YALOVA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Guide to Developing Language Skills and Independent Learning

Yalova University School of Foreign Languages

This guide helps preparatory programme students at A1–B2 levels plan their English studies outside the classroom, try suitable strategies, and monitor their progress.

Develop Your Listening Skills

To develop your listening skills, pay attention to how you make sense of what you hear and what you do when you have difficulty. Research suggests that preparing before listening, checking understanding during listening, and evaluating strategies afterwards can support listening development (Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010). A study with advanced learners of English in Türkiye also found that structured strategy instruction supported learners' strategy use and awareness of listening processes (Şık Keser & Razı, 2025). Adapt the following suggestions to your level and needs.

Before Listening

- **Choose a recording suitable for your level:** Start with everyday conversations, short announcements, or recordings on topics that interest you. If following the topic is too difficult, choose a shorter or easier recording.
- **Predict the content:** Look at the title, images, and any preparation questions. Consider who might be speaking and what information they might discuss.
- **Set a listening purpose:** Are you listening to understand the general topic, learn someone's opinion, or find specific information such as a time or place? Decide what to focus on beforehand.

While Listening

- **Listen for the general meaning first:** Try to identify the speakers, topic, and purpose. Do not try to understand every word or write down every sentence.
- **Do not get stuck on an unfamiliar word:** Focus on what comes next. Use familiar words and the context to predict the meaning.
- **Focus on important details the second time:** Depending on your task, listen for people, places, times, reasons, or results. Check the predictions you made during the first listening.
- **Take brief, selective notes:** Use keywords, numbers, or short phrases rather than full sentences. If taking notes makes it harder to follow the recording, write down what you remember afterwards.

After Listening

- **Check your understanding:** Complete any accompanying questions and check your answers. For an incorrect answer, listen to the relevant part again to identify the difficulty.
- **Use the transcript afterwards:** First try to understand the recording without reading. Then use the transcript to check unclear sections. Notice words you know but did not recognise when listening.

- **Listen to and repeat a short section:** Choose one or two sentences. Notice connected speech, stress, and rhythm. Pause the recording and repeat what you hear.
- **Listen again without the transcript:** Try to understand the sections you checked using listening alone.
- **Summarise in your own words:** Describe or write the topic and key points in a few sentences appropriate to your level.
- **Set a goal for your next session:** Ask yourself what you understood, where you had difficulty, and which strategy helped. For example, focus next time on recognising times or identifying the main idea.

Useful Links

British Council LearnEnglish — Listening: Choose listening activities suitable for your level. The A2 section, for example, includes preparation activities, recordings, and comprehension tasks.

https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/free-resources/listening

British Centre — How to Develop English Listening Skills: Read suggestions in Turkish, including repeated listening and checking with a transcript.

https://britishcentre.com.tr/blog/ingilizce-dinleme-becerisi-gelistirme

Şık Keser, K., & Razı, S. (2025). Beyond hearing: Advanced English language learners' journey through cognitive and metacognitive listening strategy training. Eğitimde Kuram ve Uygulama, 21(1), 35–50. https://doi.org/10.17244/eku.1622784

https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/4533461

Develop Your Reading Skills

Alongside regular reading, consider why you are reading a text and which strategies you use when understanding becomes difficult. A study with beginner university students suggested that explicit, visually supported online reading strategy instruction can help learners focus on texts, use strategies, and understand what they read (Oshima, 2024). A meta-analysis also found that extensive reading, which involves reading large amounts of easy material, supports reading proficiency (Jeon & Day, 2016). Adapt the following suggestions to your level, purpose, and interests.

Before Reading

- **Choose a text suitable for your level:** Start with short messages, announcements, stories, or articles on topics that interest you. If most of the text is difficult to understand, choose a shorter or easier one.
- **Set a reading purpose:** Are you reading to understand the general topic, find specific information, or learn the writer's opinion? Your purpose helps you decide how to read.
- **Preview the text:** Look at the title, subheadings, images, and any captions. Predict the topic and content.
- **Activate your background knowledge:** Consider what you already know about the topic and what you would like to learn from the text.

