

# Spoken English Errors - Introduction

Before we begin, let's be frank to ourselves – there is no magic formula that will work for all who want to speak fluently in a non-native language, because every person has different levels of understanding and learning speeds curve. Just as some learn to play basketball better and quicker than others, different people learn to speak a language depending on their individual learning aptitude.



It is quite a demanding task to learn and speak a non-native language fluently. This tutorial is meant for those readers who learn English as their second language. It provides sufficient information on how non-native English speakers can spot and rectify the errors they commit inadvertently while speaking in English.

## English Grammar vs. Spoken English

A person stands to learn English quicker if he stresses more on the spoken side of it, as compared to the grammatical side. Constant speaking and listening to correct usage will incorporate the right rules of grammar in his brain. This doesn't mean that Grammar can be neglected.

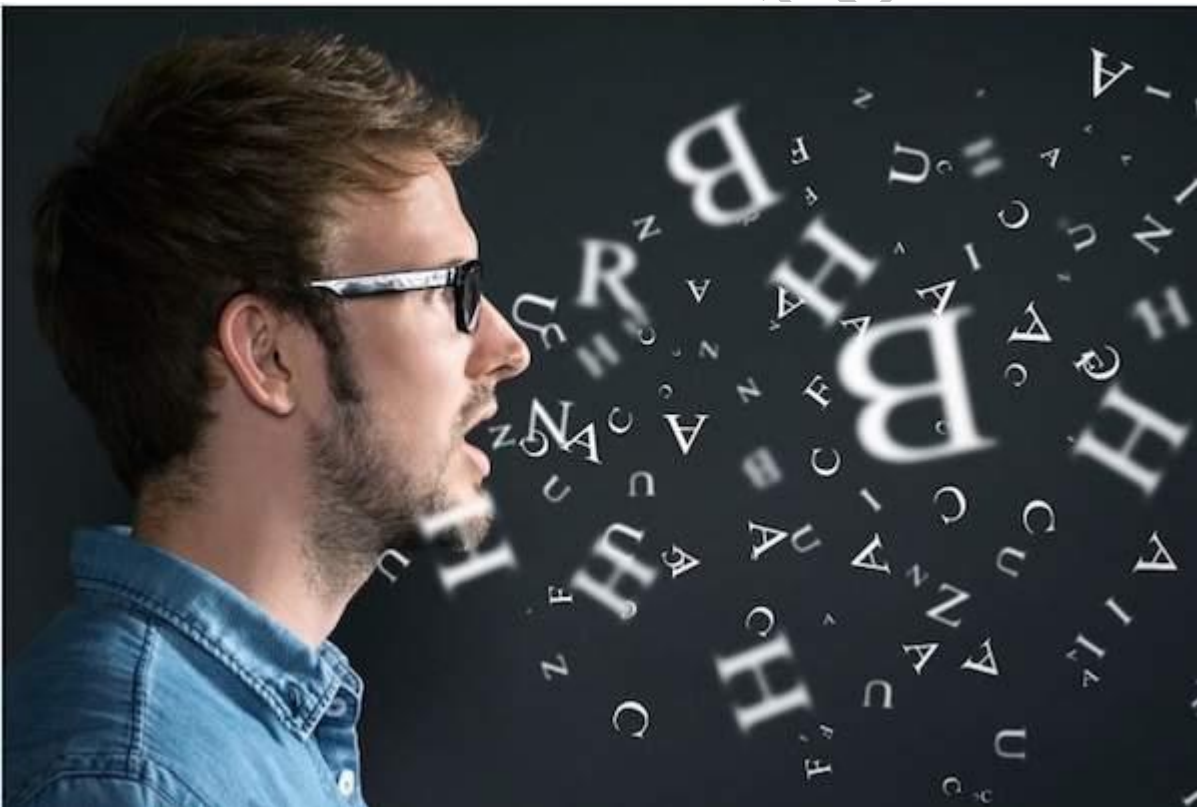


A conversation becomes more meaningful with the right usage of grammar, but as with anything new, stress should be more on practicing what you have learnt many times first, before moving on to something more complex. Similarly, beginners should stress on speaking what they have learnt first, before moving on to grammar and more technical stuff.

## A Brief History of Speech

In the 20th century, a lot of people had a common opinion that individuals learn the art of conversing during their childhood by observing people around them and imitating them.

