

Improving Your English - For Design Informatics Students

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Most of you do not speak English as a first language. Therefore, the old method of total immersion to improve your skills won't work. What's more, for many of you, this will be the first time in an English speaking country, and depending on your home country and your teachers, you may not be well prepared.

But fear not - help is at hand!

In this document, I collect tips and resources for students who wish to improve their English. This is in addition to the resources published by the English for Academic Purposes team (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/students/current-students/elsis>) whose courses tend to be very full.

Language Learning Technique

My own tips would be:

1. Learn how to use bilingual and monolingual dictionaries properly. Google Translate is often misleading. Ideally, you want bilingual dictionaries that show you translations in context, so that you can check whether you have the correct translation, and monolingual dictionaries that explain definitions of terms.
2. Create flashcards for new words, new concepts in class, and new phrases, and then use a Spaced Repetition System to learn them. This will take a lot of time at first, but will speed up
3. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Just speak and write as much as you can.
4. Make time **every single day** for improving your language skills - speak, read, listen, write.
5. There are very few native English speakers on the course. Don't lean on them too heavily to improve your English - try to form language exchanges with other students.

A good illustration of the perils of Google Translate is here: A Classical Chinese poem (Classical Chinese:Mandarin Chinese = Latin:Italian) sent through the system without any second thought leads to garbage.

https://www.reddit.com/r/ChineseLanguage/comments/6yy3ql/chinas_most_famous_poem_everyone/?st=j7fv86ww&sh=6332bab3

The FAQ of the Reddit language learning community is a treasure trove of resources.

https://www.reddit.com/r/languagelearning/wiki/index#wiki_faq

Even though I don't agree with everything that is written there, and some of the links no longer work, I recommend the sections on Flashcard systems and on common pitfalls.

English for Academic Purposes

The materials for the University of Edinburgh courses can be found here:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/students/current-students/elsis/elsis-course/s/independent-study-materials>

The Open University has great writing materials, including:

- Writing in your own words:
<http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/writing-in-your-own-words.php>
- Writing for university:
<http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/writing-for-university.php>

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/>) has an entire section for students who have learned English as a Second Language:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/5/25/>

A UK-based MOOC about English for Academic Purposes is hosted at Futurelearn:

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/english-for-academic-purposes>

Thank you to my Facebook friends and the members of the Facebook Research Companion group for their help and hints!