



## PRACTICAL WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR FLUENCY IN ENGLISH

### How fluent in English are you?



Figure 1: Your fluency reflects your listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.  
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Communicating fluently in English allows you to connect with people, participate, and solve problems in American society. Fluent communication requires understanding what is being spoken or read and being able to produce fluid, well-pronounced, and accurate messages in return by speaking and writing. How fluent are you? Do you understand everything you read or hear? Do the people you communicate with understand you?

This resource offers English Language Learners strategies for acquiring greater fluency in English. Most of the strategies involve the simultaneous use of two or more literacy skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. You may already use some of the suggested tools such as dictionaries, television, or social media--excellent! By now seeing these mediums as ways to advance your language learning, you will have more opportunities to practice and improve your fluency in English.

### Developing Listening Skills: Could you repeat that, please?



Figure 2: How much you understand of what you hear depends on your listening skills.  
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Whenever you engage in a conversation, watch TV, participate in class, or attend a meeting at work, you are listening. But are you also understanding? In order to make sense of the spoken word, you must develop strong listening skills, and this takes practice and patience. Here are some tips for improving your listening skills in English:

**Get to know the English Sound System:** [Consonants](#), [Vowels](#), and [Blends](#). When you first heard English, it probably sounded like a long strand of sounds with some pauses and pitch changes. Learning to recognize the different sounds of the language will help you identify syllables, words, and sentences, and finally general content and ideas.

**Listen for Key Words that Carry Meaning:** English speakers emphasize “[content words](#)” that carry meaning more than “[function words](#)” that help modify words and connect sentence parts together, so instead of striving to catch every word and becoming overwhelmed with excess information, listen for the emphasized words. Comprehension will come much easier. Table 1 lists some categories of function and content words.

**Table 1: Function and Content Word Categories**

Function	Content
Articles	Adjectives
Auxiliary verbs	Adverbs
Conjunctions	Interjections
Modal verbs	Nouns
Participles	Numbers
Prepositions	Verbs (main)
Pronouns	Questions words



## Do Americans speak too fast?

Many English Language Learners would answer “Yes” to that question. What surprises many is that the speed of native speech is not the problem; the spacing between the words is. In spoken English, words are commonly linked together, made into contractions, or reduced by turning two or more words into one sound. For example, when a word that begins with a vowel follows a word that ends in a consonant, the words **link** together with no pause between them. Table 2 provides examples of linking, contractions, and reductions in spoken English.

**Table 2: Examples of Linking, Contractions, and Reductions**

<b>Linking</b>	<i>Turn off</i> sounds like <i>Tur noff</i>
	<i>I'm online</i> sounds like <i>I monline</i>
	<i>That's enough</i> sounds like <i>That senough</i>
<b>Contractions</b>	<i>Can not</i> becomes <i>can't</i>
	<i>Do not</i> becomes <i>don't</i>
	<i>I am</i> becomes <i>I'm</i>
	<i>Was not</i> becomes <i>wasn't</i>
	<i>You are</i> becomes <i>you're</i>
<b>Reductions</b>	<i>What did you do?</i> sounds like <i>Wadjado?</i>
	<i>Beans and rice</i> sounds like <i>beans-n-rice</i>
	<i>It's for you</i> sounds like <i>It's fer you</i>
	<i>Some of</i> sounds like <i>some uh</i>

For Web sites that offer free listening activities, refer to Table 3. (**Note:** The external Web sites linked to this resource are not owned by or affiliated with Kaplan University, so please adhere to each one's privacy policy and support service when using them.) We share these sites to encourage you to engage in as much literacy skill practice as possible and to take advantage of the many free resources available online.

**Table 3: Online Listening Resources**



Figure 3: Headphones for online listening resources.  
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<b>Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab</b>	<a href="http://www.esl-lab.com">www.esl-lab.com</a>
<b>Arlyn Freed's ESL/EFL Listening Resources</b>	<a href="http://www.eslhome.com/esl/listen/">http://www.eslhome.com/esl/listen/</a>
<b>American English Pronunciation Practice</b>	<a href="http://www.manythings.org/pp/">http://www.manythings.org/pp/</a>

## “Enuf” is enough?

English is not a phonetic language; words are not always spelled the way they sound, so listening while simultaneously reading will improve your fluency by helping you identify the way written words sound and the way spoken words are written. Listening to news programs, e-books, recorded speeches, and lectures while reading the transcripts will also help you acquire the way ideas are organized in English, which is important for being able to follow along and take notes. Table 4 lists Web sites where you can read along as you listen to English spoken by native speakers:



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Table 4: Online Radio and News Sources



Figure 4: Reading as you listen helps you acquire the spelling, pronunciation, and organization of written and spoken English. ©2013 Jupiterimages

Voice of America	<a href="http://www.voanews.com/learningenglish/home/">http://www.voanews.com/learningenglish/home/</a>
Repeat After Us	<a href="http://www.repeatafterus.com/">http://www.repeatafterus.com/</a>
National Public Radio	<a href="http://www.npr.org/">http://www.npr.org/</a>
American Rhetoric	<a href="http://www.americanrhetoric.com/">http://www.americanrhetoric.com/</a>
Lecture Fox	<a href="http://lecturefox.com">http://lecturefox.com</a>
Speech Archive	<a href="http://www.abacon.com/pubspeak/histsit.html">http://www.abacon.com/pubspeak/histsit.html</a>

### Say, “Yes!” to subtitles



Figure 5: Watch TV in English while using subtitles. Photo: (C) 2013 Jupiterimages

Television services offer subtitle options as well as programming in various languages. Watching programs in English and referring to subtitles in your first language to maintain the show’s context or clarify a new word can improve your listening skills and show you how English speakers use gestures to construct meaning.

Watching a program in your native language and then watching it in English will also promote greater fluency. Since you will already have knowledge about the subject, you can compare the different ways speakers of English and speakers of your first language present the same content. Awareness of the differences can reduce the tendency to translate what you hear into your native language to understand. Instead, you will begin thinking in English to understand, and that is a true sign of fluency development.

### Developing Conversation Skills: Let’s talk!

The best way to acquire a language is by engaging in conversation with an English-speaking peer, colleague, or friend who is patient and willing to help you along. Conversations complete the circle of communication: you listen, speak, give back feedback, and listen again. Gestures can also help you convey your meaning and ask for clarification. In fact, being able to stop the conversation and start again to get clarification or feedback is the reason that conversation is the most useful technique for acquiring a new language. If your circle of native English speakers is limited and you enjoy going to church or the movies or if you practice sports, do so in an English-only environment. For online conversation practice, refer to the Web sites given in Table 5:



**Table 5: Online Conversation Practice in English**

Learn English on Skype	<a href="http://www.learnenglish.de/learnenglishonskype.html">http://www.learnenglish.de/learnenglishonskype.html</a>
Learn English on Second Life	<a href="http://www.learnenglish.de/learnenglishonsecondlife.html">http://www.learnenglish.de/learnenglishonsecondlife.html</a>
Play Interactive Vocabulary Games	<a href="http://www.vocabulary.co.il/">http://www.vocabulary.co.il/</a>
Create and Comment on Voicethread	<a href="http://voicethread.com/?#q+Practice+English">http://voicethread.com/?#q+Practice+English</a>

## Understanding Idioms: “Easy as pie”? What “pie”?

Dictionaries are essential for progress in reading and writing. In addition to defining words, many dictionaries define idioms such as “easy as pie,” which are cultural expressions without literal translations. Academic dictionaries and word lists are especially important for college-level English Language Learners. Table 6 provides links to popular dictionaries, printed and online:

**Table 6: Dictionaries and Academic Word Lists**

Printed Dictionaries (and CDs)	Online Dictionaries	Online Idiom and Visual Dictionaries	Academic Dictionaries and Word Lists
<a href="#"><u>Longman Dictionary of the American Language with Thesaurus</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Cambridge “Double-Click Dictionary” download</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Visual Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>The Academic Word List from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>World Web download</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>The Visual Dictionary</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Wiktionary: Academic Word List</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Heinle’s Newbury House Dictionary of American Language</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Macmillan Dictionary</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Cambridge Dictionaries Online (Including an Idiom Dictionary)</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Academic Content Dictionary (iPhone/iPod APP)</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>American Heritage Dictionary for Learners of English</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Merriam-Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>The Penguin Dictionary of English Idioms</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Focus on Vocabulary 2: Mastering the Academic Word List, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition</u></a>

*Note: Dictionaries for purchase link to their respective publishing house Web sites. Visit book-selling sites such as Amazon.com for the same books at discounted prices, e-reader versions, and purchaser reviews.*



# Kaplan University Writing Center

## Developing Writing Skills: \*P.S. Don't forget to write!



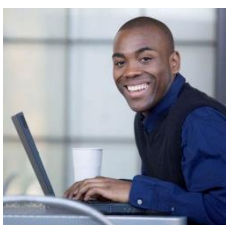
Figure 6: \*For American English Speakers, the tradition of writing letters home often included the postscript (P.S.) remark: "Don't forget to write!" © 2013 Jupiterimages.

