

# OpenLearn Works



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TI-AIE

## Developing your English

Secondary English

# Developing your English

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## What this unit is about



I'm a secondary English teacher, and I've studied English for a long time. I'm good at English, but I could still improve – especially my speaking and listening skills. However I don't live and work in an English-speaking environment. What can I do to develop my own English?

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As a secondary-level English teacher, it is important that you have good English skills and you feel confident using English to support your students' learning. Probably you already have good English skills. However, there may be one or two areas of English that you are less confident about, for example speaking in English. In this unit, you will identify the areas of English that you would like to improve, and you will find ideas about how you can do this. By continuing your own learning you are showing yourself to be a role model for your students.

## What you can learn in this unit

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- How to identify your own strengths and weaknesses in English.
- How you can improve your English listening and speaking skills for personal and professional purposes.
- How you can improve your English reading and writing skills for personal and professional purposes.

## Why you should consider developing your English

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Learning a language is a process that is never complete. Every one of us can practise to communicate better, learn more vocabulary, learn to understand more accents and write more eloquently. By improving your own English fluency, you will benefit yourself and your students. They will benefit from your new knowledge and skills, and you will motivate them to want to learn more.

# 1 Improving your English

Good teachers are continuously trying to improve their English. They find that this benefits them in many different ways. Read what these teachers say:



I enjoy watching TV programmes and films. Now I can enjoy watching them in English, too. And each time I watch, I learn even more. I can now use these programmes and films with my students.

I had heard a lot about the British Council Master Trainers programme and I wanted to become one myself – I am so happy my English has improved. I have just been chosen!

I am planning to go to a seminar for English teachers. I know that the presentation will be in English, and I want to be able to understand it and take notes for the teachers at school.

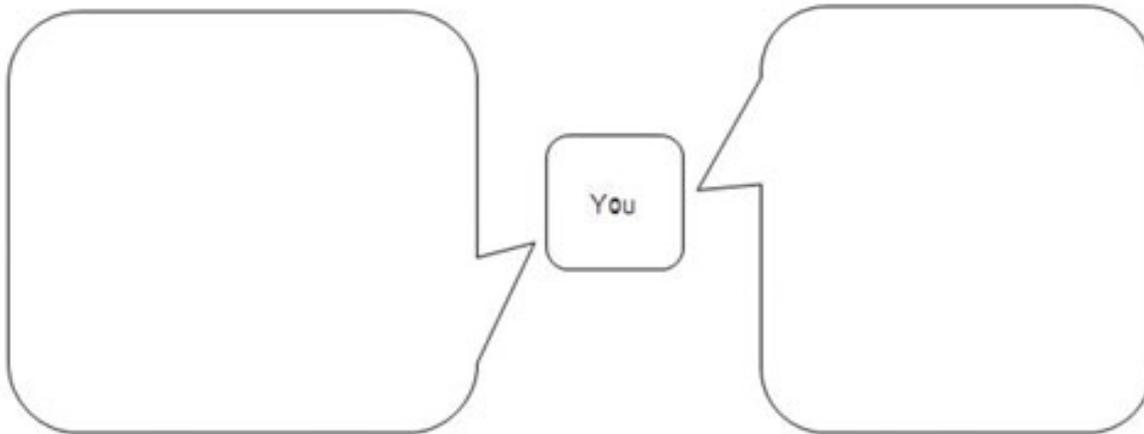
My friend is also an English teacher. She has taken a lot of time to improve her English, and now her students are achieving better exam results.

I've found some good ways of improving my English, and I've told my students about them. Some of them are making more effort to improve their own English too.

I feel more confident speaking English these days, and use it much more in the classroom. I've noticed that my students understand it better now, and are using it more themselves when they speak.

I am happy now that I can speak to visitors to our school, and understand what they say in English. I can also understand much better what our education department officers say – earlier I used to hide from them!

Now think about how improving your English could help you. Write your thoughts in the empty speech bubbles below or in your notebook. If you can, compare your thoughts to those of a colleague.



Whatever your thoughts, improving English can help you in your personal and professional life, and can benefit your teaching and your students too.

### Case Study 1: Mrs Chakrakodi wants to improve her English and sets up an English club

*Mrs Chakrakodi teaches English at a rural government secondary school. As a student, she enjoyed English and did well in exams. Now she reads and writes English confidently but is less confident with speaking and listening to English. She wants to develop these skills, but has found it difficult because she does not live and work in an English-speaking environment.*

In a recent training session at our local DIET, I asked our trainer about how we secondary English teachers could improve our English. Our trainer told us about a radio show [TeachingEnglish, 2012]. In it, teachers talked about what they did to improve their English skills. One of them started an English club in order to practise speaking and listening.

Our trainer from the DIET thought that starting an English club was a very good idea, and we did too. She organised for teachers from neighbouring schools to get together once a week to talk only in English about whatever subject we like, or even about an article or something that everyone has read in advance.

The idea appealed to me as I live in a rural area where it is difficult to practise English. I always thought that I needed to practise speaking English with people who spoke it fluently, but after listening to the show, I realised that I just needed to practise – and that there were other teachers in the same position as me. So I started to go to this group regularly for an hour each week.

The first time we met, I felt a little embarrassed about speaking English, and I was worried that I would make mistakes. But as we have continued, I have become more confident, and I have learned not to worry about mistakes. What is important is that we all practise speaking – and listening to each other, of course!

At first we tried to prepare topics to talk about, but we found that we didn't have much time for this. But we realised that we needed something to speak about, so now we take it in turns to choose a topic. Last week, for example, we talked about food. We swapped recipes, and talked about good and bad dishes that we had eaten. It was fun, and I got some good ideas for cooking too!

