# Language is something to do,
# not just something to learn

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By the time they arrive at Nagoya University, students have spent several years studying English. As a result, they think of English as something to learn and to know, similar to science or history. But language is not just something you learn. **Language is a set of skills**, something you do. Just like other skills, the way to get better at English is to do it.

Think about how people learn to play sports. You could, for example, study with the greatest baseball manager in the world and get full marks on a test of baseball rules. But if you never throw a ball or swing a bat, you will never be able to play baseball. It's the same way with English. Doing homework or passing tests is good, but someone who only learns about grammar and vocabulary will never be able to have a conversation or write a message in English. And plenty of people have good conversations without being able to pass a test. **The way to get good at doing something is just to do it.**

Do you ever make mistakes when you try to use English? I do. I think everyone does. People who are just starting out, people who have mastered English grammar, even educated and careful native speakers sometimes misunderstand or say the wrong thing. **There is no such thing as "perfect English".**

**Mistakes are good.** Making a mistake is an effective way to learn. When I make a mistake I get embarrassed. I feel bad about what I did. But that makes me remember it, and then I am less likely to make that mistake again. (Next time, I'll make a different mistake. But I'll learn from that, too.) Don't be afraid of your mistakes. If you never make a mistake, that means that you are not trying. If you try to do something difficult, you will probably make mistakes sometimes. That is how you get better at what you are learning. If you never make a mistake, it is because you are not challenging yourself.

Does improving your English take hard work? Well, it takes a lot things – time, cooperation with other people, and listening, reading, writing, or speaking. But is that hard work? It depends on what you think. If you tell yourself, "Oh no, this is hard," then you might have a difficult time. But is cooperating with other people a bad thing? Is spending time improving yourself a bad thing? What if instead of thinking, "I'm working hard," you think "I'm getting better and better"? Then improving your English is not necessarily hard work. Just like playing the guitar or mastering a video game, you can spend time and **improve your ability without suffering**.

My advice is to **find things you like** that use English. Find books that interest you, or people you like talking with, or movies or TV programs that excite you. Then spend time, not working hard but enjoying things that happen to use English.