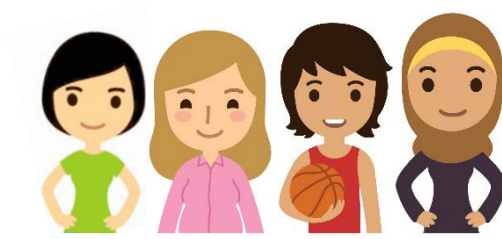


# English Language Survival Guides



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*This resource was developed by STUDYSmarter, the academic skills centre at UWA, and it covers key topics in improving language skills: thinking, speaking, reading, writing and listening in English; building your English vocabulary; and understanding different accents and Australian English specifically.*

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## STUDYSmarter

UWA's Academic Skills Centre



# THINKING IN ENGLISH

## Leave your comfort zone

One of the hardest things about learning another language is learning to think in that language. It does not happen spontaneously, but you can learn to think in English if you work strategically.

## Avoid translations

In order to think in English you need to learn to manage without dictionaries and translation apps. Leave them at home!

Turn subtitles and captions off as you watch English language programs.

See the next page for useful strategies for developing your vocabulary in context instead of in translation.

## Talk to yourself

Practise phrases, pronunciation and intonation by speaking to yourself. Listen to other speakers and try to emulate the rhythm and flow of their speaking.

## Focus on phrases

Instead of focusing on the meaning and use of individual words, focus on phrases or strings of words to make them a natural part of your conversation. “How are you?” is easier to remember than “How + are + you?”

## Be a beginner

Put yourself in an environment where you can't rely on your first language. For example, start a new hobby or study a subject you are not familiar with in your first language.

## Be thorough

Context is very important in learning a language, so make sure you develop your thinking skills in many different contexts and interests. This will help ensure your fluency isn't limited to only some parts of your life.

In order to think in English you need to develop your reading, writing, listening and speaking skills: see our other English Language Survival Guides for advice on developing different skills in context.

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# ENGLISH VOCABULARY

## Work out the words

Before you reach for a dictionary or a translation app, try to work out the meaning of an unfamiliar word or phrase from its context.

If you do want to use a dictionary, make sure you have an English-English dictionary (also called a thesaurus). Using a thesaurus will help you learn to think in English.

Translation apps and dictionaries *can* be very useful—but be careful: they don't understand the context of the words you are looking for, and can give you incorrect or misleading results...



## Keep a learning journal

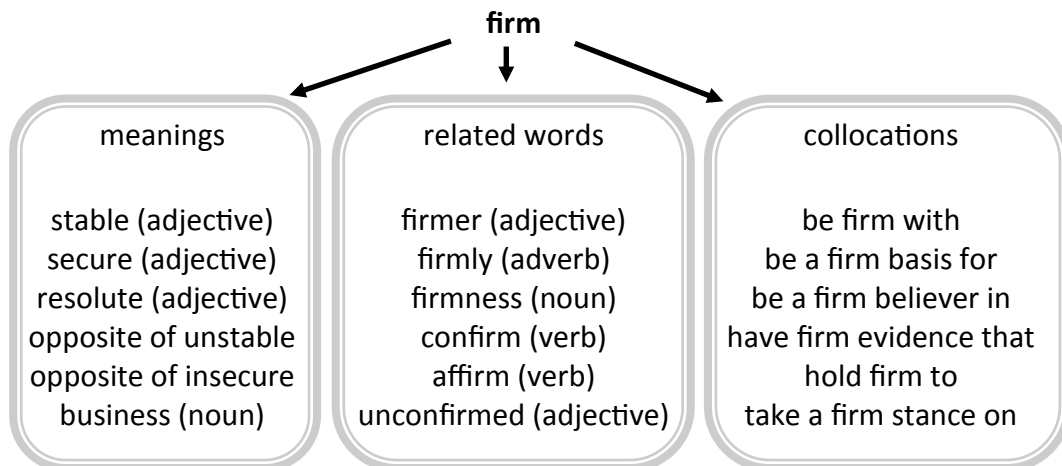
Collect new words and expressions in a notebook and try using them when you speak. Pay attention to context and formality: some words and phrases will only come up in very specific situations and can feel out of place elsewhere.

## Review often

When you learn new words and expressions try to use them regularly: write them out in sentences, say them out loud to practise pronunciation and imagine scenarios where you could use them.

## Visualise your vocabulary

Create mind maps and charts of new words and phrases, and connect and compare them to other words with similar sounds, meanings and spellings. Pay attention to related words, word variants and collocations (words that often appear together) - see below for an example with the word “firm”.



