

Activity 1

For each of the following situations, help the iEnglish student identify what he or she did well, what he or she could improve, and what he or she should do next. (See the “Answer Key” to see some examples of correct answers.)

Nadia:

Nadia wanted to improve her pronunciation by studying reductions. She watched some episodes of the TV show “The Big Bang Theory.” She wrote down some examples, looked at them carefully and noticed patterns. She chose 5 different reductions and practised. Then, last Thursday, she decided to use 3 of these reductions when she spoke to her coworkers. When she said “I know what *choo* mean” and “I ’m *gonna* spend Saturday at the park”, her coworkers responded normally. But when she tried to say “*Whattaya* have planned for the weekend?”, her listeners looked at her strangely and needed to think about what she said before the answered.

What did Nadia do well?

What should Nadia try to improve?

What can Nadia do next?

Wei Ming:

Wei-Ming had a parent-teacher conference to prepare for, but he didn ’t know what was involved. He asked a co-worker, who told him what to expect. Then, he looked at his child ’s report card and made sure he understood what each section meant. He made a list of questions, and practised them again and again with his wife, who is a native English speaker. At the conference, Wei-Ming spoke politely, and the teacher was very friendly. However, she spoke very quickly, and Wei-Ming didn ’t always understand what she was saying. He was nervous about asking her to repeat, so he sometimes just smiled and pretended to understand her. He asked the questions he prepared, and understood the answers.

What did Wei-Ming do well?

What should Wei-Ming try to improve?

What can Wei-Ming do next

Activity 1 Continued...

Priya:

Priya wanted to send a thank-you letter to the Canada Council for the Arts for approving her grant request to make a film. She attended a film screening at Cinematheque, and met other film-makers. When she asked them what a thank-you letter should look like, they told her that they didn't send thank-you letters, but they told her that she did need to send a letter of acceptance. One of her new contacts emailed her an example of a letter of acceptance, which Priya used as a model to write her own. She sent it away, and received her funding in a few weeks.

What did Priya do well?

What should Priya try to improve?

What can Priya do next?

Ederlyn:

Ederlyn wanted to learn how to talk about movies in more detail. She started searching for movie reviews online and looking for vocabulary words she could use to talk about movies she likes. She didn't have a lot of time to practice, but she did make herself some flashcards that she kept in her purse and looked at while she was on the bus. She invited a man from work on a movie date, and he accepted. After the movie, they went for coffee and were talking about the movie. Ederlyn enjoyed spending time with him, but she absolutely hated the movie! Ederlyn's date didn't like the movie either. Ederlyn was not prepared for a negative review, and so all she could do was agree with the comments her date made. She quickly changed the subject to a topic she was more comfortable discussing, and they had a great time.

What did Ederlyn do well?

What should Ederlyn try to improve?

What can Ederlyn do next?

Activity 2 - How well am I doing?

Finding sources of feedback is important. This activity will help to you locate these sources and practise using them.

Source #1: Reactions of people who are listening to you speak or reading what you write.

Pay attention to every English interaction you have this week. Write it down in your notebook or journal.

When you were speaking, did your listener...

Look confused? (raised eyebrows, open mouth, eyes looking away in thought, etc.)

Ask you to repeat?

Give you an answer that did not match your question (For example, you asked a coworker, "When did you pick your holidays?" and he or she answered "Yes. ")

Try to change the subject?

If your task was writing, did the reader...

Send you a reply asking for clarification?

Not respond, even if you asked them to?

Take a long time to read it?

If you answered "yes" to any of the questions above, you should practise those situations again. Look for feedback from a volunteer, a teacher, a friend, or someone else who can give you some advice.

Source #2: Notice your Strengths and Weaknesses

Finish each statement below. Fill in the blanks with as many examples as necessary.

Strengths:

I feel the most comfortable in situations where I have to _____ in English.

An example of a time when I spoke English stress-free is when I _____.

Weaknesses:

I absolutely hate doing _____ in English.

I have zero confidence when I _____ in English.

Activity 2 - How well am I doing? Continued...

Be proud of your strengths: they are the result of hard work and determination! Sometimes, you can also use these strengths as a back-up plan, in case you need to change the subject.

(see Ederlyn 's example in Activity 1)

Don 't be afraid of weaknesses, and don 't let them intimidate you. If you think about what makes these situations so difficult, you can use that knowledge to plan future goals. When you work on weaknesses, they become strengths.

What patterns do you notice about your strengths and weaknesses? Are you stronger in writing tasks than speaking tasks? If so, you spend more time on speaking and listening practice than reading and writing practice. Do you get nervous speaking in front of groups? If so, you should join a group like Toastmaster 's to get over this fear. Do you feel uncomfortable around Canadians? If so, you should find a friend from your country to join you as you attend events and participate in rituals with Canadians.

