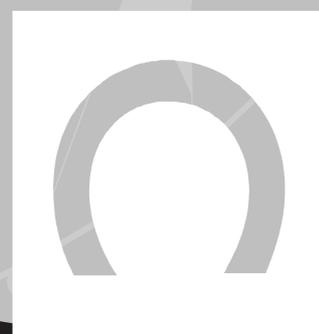


LEARNING  english



**BETTER
SPEAKING**
**A GUIDE TO IMPROVING
YOUR SPOKEN ENGLISH**

W

Welcome to **B**etter **S**peaking. This booklet is designed to help you overcome some of the most common problems which people face when they are learning to speak English.

Using extracts from the BBC World Service radio series, **B**etter **S**peaking, we look at how you can become a more fluent speaker of English, and at some of the skills you need for effective communication. The topics we look at include...

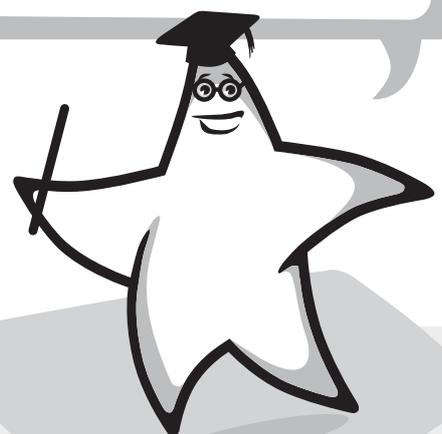
- ① Becoming a confident speaker
- ② Fluency or accuracy?
- ③ Finding the right words
- ④ Learning language in chunks
- ⑤ Showing where you are going
- ⑥ Keeping the listener interested
- ⑦ Being a supportive listener
- ⑧ Sounding natural

How

Each page looks at a different area related spoken English. On each page you'll find...

- a short introduction to the topic which explains why this aspect of speaking is important.
- an extract from one of the **B**etter **S**peaking radio programmes related to the topic.
- a reading and a language task to accompany the extract.
- key tips to help you improve your speaking.
- a task to help you practise what has been explained.

On the final page of the booklet, you will find a glossary of the terms which have been used to talk about **B**etter **S**peaking. Words which are in bold and italics (*like this*) in the text can be found in the glossary.



1 B

a

a

C is a very important element in learning to speak a language. Many learners worry that they are going to make a mistake, or that the people listening will not understand them. How can you learn to relax when you want to speak English? First, look at a piece of 'real' English – taken from an interview with tennis star Goran Ivanisevic just after he had won the Wimbledon tennis championship.

This was my dream, all my life and... er... you know... to serve for the match, suddenly I have a match point out of nowhere, you know... I came here, nobody even talked about me and now I'm holding this trophy. And it's, it's just... this support today is like... er... I mean... I was... er... three times in the final but this, this is just unbelievable, this is too good... .

Q a) How does Goran feel about his win? Which words tell you this?

Q) Look for the following words, sounds or phrases: ... er... / ... you know... / ... this is... / ... it's... Why do you think he repeats these words?

When a spoken interview is written down, we can see that many of the sentences are not grammatically correct and that the speaker repeats words to give himself time to think about what he is saying. He also uses 'fillers' like 'er...' – which are not words but 'noises' – to give himself more time.

Although the grammar in this extract is not always correct, we can understand Goran Ivanisevic's message easily. If a message is given confidently, the listener won't worry about any mistakes.

B w a ?

P a The more often you speak, the easier it becomes. Try to think of people you can talk to in English, or places in your town where English is spoken a lot. You need to put yourself in a position where you need to speak. How about joining a club, or going to a conversation class?

R a a a It's easy to become nervous if you only focus on grammar rules when you are speaking. But, as you see from Goran Ivanisevic's interview, what you want to say is usually more important than how you say it! The key to relaxing when you are speaking is to talk about something which you find really interesting. Speaking is easier when you have something to say, and you are enjoying the conversation.

