

English

from the perspective
of a non-native
English speaker

the smart way

a complete guide to get your English to the next level



English the smart way

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**from the perspective
of a non-native
English speaker**

This guide is dedicated to all of my friends, family, followers and readers everywhere in the world. :)

Special thanks goes out to Pat Flynn, AJ Hoge, Marianne Cantwell and Tony Robbins for the inspiration to write this guide.

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guide version 11-15-1

Preface

Hello my friend :)

Thank you very much for opening this guide. I am delighted and at the same time privileged to be able to share with you the knowledge I have accumulated over the years of learning English as a non-native speaker.

Writing and publishing this guide is at least one little action I could take to make a positive difference to the lives of English learners over the world who might have been struggling with English as I used to in the past. If I could help only one person to improve his or her English I would be really grateful for it and the time spent on writing this guide will have been worth it.

There can be many reasons why you got to reading this guide. Maybe you are just stuck in learning English and would like to

find some inspiration; or you just lost motivation to learn English anymore and are trying to get it back. Or maybe you are looking for some new ideas on how to improve your English speaking and gain confidence... Whatever it is for you, the goal of this guide is to help you get your English to the next level. The guide contains ideas, techniques, learning tips and resources I have found really useful, effective and have been using myself throughout my own learning process.

Let's talk about **learning English as a fun activity** that we can really enjoy. At least for the time of reading this guide forget about the old, often ineffective, traditional methods of English learning we know from schools. Leave the grammar study for linguists and other language professionals - we don't need extensive knowledge of grammar rules to succeed. We just want to enjoy English and learning without thinking about it. **Let's acquire fluency subconsciously with as little effort as possible while having fun in the process. :)**

Thank you to all of you, my followers, subscribers and friends. I appreciate your support and without you, this guide would have never come to life.

If at any point while you are reading this guide you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me. You can also reach me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or simply send me an [email](#).

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Introduction

“The future depends on what you do today.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

What this guide is not

Before we get any further, let me tell you what this guide is not.

1. **This guide is not some sort of magical book** that you read once and can speak flawless English automatically. Let's get real here. In everything we do, to get better we have to work on it. Nothing does itself. This guide will save you much time and show you the strategies, techniques and tools that work when applied.
2. **This guide is not a conventional grammar book or English textbook.** You are not going to find here any grammar rules explained. Why? Because there are so many grammar books or textbooks available already and many of them are boring and just don't help people to speak better English. As you will see, this guide takes a different approach. We want to enjoy English and improve at the same time! :)

Who am I to write this guide?

There are two answers:

1. I am a non-native English speaker who have already struggled with English and got through it

I've already wasted too much time studying English at school. Although some things I've learnt there were useful, most of the English classes were spent on studying grammar and doing some exercises from textbooks. Yeah, maybe I could describe how does present simple or present perfect tense look like, but **I couldn't use English in real life**. Even I could understand written English, I wasn't able to express myself on paper, and couldn't express myself in speaking. I had also difficulties understanding spoken English. And it wasn't everything I struggled with.

The biggest challenge for me was that **I used to feel insecure with my English speaking. I was afraid of making mistakes** and was constantly thinking about what I

was about to say and if it is correct. I thought about grammar all the time and tried to construct perfect sentences in my mind before I opened my mouth. The result of all of this was that **I couldn't talk at all!** I was stuck and couldn't react in a normal conversation in English. What a nightmare! That wasn't enough unfortunately. Each and every bad experience I had with my English speaking created a reference in my mind that I am just not good at English, lowered my confidence and my motivation dropped. I was also afraid how are others going to judge me if I make a mistake when speaking.

It was just too much to handle. I realised that the methods I had used didn't work for me. So much time was spent and I couldn't see any results. **I started searching for some new, better and more effective ways to learn English that are also fun and motivating.** It took me several months, but the time was worth it. I finally understood what really works and could apply it in my learning process.

The second reason I am writing this guide is:

2. I have helped people like you with their English

After all of my own struggling, then finding the best ways to improve English and working on it, I have decided to start a small [blog](#) to share the word and help people from all over the world with their English. After months of running the blog I realised that I could help even more people by packing up everything I learnt into one complete guide and publish it online. Today this guide is in your hands (or on your

computer screen) :) and I hope it will be a shortcut to your English improvement.

Everything that has helped me on a way of learning English can be found in this guide. Enjoy it! :)

How to read this guide?



Before we dive right into the main content, let me share a few words on how to use this guide.

The guide was written to be read from the beginning to the end. But if you like, you can start with any part of it - it is completely up to you.

If you don't understand any of the words used in the guide, don't worry. You can always look it up in the dictionary. One of my favourite English dictionary is online [Oxford Dictionary](#) which is **free** to use for everyone.

Do the exercises!

This guide is not just about reading. We are going to do a few simple exercises which are spread throughout the guide. :)

You might ask - Why are we doing exercises? The reason is simple: we can't get all the answers we are looking for just from reading. Real insights come in doing, not just "thinking". Questions in exercises can unlock the thoughts we have never thought about and can help us on our way of mastering English. Trust me, you will certainly benefit from writing down the answers to all of the questions in this guide. You are worth the extra few minutes it takes to do an exercise. :)

Tip 1: Do the exercises in your **native language** or **English** depending on how comfortable you are with your English writing already. If you prefer answering the questions in your native language that's completely fine. :)

Tip 2: Have your pen ready: If you like, you can dedicate a notebook to **make notes** from this guide. Write down all the things you found useful and put there your answers to the questions from exercises.

