

Why Fast English Sounds Fast

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

19 learning entries

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

1

contraction

DEF

a shortened form of two words combined into one, usually marked with an apostrophe (e.g., I'm, don't)

Contractions are everywhere in spoken English; expecting the full form (I am) instead of the contracted one (I'm) is a common reason learners feel behind.

If you expect 'I am' but you hear 'I'm', you already feel behind.

Native speakers use contractions like 'it's' and 'you're' constantly in casual conversation.

2

linking

DEF

the way two words blend together into a single connected sound in fluent speech

Linking is why 'do it' can sound like one word instead of two separate ones; learning to expect it trains your ear for the gaps English doesn't give you.

When two words merge together into one individual sound, that's linking.

Your ears look for gaps, but English often refuses to give them because of linking.

3

reduction

DEF

the shortening or weakening of unstressed words or sounds in casual speech, such as 'want to' becoming 'wanna'

Reductions are not sloppy speech — they follow predictable patterns, so learning the common ones (gonna, wanna, gotta) makes fast speech far easier to follow.

Reductions happen when we lose some letters on the way, like 'going to' becoming 'gonna'.

Common reductions include 'did you' becoming 'do you' and 'want to' becoming 'wanna'.

4

chunk

DEF

a group of words that native speakers process and say together as a single unit, like 'at the end of the day'

Thinking in chunks instead of single words frees up mental space, since your brain recognizes a whole phrase instantly instead of decoding it word by word.

A chunk is a group of words processed as one unit, like 'you know what I mean.'

Build a few high-frequency chunks and say them as single rhythms, like 'at the end of the day.'



5

stress

DEF

the extra emphasis placed on a particular word or syllable, which can change the meaning of a sentence

In English, moving the stress to a different word in the same sentence can completely change what it means, so listening for stress is as important as listening for words.

I didn't say he stole the money — change the stressed word, change the meaning.

Stress is the compass of meaning in spoken English.

6

intonation

DEF

the rise and fall of pitch (melody) in speech that adds meaning beyond the words themselves

The same sentence can sound like a statement or a question depending only on its intonation, so learners need to listen to the melody, not just the words.

Six, intonation, melody — used in 'you're leaving' versus 'you're leaving?'

Meaning rides on melody, so pay attention to intonation, not only vocabulary.

7

accent

DEF

a distinctive way of pronouncing a language, typical of a region, country, or social group

Different accents change the rhythm and vocabulary of speech, but they still rely on the same core patterns of linking, reduction, and stress underneath.

Martin, you really nailed a London accent.

If you listen for patterns instead of individual words, accents feel like different songs with the same beat.

8

slang

DEF

very informal words or phrases used by a particular group, more casual than standard vocabulary

Slang appears constantly in real conversations and can confuse learners because it isn't taught in textbooks, so exposure to natural speech is the only way to pick it up.

Plus slang like confetti — it appears everywhere and is sometimes confusing.

Instead of 'let me get something to eat,' they say, 'let me grab a bite' — that's slang.

9

glide

DEF

a short y or w sound English speakers add between two vowels to connect words smoothly

Glides are an easy-to-miss part of linking; once you know English inserts a small y or w sound between vowels, phrases like 'I agree' or 'go out' make much more sense at speed.

When a word ends with a vowel and the next word begins with a vowel, English often adds a small y or w glide.

Do it often becomes 'do-wit' because the w glide connects do and it.



10

culprit

DEF

a person or thing responsible for causing a problem or an effect

Here 'culprit' is used playfully to describe the four features (contractions, linking, reductions, stress) that make English sound fast — a useful word for talking about causes in general.

Four big culprits make speech sound fast: contractions, linking, reductions, and stress.

Lack of sleep was the main culprit behind her slow reactions that day.

11

to grab a bite

DEF

to eat something quickly, usually a small or informal meal

This is a very common informal way to talk about eating on the go; it sounds much more natural than 'to get something to eat.'

Instead of 'let me get something to eat,' they say, 'let me grab a bite.'

I'm gonna grab a bite before the meeting starts.

12

to head out

DEF

to leave a place, usually to go somewhere else

A common casual phrasal verb for leaving; you'll hear it constantly in place of more formal verbs like 'to depart' or 'to leave.'

Mate, I'm heading out soon — you coming?

We should head out now if we want to beat the traffic.

13

to keep up

DEF

to move or progress at the same speed as someone or something else, without falling behind

Learners often say they can't 'keep up' with native speakers; the phrase captures exactly the frustration this episode addresses.

This episode gives you the two techniques you need to finally keep up.

It's hard to keep up with a conversation when everyone is talking at once.

14

to nail something

DEF

to do something perfectly or very successfully

An informal way to praise a great performance; here it's used for imitating an accent well, but it works for almost any skill.

Martin, you really nailed a London accent.

She nailed the pronunciation of every reduced word in the drill.

15

to zoom out

DEF

to step back and look at the bigger picture instead of the small details

Often used figuratively in explanations or presentations to signal a shift from specifics to an overview.

Before we wrap up completely, let's zoom out for a moment.

If you zoom out, this episode is really just the first step in a three-part training plan.



16

to wrap up

DEF

to finish or bring something to an end

*A common informal way to say a talk, meeting, or activity is ending; less formal than 'to conclude.'**Before we wrap up completely, let's zoom out for a moment.**Let's wrap up today's episode with a quick recap of the two anchor skills.*

17

to sign off

DEF

to end a broadcast, message, or conversation, typically by saying goodbye

*Common at the end of podcasts, shows, or emails; it signals the speaker is officially finishing.**Now we're really signing off — keep your ears open and your English toolbox ready.**The hosts always sign off with the same friendly 'bye, bye.'*

18

to fixate on something

DEF

to focus too narrowly or obsessively on one thing, ignoring the bigger picture

*Used here to warn learners against focusing only on individual words instead of overall patterns — a useful phrase for describing an unhelpful habit of attention.**If you fixate on words only, accents feel like a thousand dialects.**Don't fixate on every unfamiliar word — focus on catching the general meaning instead.*

19

to make it

DEF

to succeed in arriving somewhere or achieving something, especially despite difficulty

*A very common everyday expression for managing to get somewhere or accomplish something on time, often under pressure.**She had to call a ride just to make it to the meeting.**I don't know if I can make it to the walk today — I'm running late.*