

Ten powerful ways to improve your English

1) Find a teacher or mentor, and study English regularly

Find a teacher or mentor. Go to English class often. Once a week is good, twice a week is better. You need regular input to improve. An occasional class once a month will not help you improve at all.

2) Read in English

Buy a magazine from the book store that has articles in both English and Chinese. Try to read and understand in English, then check with the Chinese text for anything you don't understand.

3) Listen to people speaking English

Any radio station in English is good. One of the best for lots of talking on interesting subjects is BBC Radio 4.

BBC Radio 2 is good for chat and music.

Get used to the patterns of English speech. It doesn't matter if you don't understand it all, just listen to A LOT of English.

BBC Radio 4:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/player/bbc_radio_fourfm

BBC Radio 2:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/player/bbc_radio_two

4) Listen to audio books

Many books in English are available in audio format. Listen to as much English as you can each day. If you struggle to understand, then buy a digital or print copy of the book too, so you can follow along with the text. This can be a big help.

Audio books are usually read in a very clear manner, so are great for practicing your listening skills.

5) Speak English with your classmates

Arrange to hang out with one of your classmates after lessons to practice the English you have just learned in that lesson. If you use the vocabulary and grammar you have learned you will remember it.

6) Speak English with someone who speaks better English than you

Level 2 students: offer to buy an Level 3 student a cup of coffee and speak to them in English for half an hour. Try not to use any Chinese. Offer to buy an Level 4 or Level 5 student a meal and do the same.

Level 3 students: find an Level 4 student to chat to over coffee, or an Level 5 student to spend a little longer with.

Level 4 students: buy a teacher a cup of coffee!! (Mine: Americano, black, hot, two sugars !!)

7) Teach someone some English

Higher students: if someone offers to buy you a coffee or meal, accept and help them. You will benefit greatly by trying to explain your understanding of English. You will also discover what you don't know and be able to decide what you need to study in order to improve yourself.

8) Watch English/American movies or TV shows

This is my #1 tip for developing your listening skills. Watch a movie FOUR times:

- a) with subtitles in Chinese – just enjoy the movie
- b) with subtitles in both English and Chinese – pause to compare the two languages and look up any words you don't understand
- c) with just English subtitles – again pause if you need to in order to understand what is being said. Don't try to remember all the vocabulary or understand all the grammar, but enough so you can follow the conversation
- d) with no subtitles – listen carefully. Watch the character's mouths as they speak. The way people talk in movies is usually very natural, so you will quickly develop great listening skills

9) Read out loud

Read some English text out loud every day. Find out which sounds you struggle with and practice those regularly. Ask your teacher or mentor for some pronunciation tips. Highlight the sounds you struggle with in a document and pay special attention to those as you read.

Read aloud for five minutes every day. Your pronunciation will improve greatly.

10) Challenge yourself

Go to Sea World and go into a coffee shop. Start a conversation with a Westerner. Say something like "Hi there, which country do you come from? Oh, I'm really interested in (that country). Would you mind if I asked you a couple of questions?"

Ask why they are in China, what job they do, do they speak any Chinese, what do they like about Shenzhen.

The confidence you will gain by doing this will boost your desire to use English, as you will see that you are able to communicate effectively with foreigners.

Good luck, Ian

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