

How To Use Movies To Improve Your English

An 8-step practice method

(Updated version 2026)

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Hi, my name's Gábor and I'm an English teacher.

I made this guide to help you find some answers to this question: "*HOW can I improve my English with movies*"?

Are you an English learner who likes to watch films and wants to learn more vocabulary and improve understanding spoken English?

Do you get frustrated because you miss a lot of what is being said in films, and you only manage watching a whole movie with the subtitles on all the time?

Would you like to know **what** to do and **how** to practise to start understanding films more?

If this sounds like you, this guide might help you better understand how movies can be helpful to improve your English.

Disclaimer

This guide aims to be informative and educational. While efforts have been made to ensure the information is accurate and effective, the author accepts no responsibility for any outcomes resulting from its use, non-use, or misuse.

Can movies really improve your English?

Yes.

But there is a big difference between **watching a movie in English** and **using a movie to improve your English**.

If you are watching for entertainment, there is nothing wrong with turning on the subtitles and simply enjoying the film.

But if your goal is to improve your English listening, you need to do something different.

When you watch a film for learning, don't expect yourself to understand everything immediately. Instead, use short scenes to **listen, compare, go deeper and practise**.

The aim is not simply to find out what was said. There's more to do. Your aim is to discover why **you did or didn't understand it**.

That's where movies can become a powerful learning tool. And you'll need one very useful piece of equipment: your **remote control**.

The 8-step method

1. Choose a short dialogue scene

I recommend starting with a film that you have already seen in your first language.

Knowing the storyline means you can focus more of your attention on the language rather than trying to work out what is happening.

Choose a scene of about 1–2 minutes, preferably one with plenty of dialogue and conversational English.

2. Watch without sound

This may seem strange at first, but give it a try.

Turn the sound OFF.

Watch the scene and try to work out what the people might be saying.

What might they be talking about?

What ideas are they expressing?

How do they feel?

What might have happened?

Use the visual information to make your predictions. You can quickly write down a few ideas if you want.

3. Listen without watching

Now play the same scene again. This time, **don't watch the screen. Just listen.**

Then stop and think: **What did I understand?**

Compare what you heard with the predictions you made in Step 2. How much could you understand from the sound alone? Don't worry if the answer is "not much". That's useful information too.

4. Watch and listen without subtitles

Now watch the scene again with the sound ON, but keep the subtitles OFF.

Afterwards, think about:

How much did you understand?

What parts were unclear?

Which words or expressions do you think you missed?

If you want, repeat this step once or twice. At this point, don't try to solve every problem.

Just notice the problems.

5. Turn on the *English* subtitles

Now watch the same scene again with **English subtitles ON**.

For this first viewing, don't pause. Watch the whole scene from beginning to end and read along. Compare what you are reading with what you thought you heard. You may discover something interesting:

Some words you missed may actually be words you already know.

Note: subtitles may not always reproduce exactly what the actors say.

6. Turn on the *English* subtitles

Now go through the scene again, this time using the pause button. Stop whenever you need more time to process what you are hearing.

Look more closely at the language:

What new words or expressions do you notice?

Which ones would be useful for you?

How are familiar words pronounced?

Are there places where several words seem to run together?

Is the speaker using a pronunciation you didn't expect?

Take notes, but don't try to write down everything. **Choose language that seems useful to you.**

7. Find out WHY you didn't understand

This is an important step.

Look at the words and expressions you noted and ask yourself:

Were they genuinely new to me?

Or:

Did I already know them, but failed to recognise them when I heard them?

These are two very different problems. Perhaps you knew the vocabulary, but:

- the words weren't pronounced as clearly as you expected
- familiar words sounded different in fluent speech
- background music or sound effects made listening harder

The point is not simply to find the correct words. **Try to understand what made them difficult to understand.**

8. Listen again until it becomes familiar

Now go back to the same scene. Listen to it a few more times. Your goal is to make the language increasingly familiar and easier to recognise.

Then watch the scene again and notice how different it feels from your first attempt.

You may find that something which initially sounded like an unintelligible stream of sounds has become much clearer. That's the **result** you are looking for.

And now you can choose another short scene and repeat the process.

Bonus tip: Come back to it later

After about a week, come back to the same scene and watch it once. You may be surprised by how much more you understand.

The scene hasn't changed. You've simply had more time to process and consolidate what you worked on.

One final tip

You don't have to understand every word in a movie to have good English. Real-life listening doesn't work that way either.

The goal is not perfect comprehension of every dialogue line. The goal is to gradually become better at understanding **more English, more naturally, with less effort.**

So choose a short scene, get your remote control ready, and start exploring.

A note about this guide

I originally created this practice plan several years ago to help my learners use movies more effectively for English practice.

This 2026 edition has been revised and updated based on further questions, teaching experience and feedback from learners.

It is intended for English learners who already have some knowledge of English and want to use authentic films and series more effectively as a learning resource.

Good luck, and have fun learning!

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