33 ways to speak better English – without taking classes

[Smart Learning Strategies](http://britishenglishcoach.com/category/smart-ways-to-learn-english/)

If you’re reading this, I imagine you want to communicate with confidence and competence in English.

When we communicate effectively we are able to express our ideas and opinions, share experiences, and build relationships with others. When we struggle to express ourselves, we feel unvalued and insecure. As human beings, we want to participate in group discussions and have an impact on the society around us.

In the modern world, we communicate across borders. English is the closest thing we have to an international language.

**By speaking better English, people all over the world can hear our voice. But, to speak better English, you need a teacher, don’t you? You need to take English classes, right?**

Well, English teachers and English classes definitely help. But, studying English for a few hours a week may not improve your spoken English very much.

**What you need is to become a self-directed learner, somebody who takes responsibility for their own learning and creates their own learning program to develop their English.**

Now, it’s certainly true that speaking is a social activity and is best done with other people. However, you could say the same about many activities.  Leo Messi became a wonderful football player because he spent hours every day for many years practicing by himself.

**You can do the same with your English. Here are 33 ways to speak better English, without going to classes.**

**1. Record yourself speaking English**. Listening to yourself can be strange at first but you get used to it. Listen to a recording of a fluent English speaker (a short audio file) and then record yourself repeating what they said. Compare the difference and try again. Humans are natural mimics so you will find yourself getting better and better. [Sound cloud](https://soundcloud.com/) is an excellent tool for voice recording as you or your teacher can make notes about your errors.

**2. Read aloud, especially dialogue**. Reading aloud is not the same as speaking naturally. However, it is very useful for exercising the vocal muscles. Practice for 5 or 10 minutes a day and you will begin to notice which sounds are difficult for you to produce. Find transcripts of natural dialogues, [such as these here](http://www.teacherjoe.us/NYBJ.html), and practice acting them with a friend, you will also learn common phrases which we use when speaking.

**3. Sing along to English songs while you’re driving or in the shower**. The lyrics to pop songs are often conversational so you can learn lots of common expressions by listening to them. Humans are also able to remember words when used together with music which is why it is difficult to remember poems but easy to remember the words to songs.[Here are some songs to get started with](http://www.esolcourses.com/topics/learn-english-with-songs.html).

**4. Watch short video clips and pause and repeat what you hear**. YouTube is an amazing resource for language learners and you probably already have your favourite clips. My advice is to watch short clips and really study them. With longer videos, you may find your attention wanders. The key to improving by watching videos is to really listen carefully and use the pause button to focus on sounds and words. Many YouTube videos now have captions.

**5. Learn vowel and consonant sounds in English.** The Phonemic chart is a list of the different vowel and consonant sounds in English. Learning how to make these sounds and then using them to pronounce words correctly will really help you speak English clearly. [This is a great resource from the British Council](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/phonemic-chart).

**6. Learn and identify schwa**. What is schwa you might be asking? Well, it’s the most common sound in English: [Click here.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMebBCUzWuA) We use it all the time in words like ‘teacher’ and ‘around’.

**7. Learn about weak and strong forms of common words.** When you know about the ‘schwa’ sound, you will listen to native speakers in a different way. English is a stress-timed language which means that we use a combination of strong and weak forms of some words. For example, which words do we stress in the following sentence?

*I want to go for a drink tonight.*

How do native speakers pronounce to / for / a in the sentence? We use the schwa sound so it sounds like:

*I wanna go ferra drink tenigh.*

[Learn how and when to use weak form](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzkzA77RMzg)s and your speaking will improve overnight. You will also learn to focus on stressed words when listening to fast, native-speaker English and you will finally be able to understand us!

**8. Learn about word stress.** When words have more than one syllable, we stress one or more of them. For example, the word *intelligent* has four syllables but which syllable do we stress? [Click here to find out.](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/intelligent?q=intelligent) Remember that the small vertical mark above the word identifies the stressed syllable:

**9. Learn about sentence stress**. Sentence stress refers to the word or words we stress in a phrase of a sentence. When we stress a word, we help the listener understand what is important. If we stress the wrong word or don’t stress the key word, the listener may get confused or not realize what is important in the sentence. A few years ago, I enrolled in a gym. I was asked to attend an introductory class at ‘*five to six*‘. The Hungarian receptionist stressed the word ‘*six*‘so I arrived at 5.55. She looked at me and told me that I was late and the class had nearly finished. She should have stressed ‘*five*‘ and ‘*six*‘ so would have understood that the class lasted for one hour and began at 5pm! For more on [sentence stress, read here](http://www.onlinetefltraining.com/teach-sentence-stress-with-bob-and-julie/).

