

# FACT, NOT FICTION: MASTERING ENGLISH IS A MUST

by Joye Foderingham

Most Caribbean people grow up speaking two languages – Standard English and our own local patois, in which ever island. No matter how nationalistic one is, or how much of a yardie you may be the fact is that the world of 2010 is a closed circuit village. The fact is that standard English is the language of choice internationally and is the most common form of communication world wide. And sadly, the fact is that without a command of this language, both from a certification and oral perspective you are shooting yourself in the foot. Sorry, make that feet, because without mastery of English you won't have a leg to stand on.

Apart from that, as every schooler should know, there are two basic subjects that you must have certification in. They are Mathematics and English Language. Without CXC certification in these two subjects most doors are closed, whether you want to get a decent job or go on to study in any field. Many students feel, incorrectly, that unless you are planning to pursue a career in the arts, standard English certification is unnecessary. NOT. If you want to go into banking or finance you won't be able to write an acceptable proposal if you haven't mastered English and can write an essay; **something 90% of students who graduate from secondary school and even tertiary institutions today have no clue about, despite their passes in** CXC English Language and Use of English. Mastery of English is not only about certification.



Thinking of politics or any career that involves public speaking? Hah! Good luck if you haven't mastered English and like so many 'leaders' are embarrassing to listen to because they are unable to pronounce simple words or ensure agreement between subject and verb – no mastering of English at play again.

So IT is your thing. You won't get far if your comprehension is not up to scratch whether you're repairing, programming or otherwise. And remember that whatever area of IT you are in you will need to be able to write and produce reports. Yup. Comprehension, essay writing, grammar and tense and verb/subject agreement are all part and parcel of English Language.

So what? you say, you're going to be an artist – paint, sculpt, etc, so English doesn't really come into it. Wrong again!! Won't you be taught in English? Won't you have to describe your pieces and explain your perspectives when you exhibit? Of course you will and you'll have to do so in English.

It should be patently clear by now that mastery of English is vital regardless of your proposed field/career choice. 'I are the one' is not funny. Its sad. Because it gives the impression that incorrect grammar is cool. Hmmm! On the corner maybe, but not in the real world. Apart from all this, bear in mind that perception is everything. We all know that first impressions last and that does not only apply to the way one looks. Picture this: you're going for a job interview, well dressed, well qualified and you open your mouth and speak – improperly pronouncing your words, mismatching subject, verb and tense as well as dropping/adding H's left, right and centre and misunderstanding instructions given to you in standard English.... What kind of impression do you think you'll make?

No one is asking or expecting you to sound like a boring Brit or an obnoxious American. You must speak in your own way, with your own Caribbean intonation and accent; BUT you must be able to speak "standard" English, pronounce words correctly: – it's the Doh - min – i - can Republic and Dom – in – i- ca. These are two different words with different pronunciations. They are the names of two different countries. duh!. Take a look at the CVM reality show 'The Anchor' and you'll see what I mean. Proper pronunciation, ability to read fluently, to phrase properly etc are missing in most of the participants attempts. And most of these participants are tertiary level students or graduates.

What can you do? Start reading - with your dictionary, a good dictionary like the Concise Oxford, at hand. Its one thing to understand a word because of its context, and quite another to be able to pronounce it or use it properly. Reading helps you to grasp how to write and how to use words while widening your vocabulary. It can even increase your IQ. And no, comics do not count. Ever noticed how many popular deejays have only mastered the word 'yeah', and perhaps a few others? And have difficulty in expressing themselves when interviewed? Patwah is in your DNA; that's a given. If English is not and you want to succeed, start reading now. The Library is free and well enough stocked for your purposes. Or ask your English teacher for their input and assistance. Even better, also go online and get software that teaches you pronunciation and other aspects of English.

Ragashanti is the patwah don. No contest. Ever heard him on a TV magazine show? His standard English is impeccable. Watch Magnum Kings and Queens of Dancehall? Listen closely to Miss Kitty, the Fluffy (and fluent) Diva. Her patwah is real, but when she is commenting on the contestants performances her English is fluent, she speaks clearly, articulates well and uses the appropriate words to express exactly what she wants to convey. Both have a mastery and command of the English language.

Face it. Until the world starts communicating telepathically - unlikely in your lifetime - all communication is going to be written and verbal. Instructions, contracts, manuals, directions, reports, assessments, theses - on whatever topic, speeches, addresses, applications for loans, housing etc all

demand a thorough and complete knowledge and understanding of the nuances of “standard’ English. Get with the programme. And understand this: people judge you by the way you speak; communication is **the** most essential tool we need and use in our everyday life. So doesn’t it stand to reason that you NEED to be able to communicate efficiently, properly and fluently in ‘standard’ English? Uh huh. It’s a no brainer.

Make no mistake about it. Patwah is important. A fi wi ting regardless of whether it’s the patwah that’s spoken in JA, St Vincent, TNT, or Grenada; but in the hamlet reality that is 2010 where communication is what drives today’s world, mastery of English is crucial and mandatory.....if success is your end game.