Source #3: Access Feedback and Resources

Think about people that you know who would not feel shy about giving you feedback. Aim for about 3 people: one personal friend, one person from work, and one other person. If you don 't know 3 English speakers, you need to start meeting Canadians! Join a club, apply to volunteer somewhere, visit the library, join an English class, make small talk at the mall, invite a neighbour over for coffee, etc.

Go to your local library and see if there are any resources you can access. Libraries often have writing tutors, conversation groups, writing handbooks, community events, free internet, etc.

Check online for some online resources. You might find checklists that you can use to self-edit your writing, or find someone who you can spend some time with each week speaking English. Be creative!

Many English speakers will be happy to give you feedback. However, keep the following information in mind:

- People are great resources, but don 't overdo it! Asking a question or two is fine, but asking someone to edit your cover letter on their coffee break might not be very kind.
- Explaining grammar is not easy for most Canadians. People who are not teachers might not be able to teach you using grammar words, but they might be able to give you examples that you can study!
- Never give out personal information online. If you find a language partner, then write to that person using email. If you meet, meet in a public place during the day, like Tim Horton 's or in a mall. Don 't meet your partner in a private place until you know him or her well, and if you do, tell someone where you 're going and when you expect to return.

Activity 3 - Keep myself motivated

Staying motivated is an important part of your iEnglish studies. Complete the following activities to find out how to increase your motivation.

1. Do a Google search for “motivational quotations”. Find 10 quotations and translate them into your own language. Choose your favourite 5 and write them on small pieces of paper. Put the quotations in places where you will see them while you study. Read them aloud whenever you feel discouraged.
2. Choose two or three of the following ways to make studying enjoyable.
 - Read an English novel as you take a bath.
 - Leave the kids with a babysitter on Sunday afternoon and go to an English movie.
 - Go for coffee or ice cream with a co-worker and speak in English.
 - Learn some current English songs, and invite some friends to karaoke.
 - Play video games in English.
 - Organize a games night at your place with other English learners (a games night is a party where you play board games like Scattergories, Taboo, Monopoly, or Trivial Pursuit).
3. Reward yourself for studying with your favourite snack.
4. Study in short periods. It 's much more effective to spend 15 minutes per day studying vocabulary on flashcards than it is to sit down for 4 hours.
5. Search the internet for more motivation techniques. Choose your favourite 3.

Activity 1 ANSWER KEY

Nadia:

What did Nadia do well? She was able to use 2 reductions so well that her coworkers didn't even notice she used them. This is a sign that she sounded natural and that she was easy to understand.

What should Nadia try to improve? She should try to find more samples where someone is saying "Whattaya" so she can compare them to her own speech.

What can Nadia do next? For example, she might listen to the song "Whattaya Want from Me?" by Adam Lambert, try singing along, then try using the reduction again.

Wei Ming:

What did Wei-Ming do well? He was very prepared. He also was able to ask questions that the teacher understood. It seems he was also culturally appropriate because the conversation was friendly and enjoyable, and it did not seem awkward.

What should Wei-Ming try to improve? Wei-Ming needs to improve his listening skills.

What can Wei-Ming do next? Wei-Ming could join a conversation circle to practice speaking with native speakers. He could also try talking to his neighbour more often. His wife is a native English speaker, but maybe she doesn't speak at a natural speed with him, or maybe he is just used to her. He needs to speak with many different native speakers to improve his listening skills. He might also practise by watching English-language movies and/or TV shows.

Priya:

What did Priya do well? She found out what is culturally appropriate in Canada. Also, she was able to make new contacts in her field, which might be very beneficial to her in the future.

What should Priya try to improve? She needs to reflect on her experience more specifically to find areas to improve. For example, did she feel comfortable speaking to the other film-makers? Did she struggle to understand the film she saw at the screening? Did she know the vocabulary and grammar structures in the example that her new contact emailed her?

What can Priya do next? Priya needs to go ahead and make her movie!

Ederlyn:

What did Ederlyn do well? Ederlyn was able to set a goal, find the information she needed, learn some new vocabulary, and go through with her action plan. Even though she had a problem, she used a good strategy to deal with it.

What should Ederlyn try to improve? Ederlyn should now focus on learning some expressions that she can use to talk about movies she doesn't like.

What can Ederlyn do next? She might look for negative reviews on "Rotten Tomatoes". Then, she can find a movie with negative reviews and ask her boyfriend out again. This time, she'll be prepared!