The guide contains blue clickable hyperlinks that will get you to the extra content online. [This is the example of such a link](#). You will find similar links later in the guide.

Motivation

“Of course motivation is not permanent. But then, neither is bathing; but it is something you should do on a regular basis.”

— Zig Ziglar,
Raising Positive Kids in a Negative World

Many English learners I have met online or in person struggle with the lack of motivation to work on their English. When we start learning something new, e. g. a new language, we are usually motivated enough to learn the basics. Then, after some time motivation tends to slowly disappear and suddenly we realise that we have lost the power to continue learning.

The goal of this chapter is to **build a strong foundation for your motivation** to master your English. If you are motivated enough, this chapter will help to make your motivation even stronger. And if you are feeling you might be losing some of your powers already, this chapter is here to ignite your motivation again and keep it high for as long as possible. :)

Why we do what we do?

In everything we do **motivation is something that drives us to take action**. We are not doing anything unless we are pushed or pulled enough. So how to get ourselves to learn English?

Try to answer for yourself this simple question:

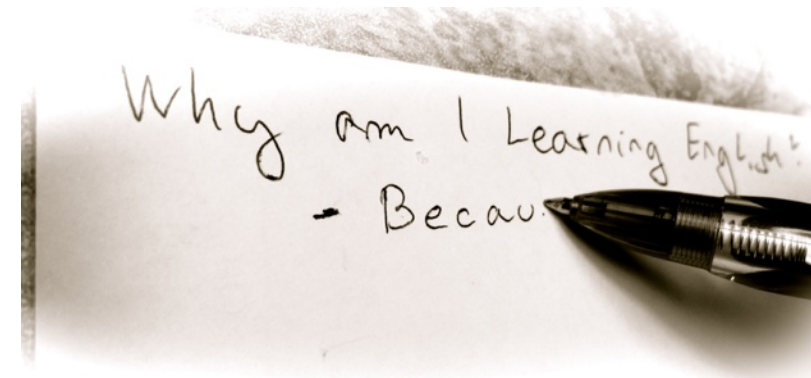
***Why** am I learning English?*

Is it because of an adventurous travelling you are planning soon, or because you want to get a better job in a specific company, or meet some new people, maybe love of your

life? ;) Or anything else? **Pick some exciting and positive reasons!** The more specific they are the better.

For example, my personal reasons to be fluent in English are:

- I want to be able to communicate with as many people as possible
- I want to travel the world and discover different cultures; English makes travelling easier
- I want to help people from all over the world - fluent English will definitely help to share the thoughts and ideas
- I want to learn from the sources which are available online but are mostly in English
- I want to be able to do public speeches in English as it was my native language
- I want to understand most of the movies and songs which are in English



Note: “*I want to pass an English exam in school*” is not enough exciting reason to learn English. :P You have to have much more exciting reasons. ;)

When I started working seriously on my English, the top motivating reason was that I wanted to be accepted for a work internship in United Kingdom.

Now, try to answer the question yourself:

Why are you learning English? Why do you want to be a fluent English speaker?

Great! I am glad you did the exercise. :)

How do you feel after answering the question above? - Write down the feelings you are experiencing now. Are you feeling motivated? Excited?

Now, every time you are feeling that you are losing motivation or energy, try to remember your exciting reasons to be a fluent English speaker. You may also consider rewriting your answers on a piece of paper you can hang on the wall to see it every day to **remind yourself your motives to get fluent in English.**

Thoughts can change our lives

Let's talk now a little bit about relationship between our **thoughts** and the **motivation** we have.

Have you ever experienced the state of mind when you are completely motivated - when you feel you have super powers to do anything you want? I bet you have. And on the other hand - have you ever been in a state when you just wanted to stay in bed all day long and do nothing to follow your dreams? Isn't the difference between these two states only in the way we think?

What do you think about when you are not motivated? And what do you have in mind when you are ready to break through any problem that comes into your way? Thoughts and beliefs we have affect our behaviour, our actions and can literally change our lives. As you could experience in the previous exercise, even one simple question and your powerful answer can change how you feel.

We have to take care of our thoughts and beliefs not just when we talk about mastering English. To

illustrate the point I would like to share with you a quote I find very inspiring (not sure about the author):

*“Watch your thoughts, they become words;
watch your words, they become actions;
watch your actions, they become habits;
watch your habits, they become character;
watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.”*

What do you think about it?

Now when we talked about how thoughts can change how we feel, let’s answer four simple questions to inspire even more powerful answers. Each question is slightly different and you will see how various thoughts are coming to your mind when you are writing the answers. The questions are about you and for you. :)

What would happen if you could speak English fluently as a native speaker?

What would happen if you couldn't speak English fluently as a native speaker?

What wouldn't happen if you could speak English fluently as a native speaker?

The last one might be little bit difficult to imagine, but let’s try anyway. :)

What wouldn't happen if you couldn't speak English fluently as a native speaker?

example: If I couldn’t speak fluent English, I wouldn’t get to an internship in United Kingdom.

