



Learning English - Outside of Class

Students at Konstanz University - if you want to learn some more English outside of class, here are some ideas. Even though everyone can now have access to real live English via the Internet, there are one or two other interesting options, with particular reference to the University, that you might like to consider.

Please keep in mind that there are basically two different kinds of 'learning'. One is when you focus consciously on some aspect of the language e.g. the meaning of the present perfect in English. The other is when you are concentrating more on getting the message of the text (whether written or spoken).

Some Ideas

- A Tandem partner. The idea is that two people with different languages get together and help each other learn the other's language. You don't pay, you don't actually 'teach', you don't hold classes, you help each other learn. In this case, if you want to learn more English, you look for a native speaker of English who wants to learn your language (German or whatever). The Tandem Team in the Sprachlehrinstitut will help you find a partner. Contact them in room E 715.

- In the Selbstlernzentrum (Self-Access centre) of the Sprachlehrinstitut you can use CDs, DVDs, videos and the accompanying books to help you learn specific things. There are, for example, materials to help you prepare for the IELTS Exam or the Cambridge Proficiency Exams.

- In the Selbstlernzentrum you can also sit down and enjoy feature films, documentaries, TV soaps from the Institute's collection – there is a wide selection available, from all around the English-speaking world. Watch whatever interests you. Relax, enjoy, try to get the message, and you will be surprised how much English stays in your mind. Find a favourite feature film and watch it several times over.

You can also watch English language television in the Selbstlernzentrum, for example BBC World, which has a wide range of topics, including news broadcasts. If you are relatively up-to-date on current affairs in your mother

tongue, it isn't difficult to understand the English version of world news and learn the equivalent vocabulary. That is a really effective way of practising listening/viewing comprehension and enlarging vocabulary.

- The Mediothek of the university also has a range of materials for learning English (books, videos, CDs, DVDs). You can use them there, or take them home with you. However, you do need to know what you want and you will probably need some help with selecting suitable materials e.g. do you want an intermediate level course book focussing on writing skills, or some audiotapes with good stories as background while you do the washing up.

- In the library there are newspapers (and journals) in English from several English-speaking countries. They have a lot to offer. For world news, current events, take a quarter of an hour, regularly, to skim through one of them. As said above, if you are relatively up-to-date on current events in your mother tongue, it isn't difficult to understand the English version and learn the equivalent vocabulary.

What I personally find really interesting is when an English-language newspaper reports on events or issues in Germany, as that way you get to know how to express in English the things that are important for you in Germany.

Newspapers offer much more than the news. 'Scotland on Sunday' for example, which you will find on the newspaper rack, has several supplements including sport, lifestyle, the property market (with beautiful pictures of castles for sale). Taking a quick look at these means you learn about the culture of the country, and you learn the English at the same time.

- In the library there is much more than just the classics of English Literature. You will find adventure, crime fiction, thrillers, historical novels, science fiction, children's fiction – everything. Find a story that you like, and you will learn a lot. For example, if you like climbing, try the novel 'Electric Brae'; if you like American football, try 'Playing for Pizza'. In novels you will find specialist vocabulary, but it is packed into a good story so it becomes more easily understandable and learnable. For some suggested titles see:

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- There is a steadily increasing number of good books which have been turned into good films. You could read the book, watch the film, read the book again, or vice versa. For a list of books with film adaptations, all available in the library, see:

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- When you are preparing for a stay abroad, listening to the accent of the country you want to go to is quite useful. I kept my own databank of English language videos in the university, so that students could choose according to topic, genre, regional accent etc. (Not every film made in Australia actually has Australian English; not every film made in Scotland actually has Scottish English and so on.) Since this databank is no longer available I am offering below just one or two feature films with a particular regional accent:

Australia: Looking for Alibrandi

New Zealand: Angel at my Table; Whale Rider

Ireland: The Snapper; The Magdalene Sisters

South Africa: Red Dust; The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency

Scotland: Just a Kiss; Young Adam

- Buy yourself a magazine in English from time to time, the kind of magazine that reflects your interests or hobbies. After all, if you love fashion, cars, football or whatever and know lots about it in German, you are going to learn the English words more easily when you read a fashion/car/football magazine in English. Seeing words in context is a much more effective way of learning than looking up words in a translation dictionary.

My basic learning-message is: we human beings are amazing detectives and can learn so much if we follow our own interests with suitable materials.

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