

Kids, Do This at Home

国際高等学校 3年 錦 織 由 果

Hi, I'm Yuka. I am an overseas returnee. I use to live in Jakarta, Hawaii, and Saipan, and I came back to Japan during 7th grade.

When I was living in Jakarta, I spoke Indonesian fairly well. However, due to lack of practice I can no longer understand the language, and I hate myself for forgetting it all. The fact that my parents are actually fairly fluent and go out of their way to use it in front of me does not help either.

When I was living in Hawaii and Saipan, I spoke English because I attended local schools and spent a lot of time watching American TV shows. And as you can see, I can still speak it today.

When I returned to Japan in 7th grade, I was confident that I would never lose my English ability. After all, my English is far better than my Japanese, I always being told my English was good or flawless. So I only thought my parents were going through a sort of nagging-phase when they told me that I would have to practice my English as to not lose it.

Only when I entered 9th grade I realized little by little that they were right, as always. Some words were becoming difficult for me to pronounce properly, and I would sometimes make grammatical mistakes, such as using “has” instead of “have”, proving that my English was no longer “flawless”. The most horrific of all was when I would sometimes forget words completely. For example, just last month I could not remember the term “plural”.

I decided I must take action to keep and rebuild my English ability. I am going share some methods that worked very well for me.

First and the most obvious of all is reading. By reading books, you naturally build up on your vocabulary because when they are used in ordinary sentences, they are not the same as the boring mass of letters from your homework. For example, I learned the term “statute of limitations” not from a textbook on criminal law but from a book about money, love, and revenge by Sydney Sheldon.

I also make myself read at least three books of the same author if I like the first one I read. In my case, my collection includes three books by Diana Wynne Jones, seven by Stephen King, and nine by Sydney Sheldon. This is because many prolific authors have a certain writing style. As a result, their works often share the same vocabulary. The repetition helps in remembering certain terms and their correct usage.

Another and very fun way is to watch a lot of English-language movies. Not only do they teach new words, but they also provide a chance to brush up on listening skills and correct pronunciation. This might sound strange, but I often memorize witty lines and repeat them to improve my articulation. Such as this line: “Makeovers? You mean where stuck-up girls make snooty faces at us while they pluck our eyebrows until we scream and they tell us ‘Well you’d be pretty if you took care of your skin?’ Pass.” So in a sense, it is killing not two but three birds with a stone. It is also very entertaining to read reviews for really good or really bad films, as their writers usually pump out all sorts of colorful language to get their point through.

The important part about both the methods is that you must enjoy it. If you have to force yourself to read dull books or watch boring movies just to practice English, you will just end up being frustrated and stressed.

Thinking back, I regret not taking these simple and fun actions earlier to improve my English. I was blinded and let myself be deluded by my groundless overconfidence and took my English ability for granted. One might think one has a special skill or ability in a certain field, and knowing so is important. But to know how to use that ability effectively at all times is important too. If my description of myself fits yours, don’t panic. Just find ways to improve that ability and yourself too.