While Reading

- **Read for the general meaning first:** Try to identify the topic and main message without stopping at every word. Use skimming to get an overview.
- **Read selectively for specific information:** Scan for dates, times, places, people, or numbers. Once you find the relevant section, read the surrounding sentences carefully to confirm the information.
- **Guess unfamiliar words from context:** Examine the sentence and surrounding explanations. Examples, contrasts, and definitions can help you work out the meaning.
- **Use a dictionary selectively:** Keep reading rather than looking up every unfamiliar word immediately. Use a dictionary if a word prevents you from understanding the main idea or an important detail. Check that the meaning you find fits the sentence.
- **Follow connections between ideas:** Notice how expressions such as "but", "because", "however", "for example", and "therefore" introduce contrast, reasons, examples, or results.
- **Check your understanding:** At the end of a section, try to explain what it is about. If you cannot, read it more slowly and consider how it connects to earlier information.
- **Distinguish the main idea from supporting details:** Identify the paragraph's main message and examine how examples and explanations support it. At B1–B2 levels, also try to identify the writer's opinion and reasons in suitable texts.

After Reading

- **Check your initial predictions:** Did the text cover the topic you expected? What new information did you learn?

- **Create a short summary:** Explain or write the main idea and important points in your own words. A few short sentences may be enough at A1–A2 levels.
- **Check your answers against the text:** Complete any reading questions. Find the sentence that supports your answer. Focus on matching meanings, rather than simply spotting the same words.
- **Record useful expressions:** Select a small number of words or phrases. Note how they are used in the text and write your own example sentence.
- **Respond personally to the text:** Ask yourself, "What was the most interesting information?" and "How does this relate to my experience?"
- **Evaluate your strategy use:** Consider where you had difficulty and which strategy helped. Set a small goal for your next session, such as finding the main idea, scanning for information, or guessing meaning from context.

Build a Regular Reading Habit

- **Read interesting, manageable texts regularly:** Choose graded readers, short articles, or texts about everyday life.
- **Do not turn every reading session into a detailed exercise:** Read some texts simply for enjoyment and to follow the content. Try to maintain the general meaning without stopping frequently.
- **Keep a brief reading log:** Record the title, date, and a one-sentence response to the text. This can help you monitor your reading habit.

Useful Link

British Council LearnEnglish — Reading: Texts and interactive activities organised by CEFR level. Explore messages, announcements, and emails at A1–A2 levels, and articles, reviews, and reports at B1–B2 levels.

https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/free-resources/reading

Develop Your Speaking Skills

To develop your speaking skills, make time to use English in different situations, try ways of expressing yourself, and evaluate your speaking. Research suggests that repeating a speaking task on the same topic can support oral fluency development (de Jong & Perfetti, 2011). In pronunciation practice, helping the listener understand your message is a central goal (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Adapt the following suggestions to your level and communication needs.

Before Speaking

- **Choose a suitable topic or task:** Start with introducing yourself, describing your daily routine, planning a trip, or comparing options.
- **Set a speaking purpose:** Will you give information, make a suggestion, share an experience, or reach an agreement?
- **Prepare briefly:** Note a few keywords and useful expressions. Use these notes to form your own sentences rather than writing and memorising your entire speech.
- **Organise your ideas:** Consider what to say first, which example to give, and how to finish.

While Speaking

- **Focus on communicating clearly:** Start with words and structures you know. Use a comfortable pace that helps you keep speaking.
- **Listen and respond to your partner:** Do not focus only on what you plan to say. Ask a relevant question or respond to what you hear: "What happened next?" / "Why do you think so?"
- **Ask for repetition or clarification:** Use expressions such as "Could you repeat that, please?" or "What do you mean by…?"
- **Check your understanding:** Confirm your partner's message with expressions such as "Do you mean…?" or "So, you are saying that…?"
- **Explain an unfamiliar word another way:** Describe its features, use, or an example. If you cannot remember "kettle", for example, say, "It is something we use to boil water."
- **Give yourself a little thinking time:** Use expressions such as "Let me think" or "Well…" when necessary. Continue after a brief pause.
- **Connect your ideas:** Use expressions appropriate to your level, such as "and", "but", "because", "first", "then", or "however".
- **Correct yourself when necessary:** If you notice a mistake that changes your meaning, correct the relevant phrase and continue. Do not restart after every small error.

