



## USING APPS TO IMPROVE ONE'S LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING AND WRITING SKILLS (LSRW).

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Language is the fundamental means to communicate to the society, and our success as an individual depends on the way we interact with others in the society. The language bestows unlimited power on the beholder, without which no proper thought process can be generated. One's language is the prime source of one's power- political, social and economical. Language is a vivacious and vital input to one's personality.

As every individual is unique, the way they perceive and deliver things also differ. The divergence among the people can be curtailed by accommodating and by being emphatic with the speaker and this builds a strong emotional bond. The people don't converse with empty brains; they do carry their experiences, expectations and assumptions with them and this influence the course of the outcome of the conversation.

As Ben Johnson said, "Speech is the instrument of society" without it, a society is unthinkable. The primary function of the language is to communicate. So a person's speech must be intelligible to others, to master a language one has to first master all the four sub skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing. Language, in fact, is a complex system of systems. Since language is a system, it should be taught and learnt in a systematic manner. A language is learned through regular practice and not just by learning the rules alone. As English is a non-native language, we have to put some extra efforts to master English. Language is allied to the culture in which it exists. English is a foreign language for us, to have the feel of the native speakers, and to learn its nuances, we can rely on the apps to master the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of English.

All the recommended apps are free apps and can be downloaded from Google play store. The learners need not pay anything either to download or use. All the discussed apps are really wonderful; one can rely on these apps to master the English language. Each and every detail of the apps is thoroughly discussed and the app rating is also provided, which the learners can rely on when selecting an app. The apps should not be looked as a replacement for teachers, but as a helping tool for the learners to outpace the fellow mates and master the English in the least possible time. All the apps are unique in their methodology; it's for the learner to choose the best app that suits one's learning style.

**1. BBC Listening English:** This is a freeware app offered by Listening English and the app rating is 4.4.

Features:

1. Three learning groups to start with: Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced.
2. Beginner themes: English Conversation, News Report, Express English, English Speak and Vocabulary & VOA learning English.
3. Intermediate themes: English We Speak, Words in the News, LingoHack, and English at Work.
4. Advanced themes: 6 minutes English, 6 minutes grammar, 6 min vocabulary and drama.
5. Practice: This helps the learners to practice intensely on various platforms like English chat, vocabulary quiz, and pronunciation.

This wonderful app helps the learner develop his/her listening comprehension. The app has 3 learning groups/section: Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced.

**Beginner:** In the beginner section we have English Conversation, News Report, Express English, English Speak and Vocabulary & VOA learning English are the broader theme groups in this section. In English conversation we have different topics grouped by year wise like 2015, 2014 etc. For example the topic 'winter activities' is a conversation among six students. The dialogues are displayed and audio is also heard. This helps the learners to understand the right pronunciation of the word. By emulating the native speakers the learners learn the right pronunciation. The topics are of a wide range dealing even with the most generalized themes. In the news report various genuine BBC news reports are displayed and heard. This helps the reader to imitate the news reader and thereby learn the accent, stress, rhythm and intonation. The text can be used to practice to a greater extent till the learner is fluent in the various structures used. In express English, every week a question is posed and people participate in the dialogue. This activity helps the learners to respond naturally to a wide range of topics, for example 'wedding vows'. In English Speak & Vocabulary, the learners can learn conversation through 38 different lessons; each lesson has a theme to generate the discussion. Vocabulary a subtopic has the words arranged under different themes like greetings, travel, location, etc. Phrases are also arranged on



the lines of vocabulary and have the same themes as the vocabulary. Pronunciation a subtopic provides the pronunciation tips, and explains all the phonetic symbols with appropriate examples. VOA learning English is the last section in the beginners, where the news from different countries (international news) is used for activity, for example, a news article that was referred, 'India wants to recover crown jewel- Kohinoor.' In this section apart from providing the audio for the concerned current affair topic, the same content is also displayed. This helps the listener to closely monitor the accent, rhythm and intonation by bringing the text and audio file together, thus help the non-native speakers learn the nuances of the English language.

