

Live from London podcasts

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Level: Pre-intermediate and above
Age: Teenagers / adults
Time needed: 30 minutes approx
Language and skills: Listening for gist, listening for specific information, talking about learner training strategies

Warm up

Write *Learning a language* on the board. Ask students to make a quick list of things that are involved in learning a language. Give an example yourself to help them get started, e.g. *learning new words, practising speaking*. Give students a couple of minutes, then do some whole class feedback and write the ideas up on the board.

Speaking

Put students into pairs and distribute a copy of Worksheet 1 to each student. Tell them to choose four questions from task 1 that they would like to ask their partner. When they are ready, they should discuss in pairs. Circulate and monitor. At the end, ask some questions from the whole class to wrap this up, e.g. *Who speaks more than three languages? Which ones? Who thinks learning English is easy? How many people are learning English for work? Who had a very interesting English teacher at school? What was he/she like? What's the most difficult thing about learning English?*

Listening

Explain that students are going to listen to different students and teachers from around the world talk about what they think is most difficult about learning English. Play the audio and ask students to do task 2 (an easier task).

Answers:

1: S; 2: T; 3: S; 4: S; 5: T; 6: S; 7: S; 8: T; 9: T



Play the listening again and ask students to tick the topics they hear. You may have to pause it after each speaker.

Answers:

The topics which aren't mentioned are: *understanding the teacher and making correct sentences*.

Learner training

Tell students to read the information on Worksheet 2 about ways to improve different areas in their English. While they do this, write the following on the board:

Have you done this? Does it work?

Would you like to try it?

What other ways can you think of?

Put the students into groups of three or four. Tell the groups they are going to go through the advice together and evaluate it. Explain that the questions on the board are there to help them. Demonstrate with one group for a minute or so, then let them continue on their own. Circulate and monitor.

After groups have finished, do some whole class feedback. Have there been any other good suggestions?

Optional: You could ask the students to make a resolution to try one of the ways they have discussed of learning English over the next week or two.

Transcript

Introduction

Welcome to Onestopenglish's Live from London podcast. In Live from London we go to different parts of London to ask locals and visitors questions about their daily lives. Every summer, thousands of people from around the world come to London to study English. Today Live from London is at the London International Study Centre. We wanted to find out what students and teachers thought was the most difficult thing about learning English.

Speaker 1 (female, Poland)

The most difficult thing about learning English is, especially when you get to a higher level of proficiency, is picking up the nuances of the language and being able to recognize different idioms and understanding phrasal verbs and ... being able to actually sound less foreign.

Speaker 2 (male, UK)

We often find students who've had a lot of tuition in reading and writing but very little practice in speaking.

Speaker 3 (male, Russia)

The most difficult ... is when people speak very fast and I don't understand.

Speaker 4 (female, China)

I think the most difficult thing is the pronunciation.

Speaker 5 (female, UK)

I think my students ... in a group situation find communicating with others and myself ... the most challenging ... business in the classroom, because they're terribly shy they don't want to make mistakes.

Speaker 6 (female, Poland)

Ok, I can speak from my experience because I'm Polish and what I've found difficult about learning English was grammar and pronunciation.

Speaker 7 (female, Russia)

The most difficult for me to learn English was trying to understand different groups of community and also to be understood by them. I was scared of talking on the phone my first year being in England. It's easier now.

Speaker 8 (female, Russia)

I think the thing that my students find the most difficult thing ... is to ... learn new vocabulary, possibly slang expressions and colloquialisms.

Speaker 9 (female, UK)

I think that pronunciation is one of the biggest problems, the fact that English is not phonetic. And recording vocabulary, learning, storing, using it.



Speaking

1. Work in pairs. Choose four of the questions about languages below and ask your partner.

- How many languages do you speak?
- Which languages did you study at school?
- How long have you been learning English?
- What were your language teachers like at school?
- Why are you learning English now?
- Are you going to continue learning English after this course? Where?
- What is the best way of learning a language?
- Is English a difficult language to learn? Why/why not?
- What is the most difficult thing about learning English?



Listening

2. You are going to listen to teachers and students answer the last question above. Decide if the speaker is a STUDENT or a TEACHER. Circle S or T.

Speaker 1 S / T Speaker 2 S / T Speaker 3 S / T

Speaker 4 S / T Speaker 5 S / T Speaker 6 S / T

Speaker 7 S / T Speaker 8 S / T Speaker 9 S / T

3. Listen again. Tick the things you hear the speakers talk about. Which of these things are NOT mentioned?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> understanding the teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> communicating with others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> idioms and colloquial language | <input type="checkbox"/> being afraid of making mistakes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> phrasal verbs | <input type="checkbox"/> making correct sentences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> listening to the radio or TV | <input type="checkbox"/> grammar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> understanding people who speak fast | <input type="checkbox"/> talking on the phone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pronunciation | <input type="checkbox"/> vocabulary |

Learner training

4. Look at the list in exercise 3 above. Which of these things do you find difficult? Compare with a partner.

5. Now look at Worksheet 2. Here are some suggestions for helping with the areas mentioned in the audio. Which have you tried? Which would you like to try? Can you add any others?

How can you improve your English? Here are some suggestions...

What do you think? Can you think of any others?



Vocabulary

- Keep a record of new vocabulary in a notebook. Include words and phrases.
- When you meet a new word, record words that go with it (e.g. *traffic – heavy traffic, traffic jam, stuck in traffic...*). Write a sentence of your own including the new word or phrase.
- Use different ways of recording vocabulary to help you remember them (e.g. *pictures, diagrams, word families*). Long lists of words are more difficult to memorize.
- Whenever possible, try to figure out the meaning of a new word from its context. This will help your reading and listening in English too.
- Have a good dictionary and use it to check words you don't know.
- Test yourself regularly on the words you've learnt.
- Read lots! Reading helps improve your vocabulary.

Pronunciation

- Get a good dictionary and read how words are pronounced in phonetic script. Many dictionaries come with a CDROM now so you can hear the words as well.
- Listen and repeat words or phrases you find difficult. Don't focus only on individual words, work on intonation and sentence stress too.
- Practice saying things in different ways (*slowly, quickly, in a high/low voice, imitating someone*)
- Record yourself speaking English and then work with a teacher or someone with a higher level to improve your pronunciation.
- Aim to be understood clearly by other people, don't worry about a perfect accent. Many adults cannot achieve a native-sounding accent.

Speaking

- Use any chance you have to speak in English, e.g. *in class, with other students, with a teacher, with an English-speaking person*.
- Make a record of useful expressions that you can use when speaking. Try to incorporate these whenever you can.
- Listen to other, better, English speakers and notice how they use little words, sounds or phrases to sound more natural, e.g. *ok, umm, well, right, so, anyway*.
- Don't worry about making mistakes all the time.
- Remember your speaking ability will only get better if you practise. There is no better way.

Understanding others

- Practise listening to English as much as you can. Use CDs, films, songs, the Internet or English TV at home.
- Don't worry if you can't understand an individual word – start by trying to understand the general idea.
- Listening to conversations on CD in class will always be harder than listening in real life. You'll be able to understand a lot more in a face-to-face situation.
- After difficult listening exercises in class, ask to listen again and read along with the listening script, if there is one.
- If someone is talking to you too quickly, ask them politely to speak more slowly or repeat something.