

TRANSCRIPT · EPISODE 05

How People Actually Get Good at English

Full episode script · English

209 lines

Your English Toolbox

HOW TO GET REALLY GOOD AT ENGLISH

Martin: Welcome back to The English Toolbox!

I'm your host, Martin, and today we're incredibly excited to begin a new series where we'll be breaking down some fascinating and highly effective ideas from a game-changing book.

Julia: We're talking about How to Get Really Good at English.

The author, Language Learning Polyglot Group, are a group of polyglot and language researchers, they have dedicated their life to teaching others how to achieve fluency by moving past traditional, outdated methods.

Martin: Their packed curriculum vitae includes living and studying in multiple countries, and they have taught thousands of students in classrooms and online.

Their work is all about making the language learning process enjoyable and sustainable.

Julia: Throughout this podcast, we're going to explore some of the most interesting and practical ideas from this book.

We'll be diving into why you should learn from what you love—things like movies, music, and books—instead of just textbooks.

Martin: We'll also cover the crucial role of a spaced recall system and how a tool like Anki can supercharge your memory.

And finally, we'll get into the advanced strategies for speeding up the process once you have a solid foundation.

Julia: So get ready to rethink everything you thought you knew about language learning, because we're about to show you How to Get Really Good at English.

Martin: Let's go, but before diving into our topic, do not forget to subscribe, click the like button and tell us what you think in the comment section.

Your support means the world to us.

Julia: To begin with, let's remember that it's a common problem, Martin.

We're often taught to learn a language like we're studying for a test.

We spend hours on grammar rules and vocabulary lists, but when we try to have a real conversation, we freeze.

That method rarely leads to true fluency; it just leads to burnout.

Martin: So, what's the alternative?

How do we break free from that "language learning bubble"?

Julia: The key is to start thinking like a polyglot.

Instead of relying on a textbook to teach you everything, you need to immerse yourself in the language as it's actually used by native speakers.

This means moving past the artificial environment of learning materials.

Martin: You mean, things like TV shows, movies, music, and books?

Julia: Exactly!

Think about it: a textbook might teach you "How are you?" and "I am fine, thank you." But in a movie, you'll hear "What's up?" or "How's it going?" and the responses are more natural, like "Not much" or "I'm good." These are the expressions you need to know to sound like a real person.

Martin: That makes so much sense!

It's about learning the "real" English, not just the textbook version.

So, for our listeners, what's a good first step to start this immersion?

Julia: A great way to begin is to choose a TV series or a movie you're already familiar with in your native language.

Re-watch it in English with English subtitles.

Since you already know the plot, you can focus on the sounds, the expressions, and the rhythm of the language without getting lost.

It's a low-pressure way to start your journey outside the learning bubble.

Martin: Julia, we're diving into the second chapter of our book, "Starting From Zero." This is for all our listeners who are just beginning their English journey.

One of the first things the book challenges is this idea that you have to study for hours and hours every day.

What's wrong with that approach?

Julia: It's the fastest way to get completely burned out, Martin.

The book argues that those intensive, marathon study sessions are unsustainable.

Most people can't keep that up for long.

The key isn't intensity; it's consistency.

Martin: So, instead of a big, long study session once a week, it's better to do a little bit every day?

Julia: Exactly.

The book suggests creating a daily habit, even if it's just for a short period—say, 20 minutes.

It's about building a routine that's manageable.

Small, regular efforts compound over time and lead to much greater progress than a sporadic, all-out effort.

It's like working out; a little bit every day is far more effective than trying to do everything on a Sunday.

Martin: That makes perfect sense.

The book also talks a lot about phonetic awareness.

Why is that so crucial for someone just starting out?

Julia: Because before you can speak well, you have to be able to hear well.

English has sounds that don't exist in many other languages, and if you can't distinguish those sounds, you'll struggle to produce them correctly.

The book recommends using tools like the International Phonetic Alphabet as a reference and actively practicing listening to native speakers.

It's not about getting a perfect accent right away; it's about training your ear to recognize the subtle nuances so you have a solid foundation for pronunciation.

Martin: That's a great point.

It's like learning the notes before you try to play a song.

And what about grammar?

We're all told we need to learn every single rule before we can say a single sentence.

The book seems to have a different take on that.

Julia: It's a huge shift from the traditional method.

The book advises against trying to memorize every grammar rule from the beginning.

That "rule-first" approach is overwhelming and it creates a mental block.

Instead, it suggests treating grammar rules more like a reference tool—like a dictionary.

The real learning happens when you encounter grammar in a meaningful context, through listening or reading native materials.

