ENGLISH STORY PODCAST

Stop Translating in Your Head

Answer faster and know what to say when your mind goes blank

EPISODE 13 | LEVEL A2-B1

Listen and read with Mia and Jake. Then practise the key vocabulary, useful phrases, listening skills, and speaking patterns from this episode.

Today's Small Win
Choose one safety phrase and say it aloud five times: “Let me think for a second.”

Episode Guide

What you will learn

• Use short sentences so answers are easier to build quickly.

• Buy thinking time with natural safety phrases.

• Choose an easy word instead of waiting for the perfect word.

• Practise quick questions and prepare three small personal stories.

Word Box

blank	unable to think of anything
pressure	a stressed feeling when you must act quickly or well
pause	a short stop or moment of silence
natural	normal and easy, not forced

Say It Like This

“Let me think for a second.”

“That's a good question.”

“How can I say this?”

“What I mean is...”

“Speak first, polish later.”

Listen & Read Transcript

Read along while you listen. Audio-performance tags have been removed for easier reading.

MIA	Hello everyone, and welcome back to the English Story Podcast. I'm Mia.
JAKE	And I'm Jake. It's so good to be here with you again.
MIA	Jake, I want to ask you something, and I want you to answer quickly. What is your favorite food?
JAKE	Um... well... it is... hmm...
MIA	Jake, you love food. You talk about food all day.
JAKE	I know. I know. But when you ask me quickly, my mind goes completely blank. Like an empty page.
MIA	And that is exactly what happens to many English learners. You know the words. You studied the words. But when someone asks you a question, your mind goes blank, and the words disappear.
JAKE	Today's episode is about that moment. We are going to talk about how to stop translating in your head, and what to say when your mind goes blank.
MIA	By the end of this episode, you will know five simple ways to answer faster, and you will have a short list of phrases to use when you need a little time.
JAKE	In our first episode, we talked about how to think in English every day. If you missed it, you can find it on our channel. Today is a different step. Today is about speaking in the moment, when someone is waiting for your answer.
MIA	And before we start, a quick tip. You can read the full transcript of this episode on our website, and listen to the audio while you read. The link is in the description, along with our free ebooks.
JAKE	Lots of valuable help, and all of it is free. So make yourself comfortable. Get a cup of tea, or coffee, or water, and just listen to us talk. You don't need to write anything down.
JAKE	Mia, let's start with the question. Why does the mind go blank?
MIA	Good question. There are two main reasons. The first reason is pressure. When someone is waiting, your body feels a little bit nervous, and a nervous brain is slower.
JAKE	That is true. When I am nervous, I forget my own phone number.
MIA	And the second reason is translating. When you translate in your head, you do many small jobs before you speak. That takes time, and the pressure makes it feel even longer.
JAKE	So the problem is not your English. The problem is pressure and a very long road inside your head.

MIA	Exactly. And the good news is that we can make that road shorter.
JAKE	Okay, it's time for our Word Box. These are four useful words for today. Listen, and then repeat after us.
MIA	The first word is blank. When your mind is blank, you cannot think of anything.
JAKE	Blank. For example, I looked at the question, and my mind went blank.
MIA	The next word is pressure. Pressure is the stressed feeling you get when you must do something quickly or well.
JAKE	Pressure. For example, I speak better when there is no pressure.
MIA	The next word is pause. A pause is a short stop, a small moment of silence.
JAKE	Pause. For example, a short pause is okay when you are thinking.
MIA	And the last word is natural. When something is natural, it feels normal and easy, not forced.
JAKE	Natural. For example, her English sounds very natural.
MIA	Let's say them one more time. Blank.
JAKE	Blank.
MIA	Pressure.
JAKE	Pressure.
MIA	Pause.
JAKE	Pause.
MIA	Natural.
JAKE	Natural.
JAKE	Great job, everyone. You will hear these words again in the story.
MIA	Okay, way number one. Use short sentences.
JAKE	This is my favorite way, because I am a lazy speaker.
MIA	It is not lazy. It is smart. Many learners try to build long, perfect sentences, and that is when the mind goes blank. A long sentence has many parts, and each part needs time.

