

# Finding time to study outside of class: Part 1

Stacey Hughes



Our adult learners may find it hard to find time to study outside of class time. Adults tend to have many demands on their time - their jobs, their families, their social life or community activities. Similarly, English may be a subject they are studying alongside other university subjects, so they may have to prioritize those.

As teachers, we know how important it is for students to spend some time outside of class reviewing what they've learned, practising language or even just getting some exposure

to English. If they want to make progress, they need more contact with English than class time alone can give them. However, we also understand that for many adults free time is a luxury they don't have.

The trick is to find ways to integrate learning English into everyday activities. Adults may not have much extra time to spend, but they can certainly study English while doing the things they have to do. When I was a student, I had a part-time job as a waitress. I remember at the time we had a new dishwasher – a young man from another country who was either a student or a recent immigrant. At the beginning of each shift, he would take a page out of his dictionary and tape it up above the sink where he rinsed the dishes before putting them into the dishwasher. As he worked, he read the page, repeating it over and over to try to memorise the words. I remember being impressed at how determined he was to learn English.

Although I don't think that young dishwasher had the best of strategies – he could have learned words by topic, for example, instead of a random list from the dictionary page – he had a brilliant way to combine his obligations with study. It is with him in mind that I have collated this list of ways to study outside of class.

Here is a list of activities learners can do as they go about their daily lives. Give this list to your students...

## 1. Learn while you commute

**Apps:** There are a number of apps and resources that you can use on the train or bus to revise or learn vocabulary and phrases. Try the ones below:

- **Duolingo** – this is a popular app for learning a number of languages and is not bad for lower levels and general English.
- **Learn the Oxford 3000** – this app helps you learn the 3000 most important words to learn in English. It focuses on their meaning, usage and pronunciation. It enables you to test yourself on them too.
- **Oxford English Vocabulary Trainer** – this app is more sophisticated than most because you can choose your word list from either your OUP course book or the integrated multilingual Oxford dictionary. It's adaptive so you can devise exercises to help you learn and improve your vocabulary. The app gives feedback on the grammar, spelling, meaning and usage of a word so you can improve your overall understanding – that is, not just the meaning but the overall usage.
- **Headway phrase-a-day** – If you enjoy learning functional phrases, this app is for you!
- **Say it** – this app focuses on improving pronunciation. It allows you to listen to words, repeat them and record yourself. You can then compare your pronunciation to the original using the apps audio-visual feedback. To find out more about OUP apps available, go to [www.oup.com/elt/fingertips](http://www.oup.com/elt/fingertips).



**Graded reader e-books:** Do you drive? Listen to graded reader e-books or CDs. Make sure you choose the right level – for this type of extensive listening, you should choose a reader that is slightly lower than your level. You don't want to struggle to understand. It should be enjoyable! To test your level, use the free **How Good is your English** app. This app links to the popular Bookworms series of fiction and non-fiction books. The professional narration in these books means that you will not only hear good models of English, but you will also be transported into the story!

To find out more about the **How Good is your English**, go to the app store or [www.oup.com/elt/fingertips](http://www.oup.com/elt/fingertips).

**Satellite Navigation:** OK, you don't need satellite navigation to get home, but set it to English to practise your listening skills.

**Music:** Stick on your favourite English song and sing along! Print out the lyrics when you get home so you know the words even better the next time.

## 2. Learn while you do what you normally do

**Shopping:** Write your shopping list in English. As you put items into the basket, silently 'talk' to yourself – *"I'm buying a courgette. It's green. I'm going to chop it up and stir fry it with olive oil."*

**News:** Watch international news in your own language, then watch it again in English. The stories are likely to be similar, so you will be able to understand them better.



**Record yourself:** Dictate your 'to-do' list in English and record it or use Siri on your iPhone to take a note. Here's an example: *"After work I have to get petrol, pick up some more coffee, milk and bread. I have to call Silvia and ask her to look after the kids on Saturday. I have to answer my sister's email. I need to check that Jose's uniform is clean for the match tomorrow. Oh, I have to iron some shirts. Check to see if there is a note from Jose's teacher about the homework for next week."*

**Practice mindfulness techniques:** While you go about your daily routine, talk to yourself (silently if you are worried about others hearing you). For example: *"I'm brushing my teeth. The toothpaste is minty. I'm getting dressed."*

**Listen while you work:** Find a podcast and listen to it while you are cooking dinner or cleaning the house. There are lots of places on the internet to find and download podcasts. Try some of these:

- **ESL: Listening: Podcasts:** <http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Listening/Podcasts/>  
(follow one of the 50+ links to find a huge number of podcasts for students. Click on *For Native Speakers (57)* for advanced level podcasts.)
- **Podcasts in English:** <http://www.podcastsinenglish.com/>
- **ESL Pod:** (great for lower levels!)  
[https://www.eslpod.com/eslpod\\_blog/what-is-esl-podcast/](https://www.eslpod.com/eslpod_blog/what-is-esl-podcast/)
- **From our own correspondent:** available on iTunes or here:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02nrtpm/episodes/downloads>
- **NPR podcasts:** <http://www.npr.org/podcasts/>

**Part 2 of Stacey's *Finding Time to study outside of class* will be featured in the August issue of *Teaching Adults*.**



*Stacey Hughes is a teacher trainer for OUP. She taught adult learners in many different contexts: EAP, BE, EFL, ESL and exam courses, groups and 1:1 in Poland, Italy, the UK and the US. She also has some experience of teaching young learners, including primary French and beginner Spanish. Stacey was also a teacher trainer for Trinity College London CertTESOL in Italy and the UK, and was an oral examiner for Cambridge Proficiency in Poland. She has written a number of articles for the [OUP blog](#) and [Teaching Adults Newsletter](#). Stacey gives talks and workshops around the world – both face-to-face and via webinar.*