

You know more than you think

Why you freeze before the first word — and how to stop

WHAT THIS LESSON IS ABOUT

Not about grammar.

Not about vocabulary.

Just the one thing that stops you from starting — and three ways to break through it.

THE REAL PROBLEM

Here is what happens. You know what you want to say. But the moment you open your mouth, everything disappears.

This is not an English problem. It is a starting problem.

The longer you wait, the harder it gets. The first word is the hardest. After that, the rest usually comes.

The real issue is that most learners wait until they feel ready. But that feeling never comes in a real conversation. You have to start before you feel ready.

KEY IDEA

Starting is a skill. You can practise it. And the more you do it, the shorter the freeze gets.

THREE WAYS TO START

1. The filler opener

Native speakers do not start with a perfect sentence. They buy themselves a second.

'So...' 'Well...' 'Actually...' 'Right, so...'

These words signal that you are about to speak. They give your brain one second to catch up. Use them.

LISTEN AND REPEAT

"So, the thing is..."

[PAUSE]

"Well, I was thinking..."

[PAUSE]

"Actually, I wanted to say..."

[PAUSE]

"Right, so I think..."

[PAUSE]

2. Start with what you know

You do not need the perfect word. Start with a word you are sure of.

If you cannot think of 'exhausted,' say 'very tired.' If you cannot think of 'opportunity,' say 'good chance.'

The idea matters more than the word. Say the idea. The vocabulary comes later.

LISTEN AND REPEAT

"I am very tired — not exhausted."

[PAUSE]

"It was a good chance for me — not opportunity."

[PAUSE]

"He seemed really happy — not ecstatic."

[PAUSE]

3. Say the first part out loud

Do not wait for the full sentence to form in your head. Start the sentence and let the rest follow.

'The reason I think this is...' — and then finish.

'What I am trying to say is...' — and then finish.

These openers carry you into the sentence. They work because once you start, stopping feels harder than continuing.

LISTEN AND REPEAT

"The reason I think this is..."

[PAUSE]

"What I am trying to say is..."

[PAUSE]

"The thing I noticed is..."

[PAUSE]

"What happened was..."

[PAUSE]

PRACTICE

Read each situation. Pause. Try to say something before reading the suggestion.

#	Sentence	Answer
1	You want to say you disagree but cannot think of the word 'disagree.'	<i>Start: 'I am not sure I see it that same way...'</i>
2	Someone asks your opinion. Your mind goes blank.	<i>Start: 'So, I think...' then finish.</i>
3	You want to explain something complicated.	<i>Start: 'What I mean is...' then one simple sentence.</i>
4	You are nervous and start to freeze.	<i>Say 'Well...' out loud. Then anything. The pause is broken.</i>

5 You forgot a word mid-sentence.

Say *'the thing that...'* or *'you know, like...'* and keep going.

TODAY'S SMALL ACTION

Today, start one sentence out loud with 'So...' or 'Well...' before you know what comes next. Say it in English. Notice what happens after.

Want more practice? The members edition has 20 starting phrase pairs, 10 error corrections, and a self-check quiz.