

Skills 360 – 9 Habits of Highly Effective Language Learners (Part 2)

Discussion Questions

1. When you study English, what topics or type of materials are truly interesting to you?
2. As an English learner, do you practice all four skills – reading, listening, speaking, writing – about the same amount? If not, which do you tend to focus on?
3. Do you feel comfortable starting conversations with native English speakers? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

To get fit: to become healthy, strong, and active; “If you make the time to exercise regularly, you’ll find that getting fit actually gives you more energy.”

A drag: something that you don’t really want to do because it is boring or annoying; “I know it’s necessary to do inventory every month, but I always find it a real drag.”

Surefire: certain to achieve intended results, especially describing a way or method; “A warm smile and a firm handshake are surefire ways of making a good first impression.”

Dull: boring; “Howard’s presentation on analyzing financial statements was so dull I almost fell asleep.”

“Couldn’t care less about something:” informally used to say that something is not important to you at all; “I really couldn’t care less about which font we should use in the proposal, so could we talk about something more important?”

To arouse your interest: to be interesting or make you curious; “A good trainer knows how to arouse people’s interest in a subject so that they actually pay attention and learn.”

A wealth of: a lot of or a wide variety of; “Graduates of our MBA program enjoy an enormous wealth of opportunities in many different business fields.”

Sponge: a material that can take in and hold water, especially for cleaning purposes, or a person who can take in and remember a lot of information; “How can you recite all those stats from memory? You must be a real sponge.”

To absorb: to take in and hold, such as water or information; "Honestly, the speaker gave us so much information that I couldn't possibly absorb it all."

To engage: to begin using or to make use of some part of a machine or your brain; "The facilitator at our brainstorming session really knew how to engage our creative sense to generate interesting ideas."

Input: data, information, or resources that are received, by a computer, process, person; "As part of our strategic planning process, we're asking all the staff for input on our company's strengths and weaknesses."

Output: data, information, or products that are created and put out, by a computer, process, or person; "With new extraction technologies, all five of our mines saw an increase in output each of the past three years."

To translate into: to cause a result or lead to something; "Providing intangible benefits like flex time, holidays, and employee wellness programs can translate into happier staff and reduced turnover."

Native speakers: someone who grows up speaking a certain language is a "native speaker;" "My Spanish language ability improved a lot after I moved to Argentina and interacted regularly with native speakers."

"Talk about:" we can say "talk about" before an adjective or noun phrase to emphasize the quality expressed by an adjective; "Carlos has asked us to be at the office for a 6:00 meeting? Talk about *early*."

To imitate: to copy in voice or behavior; "Even when I try imitating a British accent, everyone immediately knows that I'm from the American South."

Rhythm: the regular pattern of sound, in music or language; "The key to speaking with natural rhythm in English is learning about word stress and sentence stress."

Intonation: the natural rising and falling of speech; "If you're asking a yes or no question, then your intonation should rise, or go up, at the end of the sentence."

To initiate: to begin or start something, such as a project; "In our efforts to break into the Asian market, we've initiated new business partnerships with several Chinese firms."

To strike up a conversation: to start talking with someone; "John's so outgoing that he feels comfortable striking up a conversation with strangers in any situation."

Fluent: able to speak a language naturally and fluidly; "I was always pretty good at French, but it was only after five years in Paris that I considered myself fluent."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host Tim Simmons, and today I want to continue our look at the habits of highly effective language learners.

Yes, I said *habits*, because good habits are the foundation of a lot of success and achievement. It doesn't matter if you're talking about [getting fit](#) or being productive or learning a new skill. Good habits will serve you well. Why else do you think that Stephen Covey has sold over 25 million copies of his book "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People?"

So, when it comes to learning a language, what are the habits that will get you where you want to go? Well, last time I talked about the importance of being regular, reviewing what you learn, setting goals, and taking risks. Today I want to start with an idea that a lot of people are happy to hear: read and listen to things you're actually *interested* in.

Seriously. Learning doesn't have to be [a drag](#). In fact, a [surefire](#) way to lose motivation is to study [dull](#) textbooks full of information that you [couldn't care less about](#). And if you lose motivation, then you'll have a hard time being regular, and you'll never reach your goals. So why not focus on topics that [arouse your interest](#)? I mean, I assume that's why you're listening to this podcast about Business English: because it *matters* to you. And that's a great start. So take advantage of the [wealth of](#) materials and media available to you, especially online. If what you're studying is interesting, then you'll look *forward* to it, and being regular won't be hard at all.