The intention of these questions is to make us think more about the **reasons why we really want to master English**. You might be surprised of what simple but powerful question can discover.

Tip: Anytime you are feeling that you are losing motivation, get back to this section of the guide and refer to your powerful answers. **Remember all the things, experience and feelings that fluent English is going to bring to your life. :)**

Your personal results workshop

“Whenever you want to achieve something, keep your eyes open, concentrate and make sure you know exactly what it is you want. No one can hit their target with their eyes closed.”

— Paulo Coelho, *The Devil and Miss Prym*

This chapter is all about you and your English. We are going to **evaluate your current level of English**, **set the goals** for your learning and also **prepare a day-to-day schedule** of activities which are going to take your English to the next level.

In order to do that we have to understand the **process of reaching for our goals**. How do we get what we want? How do we usually get where we want to be?

A dream holidays on Bali Island

Let's take look at the process of reaching for our goals through the **analogy of travelling**: Say, for example, we want to get to Bali Island for our holidays. :) What steps do we need to take to enjoy sunny days on the island?



Step 1

The first thing we need to know if we want to get to Bali is: **Where are we now?** It would be impossible to get to our destination if we didn't know what is our current location. We wouldn't know which direction to take, where to book flight from or how to get to the nearest airport. It's similar with our English - **we need to know what is our current level of English in order to set appropriate strategy and use specific tools to get us where we want to be.**

Step 2

The second important thing to know is - of course - our desired destination **Where do we want to be** - Bali Island of course! :) When we talk about our English, the ultimate destination can be fluency and confidence in speaking, ability to express everything we have in mind and understanding other English speakers. **We need to know where are we going to get there. Without a specific goal, we would just walk randomly.**

Step 3

The third thing we need to ask ourselves when we already know where we are and where we want to get is: **How are we going to get there?** Are we going to take a flight, a bus, a helicopter, a boat, or a train? Or are we going to walk to our desired destination? Not every kind of transportation can take us where we want to get with the same comfort, speed, safety... Some types of transportation can't even take us where we want to get at all. We would hardly get to the open

universe by a normal bus, right? :) With English it is similar. When we know where we are and where we want to be, the only thing left to figure out is how we gonna get there. **As a way of transportation, while speaking of English learning, you can imagine specific learning method, language school, online Skype conversation, a book, meeting with native speakers in your city and so on...**

Step 4

And now? Now we need to **Take action!** If we planned everything above and then haven't start the journey at all, we wouldn't get to our dreamed destination - whether it is Bali Island or our perfect English speaking. All of the planning would go to waste if we haven't booked that flight ticket, packed ourselves or start the journey at all. With English it is the same - let's imagine you would bought a nice package of English audio lessons and then didn't listen to it at all; or if you joined an English conversation class and then didn't speak or even listened to your classmates or your teacher there... Thinking without taking any action doesn't make a difference!

Step 5

The last step is very important even though many people forget about it. **In order to master English we need to be consistent with our actions.** Action itself is not enough. What do I mean by that? Does a plant seed grow when we water it only once? No, it doesn't, unfortunately. We need to water the seed everyday and take care of it to make it

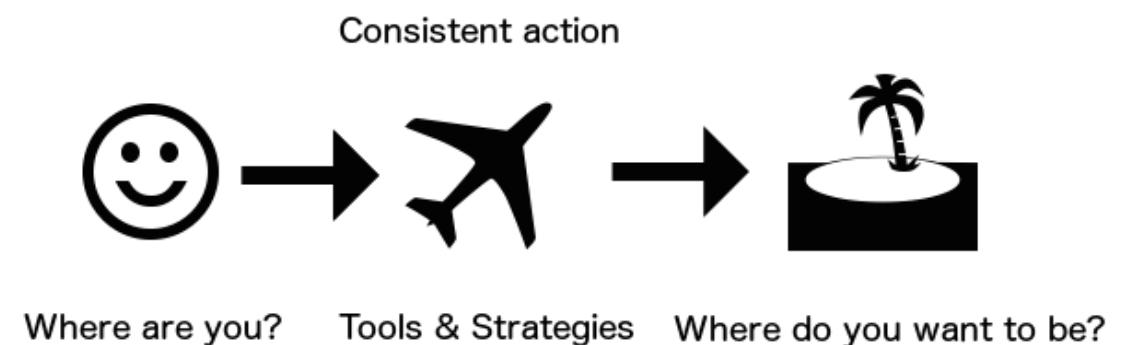
break out from the ground, grow and bloom beautifully. Similarly,

*if we want to be fluent and confident English speakers we have to **expose** ourselves to English and **dedicate** the time to actually **use** English on a day-to-day basis.*

To sum up: In order to get to your dreamed destination - whether we are talking about travelling to Bali Island or fluency and confidence in English speaking - you need to do the following:

1. Find out where you are now
2. Decide where do you want to be
3. Choose the best strategies and tools
4. Take an action!
5. And be consistent

The graphics illustrate the process:



That is the way of how we can reach for our goals. In the following subsections of this chapter we are going to go through all the steps above. Step by step we are going to build our action plan for success in English. Let's continue! :)

Where are you? or Evaluate your English skills

Now it's the time to take the first step - let's find out how is your current level of English. Don't be afraid - there's not going to be any English test. :) I believe that everyone is able to evaluate his or her English skills oneself - we know ourselves the best.

