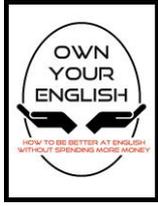




Own Your English: How to be better at English without spending more money

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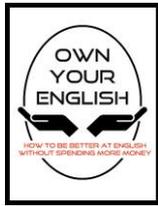


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Own Your English: **How to be better at English without spending more money**

Own Your English

Learn English faster, cheaper, better

Who is this book for?

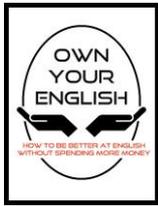
This book is for you if any of the following apply:

- You've studied English in a school but don't feel you've mastered it.
- You've plateaued at around intermediate level.
- You know all the grammar but you can't speak well and often don't understand when you hear English.
- You don't feel challenged, motivated or interested by English classes with a teacher.
- You don't want to spend a lot of money learning English. In fact, you don't want to spend any money on it!
- You don't want to spend your free time going to classes to learn English.
- **You hear fluent speakers of English and wonder how they did it and why you can't.**

This book starts from that last point and gives you the answer. You *can* be like those people who've become fluent at English. You *can* find out how they do it.

This book will show you what doesn't work for learning English so you stop wasting your time and money. Then I will guide you through the strategies that do work: the strategies that Successful Language Learners use. And the best thing is they're either free or very cheap.

Learn the secrets of Successful Language Learners and you can get to the level of English you want without wasting any more money or time.



Own Your English: How to be better at English without spending more money

1 How can I improve my English?

The number one question any language student wants the answer to is:

How can I improve my English?

If you're reading this book, you want to know the answer to that question too. Just like millions of other people around the world.

I can tell you the answer. I know the secrets of learning English. I know what successful language learners do. There's no mystery why some people are more successful at learning languages than others. Successful learners get results by doing things that you can do yourself, if only you knew what to do. If you follow their secrets, you can learn the language you want – to as high a level as you want.

The language doesn't have to be English. It might be Spanish or Chinese. It is just that English is the language millions of people around the world want to learn. It's the language that spawns an industry worth billions of dollars. Those billions come from the pockets of people like you. And it's money that's mostly being wasted on things that don't work.

The best part is that the answer to how to speak better English doesn't mean spending a lot of money. In fact, the best techniques, the ones used by successful language learners, are free or very cheap. Some of them are things you do anyway, in your regular life in your own language.

As a teacher, I know a lot about ELT (English Language Teaching) as it's called in the industry. I have two teaching qualifications – the industry standard, entry-level TESOL certificate and a Masters in English Language Teaching. I spent 12 years working as an English teacher in England, Australia, Thailand, Spain, Turkey, Qatar, Japan and The Czech Republic. I've taught children, teenagers, adults, business people, university students and people studying for internationally recognised language qualifications, like IELTS and First Certificate.

I've been to international conferences about ELT and I've listened to, read and spoken with many of the experts in the field – people who've written books that are used on teacher training courses, people that have earned lots of money researching and creating methodology books to train teachers to teach English better.

I've also written four books for major publishers that help students learn English. But I'm not going to tell you to buy those books. For one thing, they're not cheap. But the main reason is, those books don't hold the secret to learning English. The secrets I'm going to share with you in this book.



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1.1 TLS's vs SLL's

What this book is going to do is turn you from a Typical Language Student (TLS) into a Successful Language Learner (SLL).

TLS's are the majority. Let's describe one and see if you recognise him or her. Maybe you have been a TLS; maybe you are one.

A TLS probably has an English level of pre-intermediate to intermediate. They have a few course books on their shelves and a grammar reference book. They've not done all the work in all the books that are on their shelf. They've been to at least one language school since they left high school but it didn't make a huge difference to their speaking ability. They've seen most of the grammar of English but, when they speak, they concentrate on getting the grammar right even if they don't have a high level of vocabulary. They aren't very confident in situations where they have to speak but, despite that, they need English for work or study.