After Speaking

- **Identify one strength and one area to improve:** Make brief notes, such as "I explained my opinion with an example" or "I found it difficult to explain the order of events."
- **Repeat the task:** After evaluating your first attempt, speak about the same topic again. Focus on improving one selected point.
- **Ask for feedback:** Ask a friend or instructor specific questions, such as "Was my message clear?" or "Which part could I explain more clearly?"

Support Your Pronunciation

- **Listen to a short model recording:** Notice word stress, sentence rhythm, and intonation. Pause and repeat one or two sentences.
- **Compare it with your own recording:** Consider whether a listener can easily recognise the words and important information.
- **Prioritise difficulties that affect communication:** If word stress or particular sounds make you difficult to understand, ask your instructor for examples and feedback.

Sample Speaking Practice

A1–A2: Prepare a few keywords to describe your daily routine or last weekend. Make a short audio recording. Listen, choose one point to improve, and speak about the topic again. Then answer a friend's questions about it.

B1–B2: Compare two holiday, transport, or accommodation options with a friend. Explain your preference, ask at least one follow-up question, and try to reach a joint decision. Afterwards, evaluate how clearly you expressed your opinion and repeat the task with a different option.

Useful Link

British Council LearnEnglish — Speaking: Videos and interactive activities for communication situations at A1–B2 levels. Explore expressions for introductions, making suggestions, showing interest, asking for clarification, and dealing with problems, and try them in your own conversations.

https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/free-resources/speaking

Develop Your Writing Skills

Developing your writing involves turning ideas into a clear text suitable for your reader, then evaluating and improving it. Foundational research treats planning, composing, and reviewing as interconnected processes (Flower & Hayes, 1981). You can return to your plan or reorganise a section when a new idea occurs. Research on second language writing also highlights feedback, while emphasising how it is given and how learners use it (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Adapt the following suggestions to your level and writing task.

Prepare to Write

- **Identify your reader and purpose:** Who are you writing to, and what do you want to communicate? Your language may vary depending on whether you are giving information, making a request, sharing an experience, or explaining an opinion.
- **Examine the task requirements:** Identify the text type, points to cover, and any length requirements.
- **Study a model text suitable for your level:** Notice the opening, order of information, expressions, and ending. Use its organisation as a guide, but create the content in your own words.
- **Prepare brief notes:** Write keywords, examples, and important information related to the topic. Then decide which to use.
- **Make a simple plan:** For a short message, decide the order of information. For a longer text, decide which idea each paragraph will cover.

Write Your First Draft

- **Focus first on your message:** Do not interrupt your progress by trying to perfect every sentence. Concentrate on expressing your ideas clearly in the first draft.
- **Use familiar language structures:** Express your ideas with vocabulary and sentences suitable for your level. Try a simpler explanation for an unfamiliar word.
- **Connect your ideas:** Use expressions such as “and”, “but”, “because”, “first”, “then”, or “however” according to their meaning.
- **Add examples and details where needed:** Explain the reasons for an opinion. When describing an experience, include enough information for the reader to follow events.
- **Change your plan when necessary:** If you find a better idea or order while writing, return to your notes and adjust the text.

Review Content and Organisation

- **Check that you have completed the task:** Have you covered every required point? Does the text serve your purpose?
- **Read from your reader’s perspective:** Can the reader understand your message? Is any necessary information missing?
- **Check the order of ideas:** Does the information follow logically? In longer texts, is each paragraph’s main idea clear?
- **Reduce unnecessary repetition:** Revise sentences that repeat the same idea and remove irrelevant information.

Check Your Language

- **Check grammatical structures:** Focus on verb tenses, subject–verb agreement, and sentence structure. Check your frequent errors first.
- **Review word choices:** Do the words express your intended meaning? Check that any dictionary meaning you selected fits the sentence.
- **Check spelling and punctuation:** Review capital letters, sentence endings, and spelling.
- **Read slowly or aloud:** Try to notice missing words, overly long sentences, and unclear expressions.
- **Check different aspects separately:** Focus on content and organisation in one reading, and language in another, to help maintain attention.