However, this theory was later discarded, as it couldn't explain the structural and grammatical mistakes children did when they spoke specific sentences. For example, a child might say – "**food give you me.**" in a family where no one would ever say that line. This means that even at such a tender age, a child's mind starts processing and creating new rules in speech.



While language competency is inherited, the languages themselves are transmitted via learning.

## How Communication Helps

Effective communication helps individuals as well as business organizations to be more productive, to generate innovative ideas, and to build strong relationships within internal and external teams.

## English: The Language of Business

There was a time when speaking English accurately and fluently was considered a status symbol, but now English has become a necessity, as it is a universal language with around 45% of global business being conducted in English. Today due to globalization, all the multinational companies either recruit or prefer to recruit aspirants who communicate fluently and correctly in English.



Remember that spoken English is supposed to help you in conversing with people. **The listeners are more important than the speakers.** It's not what you say, but how you say it.

## Accuracy Vs. Fluency

Speaking fluently in English is a major goal for many non-native speakers. However, to communicate your ideas effectively, you will need both accuracy as well as fluency.

In majority of cases, people are either good at accuracy or good at fluency. The following cases depict the same

- An English language perfectionist might pause frequently to correct himself when he makes accidental errors in grammar, pronunciation and structure. However, in the long run, it will disengage the listeners from the conversation.

- On the other hand, a fluent person who does not bother much about grammatical accuracy might realize soon enough that the listeners are finding it difficult to understand what you really mean.

So, how can you make sure to balance a mix of both is the question. The ideal way is definitely to speak accurately and fluently, but that will come after years of practice. The important point is to strike a balance between the two.

## Why Spoken English?

Speaking in English plays a vital role in advancing your professional career to greater heights. It plays an equally important role during one's academic career as well. Here in this chapter, we will explain the significance of English in achieving career progression and personal development.



Let's see how good communication skills can become your asset –

- **For Business Executives** – Effective communication helps business executives in dealing effectively with co-workers, superiors, clients, and external vendors.
- **For Students** – Students having a good command over spoken English express their feelings better. They communicate well with classmates, friends, instructors, and parents which enables them to reduce a lot of stress and pressure.



Lack of effective communication skills is more often than not the primary reason why people tend to hate their jobs. With a little bit of improvement in communication skills, especially spoken English, they can realize their true potential and in the long-run would love the same job they used to hate so much!

With the globalization of business, almost all the major companies have started looking for employees who can communicate better in English. This is now becoming a standard communication channel in the business world.

With this, speaking in English has become a mandatory requirement in the fields of Information Technology, call centers, BPOs, to name a few.

## Identifying Language Barriers

Non-native speakers find it difficult to speak just what they really want; sometimes they even struggle to obtain basic information concerning products or services while communicating.

Teachers frequently complain about non-native speakers' lack of critical thinking. Sometimes they feel that students are lost or confused but the problem lies in the student's ability (or rather inability) to communicate effectively.



### What Stops Us?

Different speakers have different motives behind learning English – some learn it to clear their examination papers, while some to get job offers, and there are some who learn English simply because they love the language.

It's still debatable if motivation yields success or it's the other way round, but English can only be learnt out of the love to be able to hold a meaningful conversation in it.

## Limitations of Grammar

People interested in improving their Spoken English need to understand that learning the rules and usages of English Grammar does not improve their chances of speaking the language, but confuses them and discourages their speaking.

Spoken English can be only enhanced by repeated listening to correct usage, constantly speaking the language with audiences with different levels of aptitudes in speech, and learning grammar rules and usages simultaneously.

## Four Rules of Learning

Rules are important because they set the guidelines to what is acceptable and what is not. Here, in this chapter, we will discuss the four rules of learning.

### Speaking, Thinking, Practicing & Checking

Many suggest that continuous practice is the key to fluent Spoken English, however, studies have found that only practicing doesn't necessarily guarantee results.

The best way to learn how to speak in English is listening to large volumes of audio input, learning its grammatical structure and vocabulary, and then using the knowledge you have gained on a target audience.

#### **Speak the language aloud**

Traditional Spoken English training methods take a very long time to yield results, if at all, because the stress is more on reading and writing, however, speaking a language needs a lot of interaction with a target audience who can provide direct feedback and also suggest improvements to your speech.