JAKE	Let me show you. Imagine someone asks, "What did you do last weekend?" A long answer is, "Last weekend, I went to visit my cousin who lives in another city, and we cooked a big dinner together." That is a beautiful sentence, but it is hard to build quickly.
MIA	A short answer is, "I visited my cousin. We cooked dinner."
JAKE	Two small sentences. Easy to say, easy to understand.
MIA	And the other person is just as happy. In real conversations, native speakers use short sentences all the time.
JAKE	So short is not bad English. Short is good English.
MIA	Exactly. You can always add more later, if the other person asks.
JAKE	Way number two. Buy yourself a little time.
MIA	This is a very powerful way. When you need time, you don't have to be silent. You can use a small phrase while your brain looks for the answer.
JAKE	For example, "Let me think for a second."
MIA	Or, "That's a good question."
JAKE	Or, "How can I say this?"
MIA	Or, "Well, let me see."
JAKE	And these phrases are not a sign of weak English. Native speakers use them every day. When someone asks me a difficult question, I say, "That's a good question," and then I have three more seconds to think.
MIA	And it works every time.
JAKE	Almost every time. Sometimes I say, "That's a good question," and then I still say nothing.
MIA	That is a very long pause.
JAKE	Okay, it's time for our segment called Say It Like This. Here are four phrases to buy a little time. Repeat after us. Let me think for a second.
MIA	Let me think for a second.
JAKE	That's a good question.
MIA	That's a good question.
JAKE	How can I say this?

MIA	How can I say this?
JAKE	What I mean is.
MIA	What I mean is.
MIA	Very good. Now you have four small safety phrases, and each one gives you a few extra seconds.
JAKE	And "What I mean is" is also great when you started a sentence and you want to say it in a simpler way.
MIA	Yes. For example, "It was a long journey. What I mean is, I was very tired after the trip."
JAKE	I like that. You can always try again, and that is completely natural.
MIA	Now, way number three. Use the first easy word, not the perfect word.
JAKE	This one is hard for me. I always want the perfect word.
MIA	And that is a very common habit. Imagine you want to say that a movie was fascinating. But you don't remember the word fascinating. If you stop and search for it, your mind goes blank.
JAKE	But if I say, "The movie was very good, and very interesting," then the conversation continues.
MIA	Right. Good and interesting are simple words, but they do the job. You can learn the fancy word later.
JAKE	So the rule is, speak first, polish later.
MIA	I love that. Speak first, polish later.
JAKE	And if you really cannot find a word, you can do what we learned in episode one. Explain it with simple English.
MIA	Yes. "It's the thing you use for." "It's a kind of." Those phrases are still very useful.
JAKE	Okay, way number four. Practice quick questions.
MIA	This is like a small game. A friend, or a recording, asks you a simple question, and you answer in five seconds. Not perfectly, just quickly.
JAKE	For example, "What is your favorite color?" "Blue." "Why?" "Because it is calm."
MIA	That is a perfect answer. Short and fast.
JAKE	And the more you practice, the more your brain learns to go straight to English. The road in your head becomes shorter.
MIA	You can do this alone, too. Ask yourself a quick question in the mirror, or while you cook, or while you walk. Then answer out loud in one or two short sentences.