When you hear a grammatical structure in a movie, it's more likely to stick in your long-term memory because it's attached to a real-world example, not just a dry rule in a book.

Martin: So, the goal is to internalize the grammar through exposure, not just to memorize it.

And speaking of native materials, the book suggests bringing those in much earlier than most people would think.

Why is that so important for a beginner?

Julia: The sooner you start, the better.

Staying in the "language learning bubble" of simplified textbooks and instructional materials for too long prevents you from getting a feel for how real English is spoken.

The book encourages beginners to start with simple, enjoyable content like children's cartoons, easy-to-read books, or podcasts on topics they love.

The key is to find something that is slightly challenging but not so difficult that it becomes frustrating.

Martin: Right.

It's about building a bridge from the classroom to the real world.

I love that idea.

It sounds like it makes the learning process a lot more engaging.

Julia: Absolutely.

The early immersion to authentic language helps learners get a feel for the rhythm, the slang, and the natural expressions of English.

It makes the process fun and, as we said, less likely to lead to burnout.

And finally, the chapter emphasizes the mental game.

It tells learners to be patient with themselves, celebrate small wins, and to not be afraid of making mistakes.

Martin: So it's a holistic approach—focusing on consistency, phonetic awareness, contextual learning, and a positive mindset.

It's a great roadmap for anyone just starting their English learning journey

Martin: Julia, Now we're going to talk about Chapter 3, "Learn From What You Love." This is a really fun chapter because it focuses on using things people are already passionate about to learn English.

What's the main idea here?

Julia: It's all about making the process enjoyable, Martin.

The book introduces the 20-Minute Rule as a practical way to immerse yourself in native content without it feeling like a chore.

If you love what you're watching or reading, you're going to be more consistent, and that's the key to long-term success.

Martin: So, what does this 20-Minute Rule actually look like in practice?

How do our listeners apply it?

Julia: It's a four-step process.

First, you choose something you love—a TV show, a movie, a book—and you spend about 20 minutes with it, without subtitles or translations.

The goal here is just to get a feel for the language, not to understand every single word.

It's pure, low-pressure exposure.

Martin: And what happens during those 20 minutes?

Are we supposed to be frantically writing down every new word we hear?

Julia: Not at all!

That's the second step.

Instead of writing everything down, you just listen or read for words and phrases that are repeated.

These are usually the important ones.

You'll notice them because they keep popping up.

Martin: Okay, so we've got a few key words.

What's the next step?

Julia: The third step is to look up those specific repeated words and phrases.

Because you've already heard them in context, their meanings are much more likely to stick.

This is where the context from the show or book does the heavy lifting for you.

It's so much more effective than just memorizing a list of random words.

Martin: And the final step?

Julia: The book suggests that for the most important words or phrases, you can create one or two flashcards to review later using a spaced repetition system like Anki.

This helps you move the new vocabulary from your short-term memory into your long-term memory.

It's a way to solidify what you've learned.

Martin: It sounds like a fantastic way to make learning an active, but not overwhelming, part of a hobby.

And the chapter also recommends variety, right?

Julia: Yes, absolutely.

The book advises against re-watching the same thing over and over.

While that can be helpful initially, a wider variety of materials exposes you to different accents, vocabulary, and styles of language.

That's crucial for developing well-rounded proficiency.

Ultimately, the 20-Minute Rule is about turning the things you love into powerful language-learning tools.

Martin : We've talked about finding what you love and using it to learn English.

But once we've found those new words and phrases, how do we make sure we don't forget them?

That's where Chapter 4, "Spaced Recall System," comes in.

What's the big idea here, Julia?

Julia: That's the million-dollar question, Martin.

The book's main point is that exposure isn't enough; you need a system to move new information from your short-term memory to your long-term memory.

You can't rely on just encountering a word once and hoping it sticks.

Martin: So, what's the secret sauce?

The book talks a lot about a program called Anki.

Julia: Yes!

Anki is a Spaced Repetition System, or SRS.

It's a flashcard program, but it's super smart.

Its algorithm figures out the perfect time to show you a card again—right before you're about to forget it.

This is way more efficient than just flipping through a stack of cards because it focuses your energy on the words you're struggling with.

Martin: So it's not just random review.

It's targeted review.

The book also mentions different types of exercises you can do in Anki, right?

Julia: Exactly.

It suggests creating different kinds of flashcards to practice different skills.

For example, a Cloze exercise is great for grammar and vocabulary; you have a sentence with a missing word and you have to fill it in.

There are also Listening exercises where you add an audio clip to a flashcard, which helps you train your ear, and Shadowing exercises, where you repeat what you hear, which is fantastic for pronunciation.

