

Writing and Tutorial Center

Tips for Multilingual Speakers

Here are some keys to communicating in spoken North American English. Generally, we speak in phrases (not always perfectly formed sentences), which differs from academic writing. Let's break down primary elements in order to understand how to develop your speaking fluency.

QUALITY AND CHARACTERISTICS

Features change when speakers want to:

- Show a contrast between ideas
- Present new information
- Emphasize agreement or disagreement
- Highlight the importance of an idea
- Offer a correction or add information

CONTENT WORDS ~ Carry information and meaning

These words are typically *emphasized* to convey generalities and communicate a point of view:

- Nouns
- Main verbs
- Adjectives
- Adverbs
- Negatives
- Wh- words
- Interjections (Wow! Hey! Oh!)

FUNCTION WORDS ~ Connect words and ideas through grammatical structures that indicate time or tense, relationships between time and space, and specificity or reference to a noun.

When speaking we usually de-stress non-essential function words:

- Articles ("a" & "the")
- Conjunctions (FANBOYS)
- Prepositions (of, in, on, to, etc.)
- Pronouns (he, she, they, it)
- Auxiliary verbs (have, has, do, does, etc.)

TIPS

Intonation is a key quality of conveying meaning in English. It is often referred to as the melody of what is spoken and adds **character** beyond the standard meaning of the words. We express ourselves through emphasis, by changing pitch, rhythm and/or volume. Intonation adds meaning by expressing emotion, signaling intention, and engaging the listener through conveyed meaning beyond our word choices.

LINKING

When the ends of words flow into the sounds of the next, this is referred to as “linking” or “connected speech.” Native speakers naturally combine words, which often makes them sound as if they are one. While listening, you may notice that words are often combined in ways that are confusing. For example: “I want this orange” sounds like “thi sorange.”

For non-native speakers, practice “linking” by imitating others. It's not essential that you master this to be understood—just know that when you're listening that some sounds may not be clear due to “linking.”

CHUNKING

To think, and therefore speak, we employ patterns of words that formulate ideas. When learning to speak another language, practicing phrases—instead of individual words—bolsters memory, knowledge, and fluency. “Chunks” or groups of words that commonly go together include but are not limited to: idioms, common expressions, phrasal verbs, and collocations (such as adjective + noun/“huge favor”; verb + noun/“do homework”; adjective + preposition/“interested in”).

Pauses can help differentiate between **chunks**:

- Emphasize a particular point

- Adds drama/suspense and draws a listener in

- Allow time for both speaker and listener to process information

- Placed at natural breaks (e.g. after what might be a period) helps ensure meaning is clear by creating logical thought groups

Practice every day and seek out conversations with native speakers:

- This builds confidence!

- Whenever appropriate, ask native speakers for feedback; they may help you identify areas where you can improve.

Read aloud:

- Work on intonation and pronunciation of words you may know, but have never said out loud.

Imitate others by repeating what you hear (i.e. a podcast, a character in your favorite film.)

- Play with using different sounding voices and have fun.

Record your voice and listen for ways you can improve pronunciation, intonation, and flow:

- Don't worry! No one but you ever has to hear this!

Expand vocabulary by memorizing and pronouncing common chunks:

- Consider using an image to trigger your memory.

- Use a notebook/sketchbook to keep track of new vocabulary.

- Find ways to practice newly acquired "chunks" immediately.

Speak slowly at first:

- This will allow you to focus on precise pronunciation and clear articulation.

- Repeat, repeat, repeat!

- [Cambridge Online Dictionary](#) for English language learners includes phrases, idioms, and common expressions, along with individual words. You can hear both the North American and British pronunciation of anything you want to investigate.

Practice tongue twisters, sing along to music, memorize/recite a poem:

- No one speaks “perfectly” so enjoy yourself!