For a TLS learning English is a chore that has cost them money and time.

By the time you finish this book, you'll never be a TLS again. You'll be an SLL – a Successful Language Learner.

SLL's know what works and they don't waste time or money on things that don't. So, first, you need to know what doesn't work when you're learning a language. You might be surprised by what's on the list.

1.2 What you think works, doesn't

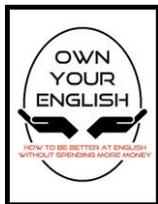
The first thing you need to know is that most of what you think you should be doing to learn English is wrong. Here are some things you might have done, or be doing, or plan to do to learn English.

- Enrol in classes at a language school or university in your own country
- Go to an English speaking country and taking classes there
- Get a private teacher
- Buy course books and self-study books to help with grammar, reading, listening, writing and speaking
- Duolingo

They don't work.

Here's what academic research and teacher training tells language teachers that students need:

- A good, knowledgeable, qualified, patient, approachable teacher
- Motivation



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They aren't enough either. The most successful language learners don't rely on either of those things. What works is what SLL's do. What works is what's in this book.

1.3 What does an SLL look like?

An SLL probably has an English level that doesn't easily fit the conventional levels but they speak fast, fluently and confidently with humour and personality. They have books on their shelves, ordinary novels not textbooks, in their own language and English and *maybe* a grammar reference book. They've read all the English books on their shelf. They remember some of the English they learned in school but most of what they know hasn't come from formal study in a language school. They don't know the grammar of English formally, but when they speak, they concentrate on conveying the message with their high level of vocabulary and seem to get a lot of grammar right along the way. They are very confident in situations where they have to speak but, despite that, if you give them a grammar analysis task or exam-style reading task, they get confused and demotivated.

Compare that with the description of a TLS in 1.1. Which would you rather be? The TLS or the SLL? If it's the latter, then this book is your way in.

But we need to make one thing clear.

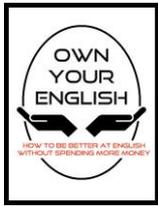
One thing I'm not going to promise you is a quick fix.

1.4 There's no quick fix

Learning a language can't be done in X number of hours as so many schools and books promise before they take your money. The successful language learners I'm going to tell you about worked at it. But they worked in the right way, an effective way, a successful way. And they didn't spend any money getting there.

Let's be clear. You're going to have to do some work. But the good news is, hard work done the right way doesn't feel as hard as hard work done the wrong way.

The things you need to do to learn English are effective enough that they don't seem like hard work either. Don't spend any more time and money doing the things on that list up there that haven't worked for you. Let me explain what doesn't work and why.



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2 Why lessons in language schools in your own country don't work

This is probably the biggest money-maker out there. A lot of people are making a lot of money selling this lie to people who want to learn English. Not all of them know they're selling a lie and there are millions of excellent, well-intentioned teachers who care about their students and genuinely try to do their best for them. Even some of the language school owners believe they're helping students.

Nevertheless, those students are mostly wasting their money.

Here's the typical set up: A course that lasts for three months with one or two lessons per week with a test at the end. Pass the test, move up a level. Repeat. Or take the test, fail it, repeat the level as many times as it takes to pass the test.

Those two paths aren't as different as you might think because a lot of teachers 'teach the test'. Teachers all know what that phrase means because their jobs can depend on doing it. It means knowing exactly what's going to be in the test and then pre-teaching specifically those items in the one or two lessons before the test. Sometimes teachers even give the test questions out as a class activity.

Schools know that students won't be happy to keep paying for classes that don't seem to work so teachers have to do everything they can to make students feel they're progressing through the levels. And teachers risk losing their jobs if they repeatedly fail students or have students who ask to change class.

So students will often end up passing the level and moving up because they passed the end of course test, not because their actual level changed. I call this the Progress Lie.

