

Study Tips

Improving your learning techniques

These tips look at some specific tips for different areas of learning.

Are you finding it difficult to learn and memorise all the new vocabulary, grammar, structures, idioms and skills you are being taught? Then try this:

Plan

what you need to do.
your learning time.
your resources (dictionary, grammar book, cassettes etc.).
your vocabulary, grammar, comprehension or production strategy.
your review time

Do

your plan.
your language learning or practice activity.

Review

your work.
why you did it.
how well you did it.
what you need to do next.



For key learning areas such as grammar, vocabulary and communication skills, you should review what you have learnt on a regular basis.

Remember: Plan, do, review, then plan, do, and review again.

Vocabulary



We have two different collections of vocabulary in our brains. We have a fairly small active vocabulary of words which we use regularly in speaking and writing. We have a much larger receptive vocabulary of words which we understand in listening and reading but we do not use productively.

This is true in your mother tongue and also in English. During this period of exam preparation you should be trying to build both your active and receptive vocabularies.

Build your receptive vocabulary by reading and listening to as much English as you can. Start from topics you know well and move on to less familiar topics.

Build your active vocabulary by writing down all the new vocabulary you encounter during lessons and homework. Organise the vocabulary in groups by subject area, topic or grammatical form. Try to use new vocabulary when speaking or writing. Don't worry about making mistakes! You can only improve if you try.

Build your vocabulary by transforming words. You know the verb 'press'. Can you think From 'press' you can learn 'pressure', 'pressurise', 'depress', 'depressing', 'depressingly'.

The Longman Essential Activator groups words by meaning so starting from an easy word like 'walk' you can learn 'step', 'stride', 'creep', 'crawl', 'tiptoe', 'saunter', 'wander' or 'wade'.



Remember that English uses a lot of fixed expressions so don't limit your work to single words. Dictionaries will also give you examples of the words used in expressions. Look back at the entry for 'press'. How many fixed expressions are there?

Listening



Predict

Try to understand as much about the topic before you listen. Ask yourself questions about the speakers and what they are likely to say. Prepare yourself for listening by having lots of questions and predictions in your mind. Be prepared to change those predictions as you listen.

Prepare

Read the questions before you listen and think about the sort of answers which might be possible.

As you listen

The first time you listen, make notes of any key pieces of information. If you can't write down names, write the initial letters. Read through your notes before the second listening so that you can 'fill the gaps' in your notes.

Listen for clues

Listen, not only to the information but also to the voices. Are they angry or happy? Sincere or joking? Are they female or male speakers? Are they young or old?

Listen frequently

Listening is a skill which improves with a lot of practice.

Reading

- Do not let difficult vocabulary slow down your reading. Just ignore the difficult vocabulary on your first reading and understand as much as you can.
- Often the first sentence in a paragraph will give you a general idea of the whole paragraph.
- Remember to look carefully at the question word. Who? wants a name or person. When? wants a time. Where? wants a place. How long? wants a time or distance. Why? wants a reason.
- Examine the reading task carefully after your first reading. Some tasks require general or detailed understanding. Other tasks require searching for specific information.



- Learn to '**skim**' – that is to read through the whole text quickly to get a general idea of the meaning.
- Learn the skill of '**scanning**' the text looking for key words. Then read around the key word to find the answer.
- If the task requires detailed understanding, read the questions carefully and have a clear idea in your mind of what you are looking for before you read the text a second time.
- Don't be afraid to read the text a third or fourth time to get the information of ideas you need. This is much better than 'inventing' your answers.
- Remember that fast, repeated reading is much more effective than slow, careful reading.

Writing

Don't pick up your pen and then start to think what to write. Plan your ideas first.

Learn the techniques of 'process writing'.

1 Collect your ideas and make notes. Think about the reader. Ask your self "What does the

reader need to know?" "What does the reader know already?" Think about the 'communicative purpose' of what you are writing.

2 Organise your notes into a logical structure. Think about the language you will need.

3 Write your first draft. Try leaving every other line blank so you can make corrections without having to rewrite the whole text.

4 Imagine you are the reader. Check your draft contains all the information the reader needs and that it is clearly expressed. Also check for language mistakes and correct them.

5 Learn from the corrections your teacher gives you on your written work. Identify your bad habits and frequent mistakes. Concentrate on correcting these.

6 Learn how to check your own writing by checking the writing of your fellow students. Remember to look for a logical structure and development. Look for well-organised paragraphs. Look for details – spelling, punctuation, word order. Learn from your fellow students' mistakes. Your teacher can help you do this in class.



Speaking

Try these tips to give yourself extra time to think.

Try to think before you speak. Give yourself 'rehearsal time' and say key sentences in your head before you start.



Learn the typical 'delaying sounds' like 'er' which are used by English speakers to give themselves time to think.

In conversations give yourself extra thinking time by commenting on what the other person has said.

"Yes, I think I agree with you but ..."

"Yes, that's a good question. ..."

Try to avoid silences. Ask for repetition or explanation if you need it or even if you need time to think of your reply.

"I didn't quite get that, could you say it again?"

Listen carefully to others and reuse their vocabulary or expressions if they are good.