**10. Identify fixed and semi-fixed phrases and practise them**. Fixed phrases usually contain between 3 and 7 words and include items like:

*to be honest*

*in a moment*

*on the other hand*

A conversation is made of grammatical structures, vocabulary and fixed or semi-fixed phrases. *In fact*, t*o tell the truth*, *on the whole*,*most of the time*, *my friends and I* , communicate with each other*in a series of* fixed and semi-fixed expressions.

Learn the communicative function of these phrases and practice how to pronounce them (remember weak forms, which words are stressed) and use them in your everyday conversation.[Click here for a list of 1000 common phrases](http://broadskyblog.blogspot.com.es/2012/11/over-1000-of-most-common-fixed.html).

**11. Learn about collocations.** [Words don’t like being alone.](http://www.slideshare.net/alexandraalvarez/what-is-a-collocation-14563458) They prefer to hang out with their friends and, just like people, some words form close friendships and other never speak to each other.

*Yellow doesn’t get on well with hair. Maybe yellow is jealous of blond because blond and hair are frequently seen out together having a great time. Yellow doesn’t understand why hair prefers blond because yellow and blond are so similar.*

Listen carefully for common combinations of words. *Short* and *small* have similar meanings but people have *short hair* not *small hair*. *High* and *tall* are often not so different but people have *high hopes* but not *tall hopes*. Foxes are *sly* not *devious*. *Hours* can be *happy* but are never *cheerful*. *Idiots* are *stupid* but rarely *silly*.

**12. Replace regular verbs with phrasal verbs.** Many learners of English don’t understand why native speakers use so many phrasal verbs where there are normal verbs (usually with Latin roots) which have the same meaning. English was originally a Germanic language which imported lots of Latin vocabulary after the Norman conquest in the 11th century. Regardless of the historical factors,[the fact is that native English speakers use lots and lots of phrasal verbs](http://www.bridgeenglish.com/tips-for-learning-english-phrasal-verbs/). If you want to understand us, then try to include them in your conversation. If you make a mistake, you’ll probably make us laugh but you are unlikely to confuse us as we can usually guess what you want to say from the context. Phrasal verbs are spatial and originally referred to movement so when you learn a new one, make physical movements while saying them to help you remember.

**13. Learn short automatic responses.** Many of our responses are automatic (Right, OK, no problem, alright, fine thanks, just a minute, you’re welcome, fine by me, let’s do it!, yup, no way! you’re joking, right?, Do I have to? etc.) Collect these short automatic responses and start using them.

**14. Practice telling stories and using narrative tenses**. Humans are designed to tell stories. We use the past simple, past continuous and past perfect for telling stories but when the listener is hooked (very interested), they feel like they are actually experiencing the story right now. So, we often use present tenses to make our stories more dramatic!

**15. Learn when to pause for effect**. Speaking quickly in English does not make you an effective English speaker. Knowing when to pause to give the listener time to think about what you have said, respond appropriately, and predict what you are going to say does. Imagine you’re an actor on a stage, pausing keeps people interested. [Great strategy if you need to speak English in public.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7l1Tom9q8Ic)

**16. Learn about chunking.** Chunking means joining words together to make meaningful units. You don’t need to analyze every word to use a phrase. Look at the phrase: *Nice to meet you*. It’s a short phrase (4 words) which can be remembered as a single item. It is also an example of ellipsis (leaving words out) because the words ‘It’  and ‘is’ are missing at the beginning of the phrase. However, we don’t need to include them.  [Learn more here.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9Tmz1no1mY)

**17. Learn about typical pronunciation problems in your first language.** Japanese learners find it difficult to identify and produce ‘*r*‘ and ‘*l*‘ sounds; Spanish don’t distinguish between ‘*b*‘ and ‘*v*‘; Germans often use a ‘*v*‘ sound when they should use a ‘*w*‘. Find out about the problems people who speak your first language have when speaking English and you will know what you need to focus on.

