

English Self-study 1: Reading and Writing

Language learning can be a daunting task, so first, let's try to simplify things a little.

Language can be broken down into 'productive' skills / knowledge and 'receptive' skills / knowledge.

'Receptive' relates to reception. So, how do we receive language?

By listening and reading

'Productive' relates to production. So, how do we produce language?

By speaking and writing

Today, we're going to focus on one receptive skill – **reading**, and one productive skill - **writing**.

SELF-STUDY FOR READING

Reading is a great way to **learn new vocabulary** and to deepen and **develop your understanding of grammar**. It's a good idea to keep your reading varied; but, in order to maintain motivation, you can focus on areas of knowledge or interest (e.g., work and hobbies). Here are some ideas for self-study:

1. **News sites**. Sites, such as **BBC News**, **The Guardian**, or **Vox**, are excellent resources that cover a wide range of topics including world news, business, health and fitness, science, technology, culture, sport, and entertainment. There are also other news sites that are designed for people studying English. Some recommended sites include **News in Levels**, **CNN 10 News**, **VOA (Voice of America) News**, and **Breaking News English**.
2. Try the **English Hints** website **here** for tips and strategies to improve your reading fluency. This is an excellent site with lots of great material and comes highly recommended. You can also sign up to receive a 'newsletter' which is sent out every two weeks. The newsletters usually include interesting reading materials and links to other great resources.
3. **Graded readers**. These are books that are graded to your own English level. You can enjoy reading classic stories where the content is controlled to provide a challenging but accessible read. You can work through the levels and develop your reading fluency. This approach is better than trying to read advanced native-speaker level books from the start. Find out more information here: **Oxford Graded Readers** and **Oxford Reading Club** for digital readers.
4. **British Council**. Their Learn English site has lots of good activities for you to practice your reading skills. They are also graded from A1 (beginner) to C1 (advanced) levels, so there's something for everyone, regardless of your level. You can find the reading skills site **here**.
5. **Business English**. If you would like to focus on reading texts about business topics, the British Council also has a business section. Their business magazine site can be found **here**.
6. If you want to focus only on **grammar or vocabulary**, then you can find plenty of **self-study books** on the market. I recommend looking at the excellent "**In Use**" series.

SELF-STUDY FOR WRITING

When it comes to '*productive*' skills, writing practice has some big advantages over speaking practice. For example, you can take your time, you can review what you've written, and you can correct it until you're happy with it. *You can also get it checked!* Here are some ideas for self-study:

1. Journal-writing. (*This is NOT a diary!*)

A journal is personal, it's your chance to put down in writing your stories, thoughts, ideas, and opinions. It can be a mixture of serious and frivolous items. You can use it in any way you want: to practice writing basic English patterns, practice email writing, you can use it to write poetry or short stories, or you can do all these things. The options are endless. One of the best reasons to start writing a journal is that it helps you to better understand what you *can't do* – in areas that matter to **YOU!** It helps you to focus on those areas in which you need to study. Because the journal is 'personal', it also means that whatever you learn is likely to be useful for you because you are writing about yourself and your life.

2. British Council. Back to the British Council! They also have a writing skills site which gives you advice on how to write messages, emails, essays, reports, and reviews. Try it here.

3. Paragraph writing. For more formal or academic writing, you need to understand how to organize your writing. This means understanding how to form coherent paragraphs. This, in turn, requires practice. Click here for some ideas about paragraph writing. If you enjoy watching educational videos, you might also want to have a look here.

4. Text Organization. You can find a nice article here with some very useful tips on how to organize a text with advice on, for example, how to refer to ideas already presented and how to contrast information.

5. Academic writing. The writing course here gives you the "essential knowledge and skills you need to be an effective writer in your study life", but please note that many of these skills are transferrable to the world of work.

6. Business English. If you want to focus on business English, then you can find some very useful and practical tips here.

7. Make use of the English Helpdesk. In order to develop your writing skills, you need to practice, and you need feedback. Whatever it is that you write, whether it's an email, a document, a presentation, or your personal journal, don't forget that you can always get it reviewed by the English Helpdesk.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY

1. Let's share our ideas with each other. What are your favorite self-study resources?
2. Out of all the resources listed today, which one(s) would you like to try?