

The 3 Tasks That Actually Matter

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

184 lines

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

Have you ever finished a full day, completely exhausted... and then, lying in bed, asked yourself: "what did I actually get done today?"

Oh, I know that exact moment.

Your body is tired, your eyes are heavy... but your brain can't name one real thing you finished.

Just a blur of small tasks, messages, and meetings.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox, the podcast that trains your English while you live your real life.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

Friends, we've talked about eating your frog, and we've talked about saying no.

Today, we're going one step further.

Because Martin once had an entire year where he worked constantly... and somehow felt like he was falling behind.

It's true.

And it took me a long time to understand why.

So today, you'll walk away knowing exactly which two or three tasks actually define your success in whatever you do, a simple way to see the one weak spot that's quietly holding everything else back, and how to set yourself up so that starting tomorrow's biggest task feels almost automatic.

Let's start with a question, and it sounds simple, but almost nobody asks it clearly.

What question?

Why am I actually on the payroll?

Or if you're not employed by someone, why does anyone come to you at all?

Why do your clients choose you, why does your family rely on you for certain things, why were you hired in the first place?

That's such an uncomfortable question, honestly.

It is, but it's incredibly useful.

Because most jobs, most roles in life, really come down to five, maybe seven, key areas.



Key result areas, we can call them.

The things you're completely responsible for.

If you don't do them, nobody else quietly does them for you.

Right, and here's the interesting part: you can actually grade yourself in each of these areas, one to ten.

And most people, when they do this honestly for the first time, discover something surprising.

What do they discover?

That one area, usually just one, is dragging everything else down.

Even if you're brilliant everywhere else.

Let me tell you what happened to me, because this is exactly my story.

Go on, tell them.

So, a few years ago, I was working as a freelance web developer, and I was good.

Genuinely good — clean code, fast delivery, clients were impressed with the actual work.

But somehow, I wasn't getting repeat clients, and I couldn't understand why.

For almost a year, I assumed I just needed to get faster, or learn a new programming language, or lower my prices.

What was actually happening, Martin?

So, finally, a client I trusted told me directly: "Your work is excellent.

But I never know what's happening with my project.

I send a message, and I wait four days for a reply."

And that hit me hard, because he was completely right.

Coding, design, problem-solving — those were all nines, maybe tens.

But communication, keeping people updated, that was maybe a three.

And that one weak area was quietly capping everything else.

Like a chain — it doesn't matter how strong nine of the links are.

If one link is weak, the whole chain breaks at exactly that point.

That's such a clear way to picture it.

It really is, and here's the thing: it doesn't just apply to freelance work.

Think about learning English, actually — it's the exact same idea.

Oh, that's a good comparison.

Someone can have incredible grammar, a huge vocabulary, understand every rule perfectly...

But if their listening is weak, they still can't follow a real conversation.



The weakest area sets the height of everything else, no matter how strong the rest is.

So the question becomes: which area, if I improved it, would change everything?

For me, it wasn't a new skill.

It was something almost embarrassingly simple.

I started sending a two-line update every single Friday, even when there was nothing exciting to report.

Just: "here's where we are, here's what's next."

And that alone doubled my repeat client rate within about four months.

One weak link, fixed, and suddenly the whole chain held.

Exactly.

So, friends, ask yourself that same question about your own life.

What are your five to seven key areas, whether at work, at home, or even in your English?

And where would you honestly grade yourself the lowest?

That answer might be more valuable than any new skill you could learn.

And friends, if you're building a life in a new country, this question matters even more than usual.

How so?

Because your key result areas right now might not be about a job at all.

They might be things like handling paperwork correctly, understanding the healthcare system, or simply being brave enough to make a phone call in a language you're still learning.

Exactly, and it's worth grading yourself honestly in those areas too.

Maybe you're wonderful with your neighbors, confident at the market, completely at ease with small talk...

But one specific area — maybe calling your bank, or reading an official letter — quietly creates stress every single time.

That's your weakest link right now, in this season of your life.

And just like Martin's Friday update, the fix doesn't need to be dramatic.

Sometimes it's one small habit, practiced consistently, that finally strengthens that one link.

Now, here's a related idea, and Julia has her own story about this one.

Oh, this one still makes me a little tired just thinking about it.

Go on, tell them.

So, about two years ago, I had seventeen different tasks on my regular list at work.

Seventeen.

Reports, meetings, training new staff, answering constant questions, managing three different projects at once.



And on top of that, half of those seventeen things arrived through completely different channels — some by email, some by messages on my phone, some just people stopping by my desk.

So nothing felt organized, it just felt like constant noise from every direction.

And I was working ten, sometimes twelve hours a day, six days a week.

That's an enormous amount of hours.

It was.

And I kept telling myself, "once I finish this busy period, it'll calm down."

But it never calmed down, because I was treating all seventeen tasks as equally important.

Which sounds a lot like our eighty-twenty conversation from last time.

Exactly, and one evening, completely exhausted, I sat down and actually looked at the list honestly.

And I asked myself: if I could only keep three of these seventeen tasks, which three would still make almost all the difference?

What did you find?

It turned out that three specific things — training new staff well, managing the biggest client relationship, and one weekly strategy meeting — those three alone were responsible for probably ninety percent of my real value at that job.