**Intermediate:** In the Intermediate section we have the English we Speak, Words in the News, LingoHack, and English at Work. All the above platforms provide the opportunity for the learners to enhance the listening and speaking skills. In the 'English we speak' the content is grouped by year wise, for example 2016, 2015, and 2014. All the topics in this section can use transcription, with audio or without audio. All the themes within this are in a situational dialogue format, it certainly helps us in our day to day communication. In 'words in the news', we can usually use the transcript and audio files. All the tough words used in the transcript are sorted out and shown in the next file, if anyone is not familiar with these words, then a gentle touch on the words would reveal the meaning of the words. We will be able to learn the word and also get a closer look at the structure of the sentence where these words are used. 'LingoHack' uses the day's news; one can even refer to the dates when this news was telecasted. As usual we can even refer to the transcript, learn the meanings of tough words or just use audio files. By paying close attention to the transcript, we will be learning how to convey the content in a precisely, to the point and even know the way the theme is presented. In 'English at work' the emphasis would be on to learn some useful tips in relation to the business language. This helps the students or learners understand the working community and communicate effectively without the initial inhibition. The tough words can be saved and referred to the newly learned words at a later time.

**Advanced:** In the Intermediate section we have 6 minutes English, 6 minutes grammar, 6 min vocabulary and drama. In 6 minutes English, the various themes are arranged year wise. The word transcript provided is not a word-for-word transcript, though the important details of the theme are covered, so it becomes easy for anyone to get the content right. In 6 minutes grammar, various concepts of grammar are arranged. A situational dialogue is provided on the concept, and the meaning and use of the concept are explained in detail with various examples. So, in sharp 6 minutes one can complete a concept of the grammar in detail, great isn't it! In 6 minutes grammar, on the basis of different themes, different vocabulary, in relation to that is added. Later, the same words are used in a different context to get the meaning right.

Practice is a new platform added to help the learners improve the listening skills. In this we have English chats, vocabulary quiz, and pronunciation. To participate in the 'English chat' one has to create a login ID. This new platform provides the opportunity for learners to pose their queries or even respond to the queries of other fellow learners. In vocabulary quiz the learners are provided with the option to choose the reference material for vocabulary quiz. The category includes your words (wordlist we created), 6 minutes English words from the words in the news and news reports. Each question is provided with four multiple choice answers. For the incorrect answers if the learner is interested to refer to the source material then they can do it, thus they will even understand the context when that word is used, this simplifies the learning process.

This app is really wonderful and the learners can completely rely on this app to develop their listening and speaking skills. Listening and speaking skills are conjoined twins, and this app takes care of both the skills. This app brings the learners close to the working environment by practical approach; the different themes brought from real lifetime activities helps the learner build his/ her confidence and takes a long way forward in mastering the English language.

**2. Learn English by Audio Book:** This is a freeware app offered by B.K.Legends and the app rating is 4.5.

Features:

1. 10, 000 audio books
2. All books segregated in different themes: nonfiction, action, adventure, ancient, animals, anthologies etc.
3. Bookshelf to display your downloaded books.
4. Once downloaded, you can use it even in offline.

This app provides access to nearly 10,000 books; it's not just learning English by audio-book, but learning on various themes and genres. All the books are neatly segregated under various themes in 144 categories: nonfiction, action, adventure, ancient, animals, anthologies, technology & engineering, writing & linguistics, short stories, sports fiction,



sonnets, religion, music etc. All the books are systematically arranged in an alphabetical order. The books can be used as a transcript, one can read the text manually or the app reads for you. The audio files of various book titles can be downloaded. All the downloaded files are neatly arranged in a rack, which is your bookshelf; you can pick up any book read it yourself or let the app read for you, great isn't it!

By analyzing the learning style of individuals, the visual learners are voracious readers because they enjoy reading a text. The people with an auditory learning style are generally poor readers; this app certainly helps them to enjoy the art of learning through the use of audio books.

**3. English Grammar Test:** This is a freeware app offered by SevenLynx and the app rating is 4.5.

The English grammar test app helps to learn the basics of the English grammar or can be used to update / brush the English grammar from time to time.

Features:

1. Two levels to start: Intermediate and Upper Intermediate, the learner can choose the starting point, on the basis of his/ her belief or language proficiency.
2. 30 tests to test the learner's strength in English grammar.
3. The test can be a mixed test- all the questions from different topics are mixed and randomly displayed.
4. Topic based test- helps the learner check his/ her strength and weakness of each topic in the English grammar.
5. Each test has 10 questions and it is a multiple choice based questions.
6. Explanation for the correct and incorrect answers is provided after each question.