Martin: This sounds like a lot of work.

Is the idea to do Anki for the rest of your life?

Julia: No, that's a common misconception.

The book suggests using Anki most heavily in the early stages, for the first three to six months.

This period is crucial for building a solid foundation of core vocabulary and grammar.

After that, as your vocabulary grows, you can start to rely more on natural review through extensive reading and listening.

Anki is a tool to get you started, not a lifelong commitment.

Martin: So it's a powerful tool, but it's not the whole story.

And I imagine consistency is key here as well?

Julia: Oh, absolutely.

The book stresses keeping your Anki sessions short—around 10-15 minutes a day.

The goal is to make it a sustainable habit, not a burden.

Anki is a powerful tool to supercharge your learning, but it works best when it's part of a balanced approach that includes plenty of exposure to real, authentic English.

It's the perfect complement to the "Learn From What You Love" method we just discussed.

Martin: Finally, We've made it to the final chapter, "Speeding Up the Process." We've talked about building good habits and using smart tools, but now we're focused on truly accelerating our journey to fluency.

What's the main idea here, Julia?

Julia: It's all about extensive reading, Martin.

The book argues that to really speed things up, you have to engage with large volumes of text.

This isn't about deep analysis; it's about reading for enjoyment and overall comprehension.

You want to choose engaging, fictional stories that are just a little challenging, but not so hard that they become frustrating.

Martin: So, it's about getting lost in a good book, but in English.

That sounds much better than forcing yourself through a dry academic text.

The chapter also talks about a very clever trick for making this process even faster, right?

Julia: Yes, it introduces the concept of using bilingual texts.

Imagine reading a book in English with the translation right there on the opposite page.

If you come across a word or phrase you don't know, you can just glance at the translation and keep going.

This is a huge time-saver compared to constantly stopping to look up words in a dictionary, which totally kills your reading flow.

It helps you internalize new vocabulary much more efficiently.

Martin: That's brilliant.

It's like having a built-in tutor right there with you.

What other advice does the chapter give for optimizing our routine?

Julia: It reinforces the importance of the principles we've already discussed, especially consistency with Anki reviews.

But it's with a caveat: keep the sessions short.

A quick 10-15 minutes a day is much more effective than a long, painful session once a week.

The goal is to build a habit that's easy to maintain.

Martin: So, it's about working smarter, not harder.

The book also mentions something about the mental side of learning, like improving your focus.

Julia: Exactly.

In our distracted world, the ability to focus is a superpower.

The chapter suggests that a healthy routine, including things like exercise and even meditation, can significantly improve your concentration and energy levels.

When you're more focused, your learning is naturally more efficient.

Martin: It all ties together, then.

The final message seems to be a call to action for advanced learners to transition from structured learning to a more organic, immersive approach.

Julia: That's right.

The book's ultimate message is a reminder that the goal isn't to be in a perpetual state of "studying." Instead, you should immerse yourself in things you love and use all these tools and strategies—like extensive reading and a smart review system—as a way to make the journey to fluency faster and more enjoyable.

It's about turning a chore into a passion.

Martin: And so we've reached the end of our journey, Julia.

We've covered the entire book, from building a consistent habit to the final steps of speeding up the process.

What's the big takeaway you want to leave our listeners with?

Julia: I think the biggest message is that learning English doesn't have to be a chore.

It's not about endless grammar exercises or boring vocabulary lists.

The book's philosophy is simple: find what you love—whether it's a TV show, a podcast, or a good book—and use it as your primary tool.

It's about turning passive entertainment into active learning.

Martin: So, the core is to move away from the traditional "language learning bubble" and embrace real, authentic English.

Julia: Exactly.

We've talked about a lot of great tools—the 20-Minute Rule for immersion, Anki for smart review, and extensive reading for accelerating progress.

But these are all just tools.

The real magic happens when you connect with the language on a personal level and make it a part of your life.

It's about consistency, not intensity.

Martin: That's a great way to put it.

So, for all our listeners out there, what's our final call to action?

Julia: My challenge to you is this: stop thinking of learning English as something you "have to do." Find a show, a song, or a book that you're genuinely interested in, and start there.

Use the principles we've discussed to make it a sustainable, enjoyable habit.

Don't be afraid to make mistakes; they're part of the process.

Martin: Fantastic advice.

Thank you so much for joining us, Julia.

This has been an incredibly insightful series.

Julia: It's been my pleasure, Martin.

I hope it helps a lot of people on their path to fluency.

Martin: That's all the time we have for today.

From all of us at The English Toolbox, thank you for listening, and happy learning!