Finding out what are your biggest challenges with English is very important in order to choose appropriate learning strategies later. Let's have some fun with exercises! :)

How would you **rate your current level of English** on a scale from 1 to 10 where 10 is the best? Rate each skill separately:

- reading 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10
- writing 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10
- listening 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10
- speaking 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10

In paragraph or two describe your current level of English:

For example, someone's answer could look something like this:

"I think I can understand most of the written English, but I have problems with speaking. I am afraid of making mistakes and I don't feel confident enough to express myself. I find it difficult to motivate myself to study every day."

Or something like this:

"I can read and write in English without much trouble, but when it comes to speaking I am missing fluency. Sometimes I also don't understand spoken English. I also think that I don't have many opportunities to practice speaking."

Of course, description of your English skills may be completely different from the examples above. It can also be longer or shorter. :) **The more precise your description is, the better** we can address your current knowledge of English later and set appropriate strategy for improvement.

Everyone of us is unique but at the same time we often face the same challenges and obstacles when reaching out for our goals and dreams. Let's discover the difficulties you are having with English:

What are your 3 biggest challenges or difficulties in English you are facing? Write down what is stopping you from being a confident and fluent English speaker. You may also describe exact situations that you find difficult.

Some readers may answer for example:

1. I don't have confidence in speaking, I feel shy when I am about to say something, I don't believe in my English knowledge.
2. I have problems understanding spoken English. I understand more when I listen to some foreigners speaking, but when I hear native speakers, I can't understand because of their accent, or they speak too fast.

3. All the grammar rules just confuse me! It takes me too much time to form a sentence. It's ok when I write - because I have plenty of time to think about what I am writing - but speaking requires immediate reaction.

As you could read in the beginning of this guide, my biggest challenges with English were:

- I couldn't speak English, had low confidence and were afraid of making mistakes
- I thought too much about the grammar and tried to carefully prepare each sentence in my mind before I opened my mouth
- I had problems understanding spoken English

Maybe you are facing the same challenges as I used to. Or maybe you have difficulties with something else. Important is, that **now you know what exactly is the challenge for you**. It is so much easier to choose the best techniques and sources when you know where you are with your English.

The next section is all about **dreaming** :) and then, we are going to use all we have learnt to take action!

This time I am not going to give you any examples for the answers in the exercise because I want you to dream free just with the ideas you have in your mind. ;)

Imagine yourself speaking excellent English. Describe the day when you finally speak fluent and confident English. How would be your interactions with other people in English, how would your job be? What opportunities would you have if you could speak perfect English? How would your life look like if you were an excellent English speaker right now? Write down everything that comes to your mind even if it sounds crazy or unreal. Don't let the pen stop and get your thoughts out. :)

[illegible]

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Let's get there! Take an action!

I am so excited you got to this section finally! This part of the guide is all about taking action. We are going to prepare the **action plan** for your success in English, choose the best English resources for you and commit to get your English to the next level.

Building the Action plan

What is the Action plan? It is simply a **set of daily activities you can do everyday to improve your English**. Action plan has to suite your own time schedule, needs and lifestyle. Therefore it's different for everyone and your own action plan will be unique! :)

Before you build your own action plan, let me share with you my own plan that has helped me on the way of improving my English. Even though my current plan is little bit different, I am sharing with you the example that I think you will find useful.

Action Plan Example

At the time when I created this plan to improve my English, I studied at the university that was about an hour journey away from my home. It means that every workday I travelled for 2 hours a day by bus for full 5 years. If we count all these hours together, it makes **1 200 hours** in total! :) (and that's just time spent on commuting)

In the evenings when I got home, I was exercising for about 30 minutes each day and also I usually had around 3 hours for myself during Saturdays and Sundays (not every weekend of course).

How did I use all these hours?

Every time I travelled by bus I put the **earphones** on and listened to the [Power English](#) **audio lessons**. Then, when I was at home and exercising in the evening I turned on a computer and watched two or three **videos on** [TED.com](#) while I was lifting weights. That was my schedule for every workday.

When the weekend arrived, I went to **British Council** [Learn English](#) website and did language **exercises**, played language **games** and watched some more videos. Sometimes during a week me and my brother watched a **movie** in English with English **subtitles** together. Also I was **chatting** with my **friends** from all over the world on Facebook and maybe once a month we had a Skype call together. :)

When I found a word or a phrase I didn't understand, I used [Oxford Dictionary](#) and then noted the new learnt expression into my **notebook**.

That was pretty much it. I didn't attend any English school apart from obligatory course at the university, neither I studied any grammar book that time.