Use Feedback and Rewrite

- **Ask for specific feedback:** Ask your instructor or a friend questions such as "Is the order of ideas clear?" or "Can you understand what I mean in this section?"
- **Understand the feedback:** Consider the reason for a suggested change. Ask for clarification if you do not understand a comment.
- **Revise your text:** Add an explanation, change the order of ideas, or rewrite a section where needed.
- **Keep both your first and final versions:** Briefly explain two important changes and how they improved the text.
- **Set a goal for your next task:** Choose a small goal, such as organising a paragraph more clearly, supporting an opinion with an example, or reducing a frequent error.

Sample Writing Practice

A1–A2: Write a short message or email to a friend about your weekend plans. First note the information to include. After drafting, check that the time, place, and activity are clear. Then review your language and revise the text.

B1–B2: Write a short text explaining your opinion on a topic that interests you. Plan supporting reasons and examples. After drafting, ask a friend for feedback on the clarity of your ideas. Rewrite the text and explain the reasons for two changes.

Writing Resource

British Council LearnEnglish — Writing: Model texts, writing advice, and interactive activities organised by CEFR level. Explore messages, forms, and emails at A1–A2 levels, and reviews, short essays, and reports at B1–B2 levels.

https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/free-resources/writing

Support Your Vocabulary and Grammar

Vocabulary and grammar practice helps you understand what you hear and read, and express ideas through speaking and writing. Repetition, retrieval, and meaningful engagement with words are important conditions for vocabulary learning (Nation, 2022). Research suggests that spacing practice over time, rather than concentrating it in one session, supports second language learning (Kim & Webb, 2022). The following suggestions can help you review words and structures regularly and use them in different tasks.

Learn Words with Their Meanings and Uses

- **Choose useful words and expressions:** Prioritise expressions from lessons, texts, or recordings that you can use to communicate.
- **Notice word combinations:** When learning "decision", for example, record "make a decision" too. Examine examples to see which words occur together.
- **Write your own example sentence:** Connect the new word to your life or interests: "I need to make a decision about my summer plans."
- **Check pronunciation and spelling together:** Listen to the dictionary recording, repeat the word, and notice its spelling.
- **Do not try to learn every meaning at once:** Start with the meaning in the text you encountered. Add examples as you meet other uses.

Practise Retrieval and Space Your Reviews

- **Try to remember without checking your notes:** Use a meaning, image, or incomplete sentence to recall the word. Then check your answer.
- **Recall both the meaning and the English expression:** Sometimes explain the meaning of an English word; at other times, express a given meaning in English.
- **Review on different days:** For example, revisit expressions the next day, a few days later, and the following week. Review difficult expressions more frequently.
- **Use vocabulary cards:** Write the word or expression on one side and its meaning and a short example on the other. Try to recall the answer before revealing it.
- **Use expressions in a new task:** Write a short message, describe an event, or try selected expressions when speaking with a friend.

Connect Grammar with Meaning and Use

- **Consider the purpose of a structure:** Examine both its form and the meaning it expresses. For example, use a past tense to describe a completed experience.
- **Compare example sentences:** Identify changes in affirmative, negative, and question forms. Try to explain the rule briefly in your own words.
- **Use the structure after practising it:** After a gap-fill or multiple-choice activity, create your own sentences. Write a short message or speak using the structure.
- **Notice the structure when reading and listening:** Examine the information or relationship it expresses in a real text.
- **Investigate incorrect answers:** Do more than check the correct option. Identify the clue you missed, such as a time expression, verb form, or sentence meaning.

Monitor Your Progress

- **Make a short list of frequent errors:** Record the incorrect expression, correction, and a reminder: "She go → She goes: Add -s to the verb with he/she/it in the present simple."
- **Focus on one or two points per task:** For example, check verb tenses in one writing task and plural nouns in another.
- **Create a new example after a correction:** Use the correct form in a different sentence to check your understanding.
- **Evaluate progress through examples of use:** Alongside asking whether you know a word's meaning or can explain a rule, consider whether you can use it in your own speaking or writing.

Useful Links

British Council LearnEnglish — Vocabulary: Topic-based activities at A1–A2 and B1–B2 levels. Practise word meanings, pronunciation, and spelling.

https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/free-resources/vocabulary

British Council LearnEnglish — Grammar: Level-based explanations, example sentences, and interactive exercises. Choose and practise the structure you need.

https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/free-resources/grammar

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