

TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR ENGLISH

1. In the Classroom

- Attend class consistently and punctually; bring books, notebook and writing materials. Pay attention, ask questions, clarify doubts by paraphrasing instructions and information.
- Write the date and subject at the top of the page. Take legible notes, using pictures, diagrams, examples and simple definitions in English. Write down all homework assignments.
- Practice self-confidence and tolerance. Relax. Do not obsess about your mistakes or ridicule your classmates when they make mistakes.
- Create a positive atmosphere in the classroom. Help your classmates; don't distract them. Be quiet and listen when the teacher or a classmate is talking.
- Use English in the classroom. Ask your teachers to use English.

2. After Every Class

- Review notes, clarify doubts and write down any questions. Ask your teacher about your doubts and questions before the next class. Copy your notes if they are difficult to read. Organize your notes in a logical way. If you have to miss class, ask to copy a friend's notes.
- Do your homework. Dedicate at least one hour per class for homework. Homework helps you learn, prepares you for exams. Do not copy answers. If you have to miss class, ask your friends what the homework was; then do it.
- Organize your time and space with no distractions. Divide long projects into short sections to complete every day. Take a break for 10 minutes every hour; get up, move around. Study in different places.
- Discover your learning style: auditory, visual, kinesthetic, analytical, social. Use appropriate study techniques (inventing visual tricks, drawing pictures, reading aloud, inventing memorable rhymes, using mime, organizing material into logical categories, studying with friends).

3. Application and Reinforcement

- Dedicate at least 5 extra hours per week to improve your English. This does not include the time you use to do homework.
- Make posters with difficult material. Put the posters on the wall of your bedroom, on the cereal box in the kitchen, in the bathroom, etc. Short, constant reviews several times a day are more useful than exhaustive, all-night reviews before exams.
- Write difficult material in a small notebook. Keep the notebook in your bag. Study the material when you have extra time (in the bank, waiting for the bus, etc.).

- Correct your mistakes on tests to discover your characteristic errors. Keep graded tests and homework. Identify your problem areas. Invent test questions for yourself.
- Teach English to another person. Check your homework with a friend.

4. Extend your English language skills

- Write your shopping list, agenda, diary, emails, text messages, chats and Facebook posts in English. Find a pen pal.
- Find a conversation partner at a language school. Help tourists and talk with them. Create a time and place for English conversation with your classmates. Chat/converse by internet using a microphone and speakers. Memorize songs in English and sing them.
- Read familiar material in English: articles or stories in magazines, newspapers or internet; find a favorite book in an English version. Exchange reading materials with a friend. Don't use a dictionary for every word; try to guess meanings or understand the general ideas.
- Listen to songs in English and try to write down the words before you check them on the internet. Listen to movies and DVDs in English, with English subtitles. Listen to the radio or television in English, BBC or CNN, on internet or cable TV.
- Try to think in English. Talk to yourself in English.

5. Practice your Grammar

- Identify your problems. Take practice tests online (PET, FCE, TOEFL, etc.), allowing exactly the same time as the real tests do for each section. Analyze which sections were most difficult for you. Do you have problems with sentence transformations? Is it hard for you to predict answers to Listening questions because you don't know which kinds of language follow the different prepositions? Do you have problems with Reading comprehension because you couldn't identify the conditionals that indicate fantasy or reality, past opportunities or general rules? Do you have problems organizing your Writing, or finding the correct parts of speech?
- Check out online exercises and more practice tests. Analyze the kind of questions you will need to answer. Use English Grammar in Use or the Grammar Folders on the school's webpage, www.elsc.unach.mx, to practice specific areas.
- Create your own exercises, similar to the TOEFL or the FCE ones. Create questions about Listening texts (YouTube videos or BBC news clips). Create a Reading

Comprehension test using articles online. Adapt online texts to create all the sections of the Use of English exam. If possible, exchange your exercises and links with a classmate for extra practice.

- Search in online texts, magazines, newspapers or books for particular structures or language that are difficult for you. Circle all of those problem areas in the text. Then analyze the language. For example, observe how the text uses different verb tenses and auxiliary verbs, how often and in which situations each tense is used. Underline the words before and after each preposition to identify phrasal verbs or to understand which form of a verb appears after a preposition. (Is it an infinitive: “To Go,” a root: “Go,” or a gerund: “Going”?)
- Find examples of difficult language in songs. For example, “Six Ribbons” contains many 2nd Conditionals, while “In the Pines” contains a 3rd Conditional. Memorize the songs so that you have a natural, intuitive sense of how these structures work.
- Create your own mnemonic tricks to remember difficult language. For example “At-In-On-In” is a way to remember the prepositions for time and place, from the most specific to the most general. “I’ll meet you AT 5:32, IN the afternoon, ON the first Sunday IN January.” “I’ll meet you AT the Harmer classroom IN the language school ON Eje Vial Javier Lopez Moreno IN San Cristobal.”

6. Exam Strategies

- **Before the exam**, review similar texts and exercises in your book. Create your own practice tests with friends.
- **When you get the exam**, read the instructions first. Ask the teacher questions if necessary.
- Use titles, format, pictures, key words, questions and context to help you select and understand the most important information. Predict answers.
- Use your general knowledge, logic and information from other questions to help you. Eliminate illogical answers. Follow your instincts.
- Check your answers. Make sure you answered all questions, included all the necessary information and followed all instructions. If you don’t know, guess.
- Before you complete the Writing section, organize your ideas into a logical order and find examples or supporting arguments for each one. If you don’t know a word, paraphrase. Use simple, clear sentences. Read your text to make sure it is easy to understand.

- In Speaking sections, listen to your partner. Use a lot of questions and short responses to create a dialogue—not two monologues! If you make a mistake, correct yourself, but don't get nervous. Have a natural conversation. Help your partner: offer alternative suggestions.