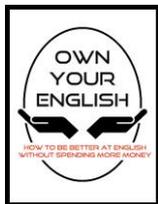
2.1 The Levels Myth

To add to the misleading of the Progress Lie here's another, if not a lie, a debatable point about levels. They don't exist in the neat and tidy way they are presented. Whatever they're called, Level 2 / A2 / pre-intermediate / low-intermediate, not all students fit into the mould of the level.

Implicit in the idea of a level are the following (and more) points:

He or she ...

- knows pre-intermediate grammar and vocab
- uses it correctly
- speaks with a pre-intermediate degree of fluency
- writes, reads and listens to equal and comparable levels to pre-intermediate



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The levels are a convenient way to package courses and course books, but what does it mean to 'know' the grammar and vocab? To recognise and understand it when you hear it? To actively use it?

What does using it mean? Correctly all the time? Most of the time? More often than not? What if you use it correctly but make some other errors more commonly found, or taught, at a lower level?

What if you speak much better than you read and write, or know the grammar really well but don't speak well? Both of these are common student profiles. It's more usual to find students that understand more than they can produce i.e. their (passive) listening skills are better than their (active) speaking skills. But people don't fit such convenient boxes.

I knew an American woman who worked as a music teacher in Turkey. Her Turkish speaking was much higher than her listening because her job involved giving verbal instruction but her students didn't speak to her – they played their instruments as their 'reply' and she would then respond with more verbal instruction. She didn't fit the box.

Given that the criteria for assigning a level are not likely to all individually match the pre-intermediate criteria, what is the best way to assign a level? Take the weakest score as the level or the highest? Or average them?

Whichever way is chosen, it's fairly likely that most TLS's could just as easily be in a class one level up or down from the one they are in. Levels mean very little and placing emphasis on them serves schools and publishers more than learners.

2.2 Placement tests vs. progress tests

Some schools split the levels up into smaller and smaller units. Level 3 becomes Level 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4. Now you're stuck in one level for even longer but you feel like you're progressing. Level 3.1 might start with revision of things you did in 2.4 but have forgotten. The rest of the content is split up across the levels. A lot of it looks a lot like the things you did at Level 2, but with a bit more grammar analysis and reading at a higher level. You've probably forgotten a lot of the words you saw at Level 2, but that's OK because there are more words for you to forget at Level 3.

The reason I know that very few people genuinely move up a level is this:

There are two kinds of tests.

Placements tests and progress tests.

A placement test is the one you do when you enrol. You take it to find out your level and are placed in the class that corresponds to that level. A progress test is one that



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tests what you've learned on the course. On long term, non-intensive courses (and even on full time courses in the UK where students have five hours a day, every day) I have always seen the same thing. The students whose placement test says 'upper-intermediate' have much better English than the students who've moved up the levels into the upper-intermediate class.

I worked for one school that operated in summer only. Our school ran for 7 weeks, with students attending anything between 2 and 7 weeks. We gave the students a placement test and put them in classes. Some students would complain that in their classes at home they were in a higher class. We told them, fine, but *this* is your level. They weren't happy because they believed the Progress Lie their schools at home had told them.

So, we were telling them the truth, right? However, the school had a policy that all students would automatically move up a level after 4 weeks. We told them the Progress Lie. And then we wondered why they came back next year and expected to be in the level they had ended the previous year at!

Most schools operate a version of the Progress Lie, but it's more evident on short courses. Unless a school periodically gives a version of a placement test, sometimes called a level test or a proficiency test, there is no evidence you've improved your level of a language.

2.3 The Two Hours Lie

The overarching lie schools are selling is that a couple of hours of classes a week is enough. They are promising a quick fix but they dress it up with homework and level tests and the teacher tells students to get as much English outside the class as they can because they know the course alone isn't enough. But that ignores the psychology of paying for a class.

For most things in life if we hand over money, we get what we paid for. Customers at a language school forget they're only paying for lessons and convince themselves they're paying for English. If they're paying, they're going to get what they want at the end – English. If they go to the lessons, they think they're doing their part of the 'hard work'. They're right about one thing – that method is hard because it takes time – often years, and money – thousands of dollars. But it doesn't work.