On the next page you can find how my action plan looks like on a week schedule. At the end of this chapter you will find a similar, but empty week schedule you can use to create your own personal action plan. :)

When you will be creating your action plan keep in mind the following:

Action plan is not to be set in stone forever. Always **adjust your action plan to your current level of English, time possibilities and life style.**

and ;)

Be creative! - there's nobody to tell you how your action plan should or shouldn't be. Get inspired, but be your own boss and choose what is best for you. :)

Make your plan fun! - learn English in a way that makes you happy. It is so much important to enjoy our time while mastering English.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7:00							
8:00	Listening English on the bus	Listening English on the bus	Listening English on the bus	Listening English on the bus	Listening English on the bus		
9:00						English at home	English at home
10:00						English at home	English at home
11:00							
12:00	lunch break	lunch break	lunch break	lunch break	lunch break		
13:00							
14:00							
15:00							
16:00							
17:00							Skype call
18:00	Listening English on the bus	Listening English on the bus	Listening English on the bus	Listening English on the bus	Listening English on the bus		
19:00							
20:00		Chatting with friends in English online		English movie with brother			
21:00	English while exercising	English while exercising	English while exercising	English while exercising	English while exercising		
22:00							

Let's Build Your Action Plan

Use the example plan as an inspiration and build your own action plan that will suit your personal lifestyle and needs.

Do the following exercises - they will help you to create your unique plan for your success in English. :)

1. Finding the time



As you could see in the example action plan - I improved my English a lot while I was commuting to university and during the weekend mornings.

If you think that there's not enough time in your week for English, try to think about activities like:

- **commuting** (to/from work, university, school, ...)
- physical **exercise** (running, working out, cycling, jogging, walking, ...)
- or **cooking**, doing **chores**, **cleaning** the house, ...

Can you imagine how much time we spend on these activities in a year? What would happen if we used all of this time not just for that primary activity, but also to improve our English?

Imagine your normal week. When do you have extra time that you can dedicate to English?

Monday: _____

Tuesday: _____

Wednesday: _____

Thursday: _____

Friday: _____

Saturday: _____

Sunday: _____

Example: **Monday:** 7:00 - 8:00 on the bus, **Tuesday:** 6:00 - 6:30 while exercising, **Wednesday:** 17:00 - 18:00 on a train home,

and so on...

2. Discovering your interests



When we are improving our English, it is worth **choosing the materials based on our interests**. If you love cooking for example, it's great to focus on reading blogs and TV shows about cooking. If you are a fan of racing cars - that's the one of the topics you should focus on. And so on... :)

Combining our interests and hobbies with learning English is so powerful tool to get better fast!

What are your top 5 interests?

From now on, every time you are going to read, watch or listen to something new about one of your interests, search for the information in English first. Discover videos, podcasts and blogs about your hobbies.

3. Choosing the right resources



English language is so popular that there are many materials to choose from. The wide selection of resources is growing everyday and sometimes it might be difficult to choose the best materials for your personal needs and preference. I would like to show you the materials that I think are one of the best out there.

Everything I share with you is what I have been using personally to improve my own English. **These resources have helped me and I believe they can help you too. :)**

As you could read in my own action plan, I use a combination of resources to improve my English. Let me tell you a little more about each of them.

Power English

When I am on the bus, commuting, travelling or exercising, I listen to the [Power English audio lessons](#). Here's why I like and recommend the program so much:

- you can actually have **fun** while learning English :)
- each lesson tells a **powerful inspiring idea** which can help you in other areas of your life (not just learning English)
- all audio lessons have **transcripts**, so if you don't catch a word while listening, you can read it
- you learn spoken grammar without studying grammar rules; you just **listen** to mini stories and actively answer simple questions
- there are so-called *action vocabulary videos* that make you **move, laugh** and **feel good**; and teach you vocabulary at the same time
- **mp3 files** are easy to keep on a phone or mp3 player **everywhere you go**; there's no need of a computer to enjoy the course :)

In general I think that [Power English](#) has helped me most with my **speaking, fluency, pronunciation** and showed me how to be **confident** when using English.

[If you want to know more about the Power English, read my full review here.](#)

British Council Learn English

I use British Council's [Learn English](#) website mostly because of its **great videos and language exercises**. if you are into British English, definitely check out the website. :) You can find there many fun **language games** and also a **grammar reference** that may come handy sometimes. I consider this website as one of the best resources I have found on the internet. It's better if you can use the website on a computer because the exercises are **interactive**. :)

TED: Ideas worth spreading

Do you like to get inspired? The [TED.com](#) website does definitely offer huge amount of inspiration! You can find there **great talks in English** - interesting people sharing interesting ideas. Select the category you prefer, then listen, watch and enjoy variety of talks. If you like, you can turn on **subtitles** or read the **interactive transcript** (sometimes even in your native language!). Get a friend and watch videos together! ;)

That were the top 3 online resources I use to improve my English.

[If you would like to learn more about other great resources I use, check out this article.](#)

Choose the resources you like the most, combine them with your time possibilities and **create your own action plan now!** Everything is in your hands. :)

Have you created your action plan? If so:

Great! I am so happy for you and your new action plan! If you would like to share your new action plan with me, feel free to do so at ivan@englishthesmartway.com. ;)

Let's finish this section with one more exercise:

What are the 3 little actions you can take right now that will take you closer to the fluency and confidence in English?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

You can **for example**:

- put your **action plan** on the wall in your room so you can see it every day; or show your action plan to a friend
- **bookmark** the resources you like the most and check out the websites of the resources :)
- **dedicate a time** in your calendar to work on your English; create a reminder on your phone

Decide and take the action! See you in the next section. ;)

My personal action plan

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							
13:00							
14:00							
15:00							
16:00							
17:00							
18:00							
19:00							
20:00							
21:00							
22:00							

The 30 days challenge

I believe that when you are now reading these lines you are already committed to be a confident and fluent English speaker. :) Let me congratulate you because only a handful of people are able to work hard on their goals and enjoy the benefits of their constant effort. You definitely understand how mastering English can help you in your career or personal life. How much new and useful knowledge is opening to you and how your great English can help your family, friends and community you are part of.

