To improve your comprehension and speaking, recognize that English is a stressed language. Each word of two or more syllables has a stress on just one syllable, and the stress is always on a vowel sound. The stress on the word "English" is on the first syllable; the same is true for "language" or "syllables." The stress on the word "photograph" is on the first syllable whereas the stress on "photography" is on the second syllable, and the stress on "photographer" is on the second syllable. When you hear a new word, you should make a note – a mental note or, better still, a note in a file or notebook you keep for new words – of where the stress comes. Dictionaries usually show this (in the phonetic rendering of the word, to show what it sounds like) by placing an apostrophe (’) before the stressed syllable.

Stress is also important at the sentence level. Every sentence in English stresses only "content" words (words you need to hear to understand the sentence) and de-stresses (or swallows) "structure" words, because you don’t need to hear them to make sense of the sentence. For example, in the sentence "Would you sell my car, because I’m going to England," the sentence sounds like "sell ... car ... going ....England." English-speaking people tend to sound the other words very quietly. Each group of words between the content words, whether just one word or three or four, are given the same amount of time. For instance, the words "because I’m" get the same amount of time (and it’s very little time) as "my," even though "because I’m" has three syllables and "my" has only one syllable. "Because I’m" is therefore spoken very quickly. When you listen to an English speaker, try to listen only for the stressed words, and you’ll understand a lot more than if you listen for all words. And when you speak, try to stress the content words and de-stress (or swallow, or glide over) the other words: "Would you SELL my CAR, because I’m GOING to ENGland."