
3 Unique Ways to Improve Your Speaking with English Podcasts

by ELENA MUTTONONO

Have you ever listened to a podcast?

If so, you were probably practicing your listening skills, right?

Well, you can also use podcasts to improve your speaking level!

It's true! And I'm going to show you three different ways you can use podcasts to improve your speech.

By using podcasts in these ways, you'll remember useful words and phrases, become a better listener and also be able to speak more fluently.

It's all right if you don't have a friend to practice with, because these exercises can be done by yourself!

Before we get started, it's important to know the two different types of speaking you'll hear in podcasts and how they are different.

Two Types of Speaking in Podcasts

Did you ever notice that you speak differently in certain situations? Sometimes you need to talk about something for a long time, like when you're telling a story of something funny that happened to you.

But other times, you might be talking back and forth with a friend, taking turns saying shorter phrases and asking each other questions.

We have fancy words to describe each of these situations: **monologue** and **dialogue**.

Monologue vs. Dialogue

The first situation, retelling a long story, is a **monologue**. That's when you spend most of the time talking. You could be sharing what you did over the weekend, how you spent your summer vacation, what books you enjoy reading, etc.

The second example—the conversation with your friend—is a **dialogue**. This happens when we're not just talking about ourselves. Rather, we ask our friends questions and get answers. In a dialogue you don't speak for a long time, because someone else talks too, and you use more slang and conversational phrases.

(A quick tip to remember the difference: In many English words, "mono-" means "one," and "di-" means "two.")

So why am I bringing up these two big words? Because it's important to know **how we speak**, since it's not the same in every situation, and you'll hear both in podcasts.

Monologues and Dialogues in Podcasts

In a **monologue** (by yourself, *one* person speaking) you use correct grammar, longer sentences, fewer slang words and you speak for a longer amount of time.

A **dialogue** is sometimes easier because you use shorter sentences and answers, you might make grammatical mistakes and you use easier words in general.

So the podcasts you listen to can be either one person talking about something (a monologue) or two or more people talking together (a dialogue). **Each of these two types of podcasts will have different types of words, phrases and expressions** that you can practice for different situations.

Let's look at a small example to show why the difference is important.

A Real-life Example of Types of Speech

I asked one of my students to talk about learning English. I expected a monologue (a small speech maybe). But here is his answer:

*I like learning English because it's **cool**. Don't know why some people don't **dig it**. But I have my own method of learning, and I'm **fed up with** teachers that tell me they can teach me something, but then they fail.*

What's wrong with this monologue? Well, nothing really, except **the words in bold (like this)** are often used in a dialogue. It sounds like this student is talking to a friend, since he uses shorter sentences and lots of slang.

Is it wrong to use slang in a monologue? Well, it sounds a bit strange.

Think about your native language. Do you speak differently when you're in front of a class or with co-workers than when you're talking to your friend on the phone?

Know these differences before you use podcasts to improve your speaking. Try to think about which words can be used in certain situations, and your speaking skills will be excellent!

Here are three interesting ways to improve your speaking with podcasts.

1. Summarize What You Hear in Podcasts

For this first exercise, you will need a **headset with a microphone** (if you're using a computer), a **voice-recording program** (any computer will have one) and a **piece of paper** (where we'll later write some key words and phrases).

First, listen to a short podcast.

While you're listening, you're going to write down some key words and phrases that you hear on that piece of paper. Which words should you write down?

Write down the words and expressions that are:

- New: You've never heard the word before.
- Not new, but forgotten: You have heard the word before, but you've forgotten what it means.
- Familiar, but used with a different meaning: You've heard the word before, but it's used in a different way.

Don't write down the words alone if they're used with other words. For example, for the word "launch," write the whole phrase, "launch a campaign."

When you're done listening, look up the unfamiliar words in a dictionary to learn what they mean.

Next, summarize the podcast out loud.

Use your key words and phrases as an outline that will help you move from one point to another. This speaking activity will help your monologue skills.

Now, set a timer for five minutes and try to say your summary in that amount of time. Good? Then set your timer for *three* minutes! You will speak faster every time you summarize the podcast.

When you're ready, the next step is to record yourself summarizing the podcast.

And after recording... listen to yourself! It's always hard to listen to a recording of your own voice, but it will really help you! Listen for any mistakes or mispronunciation and write them down.

In this activity, it's important that you only look at the outline of key words and phrases when you speak. It won't help to write out an entire summary and read it. Why not?

Why is it important to only use an outline of key words?

Well, when children begin talking, they use single words. They'll say, "Milk, mama, please!," for example—using single words to form a sentence.

