



A Mr. Vig GUIDE

simple solutions for
your biggest English headaches

ENGLISH LESSONS on Steroids

**2x your progress in
1/2 the time with
ANY teacher**



English Lessons on Steroids

by Mr. Vig

A BETTER WAY

“So, how was your weekend?”

Sound familiar?

This is probably how 99% of English lessons begin.

It’s ok. It’s called “just talking.” And it’s what many students want from lessons.

But there’s a better way.

Top musicians, athletes, dancers... they don’t “just play” or “just practice.” They have a strategy. And they apply a structure to their practices to improve as fast as possible in the shortest amount of time.

What you’re about to learn is the same strategy and the same formula adapted for an English lesson.

Cheers,
Mr. Vig

YOUR LESSONS ARE A PRACTICE, NOT A PERFORMANCE

I once saw John Denver in concert. (This was before he died.)

On the stage there was a chair, a guitar and John. That's it. Nothing else. No dancers. No fireworks. Not even another musician.

Yet for two hours he had my complete attention, and the attention of thousands in the audience.

Of course, he played and sang beautifully. But did you ever think about the fact that most of the time when he played his guitar, you wouldn't want to be in the audience? In fact, John would probably have had to pay you to listen.

I'm talking about all the time he spent practicing.

But what I paid for, that was a performance.

There's a big difference. And it's the same for English.

But most students either don't separate practice and performing, or they mix them up and practice when they should perform and vice versa.

I'll explain the difference and how you can practice during your lessons. Then, like John Denver or any master, when you need to you'll be ready to perform effortlessly, smoothly and hold the attention of your audience.

But first, let me tell you the story of how I made this discovery.

Let me tell you...

HOW I MET THE PIANIST

One year my dad invited me to join him on a trip to France. A friend was turning 70 and had invited 70 friends to a party in a small village where he had his second home.

It was a four-day celebration and every day there were cool activities planned for the group: hiking in the largest woods in France to look at Roman ruins, taking a tour of the village with a local whose family had lived there for generations, buying food in a local market then eating it at a nearby farmhouse...

But the main event was the birthday dinner. And for this evening, the birthday boy rented out the entire restaurant, made two long tables for everyone, and put those little name cards in back of the plates that tell you where you should sit.

Well, when it came time to eat, and after I found my name card, I sat down and met the woman sitting to my left.

This was the pianist.

Now, I'm not a pianist. Nor am I a musician. I even have trouble staying awake during concerts that don't have explosions and dancers who can kick their legs over their heads. (Unless it's John Denver, of course.)

But I have memorized Dale Carnegie's 3rd rule for conversation, "show a genuine interest in the other person."

So that's what I did. I was genuinely interested in how she became so successful.

One of the first questions I asked was about her daily routine. And here's what she said.

Every day she sits down at the piano for a few hours and practices.

Big surprise, right?

I've noticed that people who are good at what they do rarely know why they're good. To discover their secrets, as we say in English, you have to dig a little deeper.

So I asked her more and more questions, and finally I got the complete picture.

Here it is:

THE THREE ELEMENTS OF PRACTICE

Number One

She doesn't practice for a few hours in a row. Instead, she practices for a few minutes, gets up, does something else like clean or stretch or go to the bathroom, then comes back and practices some more.

Number one is: short.

Number Two

She doesn't sit down and think, What do I feel like playing today? Rather, she's strategic about her practice; she has it all planned out.

She practices pieces of music designed to help her improve areas that need improving.

If she needs to work on her finger placement, she chooses a piece of music that challenges her fingers. If she needs to improve her timing, she'll play a piece that requires her to focus on this.

She's always training and improving her weak areas.

Number two is: strategic.

Number Three

She practices every day.

Not when she feels like it. Not when she has time. Not when she isn't tired.

Every day.

Maybe some days she doesn't get to practice as long as she would like, or she isn't as focused, but she does it anyway.

Every day is more important than practicing perfectly.

Number three is: daily.

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So that's her "secret."

It won't happen overnight. But when you keep a routine like this – Short... Strategic... Daily – success is inevitable.*

Now let's look at how you can apply the same to your speaking.

*it will definitely happen

HOW TO PRACTICE SPEAKING ENGLISH

STRATEGIC

A lot of students tell me, “I can talk about my work but I can’t talk about the news.” “Or, I can talk about myself but I don’t have enough words to talk about my job.”

And they say it like they were born with a disease and there’s nothing they can do about it.

But I have this problem, too. For example, I can’t talk about genetics. I just don’t have the words.