# READING IN ENGLISH

## Develop basic concepts first

To understand more challenging concepts in a new area, it helps to become familiar with basic concepts first. This way you can link new ideas to what you already know.

Before reading complex texts on a new topic, try reading simpler ones on the same topic first. You might start with a facebook post, then a newspaper article or review before tackling an academic article.

## Read in chunks

Try to read in chunks, taking in whole phrases rather than focusing on individual words. When words are unfamiliar, guess!

At the end of sections, pause for a moment. Ask yourself how what you are reading now relates to what you've just read.

## Be an active reader

Use active reading strategies to familiarise yourself with the content and structure of a text before reading it in more depth. First scan through titles, subheadings and topic sentences to get a sense of the overall message of the text. Then pause to ask yourself questions based on the pre-reading and predict what you think the answers will be.

Don't worry if your questions aren't perfect or your answers correct. The purpose of these is simply to keep you alert as you read.

Read *STUDYSmarter's* Survival Guides "Read Effectively" and "Critical Thinking" for more active reading techniques.

## Read widely and read often

Think about all your interests, and look for reading material in all of them: don't limit yourself to your course material, but seek out novels, blogs and twitter feeds that interest you. Make reading a regular part of your day.

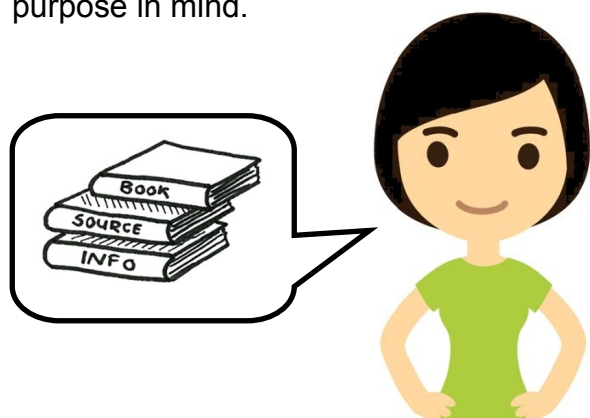
You might also enjoy reading 'parallel texts'. Parallel texts have two languages arranged side by side, and can help you understand words and phrases in context.

## Read socially and read out loud

We tend to think of reading as a solitary activity, when it doesn't have to be that. For example, you can join a group of friends to read together.

Reading out loud will help you understand the rhythm of the text, and is an easy way to practise speaking without having to think of a topic yourself. Group reading can also help you develop your listening skills and understand different accents better.

Pay attention to sentence structures and turns of phrase that you can incorporate into your own writing and speaking. Remember that you are often reading in order to write or speak about a text, either in assignments or conversations with friends, so read with that purpose in mind.



# WRITING IN ENGLISH

## Start messy!

Good writing depends on good ideas and a clear message—but that doesn't mean you should aim to be perfect right away.

Instead, generate lots of ideas and try different ways of telling your story. This will help you think more clearly about what's most important: your key message.

There are many different techniques that can help you get your ideas on the page fast, so you can then move on to refining your writing. For example, you can try

**free writing:** Write on any topic for least 15 minutes. Don't edit your writing as you go: just keep writing. Free writing regularly will help increase the speed and fluency of your writing.

**keeping a writing journal:** Record your thoughts daily in a notebook, diary or social media. Aim to write at least 250 words a day. Writing regularly will help you try out new expressions and learn to think in English.

## Know your grammar

Correct grammar is typically more important in written than in spoken English, and in order to do well in your assignments you need to understand English grammar very well.

STUDY *Smarter* can help you develop your grammar: attend our English language workshops, watch our Grammar School YouTube videos and read our Survival Guides on different points of grammar. We also encourage you to attend WRITE *Smart* drop-in or book an online consultation for personalised advice on how to improve your grammar.

## Read to write

To write well in English, read in English every day. This will help you expand your language and your ideas. As you read, don't read just for comprehension: pay attention to sentence structures and turns of phrase that you can incorporate into your own writing.

## Get started!

To learn to write you have to practise writing—so start writing now!

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# SPEAKING IN ENGLISH

## Persist and be positive

Speaking in another language can be exhausting at times, but it will get easier if you practise and persist with it.

When you make mistakes, remember: this is just part of learning. It's OK to fail sometimes. Be patient and don't be too hard on yourself.

You might feel like you're on an emotional roller coaster, but try to relax and have fun by being creative and experimenting with language.

