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**CIVIL SOCIETIES AND ENGLISH**

Every year we hear about conflicts erupting all over the world. A number of them could have been prevented if civil societies had been active in alerting the international community to their problems.

Under these conditions, English plays an ever increasing role as the most popular means of communication between civil societies.

Using free web applications can help activists learn English quicker and in a more interesting way.

I'm going to share 8 of my  favorite online English tools you can use to improve your English faster than ever! The best part is that you can use them all for free!

The first tool on this list is HelloTalk.  It's my favorite way to find native speakers to practice having conversations. Once you've downloaded the app, you can find people by going to the search tab and then clicking the filter button. This allows you to pick the age range, region or city, the person's native language, and what they are trying to learn. When you click "search," you'll see a list of everyone that meets that criteria. If you get a lot of results, you can also click where it says "serious learners" to find people who really care about practicing.

Another great feature is that you can limit who can find you.

Just go to the Me tab, click the gear icon, select "privacy," and then "who can find me." In addition to hiding yourself from search results, you can say that only people of the same gender can find you. This is useful if you have problems with people just looking for romantic relationships.

Once you've chosen someone, my favorite features are that you can easily give each other corrections on texts and send audio recordings.

The second tool is Forvo. It's a great  website to help you discover how real people, not robots, pronounce words in English.  All you need to do is search for a word.

Let's try to see how people say special. You can see in the results that we can first filter by type of accent, British or American. If you click on the word itself, it'll take you to a list of people who submitted a recording so you can hear multiple ways of saying that word.

The third tool is YouGlish, and it's one of my absolute favorites! With YouGlish, you can search for a word or phrase and see how it is used in context across multiple high-quality YouTube videos. All you need to do is enter an expression, choose the type of English you're interested in, and click search.

In the results, you'll get dozens or even hundreds of videos with the expression, and the video is set to the exact moment where the expression appears. You also get the full subtitles beneath the video with your expression highlighted.

This tool is fantastic for improving your pronunciation and your vocabulary by seeing how native speakers use whatever you're trying to learn.

The fourth tool is HiNative. I've talked before about how important it is to get consistent feedback from native speakers to speak more naturally. The problem is, you might not personally know a lot of native speakers, and even if you do, you might feel guilty asking them for feedback all the time. That's where HiNative comes in.

HiNative allows you to ask questions about English and get feedback from a community of native speakers.

The nice thing is that since there are thousands of people on HiNative, you never have to feel guilty about asking the same person for feedback all the time.

All you do is write a question, click submit, and within an hour or two, you'll have a handful of responses. You can use HiNative to ask for feedback on your writing, speaking, pronunciation, or just to get answers to questions about confusing words or expressions.

Number five on this list is DeepL. If you've used an online translator before, you've probably used Google Translate, but Google doesn't provide the most natural translations in my experience. DeepL, on the other hand, provides extremely natural translations you can use to get instant feedback on your speaking or writing.

With DeepL, all you do is write or paste your text on the left, and you'll get the translation on the right.  What's great about DeepL's translations is that it lets you select specific words and see different alternatives, allowing you to make sure the translation fits what you wanted to say. DeepL currently supports Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. It seems like they're adding new languages all the time, though, so if  yours isn't currently supported, be sure to check back in a little bit to see if they added it. By the way, DeepL even lets you translate complete documents. Just click the translate documents button and select or drag and drop your file.

Tool number six is Visual Speed Controller.  If you've ever wished you could control how fast people spoke while you're studying, this tool is for you.

Visual Speed Controller lets you control the speed of any video or audio on your PC and gives you the ability to create shortcuts for rewinding and fast-forwarding content.

This is particularly useful if you're trying to do a dictation. You can play a video, use your space bar to pause it, write what you heard, and then click the Z key to go back just 2 seconds so you can listen to anything you missed again and again.

It makes it much easier than having to click buttons with your mouse to rewind.

The seventh tool is my favorite way to study vocabulary. It's called Anki.

Anki allows you to create digital flashcards and, most importantly, controls when you review them using a technique called spaced repetition. If you've never  heard of spaced repetition before, it basically means you'll be asked to do a flashcard exactly when you're about to forget it.

For newer vocabulary, this means reviewing the cards frequently. For vocabulary you already know, this means reviewing it days, weeks, or even months later.

Over time, this repeated exposure just as you're  about to forget helps reinforce what you already learned and gives you a better chance to remember it in a real conversation.

In addition, Anki has many cool advanced features, such as the ability to create multiple decks, create tags to filter your vocabulary, easily search for cards quickly, and view your statistics over time.

The eighth and final tool on my list is super cool. It's called Loom, and it's a way to record short videos of yourself easily. You can share these videos with people via email, social media, or anywhere else you can paste a link such as HiNative.

If you use Loom to record yourself, it's a great way to get used to speaking under pressure. In other words, it lets you feel a similar type of stress to what you'd feel in a real conversation.

Therefore, the more you do it, the more comfortable you'll feel in stressful situations, like a conversation. The more comfortable you feel, the easier it'll be to remember vocabulary and organize your sentences. Once you record yourself, you can share that video with a native speaker to get feedback or just have an asynchronous conversation.

So there you have it! My top 8 favorite free tools to help you improve your English.

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