R a w a a If you are very nervous, try to practise saying what you want to say to yourself a few times. Planning and rehearsal can make your speaking more confident. Remember, however, that you need to think about the person who is listening to you – what are they likely to say in response?

TASK C

Imagine you are joining a new club or class. How would you introduce yourself? What would you tell other people in the group about yourself? What would you like to know about them? Practise introducing yourself and asking questions about others.

If you have a friend who is learning English, or you are a member of an English Learning Circle, you could play this as a game. Everyone should choose a new identity – a new name, job, hobbies etc. Now introduce yourselves and find out about each other. Who has the most interesting 'new identity'?

3 F

W

We all know how important vocabulary is when we are learning a language. Finding the exact word for the idea you want to express is important for becoming a fluent, confident speaker. It is not unusual for learners of English to feel that they don't know enough words. Here, in an extract from **B**, **S a**, Ngoc from Vietnam tells us how she feels.

One of my problems is my spoken English. Sometimes I try to say something but I don't know the word so I feel... um... a bit confused and I stop because I don't know how to say it or to say what I want to say. So I feel less confident in speaking and I stop myself from speaking sometimes.

- Q** a) What does Ngoc do if she cannot find the word she needs? Do you do the same thing?
Q) What advice would you give to Ngoc to help her overcome this problem?

As Ngoc says, not having a wide vocabulary can have a serious effect on your confidence as a speaker. But how can you become more confident even if you don't know a lot of words. The first thing to do is to think of what you do in your own language. When speaking in our own language, we often forget the word we need, or have problems finding the precise word for an idea we want to express. This doesn't make us less confident – we simply find other ways to express what we want to say.

S w a i E ?

E a w a i a Don't worry if you can't find the exact word you are searching for. Instead, try to explain what you mean. This is known as **paraphrasing** and is an important skill. You can give a short definition – for example, if you forget the word 'envelope', you might say 'the thing you put a letter in before you post it'. Or you can give a description. So, instead of 'elephant' you could say 'a big, grey animal with large ears. They live in Africa.' You can even use your hands to demonstrate the meaning.

S a i a a If you simply stop when you reach a word you don't know, the person who is listening to you will just stop listening. Remember that what you are saying is important to you and to them. To give yourself more time to think of a word or definition, go back to the beginning of your sentence and start again. It's not unusual to hear native speakers of English say 'What was I saying?' before repeating what they've said. Remember – try to give yourself time to think.

A i If you get stuck and really can't think of the word you need, why not ask the person listening for help? You could say 'I can't think of the word I need'. Together, you and your listener might be able to find the words for the idea you want to express. Working together with the person who is listening will make life easier for you – and give you both a chance to practise speaking and listening.

TASK E a w a i a

Look at the words and phrases below. Try to think of a definition or explanation for each word or phrase. Then try them out on some friends – can they identify the word or phrase from your explanation?

a radio series	speaking <u>fluently</u>	vocabulary
bread	I feel <u>confused</u>	dictionary

4 Listen and write

When you listen to BBC World Service radio, there are probably phrases or groups of words which you hear together all the time. For example, when announcers begin talking about a programme which is about to start, they usually say 'Coming up next is...'. In this situation, 'coming up next' is a **chunk** of language – a phrase or group of words which you hear together all the time. But why are **chunks** important for better speaking? First of all, have a look at an extract from an interview with Icelandic singer, Bjork, talking about her albums 'Debut' and 'Post'.

I've always thought of Debut and Post as twins. They're sort of before and after I learned to do things well. And I think that after this I'll move on to different sorts of things. But the concept with Debut and Post was that they were the week in the life of a normal person and all the ups and downs you have – all the things you can't plan. So that's what Debut and Post represent – that you can't plan your life and you're not supposed to. Just live life to the full and take it as it comes.

- Q 1 a) What are the ideas which link Bjork's albums Debut and Post?
Q 2 b) Look at the groups of words which are underlined. Can you **paraphrase** them?