You know why? Because I never talk about genetics.

But if I wanted to be able to talk about genetics, then I would start talking about genetics.

In other words, practice what you want to be better at.

Make sense?

Here’s how.

Likely, your conversation partner won’t know about your industry or job. And the conversation won’t go far.

Better:

1. Find an article or video about the subject.
2. Both of you read /watch it at home.
3. Then you discuss it during your conversation.

Answer his/her questions. Ask questions about new words. Practice the new words.

And soon you’ll be very comfortable talking about this subject and you’ll be ready to move on to the next topic.

SHORT

When I was a freelance teacher taking the tram and metro all over Prague, if a student had asked me to meet him for 30 minutes or 10 minutes I would have said, “No way.” Traveling in the city for 40 to 60 minutes round trip just to make a few crowns would have been a huge waste of time.

But if I could stay at home and meet him or her online, I would have been very happy to do that.

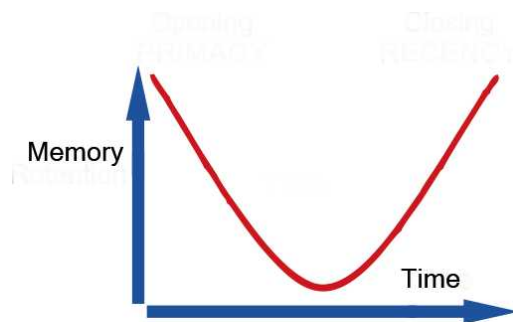
Maybe you can pay for one hour and have a ten minute phone chat every day. Or pay three teachers for one hour each week and meet each one on Skype for thirty minutes every day.

Short is important because of the simple fact that it’s easier to stay focused for a short period of time than a longer.

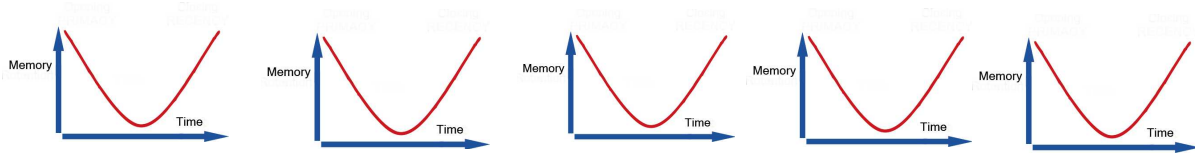
Plus, it’s more practical to have daily practices if they’re short.

DAILY

In memory research there’s a phenomenon called “recency and frequency.” Basically, your brain power peaks at the beginning and at the end of a practice / learning session. Students in a sixty-minute lecture remember more in the first and last five minutes than they do in the fifty minutes in the middle.



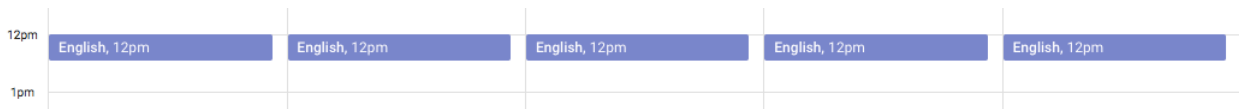
These brain power peaks are so valuable that you want to get as many as you can. So if you have one practice session during the week you get two peaks. But if you have five you get ten. On Day 15 in the



Freetime Fluent Course, I teach you how to create an English Habit.

When you do something every day, after a while, it becomes a habit. And when it's a habit, then it's easy. You won't have to remember, you won't have to use discipline, it will be as automatic as brushing your teeth.

For example, instead of every day having to remember to check your calendar and find out, "Who am I meeting today? What time? Have I paid yet?", it will be much easier when you know that every afternoon before lunch, from 12 to 12.30, you go on Skype and practice speaking.



The easy way to schedule English: the same time every day.

AND IF YOU CAN'T DO DAILY...

Do something else.

Watch TV... listen to a podcast... read...vocab testing...something!

Daily practice is one of the most important things you can do for your English.

Yes, even if it's just for a few minutes!

SAMPLE SCHEDULE FOR A 30 MINUTE CONVERSATION PRACTICE

-5:00 (five minutes before)

slow down, relax, breathe,
look at your notes

I

0- 5:00.

warm up with easy
conversation,
ex. "Hey, what's new?"

II

5:00-25:00

talk about what you need to
talk about

III

25:00-30:00

write down new words in your
vocab notebook, plan next
lesson: when will you meet?
what will you talk about?
anything to read/watch
before?

