

Using Audio Journals to Exercise Spoken English

What is an audio journal and why is it useful?

Audio journaling is a technique you can use to practice and assess your speaking skills. You can record yourself, then listen to the recording and evaluate your language. Audio journaling is a flexible and convenient way to develop spoken English outside of the classroom.

How do you start audio journaling?

- Establish a specific language goal. This goal should be very focused, e.g., improving pronunciation for clearer comprehensibility, recording daily for continuous exercise of your language, etc.
 - Choose a topic and record yourself speaking for 2 - 3 minutes. Common topics include discussing your research or summarizing something you previously read, watched, or learned in class.
 - Listen to the recording. Depending on your goal, there are different aspects of language to assess within your recording (see three below). You may want to record yourself a second time after listening.
1. **Robust Fluency:** Record an audio journal entry, then identify any of the following:
 - **Lack of redundant language usage**, such as rewording, synonyms, paraphrasing, etc. Express concepts using different words rather than those written in your textbook.
 - Example: *Syntax is the set of principles that govern the structure of sentences in a language. In other words, these principles outline how a speaker constructs a sentence.*
 - **Overuse of jargon/technical terms** while talking about concepts from your field. Reword and simplify the concept as if you are explaining it to someone outside of your field.
 - Example: *Sodium chloride is soluble. That is, it dissolves in water.*
 - **Unclear, disconnected ideas** within the audio journal entry. Use linking and organizing language to explicitly give an overview, make transitions, give examples, or highlight key concepts.
 - Example: *There are two benefits to this research... First... For example... Let me say that again....*
 2. **Grammar:** Build an awareness of frequent grammar errors by analyzing your recording. There are three methods to monitor grammar errors in your audio journal entry:
 - A. **Pause** the recording and immediately correct the error aloud.
 - B. **Transcribe** your speech and make grammar corrections in writing.
 - C. **Rerecord** the entry with conscious avoidance of errors.

Common grammar errors:

- ✗ Incorrect subject-verb agreement
 - Example: *The results of the experiment **is** interesting.*
- ✗ Wrong verb tense
 - Example: *Yesterday I **walk** to my office in the rain.*
- ✗ Omission or insertion of incorrect article

- *There is event in the library this afternoon.*
 - *Shake hands with new guests to show **the** respect.*
 - ✖ Count or non-count noun errors
 - *The folder contains many **document** I need to save.*
 - *We have ordered new office equipments.*
 - ✖ Vague pronoun reference
 - Example: *Take the battery out of the device to fix **it**.*
3. **Pronunciation:** Incomprehensible spoken English is often too monotone, too choppy, and too fast for the listener to hear important words. Improve comprehensibility by practicing a variety of speech techniques.
- **For clear speed:**
 - **Slow down** for listener ease and comfort.
 - **Pause** between thought groups.
 - **For emphatic word stress:**
 - Say content words **louder** than function words.
 - **Lengthen** the vowel in the stressed syllable of the important word.
 - Use a **higher pitch** on the stressed syllable of the important word.
 - **Pause** before or after important words.

Content words: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, question words, etc.
Function words: pronouns, prepositions, articles, “to be” verbs, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, etc.

Continue improving pronunciation by using the following methods:

- A. Listen for key words that were not emphasized in your audio journal entry. Pause the recording and immediately say the words louder, with longer vowel sounds, or with a higher pitch.
- B. Identify thought groups in your audio journal entry and decide if the pauses between the thought groups are long enough. Take a deep breath between thought groups.
- C. Transcribe your speech and identify content words that should be emphasized as well as unnecessary pausing. Rerecord the audio journal entry with these pronunciation edits.
- D. Find a video (e.g., TED Talks) of a speaker with comprehensible pronunciation. While watching the video, use the transcripts to identify the speaker’s stressed words and pausing. Record yourself mimicking the speaker and compare and contrast the speaker’s pronunciation to your own.

Repeated and sustained exercise of your spoken English will develop your language proficiency, so start your audio journal today!

Gilbert, J. B. (2014). *Clear speech: Pronunciation and listening comprehension in North American English*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Murphy Paul, A. (2012, April 04). *How to Speak Like a Native*. Retrieved from <https://ideas.time.com/2012/04/04/how-to-speak-like-a-native/>