

How to Learn Perfect English As a Native English Speaker

Even if you were born into English, it can be a tough language to master. It has widely [irregular spelling and pronunciation](#) . English borrows words from all sorts of different languages and new terms are emerging constantly.



Steps

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1. [Read, read, read!](#) It doesn't matter a whole lot what you read, so [choose subjects that you like](#). Not everything in print is perfect, but the vast majority of printed works, such as [books](#) and [magazines](#), have been thoroughly [edited](#). You will pick up structures, tones and ideas from your reading. The more you read, the more mistakes and problems will start to "look" or "sound" wrong to you. Correctness will start to feel natural.
 - o If you want to write with a particular style or in a particular genre, read things that are related to that. You will tend to adopt styles and ideas from what you read.
2. [Listen](#) to talk [radio](#), [podcasts](#), and audio books. It's good listening practice. [Audio books](#), especially, are an opportunity to hear writing. Besides hearing words pronounced that aren't normally used in conversation, you'll hear complex sentence structures inflected.
3. [Read out loud](#), with intonation. If you have kids, read to them, and ham it up with Dr. Seuss. Even if your dog or cat is the only one listening, reading passages out loud is one way to interpret their structures, and it will make you more conscious of their details.
4. Study the creation of works using proper English. What makes the artful imagery in a novel so beautiful? What makes a good speech so persuasive?
5. [Build your vocabulary](#). Reading is the best way to do that since it exposes you to a far wider range of words than conversation or spoken media, such as radio or television. Collect words you don't know. In addition, browse in the dictionary, play word games, and subscribe to a [word of the day](#) .
6. Play with the language. Start a [pun war](#). Dust off your [Scrabble](#) game. [Invent your own word](#). Try your hand at a [garden path sentence](#) or enter the [Bulwer-Lytton contest](#) for bad prose or [one of its imitators](#) . Making fun of the language is a great way to explore it.
7. Brush up on the rules. Get hold of a copy of William Strunk's [The Elements of Style](#) , a thin volume covering the essentials of good writing. If you prefer a physical book, an updated version by Strunk and

E.B. White is still in print. Other style manuals discuss common, frequently-confused rules, too.

8. Practice writing. [Write](#) for a [journal](#), [blog](#), or [wiki](#). Wikis, especially, need writers and frequently come with a whole community of editors who will help you. Whatever and wherever you write, practice daily, if possible. In email and text messages, use complete sentences. That's writing, too.
9. Consider your [audience](#). Just as you wear different clothing for different weather, you should write or speak differently depending upon your audience. Having an audience in mind will help to focus your communication, too.
10. Consider your purpose. Is this communication factual or fanciful? Are you telling a story, arguing a point, or explaining a procedure?
11. [Proofread](#) your writing. Even a thorough grasp of English does not ensure perfect typing or ideal sentence structures the first time around. Proofreading will also tell you what sorts of things you regularly do wrong, so that you can improve. Reading out loud is a very good way to catch things you might have missed.
12. Have somebody else [proofread](#) your writing. Something that sounds right to you may not make sense to somebody else.
13. Don't be afraid to [make mistakes](#). Language takes extraordinary amounts of practice to master, and mistakes are part of the learning process.
14. Try [learning another language](#). It will make you more conscious of the structures and grammar in your own. Many of the Latin-based and Germanic languages have words and structures similar to those in English, and exploring these similarities and differences will strengthen both languages.
15. Avoid trying too hard to perfect the accent and criticizing other people for their not-so-perfect ones.

Tips

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- Do not hesitate to split an infinitive when it is warranted. Grammarians, teachers, and writers used to try not to split "to" and the verb. The rule was supposed to make the English language more like Latin because the infinitive is one word in Latin. Strictly speaking, however, "to" is not a part of the infinitive, and both English and Latin use one-word infinitives. For example, in the sentence "I made my daughter clean her room," "clean" is an infinitive without "to." Split infinitives are not ungrammatical because they are unavoidable in some sentences. Infinitives lack subjects and thus do not have voice, meaning that split infinitives can be used in very formal English that avoids the active voice. In the sentence, "Her plan is to not use the active voice," the split infinitive prevents confusion. If we place the "not" after "is," we end up saying that it is not her plan to use the active voice, instead of saying that she is trying not to use the active voice. "To more than double" is another example. "More than to double" and "to double more than" are not English!
- Do not be afraid to use a "split verb phrase." Some writers who do not split infinitives refuse to split verb phrases as well, but there is no such rule. If there were such a rule, we should all be saying, "I saw her not" instead of "I didn't see her." We should also say, "You are going?" instead of "Are you going?" but "You are going?" is a Nonstandard question. This rule is not consistent with the evolution of the English language. In fact, split verb phrases have the advantages (in terms of emphasis) of split infinitives.
- Realize that you sometimes have to end a sentence with a preposition. Consider this line from *Robots*: "You can shine no matter what you're made of." It would be ungrammatical to write, "You can shine no matter of what you're made," and it should sound foreign to you! Also consider that like Latin, the English language is able to use intransitive verbs in the passive voice! Consider "Speak only when you are spoken to." "Spoken to" are treated as a single unit in English, and this sentence can be "corrected" only by rewriting it in the active voice: "Speak only when someone speaks to you." This sentence makes assumptions because you may be

spoken to by one person or by a group. When your sentence uses a relative pronoun, try to place the preposition in front of the relative. For instance, "It was the ball by which I was hit" works better than "It was the ball that I was hit by." Your sentences will generally be stronger if you try to follow this rule. After all, few people are going to say that their favorite part of speech is the preposition. Your writing will be more exciting if you end your sentences with an exciting word.

- An intuitive grasp of English usage, while not infallible, is the most flexible. You will write or speak most naturally if you can focus on the ideas and their communication, instead of thinking about the rules.
- Remember that good writing calls for good grammar, good spelling, logical organization, clarity, attention to the audience, and a good selection of content. A good writer does not overlook any of those things. Be sure to allot plenty of time to check for grammar and spelling errors and poor organization.
- Accept that the rules change over time. For instance, the word **data** was once strictly the plural of "datum", but has come to be used as a mass (or uncountable) noun, similar to "information" or "water."
- Write first, fix second. If you do not know how to spell a word, keep writing! Do not stop to correct errors if you might lose your train of thought. You can always make corrections later.
- The ability to spell is not necessarily an indicator of the ability to write, although the two skills are closely related. If spelling is not your strong point, use a dictionary or spell-checker before you publish a work or hand something in.
- Attention to written English will improve your spoken English as well.

Warnings

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- Nobody is perfect. Even English mavens such as William Safire, Richard Lederer, and Lynne Truss draw comments and criticism on their writing styles.
- Written works, especially on the Internet, may not be grammatically accurate.

Related wikiHows

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- [How to Be a Good Writer](#)
- [How to Be the Best at Your English Class](#)
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