

Learning English with Apps

Here are some free apps to explore. They are roughly grouped by skill. However, most skills overlap. Many of these are available for both Android and Apple, so check both tip sheets. Paid upgrades are often available.

If you find other helpful apps, please email your Rural Routes regional advisor so we can update the tip sheet.

Apps for Android

Listening

- **ESL Listening Quizzes (by Essential Studio):** CLB 1–4. CLB 5–8 would find the Academy level useful, but this requires paying for the Pro upgrade. The site has short conversations with transcripts and five to 10 multiple-choice questions that require students to recognize information from a passage and identify it in different words in the question. It provides good practice for listening.
- **Oxford 500 English Conversation (by AT Production):** CLB 1–8. This app includes dialogues with transcripts. The dialogues become progressively more difficult and longer, and introduce more abstract vocabulary and idioms. Conversation 125 is about CLB 4, recorded at near-native speed. There are cloze activities that are very simple, often four blanks in a 1.5-minute conversation, with often the same word repeatedly missing.
- **TED Talks:** Also for Apple. CLB 5–8. These are great talks on many different topics, including science, art, philosophy, and more from speakers around the world. The talks range from six to 60 minutes in length. Learners can download transcripts for reading and listening, and to develop vocabulary and clarify comprehension.

Speaking

- **ESL Fast Speak (by Ron Lee):** CLB 1–6. Easy conversations with two speakers, with transcripts. The topics include daily life, school life, transportation, health, sports, and safety. This app is a good starting point for listening, reading, and speaking. The section “Speak English Fast” has conversations at near-native speed and introduces more abstract vocabulary. In the classroom, learners could practise the conversations with a partner, learn the dialogues, and role-play.
- **Duolingo:** Also for Apple. CLB 1–6. This is a really good, all-purpose app for learning sentences, grammar, and vocabulary with pictures. Features include regular review of vocabulary and grammar, and listening and repeating. Learners have the option to record their voice and compare what they said to a native speaker, and then the app evaluates the learner’s pronunciation. Learners can take tests as they go along, and there are advanced levels if they already know the language. For higher-level students, this app is useful for reducing accent and improving intelligibility.
- **Phrasebook (by Bravolol).** Also for Apple. Pre-CLB–CLB 6. This is an all-purpose language-learning app for phrases and vocabulary. It is similar to Duolingo, Busuu, Babbel, and Memrise.

What are apps?

Apps are applications, or small pieces of software, that run on a mobile phone, computer, or other electronic device. They can be downloaded from the App Store onto a cellphone or tablet, and many of them are free of charge.

Why use apps?

- Apps help learners control their own learning and allow them to have a language resource with them at all times.
- Most learners have mobile phones even if they don’t have reliable Internet at home or don’t have a home computer.
- Phones have a 24/7 connection to the Internet that allows learners to access the World Wide Web.
- With groups of learners, apps can be used to create a language lab in any meeting room that has an Internet connection. Teachers can allot time for individual practice with the app and circulate to observe, or they can use the time to work one-on-one with learners.

How do learners find apps?

- New apps are constantly being developed, so learners can type keywords like “ESL,” “learn English,” or “English pronunciation” into the Search bar to find a selection of apps.
- Then learners can screen the apps, try them out, and find the ones that best fit their learning needs.
- As learners’ language needs change, they can search for new apps.

Reading

- **ESL Fast Read (by Ron Lee):** CLB 1–5. This app provides short reading passages (50 words) in the present tense, with sentences four to six words long for beginners, progressing to about 200-word readings for intermediate learners. Passages are recorded for listening and reading along, and there are also vocabulary lists, sentence dictation, and cloze activities. This app would be useful for in-class activities as well as for individual self-study.
- **Google Translate:** Also for Apple. Literacy learners and all CLB levels. Very useful in multi-level classes. Learners can write, speak, or photograph text for the app to translate into English, or from English into their L1. The app translates between 103 languages by typing, translates 52 languages without an Internet connection, uses a camera to translate text instantly in 30 languages, and provides two-way instant speech translation in 32 languages. **Teachers and tutors recommending this app to learners need to give explicit instructions about plagiarism and what that means, especially for CLB 3 and above.**

Writing and IELTS Test

- **IELTS Skills – Free (by Macmillan Education):** Also for Apple. CLB 5 and up. Learners can practise reading, writing, listening, and speaking in exercises similar to what they will meet on the IELTS test.

Grammar

- **Murphy’s English Grammar in Use (by Cambridge University Press):** Also for Apple. CLB 1–6. This app gives learners practise with grammar structures. The structure is explained, along with examples, and there are practice exercises. Activities include listening to short talks, and then answering multiple-choice questions using the grammar point or filling in the blanks. The app provides good practice for accuracy with tenses.

Vocabulary Development

- **Photoscan (Google Inc.):** Also for Apple. This app scans photographs and removes glare, so photos can be used in flashcards or other documents.
- **VerbBusters Phrasal Verbs (by VerbBusters):** Also for Apple. CLB 3–8. This app includes 250 phrasal verbs with meanings in flashcard format, as well as example sentences. A search function allows learners to look up phrasal verbs.
- **Quizlet Learn with Flashcards (by Quizlet):** Also for Apple. Pre-CLB–CLB 8. Teachers and learners can create their own flashcards to learn vocabulary. Functions include learn, write, match, and test.
- **WordReference.com Dictionaries (by WordReference.com):** Also for Apple. Pre-CLB–CLB 8. This app is an online dictionary that translates between many languages. It includes a forum where learners can post questions and native-speaker users around the world can help find the right translation.
- **AnkiApp Flashcards (by Admium Corp.):** Also for Apple. Pre-CLB–CLB 8. Learners can study vocabulary whenever they have a minute and access free, pre-made content or create their own.

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