

**Transcription:**

**Amy:** Hi, everybody, this is Amy from realenglishconversations.com, and today I have another one of these advice podcasts where I'm going to give you some advice about how to learn English in a more efficient way and to make sure that you're focusing on the right things, so that you can start making progress forward faster with your English and working toward fluency.

So today I'm going to talk about something that's related to learning the right type of vocabulary to help you become fluent and really talking about the most common error that I see students making over and over and over again that I'm working with.

To get started I just need to explain how students generally at an intermediate or an advanced level or any level really think about vocabulary and how they're studying English.

And generally, with most people, if you're reading a newspaper or maybe a novel or you're watching a TV series, if you hear a brand-new word, you're probably going to write it down or look it up in a dictionary and try to learn it. And that's sort of our strategy for learning new vocabulary, and that's why it's called new vocabulary.

But what happens is when we reach this intermediate to advanced level of the language, we have this gigantic pile of new vocabulary that we've taken the time to learn, but then we're not really able to use any of it, and we realize that a lot of the vocabulary that we learned and use that precious brain space and that memory power isn't exactly useful either.

So I have a small strategy, something that you can implement and start using immediately to help you to create a better filter that's going to help you to be able to determine if a word or a phrase is something that you will use at the current level that you have of the language.

The frequency that the word is used in communication is definitely going to be the thing that tells us whether or not it's worth learning. So, for example, if you are an intermediate student or even a pre-intermediate student, if you see a word and you think, hmm, that's a new word, ok?

The next question I want you to think is OK for that word is that a common word? Is that one that I've used in my own speaking in my native language? Have I used that word within the last week, like within the last seven days? Have I used it? And really, that's a lot of speaking in your native language. If you have not used that word or a similar

expression in your native language, I would say that is probably not a very important word for you at this stage as an intermediate student. So just forget about it. Let it go.

If it's a high-frequency word, you're going to see it many times. You don't need to worry about writing down every single new word that you see in the language. Focus on the ones that are high frequency because you need to put all of your energy into these words that are useful so that you can start using them and therefore remember them and help you with your fluency.

Now, as we move up the scale, let's say that you're an upper-intermediate, let's expand that window by another week. Have you used that word within the last two weeks? Is that something that's similar to your native language? You use it all the time. OK, great. Learn it, write it down, make an effort to learn it and use it. But if it's something that you probably haven't said in the last two weeks, like, again, that's a lot of speaking. You haven't used that word. I mean, if you don't use it in your native language, it's going to be very unlikely that you use it in English in a language that you still haven't mastered yet and you're still not fluent in. So, probably not a good use of your brain space if you haven't used it within the last two weeks in your native language.

And I know that these phrases and words, they don't always translate perfectly. But I think you're getting an idea of the importance based on frequency.

Now, as you get to this advanced level, let's say you're a C one advanced, it is important to continue to grow your vocabulary, and at this point, you should have a richer vocabulary that's more descriptive. And instead of having the basic verbs, you want to be able to use more specific verbs. And it takes time and this is a lot of vocabulary, but you can still apply the same filter, is this something that I have used within the last month? OK? Is this something that I'm likely going to need once a month? Because, I mean, again, that's a lot of vocabulary. That's a lot of speaking and also a lot of effort to try to remember a word that you're only going to be using once a month, maybe like you're probably going to forget it before you remember it or use it again, OK.

So it's not really a good use of brain space to remember very infrequently used words. And this is kind of the situation that's going to happen all the way up to fluency. But when you get to those higher levels of the language, it becomes a lot easier to remember new vocabulary because you have connections to other words and you understand the context with so much detail that this sort of vocabulary just sort of absorbs in your mind with a lot less effort than it does at the lower levels.

So a lot of students this is the mistake, this is the mistake that I see all the time. They really enjoy TED talks and really advanced and formal type of communication, kind of like TED talks, that's a really familiar one. So I'm going to talk about that one. And I know that a lot of you love TED talks and not just because of the language and the vocabulary, but because of the content. And if you're watching a TED talk for the content, because you find it interesting and you love the topics that they're discussing, then absolutely continue listening to them and enjoying that type of content.

But in terms of vocabulary, it's probably not a very good source of vocabulary to improve your fluency.

Remember, I focus on fluency and being able to have everyday conversations in any sort of situation with that really the core of the English language and the type of vocabulary that the majority of people in TED talks are using in their speeches is very advanced, very specific and very precise for the purpose of their presentation.

And a lot of my students don't realize that TED talks and similar types of speeches, the presenters are actually rehearsing their presentation for months and months and months to be able to have just to have the most impactful speech that they can have while they have this once in a lifetime opportunity to present on a TED talk stage.

So trust me, if you're an advanced level speaker and you have the opportunity to perform or to be on the stage at a TED talk, you are going to have months to be able to perfect your speech as well. And the type of language that those people are using in that speech is not the type of language that they use in everyday communication. And it's really important to realize that.

Recently I had a student and she's a lady that is living in the United States and has an incredible level of English, but she was constantly feeling like her English wasn't good enough. And I got to the bottom of where this was coming from, and she had been comparing English fluency with people that have extraordinary communication skills or people that are presenting on a TED talk stage, or maybe somebody who's a really powerful interviewer with these extraordinary skills.

And once we identified that this was the comparison and what she felt was what fluency looked like, that was when things started to change and her confidence increased and she stopped feeling this desperation to learn all of this vocabulary, because, "in order to be fluent, I guess you have to know all of this vocabulary and be able to use it spontaneously at a moment's notice any time in a conversation."

And that is simply not true.

You can be fluent using regular everyday vocabulary, just like the words that I have been using in this podcast, I would consider that I am a fluent speaker and nothing that I've said here has been extraordinary.

And I just want you to think about that. If you learn the most common vocabulary, you also are going to be able to express your ideas clearly. But that vocabulary, that core vocabulary, you need to be able to use it really, really well.

And a lot of students are skipping over that step. They're on this mission to find. New new new new, and they're not working on what they know kind of, but it's not really

active in their vocabulary, meaning that it's not something that you can use quickly and automatically, and that is something that can change and make a huge difference in your ability to speak with more fluency.

So, thanks for listening today, guys, and I'll see you next time in the next podcast.