a language takes a lot of patience, dedication and passion, but if you stick to it, the rewards are magnificent. Mastering English not only improves your job prospects, but it also opens up a whole new way of thinking, as well as connects you to over two billion people who also speak the same language.

And isn't that a wonderful feeling?

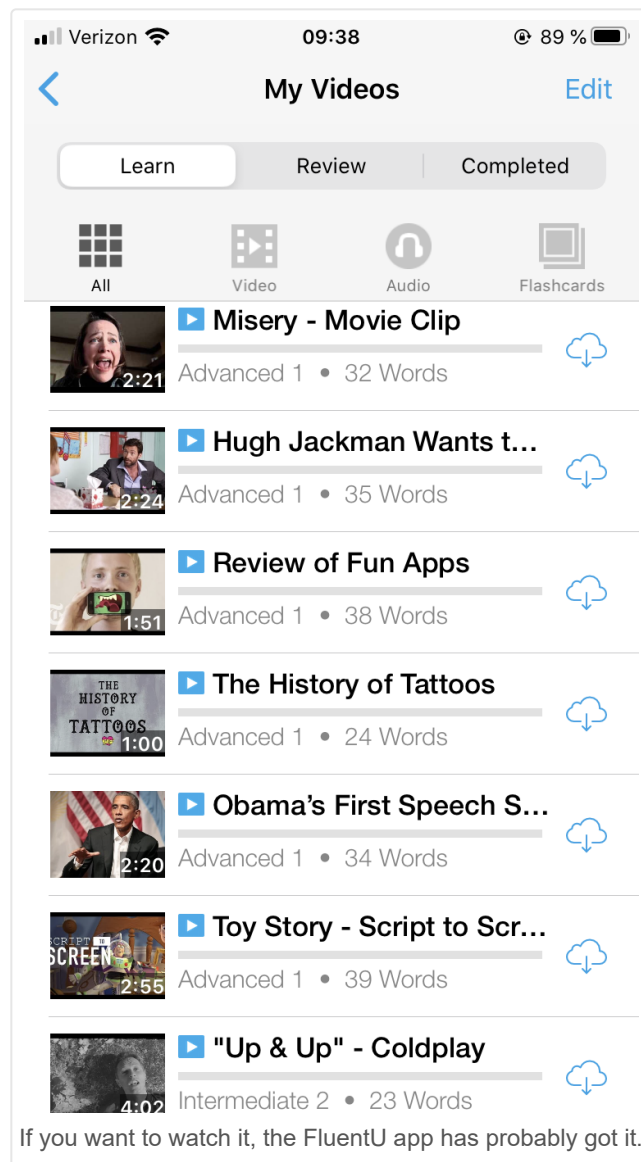
Happy learning!

***Archita Mittra** is a freelance writer, journalist, editor and educator. Feel free to check out [her blog](#) or contact her for freelancing/educational inquiries.*

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And One More Thing...

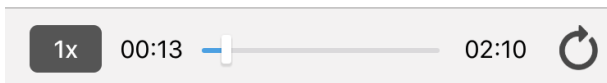
If you like learning English through movies and online media, you should also check out FluentU. [FluentU lets you learn English from popular talk shows, catchy music videos and funny commercials](#), as you can see here:



The FluentU app and website makes it really easy to watch English videos. There are captions that are interactive. That means you can tap on any word to see an image, definition, and useful examples.



Well, a friend of mine,
Steven Spielberg, told
me to look on the Harlem
Village Academy
website and I was blown
away by it,



FluentU lets you learn engaging content with world famous celebrities.

For example, when you tap on the word "searching," you see this:

Quit

Learn this word [Already know](#)



searching

verb present participle to try to find;
to look for



I spent an hour **searching** for
my keys.



Continue

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Learn all the vocabulary in any video with quizzes. Swipe left or right to see more examples for the word you're learning.



Fill in the blank [Already know](#)



I spent three years ____ for
that company.



Hint: (verb) (present participle) to perform an
activity that is not for leisure, typically as part
of a job

w o r k i n g

Correct!
+20

Continue

FluentU helps you learn fast with useful questions and
multiple examples. [Learn more.](#)

The best part? FluentU remembers the vocabulary that you're learning. It recommends examples and videos to you based on the words you've already learned. You'll have a truly personalized experience.

Start using FluentU on the website with your computer or tablet or, better yet, [download the FluentU app from the iTunes or from the Google Play store](#).

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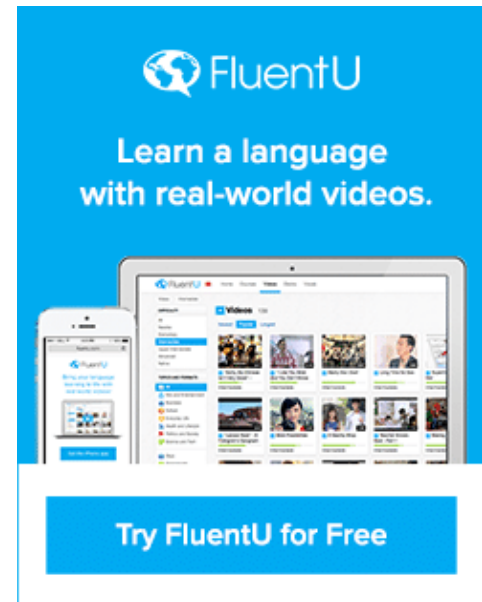


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