Sometimes I can't go to the club because I am just too busy – and that's true for all of us. But we decided that the club would take place no matter how many people are there. It's helped me to become more confident at speaking English, and that means I am more confident in my classes too.

### Activity 1: Improve your own English

In Case Study 1, Mrs Chakrakodi identified that she is less confident at speaking and listening to English, which is why she started going to the English club. Now read Table 1, which is something she filled in to describe her English skills.

**Table 1** Mrs Chakrakodi describes her English skills.

Type of skill	My English skills	What I can do to improve
Reading English	I can read and understand most English texts. I read English newspapers when I can. Sometimes I don't know the vocabulary.	Continue to read texts as much as possible. Use a dictionary to look up words.
Writing English	I can write texts quite accurately.	Right now I will not work on writing. I prefer to spend my time developing my speaking skills.
Listening to English	I don't have many opportunities to listen to English.	Listen to the news in English once a week, on TV or the radio. Go to English club once a week.
Speaking English	I don't have many opportunities to speak in English.	Go to English club once a week – and speak as much as I can during the session.

Now complete the table for yourself, using Table 2 or a copy. First, make some notes about your abilities and the things you already do in English. Your notes might be similar to the teacher of Case Study 1, or your case might be very different. Identify any areas where you could improve your English. Make some notes about what you think you could do that would help you improve. If you can, discuss these ideas with a colleague.

**Table 2** English skills template.

Type of skill	My English skills	What I can do to improve
Reading English		
Writing English		
Listening to English		
Speaking English		

## 2 Developing speaking and listening skills

Many teachers – even at secondary level – feel less confident about their speaking and listening skills than they do about their reading or writing. Here are some occasions when an English teacher might speak or listen to English. Do you use English for any of these? Tick the ones that apply to you. If there are some occasions that are not listed, add them to the list.

- talking to students in the classroom
- talking to colleagues
- talking to visitors to your home or school
- listening to a radio show
- listening to an expert at a seminar or conference
- listening to or watching a discussion about education
- listening to music
- watching a movie or TV programme.

There may be times when you *have to* listen to or speak in English, and there may be others when you *choose to*, for enjoyment or for information. It isn't really important what you listen to, or who you speak with. The more you practise listening to and speaking English, the better you will be at these language skills.

### Case Study 2: Mr Meganathan improves his listening skills by listening to the radio in English

*Mr Meganathan is an English teacher at a secondary government school and has been teaching for 11 years. He is quite confident with English, but recently had an experience that made him decide to improve his listening skills.*

A few months ago, a visitor from New York came to our school. As the teacher of languages, I was asked to greet the visitor and accompany him during his visit. The students behaved well, and the visit went well. However, I knew that I had some problems understanding the visitor. At first, it was quite difficult to understand his accent, and I had to ask him to repeat what he was saying quite a few times. Over the course of the visit I understood him better, but there were still some times when I wasn't sure what he was saying, and I felt a little embarrassed.

I was pleased to meet the visitor, but it made me realise that I had perhaps become a little lazy, and had stopped using my English apart from in the classroom. I wanted to be able to understand future visitors to the school – something that was likely to happen again as my school was involved in an international project.

I watch the news every day on TV, and thought that I could sometimes watch it in English. Now I watch it a couple of times a week, and it's not too difficult as I already follow news stories so I know something about what's going on. And I'm getting used to listening to real English. Often there are people from different countries speaking English. That means I am getting some practice in listening to different accents. That's one thing that is difficult where I live. I've told my students about the radio stations too, and have suggested that they listen to them if they can.

### Activity 2: Improve your speaking and listening skills

Table 3 lists some ways that you can improve your speaking and listening skills in English. Read each one and think about the questions.

**Table 3** Improving your speaking and listening skills in English.

Activity	Ways of improving your skills
Listening to the radio in English	Do you get any English radio stations? If you do, which ones? Which programmes does the station have? Are these programmes interesting for you?
Watching films or TV programmes in English	Do you have cable TV? Do you get English news channels, movies, cartoons or other channels? If you do, which ones do you like to watch?
Listening to music in English	Do you listen to English music on your mobile phone, radio or TV? If you do, how many songs do you listen to each week?
Listening to the radio or recordings on the internet	Do you have access to the internet? If you do, find recordings that you are interested in. See Resource 1 for some ideas.
Recording speakers of English (e.g. on a mobile phone)	Do you know anyone who speaks English well? This could be someone from your place, another town or city, or even a foreign country. If so, can you record some of their speech to listen to and use as a model?
Setting up an English club with colleagues	Are teachers in neighbouring schools interested in setting up an English club? If so, how often and where will you meet? What will you talk about?

Now make a plan for improving your speaking and listening skills. Set yourself a target.

- Which of the activities listed above will you do?
- How often will you do each one?
- When will you do this activity?
- Will you do this with another teacher?

Improving your speaking and listening skills will benefit you and your students. But don't be too ambitious! Just choose one or two of the activities listed above. Choose the ones that most appeal to you, and that you can fit most easily into your daily routine. You are more likely to continue that way. You are also more likely to continue if you do short bursts – listening to ten minutes of the radio every day, for example – rather than spending long periods of time infrequently. Find some time each day to practise English. Make it a habit!

## 3 Developing reading and writing skills

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Many teachers feel more confident reading and writing English than speaking it. Typically, secondary teachers have studied long texts, and see English texts around them every day (see the unit *Local resources for teaching English*).