**18. Choose an accent you like and imitate it**. We often have an emotional connection with certain nationalities. Do you have more of an interest in British culture or American culture? Do you support Manchester United or Arsenal?  [Deciding what variety of English you want to learn is your first step.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvbEODnJVTc)

**19. Find an actor/actress you like and identify what makes them powerful speakers.** Do you want to sound like Barack Obama, Benedict Cumberbatch (Sherlock Homes) Beyonce or Steve Jobs? If you want to sound like David Beckham, I advise you to reconsider, unless you want to sound[like a young girl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCDBYBQDVbs)!

**20. Use a mirror and / or a sheet of paper for identifying aspirated and non-aspirated sounds**. Aspirated sounds are those with a short burst of here, such as ‘*p*‘ in ‘*pen*, and unaspirated sounds have no or little air, such as the ‘*b*‘ in ‘*Ben*‘.[Watch this video to learn more.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjvHyq5SsSQ)

**21. Practice tongue twisters.** Tongue twisters are phrases designed to improve your pronunciation of particular sounds. [Here is a list for kids but it’s great fun](http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/tongue-twisters).  Have a go now. Try saying this phrase quickly:

*What a terrible tongue twister. What a terrible tongue twister. What a terrible tongue twister.*

**22. Practice spelling names, numbers and dates aloud.** This may seem very basic to some of you but if you don’t practice, you forget how to say them. Have a g[o here at numbers here](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6NNkW1mDQc) and at[place names here.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZBREk7l39M)

**23. Learn about common intonation patterns.** Intonation (when the pitch of the voice goes up and down) is complex in English but it is very important as it expresses the feeling or emotion of the speaker. Here is an [amusing introduction to intonation](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPcBJfBTlNo).

**24. Learn about places of articulation.** The articulators are the parts of the mouth we use to turn sound into speech. They can be fixed parts (the teeth, behind the teeth and the roof of the mouth) and mobile parts (the tongue, the lips, the soft palate, and the jaw). [Click here for more information.](http://www.soundsofenglish.org/pronunciation/sounds.htm)

**25. After looking at places of articulation, practice making the movements that native speakers use when they speak.** [Here’s a video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfZscA9V6nU) and remember to open the jaws, move the lips and get your tongue moving!

**26. Learn why English is a stress-timed language.** The rhythm of the language is based on stressed syllables so we shorten the unstressed syllables to fit the rhythm. Syllable-timed languages (such as Spanish) take the same time to pronounce each syllable. Here’s an [explanation](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUMM5eCvi8w) which might explain why you speak English like a robot or [watch this funny clip](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLOBq2WcINY) here.

**27. Learn how to interrupt and interject politely and successfully**. Click here for a[list of interrupting phrases.](http://britishenglishcoach.com/how-to-interrupt-politely-and-not-so-politely-in-english/)

**28. Learn about**[**ellipsis, assimilation and linking sounds**](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwjXF7289to)**.**

**29. Speak lower not higher.** Studies show that you command attention and demonstrate authority with a deeper vocal tone, especially men. This is particularly important if you have to speak in public.[Here is a quick guide.](http://www.wikihow.com/Talk-With-a-Deeper-Voice)

**30. Listen and read along to poetry (or rap songs) to practice the rhythm of English**. [Limericks (short, funny, rhyming poems)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0moGwr4huc) are really useful and demonstrate how English is stress-timed and how we use weak forms.

**31. Learn exclamation words and fillers.** Watch [this video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gz-pfiO6lyA) or study this list of [100 common exclamations](http://www.dailywritingtips.com/100-mostly-small-but-expressive-interjections/)here.

**32. Learn how to paraphrase**. Paraphrasing is when we repeat what we have just said to make it clear to the listener or when we repeat what the other person has said by using different words. H[ere are a few to get started.](http://www.ihbristol.com/useful-english-expressions/example/paraphrasing/8)

**33. Use contractions more.** Contractions make your speech more efficient because they save time and energy. Say ‘should not’ and then say ‘shouldn’t’: which is easier to say? [Very common in fluent speech.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvaXnJqrdcg)

**Now, here’s your CALL TO ACTION.**

**In the next 33 days, spend 15 minutes every day on one of the tips. I’m sure you’ll notice a huge improvement.**

**And maybe one day you’ll speak English like Messi plays football!**

**Thanks for reading the post.**

**Would you like to learn how to speak polite English?**

My **free** video course (nearly 28,000 learners have taken it) is available on Udemy. Take it now and learn how to show respect by using polite English. Just click on the link below