

Do you want to improve your listening, speaking, and/or presentation skills? Here are some ways to use two popular websites to work on your pronunciation, vocabulary, non-verbal communication, and other aspects of presentation.

The website <https://www.ted.com/> has over 2,500 videos on a strong variety of subjects, with speakers from all over the world. Most of the videos have “interactive transcripts”—the written text of what the speaker is saying, with time marks and highlighting that tracks along with the video. (Some videos also have translations in other languages, which can be helpful for non-native English speakers). Pick a topic of interest, find a video with someone who sounds like an American native English speaker (if you are working on pronunciation), and try one or more of the approaches listed below. Also, search for words like “listening”—there are videos on language-related topics too!

Listening

- Start by listening to the first few minutes of the video. If you have trouble understanding what is said, open the transcript, copy the text into a file, print the file, and listen again while reading the text. Circle or highlight any word you do not understand.
- After doing that for a few minutes of the video, look at the circled words and see if you can find a pattern in the problems. For instance, are unfamiliar words harder to understand? Or long, multi-syllable words? Maybe words that have a different stress pattern (loud/soft variation) than expected? Maybe words with a certain sound or combination of sounds? Or sometimes words runtogethertoomuch?
- Also look for phrases the speaker uses to identify the type of information that will be said (such as “for example” or “the next step.” Keep a list of the transition words you hear.
- After your analysis, listen again to the same section while reading your printed text. Is it easier to understand the speaker now? If so, try listening to a new part of the video, without reading, to see if you can get more of the words. If not, try the same process with a different video: perhaps the problem is with the speaker, not you.
- Once you improve listening to a “standard” American accent, try other videos.

Vocabulary

- Choose a topic you like, and print out a portion of the transcript.
- Make notes on the words the speaker says that you did not know, or did not know how to pronounce.
- Also think about how the speaker defines new words, or uses voice changes to introduce a new word.
- Keep a list of the vocabulary words and ways used to define a word.

Speaking speed

- Choose a topic you like, and sample the videos to find a speaker who you find easy to understand. The clarity may partly be from the speaking speed.
- Watch a few minutes of the video, and try to imitate the speaker's speed while reading the transcript.
- Print out a section of the transcript that has minute marks, and record yourself reading a full section.
- Compare your time to the speaker's time. If you were faster, listen again to see if the speaker spoke the words more slowly, or used more pauses. If you were slower, was it because of speaking more slowly? Using more pauses? Repeating a word or words as you struggled to say a sentence?
- Try again with a different video, and keep notes on what you learn about your speaking speed.



Pronunciation

- Decide on an aspect of pronunciation to focus on, and select a video of interest.
 - Print out a section of the transcript, and highlight the words with the sound(s) you want to improve (such as specific letters or consonants at the end of words).
 - Listen to the video carefully for those sounds. Record yourself saying the same text that you heard, and compare your recording with the speaker's video.
- Look at another part of the transcript for words that may have similar sounds. This time, record yourself reading the section before you listen to the video, then compare your recording with the speaker's pronunciation.
 - Keep notes on which words or sounds are most difficult for you, and which words or sounds showed improvement. For help with pronunciation, see rachelsenglish.com.