

EFFORTLESS ENGLISH

LEARN TO SPEAK ENGLISH LIKE A NATIVE

A.J. HOGE



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CHAPTER 1

A Better Way to Learn English

If you've picked up this book, chances are you've wanted to speak English for a while. Maybe you've even taken classes. You probably need English to improve your career. Maybe you want to travel internationally or study abroad. You know that English is the key to international business and international travel. So let me ask you something.

Do you feel nervous or shy when you try to speak English? Do you still struggle to understand what someone is saying to you despite years of study? Are you embarrassed about your pronunciation or worried you speak too slowly? Are you frustrated that despite all the time you've invested in learning English you still can't speak it? Despite your goals, is it difficult for you to actually use English in your job, travels, or studies? Do you sometimes feel that you'll never master spoken English?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you're not alone. In fact, you're fairly typical. Most English students feel this way. Most adult English learners are stressed and frustrated about their speaking ability. Some feel completely hopeless and feel they'll never be able to speak English powerfully. Not because they're bad at languages, but because, like you, they've been taught using the wrong methods.



The good thing is that it doesn't have to be like this. There is nothing wrong with you. You can learn to speak English naturally and with ease. You can use English effectively in your job, travels, and studies. You can feel relaxed and confident every time you speak English. In fact, as a long-time English teacher, I've helped thousands of students all over the world become fluent and powerful English speakers.

How did I do it? I did it using a teaching method I developed called Effortless English™. Effortless English™ enables you to learn English naturally and automatically – the way children learn before they enter school. Too often, English classes get so focused on tests, textbooks, grades and “levels,” students forget why they're there in the first place. They forget about the real world goals of a more successful career and exciting international travel. With Effortless English™ you never lose sight of the fact that the ultimate goal of learning a language is communication. Instead, you learn to speak English both quickly and with more precision.

Effortless?

I understand if you're skeptical – particularly if you've been trying to learn English the traditional way. You've put in the hours: memorizing vocabulary lists, doing grammar drills, reading boring textbooks. “How?” you're thinking, “can speaking English possibly be effortless?”

Believe me, I feel your pain.

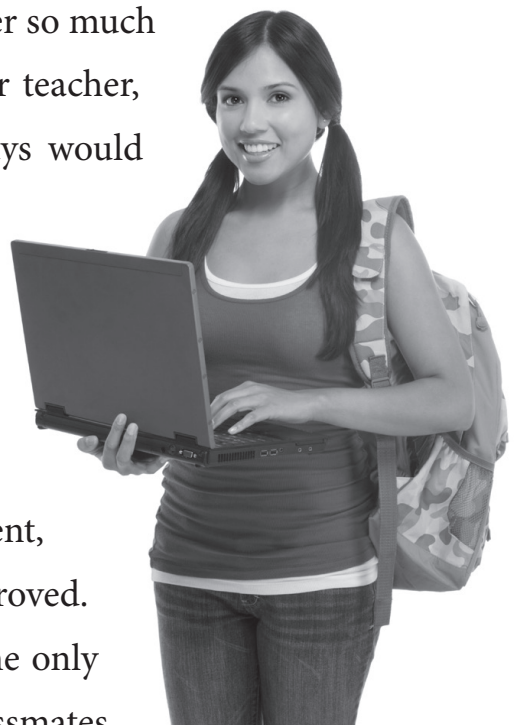
Back when I started teaching 15 years ago, my students were all excited to begin conversing in English. And I was excited to help them. At that time, I taught in the usual way. I used textbooks and I focused on teaching grammar. I thought this was the best way to teach, and none of my students complained.

I still remember one particularly intelligent student of mine from Venezuela named Gladys. Gladys was determined to speak English well. Talk about effort! Gladys attended every one of my classes. She always sat in the center of the front row. I can still picture her eager and smiling face. She took detailed notes. She listened to every word I said. She also studied at home. Every day Gladys studied her English textbooks for four hours or more. She also tried to learn 50 new vocabulary words by memorizing word lists. Gladys was my star student and I, too, was sure she would succeed.