2.4 Stuck at intermediate level

Do you know which level at any school has the most classes? Low intermediate and intermediate.



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This could be partly explained by a normal distribution curve which says that the majority will fall in the middle of two points on a scale. It could also be that once students reach a certain level, they decide to stop learning English. But that doesn't fit because most learners will tell you they want to speak English really well, not just to low intermediate or intermediate level. There are two reasons the classes tail off:

1. People get stuck at that level because nothing works to improve their English beyond it.
2. The successful learners realise that the strategies they've developed mean they no longer need the classes.

There's one time I'd recommend classes under this system: When you're an absolute beginner. Classes are fun, progress is rapid because you go from knowing nothing to knowing some basics, and motivation stays high. After that, you're wasting your money. But there are other things to suck your cash away too ...



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3 More things that don't work

3.1 Going to an English speaking country for lessons

Many language schools also have branches in 'sexy' places like London, New York, Dublin. They're very expensive. Then there are cheaper ones in smaller cities, less cool maybe, but not bad places to spend a fortune in. The courses, they want you to believe, are better because you'll have twenty or more hours in one week instead of one month and you'll be living there so you'll be immersed in English.

The courses are sold as so good that even if you just go for two weeks, because that's all you can afford and you can't get any more time off work/university, you'll improve your English and make it all worthwhile.

It's true, you'll study for more hours, but you'll have paid for the course, accommodation, flights, food and the inevitable sightseeing you'll do. It's also true you'll be immersed in the language but only if you don't spend any time *at all* speaking your language with the other students who share your mother tongue.

Most people completely fail to do the latter because, when you're away from home, it's too tempting and easy to spend time with people who you instinctively trust and feel comfortable with. The worst people to spend time with when you're trying to learn a language are other people who are learning it too because it's unlikely they'll make the huge effort of speaking it all the time when your common mother tongue is just less tiring.

3.1.1 An alternative

Cutting out the biggest expense – the course – means you could still go to an English speaking country, maybe for twice as long. Choose somewhere where there are fewer students from your country (so not the one that has a branch of a school in your home city). Use the money you saved on course fees to go there and spend all your time talking to anyone you can find. And if you can't afford that, find a tourist spot in your own country and talk to English speakers there or get a job as a waiter or taxi driver and get paid to talk to them. Or find a charity or job abroad which you can work for if you can get a visa. Do anything but pay money to spend half your time talking to others from your country in language lessons.

3.2 Getting a private teacher

This has to be better because it can be one-to-one so you get more time speaking than in a group class, right? And the teacher will create lessons especially for you. A



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good teacher will definitely do that. An average teacher will just get a course book and work through that.

I used to make materials specially designed for my students and I prepared lessons and marked homework in my free time. However, none of my students did more than improve their confidence and pick up a few new words.

Why?

Because they were making the same mistake as the TLS's at language schools. They thought because they were paying for English lessons, they'd get English. They had no strategies for learning. Even when I showed them the strategies. The fact they were paying for lessons meant they were committing some time a week to it and could feel they were doing something so didn't need to do anything else. It was the Two Hours Lie all over again. Except this time they were the ones telling the lie. To themselves.

If hanging out and chatting is what you want and you live somewhere with foreigners, find some and make friends. Not with teachers though as they don't want to spend their unpaid time helping you learn English. Meet regular people doing something you enjoy. Friends are free.

3.3 Buying books to study from

Just like with language schools, there is a lot of money being made from people who want to learn a language. The big course books sell in high volumes and have become brand names that any student who's been to a language school will recognise. They all teach the same things via very similar syllabuses and they're often written by the same authors even when they're published by different companies. There are differences in style and methodology, but it doesn't matter because teachers are encouraged to add to them and most teachers have done the same training course.