The other fourteen mattered, technically, but barely moved anything.

So what did you do with that information?

I went to my manager, and I said, "I think I can deliver far more if I focus almost entirely on these three things, and we find another way to cover the rest."

And she agreed?

She did, actually.

Some tasks got handed off to a colleague, a couple were simply dropped completely, and within about thirty days, my actual output had roughly doubled.

Thirty days.

And my working hours dropped from twelve a day down to something much closer to eight.

That's remarkable, honestly.

It really felt like discovering a secret, but it wasn't really a secret — it was just clarity.

Which brings up something worth mentioning, because it explains why we all end up with seventeen tasks in the first place.

What's that?

There's an old idea that work tends to expand to fill whatever time you give it.

It's called Parkinson's Law.



Meaning?

If you give yourself a whole day for a task that really only needs two hours, it will somehow take the whole day.

Oh, that's painfully true.

Small decisions stretch out, extra checking happens, tiny details get polished that nobody will ever notice.

Which means all seventeen tasks can quietly grow to fill twelve hours, even if only three of them actually matter.

Exactly, so the Law of Three isn't just about choosing what matters.

It's about refusing to let everything else expand and steal the time your real priorities deserve.

Give the small stuff a small amount of time, on purpose, and stop there.

Which leads us to one final piece, and it's less exciting, but it makes everything else so much easier.

Preparing before you even begin.

Tell them what you do now, Martin, after everything you learned.

So now, every evening, before I close my laptop, I get tomorrow's biggest task completely ready.

Meaning?

Meaning the files are open, the notes are next to my keyboard, my coffee is already prepared for the morning, and my phone charges in a different room overnight.

So there's no friction at all when you sit down.

None.

I'm primed and ready, honestly — one small push, and I'm already moving.

Because the hardest part of any big task is usually just the first thirty seconds.

If those thirty seconds are full of friction — a messy desk, a dead phone, missing files — you'll find a reason to delay.

But if everything's ready, there's nothing left to do except start.

And you don't need it perfect either.

Get it roughly right, and correct it as you go.

Waiting for the perfect plan is just another polite way of avoiding the frog.

One more small idea here, because it pairs nicely with preparation.

What's that?

Group similar small tasks together, instead of scattering them through your day.

Meaning?

If you have five phone calls to make, five emails to answer, or five errands to run, do them back to back, in one block.

Instead of one phone call now, then an hour later another one, then another later still.



Exactly, because every time you switch between different types of tasks, there's a small mental cost.

A bit like restarting a cold engine each time.

It doesn't sound like much, five times a day, but it adds up to real lost time and lost focus.

So group the small stuff, protect your morning for the big stuff, and prepare everything the night before.

So, let's bring today together for our listeners.

Ask yourself honestly: what are my real key result areas, and which one is my weakest link?

Fix that one thing, and everything else you're already good at finally gets to shine.

Then find your three — the tasks that quietly carry almost all your real value.

Protect them from the seventeen distractions trying to steal their time.

And prepare tonight, so tomorrow's biggest task starts the moment you sit down.

Now, let's gather the useful English from today's conversation.

Let's do it.

First: "the weakest link," the idea Martin used to describe his communication problem.

We use this to describe the one weak part that limits everything connected to it.

"Her nerves before presentations are the weakest link in her career."

Next: "to drag something down," meaning to reduce the quality, success, or performance of the whole.

"One unclear process can drag the entire team down."

Next: "to cap something," meaning to limit how high something can go.

"Poor sleep can cap your performance, no matter how hard you train."

Next: "to hand something off," meaning to give a task to someone else.

Julia used this when she handed off some of her seventeen tasks.

"I handed off the report to a colleague and focused on the client call."

Next: "to expand to fill the time," describing how tasks grow to match however much time you give them.

"Give yourself a whole week for a two-day task, and it will expand to fill the week."

Next: "friction," used the way Martin used it, meaning small obstacles that make starting harder.

"A messy desk creates friction before you've even begun."

Next: "primed and ready," meaning completely prepared to begin immediately.

"With her notes open and her phone put away, she was primed and ready to work."

One more: "back to back," meaning one right after another, with no gap.

"I scheduled all my calls back to back on Friday morning."



Eight useful expressions, straight from a real conversation.

Now, here's your sentence of the day.

Listen carefully, we'll say it twice.

"Find your three, fix your weakest link, and prepare tonight for tomorrow."

"Find your three, fix your weakest link, and prepare tonight for tomorrow."

Say it with us, out loud, right now if you can.

Feel the rhythm of it.

"Find your three... fix your weakest link."

So, friends, let's close today's episode.

Somewhere in your week, there are seventeen tasks pretending to be equally important.

They're not.

Three of them are carrying almost everything.

Find them, protect them, and prepare the ground so tomorrow, starting takes no effort at all.

Thank you for spending this time with us today.

If this episode helped you, visit yourenglishtoolbox.com for the transcript, multilingual translations, vocabulary resources, Cinema Mode, and our seven-speed player, all designed to help you turn listening into active English practice, so you can choose the listening rhythm that works best for you.

Until next time, friends.

Take care of yourselves.

And go find your three.

Goodbye!