As you can see from Bjork's interview, she is very comfortable speaking in English, although this is not her first language. Most importantly, she uses the types of phrases or groups of words which make her sound natural. When learning English, it's very important to notice how words are often heard together. For example, Bjork says she'll do 'different sorts of things'. In this context, 'sorts' means the same as 'types' – but we would not usually say 'different types of things'. This linking together of words is called **collocation**. So, we can say that 'sorts of' **collocates with** 'things'. There are no clear rules for making **collocations** but, by listening to English a lot, you will begin to hear which words are usually found together.

Very often, you will hear whole phrases which are repeated often within a single situation. You can see examples in Bjork's interview – 'take it as it comes' and 'live life to the full' are examples of phrases that have a fixed meaning. We understand the meaning of the phrase from the context in which we heard it, not by analysing each word. These fixed phrases or **chunks** are useful because, when we use them, we do not need to build each sentence word by word. By learning and using useful **chunks** of language you can begin to sound more fluent.

4 Listen and write

L 1 a Are there any phrases which are repeated a lot in your favourite programmes? How do the presenters introduce new stories, or end the programme? When they talk to guests, how do they introduce them or say goodbye? By focusing on phrases rather than individual words, you can begin to build your store of language chunks. This can help you become more fluent because you will not need to think about each individual word in the sentence.

R 1 a When you are putting new vocabulary in your notebook, remember to think about any important collocating words. For example, if you have learned the verb 'to depend', don't forget that it is almost always followed by the preposition 'on'. So, in your notebook, write 'to depend on'. You will find that many nouns have strong collocating adjectives (e.g. heavy smoker) or verbs (do your homework) and verbs can have collocating prepositions, like 'depend on'! If you are buying a new dictionary, check to see that it contains information on collocations.

TASK C a a

How many things can you do with the radio? Set yourself a time limit of two minutes to think of as many verbs as you can which we often hear before the words 'the radio'.

You can find a list in the Answer key on page 9 – but you may have some more!

You can try this game with a friend. One of you must choose a noun, and the other must think of as many adjectives or verbs which are often used with that noun.

5 S w w a

Have you ever listened to a presentation, lecture or talk in English? Did you find it easy or difficult to understand? One thing which is important to consider when you are speaking in English is how you are going to show the listeners what is important in your talk, and places where they don't need to concentrate so much. We call this **signposting** – showing how the information is relevant to the talk – and it is an important feature of spoken English. But how do you recognise signposting? First, read this extract from an interview with Stelios Haji-Ioannou, the owner of the easyJet airline company. Stelios is Greek but lives in Britain.

Why did I start easyJet in London? Well, first of all, I know the language. It would have been impossible to run an airline in the UK without speaking English – that would have been a serious limitation to my ability to communicate with my customers. In fact, people ask me 'Why didn't you start the business in Greece?' but one of the things I say is that Greece is too small. On the other hand, France and Germany are big markets, but the only language I could speak was English so I had to come to London!

Q 1 a) Find two reasons why Stelios started his business in London.

Q 1) Find two phrases which mean 'I am going to give you a piece of information. There are more pieces, but this one is important.'

As you can see, Stelios uses some fixed phrases to show how his talk is going to continue. He introduces a list of new information with phrases like 'First of all...'. This means we know he has more to say later. Phrases like 'One thing I say is...' show us that what he is going to say is important – he has chosen to emphasise this point. And when he wants to make a contrast between the Greek and French markets, he uses the phrase 'on the other hand'. By putting these phrases before the important information, he makes the listener aware that he is going to make an important point.

S , w a i a ?

L 1 How do your favourite BBC World Service presenters show where the programme is going next? Listen out for the phrases which they use for signposting in your favourite programmes. Becoming aware of how other speakers signpost their talks will help you to do the same.