Just like with the language schools, the books promise a level in a certain number of hours. Finish the book, take the test, move up to the next book. And just like the schools, which level of the book do you think gets written first and sells the most copies? Intermediate.

The course books always focus on 'grammar plus skills' and a bit of vocabulary while self-study books might take a narrower approach e.g. vocabulary, listening. They're not free, they're not even cheap and they don't work. Even the academic researchers into English Language Teaching can't agree on what works, probably because there is very little real evidence to suggest any of it does.

Most of the books are full of exercises with gap fills like 'How long have you (learn) English?' or 'How much money have you (spend)



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on English since you started?'. The answer is 'years' and 'a lot'. It's much more relevant and useful to think about those two answers than what form of the verbs goes in the gap. Gap fills are another thing that doesn't work.

If you do buy a book, it won't be the book that makes you learn, it will be the strategies you employ to make the book work for you. But if you copy the strategies of SLL's – successful language learners – you'll see they don't use study books. So cut out the expensive middle man and learn English like an SLL. Use their secrets from this book.

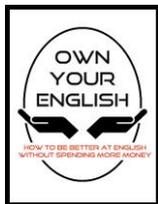
3.4 Duolingo

Find me someone who has become fluent in a language from using Duolingo. Or any other app or website that promises you can learn a language. Even if it's free.

Don't spend too long looking because you'd be better off spending that time reading about what SLL's do. You won't find any that owe their fluency to Duolingo. You can't. There aren't any.

But Duolingo, or another app like Memrise, isn't all bad. For starters it's free. Plus Duolingo isn't bad for learning some basics and getting them to stick because it reminds you when you haven't studied something for a while and tests whether you remember it or not. And it's quite fun. So use it, but don't think it's enough. As part of a strategy for learning a language it might do you some good.

Now let's look at what teachers think students need to learn a language and why they're wrong too.



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4 Things teachers wrongly believe make a language learner succeed

Most teachers I've met over the years care very much about their students. They're in a profession that won't make them rich and they're often very poorly treated by their schools. They truly believe they're helping their students but their training blinds them to some of the mistruths of the industry. Here are the main two.

4.1 Students learn with a good teacher

A good teacher is a wonderful thing. They make lessons interesting and challenging, they plan in detail or are amazing improvisers, they are patient and can explain things clearly. They personalise lessons and write their own materials so their students will be engaged. Their students know their teacher cares about them and they can see their true passion for their job. Good teachers take training courses and go to conferences to develop. I know because I was that kind of teacher.

But, still, my students didn't progress. They didn't move up the levels – not in the real sense. Their English improved a bit and they spoke more easily, but their gains were mostly in confidence. During lessons, I made pages and pages of notes for them of new vocabulary or corrections of their mistakes. At first, I tried to make them write the notes themselves but that interfered with their speaking time and anyway, they didn't write down everything that had come up and most of the time wrote nothing. Then I made the notes and tried to get them to copy them, but there was never time in class and they rarely did it outside of class. So I made clear notes that would be easy to look at or revise from and gave them photocopies. But they would ask for the same words a few lessons later and carried on making the same mistakes.

They kept coming to class because I was a good teacher and they liked me. If I had been a bad teacher who didn't plan lessons and didn't explain things well and was impatient, I am sure my students would have stopped coming. I am not sure that would have made a huge difference to their English level. They would have got a bit rusty and slow again without regular practice, but that's all.

A good teacher can only do so much. The student is the one that does the learning.

4.2 Motivation is the most important thing

There's lots of research into this. And overwhelmingly the correlation between motivation and success is higher than between lack of motivation and success. Also, the motivation is more of an indicator of success if it comes from within the student and is not just because their parents or employer requires them to learn.

That is not at all helpful to students who only learn a language because they need it. And that's most people. It's not a hobby they do for fun. Learning is not its own reward.



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Fluency is the reward, not learning. And learning is usually based on goals like getting a job, or a better job, passing a course, earning more money. The pay rise, the promotion or the university degree is the reward; the learning is the time consuming, boring work you do to get the reward.