Six months later, however, she still could barely speak English. Her speech was hesitant and unnatural. She constantly made grammar mistakes with even the simplest sentences. Her pronunciation was difficult to understand. She still thought in Spanish and tried to translate to and from English when she spoke. Worst of all, Gladys felt nervous every time she tried to speak English. Speaking English was a painful experience for her.

Gladys was extremely frustrated. After so much effort, she had barely improved. As her teacher, I too was frustrated. I was sure Gladys would improve quickly and couldn't understand why she had not. I followed all of the traditional teaching methods. I used the standard textbooks and the standard classroom activities. Gladys was intelligent, disciplined and consistent, and yet her English speaking barely improved.

Sadly, I realized that Gladys wasn't the only one who had not improved. Her classmates



also had barely improved. It was frustrating, and I felt like a complete failure as a teacher. But when I asked my colleagues for help, it turned out they had the same problem – very few of their students were improving either! At that point, I realized something was wrong – something *is* wrong with standard methods for teaching English. The worst part for me was that everyone accepted this situation as “normal.” The other teachers didn’t seem to be concerned about their students’ lack of progress. All the teachers were using the same methods and getting the same poor results.

In most parts of the world, students study English in school for years. Yet, the vast majority of them never learn to speak English well. After years of study, they still have trouble with real English conversations. They still feel nervous and shy about speaking.

A few years after my experience with Gladys, I got a job as an English teaching assistant in Japan. I was excited and eager to help these young students learn my language. I still remember my first day. I was sitting at the front of the class next to the main teacher, who was Japanese. As the students came into the room, they saw me and giggled nervously. They sat down and continued to shyly glance up at me. They were sweet and curious.

Then the class started. The main teacher wrote an English sentence on the board. I don’t remember the exact sentence, but it was something like, “The little girl goes to school.” The teacher pointed to the sentence and began to talk in Japanese. The students all grabbed their notebooks and began writing. Everyone was very serious.

Next, the teacher circled the word “goes.” She pointed at the word and continued speaking in Japanese. She talked and talked and talked, in Japanese. The students wrote quickly, filling their notebooks with

information. Finally, the teacher drew a line from the word “goes” to the word “girl.” And then she talked more, on and on and on, in Japanese.

This continued for the entire class. The teacher drew lines, circles, and squares. She used different colored chalk. And she continued speaking Japanese.

I was totally confused. I am a native speaker of English, and I was sitting in a beginning English class. Yet I could not understand anything in the class (except for that one sentence). I was thinking to myself, “What could this teacher possibly be talking about so much? It’s just one sentence.” Yet the teacher spent an entire hour analyzing, explaining, and dissecting that one simple sentence. Finally, at the end of the class, the teacher asked me to read the sentence aloud “for pronunciation.” I read the sentence a couple of times, and that was the only real English input the students got that day.

Sadly, this same pattern repeated every day. Day by day, I watched the students’ enthusiasm and curiosity disappear. They became bored. They became stressed and confused. Every day they wrote pages of notes, mostly in Japanese. Every day the teacher talked and talked and talked, mostly in Japanese. I couldn’t understand why an English class was being taught mostly in Japanese. During the average class, the students were listening to Japanese 90% of the time or more. They heard very little English. No wonder they never learned to speak! No wonder they were frustrated and confused.

Honestly, it broke my heart to watch as the school crushed these students’ natural love of learning. It was terrible to watch them grow bored, frustrated, and stressed. And six months later, none of the students could speak to me at all, not even the simplest conversation.

This kind of situation is repeated in English classes all over the world.

My experiences with Gladys and in Japan convinced me that traditional English language education is broken. I knew there had to be a better way to help my students speak English than what we were doing. So I began the search for a better way. I devoured books about English teaching. I constantly tried out new methods in my classes. I read research studies. I traveled and taught English in other parts of the world.

What surprised me was how little the actual research supported traditional teaching methods. As eminent University of Southern California linguist Stephen Krashen noted: “We acquire language when we understand what people tell us and what we read....there is no need for deliberate memorization.” If most of us knew, intuitively, that the best way to learn English was naturally, I wondered, why were so many teachers and students still choosing to use unnatural, ineffective and old methods of teaching?

