



**RealEnglishConversations.com**

**Conversation Topic:** Get Specific & Purposeful

**Transcription:**

**Curtis:** This is the Real English Conversations Podcast.

**Amy:** Where you'll find the lessons and advice you need to be able to confidently use your English in the real world.

**Amy:** Hey, everybody, this is Amy from [realenglishconversations.com](http://realenglishconversations.com). And welcome back to the second podcast in this special series where I'm talking about something called deliberate practice, and this is a very cool concept and a powerful tool so that you can see much better results for the time that you're putting into your English.

And if you're just tuning in now and you realize that you didn't listen to the first episode of this series, I strongly recommend going back and listening to that now.

Not only is it important for you to understand the concepts that we're talking about, but there was also a really important activity that I asked everybody to do that is going to be part of this episode.

Okay, let's continue on. In the last episode, I introduced this concept called naive practice versus purposeful practice.

And if you're like most of the people that are listening to this podcast, you were probably surprised that the type of practice that you're doing falls into the category of naive practice.

The problem is when we have a very general goal or in some cases, it's just kind of a general idea of what we'd like to improve, it's very difficult for us to focus on the right types of activities that would allow us to actually make progress toward that skill.

It's kind of like saying that you'd like to improve your listening or speaking, or maybe just improve your English in general. So, you think of something that's in English, like your favorite TV show, and you spend 2 hours every night watching this TV show and you're expecting some sort of result to come out of it, and you can't even define what you think that result should be.

And although the intention behind it is good because you are trying to spend time in English, absorbing English, trying to catch something new. The truth is when you're spending time doing things like this that don't even have a specific activity that you're trying to do are going to lead to very slow progress.

So today I would like to go a little bit deeper into this concept of purposeful practice and explain a couple of the other key elements that are going to help you to really define your goals, to figure out what you're trying to improve why you're trying to improve it, and to

work backwards to find the right types of activities that can help you to really see the type of progress that's going to keep you super motivated.

If you remember back to the basketball example from the last episode where I was talking about someone that wanted to learn how to play and they had the strategy of just showing up every Sunday and playing in the game.

But then when they actually had some sort of goal, which was to not be the worst player on the team, and they started to look at the areas that they were weak in.

They identified that they needed to work on their shooting and passing skills, and then they set a goal during their practice to try to get eight out of ten shots into the net.

In this simple example, it was really easy to set a clear goal, something that you could measure and to be very specific to work toward.

And when we try to apply the same concept to language learning, of having a very clear and well-defined goal, this is a little bit more complicated.

Sure, we can take a standardized language test like IELTS or TOEFL, or maybe we can measure the words per minute that we're speaking at or the percentage of words that we're able to hear and write down with our listening.

Yes, those are statistical things that we can measure, but what's more important than having a well-defined goal, at least in my experience, is really looking at what you want to achieve. What are you wanting to be able to do in English?

And although the answer to this question isn't going to give us a very specific and well-defined answer, it's certainly going to give us a much better answer to help guide us toward the types of activities that we need to be doing in order to get the end result that we'd like to have.

Let me give you an example.

I'm going to give you a classic case. This is something that I hear all the time.

A student will come to either myself or one of our teachers, and they'll say that they want to improve their speaking, and that leads us to have to ask a lot of different questions because improving your speaking could be many different things. It could be that you're unhappy with your pronunciation, maybe your speaking fluency is bad. Maybe you're making a lot of grammatical errors and thinking too much, or maybe you're just missing vocabulary and you feel like everything that you're saying is really simple.

As you can see, there's a lot more to speaking and improving it than just saying you want to improve your speaking, there are many different areas that we can work on here.

But in order for me to get to the root of why you want to improve your speaking, I need to understand what you're using your speaking for, and typically, when this really bad speaking is happening.

So, let's pretend that you're in a meeting at work and suddenly one of your coworkers asks you a question because whatever you guys are talking about is related to the department that you're working in or a project that you're working on, and you know the answer.

And when it's your turn to speak, it feels like your mind goes blank.

All of those words that you apparently know are just nowhere to be found in your brain, and you have these long, awkward pauses while you try to piece together your answer while everybody is staring at you, and the slower you are with your fluency and the more mistakes that you're making, the more nervous you get, the worse you're speaking gets.

And all you're trying to do at this point is just to stop speaking. So, you can go back to being the quiet one in the meeting that just listens.

Anytime that I have a student tell me something like this where speaking is their main issue, and they describe this type of situation happening at their job, I start to listen to the individual things that are happening here and try to figure out the order that they're happening in.

