

# How to Overcome ESOL Problems

## How to Overcome English Language Problems

In their writing, a number of members of the class have shown problems with the use and mastery of the English language. Obviously, every one of you speaks and reads English, but there is a difference between that and mastering the language at the university level. **This can be a critical challenge for your future success at UTEP and in your professional careers**, so if this applies to you, it is something you absolutely must urgently address now.

The bad news is that, unlike in high school, at UTEP many professors will not "cut you any slack" just because your first language is not English. At UTEP, everyone is held to the same high standards of performance. The good news is that, generally, the younger you are the easier it is to master a language at a scholarly or professional level.

Of course, the English language is no better than any other language, and I am certainly not trying to impose some kind of racist "English Only" approach on anyone! Be proud of your first language, and become or remain an expert in it.

However, UTEP is primarily an English-medium university, so for your own present purposes and goals (i.e., graduating), mastering (not just "knowing" or "speaking") English is essential. And, most of the following advice is useful for learning ANY language. Even if your mother language is already English you can use much of the following to improve your grasp of the language at a scholarly level. And, in the future if you ever have to learn a second language, I guarantee that these ideas will help in that task as well.

### Breaking the Language Barrier in College

For educational purposes only.

**1. Begin a personal campaign to master your target language: in this case, scholarly English.**

Set a goal: for instance, that by the end of the semester you will be able to write a paragraph in Academic English with no grammar errors. If you do not consciously and purposely resolve to do this, your English may take many years to improve, and by that time you will have long since flunked out. So, this task is serious and urgent.

**2. To master a language such as English, read the language as much as possible.** Here, I do not mean just textbooks and assigned readings! I mean, read things that you understand and enjoy, and that you would pick up to read even if it were in your mother language. If you like romance novels or science fiction, read romance novels or science fiction--in English! If you read the news, get an English-language newspaper in English. If you like sports, read sports reports in English. If you study Holy Scriptures try to do so in English.

**3. To master any language, surround yourself with that language.** For a semester or so, all your radio and TV, music, videos and entertainment should be in your target language. While you are mastering English, you should try as much as possible to wake up, work, study, play, relax, eat, drink, sleep, dream and make love in English.

**4. Converse informally as much as possible in English with educated speakers of that language.** Learn educated vocabulary, grammar and conversation patterns.

**5. Do not try to translate from your mother language to your target language, or vice versa.** Not even the world's greatest genius can master a language by translating. Force yourself to **think** in the target language, and translating will come naturally.

**6. Talk to yourself (silently, of course!) in your target language.** Thus, when you are wondering what to have for lunch, or cussing silently about the traffic and parking problems, or composing poetry for your Significant Other, do so in your target language: English.

**7. Get a paperback bilingual dictionary**, and let it become your best friend.

**8. Get an English grammar guide and a verb-book. But, use them only as references when you are stuck on what to write--do not expect to learn English from them, because you will not. I guarantee it.**

**9. Most importantly, \*get EVERYTHING you turn in for any class proofread and corrected first by someone whose mother language is English.** Depending on your language aptitude and your age when you first began to learn English, you may study until you are 100 and still not get it perfect. But this is no dishonor! Even Prof. Albert Einstein still spoke English with a thick accent and made occasional English grammar errors until the day he died. Are you smarter than he was? Do what he did; **get help!**

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