Eventually, I went back to school and got a master’s degree in (TESOL) Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Along the way, I did more research and discovered the incredible new methods that would become the basis for the Effortless English™ program.

I also did my own informal research. I searched for excellent English speakers who had learned the language as an adult. Whenever I found such a person, I interviewed them. Over time, I noticed patterns. Most of these successful speakers were independent students who mastered spoken English outside of school. Most of them used similar methods, the very same methods supported by my master’s research. Most avoided the traditional methods used in most schools.

I changed my teaching, and when I used these new strategies in

classes, my students improved quickly. I couldn't believe it! They learned to speak easily and powerfully. And even better – they were enjoying themselves! After years of searching and experimentation, I had finally found methods that worked.

Effortless English Today

Over the years, I've continued to test and adapt these methods and developed the Effortless English™ system. I've organized the program to include seven essential rules for learning English, which have led countless students to fluency. To build on the success of my classes, I created audio courses and began offering them online to English students around the world. My audio lessons are currently bestsellers in 25 countries.

In addition, I founded the Effortless English Club™ to create an international English learning community where students can communicate with other members. I wanted to create an environment that encouraged confidence and success with English, because so many learners struggle with nervousness, shyness, frustration and fear when speaking. In fact, for many people these negative emotions are the worst part of speaking English.

In our Effortless English Club™ students are able to interact on our forums and speak with each other online. It is an extremely positive and encouraging community, where everyone is free to “play with English,” make mistakes, and communicate without fear. In my opinion, we have the best members in the world. Every one of our members is focused not only on their own success, but also on helping other members achieve success too. The result is a supportive “family” of learners and international leaders.

This book is another resource for students looking to speak English powerfully and fluently. It is designed to guide you on the road to fluency, to speed your journey to confident, powerful, effortless speaking. In this book, you will learn how to re-program your negative emotions about English, develop confidence when speaking, and follow a powerful and effective road to fluency. You'll also learn how to use English to improve your career and achieve the success you want.

Over the next several chapters, I will describe the Effortless English™ system in detail, explain the philosophy behind it, and tell you why both psychology and method are important for language learning. I'll also tell you exactly how to use the system to reach your goals.

Join me and enjoy the journey. You really have nothing to fear by leaving the old education system behind. So let go of the pressure, the stress, the fear and the boredom. I promise you this natural learning system is fun, friendly, and energetic – the opposite of most school classrooms. There is no pressure – just friendly encouragement and support.

Trust me. I have helped students everywhere in the world... and now I am eager to help you. I promise I will always do my best to help you speak excellent English.



NOT “LAZY” ENGLISH

So what is Effortless English™? By “effortless” I certainly don't mean lazy English. On the contrary, “effortless English” is going to be the result of the work you put in every day. By following my system, you will make progress and achieve the result of speaking naturally and “effortlessly” (unforced, without stress, hesitation or nervousness).

In other words, “effortless” is the result, not the beginning. Your goal is to speak English effortlessly. You want the words to flow out without thinking, without translating, without worry or hesitation. You want to speak English just as you speak your own native language. Effortless speaking is the final result, and sometimes it takes a lot of effort to become effortless!

It is possible, however, to thoroughly enjoy that effort. The example I like to use is that of an athlete or artist “in the zone.” “In the zone” means performing excellently and effortlessly. When an athlete is “in the zone” at one level, they are working very hard – expending a lot of energy, pushing, totally focused. However, when they are enjoying themselves and completely focused, the activity FEELS effortless to them. There is no feeling of forcing, straining, etc.

In fact, the name Effortless English™ was inspired by the Taoist idea of “wu wei” or effortless effort. It’s a description of that flow state where you can be expending a lot of effort and yet it feels totally effortless and natural, not forced.