The app provides the learners the choice to choose a level, either intermediate or upper intermediate. This provides the learner to choose his/ her base level to start with. If the learner is interested to learn the English grammar step by step, covering one topic at a time, then he/ she has to choose 'by topic'. There are 20 different topics: word order, articles, present tense, past tense, future tense, passive voice, modal verbs, phrasal verbs, irregular verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, relative clauses, nouns plus preposition, preposition, adjective plus preposition, nouns, general, conditionals, and reported speech. In each topic we have three tests: Test1, Test2, and Test3. In each test we have ten questions/ tasks. All the questions are followed by an explanation where the answers are explained and presented as a box item at the end.

The learner can attempt the 'mixed test' and there are 30 tests. Each test has 20 different questions, taken from 20 different topics. Each question also bears the title of the topic, this helps the learner to pinpoint the error and work in the direction of getting rid of the weak spots by focused approach. This quick analysis will bring a lot of change in learning the English language and undoubtedly bear great results in a brief time.

**4. TOEFL Essay:** This is a freeware app offered by Estar Education and the app rating is 4.0.

Features:

1. 140 readymade essays.
2. Topics of essays are chosen from different subjects.
3. An almost perfect introduction, body and conclusion.

TOEFL Essay provides 140 essays on a wide range of topics. Every essay is properly analyzed and presented. The only drawback is that they have not provided any information to the topic, on how to write an essay, planning an essay, analyze the topic of the essay, and above all on how to maintain clarity and coherence in writing. Though 140 essays have followed all the above details; it's for everyone to interpret the examples that are provided. Once the learners critically start looking at the essays they will definitely understand the nuances of the writing an essay. By looking at the various essays the learners know how a particular topic could be presented.

**5. English Writing Skills:** This is a freeware app offered by MobDevs and the app rating is 4.3.

Features:

1. How to effectively use punctuation
2. How to use effective cover letter
3. How to write a biography
4. How to write a conclusion
5. How to write a descriptive paragraph
6. How to write a five paragraph essay
7. How to write a literature review
8. How to write a news article
9. How to write a report



10. How to write acknowledgements
11. How to write an abstract
12. How to write a dissertation
13. How to write an essay
14. How to write an introduction
15. How to write effective sentences
16. How to write title pages
17. Tips to improve your writing skills
18. Tips to write an effective resume
19. Using tables and figures
20. Writing different types of essays

The basic information in relation to the different forms of writing is discussed in detail. If one is looking into brushing the basics of the writing skills then this is a fantastic app for you. Many a times the apps don't provide the detailed information on how to write, for example how to write an essay, what are the different types of essays, how is descriptive essay different from narrative essay and persuasive essay. Almost all the topics of the writing skills are covered; twenty different broader titles make the app a comprehensive volume on English writing skills.

**6. TED:** This is a freeware app offered by the TED conferences LLC and the app rating is 4.5.

Features:

1. Inspiring short lectures.
2. All are short duration lectures.
3. Sparkling new ideas to stimulate the lateral thinking.
4. Lectures are grouped under four clusters: Newest, Trending, Most viewed, and Hidden gems.

The TED is a nonprofit organization to spread great ideas, which inspires the people by short and powerful talks preferably within the definite time of 18 minutes. The topics range from science to business on global issues. The talk inspires and stimulates the world community through its ideas and sparks a conversation which may lead to make a world a healthy, safe and loving environment. This helps one to be always on the right track amidst the best thought processes and helps a person to transform from normal individuals to a great leader.

The TED lectures are grouped under four clusters: Newest, Trending, Most viewed, and Hidden gems. By selecting the Newest one can receive the latest talks that are added from time to time. The title, name of the speaker and presentation time is displayed. One can even view the gist of the topic and get the details like when it was filmed, about the speaker. One can even add the title as favorite, rate the video, download the file, share the file, or can view it as a video or just listen to the audio file. A wonderful app and as a true companion the app will help you dream big and make an impact in the society.

### **Conclusion**

The apps are magnificent and help you learn English and master all the four sub skills: listening, speaking reading and writing skills. All you need is the determination to excel and belief that you can do it.

### **References**

1. Apps from Google play store: BBC Listening English, Learn English by Audio Book, English Grammar Test, TOEFL Essay, English Writing Skills, TED.