Becoming a strong writer in English involves the same guiding principles as developing listening skills in English: formal learning along with practice in your everyday life.

Courses in grammar and English composition provide instruction and activities for learning college-level and academic writing, but unless the courses are designed for second language speakers, they will not likely include instruction on word order, verb tenses, or the peculiar uses of articles, gerunds, and infinitives. Nor will they address the cultural aspects and expectations or writing in English that influence sentence structure, paragraph development, and essay organization.

The Kaplan University Writing Center therefore provides instructional resources and tutoring services for English Language Learners who are developing their writing skills in English. \*You can access these resources and more using the links below:

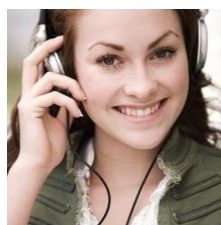
## KUWC Support for English Language Learners



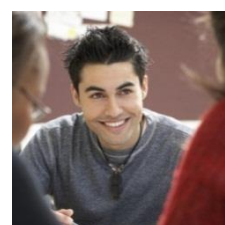
[Writing an Essay in English](#)



[ELL Glossary of Grammar and Writing Terms](#)



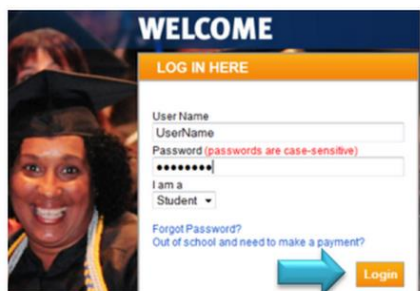
[ELL Resource Library and Workshop Archives](#)



[ELL Tutoring and Outreach Program](#)

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\*To access the ELL Support links (above), log in to [KU Campus](#), select Academic Support Center on the My Studies dropdown menu, then click English Language Learners as shown in Figure 7 (below).



KU Campus Log In



My Studies > Academic Support Center



Writing Center Menu

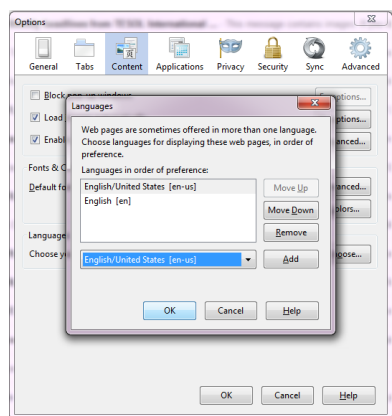




# Kaplan University Writing Center

## Developing Reading Skills: Immerse Yourself in English, *Virtually*

Reading in English is fundamental to language acquisition, and in an online-academic environment, being a strong reader is important for academic success. More resources on developing reading skills are available in the ELL Resource Library. However, for one last practical way to develop greater proficiency in English, we recommend immersing yourself in an all-English online environment where every word you read is in English. Logging into KU is a start! Here are some tips for an even fuller English-immersion experience online:



**Change the settings of your Internet browser and email to English:** Learning email terms and commands in English and retrieving your Internet search results in English will make you more adept at using email for academic purposes. Collaborating with classmates and conducting research will be easier if you already use the same terms as your classmates and instructors for downloading attachments and conducting searches on the Web.

Figure 8: Set your browser's language option to English/United States. Shown here is the options window of the Firefox browser

### Post your social media updates in English:

Posting, commenting, and “liking” social media pages in English will immerse you in the nuances of written, conversational English and provide you more chances to practice conversing in English as well. Table 8 provides some sites to get you started:

Table 8: KU and KUWC Social Media Sites

	<a href="#">Kaplan University Facebook Page</a> <a href="#">Kaplan University Writing Center Facebook Page</a>
	<a href="#">Kaplan University Twitter Page</a> <a href="#">Kaplan University Writing Center Twitter Page</a>
	<a href="#">Kaplan University Video Library</a>
	<a href="#">Kaplan University (Official) Linked in Page</a>
	<a href="#">Kaplan University Google+ Page</a>
	<a href="#">Kaplan University Community Center</a>

***Most importantly, to improve your fluency in English, believe you can do it, practice, and persist! The Writing Center is here to help!***