So the point is that Effortless English™ is not about laziness, quick fixes, or impossible scams... but rather about finding that state of “effortless effort” or “wu wei.” Effortless English means you speak English fluently. You don’t struggle as you speak. You don’t feel nervous or stressed. You don’t think about grammar rules or translations.

When you speak English effortlessly, you communicate your ideas clearly. You express your feelings powerfully. You focus on connecting with other people, not on conjugating verbs. You thoroughly enjoy the process of speaking English as you work, travel and learn.

CHAPTER 2

The Problem with Schools

My teaching experiences in different parts of the world convinced me that something is wrong with English education. Everywhere I went, it was the same situation. The students were bored, frustrated, stressed, and nervous. Most students, even after years of studying English, failed to speak the language fluently. You are not alone, because it's a global problem.

One of my students, Seiko from Japan, described this combination of failure and stress as “English trauma.” Seiko said that she hated English. She felt that learning English was boring and stressful and speaking English was even worse. In fact, the thought of speaking to a native speaker immediately made Seiko feel extremely nervous and shy. Seiko felt she had developed a psychological problem with English and had named it “English trauma.” A “trauma” is a deep wound or injury. “How sad,” I thought to myself, “that so many people now think of English as a kind of injury or mental disease.”

Throughout my teaching career I've met many students who had similar feelings about English. I discovered that Seiko was not alone. Rather, “English trauma” is a global epidemic. Though most people feel they must learn to speak English, very few seem to enjoy it. Most who learn the language struggle with the same feelings of nervousness and frustration that Seiko had.

As I encountered this problem more and more, I began to look for the root causes. I realized that before I found a solution, I needed to

understand the problem. Just as a doctor must first diagnose a disease before treating it. Think about it. What is the cause of all this misery and failure? Why do so many people fail to speak English effortlessly despite years of study? What is wrong with English education?

The first and most obvious problem I found with schools was the way in which they teach English. Most schools, everywhere in the world, use the grammar translation method. As the name implies, the focus of this method is on grammar analysis and the memorization of translated vocabulary. This method breaks English into an endless series of grammar formulas to memorize. Of course, each grammar formula has exceptions and these must be memorized too.

Schools like the grammar translation method because it appears to be serious, academic and complex. The grammar translation method fits the way schools teach most subjects — with textbooks, lectures, notes, memorization, and tests. The only problem, as you know, is that it doesn't work. In real conversations, there simply is no time to think about grammar formulas and their exceptions. The failure rate for this method, therefore, is absolutely horrible. Despite the failure of most students to speak English fluently, schools continue to use this method. This is an epic failure of our education system.

Recently, because students find the grammar translation method so boring, some schools have added “communication activities” to their curriculum. Occasionally, the teacher puts the students into pairs or groups. The students then read or repeat dialogues from a textbook. Sometimes they might answer a few questions from a worksheet. Of course, these activities are unnatural, nothing like real English conversation. Consequently, the failure rate of “communication activities” is just as bad as grammar translation.

Obviously the English teaching methods used in schools do not work. That was easy to see. I knew it. The students knew it. And many teachers know it too, though few will admit it.

However, as I continued to investigate the problem with schools, I found even deeper problems in the education system. These problems are less obvious, but in many ways far more damaging to the students. I call these problems “the hidden curriculum” because they are the hidden lessons taught by schools.

The Hidden Curriculum

Most schools, everywhere in the world, share a similar hidden curriculum. One element of this curriculum is student passivity. In schools, students are trained to be passive, not active. They sit in chairs, in rows. When they are young, they are told to be quiet and obey the teacher. As the teacher lectures, the students take notes. Later, they are told to memorize these notes in preparation for a test. The message is clear — learning is a passive activity. You listen to the teacher, you take notes, you memorize the notes.

The problem is that speaking English is not a passive activity. You must connect with other people. You must constantly ask and answer questions. You must communicate ideas, emotions, and descriptions. You must be ready for the unexpected. You must be spontaneous. You must actively interact. English is not something you passively study, it's something you do.