## Record yourself

Record yourself speaking as you prepare for a presentation, talk through a problem or practise a conversation.

When you listen to the recording, take notes of what went well and what you would like to improve.

Keep an archive! Over time you will hear yourself improve.

## Speak socially

Look for opportunities to speak English outside the classroom. This is particularly important if you speak your first language at home. You might even find it helpful to start a hobby you are not familiar with in your first language so that you are not tempted to translate back and forth between languages.

## Attend workshops

Come along to *STUDYSmarter's* workshops. These sessions are designed to help you develop your academic skills and give you the opportunity to connect with others in a relaxing and supportive environment.

## Speak up in tutorials

You don't have to have all of the answers in order to participate in class discussions. Ask questions and don't be afraid to ask other speakers to slow down and explain things in a different way.

Try phrases such as

"When you say '[x]' do you mean..."

"I'd like to go back to the question about [y]..."

"I didn't understand what you meant by '[z]' - could you explain it again?"

Finally,

## Just start talking!

Language is like music: you have to practise as you would practise any instrument—and you can only practise by doing.

Don't overthink it, and don't be afraid to make mistakes. No one speaks in grammatically pure sentences, so don't let that hold you back.

Start conversations, ask questions and be positive.





# LISTENING IN ENGLISH

## Immerse yourself

The best way to learn a language is to immerse yourself in it. To a certain extent you are already doing this because you are at UWA. However, make sure you are surrounded by English: have the radio on in the background at home, sing along to music, listen to podcasts and so on.

Remember that you are learning English not just as a student, but as a whole person: a badminton player, a friend, a science fiction fan and so on. Give every part of you the opportunity to learn English.

## Predict

As you listen to a person speaking try to predict what they will say next or how the sentence will end. If you are watching a video or listening to a recording you can pause regularly and do your predictions in short sections.

Getting better at predicting means you will also get better at participating in social situations and tutorial conversations.

## Listen in lectures

Sit near the front so you can see facial expressions, gestures, slides and videos.

Write down questions as they occur and make sure to ask these when there's a chance.

Don't try to write down everything a lecturer says: copying the lecture too effectively often means you don't have time to understand what is being said, which means you end up wasting your time and effort.

Remember that you can listen to lecture recordings at different speeds.

## Take cues from other senses

When you listen, don't just listen out for words. Pay attention to a speaker's gestures, facial expressions as well as tone of voice and intonation.

You can even try watching a video with the sound off and see how much information you can glean just from the speaker's body language.

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# UNDERSTANDING ACCENTS

You will meet and work with people from all over the world at university and beyond, so it is important to expose yourself to many different accents and varieties of English to fully participate in conversations both in Australia and internationally.

## Appreciate your accent

First, everyone has an accent, and no accent is 'better' than another. Accents are tied to identity, so even if you need to work on some aspects of pronunciation to make sure other people understand you better, it is important to value your own accent.

Accents are incredibly diverse. They can tell us a lot about the person speaking: for example their place of origin, class, age or educational background. The more you are exposed to particular accents the better you become at distinguishing their variations: for example, the "Scottish" accents spoken in Edinburgh are different to the ones spoken in Glasgow, and the "Chinese" accents from Beijing are different to the Hong Kong or Chengdu accents.

## Listen up

Although the International Phonetic Alphabet can be useful to note the sounds rather than the spelling of words, it is very hard to capture different accents in writing. Learning to understand accents requires a lot of listening practice, so see our Survival Guide on Listening and Speaking in English for advice on improving your listening comprehension.

## Practise different accents

Some people are skilled at using many different accents, and may even find their speech shifts naturally to mirror the dominant one in their environment. Actors need to know how to use different accents accurately, and you can find many YouTube videos with advice and examples of how to switch between accents.

Practising different accents can be fun—but be aware that 'putting on' a different accent can be seen as mocking people whose natural accent you are imitating.

## Do your research

There are useful online databases of recordings of different accents. For example, try

- IDEA International Dialects of English Archive ([dialectsarchive.com](http://dialectsarchive.com)); and
- The Speech Accent Archive ([accent.gmu.edu](http://accent.gmu.edu))

You might also find it useful to learn about the key characteristics of different languages to help you understand when those features are transferred into English. For example, Finnish speakers often find 'th' sounds [ð] and [θ] challenging, and [f] and [v] do not exist in Japanese.

## Ask for help

If you are speaking to someone whose accent you cannot fully understand, ask them for clarification. Everyone wants to be understood, and most people are happy to help their listeners follow the conversation.

