IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY TO IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES FOR SUCCESS

If you want to succeed at an English language university (or any place where you are required to use a new language), you need to be able to understand your professors and your textbooks, and you need write and speak in English.

Your best chance for success is to immerse yourself in the language. Although you may have a good understanding of the fundamental rules of the English language, you may discover these rules don’t always apply – there’s no better way to learn these exceptions than to socialize with people who are fluent in English. You may also realize that different disciplines (e.g., arts, health professions, sciences, technology) have different writing conventions and use the English language slightly differently – the best way to learn these subtle differences is to talk to your professors, TAs, and other students in your classes. You may also notice that conversational English is much, much different from academic English. So, instead of spending most of your time with peers who speak your native language, seek opportunities to interact with people who are already fluent in English (or whatever new language you are learning). Sure, it’s probably more comfortable to spend your time with friends who also speak your native language, but you are really hurting your chances of succeeding in university if you don’t take the opportunity to engage with the English-speaking community.

Without practice, your spoken English and your listening skills, as well as your reading and writing skills, will not improve during your years at Dal. Needless to say, if the only time you write in English is when you have to do assignments, and if you rely on translating, your English skills – speaking as well as writing – will remain rudimentary.

Here are some tips that may help you succeed:

1. Live in a homestay with English-speaking homestay parents.
2. Share an apartment or house with English-speaking students or at least with students whose home language is not the same as yours.
3. Read some English-language fiction or non-fiction outside your course materials every day (even 10 or 15 minutes a day). (The library’s staff will help you find books suited to ESL readers in subjects that interests you.)
4. Watch some English-language TV (try sitcoms, which will help you develop your idiomatic language); listen to the radio (e.g., the 8-minute newscast on CBC each morning at 7 and 8 a.m., 90.5 FM); watch sports with an English-language commentator; watch English-language movies; or browse English-language websites for material that interests you outside your studies (e.g. YouTube).
5. Try – it’s hard, I know – to make friends with English-speakers or people who have a home language that’s not the same as yours so that you have to use English to communicate.
6. Write a daily, or at least twice-a-week, diary or blog entry in English about life in Halifax and at Dalhousie. Write it for parents or friends back home – but in English. It will make a most interesting record of life in a foreign country, and it will do wonders for improving English-language skills.