#### **Think in the target language**

Most of us have a faulty technique of thinking about a sentence in our native language and then translating it in our head into English before finally speaking it out. You need to remember that speaking, in itself, is an extremely tricky and complex exercise involving a huge part of our brain, throat and tongue muscles

and wind flow. Adding mental translation to the already complex task leads to errors like abrupt pauses and fillers in speaking. Thinking in the target language is a major decision which has to be taken by the individual

### **Speak in the language whenever possible**

Any language comes with its own set of sounds, phonetics, wind flow that makes pronunciation of words and sounds in that language very different from the way we speak in our native language. To master these variations in sounds and speech, one needs immense practice of the correctly pronounced sounds.

### **Never repeat this mistake**

There's a misconception that while speaking English, a person should be encouraged to just speak in the language, without any stress on proper pronunciation or grammar sense. This, in reality, adversely affects a person's learning as speaking incorrect English is actually forming a bad habit of incorrect English. The right way is to train the speakers on basic grammar skills and guide them to create simple sentences using appropriate grammar.

## **Tips to Correcting Errors**

### **Fossilization**

A person who is interested in just putting his message across may not be completely aware of correct usage of grammar, as his primary objective is only to convey his/her message across by using any means of communication available to them, which include signaling, paraphrasing, signaling and directing. In this way, over a period of time, these people learn a self-adapted method of speaking.

They learn that their errors in subject-verb agreement (e.g.- '**she**' instead of '**her**', '**us**' instead of '**we**') are not affecting their transfer of the message to their listeners, so they start to subconsciously ignore certain rules of grammar even when they are introduced to it, trained in it and asked to communicate with it.



This phenomenon is called “**fossilization**”, where a speaker continues to make the same mistakes over and over again, even if he knows the correct usage, simply because he is encouraged by the fact that his message is getting understood without him not having to abide by the rules of grammar.

Speakers like these need to be nurtured in an environment where their target audience encourages them to talk in simple and accurate English, and **ask them to repeat themselves when they make such mistakes**. This will eventually help these speakers internalize the correct usage, as opposed to storing all the usages for a short period of time and then forgetting them as soon as the testing scenario-like examination, evaluation, presentation- changes.

## The Art of Paraphrasing

Despite having a wide vocabulary enables you to speak fluently and accurately in English, not knowing the right word for something you want to mention shouldn't dent your confidence too. A lot of people feel insecure about speaking in English for the fear of not being able to find the right words. In cases like these, they should revert to a very effective technique called “**paraphrasing**”

Paraphrasing is a technique of using an alternative word or sentence to describe something you wanted to say, for example, instead of saying '**rhinoceros**', you



could say – "**you know? That animal with a horn on its head?**", or instead of 'resume', you could say – 'that document you are supposed to give to the HR'



When you speak to someone, it's a two way communication. Both are equally important to be a part of the conversation. If your listeners lose interest while you wait for the right word, the conversation might get over very quickly. Paraphrasing will allow you to continue your speaking while involving the listeners by asking them to help you out with the right word(s).

**Speaker** – "I went to... what do you call it? The place where they keep animals?"

**Listener** – Yes, yes... a zoo. You went to the zoo? Wow!

**See? The listener feels he has a part in helping you speak and in return, will value the conversation much more.**

## Active Listening

### Filter the Content Words

The traditional approach of learning grammar has always been to help you understand what others are saying and at what time they talk.

A lot of people get confused with the excessive intake of information while talking to a native speaker. They complain that the native speakers speak the language too fast, even when the native speakers are speaking with a perfectly normal rate of speech. This is due to the fact that your brain is taking in way too much information (**grammar, intonation, meaning, usage, pronunciation**) than your brain can process at one time.

The idea is to listen carefully for '**content words**' that help us in getting a very basic idea of what the person is talking about. Listen carefully to the entire sentence, picking only those familiar words that you could comprehend, and filter out the rest of the words. Now you have lesser and familiar words to understand the meaning of. Try to arrange the words in a sentence and start paraphrasing.

## Beginner's Jitters

If you have understood what the speaker was saying, he would respond with a 'yes', or else he would reply back with a much easier version of his original sentence. By doing this you have given him a clear idea of how much of his former sentence you have grasped the meaning of, so that the next sentence he speaks will be directed towards explaining the rest of the information in a simpler way.

Similarly, don't get upset or disappointed when you can't apply all the correct rules of Grammar in spontaneous speech. **It's perfectly normal for a beginner to become nervous** when you are trying to be fluent and accurate in a non-native language, but the key lies in enjoying the conversation without paying a lot of stress on correctness in the beginning.

