

## Introduction

The good news is that although the productive skill of speaking can be the most difficult to master successfully, it is the more natural way for people to learn. Think about how you learned to speak your first language when you were a child. You probably spent a lot of time ‘babbling’ – making vowel and consonant sounds but no real words - out loud, instinctively repeating the sounds you heard other people making. It is the same when learning another language. You can’t learn to verbalize in English (or any other language for that matter) if you don’t speak out loud. This advice sheet will provide you with numerous suggestions on how you can create speaking practice opportunities both on your own or working with a partner or small group of friends.

## Before you begin, remember...

- You need to make speaking a habit and something that you do regularly. If you practice speaking out loud every day for 30 minutes, that will have a more positive result than trying to speak in English for longer periods of time less frequently.

- That learning to speak fluently takes time – it won’t happen over-night - you need to be patient.
- To choose appropriate materials to study with. The **Speaking Advice Sheets** suggest a wide selection of vetted materials.
- To move your mouth! Understanding something doesn’t mean the muscles of your mouth can produce the sounds. Practice speaking out loud what you are learning. You can’t become a proficient speaker without doing any speaking!
- To try and find friends to study and speak with. Learning English together can be very encouraging. Use the Internet – and use it in English

## Ideas for practicing speaking English on your own

1. **Speak everything you do:** Don’t worry – you won’t look crazy...people will just think you’re talking on your mobile phone. This is a fun way to practice speaking out loud. Simply tell yourself what you are doing: ‘I am getting out of

bed’; ‘I’m eating noodles’; I’m stalking friends on Facebook’; etc. If you don’t know the word you need to describe what you are doing, then look it up an online dictionary. Check pronunciation and usage and try to use that word as much as you can throughout the day.

2. **Keep a daily audio journal:** This daily practice is beneficial for a number of reasons. You not only practice speaking out loud but you retain a record that you can refer back to in order to check your progress. Unlike #1 above, this strategy enables you to actually listen to yourself in order to check for pronunciation errors. Your computer’s audio recording files makes it easy to keep your journal properly organized. Make sure you complete your journal at the end of the day – this will help you focus on using the past tense and permit you to work on any –ed endings you have trouble with.
3. **Repeat what you hear:** You can do this quietly to yourself. Simply repeat what you hear other people speaking English saying.

4. **Read aloud to yourself:** Choose something interesting to read – perhaps a novel or the sports section of the newspaper. Pay attention to the punctuation – pause when you reach a semi-colon (;), a bit longer at the full stops (.) and slightly longer at a paragraph break. Use more emotion for sentences ending with exclamation marks (!).
5. **Read out loud and record yourself:** Then listen back to see how you are doing. You can use your phone or computer.
6. **Talk to yourself in front of a mirror:** Practice chatting to yourself while observing how your mouth moves as well as your body language. As you become more confident, speak louder and with more feeling. This is the best way to make sure you are moving your mouth correctly and sufficiently. Try over-exaggerating your mouth movements until you feel more comfortable.
7. **Watch and then talk about an English movie:** Choose a movie you are interested in, and then afterwards describe the movie to yourself out loud. Talk about the characters and what happened. This is also a good way to practice the past tense.
8. **Practice a role-play with yourself:** Look at yourself in a mirror and imagine you are introducing yourself to someone, or disagreeing with someone’s ideas, or being interviewed for a job, or asking a stranger for information.
9. **Read along with a video and accompanying script:** You can use a movie with accompanying script or CNN Student News, which contains a matching transcript. First just listen to what the speaker is saying, how they are pronouncing words, how they are moving their mouths, as well as their intonation. Use the script to follow along. Then read the script out loud in unison with the speaker, trying to match their pronunciation and intonation. Finally record yourself reading the script out loud and then compare your version to the original speaker’s.
10. **Sing out loud:** Karaoke here you come! Pick an English song you like; “Google” the lyrics, then watch and listen to the singer on YouTube before joining in.
11. **Write poetry and recite it:** When you read your poem out loud you can try different styles of emphasis and pacing. You can also play around with how different sounds fit together.
12. **Find an English-speaking partner online:** Join a Skype chat forum! Check out some of the online opportunities to connect and make friends with other people from all over the world. You’ll find plenty of other people who also want to practice their English.

## **Ideas for practicing speaking English with a friend**

1. **Form a ‘Meet and Chat’ group:** Find a like-minded friend who also wants to improve their conversational English. Agree to meet once a week for 30-60 minutes to speak together only using English. It doesn’t matter what you talk about, just try to keep using the target language.
2. **Practice speaking spontaneously:** Get together with one or more friends and take turns challenging each other to speak about a surprise topic for 2 minutes. The topic can be anything: flowers, a favorite color, a current event, your favorite professor, etc.

3. *Enact a role-play.* This can be scripted or unscripted (using a written dialogue, or improvising your own dialogue based on a pre-determined scenario).
4. *Make friends with the exchange students visiting HKUST* - they are here because they want a rich cross-cultural experience. Don't be shy – they want to meet new people too!

### Reflecting on, and evaluating, your performance

After you have spent some time practicing speaking English, or have held a conversation in English, be sure to take some time to reflect upon how you performed. Try to identify some of the factors that may have helped you to participate in the interaction or prevented you from taking part effectively. Think about factors such as who you were talking to (were you very nervous?), what you were talking about (did you know much about the topic?), the environment (were many people involved in the interaction?), and your own feelings about the situation (were you feeling tired? impatient?).

Above all, don't be too hard on yourself. And remember - if at first you're not happy with your performance, try again!

## Useful materials in the Language Commons

### Textbooks

The following books can be found on the *Speaking* shelf and contain activities that you could work on individually, with a partner, or in a group:

#### *Pairwork*

You may find that many books that have been written to help people improve their fluency contain activities or tasks for pairs or small groups. See if you can find a few friends to join you. Remember that with these activities, it is not always necessary for you to correct each other's mistakes. It is more important that you can make yourself understood and maintain a smooth flow of conversation.

### And now...

If you would like any help or advice, or just a chat about your progress, please get in touch - **we are here to support your independent learning!** To contact us:

- Make an appointment to see an **adviser**. For details of advisers and their availability, please go to <https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/language-adviser-timetable/>.
- E-mail your questions to **iLANG** ([lcilang@ust.hk](mailto:lcilang@ust.hk)).

- Ask at the reception counter of the Language Commons — if the receptionist cannot help you directly, s/he will pass your query on to one of the advisers.

### What else can you do?

- Browse the many physical (<https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/language-commons/#resources>) and online materials (<https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/resources-speaking/>) for Speaking.
- Join a Speaking activity or short course (<http://ilang.cle.ust.hk/speaking/>).
- Join HKUST Toastmasters - [https://www.facebook.com/groups/HKU\\_STTMC/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/HKU_STTMC/) - which meets on a regular basis for members to practice various skills useful in public speaking, including giving prepared as well as impromptu speeches, listening, and providing each other with feedback and evaluation. Toastmasters adopts a "learn-by-doing" philosophy.

*Last Updated: May 2017*