



# **UNDERSTAND NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS WITH THESE 5 TIPS**

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# Helping you Become a Confident English Speaker

*Many IELTS students lack confidence in their speaking skills.*

*The Keith Speaking Academy helps you develop your speaking skills so you can face the examiner with confidence and ace the IELTS test.*

*This PDF is one of many that Keith has developed to help you do this.*



*Keith has been working in international education for over 20 years as a teacher, teacher trainer, and education manager.*

*He has helped over 40,000 students prepare for their IELTS Speaking test with his online courses.*

Hello, my dear students! Are you preparing for your IELTS test and finding it difficult to understand native English speakers?

If so, this guide is just for you. It will help you significantly improve your listening skills so you can understand much more when faced with native English speakers. Let's dive right into it!



## Tip 1. Don't Just Focus on Individual Words

One common mistake students often make is focusing too much on individual words and trying to translate them. The truth is, when you put two words together, the sound often changes. Therefore, if you're listening for individual sounds, you might be focusing on the wrong thing.

For instance, the phrase 'good day' might sound like one word when spoken quickly by a native speaker. This is because we often drop sounds, vowels, and consonants when words come together.

In this case, we would only pronounce one **'d'** sound and say these 2 words as one, like this;

- **Good day** /gʊdeɪ/

Here are some more examples of how 2 words may be pronounced as 1:

- **Shall we** /ʃwi:/
- **It's fine** /sfain/

By knowing that sounds may disappear when words are put together, you can start improving your listening skills and better understand native English speakers.

## Tip 2. Notice How Native English Speakers Link Sound

Words in English are often linked together and can even include added sounds that you don't write.

Here is the secret to linking words:

*If a word ends in a consonant and the following word begins with a vowel sound, you can link them.*

Here is a common example, where 2 words are linked and pronounced as one sound.

- **Have a** /hævə/
- **I have a car** /aɪ hævə kɑː/

Take the phrase '**go and**,' for example, which when spoken fast can sound like '**gowan**'. It is usually pronounced like this;

- **Go and** /gəʊwən/

The '**d**' in '**and**' is often dropped, while a '**w**' sound is added between the two vowels '**o**' and '**a**'. Here's a longer example,

- **Go and see** /gəʊwənsiː/

By recognising these changes, you can understand phrases such as the one below more easily.

- **'Shall we go and have a good day?' /ʃwɪː gəʊwən hævə ɡʊdeɪ/**



## Tip 3. Pay Attention to Sentence Stress

In spoken English, certain words are stressed while others are reduced, creating rhythm and intonation. The stressed words typically carry the main meaning and are usually nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs.

For instance, in the sentence 'Can you pay by cash?' 'pay' and 'cash' are stressed.

By focusing on these stressed words, you can grasp the main idea more quickly.

Here is an important study tip. When you are doing listening practice, you should practice both **intensive listening**, where you listen to short clips of say, 30 to 60 seconds, and focus on understanding as much as possible, and **extensive listening**, where you listen to longer clips (podcasts, films TV shows) and focus on understanding the main ideas, not everything.

When you do intensive listening practice, focus on sentence stress and picking out the keywords that are stressed. That is usually enough to get the meaning. Forget about the other unstressed words. This is actually what native English speakers do, so why not try it too?



## Tip 4. Learn and Recognise Chunks

Chunks are phrases or expressions that are learned and used as single units, rather than individual words. For instance, 'have a good day' is a common English chunk.

Many grammatical structures and idiomatic expressions are also chunks. By training your ear to pick out these sounds or chunks, you can understand native English speakers more effectively.

A useful tip to improve your **spoken grammar** is to understand that most grammatical structures are actually chunks and we learn them, and say them, as **one** sound.


Here are some examples,

- **I'd like to** /aɪdlaɪktə/
- **I should have** /aɪʃʊdəv/
- **Can you** /kənjə/
- **I didn't want to** /aɪdɪdnəwəntə/

When listening, try to pick out and hear these chunks as one sound. Then, if you can, practice repeating these sounds again and again, until they start to sound like familiar music.



If you want to practice lots of grammatical chunks like this, and really improve both your listening skills and spoken grammar, go and check out my online course **Fluent Grammar for IELTS Speaking**.

You will not only improve your listening skills, but you will also start to speak grammar more correctly with English-like intonation.  
**[Learn more here.](#)** 

## Tip 5. Learn About Weak Forms and Contractions

Many English words have a strong form and a weak form, especially small, functional words like **prepositions**, **conjunctions**, and **auxiliary verbs**, such as the following:

<b>Prepositions</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Weak</b>
To	/tu:/	/tə/
Of	/ɒv/	/əv/
For	/fɔ:/	/fə/

Conjunctions	Strong	Weak
And	/ænd/	/ən/
Than	/ðæn/	/ðən/
Auxiliary verbs	Strong	Weak
Are	/ɑː/	/ə/
Was	/wɒz/	/wəz/
Have	/hæv/	/əv/

Can	/kæn/	/kən/
Do	/duː/	/də/

The weak form is typically used when these words are not stressed which is actually most of the time.

The mistake most students make it to try and listen for the strong form, such as **'to'** /tuː/, when most of the time you need to be listening for the weak form /tə/.

Recognising these weak forms when listening to native English speakers, can greatly aid your listening comprehension.

In addition to weak forms, you should also familiarise yourself with contractions, which are often used in spoken English. Contractions are words made by shortening and combining two words, like 'I'll' for 'I will', or 'I'm' for 'I am'.

Here are some common ones you should learn to listen for;

- I am hungry = **I'm** hungry
- You are late = **You're** late
- I would like one = **I'd** like one
- He is happy = **He's** happy
- He has done it = **He's** done it
- You should have told me = **You should've** told me
- I would have helped you, if you had called = **I'd've** helped you, if **you'd've** called



## Conclusion

Understanding native English speakers may seem challenging at first, but with these tips, you'll soon find it easier to follow conversations, understand films, and even excel in your IELTS listening test!

Remember, the key to improving your listening skills is practice, so make sure to expose yourself to English audio regularly. Most importantly of all, enjoy your learning!



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