JAKE	I do this with my breakfast. I ask myself, "What do you want to eat?" And I answer, "A banana."
MIA	Jake, you always say banana.
JAKE	It is a very reliable fruit.
MIA	Okay, way number five. Prepare three small stories about your life.
JAKE	Three small stories? Tell us more.
MIA	Most conversations are about the same few topics. Your job, your family, your free time, your last trip, your favorite food. If you prepare a few short answers in advance, you will not go blank, because you already know what to say.
JAKE	So you don't need to prepare everything. Just three small stories.
MIA	Exactly. For example, story one, "I work as a nurse, and I love helping people." Story two, "I have two brothers, and we live in different cities." Story three, "Last year, I traveled to the sea, and it was beautiful."
JAKE	And you can say those stories out loud five or six times this week, until they feel natural.
MIA	Natural, our word from the Word Box. When something becomes natural, your mouth does it almost by itself.
JAKE	And then, when someone asks you about your life, you are ready, and the pressure feels smaller.
MIA	Let's put the five ways together. Way one, use short sentences. Way two, buy yourself a little time. Way three, use the first easy word. Way four, practice quick questions. And way five, prepare three small stories.
JAKE	And here is something I want you to remember. A pause is not a failure. A pause is part of every conversation, in every language.
MIA	I love that. Even native speakers pause and think.
MIA	Let's try a short example, so you can hear all the ways working together. Imagine Jake is at a party, and he meets someone new. I will be the new person.
JAKE	Okay. I'm ready. Well, I'm a little bit nervous.
MIA	Hi, nice to meet you. I'm Mia. What do you do?
JAKE	Hi, Mia. Nice to meet you too. I'm Jake. I work in a bakery.
MIA	Oh, that's interesting. What do you like about it?
JAKE	That's a good question. Let me think for a second. I like the smell of fresh bread, and I like the customers.
MIA	Nice. And what do you do in your free time?

JAKE	Hmm. How can I say this? I play the guitar, but I'm not very good. What I mean is, I'm still learning.
MIA	That's great. Why did you start?
JAKE	Because I want to make music for my friends. It's a small goal, but it makes me happy.
MIA	I love that. It was nice to meet you, Jake.
JAKE	Nice to meet you too. Have a great evening.
JAKE	Did you notice what happened? I used short sentences. I used two safety phrases. And when I didn't know how to say something, I used simple words.
MIA	And the conversation felt natural, even though Jake was nervous. That is exactly what we want.
JAKE	And notice that I never said a perfect, long sentence. I only said the next small sentence, and then the next one.
MIA	Exactly. A conversation is a chain of small sentences. You only need to make the next link.
JAKE	And now it's time for our Mini Story. This is a short story with today's new words inside it.
MIA	Our story today is about a woman called Nina. Nina was learning English, and she loved it. But she had one big problem. Every time she spoke to someone new, her mind went blank.
MIA	One Saturday, Nina went to a small cafe to order a coffee. The waiter smiled and asked, "Hi, what can I get you today?" Nina felt the pressure. Her mind went completely blank. She wanted to say, "A medium coffee with milk, please," but she only said, "Um... um..." The line behind her was getting longer, and she felt very nervous.
MIA	Then Nina remembered a small tip. She took a deep breath, and she said, "Let me think for a second." The waiter smiled and said, "Of course. Take your time." That pause helped her so much. Her mind slowly came back, and she said, "A medium coffee with milk, please."
MIA	The waiter gave her the coffee and said, "Your English sounds very natural." Nina laughed and thought, I only needed a small pause. From that day, she kept her safety phrases in her pocket, and her speaking became more relaxed every week.
JAKE	I love that story. Poor Nina and the long line.
MIA	And what a kind waiter.
JAKE	Did you notice our words? Blank, pressure, pause, and natural were all in the story.
MIA	That is why we tell stories. When you hear new words inside a story, they are easier to remember.
JAKE	Can you remember the phrase Nina used to get more time?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.

MIA	It was, "Let me think for a second." Simple, and very useful.
JAKE	And now it's time for our last segment, called Your Turn.
MIA	Okay, now it's your turn. This time, we will play the quick question game. I will ask Jake some questions, and you will answer in your head at the same time. Remember, short answers are perfect.
JAKE	And if my mind goes blank, I will use a safety phrase.
MIA	Ready. Let's go. Question one. What is your favorite food?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
JAKE	That's a good question. Let me think for a second. I think my favorite food is pasta, because it is simple and delicious.
MIA	Question two. What did you do yesterday?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
JAKE	I worked in the morning, and I cooked dinner at night.
MIA	Question three. What do you like to do on weekends?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
JAKE	I like to sleep late, and I like to walk in the park.
MIA	Question four. How do you feel right now?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
JAKE	I feel calm and a little bit hungry.
MIA	Of course you do.
MIA	And one last question for you, listeners. What is one thing you want to say better in English?
YOUR TURN	Pause and answer aloud.
JAKE	If you answered even a little in English, without translating every word, then you just practiced exactly what we talked about today. Congratulations.
MIA	Let's finish with a quick review of the five ways, so you remember them.