Related to the problem of passivity is the issue of energy. Sitting for a long time is a low-energy activity. The longer you sit, the more your energy drops. And as your energy drops, so does your concentration. What's worse, we know that some learners need physical movement in

order to learn effectively. These people are called “kinesthetic learners.” The truth is we are all “kinesthetic learners” to some degree, because we all benefit from physical movement. Schools stick us in chairs and drain our energy. Eventually, an inactive body leads to an inactive mind.

The One Right Answer Mentality

One of the greatest flaws of school education is the idea of “one right answer.” One right answer is a powerful part of the hidden curriculum. It is a result of using textbooks and tests.

In school, you are frequently taught that there is one, and only one, correct answer to a question or problem. For example, you may be asked to choose the correct verb tense on a test, or you may be taught “proper” English greetings. The hidden message is that the teacher’s way is always right.

Real life, and real English, is not this way. For example, sometimes I will tell a story using the present tense, even though the events happened in the past. This is a technique commonly used by native speakers. However, when English learners hear these stories, many are confused and upset. They are convinced that the past tense is the “right answer” and the only correct way to tell the story. Some get quite upset and even argue with me about it. These students are so convinced that there is only “one right answer” that they will argue with native speakers!

These students have been trained to believe that there is only one correct way to say things in English. The truth is there are always many ways to say the same thing. We can change verb tenses in order to change the feeling of the story. We can use different vocabulary

and different phrases. And we even break grammar rules all the time! ‘One right answer’ thinking limits and confuses English learners. Effective communication requires flexibility while the “one right answer” mentality trains students to be rigid and unimaginative.

Connected to this problem is another dangerous part of the hidden curriculum — fear of mistakes. This is one of the most negative and traumatizing messages taught in schools. How is the fear of mistakes taught? Through tests and corrections. In nearly every school all over the world, teachers regularly give quizzes and tests. The teacher asks questions and the students must provide the one right answer. Of course, the one right answer is always the teacher’s answer.

What happens if the student provides a different answer? They are punished with a lower score. Students are smart, and they quickly understand that in school, mistakes are bad and must be avoided. They also understand that truth is unimportant and the best way to succeed is to simply give the answer that the teacher wants. Even worse is when a student, already feeling nervous, tries to speak English with the whole class listening. They are just learning, so of course they will make mistakes. When the teacher corrects these mistakes, the student is embarrassed and becomes even more nervous. Eventually, most students try to avoid speaking English because the situation is so painful.

By punishing and correcting mistakes, schools punish risk taking. Little by little, they train students to avoid risk and avoid doing anything they can’t do perfectly. Yet there is no perfection with English speaking. Even native speakers make mistakes. We make grammar mistakes. We mispronounce words. We forget vocabulary words. It doesn’t matter, because we are focused on communicating, not on tests and grades.

Of course, the fear of mistakes goes far beyond English class. After years of school, most people learn to avoid risk in most parts of their life. School trains them to be passive, rigid, timid, and obedient. This not only hurts your English speaking, it also harms your career and limits your success in all areas of life. Fortune favors the bold. Those who are active, flexible, and passionate are the ones who achieve the greatest success in life. The passive and obedient rarely live their dreams.

You will make many mistakes as you improve your English speaking. There is no need to be upset by this. The truth is, most native speakers don't care. They don't care if you make grammar mistakes. They just want to communicate with you. They want to share thoughts, ideas and feelings. They want to communicate with you as a human being, not as an "English student." To communicate effectively, you must forget the idea of perfection and learn to be flexible.

The Dirty Secret of English Teaching

If the hidden curriculum is so bad, why do schools and teachers continue to follow it? The truth about our education system is that the curriculum exists to benefit the schools, not the students. Teachers use these methods because they are easier for the teacher, not because they are good for the student. The hidden curriculum creates passive students. It creates obedient students. Passive and obedient students are easier to control, making life easier for teachers and school administrators.

Textbooks, for example, make the teacher's job much easier. By using a textbook, the teacher doesn't have to plan new lessons for every class. Planning lessons is hard work, and a textbook makes it much easier. The

teacher can simply follow the textbook with minimum effort. Many teachers are little more than textbook readers. Every day they read the textbook to their students, slavishly following the lessons. In my opinion, they can barely be called “teachers” at all. Perhaps we should call them “textbook readers” instead.

