

How to Improve Your English through Studying What Interests You

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Introduction

Learning another language is difficult. It takes a long time. Sometimes you may think you are not learning enough, but later you will look back and see that you learned a lot. Other times you may be too self-confident about what you are learning. You think you are doing everything perfectly, yet you need to put more effort into studying. Attending English classes can help with both. They set a regular schedule to keep you motivated when you do not feel so confident. A teacher can also push you towards higher goals than you may set for yourself.

While attending class helps, you have to make a considerable amount of effort to learn English. This is not just the effort that you will put into class participation and regular homework. It involves effort outside of regular class assignments. Acknowledging this may be scary for students who are busier than ever. How do you manage this around your other classes, your club activities, your part time job, your social lives and your family obligations? I would like to make some suggestions for having fun and improving your English language abilities.

What do you like to do or think about?

Effectively learning another language involves a lot of memorization. However, if you really want to learn how to read, listen to, and speak another language you need to have a context. It should be a context that focuses on what you like to do or think about (this is your free time after all). Ask yourself “What do I like to do or think about?” Choose one or two things. Now, every day spend at least a few minutes on the Internet reading about these things. Do you like music? There is a lot of English language writing and news about music on the Internet. Even if you like J-Pop only people are writing in English about J-Pop. Do you like politics? You can read about politics on the online sites for *BBC*, *Al-Jazeera*, *The Washington Post*, etc. Even if you are only interested in Japanese politics, guess what? People in America, Australia, the U.K., India, etc. are writing about Japanese politics. Do you like sports? Look at English language websites about sports. The Internet is helpful for learning about anything you are interested in, using English language.

Listen to English language music

Music is a fun way to learn another language. It is less stressful than reading and can easily be listened to when tired. Some of the music—i.e. the guitars, bass, drums, etc.—may help you understand the complex emotions in the lyrics. Many song lyrics can be found on the Internet. You also can listen to English language music while doing other things, such as chores or socializing. This helps keep you familiar with English language in your free time.

Listen to English language radio

Listening to another language is important for learning. You can even sometimes find written transcripts if you have trouble listening. The United States has a good radio station for this which is available on the Internet: National Public Radio (N.P.R.) (<http://www.npr.org/>). There are a variety of news and music shows available with transcripts. These talk about many topics so you can pick the ones you are interested in.

Speak to others in English outside of class

There are many people on the Nagoya University campus that speak English—both from English speaking countries and people like you who speak English as a second language. This is a good opportunity to practice English in unstructured conversations. While these unstructured conversations may be difficult at times, you do not have time to prepare for the subject matter or may encounter new dialects or informal language not in your text book, these are the types of conversations that you need to become comfortable with. These are the conversations that you will have in your professional life. Now is the time to begin having them. They will improve your language proficiency.

When you learn a new phrase use it outside of class

When you learn a new phrase, use it in your daily conversation with others. If you want to practice on your own, write down the phrase using different nouns and verbs. This will help you see how it can be used elsewhere.

Ask questions in class

You may feel pressured to know everything. However, when learning a language, remember that you cannot know everything. Your teacher is a good resource for questions that you may have. Do not be afraid to ask questions.