

Headline	Master it = World's best		
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Description	The writer pointed out that good English takes practice and mastering it requires a lot of conscious effort. It doesn't come naturally, even if you are from an English-speaking background. The key to writing and speaking good English is daily practice.		

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ON WHY GOOD ENGLISH MATTERS

Mastering it = World's best



MELISSA HENG

SINGAPOREANS have everything – comfortable lives, good job prospects and strong family support. Everything, except the right mix of **verbs and tenses**.

I should know.

I have interviewed newsmakers for the past 10 years and taught journalism for the last three. Be they industry movers or fresh-faced teenagers, few can claim mastery of English, even as they proudly call English their “first language”.

Many times, I have come close to choking while trying not to laugh during an election-rally speech or an important press conference. Likewise, I have pulled my hair out marking my students’ papers term after weary term.

But my credentials as an

English-language critic go further than this. You see, I was once a bad practitioner of the English language too – and this despite my father being an English-language teacher.

It took several hugely embarrassing episodes while I was studying at Cambridge before I resolved that enough was enough.

After a few weeks of polite chuckles each time I presented a seminar paper, I told myself that I would read, write and speak English as well as any Englishman. No longer would I have “second-best” tagged to my language abilities.

Of course, a resolution like that wasn’t realised overnight. For months, I tuned in to the BBC, pored over basic **grammar** books with rules that an eight-year-old English child would have already internalised, proactively engaged my friends in conversation and slowly but surely clawed my way out of the language dumpster.

The point I’m trying to make is this: Good English takes **practice** and a lot of conscious effort. It doesn’t come

naturally, not even if you are from an English-speaking background. The key to being able to write and speak good English comes from daily practice and, by this, I don’t mean conversing in Singlish.

Sure, foreigners might understand our Singlish with little or no difficulty, but where should we peg ourselves? What’s our benchmark? Why should we settle for mere understanding when we can aspire to mastery?

We may laugh at the girls who gagged on their words on the latest reality show, *S Factor*, but let’s ask ourselves: Are we laughing because we think we would fare better, or because we recognise our own linguistic **inadequacies** in their delivery?

True, it may be two sides of the same coin, but depending on how that coin falls, we could one day find ourselves short-changed in this fast-moving world.

Singapore sits at the crossroads of East and West. We are in a unique position. We should look to language to show that we are equal to the

best in the world. But how can we do so when, by opening our mouths, we evoke nothing but laughter?

Have I mastered the English language?

Honestly, no. To me, language is and always will be a work in progress. The trick is to progress alongside it and this, my friends, takes continual and unflinching effort.

Melissa Heng is a seasoned journalist. She lectures on journalism and helms her own editorial consulting firm, My Blue Ink.

myp@sph.com.sg

HELPDESK 我的字典

Verbs and tenses:
动词与时态
dòng cí yǔ shí tài

Grammar: 语法 yǔ fǎ

Practice: 练习 liàn xí

Inadequacies: 不足之处
bù zú zhī chù