4.2.1 What you really need are results

What motivates people to go to the gym? The exercise itself? The nice surroundings of the gym? For some people yes. But for most people it's *the result* of exercise that is the motivation. Seeing muscles, losing fat, gaining stamina, feeling healthier. And that's why so many people lose motivation for going to the gym. They can't see an instant result, so it becomes a chore. They skip a couple of sessions. They don't go if they're on holiday. Eventually they let the membership slide. Learning a language is like going to the gym. The results take a while. And you can't let the personal trainer do all the work or you don't improve.

At the gym, you need to be doing the right type of exercise to get the fastest results for the changes you want to see happen. That means you need strategies to get you where you want to go. If you don't have the right strategies and you don't see results, motivation falls. Strategies will keep results high and therefore motivation stays high longer.

Motivation is not the most important thing because it can't exist for long enough without strategies to support the learning. Students who rely on the teacher are less equipped to learn effectively because they have given up responsibility. So a student who accepts that responsibility, and then employs strategies for learning, will get better results and stay motivated longer.

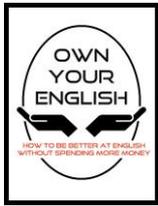
4.2.2 What you really need is commitment

Motivation is a flighty thing. It comes and goes and, if you manufacture it, it tends to escape as soon as it can. Even getting results doesn't always guarantee motivation will stick around because you get used to the pleasure those results bring. You become immune to it. The dieter finds it hard to maintain their new weight once the novelty of fitting into different clothes wears off. The smoker forgets what it was like when they couldn't run without being out of breath. For the gym-goer, feeling fit becomes the norm. And the language learner stops taking pleasure in their growing skill, especially as growing language skills don't change visibly every day.

What you need to cultivate early on is commitment. Commitment will get you through the days when motivation is low. Steve Peters, in his best-selling book *The Chimp Paradox*, describes motivation as being feelings-based and, therefore transient. Commitment, on the other hand, he says, is based on making a plan and then sticking



Own Your English: **How to be better at English without spending more money** to it. So, make sure the strategies in this book form part of your daily, weekly, and monthly plan for learning English. That way, on a day you feel less motivated, the plan will still be there.



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What you think you need, you don't

There's one more thing you probably believe about English based on the way you were taught it at school.

4.3 Let go of grammar

An entire industry has been built on making TLS's feel that they need to learn grammar as a priority. As a result, students learn that speaking a language is about knowing the grammar and they come to expect that from their lessons. It's very hard to change that idea and I can't count how many students tell me they need grammar practice when it's very clear to me that they need to work on other things.

It might be hard to believe that grammar is less important than you think but ask yourself this. What is the reason we have language?

To convey message.

For example, if we need to convey that something happened yesterday, we can say 'yesterday' in the sentence.

'Yesterday I go shopping' is grammatically incorrect but it tells the listener everything they need to know with the key words 'Yesterday', 'I' and 'shopping'. Maybe this example is simplistic, but most of the time you don't understand something it will be because you lack the vocabulary or are not used to listening to spoken English. It probably won't be because the speaker used grammar you didn't know. By pre-intermediate / intermediate level, you know all the grammar you need to know to function in English. Any of the finer points in grammar can be picked up after that simply by using the language and observing how others use it.

That's not an idea that sells books though. Speaking, vocabulary and phrases are much more vital tools for communication but they are harder for teachers with a low level themselves to teach and don't make such convenient gap-fill exercises. Schools tend not to buy books that their teachers can't teach easily, so publishers don't commission them. When publishers have tried to make books with less grammar focus, they have failed to sell them.

It's true you need some grammar, but all grammar is not equal. A typical course book has 10-14 units, each one with at least one lesson devoted to its grammar point. Below, I'll show you six lessons – half a book – a TLS will waste their time on. Actually, it's more than six as each point will be introduced at one level and then built on in subsequent levels, not to mention lessons taken up with revision and untangling the confusion that comes from analysing grammar and comparing structures in ever more unnecessary detail.



