




*The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal*  
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Title	 <b>VOA Learning English</b> <i>VOA Learning English</i> <a href="https://learningenglish.voanews.com/">(https://learningenglish.voanews.com/)</a>
Owner	Broadcasting Board of Governors
Platform	Web
Minimum System Requirements	Internet connection, internet browser, speaker
Target Language	English
Cost	Free

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Gone are the days when language educators had to sort for hours through libraries, bookstores, and even newsstands for authentic English learning materials. The internet, with its vast array of multimedia information available at a moment's notice, has now made such efforts nearly "archaic." And yet, the convenience the internet seems to offer also comes with a price not easily discernible at first. Language educators still have to sift through hundreds of thousands of page results to find and select the material they deem most beneficial to their language-driven purposes. No doubt, looking for language materials that are "just right" demands much time and effort. To that end, the *VOA Learning English* website by Voice of America radio network provides a welcome alternative we wish to explore here in more detail. Laconically expressed, the site offers visitors an opportunity to test their level of English in 15 minutes or less. Visitors have access to a total of 82 English lessons certified American English teachers designed. Combined, these lessons offer a platform where learners can ask questions (and teachers answer them), the availability of short video explaining a word or term used in news stories, and a variety of authentic material in the form of global news notwithstanding. Best of all, available content information is provided free of charge.

Furthermore, users do not need to go through the hassle of creating an account or following mundane tutorials. Once users enter the main page, six distinct options become immediately available: *About Learning English*, *Beginning Level*, *Intermediate Level*, *Advanced Level*, *US History*, and *Video*, all lined up neatly at the top of the screen—the navigation bar. Users can then click on the navigation bar or scroll down to access the Beginning Level, Intermediate Level, or Advanced level. Each component is listed with a clear title and supporting image. The English Lessons are considered as Beginning Level and are divided into *Let's Learn English Level 1* (52 lessons) and *Let's Learn English Level 2* (30 lessons). Users can equally access *Test Your English*, *Ask a Teacher*, *The Day in Photos*, and *News Words* therein.

As stated above, *VOA Learning English* courses are designed by certified American English teachers and adhere to a unified format. Each lesson begins with a video following the adventures of one Anna Matteo in Washington, DC, followed by a brief written summary. Scrolling down the webpage, users first encounter a video detailing the movement of the lips while speaking and another video with the same sentences, albeit at a slower pace to focus on pronunciation. Next, the users come across an audio player with a full transcription to model a basic conversation depicted in the video lesson. Following the video and audio input and practice, users can then work on a writing task. Equally, they can review the lesson's learning strategies before taking the listening quiz. Finally, users have access to a list of new vocabulary along with the corresponding definitions. Adding to the users' convenience, *VOA Learning English* provides free materials to teachers in the form of lesson plans and activity sheets. A poll and comment section for feedback is also provided.

The screenshot shows the VOA Learning English website interface. The top navigation bar includes 'ABOUT LEARNING ENGLISH', 'BEGINNING LEVEL', 'INTERMEDIATE LEVEL', 'ADVANCED LEVEL', 'US HISTORY', and 'VIDEO'. The main content area is titled 'Beginning Level' and features two lesson cards: 'Lesson 45: This Land is Your Land' and 'Lesson 1: Budget Cuts'. Below these are sections for 'Test Your English' (20 questions, 15 minutes), 'Ask a Teacher', 'The Day in Photos', and 'News Words'. A right-hand sidebar displays 'Lesson 1: Welcome!' with a video player and a list of related content.

The screenshot displays the 'WORDS AND THEIR STORIES' section of the VOA Learning English website. The page features a grid of article cards, each with a date, a title, and a small image. The articles are:

- July 20, 2019: What Happens with 'Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen?'
- July 18, 2019: What Happens with 'Too Many Cooks in the Kitchen?'
- July 13, 2019: 'Butterfly Effect' and Chain Reactions
- July 12, 2019: 'Butterfly Effect' & Other Chain Reactions
- July 06, 2019: 'A Short Leash' Not Just for Dogs
- July 05, 2019: 'A Short Leash' Not Just for Dogs
- June 29, 2019: How Can You Be 'Beside Yourself?'
- June 28, 2019: How Can You Be 'Beside Yourself?'

The page also includes a search bar, social media icons, and a calendar widget.

The lessons provided in *VOA Learning English* primarily support the tenets of the audio-lingual methodology wherein users listen to and repeat the materials presented. Even so, with the use of multimedia, users are exposed to contexts surrounding the prescribed dialogue using both video and acting cues. As there is no time limit for accessing the material, users are thus given the freedom they require to repeat and learn the materials as they see fit and according to their own learning style and pace. Accordingly, *VOA Learning English* is most suitable for beginner to intermediate level learners who seek opportunities to practice their listening and speaking skills in authentic contexts. Moreover, *VOA Learning English* provides additional learning resources that go well beyond English lessons only. As previously noted, users have unlimited access to current, authentic global news that helps them learn English as they read and listen to the news. News articles are sorted by the complexity of the sentences used. *Intermediate Level News* articles encompass 500 words or less per news story. Featuring one idea per sentence, these news articles are organized into four categories: *Health and Lifestyle*, *Science and Technology*, *Arts and Culture*, and *As It Is*. Conversely, *Advanced Level News* articles contain more than 500 words per news story, provide an array of stories that are much more abstract and complex in nature such as educational topics and trends, and employ more complex sentences which seek to challenge the knowledge base of advanced English learners. Both categories—Intermediate Level News and Advanced Level News—provide new vocabulary and meaning information at the end of the articles, and even include audio akin to a text-to-speech reader. Moreover, the website features videos explaining common expressions, terms, and grammar. Among them, the categories of *English in A Minute*, *English @ the Movies*, *Everyday Grammar*, and *Words and Their Stories* are easily found.

In sum, the *VOA Learning English* website reviewed herein includes a trove of information and resources waiting to be discovered and utilized by learners and educators alike. It is continuously updated, provides free, unlimited access to its visitors, and, perhaps, most importantly, requires minimum digital knowledge or skill to navigate. *VOA Learning English*, no doubt, makes learning English language easy and helps learners expand their vocabulary, improve their speaking skills, and even advance their ability to communicate their daily needs and wants for school, life, and work in contexts befitting natural language use. In more ways than one, the English teaching materials available are “just right” for the audience they seek to attract and, unlike other sources available on the internet, require minimum investments of time and effort. In light of the many language benefits already reviewed herein, we wholeheartedly recommend its use to language professionals (and students) who seek to optimize their resources, one website at a time. Adding *VOA Learning English* to the select list of websites to keep is a wise decision indeed not soon forgotten.

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