THREE BONUS FORMULAS

THE PERFECT BUSINESS ENGLISH LESSON FORMULA

Renata's boss told her she had to give a presentation at a conference in Berlin about environmental remediation. So she sent me her presentation, we talked about it during the lesson, I asked her questions, and when she heard me say a word or a sentence she liked, she wrote it down in her notebook and immediately practiced it.

Jakub was a lawyer who needed to talk about Czech law with international clients. So I sent him links to Wikipedia articles about famous legal cases. We talked about them, he asked me about some of the vocabulary, he wrote new words in his notebook, and I asked him to explain how the local law was similar or different.

Marek was a manager and sometimes needed to take visiting clients out to dinner. He worried that he wouldn't be able to talk about non-work topics. So after I suggested some websites, he sent me links to articles he was interested in: international news, The World Cup, TED videos, whatever topic he was interested in and thought would be appropriate dinner conversation, that's what we talked about during our lessons.

These are all effective business lessons. They work because:

- you're talking about what you need to talk about
- you're learning vocabulary you need and will use
- the subject is always interesting, which means you'll be more focused and will learn faster

Now compare this to what happens when you use a business English text book. Chapter one is all about negotiations. You learn negotiation vocabulary, negotiation grammar, you read a text about negotiations, and then you do some negotiation role-play.

But you don't do negotiations at work, you'll never use the vocabulary, the grammar rules are confusing, and it's so boring you start looking for excuses to cancel your lessons. Not good.

THE PERFECT VOCABULARY LESSON FORMULA

I got this idea from Gabrielle Wyner, who wrote the book Fluent Forever, which I highly recommend.

When he was learning German so he could sing an opera, he gave his teacher a list of the most frequently used words in German (a frequency list) and they spent months talking about each word.

You've probably had the experience of memorizing a list of words and then forgetting them a day later. Or if you do remember them, you have no idea how to use them in a sentence.

But when you spend some time talking about one word, asking questions about it, practicing it, connecting it to a personal experience, and really thinking about it, then you've got a great chance of not just knowing it passively, but adding it to your active vocabulary almost immediately.

As a bonus, write it down in your vocab notebook or create a flashcard / Anki card and start a daily testing routine.

All these vocab techniques, and more, are described in my advanced training: The Memory Machine Method

THE PERFECT GRAMMAR LESSON FORMULA

I don't recommend it.

Lots of research has been done on this. There's a difference between learning a rule and speaking like native speakers. You can learn a rule in a lesson, but you won't use it when you're speaking. Instead, your speaking will get slower and your confidence will decrease because you're focused on yourself and being perfect.

And I've seen it over and over again with my own students.

When I teach some grammar, my student learns the rule and can do a grammar exercise. But when the conversation resumes*, he continues to make the mistake – even though he knows the rule!

So what's going on?

There's a difference between learning and knowing. Learning is conscious. It's what you do in school. But knowing is unconscious, and it's the only way we learn to speak a language.

It happens slowly, gradually, and only after you've read and listened to a ton of correct English.

And one day, you wake up and say "he goes" instead of "he go", and it's not because you quickly remembered, "Oh yeah, he is the third person pronoun and for it to agree with the verb I must add an 's'."

No, you say it because you've seen and heard it thousands of times and if you said "he go" that would feel strange.

*continues

CONFIDENCE BUILDING LESSON FORMULA

Have you ever met someone who wasn't confident but they were good?

What about. the opposite?

Have you ever met someone who was confident but they sucked?

So what is confidence?

It's not competence.

Isn't it just a feeling?

I say it is.

So can't you have confidence right now? Even if your English doesn't improve?

You can. But unfortunately we learned the opposite in school.

For years you did English in school and you felt boredom, shame, fear, humiliation....

And you connected it to English like Pavlov's dogs connect the sound of the bell to food.

And now it's a habit.

You hear English or speak English and BAM! here are the negative feelings again!

But you can practise the feeling.

Most people practice bad feelings.

They speak English and their energy goes down, their voice goes down, their head goes down, and their posture goes down.

They say things like, "I'm stupid, I have a bad memory."

Soon, you connect English with feeling bad.

You want to feel good so you work on your grammar.

But that doesn't make you feel good.

So let's practice feeling good and connect it with English

A very good English teacher named A.J. Hoge recommends this technique, which he learned from NLP.

He recommends playing some music you love, jumping up and down, dancing, feeling great, and then immediately doing some listening or TV or reading.

Great idea!

The only problem is, when I tell my adult students about this method they look at me like I'm crazy.