P a w a 1 a a If you are going to give a talk or presentation, plan the stages in your talk. When you introduce a new idea, show the listener by using phrases like 'Let me tell you about...' or, like Stelios, you could start your talk with a question which you then answer. If you are going to give a list of points, how are you going to show the listener that they link together? Think of phrases such as 'first of all...', 'another thing is...' . And how are you going to finish? Perhaps you could say 'in conclusion...' or 'to finish off...'. Use your plan as a map through your talk, showing how things link together.

A a 1 w 1 a If you are speaking in your English club or Learning Circle, ask one of your friends to note down phrases they notice you using to signpost your talk. Did they notice all the important points? Getting **feedback** like this from friends is one good way of finding out how effective your speaking is.

TASK P a a a

To do this task, you need to be a member of a Learning Circle or you need to gather some friends together to listen to you.

Prepare a short talk (no more than four or five minutes). Make a plan like the one suggested above, and think about the phrases you are going to use to show where your talk is going. DON'T write your talk out in full and read it aloud – try to work from notes only.

After the talk, ask one of your friends to give you feedback (as mentioned above). How successful was your talk?

6 K

What is the secret of being an interesting speaker? When you speak English, how can you make sure that the person you are speaking to really wants to listen? Here is Richard Hallows, talking about a speech made by Kofi Anan, Secretary General of the United Nations.

He is a really effective speaker of English. He really knows how to involve the listener, to make us want to listen through the language he chooses. For example, he avoids using the same words all the time. Sometimes he uses alternative words – so, for example, in one sentence he says ‘human beings’ and in the next ‘humanity’. And he interacts with the listener, asking us all to do something. So he says ‘Try to imagine what life is like...’, and we all start to think. All of this helps to involve the listener – to make us want to listen.

- Q 1 a) What are the two techniques which Richard mentions for keeping the listener involved?
Q 1) Think about someone who you enjoy listening to. How do they keep you involved as a listener?

When we are learning to speak a new language, we often focus on the accuracy of what we are saying. We think about what we are saying, making sure we choose words and grammar to express our ideas precisely. However, as a speaker, it's also important to think about how your listener *feels*. If what you say is dull, or if the listener does not have a chance to become involved, then she or he may stop listening.

S w a i a í a i a í á, a ?

Vá í a í á As Richard says, effective speakers usually use a variety of words for the same idea. When speaking English, it's important to avoid repeating the same words too often – this can make what you say sound very boring. To help you vary your vocabulary, try to make space in your vocabulary notebook for ‘synonyms’ – that is, words which have the same meaning.

P a w a i w a a If you are a member of an English club or Learning Circle where you have regular discussions in English, or if you have business meetings or academic study in English, it's important to think about the topics you are going to discuss *before* the discussions begin. Simply take a few minutes to remind yourself of all the words you know about this topic – you could **brainstorm** vocabulary with a colleague or other club members. Then, when the discussion starts, you will have a stock of words ready to use.

I í á As Richard says, the most effective speakers find ways to keep their listeners involved. The easiest way to do this is to ask questions – don't worry, the listeners don't actually need to answer. But questions such as ‘Have you thought of...?’, ‘Do you know about...?’ asked *before* you tell your story will get the listeners to think about the topic, and to be more interested in what you have to say.

TASK K

Listen to your favourite BBC World Service Programme. If possible, record the programme.

The first time you listen, take notice of all the things which the presenter says to keep you, the listener, interested. How many questions does he or she use? Are there any phrases she or he uses more than once?

The second time you listen, note down all the alternative words which are used to express a main idea. For example, if you are listening to a programme about ‘education’, you might listen for all the words used to describe ‘students’.

8 S a i a

For many people who are learning to speak English, pronunciation is a problem. There may be sounds in English which you don't have in your own language and which are difficult for you to recognise and to say. You may have had difficulty making yourself understood, even though your vocabulary and grammar are good. So how important is pronunciation – and what should you do about it? Here is Richard Hallows from **B S a** with a suggestion.

There's a very interesting theory that if you want to improve your pronunciation, you should choose one person you want to sound like, and you basically copy that person. You copy the way they speak, the rhythm of their language and your pronunciation will change to be more like that person. Try to choose one person you want to sound like – maybe from the radio – and focus on them.