Another benefit of textbooks, for the schools, is that they standardize learning. By using a textbook, the school ensures that every English class is learning exactly the same thing. School officials like this because it makes testing and ranking students easier. Schools are like factories, the bosses want everything to be the same.

The same is true for tests and grades. These provide little to no benefit to English learners. In fact, as we have discussed, tests and grades increase stress and create a fear of making mistakes. Tests and grades are a primary cause of “English trauma.” On the other hand, tests and grades are a powerful tool of control for teachers. When students fear bad grades, they obey the teacher more. They learn that the teacher is always right, because if they don’t agree with the teacher’s answer they are punished with lower scores.

Grades are a means of ranking students. Most teachers and administrators are focused on ranking students rather than helping all succeed. In many schools, the official policy is that a certain percentage of students in every class must get poor grades, a certain percentage must get “medium level” grades, and only a small percentage can be given excellent grades. In other words, the system is designed to create failure for a large number of students.

While working at a university in Thailand, I was told directly by my boss that too many of my students had high scores. My boss insisted that I fail more students in my class. I was shocked and angry. I quit

the job rather than purposely fail dedicated students. Sadly, this mentality of “designing for failure” is present in most school everywhere in the world. Schools benefit from ranking and controlling students.

The grammar translation method also benefits the teacher but not the student. By teaching grammar rules, the teacher can simply lecture from the textbook. Because linguistics is a complicated subject, the teacher appears knowledgeable and thus establishes a position of superiority over the students. Even if the teacher is a non-native speaker with terrible English ability, he or she can pretend to be an expert by teaching complex grammar from a book. The shocking truth is that many non-native English teachers, in fact, speak English very poorly. By focusing on grammar they disguise their inability to speak well.

What about communication activities? Surely they are designed to help students. Actually, they are not. These activities, as we discussed previously, are unnatural. They are nothing like a real conversation, and thus do not prepare students to have real conversations. However, communication activities are great for teachers. The teacher puts the students into pairs or groups and asks them to follow a textbook activity. Often, the students simply read a written dialogue from the book or answer pre-written questions from the book. The advantage for the teacher is that once such an activity is started, the teacher can rest and do nothing. While the students go through the textbook activity, the teacher relaxes. It’s a secret among English teachers that communication activities are a great way to waste time and avoid work.

One particularly horrible version of communication activities is the use of movies. Used correctly, movies can be a powerful English learning tool. Most teachers, however, simply use movies as a way to waste time. They put in a movie, turn out the lights, and push play. For the

remainder of the class, the teacher happily does nothing. The students are usually happy, too, because watching a movie is far more interesting than grammar, even if they can't understand most of the film.

Passive Low Energy Benefits the Teacher

Finally, let's look at the low energy situation in most schools. From childhood, students are forced to sit for hours, motionless in chairs. They are told to be quiet and obedient. By adulthood, most people are thoroughly trained. They accept passive lectures and low energy as a normal part of learning.

Why would schools and teachers want low energy? Again, because low energy students are easier to manage. A teacher must work much harder with curious, energetic students. Sadly, most teachers prefer the easy way. It's much easier for them to lecture quietly to passive students.

The truth is that many teachers are tired and stressed. Because of this, they constantly look for ways to make their own job easier. Their first concern is not the students. They are not obsessively focused on getting better results for the learners. Rather, they just want to get through their workday as easily as possible. There are many reasons for this situation, but the end result for the student is boredom, frustration, and poor results.

This is the ugly truth of education. This is the reason you cannot speak English well, despite years of study. This is the reason you find English to be stressful, difficult, and boring. This is the cause of English trauma. This is the source of the problem.

Happily, there is a solution. The Internet has made independent learning easy for all. No matter where you live or what you do, it is

possible to master spoken English without schools. All you need is an Internet connection!

In the next chapter, I will introduce the solution to English trauma. You will learn how to heal and how to finally get the results you want with English speaking.