When we are learning English, there's really nothing we can lose. **English is an investment of our time and effort we put together to enjoy brighter future.**

Now you should be clear on **why** you are learning English, **what** are the biggest difficulties you are facing and have an idea of **how** to overcome them. There's also an **action plan** you have created for yourself.

Now I have one little **experiment** for you. Will you join? ;)

The 30 days challenge

What is the 30 days challenge? It's more of like a **game**.

Rules are simple:

1. Have your English **action plan ready** - if you haven't prepared it yet, now it's the right time!
2. Decide that you are going to **follow** your action plan every day **for 30 days** in a row.
3. Use the **tips, techniques** and **sources** you have learnt in this guide.
4. **Have fun** and enjoy the process
5. **See what happens** after 30 days :)

Tip: If you miss a day or two, **don't beat yourself up**. Sometimes we can't make our schedule for 100%, and that is ok. Important is to never give up and continue.

The goal of the 30 days challenge is to help you **build a habit of improving your English**. After 30 days of challenge, you should not just feel better about your English, but also your action plan should feel like a usual part of your daily life similar to brushing teeth or taking a shower. :)

Bonus

“Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

Tips for your success in English

Fear of making mistakes

As you know already I am not a native English speaker. Maybe you could find some grammar mistakes in this guide or on my blog. Did my not-perfect English stop me from writing this guide or posting articles on the blog? No! :)

Well, I had three options basically:

1. write the guide and hopefully have some positive impact on you :)
2. learn and learn English until “I am ready”, my English is perfect and then start writing
3. don't write anything (this is not an option in fact :))

The problem with the second option is that: **Do we really know when “We are ready”?** Isn't perfection just something we can never achieve? I would have probably

written nothing if I was trying to be perfect in English before I started writing this guide or blog. :)

Mistakes are our friends. Every time we realise we made a mistake, we certainly learnt something new. Important is not to fear our mistakes, but to use them on our way to success.

But what if people are going to judge me when I make a mistake?

From my personal experience, people are not going to judge you at all.

When you speak English, you can either talk to:

- a non-native English speaker

or

- a native English speaker

Non-native English speaker is like you and me - we are all English learners, we have very similar feelings when using English. We can understand the difficulties we are experiencing and therefore - why would we be judging or making fun of our friends?

What more, when we talk to **native English speakers**, they are usually glad that we are trying to communicate with them in their own native language. Imagine a foreigner who is trying to talk to you in your native language. How would you

feel? I bet you would like it. ;) You would even like to help him, wouldn't you?

Physical exercise and learning English

I think we can all agree that physical exercise is important for our health. But have you thought what positive impact can exercising make to our learning process?

If possible, do a little bit of **easy exercise before learning** (walking, running, lifting weights, ...) - it will make you energised, keep blood flowing and you will be more alert. **You can also exercise while learning** (listen to some English audio for example).

How to watch movies or videos in English?

When you watch something in English, try to **have English subtitles on the screen**, or **have a transcript** around. Sometimes we don't understand a word and when we can see how is it written we can check it out in the dictionary later.

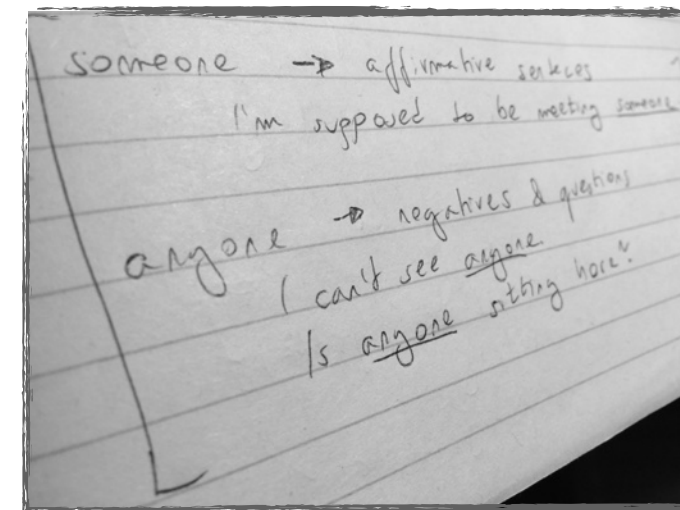
How to make notes from your English progress?

When we watch a movie in English, or read a book, or maybe listen to an audio lesson, sometimes we come to a word or a phrase we don't understand. That's completely ok. If we want to be really effective, it's worth to have a separate notebook

dedicated to our English learning. There you can put everything new you have learnt.

How does the English notebook look like? Simple. It can be a normal A4 format notebook where you put line by line everything new you come across - doesn't matter if it is a new word, an interesting idea, joke or some language speciality as long as it is related to English. :)

Example: Here is how I noted when to use word "*someone*" and when to use "*anyone*" in a sentence. :)



When you look at your notebook after a year of using it, you will realise how much you have learnt. :)

Travel or meet with tourists

If you can, spend at least several months in an English-speaking country. It can be one of the best investments in your language learning. If you don't have an opportunity to travel abroad, try to meet up with English-speaking tourists in your area.