## Pronunciation of Vowels

### The Connecting Sounds

Vowels help us in distinguishing one word from another. Needless to say, when you are not fluent with the vowel sounds, your speech sounds confusing and vague.

There are no straightforward answers to the question of which language has more vowels, since that entirely depends on how they are counted. However, in the following activity, we have tried to list the most common variations on vowels in English. You are requested to read the words aloud to understand the difference in pronunciation vowels bring in words with almost identical spellings.

### Practicing Vowel Sounds-I

#### [I:] As In TREE:

- Equal – Even – Evening – Evil – Recent – Region
- Sea – Tea – Team – Cream – Clean – Lead – Read

#### [I] As In NEAR

- Fear – Hear – Ear – Near – Clear – Rear

#### [I] As In BIT

- Hit – Him – His – Is – It – Fit – Did
- Cabin – Habit – Unit – Justice – Public

**[E] As In BED**

- Red – Bed – Bet – Let – Met – Set – Sell
- Embrace – Employ – Engage – Enjoy – Enlarge

**[E] As In FARE**

- Care – Dare – Bare – Rare – Share – Spare – Scare
- Fair – Hair – Air – Affair – Pair – Repair – Despair

## Practicing Vowel Sounds-II

**[Æ] As In BAT**

- Land – Hand – Sand – Stand – Command – Demand
- Dance – Chance – Glance – Fancy – Answer – Dancer

**[A:] As In TAR**

- Car – Card – Hard – Are – Far – Bar – Garden
- Mirage – Garage – Massage – Facade – Ensemble

**[O:] As In SHORE**

- Core – More – Bore – Before – Shore – Sore – Store
- Boring – Story – Sorry – Borrow – Sorrow – Tomorrow

**[O] As In HOT**

- Hot – Lot – Not – Got – Forgot – Forgotten – Bottle
- College – Dollar – Tom – Bomb – Comment – Compliment

**[U:] As In RULER**

- Rude – Rule – Rumor – Brutal – Lucy – June – Junior
- Food – Cool – School – Fool – Foolish – Pool – Tool

**[U:] Or [U]**

- Room – Broom – Roof – Root – Soot – Hoof – Coop – Boulevard

**[Yu:] As In USER**

- Use – Useful – Union – Unit – Unite – Unique – University
- Fuse – Refuse – Future – Cute – Cube – Huge – Humor – Human

### [U:] Or [Yu:] As In TUMOR

- Tune – Tulip – Tumor – Student – Studio – Stupid
- New – Newspaper – Nude – Nuclear – Numeral – Nutrition

### [U] As In BOOK

- Book – Cook – Hook – Look – Shook – Took – Good – Hood
- Put – Push – Pull – Full – Bull – Bullet – Bush – Butcher

### [Ər] As In SIR

- Her – Herb – Verb – Serve – Perfect – Person – Certain
- Mister – Cover – Buyer – Better – Teacher – Finger

### [Ə] As In BUT

- But – Nut – Fun – Sun – Dull – Lucky – Ugly – Suddenly
- Correct – Collect – Contain – Memory – History – Freedom

## Common Errors in Conversation

A huge number of non-native English speakers make frequent English slip-ups during conversations. Instead, they are supposed to have awareness of where their weak spots are during the initial period of learning. By this, they can be close to understanding themselves and how they can progress from that point.

### Stressing on Words in Speech

Many non-native speakers tend to forget that reading a text doesn't explain intonation in speech. In English, it is possible to put the main stress on (more or less) any word in a sentence. For instance, the speaker can stress on reflecting the meaning they intend the listeners to understand.

### Example

- **Here** is your Indian friend. (= the friend is standing near the speaker)
- Here **is** your Indian friend. (= the friend has not left yet)
- Here is **your** Indian friend. (= he is your friend; not his nor mine)
- Here is your **Indian** friend. (= not French)



- Here is your Indian **friend**. (= not enemy)

Many errors in speech would be corrected if the right words were properly pronounced at the right time. The following activity is designed to slow down your rate of speech so that you can focus on pronunciation and clarity.

## Tongue-twisters

**Read out the following sentences as loud as you possibly can –**

- **She sells sea-shells on the sea-shore.**

The shells she sells are sea-shells, I'm sure

For if she sells sea-shells on the sea-shore

Then I'm sure she sells sea-shore shells.

