

Why care about English?

"Two bullets of vanilla ice-cream, please"

What is your motivation for learning English? Here are two answers from prominent Norwegians. They might help you reflect on your own experiences with the language and your skills. They might even inspire you.



Brede Hangeland:

The answer to this question may not be obvious to all students, as it is to me now. Personally, I enjoyed my English lessons at school, and despite the fact that my mother was an English teacher, it took me a long time to fully understand the importance of having good English skills.

My first encounters with the English language were endless repetitions of vocabulary and grammar, a giant puzzle that slowly fell into place. I remember how I made the leap and started talking, as best as I could, both in class at school, and on holiday abroad. You should try not to worry about possible mistakes, as nobody can learn English without making some. On the contrary, take pleasure in the laughable situations that sometimes occur. Like when a friend of mine ordered "Two bullets of vanilla ice-cream, please"!

As my English skills improved, I noticed how I no longer read the subtitles on TV. Moreover, it became increasingly rewarding to read English books and newspapers, an activity which offers great learning potential. Even though you do not understand everything immediately, the pieces fall into place as you practise. Simply put, you are in the process of learning the most important language in the world.

Today, as I write this, I have been living and playing football in England for many years. I speak English on a daily basis, and sometimes even find myself thinking in English. To me, English has been a vital skill both in my job as a football player, but also as a Norwegian living abroad. My years in England would not have been nearly as inspiring and eventful had I not known the language. Living abroad has merely made me realize the value of learning English. It is THE world language, and if you know it you will be able to communicate wherever you are.

My best advice to you, today, is to make a real attempt at learning English, thoroughly. Not only will you benefit much more from holidays and travelling, but you will have the opportunity to study and work abroad. Most importantly, you will be able to communicate with most people in the world, not only the 5 million in Norway. Consider it. Good luck!

“Bring your sneakers”

Kristin Skogen Lund:

I liked taking English at school, and was highly motivated to learn. We used to have a lot of relatives visiting from the USA, and I could never talk to them to begin with. I had picked up a single sentence from a children's book in English that had “scratch and sniff” panels, so you could smell what you were reading about. And I kept repeating to my relatives: "Something wonderful is about to happen, my nose tells me so".

When I was at school, we didn't start taking English before the age of 10, So it wasn't until we were approaching the end of middle school that we got going with it properly. I went to summer school in the USA and lived with relatives, the summer after middle school, and that is when I first became confident with the language, especially when it came to speaking. I picked up my American accent at the same time, and it has stayed with me ever since!

After high school, I traveled to Oregon, where I went to university. I thought my English was excellent before I left, and had quite a shock when I went to lectures and hardly understood a thing. The vocabulary used there was quite different from what I knew from school and it took me months of sweating over a dictionary before I felt completely comfortable. At the same time, it did me good, as the language difficulties forced me to become much more disciplined in my studies than I otherwise would have been. The very first week I was in Oregon, I was supposed to go on a day trip for new international students and the invitation said, “Bring your sneakers”. This bit of jargon was new to me, so I brought with me a bag of mini Snickers bars.

Given that it's quite common to come across unfamiliar words and phrases both in one's studies and at work, a good idea is to read books and magazines that expose you to the diversity and depth of the English language – preferably including an academic vocabulary.

Since completing my studies, I have used English a great deal. I have worked abroad and for international companies, and now, as head of the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise, I'm often required to hold presentations in English both at home and abroad. Being confident and comfortable with the language is an enormous advantage, and I am truly thankful for the experiences I had when I was younger, that got me here!