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4.3.1 Must vs have to for obligation

You have to wear a seat belt when you drive a car.

English speakers use 'have to' most of the time. Trust me you don't need to know why. So, don't worry about the difference and just use have to. You'll be right 90% of the time.

4.3.2 Will vs going to vs present continuous to express the future

I will meet him in London next week;

I'm going to meet him in London next week;

I'm meeting him in London next week.

Books make a whole grammar unit on this at around pre-intermediate level. It really doesn't matter. The differences between them are so subtle, there's no need for you to worry about getting it 'wrong'.

4.3.3 Reported speech

I live in Moscow ... she said she lived in Moscow

Totally made into a thing because it lends itself so well to grammar gap-fill exercises. There has never been a more pointless way to fill time in class and pages in a book. Just talk in quotes: She said 'I live in Moscow.' and I said 'Wow, really?' and she said 'Yes, it's a really cool city.' If anyone is confused and thinks you live in Moscow, they'll ask a question and it will all get straightened out. It's called conversation.

4.3.4 Past perfect

When I arrived, she had left

It's good to be able to recognise this but you can totally avoid using it by just stating events in order with the words 'before' or 'after'. 'She left before I arrived' or 'I arrived after she left'. What usually happened to my students when I introduced this tense was that they would go from correctly using the past tense with time markers like before, after etc. to inserting the past perfect all over the place. Incorrectly. I was literally teaching them into making more English errors.

4.3.5 Could/may/might for speculation

The weather might be bad tomorrow.



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She's not answering her phone. She could have gone on holiday.

For exam classes, I used to have to force students to use these structures so that the examiner would give them higher marks for grammar. They would make mistakes and become more hesitant while they planned their sentences. They were all perfectly comfortable using their old structure but that wasn't as 'sophisticated' grammatically. It's much easier to say 'Maybe the weather will be bad tomorrow' and 'Maybe she's gone on holiday'. For speed and fluency, this is what you should say. Language has lots of alternatives and there's no need to add layers of grammar just because Unit 7 needs a grammar point.

4.3.6 Adjective order

Some books, at lower levels, teach that there is a correct order to say 'The big, cheap, red chair.' It's true that native speakers follow the rules unconsciously. It's not true that it matters if you don't.

4.4 Good news!

We've looked at things that people usually think will make them successful language learners. And we've seen why they don't work, and haven't worked, but cost a lot. This is a lot more positive than it might first seem – even if you've spent years doing some or all of the things that don't work. It's like cleaning a very old, dusty room. Now you can redecorate.

But, before we get to the strategies, I want to share some good news.

I know you've already got what it takes to be a successful language learner.

I'm absolutely positive about it.

You already have more in common with people who speak another language to a high level without taking lessons or studying from books than you do with those who spend huge amounts of money with very little progress. And that's true even if you currently study in a school, or with books, or any of those other methods we saw aren't really working for you. You're still closer to the successful than to the mediocre learners.

How do I know?



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5 Why you're already on the way to success

The best language learners I have met, the ones who progress faster than others and who are highly fluent in any situation, are the ones who never went to lessons. They learned in their own way.

I've seen some of those people get a teacher to learn a third or fourth. They suddenly slowed down or got stuck.

Nacho learned English and Italian fluently. He was able to live and work in three different languages. He never took a single class but he employed some of the strategies I'll tell you about later. He was so successful at languages that he even got annoyed by people that didn't speak languages as well as he did. Then he wanted to learn French to increase his job opportunities. He didn't have much time because he was spending it looking for jobs to apply to and going to interviews, so he hired a private French teacher to work on grammar and practise speaking with him. He would miss some of the lessons because he was travelling so much. He rescheduled when he could but, somehow, he just never progressed with his French.

How is this possible? Surely Nacho had a proven ability to learn languages so shouldn't he have been able to keep doing it to the same fluency every time?