The mother would probably say, "Would you like some milk?" or "Do you want some milk?" So the mother is using the child's single words to make a sentence. Then the child repeats, and voila! This is how they learn to speak.

So we're doing the same thing here: Look at the words and phrases and try to put them together yourself, without writing a text. It will take you a long time at first, and it might be hard, but in the end **you will learn to speak**.

You will start speaking fluently because you will try to use every word out loud many times, so these words will stay with you forever.

2. Repeat (Out Loud) the Phrases You Hear in a Podcast

This method is about repeating what you hear in a **dialogue podcast**. It will help you learn and remember slang and informal phrases that people use in their [real, unplanned conversations](#).

So here are a few steps to make this exercise great:

- **Choose the right podcast.** Monologue podcasts won't work for this exercise because they have a completely different structure. So, choose an interview or a podcast that has a conversation in it (see my list of suggested podcasts at the end of the post). Listen to the podcast.
- **Select a small part from the podcast (some questions and answers), and write down every sentence.** Write down exactly what everyone says (word-for-word). If you want to repeat a real-life dialogue, you need to remember (memorize) the phrases exactly as they are. Writing them down will really help you learn the phrases.
- **Repeat these phrases.** Phrase by phrase, listen to the podcast, and then pause and repeat. Try to say it the same way you hear on the podcast. Repeat again and again until you feel like you can say it naturally. Then, you can even record yourself and listen!

3. The Voice Search

If you don't have the script of the podcast (the transcript), it could be hard to look up new words. How are they spelled?!

This last activity will show you how to have fun figuring out the new words! Using your knowledge, the context of the podcast and your dictionary, you can play detective (a person who solves mysteries) to solve the puzzle.

There are two ways to do that, and the second way will improve your speaking/pronunciation skills, too:

- **Use the information in the podcast to guess the meaning of the word.**

For example, a few weeks ago one of my students was working on a podcast and couldn't figure out the word "demolish." She was hearing "molish," but not the whole word.

Instead of spelling the word for her, I asked what she thought the word meant. The topic of the podcast was about destroying one building to build another one, so she guessed that the word meant "destroy."

So we looked up "destroy" in the dictionary, and saw that a similar word was "demolish"—hooray!

- **Use Google Voice Search to find the word.**

This is a great method that one of my students shared with me. I gave him an assignment that was a bit too difficult for him, but when we met again he understood all the words! I was surprised, so I asked him how he did it.

His answer: He listened to the podcast and heard the new words. He listened again to make sure he could repeat that word aloud.

Then, he went to Google and clicked on the small picture of a microphone on the right side of the search bar. This lets you search by voice! Then he said the word aloud, and most of the time the correct word would appear on Google.

This method will definitely **strengthen your listening skills, as well as your English pronunciation**—plus it's fun!

Choosing the Podcast That's Right for You

Now that you know these methods, it's time you started practicing! I'm going to share with you a few major resources that I've been using with my students for more than five years.

Below you will find the links and my short final tips on how to choose the right podcast.

Monologue Podcasts:

- [BBC News for Language Learners](#)
- [Scientific American Podcasts](#) (Not only for those who love science)
- [Business News for Language Learners](#)

Dialogue Podcasts:

- [Podcasts in English](#)
- [Culips Podcasts](#)
- [BBC 6-minute English podcasts](#)
- [ELLLO Podcasts](#)

[Both dialogue and monologue podcasts](#)

Length

When you're just starting out, make sure your podcasts are **not too long (no longer than five minutes)**.

I suggest using [Podcasts in English](#) to practice dialogues (podcasts are 3-4 minutes) and [Scientific American](#) for monologues (podcasts are 1 minute).

The Variety of English

Obviously, if you need to practice British English, you may want to choose only British English podcasts, although try not to limit yourself to one variety of the English language.

Since English is a global language, there are multiple varieties of it that you will hear wherever you go, so embrace this challenge and listen to many types!

Topic

Choose the topics that are interesting to you! You have your job and your hobbies, and you want to be able to discuss those topics when you meet English speakers.

Transcript

As I already mentioned, it's good to have a transcript so you can go back to it and easily learn the words you couldn't hear well. Transcripts also work great if you need to practice the **repetition** method, because you won't need to write down all of the phrases that you want to practice.

I hope these tips will help get you started with practicing your speaking on your own! Work hard, record, listen to yourself and then practice again, and you will see some terrific results in 2-3 months!

Elena Mutoonono is the author of [LinkedEnglish Pronunciation](#) courses. Her methods of pronunciation training have helped students to achieve clear, confident and fast-paced speech, as well as improve their listening comprehension. She teaches English fluency classes online and trains English teachers in the area of online teacherpreneurship.