

Improving English Communication Skills

For most Korean students, the reason for studying English is to get a high test score. English, however, is not a test subject but a language that allows people from all around the world to communicate with each other. As students start to realize the true purpose of learning English, they will understand that being able to communicate with others will be a skill that opens many doors.

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Common Mistakes

One of the most common mistakes occurs when a Korean person tries to introduce themselves in English. Due to the nature of a Korean name, we cannot simply translate a Korean name into English because the family name comes first in Korean, but the family name comes last in English. For example, a person named 준용민 will commonly introduce himself as Joon Yong Min in English, however, this will cause confusion as the listener will think that this person's first name is Joon Yong and last name is Min. In order not to cause confusion, this person will need to introduce himself as Yong Min Joon and follow the common ways of introducing names in English. In addition, this person should write his name as Yong-Min Joon or Yongmin Joon to indicate that his first name is not simply Yong. Another common mistake that is made when learning in any language is not thinking in that language. It is obvious to see that most Korean students think in Korean while trying to communicate in English. Not only does it slow down the learning process, but

it causes a delay in communication by making an awkward silence because too much time is being used to translate English to Korean and then back to English in your brain.

Pronunciation

What good is perfect grammar if the listener is unable to understand the words you are trying to pronounce? Although it is beneficial to always be working on your pronunciation skills, it is necessary to tackle the most commonly mispronounced sounds for Koreans. Try comparing the following words and see which letters are difficult for you to pronounce.

P vs. F	B vs. V	L vs. R	Z vs. J
Pork vs. Fork	Berry vs. Very	Lice vs. Rice	Zoo vs. Jew
Pig vs. Fig	Ban vs. Van	Lead vs. Read	Zack vs. Jack
Pun vs. Fun	Bow vs. Vow	Lent vs. Rent	Zone vs. Joan
Poor vs. Four	Best vs. Vest	Liver vs. River	Zeus vs. Juice

After identifying your pronunciation problems, it is necessary for you to practice these sounds repeatedly to train the muscles in your mouth to become comfortable making these sounds naturally.

Unfortunately, the Korean accent is an undesired accent when speaking in English because of the dramatic differences in the sounds. While most people believe that the above mispronounced letters are the main cause of the Korean accent, the misuse of vowel sounds is the bigger concern. The problem lies in the fact that when Koreans speak in English, they are using the Korean vowel sounds instead of the English vowel sounds. For example, when saying "hot" it is commonly said as "h ㅏ t." The difference can be seen in the "o" vs. "ㅏ" vowel sound. When we say "hot" properly, there is a prominent "o" sound which is quite longer and allows the ending "t" sound to come after finishing the "o" sound. When we say "hot" using the Korean vowel "ㅏ" instead of the

“o” sound, the “ɪ” vowel sound becomes very short allowing the “t” sound to come out as quickly as possible. In general, we need to speak English using the English vowel sounds, which are longer, and eliminate using Korean vowel sounds, which are shorter, when we speak in English.

Essential Communication Skills

Many people who are not familiar with the English language do not know what the most polite form in English is. Adding please to a statement does make it more polite, but it still is not the most polite form. Give me a handout. Please give me a handout. You can see that it does become more polite, but in situations where it is necessary to be both respectful and polite, we should be asking questions to allow the intended listener to have a choice in the matter. Therefore, if you are speaking to someone in a higher position, such as a professor, and you need a handout, you should be asking, “could I please have a handout?” It is key to remember that there are situations in English where it is necessary to be as polite and respectful as possible just as there are situations that you want to be as polite and respectful as possible when speaking Korean. Keeping the following phrase in mind will help you whenever you need to make a request: “Could I (you) please...?”

One of the most difficult parts of communicating with someone in English is being able to first understand what the other person is trying to say. We are taught to say polite phrases such as excuse me, pardon me, I’m sorry, and even could you please repeat the question. However, by using one of these phrases, the speaker will simply repeat the question or statement word for word which sometimes does not make it easier to understand simply because we lack the proper vocabulary skills. The more useful phrase which should be used is “could you please rephrase that (for me)?” By asking this polite question, the speaker will recognize that you heard the question clearly but are having trouble understanding the question and need it to be simplified. In return, the speaker will ask the same question again but with easier words.

Practicing Effectively

How can I immerse myself in English without having to spend lots of money on a tutor or private institute? Luckily, the internet provides an unlimited amount of resources for you to practice and improve your English as long as you are doing it correctly. For example, TED.com offers many presentations in English for you to practice your listening, but the key point is to use English subtitles and NOT Korean subtitles if you decide to use subtitles. To improve your speaking skills, it is necessary to watch TED.com or your favorite American TV series and focus on how they speak and their pronunciation. With the English subtitles turned on, it is important to try and repeat the words exactly as they do and to stop and repeat as needed.