He would but, by taking lessons, he changed his strategy. Or more accurately, he stopped using any strategies to learn.

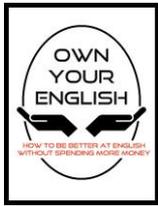
The first secret to learning a language well is simply to use strategies for your own learning. And – this is the best part – *it might not matter what that strategy is.*

5.1 The power of strategies

I've seen it again and again. Learners who employ strategies for their own learning learn more successfully than those that don't. Academic research into strategies has led to some attempts by teachers to change their students' behaviour by teaching them strategies. It has not been very effective. That's because it's coming from the teacher, yet again, not the learner.

If you want to learn effectively, you, the learner, must be the origin of the change. So, this book will not learn English for you but it will show you ways to learn. Choosing what strategies work for you and implementing them is your responsibility.

It doesn't matter what strategy you use. If Ava has a strategy for learning, she will learn at her optimum speed. If Omar has a different strategy, he'll also become fluent at his optimum speed. Ava and Omar both find a way that works for them but, simply by being the type of learner who looks at their learning as their responsibility and not



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something that comes through a teacher or app, they succeed while others stay at a low level.

This book is about using strategies for learning English. I am not claiming to teach you English.

Let's be clear about this.

I am not going to teach you English. This book will not teach you English.

I'm not going to tell you about grammar or structure. I'm not going to give you vocabulary exercises.

Instead, I'm going to show you how successful learners learn and then you're going to learn the language yourself.

5.2 Taking responsibility

I taught for 12 years and I don't think I actually taught anyone English. Many of my students stayed the same level as when they started, even if they were with me for three years. And that's not because I was a bad teacher. It's because it's not enough to *be taught*.

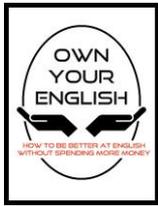
You have to learn.

Learning is active, being taught is passive. Receiving language is not possible, you have to seek it out and grab hold of it. Chew it over, swallow it, digest it so it becomes part of you. Inhale it, hold it in, then breathe it out as speech or writing.

What most of my students gained was confidence and a bit of vocab. They mostly just activated English they already had in their brains. And those were the good students. The bad ones just came to class, did the minimum and then came back next lesson (or not if they had an important meeting / holiday / social plan / family situation) having forgotten everything I had fed them the lesson before. They hadn't taken responsibility for their learning – they'd handed responsibility to me. But I couldn't do the learning part for them, I could only teach them.

Nacho gave responsibility for learning French to his teacher and so, he never put enough effort into learning French. If he missed a lesson, he didn't learn anything that week. He didn't use any of the time he had on planes, or between interviews, to do the things he'd done to learn English and Italian because learning French was something he did in class.

That's how I know you're an Ava or an Omar. You've bought a book about using strategies.



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You're taking responsibility for your own learning.

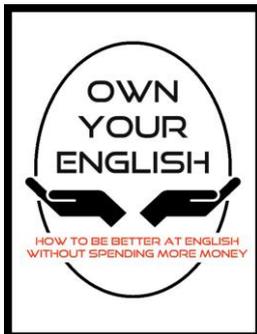
You are on the way to becoming a learner that employs strategies.

You're on the way to being an SLL and you've already taken the first step.

The next step is to come up with some strategies. And for that why not take some ideas from strategies that SLL's use? If you want to create your own strategies, go right ahead. You know yourself best. But, if you've been stuck in the 'teach me a language please' way of learning, you might need a few ideas to start you off.

The first set of strategies to arm yourself with are what I call Tools. They're basic strategies that will give you some foundations to build on and you'll find they become part of your new SLL lifestyle.

Let's start with the tool that will gain you the quickest result. The tool that will give that vital boost of motivation and the one that begins to unlock a language that you can actually use.



To continue reading and learn the strategies and secrets of Successful Language Learners, buy *Own Your English* for only €2,99 on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.es/dp/B017KMOUQK).