First of all, I can tell that this person is nervous before they even start speaking.

They're nervous before they even show up to the meeting, and the whole time that they're there, they're thinking, "Please don't ask me a question, maybe I can get through this meeting without having to talk". And it's a little bit counterintuitive, but this person's problem actually isn't speaking, it's confidence.

And the reason why they're not able to remember those words is because they're so nervous going into the meeting, and every time that they need to speak, they're worried about it from the very beginning.

When your brain is in that state of mind, it doesn't work well. And the crazy thing is that this person wants to share their ideas with their coworkers. They want to speak, they want to have conversations and to enjoy their communication in English, but because their performance is so bad when they're speaking, they think that speaking is their problem where actually it comes back to confidence.

And this is the interesting thing. Most students that are trying to solve a confidence issue on their own are generally focused on improving their skills. They feel that if they improve their speaking skills, they speak with more fluency, or they speak perfectly without any errors, that they're going to have more confidence.

But as soon as we start looking at activities that can improve their confidence, to reduce their anxiety and to help them to think better when they need to communicate in English, we start to see that they're able to speak with much better fluency.

As you can see here from this example, it is super important for us to be specific about what we're trying to improve, and it was also really important for us to go quite deep into the issue to really identify the root of the problem.

Now I know that you might be thinking of this example and saying, "Amy, I would never be able to figure that out on my own, even if I thought about it all day long".

But the thing that I really want you to take away here is how much closer you can get to focusing on the right thing when you're really thinking about what you would like to be able to do with your English and trying to identify what the obstacles are that are stopping you from being able to do that.

In the last lesson, I gave you an activity, and it had a bit of a challenge.

First of all, you had to think about what you wanted to improve, then you needed to look at the ways that you were practicing that in order to improve. And then I asked you to try to think of different ways that you might be able to practice that would be more effective.

And the activity that you need to do today that's related to this lesson is to try to look at what you are trying to accomplish, what is your goal? And to really figure out. Is it specific enough?

Because it may have been difficult for you to think of good activities to do if the skill you're trying to improve or the outcome you want to have was not specific enough.

So, I want you to go back and look at what you wrote down yesterday. Is there any way that you can improve it? Can you make it a little bit more specific or clearer? Because when you do that, it's going to become more and more obvious the types of things that you need to be focusing on.

Now, last, but not least, I know that many of you didn't get around to [downloading that worksheet](#) yesterday where I was sharing how we helped Pedro to solve his listening problem.

I'm only going to give you a partial answer to keep the suspense going, and it's going to go hand in hand with what we're talking about today.

As you remember, Pedro came to us because he had a major problem with listening.

He was finding that when he was in meetings, he was unable to understand his coworkers well. And he even realized that he was missing full sentences at a time. The ways that Pedro was practicing his listening were actually pretty good.

First of all, he was using real life audio, he was listening to podcasts and radio shows, and he was even re-watching his work meetings to try to understand them better. And the other thing that was really impressive was that he was listening to the audio multiple times.

And this is the part where a well-defined goal comes in.

I want you to pretend that you're Pedro for a minute and you are given an audio that you only understand 80% of, which is perfect for you to improve your listening skills.

And your teacher says to you, you know what? I want you to come back to the next class, and you need to be able to understand 97% of this audio without reading the transcript.

And the question that you should be having right now is, how are you going to do that? What do you need to be able to do that? And that is really where the answer lies because with Pedro, he is having conversations with real people and they do not come with a transcript, which means that we need to help to develop his listening skills.

But there's something missing here, there's something that he needs to do to get to a point where let's say he's listening and he's reading and he's able to hear everything while he's reading and listening, but he's not able to hear it if he's just listening without the text.

So, we need to be able to close that gap somehow and get him to be able to understand 97% of this difficult audio.

And again, if you would like to hear the answer or see how Pedro solved his listening problem, you can [download the link to the document](#) that I have in the description area of this podcast.

So, that's it for today and I'm really excited to share something with you tomorrow. And this is actually related to my personal story and why I was stuck at a beginner level for nearly 14 years when I was trying to learn Spanish.

And I mean beginner like I couldn't have a two-minute conversation and what I did to change that, I don't want you to make the same mistake that I did, the one that kept me stuck for years and years and years.

Whatever your goals are, I want to make sure that this is happening in months and not taking years, so being sure to tune in tomorrow to listen to that podcast, it's going to be really really helpful.

And I'll see you then.