Now, wouldn't it be great if we could learn a second language as easily as we learn our first? I mean, when we're young, our brains are [sponges](#) that can [absorb](#) new information without even trying. But then we grow up and the old memory unit needs a bit of help. And that's why you should get in the habit of writing things down, like new words, new expressions, interesting facts, or key points about how the language works.

Of course, writing these things down will give you something to review, which I've already suggested doing. But it's more than that. The very act of writing something down will help you process and remember it. It's true! Because when you write it, you are using the part of the brain that *makes* language. And that means you've [engaged](#) both the understanding and the creating parts of your brain. The result? It sticks in your memory.

But I assume that you're learning English more than just to understand it. I'm guessing that you want to actually *use* it, which takes practice. And that's why another important habit is finding a balance between [input](#) and [output](#). Reading and listening don't necessarily [translate](#) directly into writing and speaking ability. You need to practice *producing* the language. But if all you do is speak and you never take the time to read and listen, then you'll have the opposite problem. So look for balance.

Now, is all input and output equal? I mean, does it matter what you read and listen to and how you practice? You **bet** it does. And good language learners know that the best source of learning is **native speakers**. Why do I say that? Well, here's an experience I'm sure you've had: in school you learned some useful English expressions for different situations, like greeting people or ordering in a restaurant. Then you actually experience these situations and discover that people are saying something *completely different*. **Talk about** frustrating.

So, if you want to learn the real language of conversation, listen to native speakers. Then take the next step and **imitate** what you hear. That means trying to pronounce words in the same way, using the same **rhythm** and **intonation**, and copying natural words and expressions.

You can do this kind of practice alone, with podcasts, TV or movies, but language is meant to be used between people. And this brings me to the last habit I want to mention: effective language learners **initiate** practice opportunities. I know it takes confidence to **strike up a conversation** when you're still learning the language. But what are you afraid of? Having a hard time communicating? Making mistakes? That's just part of the process. Every single person who has become **fluent** in a second language went through that. So relax and have fun with it.

All right, let's run through these habits one more time. First off, listen to and read things you're actually interested in. And when you do, be sure to write things down, especially vocabulary. But don't *just* read and listen. You need to balance all the input with *output*, or practice. And when you do that, try imitating native speakers that you hear. Finally, go out and initiate practice opportunities.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the **BusinessEnglishPod.com** website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. What is the key to staying motivated and regular in learning a language?
 - A Buying good textbooks.
 - B Taking a course.
 - C Studying things that interest you.
 - D Focusing on social media.

2. What are the benefits of writing down things that you learn? [choose 2]
 - A It engages different parts of your brain.
 - B It improves your overall writing skills.
 - C It helps you review later.
 - D It allows you to share what you learn with others.

3. When it comes to the four skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing, what should we aim for?
 - A Relying on our greatest strength.
 - B Achieving balance.
 - C Focusing on our biggest weakness.
 - D Finding opportunities that incorporate all four skills.

4. Which of the following can be improved by imitating native speakers? [choose all that apply]
 - A intonation
 - B understanding of grammar
 - C vocabulary
 - D rhythm
 - E cultural knowledge
 - F writing ability

5. What is true about making mistakes in conversation with native speakers?
 - A It can be avoided by writing things down more.
 - B It will lead to social rejection.
 - C It leads to bad habits.
 - D It's just part of the learning process.

6. Which of the following are recommended as effective ways of improving your English ability? [choose all that apply]
 - A Translating from your first language.
 - B Talking with native speakers.
 - C Learning from young children.
 - D Using online materials
 - E Carefully practicing what you learned in school.
 - F Balancing input and output.
 - G Copying how native speakers speak.

Review Answers

1. What is the key to staying motivated and regular in learning a language?
C Studying things that interest you.
2. What are the benefits of writing down things that you learn? [choose 2]
A It engages different parts of your brain.
C It helps you review later.
3. When it comes to the four skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing, what should we aim for?
B Achieving balance.
4. Which of the following can be improved by imitating native speakers? [choose all that apply]
A intonation
C vocabulary
D rhythm
5. What is true about making mistakes in conversation with native speakers?
D It's just part of the learning process.
6. Which of the following are recommended as effective ways of improving your English ability? [choose all that apply]
B Talking with native speakers.
D Using online materials
E Balancing input and output.
F Copying how native speakers speak.