JAKE	Way number one. Use short sentences.
MIA	Way number two. Buy yourself a little time.
JAKE	Way number three. Use the first easy word, not the perfect word.
MIA	Way number four. Practice quick questions.
JAKE	And way number five. Prepare three small stories about your life.
MIA	You don't need to do everything in one day. Choose one way, and try it this week. Then add another one next week.
JAKE	And remember, speaking is not a test. It is a conversation between two people, and both people want to understand each other.
MIA	I love that. Small steps, every day.
MIA	Before we go, here is Today's Small Win. A small win is a very small task that you can finish today, and it makes you feel good.
JAKE	Today's Small Win is this. Choose one safety phrase, for example, "Let me think for a second," and say it out loud five times. That is all.
MIA	It only takes one minute. And the next time your mind goes blank, your mouth will already know what to say.
JAKE	Now, we have a question for you in the comments. Which safety phrase will you use first? Write it in the comments, and add one short sentence about your favorite food.
MIA	We read the comments, and we love to see your sentences. So please write one, even if you feel shy. You can do it.
JAKE	And remember, you can read the full transcript of this episode on our website, and listen to the audio while you read. The link is in the description, with our free ebooks.
MIA	If this episode helped you today, please give it a like, and share it with a friend who is learning English. And if you haven't subscribed yet, please subscribe to the English Story Podcast, so you can find our next episode.
JAKE	Thank you so much for spending this time with us.
MIA	Keep listening, keep practicing, and remember, your English is already better than it was yesterday.
JAKE	Take care, everyone.
MIA	Oh, Jake, one quick question before we go. What is your favorite food?
JAKE	That's a good question. Let me think for a second. Pasta. My favorite food is pasta.

MIA	And not banana?
JAKE	Banana is my favorite fruit. It's different.
MIA	Goodbye, and see you in the next episode.

Practice Exercises

1. Match the Word

1. blank 2. pressure 3. pause 4. natural

A. normal and easy, not forced B. a short stop or moment of silence C. a stressed feeling when you must act quickly or well D. unable to think of anything

2. Complete the Sentences

1. Let me _____ for a second.
2. That's a good _____.
3. How can I _____ this?
4. What I _____ is...
5. A short _____ is okay.
6. Her English sounds very _____.

3. Make It Personal

One new phrase I want to use: _____

My own example sentence: _____

A question I can ask someone: _____

4. Choose the Best Answer

1. You need a few seconds to answer.
A. Let me think for a second. B. Wait. My English is bad.
2. You forget the word “fascinating.”
A. The movie was very good and interesting. B. Stop speaking until you remember.
3. Someone asks about your weekend.
A. I stayed home. I watched a movie. B. Build one very long perfect sentence.
4. Your sentence is not clear.
A. What I mean is... B. Never try again.

Speaking & Listening Practice

5. Practise Your Answers Aloud

1. Use one phrase from Say It Like This.

2. Give a short answer, then add one detail.

3. Ask a follow-up question.

4. Tell a 20-second personal story using today's language.

5. Repeat one answer again, a little more naturally.

6. Listening Check

1. What are the two main reasons the mind goes blank? _____
2. What food does Jake choose in the quick-question game? _____
3. What did Nina want to order? _____
4. Which safety phrase helped Nina? _____

Answer Key & Sample Answers

1. Match the Word

1-D, 2-C, 3-B, 4-A

2. Complete the Sentences

1. think 2. question 3. say 4. mean 5. pause 6. natural

4. Choose the Best Answer

1-A, 2-A, 3-A, 4-A

6. Listening Check

1. Pressure and translating 2. Pasta 3. A medium coffee with milk 4. Let me think for a second

Useful Phrases to Keep

- Let me think for a second.
- That's a good question.
- How can I say this?
- What I mean is...
- Speak first, polish later.