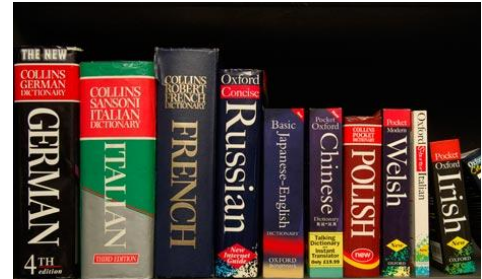




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## **Taking Control of the English Language: For the Advanced Student**



by Steven David Bloomberg

How can I speak English better? How can I communicate better in English? How can I express myself better in English? How can I listen to and understand English better? How can I improve?

You speak English at an advanced level. You speak it fluently and you use it every day, yet you aren't satisfied with your ability. You feel like you can't express yourself the way you want to. When you can't say what you want to say or need to say in the manner that you would like to, it might not leave you with the best feeling you could possibly have. There is only one thing to do about it. You must take control of the English language. What does taking control of the English language mean? It does not mean taking control of the entire language. It means taking control of the English language that is yours; the English language that you have. It means using the English that you already have to get more. It means taking responsibility for your own learning.

You might tell yourself that you want to have private instruction with an English language tutor. That's a good idea. However, there is something you should know and be well aware of. What happens during the time that you meet with an English language tutor is very important, but what happens during the time between your meetings with an English language tutor is even more important. The proactive steps that you take in order to improve have a direct effect on what it is you get out of the time and money that you spend with an English language tutor. In order to receive the maximum benefit possible for the money you spend on a tutor, you must dedicate a sufficient amount of time to studying between each lesson. Of course, the amount of time that anyone is able to dedicate to studying will vary, but nevertheless, it must be done. Furthermore, there are a number of things you

should do leading up to the time that you decide to pick up the phone and make that call. So you ask, what is it that I need to do? What can I do on my own?

You need to increase your vocabulary. You need to build your lexicon. You need to learn more idiomatic expressions. Does this mean studying vocabulary lists? No. Does that mean buying books that list idiomatic expressions in English and their meanings? That may or may not be helpful. Does it mean going to the Internet and studying idiomatic expressions that are listed at websites? Perhaps, but that wouldn't be all. Does it mean learning the word of the day that is given by online dictionaries? No! You need to build a personal lexicon. You need to maintain a lexical notebook. You need to learn words and expressions that are interesting to you and will be useful to you. You need to learn words and expressions that are part of your environment. Where can you find these words and expressions? You can find them by listening to the radio, by listening to those that you speak with on a daily basis, and by even listening to those that you don't speak with. You don't have to converse with someone in order to listen to someone. Of course, you can find new words and expressions by choosing challenging reading material that is interesting to you: newspaper and magazine articles, books, short stories. In order to start building your new lexicon, I suggest starting by finding something to read.

Now that you have chosen something interesting to read, here is what you need to do. You need to write down the words and expressions that you don't understand. Take note of the page number and paragraph that the words or expressions are on as you read. After you are done reading, go back to the words and expressions that you didn't understand and write them in your lexical notebook. Leave space to write an explanation or a definition. From the context, see if you can figure out what the words or expressions mean. After you have done this, go to a dictionary. For idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs that you are unfamiliar with, I strongly recommend taking advantage of Cambridge Dictionaries Online. It is important that you practice these new words and expressions by writing your own sentences. This is helpful in incorporating them into your daily conversations and speaking habits. Don't be overwhelmed by thinking you have to read a lot. Read what is good for you. If you come across too many words and expressions that you don't recognize, it might be a good idea to find some less challenging reading material. What you read should be challenging, but it should not be so challenging that it might be discouraging.

Listen to the news on the radio. Listen to talk shows. Generally speaking, radio announcers that report the news speak clearly, use good vocabulary, and also use idiomatic expressions. If you have a computer, you can listen to news reports from National Public Radio and the British Broadcasting Corporation (NPR and the BBC). You can usually find a RealPlayer link to listen to news stories from both of these resources. However, listening to the radio will suffice as well. If you can, it would be a good idea to record a ten to fifteen minute segment of a news show or any broadcast that might interest you. Take note of any words or expressions that sound unfamiliar to you. Write them down in your lexical notebook. If you were able to record what you listened to, listen to it again to see if you can figure out what the new words and expressions mean through the context that they are used

in. If you are unable to figure out what something means, then by all means go to a dictionary. Once again, I suggest using Cambridge Dictionaries Online for a comprehensive overview of any single word. Cambridge Dictionaries Online is a very good resource in that it demonstrates how words are used in idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs. Cambridge Dictionaries also point out any important secondary definitions that a word might have.

Pay attention to what you hear wherever you go. If you are on a bus or a train, listen to what people say and how they say it. If you are in a supermarket, a shopping mall or any other public place where you can hear others speak, open your ears and try to listen. Take note of what you hear. Jot it down in a small pocket size notebook. Later, you can add it to your lexical notebook. If you pay attention, you are eventually bound to hear at least one word or one expression that is new to you. When you hear it, write it down. Find out what it means later. Learn it. Use it.

When learning new words and expressions, it is important to take note of whether these words and expressions are used in an informal context or a formal context. Many words and expressions are used both formally and informally. If you aren't sure of exactly how to use a new word or expression, you can try them out with work colleagues and friends. Find people to converse with. They may not be instructive in any way, but you can try out new ways to express yourself. You should also listen as closely as possible when you converse. Listen for anything that sounds different, new, or unfamiliar. If the circumstance permits, don't be afraid to take out your pocket notebook and write it down. If you say something that isn't quite right, the person you are speaking with might take note of it and let you know. If you aren't sure of something you said or would like to say, then ask about it. If you hear something and you don't know what it means, ask about that as well. Some, or even many people, may not view themselves as "teachers" per se, but most native speakers of English should be able to assist you in this manner. I believe most people would be glad to help. It is of the utmost importance to not be afraid to ask questions. That's part of taking control of the English language. That's part of making the English language your language. English is not your first language, but there is no reason why it cannot be your language. Get a notebook. Get something to read. Find something to listen to on the radio. Take control of the English language now.



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