- **Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers**

A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked.

If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,

Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

- **Shep Schwab shopped at Scott's Schnapps shop**

One shot of Scott's Schnapps stopped Schwab's watch

## Strategy to Avoid Errors While Speaking

You can record sample pieces of your speech and play them to find out the areas where you can improve further. It will help you in reviewing and understanding your strengths and weaknesses better.

Secondly, ask your friends to give constructive feedback and suggest areas of improvement. It helps in getting more insights and uncover more details which were missed by you.

Play the recorded audio several times and try to rectify the errors until you have mastered the technique. It is a time-tested strategy used even by experienced speakers.

## Reading Exercises

### Content-Speech Disagreement-I

Please read the following paragraph in your mind first –

**"There was a time when the Software Industry was just warming up, and the government needed to allot space to the multinational companies, who aggressively lobbied for larger territories to expand their office premise."**

Note that, it was very easy to go through the entire paragraph without any issues. However, I'm sure many of you could have speed-read through it.

## Content-Speech Disagreement-II

Now, let's try reading the same paragraph as you would read something aloud, but only by moving your lips and not uttering any sound –

**"There was a time when the Software Industry was just warming up, and the government needed to allot space to the multinational companies, who aggressively lobbied for larger territories to expand their office premise."**

**Did you notice any difference in the way your brain functions in both the cases?**

Human brain is trained to accept running text as just information, hence the level of mental exercise is minimum. However, when we try reading it aloud, different factors which are listed below will start coming to our mind which increases brain activity

- Pronunciation
- Speech
- Breath
- Wind manipulation



This is the reason why many experts state the traditional method of book-reading **as a complete waste of time**, unless it includes exercises where people are encouraged to read from text and speak it aloud, at times at top volumes.

## Types of Spoken English

Slangs consist of a vocabulary of non-standard words and phrases in a given language. Its use implies that the user is familiar with whatever is referred to, or with a group of people who are familiar with it and use the term.

### Variations in Spoken English

Different people will need different levels of accuracy and fluency in Spoken English, depending on the professions they are in. Let's discuss the different levels here –

#### Professional Spoken English

This type of language is used by professionals from specific industries. The speech used here is highly technical, with stress put on facts, figures, data and industry jargons.

##### Example

**Mary** – "How is your day going?"

**John** – "Very busy. I'm preparing a detailed presentation on marketing strategy and competitor analysis which would be presented to the client. I'm not even half done yet."

**Mary** – "You must feel anxious out now."

**John** – "Of course, that's an understatement."

#### Literary Spoken English

This is the language used in magazines and newspapers. The stress is more on communicating with a large section of the crowd. The speech follows all rules of grammar and yet, the words used are simple and common.

##### Example

Clive Staples Lewis, commonly known as C. S. Lewis (29 November 1898 – 22 November 1963), was a novelist, poet, academic, medievalist, literary critic, essayist, lay theologian, broadcaster, lecturer, and Christian apologist. Born in Belfast, Ireland, he held academic positions at both Oxford University (Magdalen College), 1925–54, and Cambridge University (Magdalene College), 1954–63. He is

best known for his fictional work, especially The Screwtape Letters, The Chronicles of Narnia, and The Space Trilogy, and for his non-fiction Christian apologetics, such as Mere Christianity, Miracles, and The Problem of Pain.

## Conversational Spoken English

This English is the more widely used in daily conversation, where rules of grammar are more relaxed, stress is more on just getting the message across. Sentences might be dropped half-way on realizing that the listener has gotten the message.

### Example

**Situation** – The conversation is between an employee who works with an interior designing store and a client.

**Receptionist** – “Good Afternoon. This is EFX Interior Designer Store. How may I help you today?”

**Mohan** – “Hi. I am Mohan. I wanted to get a custom-made interior decoration done for my house. Could I please speak to someone?”

**Receptionist** – “Sure Sir. Just hold on for a second or two.”

**Mohan** – “Okay. Sure.”

After a while...

**Raj** – “Hey. This is Raj. How can I assist you?”

**Mohan** – “Hi Raj, I’ve heard a lot about your Interior designing company. Could you provide me some samples of your work? I am looking for a trendy and aesthetically looking interiors for my newly built house.