So here's something you can do and not feel silly.

During your lesson

- sit up straight
- smile
- talk about things you like, no complaining, no negative shit
- pick a teacher you like (friendly, good mood, positive)
- deep breaths from your diaphragm (belly/gut/stomach-NOT your chest)
- If possible, why not go for a walk? There's no rule that says you have to sit while you talk. If you meet your teacher on Skype/Zoom/Whateverispopularthisweek, take your phone outside. Get some fresh air. Move. And get the blood flowing to your brain.

Feel good. Think positive thoughts. Talk about positive things. And do this while you're speaking English and soon you'll automatically connect feeling good with speaking English. And you will become... Confident!

THREE ADVANCED TIPS

or

WHAT THE BEST STUDENTS

KNOW THAT YOU DON'T

#1: SLOW DOWN

Here's a common problem.

Jan comes to my apartment, sits down on my couch and starts talking about his work.

Then his phone makes a sound and he checks it.

He continues with the conversation but I can tell half his brain is still at the office.

I say something, but he doesn't hear and I have to repeat it.

Finally, our time is finished, Jan leaves, and I think about how slow his progress is.

Unfortunately, distractions are the reality of modern life.

But you can manage it so that your time speaking is focused and not wasted like Jan's lesson.

Here's what I recommend.

Before you do anything in English, take a few minutes to slow down, relax, and focus on your breathing.

In your office, in your car, on the metro, or even while walking, slowly breathe in through your nose and count to three, then slowly breathe out your mouth and count to five. Do this ten times.

Simple, but it works.

Or if you want to become a focus master, you can learn about mindfulness and meditation. There's a ton of info online. For a good introduction, I recommend going to ted.com and searching for "Andy Puddicombe."

And turn off your phone and put it out of sight!

#2: WARM UP

Musicians play the scales.

Runners run slowly and stretch.

Weight lifters lift twenty pounds before they lift fifty.

It's called warming up.

For English, this is talking about something that's easy.

With my students, I usually start with — big surprise — "How was your weekend?"

#3: REPEAT

Here's a common mistake:

Bohuslav is talking about his ex-wife. He says "She broke my nose, drank all my beer, and then called the police."

I say, "She sounds like a crazy bitch."

Bohuslav says, "Yes." And then he starts talking about hockey.

No! No! No!

Every new word or interesting phrase you hear from a native speaker is an opportunity to add that word to your active vocabulary.

Instead, here's what Bohuslav should have done and what you can do in your next lesson:

First, ask about the word. Really get to know it — what's the opposite? Is it formal or informal? When can you use it?

And then practice it. Use it in a sentence about yourself. Then another. And another.

Make this a habit in your lessons and soon you'll be sounding like a native speaker!

HOW TO TEACH YOUR TEACHER

So now that you know how to have a super lesson, what about your teacher?

Some will have their own ideas how to have a good lesson (and they may be right – there’s more than one way to learn a language!)

But it’s important that you both agree what will happen during your lessons.

Most teachers are happy to adjust and do what you want; after all, you’re the one who’s paying.

So it’s important to have a short conversation before you start.

I recommend saying or writing the following:

“I’d like to try a new type of lesson I read about. In this lesson, the teacher rarely corrects the student, he/she rarely explains grammar, and the lesson has three parts: a warm up, a conversation, and then a short time to review notes and to plan. Is this something you’re willing to try with me?”

*rarely=almost never

THE TWO PIECES OF EQUIPMENT YOU MUST BRING TO EVERY LESSON

When you go shopping, do you make a list?

If you do, it's because you don't want to forget anything; potatoes are important.

You write down what you want to remember.

It's as simple as that.

So why not write down new words and expressions you learn from your teacher?

1. A pen
2. a notebook

Why not paper?

Take a look at this.

This is a student who chose paper.

What a mess.

But a notebook is just one thing. It's harder to lose. It's neat. And it has a natural order so you can tell which notes came earlier and which came later.

HOW TO WRITE IN YOUR NOTEBOOK

But it's not enough.

How you write them down is equally as important.

Because if you write them down the wrong way, you won't remember them. And if you write them down the correct way, you at least have a chance.

I see students on the metro all the time staring at vocab lists: English word on the left, Czech word on the right.

This is the hard way.

Follow these three rules and you'll learn faster and make the job of remembering much easier.

THREE NOTEBOOK RULES

Rule #1 All English

Sometimes when I ask a student a question in English there's a pause and I can see their lips moving juuuuust a little bit.

They think I don't know what they're doing, but I know....