How to make friends **online**?

As you could read in the previous chapter, one part of my action plan is chatting with people from all over the world and having a Skype calls with them. You may ask - **How can we meet all this people?** Now when we have internet it is so easy. Check out the website like italki.com where you can find many friends who are eager to exchange language knowledge and meet new friends. You can arrange a Skype call with them for **free**, or you can take a paid lessons with professional teachers.

How to make friends **offline**?

Even almost everything can be done online these days, there's nothing better than practicing language with a person sitting nearby. :) But how can we meet someone? And how do we know if a person wants to practice English? Perfect website for meeting people is meetup.com. There you can search for *meet up groups* based on your location and interest. You can for example search for "English in Delhi" or "English in Hanoi" and you will find groups of people who regularly meet and practice English. Often you can meet there foreigners from English-speaking countries.

By the way, have you heard of **language cafe**? It is an informal meeting of people who are interested in language exchange. These meetings usually take place in a normal pub or a bar. Each table has a label with a country flag or language name on it. You can just come to the table with language that you want to practice and join the conversation. :) It's a very

nice way of meeting new friends and learning language at the same time. Try to search for "language cafe" in you city!

Let your electronics help you with your English!

If you can, set **English as a language on all of your electronic devices** - phone, camera, car navigation... You can also learn some new phrases when you choose English language when withdrawing money from ATM. :)

Plus, don't forget that you can set English language on services like Facebook, Gmail, Twitter and so on... If you use these websites on a daily basis you can pick up new words really fast!

How can I improve my writing?

Simple answer - **by writing**. :) I know, I am not telling you anything new here, but people sometimes ask this question. Great way of improving writing skills is actually **chatting with your online friends** on social networks. It's **interactive, fun** and it requires you to react faster than if you were to write an essay in English.

Don't study grammar so much!

Most of the English teaching methods especially in public schools are based on constant studying of English grammar from grammar books and textbooks. From my own experience this is a very ineffective way of improving English.

From my point of view, **it's fine to study a little bit of grammar** when we are total beginners starting to learn English. But as long as you know the basics, it's time to stop studying grammar rules.

Instead of memorising grammar rules, focus on listening English and actually enjoy it. Use the recommended resources from the previous chapter, immerse yourself into real English and you will see how you can learn grammar automatically without even thinking about it. :)

Be aware of cultural differences

People all over the world communicate in English. **We share the same language but we all have different cultures.** Isn't that great?! :) We can share and experience each other's traditions, habits and values.

When talking to someone who is from other part of the world, keep in mind that **some words or expressions might be interpreted in a very different way than we are used to in our native language.** Yes, there are speech differences.

When someone asks an inappropriate question, or doesn't apologize when he or she should; or is complimenting wrong person - it doesn't necessarily mean he or she is impolite. His or her culture just values different things for being polite. :)

Common difficulties of English learners

Everyone of us might come from different country or culture. But all of us - English learners - face very similar obstacles and roadblocks on the way of learning English. This section summarises **frequently asked questions and common challenges English learners** encounter while they are trying to achieve fluency in English. All the questions in this section are asked by English learners from all over the world. I hope this section will be beneficial for you. :)

Question: "My mind gets blank and I struggle to speak in English with people who have better English knowledge than me. What should I do?" - Anonymous

Note: The person also mentioned that an example of such a stressful situation is meeting with managers in a company who have far better English knowledge.

My answer:

Thank you very much for this question.

I can completely relate to your problem because I have experienced something similar in the past. I believe that the underlying problem is **our psychology** - when we are dealing with someone who we think is better than we are in some way we can **feel intimidated**, or frightened.

This isn't related to speaking in a foreign language only - we can have similar experience when dealing with our boss, potential partner on a first date, and so on...

The reason our "mind gets blank" is because of **the stress we are experiencing** at that moment and the **way we are focusing our thoughts**.

The problem is also that this **negative experience works as a reference for the future**. That means - when we are about to get to the similar situation again, we can start feeling stressed even before the situation begins.

How to overcome this? :) (or what has helped me personally?)

- **Focus is the key** - we have to stop focusing on the negatives - don't think about managers as some "special people" who have "perfect English". It might be true, but it will make you feel unworthy. **Don't even compare your skills with theirs.**

- **Think** about the situation **differently**. Think that you are going to have a nice conversation with another human being, your friend, or colleague. **Focus on the goal** of the conversation you are going to have.
- Then, we need the **practice** - it's going to take some time until we are ok with the situation itself. We have to expose ourselves to the similar situation again and again - and **create positive reference**.
- What has helped with my **confidence in speaking** a lot is [Power English](#) program that is focused exactly on that.

Question: "I have been reading and practicing English grammar since I was 10. Now I am 28 and my grammar is still not good. How should I improve my grammar?"

- Anonymous

My answer:

It's really an interesting question. First thought coming to my mind was - **what is your goal with English?** - what is the reason you are trying to make your grammar perfect - is it because of some English certificate or test? Or you just want to understand all the grammar constructions, exceptions, tenses and so on?

