

Smart English Grammar



Listening to Real English

by Maureen Bouey & Dahlia Miller

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7 Secrets to Fluent English Secret #2



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by Maureen Bouey

Last time we looked at Secret # 1 to speaking fluent English. This was Listen, Listen, Listen! I hope you've already started looking for more listening opportunities – it really is SO important.

This time we will explore the next important secret to speaking English. Let's begin!

SECRET #2: READ

Read often

Read a LOT!!!

I know, I know! Some of you don't like reading – even in your first language. I admit, if you like to read, you will have a bit of an “edge” (an advantage), but, even if you don't really like reading, I promise to show you why this skill is so valuable to fluent English. And maybe, together, we can find a way for you to like it!

“What is reading but silent conversation?”

Walter Savage Landor

In this lesson I will show you:

- how reading can help you become a more fluent English speaker, and
- how to find reading material you can enjoy.

First though, let's look at a couple of 'whys'. Here are two questions for you to consider:

1. Why is reading such a valuable skill?
2. Why do you need to read to improve your English?

Let me try to answer these questions for you.

Reading and writing are linked. Reading is written information going in; writing is written information going out. Even if you don't like writing, you'll probably want to be able to write well in English, for tests, for business, or even for communicating by email or mail. Perhaps you're a song writer and would like to write songs in English. If so, then read. **THROUGH READING, YOU WILL IMPROVE YOUR WRITING.**

What other benefits can you get from reading? Probably one of the biggest advantages is that you can broaden your vocabulary. You can learn brand new words and, at the same time, gain a deeper understanding of words you have heard or seen before. You see, what you are doing is learning/reviewing words "in context". And this is so important!

When you learn a new word "in isolation", you don't get a clear understanding of how to use that word. And yet, learning words in isolation is the way most students learn new vocabulary! For example, here is the word "shout" and here is its definition: "to speak very loudly - either because someone is a long way off, or because you are angry." So, you've learned the definition of the word "shout" but can you use it?

Another way of learning the meaning of a new vocabulary word (the way ALL native speakers of their own languages learn) is to understand new words from context. For instance: if you read a story and there is the sentence, "He shouted so loudly, it hurt her ears;" and then you read another story with a sentence that says, "Don't shout so loud – you'll wake the baby!"... well, you're going to begin to have a pretty good idea of what "shout" means, aren't you? You can understand and learn the meaning of new words from the context (from what's around the words). This is the most natural, and very best way to learn new vocabulary. So, **READING IS A GREAT WAY TO BUILD VOCABULARY.**

Which brings me to this important point: **DO NOT** use your dictionary when you are reading (at least not at first). Use it later if you still don't understand the word from the context. You see, if you stop to use your dictionary, it breaks the natural rhythm of your reading.

A third reason why you should read is because **IT INCREASES YOUR EXPOSURE TO ENGLISH IN GENERAL.** In other words, you will understand more about Western culture through reading, and if you do, you will understand the language more, including idioms, etc.

"Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are."

Mason Cooley

Here are some great tips on **HOW TO READ:**

- Read **WITHOUT** a dictionary.
- When reading, practice either guessing at the meanings of unknown words or ignoring them.

- Don't worry about every little detail. Keep reading even if it seems a little bit hard (but not too hard). Try to get the overall meaning.
- Read quickly. By maintaining a natural rhythm and flow, you will learn to “infer”, or guess meanings.
- Read aloud – to children, to friends, or just to yourself. (This will improve your pronunciation as well.
- If a book is just too boring - or too hard - stop reading and find another book.
- Read without stress – get a cup of tea or coffee and relax.
- Read frequently – ten or fifteen minutes every day is better than an hour once a week.

Here are some tips on **WHAT TO READ**:

- Well, the short answer is: read anything and everything!
- Choose something based on your ability – for instance, if you are at a pre- intermediate level, don't try reading a long, difficult novel.
- Read for information.
- Read for pleasure – science fiction, mysteries, romances, etc.
- Read about topics that interest you.
- Read books, magazines, newspapers, journals, the Internet, letters, emails, texts, bus schedules, travel brochures, textbooks, novels, cookbooks, you name it!
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And here's a great way To Practise both your Listening and Reading Skills:

Read books that have audios (tapes or CDs) with them. With audio books, you're practicing both of your receptive skills (listening and reading) at once. You can do this anywhere, and it's very, very helpful.

It's a fact: the more you read, the sooner you will begin to easily recognize more and more words. When this starts to happen, the speed of your reading will increase. Best of all, you will grow increasingly more comfortable with English. There have been several scientific studies done that show when students read a lot they become more confident, and thus improve their overall English.

Why not keep a reading log (a record of what you've read)? It will surprise and encourage you when you look back on it.

These are just some ideas – the important thing if you want to improve your reading, vocabulary and general English: you must read OFTEN and read CONSISTENTLY. 10 minutes every day is better than 1 hour a week.

Here is a common English expression: “There’s no time like the present.” Perhaps you have a similar one in your own language. It simply means: there is no better time to begin something than the present moment. In other words, right now!

So, we’ll see you next time with Secret # 3! Until then, Keep Listening and Reading! And if you’re ready to begin, there’s no time like the present!

Maureen Bouey is an ESL teacher in Victoria, BC, Canada. She is the co-author of Smart English Grammar – Real English Listening – Intermediate with Dahlia Miller.

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