(They are secretly translating in their heads.)

My student Jan told me about his English exams when he was in grammar school.

The teacher would tell him a Czech word, for example, strom.

And he would have to say the English word - tree.

That was the exam.

Czech word - English word.

Just translation.

For years he studied lists of words, and guess what the result is: he's a translation addict.

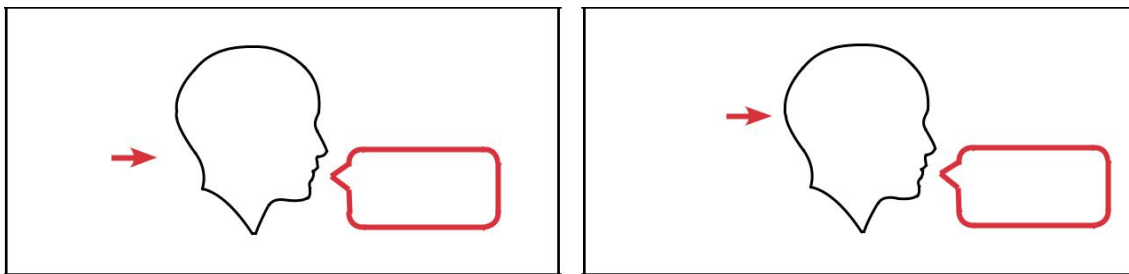
Another Czech I know (who doesn't need my lessons) tells me a different story. He's a lawyer who has international clients, and when he needs to research something for them, he does all his reading in English.

Then an interesting thing happens when his Czech colleagues ask him about the case: he has difficulty telling them! He can explain it perfectly in English, but in Czech it's a challenge.

That's because his input was 100% English. But when he tries to explain it in Czech, he's translating, which is always more difficult.

And when you use a dictionary in your native language you're inputting a translation.

So whatever you write down in your notebook, keep it 100% English.



You will never be fluent in English if you translate.

Real conversation is too fast.

You need to think in English.

Rule #2 Complete sentences

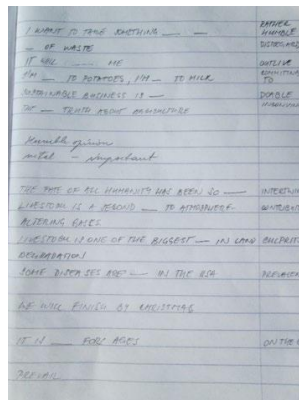
Don't just write down the new word. Write down the sentence that the word is in.

Remember the example I gave when my French friends visited me?

If I had had a notebook with me at the time, I would have written (in French):

“The original museum was damaged in an earthquake.”

Why? Because it's easier to remember a word in context - when it's connected to other information.



One of my student's notebooks

Rule #3 Gaps

When you simply stare at a list of words your brain is passive.

(Remember the people on the metro staring at their lists of English words?)

It's like going to the gym and just looking the barbells.

But when you quiz yourself, your brain is active, and you're actually exercising the muscle.

In one research study, one group of students was given extra study time, while the second group was given a test.

The group who was tested remembered 35% more after one week.6
Psychologist call this "the testing effect."

So here's what you do:

1. Write the sentence on the left side of the page
2. Instead of writing the new word, leave a gap (ex. _____)
3. On the right side write the word you want to learn

And here's what it would look like:

The original museum was damaged in an _____.	earthquake
Jordan struggles to _____ refugees.	absorb

Then when you want to review, cover the right side of the page and quiz yourself.

HERE'S THE END OF THE PIANIST STORY

The next morning after breakfast I went out into the courtyard of the inn where we were staying and sat down with a book and some coffee.

No one else was there.

I admired the old stones on the ground, the green ivy crawling up the walls, the wild flowers that were growing from between the cracks in the bricks. Soon a cat walked up, jumped on my lap and fell asleep.

Then I heard the music.

The pianist had found the inn's piano and had started her daily practice.

C'était si jolie.

Music is a skill. And so is English. And to master any skill you must practice.

Happy practicing,
-Mr. Vig

About Mr. Vig

Awards Won: none

New York Times Bestsellers: nope

Lives Saved: zero

But I have been on TV. Although I was in a crowd and you can't really tell it's me.

And I do have a blog.

And it's not one of those boring blogs, either.

It's about English. (No, really. I promise. It's not boring!)

Check it out. And when you join I'll send you some free stuff.

Here's the link: MrVig.com

Cheers,

-Ryan Viguerie (also known as Mr. Vig)



from the home page of MrVig.com