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Do you find it difficult to speak English fluently and confidently, even after many months or years of study? If so, this post may help you understand your situation more clearly, and offer some helpful tips. Let's begin by looking at a few numbers: According to research, most native English speakers know 3,000-4,000 words by the time they begin attending school (at age 5-6), and 15,000-20,000 words by the time they reach university. In comparison, many non-native speakers know only 2,000 words in English, even after many years of study. One group of researchers found that, in some school programs, students learn just 1 new word for each hour of class time. Other researchers have found that, to understand a conversation, you need to know at least 95% of the words that you hear. For a typical conversation, this equates to knowing the 3,000 most frequent English words. Do you notice a problem here? Why You Can't Speak English Fluently The numbers above present an interesting picture of this thing we call 'fluency'. If we look at native English adults, we find that they use just 16% of the words they know to express 95% of what they typically want to say. Perhaps because they use them so often, these words seem to simply roll off the tongue/roll off the tongue; an idiom to describe a word or phrase that is easy to say. These numbers also seem to confirm what you may have noticed about children: by the age of five, they sound amazingly 'fluent' and can understand and take part in many conversations with adults, despite their smaller vocabulary. These 3,000 words appear to be extremely important, both for speaking and for understanding your conversation partner. It can be difficult to speak fluently if you have a limited vocabulary. (Photo by Antenna) By contrast, few non-native speakers learn English the way children do, by listening and speaking. Instead, their lessons tend to focus on learning advanced grammar. This may be one reason why you can't speak English fluently. Whereas non-native speakers have a small vocabulary and big concern for grammar, native speakers rely on simple grammar and a larger vocabulary in order to communicate quickly. Another good reason for increasing your vocabulary: when you understand 95% of spoken English, you can more easily enjoy and learn from spoken content, including films, TV series, YouTube videos, and podcasts. Moreover, you can focus more easily things like pronunciation, idioms, grammar, as well as that other 5% of not-so-frequent vocabulary. How to Learn New Vocabulary Quickly There are many methods to new words, such as flash cards or the goldlist method, and it's worthwhile to try these techniques for a couple weeks in order to see if they're a good fit for your personal learning style. You can also discover some interesting techniques from polyglots/polyglot: someone who speaks or uses many different languages like Luca, a fluent English speaker from Italy: On the other hand, you might also find that 'natural' methods are more effective. Think about the way children learn their first language. They don't use flashcards or smartphone apps; they simply do lots of listening (and later on, lots of reading). Looking again at the numbers above, we can see that native English speakers learn about 1,000 words per year during their time in school. That may seem daunting/damning; causing anxiety or fear because something is difficult or dangerous, but it's only 20 words per week, or 2-3 words per day. Interestingly, researchers estimate that learners need to see a word 6-12 times for it to enter into their long-term memory. By this calculation, in order to learn the 3,000 most frequent English words you could simply read for 10 minutes per day. One important advantage of this natural approach is that you see the many meanings and uses of these high-frequency words in different contexts. For example: the word 'look' is one of the 100 most common words in English, but it means something different in look at a picture, look confused, look forward to, look something up, give someone a look, and have a look around. It's difficult to learn all of these phrases from a single flashcard or simple program like Duolingo. How to Focus on Learning Useful Words One risk with the learn-vocabulary-by-reading method, however, is that you may focus too much attention on words that are not very useful. For example, reading Harry Potter can be a good way to expand your vocabulary, but you might also squandersquander: to waste something (time, money, opportunities) unwisely your time learning unimportant words like cereal, moustache, and prickle. One solution is to learn vocabulary from spoken content. Remember, the most frequent 3,000 words in English make up 95% of spoken content (compared to 80% in written English). The other advantage of studying spoken content is that you encounter lots of useful phrases, and the grammar is often simpler. How to study more efficiently: Find a podcast transcript, movie script, or the subtitles from a YouTube video about a topic that you find interesting. Copy a section of the text and paste it into Oxford's Text Checker and click Check text. The high-frequency English words will be highlighted in 4 colors; low-frequency words will remain black. Focus on learning the colored words first. Add to your study routine (flashcards, goldlist, etc) any unfamiliar words. After studying the colored words, turn your attention to the black (low-frequency) words. You can look these words up in a dictionary, but don't add them to your study routine thoughtlessly. First ask yourself if you expect to use this word in a normal conversation. Do you love to eat cereal? Do you know someone with a moustache? Are you a wizard with a scar that prickles? If not, don't waste your time learning these low-frequency words. Finally, listen to the podcast / movie / video again. Pay attention to the pronunciation and other spoken aspects of the content. To practice your speaking, pause and repeat words and phrases that you can imagine using in a conversation. This method may initially seem difficult, but it has the advantage of exercising your reading, listening, and speaking skills — while also avoiding the distraction of unimportant vocabulary and the complex grammar of other written texts. Last but not least: a common phrase to emphasize that something is important, even though it is the final item: take a close look at the Oxford 3000 word list, which offers clear definitions, example sentences, helpful collocations, and pronunciation of these common words in both British and American English. If you plan to take an exam like the IELTS, I also recommend studying OPAL, Oxford's list of the most common words used in academic texts