

EPISODE 005

Why Listening Helps You Speak

Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening
Full transcript · speaking practice · vocabulary review

Hi, everybody! I'm Georgiana, founder of SpeakEnglishPodcast.com. Welcome to a new episode of the Speak English Now podcast!

Today, we're going to talk about something many English learners get wrong.

Should you speak more... or listen more?

Should you write more... or read more?

And after that, we'll practice speaking with a Mini-Story.

Okay. Let's get started!

When people want to speak English, they often hear the same advice:

"Just speak more."

"Find a conversation partner."

"Write every day."

This sounds logical. If you want to speak, you should speak. If you want to write, you should write.

But after teaching English for many years, I see the same situation again and again.

Students try very hard to speak. They join conversation groups. They push themselves to produce English.

And still, they hesitate. They translate. They search for words.

The problem is not always effort. Sometimes the problem is balance.

Listening and reading are input. They are how you receive English.

Speaking and writing are output. They are how you use English.

You can't produce what you haven't first taken in.

Think about cooking.

If you have never tasted a soup, never watched someone make it, and never seen the ingredients, it will be very hard to cook that soup well.

You can stand in the kitchen and "practice cooking" all day. But without enough examples, you keep guessing.

English works in a similar way.

If you don't hear enough natural English, speaking feels like guessing.

If you don't read enough clear English, writing feels like translating word by word.

So no, speaking and writing are not a waste of time.

They are useful. Very useful.

When you try to speak, you notice what you cannot say yet. The next day, when you listen again, your brain pays more attention to those missing pieces.

Speaking shows you the gaps. Listening fills the gaps.

But if most of your time is speaking with other students who also hesitate, you don't get enough good English to copy.

A better plan looks like this.

Listen a lot to English you can understand.

Then speak a little, with focus.

For example, you can listen for about one hour a day. A podcast. A course. A short audio story at your level. You can do this while walking, cooking, or driving. And this reminds me of my conversation with my student Paola from Milan. She just told me she listens for about 2 to 3 hours every day. While cleaning, cooking or walking her dog and also before going to bed. And we also meet every Monday online to have our weekly conversation class. But let's get back to our lesson.

So, start listening every day for about one hour. Then practice speaking once or twice a week. With a tutor. With a friend. Or with the Mini-Stories in this podcast.

Little by little, listening feeds your speaking.

And reading feeds your writing.

That's why this podcast focuses so much on listening and responding.

You hear English you can follow. You answer easy questions. You repeat.

You don't need a perfect conversation every day. You need enough understandable English so that the words are already there when you need them.

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Mini-Story

Speaking Practice

Okay. Let's practice.

Remember: I'll give you some information. Then I'll ask you very easy questions. Try to answer out loud before I give you the answer.

Let's start!

Maya started a new job in a café in London.

Did Maya start a new job?

Yes. She started a new job.

Did she start a job in a hospital?

No. Not in a hospital. In a café.

Where was the café?

In London. The café was in London.

Maya didn't know much English.

Did Maya speak fluent English?

No. She didn't.

Did she know a lot of English or only a little?

Only a little. She didn't know much English.

The customers ordered coffee, tea, and cake.

Did the customers order pizza?

No. Not pizza.

What did they order?

Coffee, tea, and cake.

Maya was nervous, so she asked people to point at the menu.

Was Maya relaxed?

No. She was nervous.

Did she ask people to point at the menu?

Yes. She did.

Did that help her a little?

Yes. It helped her a little.

But Maya wanted to understand the conversations around her.

Did she want to understand more English?

Yes. She did.

Did she only want to study grammar rules?

No. She wanted to understand the conversations.

So Maya listened. Every day. While she worked.

Did Maya listen once a month?

No! She listened every day.

Did she listen at work?

Yes. She listened while she worked.

At first, she only caught a few words.

Did she understand everything at first?

No. She didn't.

Did she catch a few words?

Yes. A few words. Words like coffee, tea, please, and thanks.

After two months, the same phrases started to feel familiar.

Did the English feel more familiar?

Yes. It did.

Did it happen in one day?

No. After two months.

Soon Maya could use short sentences at work.

Could she give long speeches?

No. Only short sentences.

Were the sentences related to work?

Yes. They were related to work.

"Small coffee, please." "Here you are." "Enjoy your cake."

Maya also went out with her colleagues.

Did she stay home every evening?

No. She went out with her colleagues.

Could she practice listening there too?

Yes. She could.

The conversations were relaxed, so she felt less nervous.

Did she feel more nervous or less nervous?

Less nervous.

After one year, Maya could have real conversations.

Could she only point at the menu after one year?

No. Not anymore.

Could she talk with customers and friends?

Yes. She could.

Maya was happy. She didn't learn English by speaking all day with no input.

Did she only speak, with no listening?

No. She didn't.

What helped her most?

Listening first. Then speaking a little.

Little by little, the English she heard became the English she could use.

Review

Vocabulary from This Episode

Review the most useful words and expressions before listening again.

01 input English you receive by listening or reading.	07 gap something missing; a part you cannot do yet.
02 output English you produce by speaking or writing.	08 understandable clear enough to follow.
03 balance the right mix of different activities.	09 colleagues the people you work with.
04 hesitate to pause because you are not sure.	10 relaxed calm; not nervous.
05 produce to create or use language yourself.	11 related to connected with a topic.
06 familiar easy to recognize because you have heard it before.	12 feed to give something what it needs to grow.

Excellent! That's the end of the Mini-Story.

Remember, you can replay this section and answer the questions another time. The goal is to respond quickly.

If you want to speak more easily, give your brain enough English to work with.

Listen more than you speak. Then, when you speak, you will have something ready to say.

You can get the transcript for this episode at SpeakEnglishPodcast.com/podcast.

And if you want more structured listening and speaking practice, you can check out my premium courses at SpeakEnglishPodcast.com/courses.

Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode!

Bye-bye!

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Georgiana

Founder of Speak English Now Podcast

SpeakEnglishPodcast.com