- Q** a) Try to summarise Richard's idea and tell a friend about it.
Q) What do you think? Who would like to sound like?

Pronunciation is often a difficult area for students and teachers. Improving your pronunciation in English involves many things. You need to think about the **stress** in words and sentences. This means thinking which syllables you need to put emphasis on in order to make your meaning clear. You also need to think about **intonation**. The 'music' of British English, for example, may sound strange to you – and how does your intonation sound to speakers of other languages? We use intonation to show how we feel about the subject we're talking about – but intonation differs across languages. There are also 'problem' sounds which you may recognise in English, but which are difficult for you to say.

One final, but very important, area to think about is how you feel about your pronunciation. If people understand you easily, you may feel satisfied that it is OK. However, you may want to sound different. Many people want to sound more like 'native speakers', and Richard's tip above can help you if this is your ambition. The most important things to consider when thinking about pronunciation are:

- a) Can people understand what I'm saying easily?
 b) Do I feel comfortable and confident when I speak?

S w a i w i a a ?

N When you learn a new word, always try to notice which syllable is stressed. For example, in the word 'dictionary', the syllable - is the one which carries most emphasis. Getting the stress right is very important. If you put the stress on the wrong syllable, listeners may not be able to understand you.

G Just as words have stressed syllables, so sentences have stressed words. When speaking in English, try to think which words are the most important in showing the meaning of what you want to say. These are the words which are likely to carry most emphasis. The result of this type of stress is that some of the other words in the sentence almost disappear. This means that, when you listen to English...

you can hear the speaker jump from one important word to the next.

To practise identifying stress in sentences, listen to a short extract spoken by your favourite BBC World Service presenter. Can you identify which words she or he stresses?

S a a Many students of English think that native speakers talk very quickly, and try to do the same. However, the 'speed' you hear is the effect of the type of stress we've spoken about above. If you find that your listeners are having some difficulty understanding you, it could be because you are speaking too quickly. Try to slow down a little and concentrate on stressing the meaning-carrying words in your sentence.

TASK F a a

Who would you like to sound like? Try to find a 'model' of pronunciation which you like. This could be someone you know, or it could be someone you listen to on the radio. When you find your 'model', try to listen carefully to how he or she speaks. If you can record him or her, you can even talk along with the recording. What do you think – is this making a difference to your pronunciation?

A w

① **B** a a .
 a. Goran Ivanisevic is happy. He uses phrases such as 'this was my dream', 'this is unbelievable', 'this is too good'.

② **F** i a i a ?
 a. Jinping thinks that too much emphasis was put on written English and grammar when she was at school. She didn't have much opportunity to speak.

③ **F** w
 a. Ngoc stops speaking when she cannot find the words she needs. Because she cannot say what she wants to, she becomes less confident, and so she speaks less.

④ **L** a a i
 a. Bjork's albums Debut and Post were both about a week in the life of a normal person. One important thing about this is that life cannot be planned.
 b. 'the ups and downs' are all of the positive and negative things which happen to you.
 When you 'live life to the full' you do as much as you can and you enjoy everything you do.
 If you 'take life as it comes', you don't make plans.
 You accept what happens each day, even if it is not enjoyable.

switch on / turn on / break / switch off / turn off /
 fix / turn up / turn down a

⑤ **S** w w i a
 a. He speaks English. The Greek market is too small for his business.
 b. First of all... One thing I say is... .

⑥ **K**
 a. Try to avoid using the same words all the time. Ask your listener to do something.

⑦ **B** a i
 a. Avoiding silences in conversation, using noises such as '...erm...'.
 b. Callum says 'uh-huh', 'right' and 'Oh, I see' to show he understands and agrees with Richard.

S i a i a
 a. To improve your pronunciation, try to find one person whose way of speaking you like. Try to copy the way that person speaks.

Listen out for **B** **S** a on
 BBC World Service radio.



