

Of course, most English communication is spoken. It's the best way to make an impression... Meeting people, making friends, business trips, business socialising, negotiating, shopping in London, interviews, dating, asking for directions, buying cat food (OK, only joking) ... all so much easier if you have a good level of fluency.

Having good fluency also means you ENJOY English more. And this makes you keener to learn and use it.

And unfortunately, in some English speaking countries, a lot of the locals will have a lot more respect for you if you seem competent in the language. It's sad, but true.

Here are some tips for improving how well you speak.

Before you read this post, remember there are no shortcuts to any place worth going to. Fluency in any language may come easier to some people than others, but in reality if you don't practise, you won't get there.

For this reason, the first tip is obvious, but it has to be included.

1 - Practise

Notice I spelt practise with an S. In British English, practise with an S is a verb, with a C it is a noun. Just a brief point.

If you can find a native speaker to practise with, generally this is better, but there are a lot of non-native speakers who speak fluent English in Almaty. Even if their English is not perfect, it is YOU who is practising. You will increase in confidence the more you use your English.

Of course, it won't help your fluency to speak with a low level student, but in Kazakhstan there are many locals with brilliant English.

If you want to find somebody, I can possibly help if you are in Almaty.

I am re-learning French now, after 25 years, and I am VERY keen to set up a language exchange with a good French speaker. This is because I know how useful it is. I learned Kazakh almost from zero to fluent in two months without books and lessons, just language exchange. It works!

A few places where English speaking ex-patriates can be found are, Shakespeare Pub, Dickens, Coffeeroom, Mad Murphy's, Coffee Delia, and probably others, but I don't go.

On Facebook, the group, What's On? - Almaty, Kazakhstan is excellent, and there is Expats in Kazakhstan, where you can maybe request a language exchange partner.

You can also set up a language exchange over Skype, log onto www.mylanguageexchange.com and see who you can find.

2 - Role play films

I said this when I gave you vocabulary tips, but because it is an excellent way to improve fluency, I include it here too.

What you need to do, is find the transcript for an English film, and either download it or print it so you can read it during the film.

Choose one of the main characters, and make sure you can see their part of the script. Maybe highlight it, whatever helps you see it quickly.

Then watch the film, it is not necessary to turn the volume down, but don't have it too loud.

When your character speaks, you can read what they are saying, so instead of listening to them, read their words over their voice.

It really works. Maybe not immediately, but if you are serious about improving your spoken English and you don't have other chances to practise, this is excellent.

3 - Improve your vocabulary

See my other tips, below.

This is important because the more words you know, the more you can say those things you really want to say. It can be very frustrating having a conversation and stopping every time you can't say something. It also reduces your confidence. I find this most with Russian, as I have been lazy learning vocabulary. I have plenty to say, but sometimes I just can't say it because the words are just not there, and I feel that my Russian is really bad.

Like many things in life, you are so much better when you are confident in your ability. So with English, make sure the ingredients for speaking are there, and the finished product will improve.

4 - Eat lots of lagman

Ordering lagman involves very long and complex conversation. If you order it every day, you will get so much practice you will become fluent in less than a week.

OK, only joking.

5 - Go to English clubs.

I don't run English clubs because my classroom is so small the cost would be too high per student, and I only have two chairs anyway.

But there are plenty of English clubs across Almaty, the best are the ones they run in Interpress (especially if that nice Anthony Cook is running them) and they are a fun way to practise without stressing about making mistakes etc.

But remember, any teacher working in Interpress is trained and qualified, with plenty of support, ideas and materials, so the English clubs are always great.

I COULD run English clubs if students were prepared to pay 1,000 KZT each for the session. Let me know if this is OK - it is obviously expensive, but the classroom is too small for more than 4 students.

6 - Read aloud

Simple tip, get English texts and read them aloud. The best things to read are probably speeches, maybe Martin Luther King's famous 'I have a dream' speech? Something you find interesting, and not too difficult.

7 - Role play films

You may think I already included this one, but this time it is different.

This time, you don't download the transcript. Simply choose a character, watch a film or TV programme and turn the sound down.

When they speak, say something, anything. Just speak over their voice. It's hard to get ideas, but any ideas are OK, if you keep speaking while they do.

This is a fun activity to do with two or three friends in the evening. Each of you chooses a different character and speaks when they do.

If you do this in a group, you should all try to continue the same conversation. If your friend starts talking about a shopping trip, you should continue their idea when you speak.

8 - Get out of your comfort zone

Forget your level. Don't see yourself as a student of English. See yourself as somebody who already speaks English. Put yourself in situations where you really need to speak well. This is especially true if you go abroad. Don't find only friends from your country.

Don't be afraid to make mistakes, don't avoid topics because you have a few words missing. If you make a mess, it won't matter. When I lived in Italy I never spoke English outside my classroom (except with my students and flatmates) and it made a big difference.

This brings me to my next tip.

9 - Practise every day

Even a bit, the more you can speak, the better you will get. Even two minutes is better than nothing.

10 - Don't study grammar too much

Yes, you need grammar to improve the quality of what you say, but if you focus on it too much, it can be counterproductive. Fluent English is not the same as perfect English, and even native speakers make mistakes sometimes.

You can always work on your grammar, just remember, English is not a very grammatical language, certainly not compared to Russian, and mistakes may not cause problems with understanding.

11 - Listen

Television, films, podcasts, radio, etc.

Listen to somebody else speaking fluent English, and who knows?

12 - Read

This is the best tip for any English learning. When you read, you will see thousands of examples of perfect sentences. You don't even need to study them. It helps a LOT to read something you enjoy, that way, your brain just takes it all in.

Then when you speak, there is so much more quality available to you.

13 - Record yourself

Not the best tip, but if you do this, you will get an idea of how fluent you are. You may be better than you think.

There are no magic ways to achieve fluency in English.

But if you are serious about it, the two or three hours a week you are in class may not be enough. Of course, you may have a teacher who gives you communication practice every lesson, like I do, and this is great. But if your contact with English stops when you leave the classroom, can you really become a high level speaker?

Some people can, but most need to work hard on it.

Anyway, if you understand these posts, you probably don't need so much advice. But if you know people who are starting to learn, pass these tips to them and help them understand. This will help you too.