"[Each accent is a] linguistic flower in the garden of English language flowers."  
- Professor David Crystal





# AUSTRALIAN ENGLISH

The English spoken in Australia has many distinctive features. Keep an ear out for

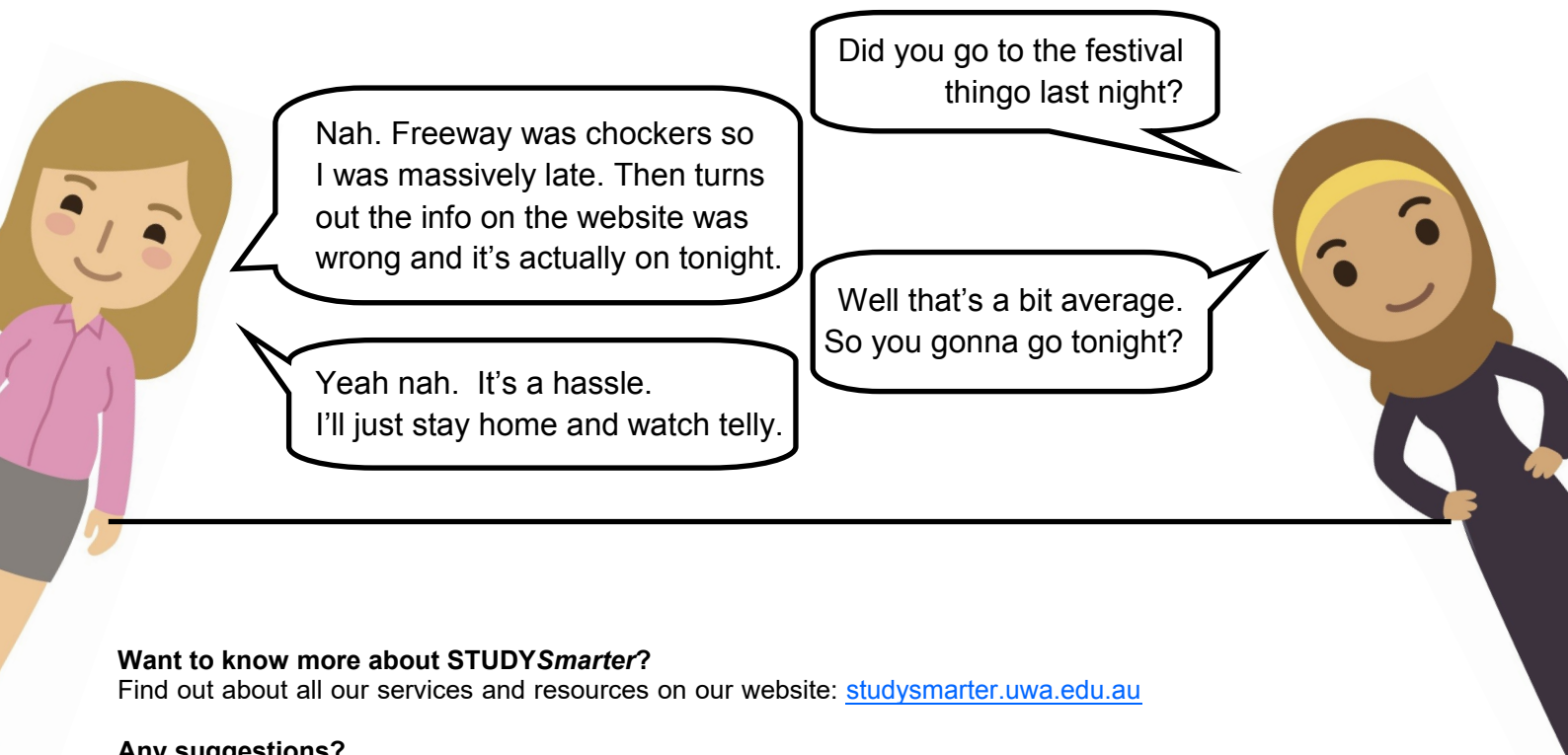
**shortened words**, often with an 'ie' or 'o' ending

**common expressions**, such as

chuck a u-ie	do a U-turn
flat out	busy
heaps	very, many
I reckon	I think, I agree
no worries	you're welcome
stoked	pleased, happy
veg out	relax

brekkie	breakfast
dunno	I don't know
iffy / dodgy /	
shoddy /	
shonky	questionable, unreliable
intro	introduction
sickie	sick day off work

You will learn a lot from context - so try the example conversation below!



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