If this is the case, I think, the best way to learn grammar is by doing practical exercises and watching videos where grammar is explained on the examples from real life. Very good source for this is for example:

- [Learn English](#) from British Council - there you can find useful videos where grammar is explained and do many exercises which are more of like games.

But, if you want to get better in English in general - speaking, reading, listening and writing - I don't think that extensive knowledge of grammar is necessary. Then you just need to practice English in real life **without thinking about grammar.** :)

Question: "As a non-native English speaker, how do I use prepositions properly (such as in phrases like be good at, be interested in, concentrate on, etc.)?"

- Anonymous

My answer:

When I went to elementary and secondary school we used to learn prepositions in a "grammar" way - for example: preposition "in" is used here and there, preposition "on" is used with these nouns... and so on. This way of learning never worked for me.

What worked was just to **use English - read, listen and speak**. It is far more easier to remember correct preposition constructions when we encounter them in the context several times than to memorise them. This way it's more fun and we don't realise we are learning. :) You will soon **get a feel** what preposition goes with what noun without even thinking.

I also think it is important to focus on the part of the English we need in our lives. And find reading / listening materials according to what we enjoy. Learning English has to be pleasure.

Question: "What are a few good books to read when trying to learn English?"

- Yaroslav

My answer:

I think it depends a lot on your level of English and your interests. **When choosing a book or ebook in English I usually take this approach:**

- do I **like** the topic? or, Is the book interesting to me?
- do I **understand** at least around 70% of the words used in the book without using a dictionary? (we want to enjoy reading book, not a dictionary :))

Over time we can move to more difficult book.

But, there's an exception. :) If I really really want to read a specific book, I don't care so much what percentage of words I already understand.

Two more tips:

- Listen to the **audio books** by your interest. Plus, you can also read the original copy of the book while listening.
- Don't feel ashamed to read a **children's book** if you like them and it suits your needs. :)

There are many more difficulties and challenges we - English learners - face. If there's something special you are struggling with and haven't found the answer to in this guide or on the internet, feel free to share it with me.

The English lesson from Southeast Asia

The last part of this guide is little bit different. I would like to tell you about what I have experienced when I was travelling through Vietnam and Cambodia with friends.

The story is about two helpful Cambodian guides and Vietnamese boy and his father in Hanoi. :)

Me and my friends travelled across Cambodia and stopped by in the world famous temple complex Angkor Wat for a few days. If you have been there or ever seen the place, I bet you were certainly amazed of the history, architecture of the monuments and the beautiful surrounding nature.

When we got to the place, we didn't know much about it. Luckily, one Cambodian guy came to us and offered his guiding service. He didn't speak perfect English, sometimes he mispronounced words, or got stuck for a second. **But he kept speaking, kept trying and without a fear he shared his knowledge about old temples with us.**

Our second stop was so-called Floating Village nearby the city Siem Reap. We took a boat trip there. On the boat was a young boy in his 17-years who was showing us the village and all the interesting places around. When we got to the conversation, he told me that the reason he is working as a guide on the boat is that he can meet tourists and **talk to them in English and practice**. He would do that even for free just to learn and improve his speaking skills.

After several days spent in Cambodia we moved to Hanoi in Vietnam. One day when we walked in the city, suddenly a boy and his father who were playing badminton on the pavement, jumped to us and asked if we would like to join them for one game. We agreed. :) After a few minutes of playing, we started to talk. The boy's English and also the English of his father were quite good. We were talking about life, travel and how they learn English. Then we took a group picture, said good bye to each other, and walked away. It was an interesting experience.

Is there anything special about this story?

Well, all the people there - whether the Cambodian guides or Vietnamese boy and his father - all of them do **look everywhere for opportunities to improve their English**. They literally go outside to speak English! :) They **don't care about the mistakes they make; important for them is to speak, practice and get better**.

What if we applied their approach in our English learning process too? :)

Final words from Ivan

Congratulations! You have just completed the guide. I am glad I could share with you all the techniques, tips and suggestions I have used to improve my own English. Now is the time to put in practice everything you have learnt.

- Don't be afraid of mistakes, they are our friends
- Keep your ultimate goals and dreams in mind, they lead us
- Take care of your thoughts, they have the power to change our lives

And don't forget - on the way of reaching for our goals and dreams we have to have fun! We have to enjoy the process. Even there will be challenges on the way don't forget that we want to enjoy our life and live fully because

"Life is a journey, not a destination."

Thank you so much for taking the time for reading this guide. I hope I could help you with your English or in any other way. Even if there was only one thing that inspired you, motivated you or just made your day better, I am grateful for it. :)

Please do let me know what you think about the guide. What do you like? How did the guide help you? **Feel free to share your thoughts and leave a comment [here](#)**. Or if you prefer more private way of communication, don't hesitate to send me an [email](#). **I appreciate your feedback and will read every message or comment. :)**

If you haven't done so, join the discussions on my [Facebook Fan Page](#) or Twitter ([@IvanOttinger](#)) to get the latest updates from me. :)

And if you would like to **share this guide with your friends** - please direct them to the link below so they have the chance to join the newsletter as well. Thank you.

<http://englishthesmartway.com/english-the-smart-way>

Ivan :)

Ivan Ottinger