and lectures. -- Photo by Fabrizio Frigeni English is the most widely spoken language in the world and is the official language of over 60 countries. If you want to succeed in any field, mastering English is a must. Here are some easy steps you can take to improve your English skills. Don't be afraid to make mistakes While English Fluency is not something you can learn overnight, there are many things you can do to help speed up the process. The first and most important thing is to be willing to make mistakes. This may seem difficult at first, but once you get used to making errors in your speech, speaking English fluently will become much easier. Practice, Practice, Practice Another key factor in learning to speak English fluently is practice. As with anything else, if you put in the effort and practice often, you will eventually get better. There are many places where you can practice your skills including speaking at home with a headset or using online resources like Google or YouTube. Learn vocabulary In order to be able to speak English fluently, it is important to have a good vocabulary. There are a number of ways that you can learn new words, and the following are some of the most popular: 1. Use online dictionaries - Many online dictionaries offer the ability to add words to your dictionary as you encounter them. This is a great way to increase your vocabulary quickly and easily. 2. Learn new words through context - When you hear a word in context, try to make sense of it and figure out what it means. For example, if you're listening to music and you hear the word "grape," try to figure out what type of grape it is and what it might be used for. 3. Use flashcards - Flashcards are a great way to train your memory and improve your vocabulary at the same time. You can find free or paid versions online, and they can be customized to focus on specific areas of your vocabulary. 4. Use apps - There are many app-based vocabulary learning tools available on both Android and iOS platforms. These tools provide timed tests as well as lessons that teach you new words in context. They're an excellent way to improve your English fluency fast! Another important factor in speaking English fluently is learning vocabulary. This can be done by reading books, watching videos, and listening to audio materials. When you know the words that are common in English language conversations, it will make it much easier for you to express yourself. Watch videos There are tons of videos available that teach you how to speak English fluently. By watching these videos, you'll not only learn new vocabulary and grammar rules but also how to use them correctly in a sentence. Reading Reading is one of the best ways to improve your English vocabulary and grammar. Not only will this help you learn new concepts, but it will also strengthen your foundations. Listening Listening is an important skill for anyone who wants to speak English fluently. You can improve your listening skills by doing the following: 1. Find a language resource that you enjoy. This can be anything from audiobooks to podcasts to video lectures. 2. Use the resources that you've found to improve your listening skills. This can involve using flashcards, practicing pronunciation, and so on. 3. Practice speaking in a relaxed environment. This can be at home or in a public setting. 4. Use the feedback that you've received to fine-tune your speaking skills. Celebrate success 1. Keep learning - There is no stopping once you've started, so keep learning and expanding your vocabulary every day. You'll soon find that speaking English with ease is no longer a challenge - it becomes a joy! 2. Practice, practice, practice - The more you use your new skills, the better they'll become. Make sure to practice speaking English with friends, family, and natives of the language wherever you can. Speaking is the best way to solidify your newly acquired skills. 3. Connect with like-minded people - If you're looking for someone to talk to about your language journey, look no further than social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. There are tons of people out there who are interested in learning new things, so finding a community of like-minded individuals is a great way to support and inspire each other. Learning grammar isn't necessary to speak fluently it can be helpful, but mastering proper English grammar is not a prerequisite for speaking the language effectively. In fact, many native speakers of English don't have perfect grammar and they're still quite successful when it comes to speaking the language. The most important thing is to use simple, clear sentences that convey your ideas without relying too heavily on grammatical accuracy. Practice using idiomatic expressions Idiomatic expressions are unique to a given language and can be really helpful when you want to sound like a native speaker. When you encounter an idiom for the first time, try using it in a sentence or two and see how it sounds. After a while, you'll find that these expressions become second nature and they add character and gravitas to your English speaking skills. Remember that pronunciation is key Although grammar may not be as important as everyone seems to think, good pronunciation is always essential. This is especially true when you're trying to dialectal your English or speak a regional variant of the language. Make sure to pay attention to the accents and intonations that different speakers use, and practice sounding them out until you can reproduce them perfectly. Use context clues When speaking any language, it's helpful to know what certain words or phrases mean in the context of a given conversation. For example, when you hear the word "hello," what might be the first thing that comes to your mind? Probably something like "May I help you?" or maybe even a hearty handshake. Knowing this information can help you Dialogue and communicate with people in English more effectively. Talk to yourself One of the most important ways to improve your English speaking skills is to practice talking to yourself. You can do this by recording yourself speaking in a natural setting or even just reading aloud from a text or article that you've already read. This will help you develop your pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary as well as increase your comprehension ability. Conclusion Speaking English fluently involves a lot more than just knowing how to conjugate verbs and order a sandwich. It's important to develop your speaking skills by practicing, paying attention to pronunciation and context clues, as well as talking to yourself. With these techniques in mind, you'll be on your way to becoming a confident English speaker!

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