

The Obstacle Is the Way

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

15 learning entries

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

1

an obstacle

DEF

something that blocks your path or makes it difficult to move forward; a challenge that stands between you and your goal

Obstacle comes from Ryan Holiday's Stoic philosophy book — the idea that obstacles are not detours from the path, they ARE the path. For language learners, every difficulty is actually training.

Treat every grammar obstacle as a gift — the things you struggle with are exactly what you need to master.

The obstacle is the way — the pronunciation you find hardest is the one that, once conquered, sets you apart.

2

to persevere

DEF

to continue working toward a goal despite difficulty, discouragement, or repeated setbacks

Persevere is the verb of long-term grit — it has a moral dimension, suggesting courage and character. Language learners who persevere through difficulty are building more than language skills; they are building resilience.

Persevere through the difficult stage — everyone who has ever become fluent passed through exactly what you are feeling now.

She persevered through three years of slow progress and then improved dramatically in the fourth year.

3

to push through

DEF

to continue despite difficulty, pain, or resistance until you have passed the hard part

Push through is the verb of grit — you do not stop when it gets hard, you push. In language learning, pushing through a plateau, an embarrassing moment, or a difficult text is what separates those who improve from those who stagnate.

The hardest moment in any language plateau is when you feel like giving up — push through it.

She pushed through three months of slow progress and emerged with a level she could not have imagined at the start.

4

a hurdle

DEF

a difficulty or challenge that must be overcome in order to make progress

Hurdle is the athletics metaphor for challenge — you do not go around hurdles, you jump over them. In language learning, each new hurdle (accent, grammar, confidence) is a specific thing to get over, not a general reason to stop.

Every learner faces the same hurdles — pronunciation, vocabulary, confidence — in different orders.

The biggest hurdle for most learners is not grammar but the fear of being misunderstood.



5

to face something head-on

DEF

to deal with a difficulty directly and without avoidance — confronting it rather than working around it

Face something head-on is the language of direct confrontation with challenge. In English learning, head-on means choosing the harder path on purpose: speaking when you would rather write, asking for clarification instead of pretending to understand.

Face your pronunciation difficulties head-on — record yourself and work on exactly the sounds you avoid.

Instead of avoiding conversations about topics she found difficult, she faced them head-on.

6

determination

DEF

the quality of being firmly committed to achieving a goal despite difficulty, setbacks, or the temptation to quit

Determination is the long-distance version of willpower — it is not the strength to resist temptation for an hour, but the commitment to keep going for months and years. Language learning is a test of determination above all else.

Determination is what gets you through the months when progress is invisible.

Her determination was visible — she missed no more than two sessions in a year and improved beyond anyone's expectations.

7

to get in your own way

DEF

to behave in ways that prevent you from achieving what you actually want — usually through fear, perfectionism, or negative thinking

Get in your own way is the phrase for self-sabotage. It names the irony of failing not because the task is impossible, but because your own habits of thought are blocking you. Every English learner does this at some point — refusing to speak, waiting to be perfect.

Stop getting in your own way — the only thing stopping your English now is your belief that it is not good enough.

She realised she had been getting in her own way for years by refusing to speak until she was sure she was right.

8

to try again

DEF

to make another attempt after a failure, error, or unsuccessful result

Try again is the fundamental language learning permission. Every error in language is just a try. The willingness to try again without excessive shame or self-criticism is the most essential quality for language success. It is also the simplest phrase — two words that contain everything.

When you make a mistake in English, do not apologise for ten minutes — just try again.

She made the same error in pronunciation five times and tried again each time without discouragement.

9

to chip away at something

DEF

to make gradual, steady progress on a large or difficult goal by doing small amounts consistently over time

Chip away is the perfect metaphor for language learning — you do not smash a mountain, you chip at it each day. Over months and years, the mountain becomes a hill, then a stone, then nothing. This phrase captures the true nature of fluency: patient, daily, incremental.

You will reach fluency by chipping away at English every day — not by cramming once a month.

She chipped away at her accent for two years and then suddenly noticed it had changed completely.



10

a breakthrough

DEF

a sudden and significant moment of progress or understanding after a period of effort or difficulty

Breakthrough is the word for the moment when everything clicks. You understand what you could not understand before; you speak what you could not speak. In language learning, breakthroughs often come after periods of apparent stagnation — which means the dark periods are not wasted, they are preparation.

Every language plateau is the silent preparation for a breakthrough — keep going.

She had a breakthrough when she heard a native speaker and understood every word for the first time.

11

the present moment

DEF

The time happening now rather than the past or future.

Frequently used in mindfulness and practical philosophy.

Return to the present moment and choose the next action.

His attention came back to the present moment.

12

the discipline of perception

DEF

The practice of choosing how to interpret an event.

A Stoic framework: perception concerns the meaning we give to circumstances.

The discipline of perception turns a problem into information.

She changed her response by changing her perception.

13

the discipline of action

DEF

The practice of taking purposeful action despite difficulty.

In Stoicism, action follows a clear and useful perception.

The discipline of action asks what you can do now.

He stopped complaining and moved into action.

14

the discipline of will

DEF

The practice of accepting what cannot be controlled while maintaining inner direction.

Will here means inner resolve rather than future grammar.

The discipline of will helped her accept the delay.

His will remained steady when the plan failed.

15

to focus on what you can control

DEF

To direct energy towards your own choices and actions.

A core Stoic principle, often contrasted with worrying about outcomes.

Focus on what you can control before the exam.

The team focused on what it could control.