**Raj** – “Well, Mohan. You’ve approached the right place. I will be more than glad to help. Though you will have to provide some more details that you are looking at.”

**Mohan** – “Raj, I am actually looking for a colourful theme for each room along with some lighting variations on the ceiling”

**Raj** – “Sounds interesting! Any colour in particular?”

**Mohan** – “Yes, actually. I am hovering over two colours. One being light blue and one being sunset orange.”

**Raj** – “Perfect! Though Mohan, I will require you to visit my store at the earliest.”

**Mohan** – “That will be good. Can I drop by on the coming Sunday?”



**Raj** – “Great! Sunday, around 4. Also, by the time you are here, I will assemble some samples in the two colours mentioned by you along with some of my printed designs that display the pattern you’ve got in mind.”

**Mohan** – “Perfect. Thanks a lot. It’s quite a relief frankly. See you soon.”

**Raj** – “You’re welcome Mohan. Bye.”

## Slang, Ethnic, and Vulgar English

Every language comes with a set of words that have multiple meanings, and depending upon the situation in which you use them, multiple interpretations as well. These words are called slangs, and are native to a particular region.

Certain words might not be strictly off-limits in a society, but could be highly offensive to a particular community. These ethnic slangs and vulgar words find their way into the slang talk. Close friends use this mode for communication while having a friendly, informal conversation. In addition to this, the pronunciation of certain words changes with different regions which might cause confusion in speech.

## Quick Tips

While learning English, or any new language for that matter, one should always seek opportunities to interact with people who can converse in the same language. However, not everyone gets such opportunities on a daily basis. For them, we have listed a few tips here that can boost their level of confidence.

## Reading newspapers, books, magazines aloud

There is a difference between reading and reading aloud. While many of us read newspapers which helps us to build vocabulary, we hardly read its content aloud.

When we read the content loud, our brain analyses the information as speech and activates our speaking abilities. It is a good practice to read the text aloud every day for some time. Not necessarily, in front of someone.

## Playing word games to relax throat and mouth muscles

Opening the mouth and manipulating the flow of air is one of the fundamental techniques of speech. Proper utilization of these techniques enhances our clarity and pronunciation of speech. Practice tongue-twisters and word puzzles frequently. Take a look at the following examples –

- The big black bug bit the big black bear, but the big black bear bit the big black bug back!
- The thought I thought wasn't the thought I thought I thought.
- There was a fisherman named Fisher who fished for some fish in a fissure. Till a fish with a grin, pulled the fisherman in. Now they're fishing the fissure for Fisher.

## Record your voice while practicing speaking

Listening to your voice while talking improves your confidence and gives you a record of your progress.

## Try to speak with people in your locality

After you gain some confidence, try to speak with people who you know. It will encourage you towards improvement.

## Listening to English songs and understanding the lyrics

Listening to English songs and understanding their lyrics helps in building a good vocabulary of commonly spoken English. It also helps improve the way you pronounce certain words. Be careful of the songs you choose, though.

## Exercises on Increasing Expression

A common saying is that “it’s not about what you say; it’s about how you say.” Nothing could be truer in the case of speaking, especially public speaking, where a great emphasis is put on words deliberately to invoke strong emotions from the listeners. There are many exercises that can be practiced regularly to improve expression, some of which are discussed here.

## Exercises on Increasing Expression

- Try to listen to native speakers and imbibe their usage and structure of words
- Speak with non-native speakers who understand but hesitate to speak English.
- Try to learn how to speak confidently, even with mistakes, and read text aloud.
- Talk in English over the phone with people; it will increase intonation abilities.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Mistakes are common and absolutely normal.
- Study grammar so that supports the purpose of language, i.e., communication.

- Overcome fear of losing face. Take advantage of opportunities to use English to communicate with both native and proficient non-native speakers.

## Tips to Remember

**In the beginning, people might not always understand what you are saying. In these cases –**

- Repeat things they didn't understand.
- Use gestures
- Speak easier sentences, or say the same thing in a different manner.
- Give examples of what you are trying to say.
- Instead of using big words, use sentences to explain their meaning

**There might be cases where you won't understand what people are trying to say. In these cases –**

- Skip structural words (e.g.- it, for, then) and grasp content words (pizza, go, lets, share)
- Try to get a basic idea and guess the meaning of the sentence
- In cases when you are confused, always reinstate the original statement with your guess. **e.g.** – "**Did you mean...?**"