

RUSBASE&SKYENG

An experiment: how the editorial staff of Rusbase studied English for a month

[Special project]


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As part of a special project with **Skyeng** school, Rusbase editors studied English online. They had only a month, eight lessons and about the same Pre-Intermediate level of English. Did the participants manage to improve their level, overcome the language barrier and sort out their tenses in four weeks? Read the reviews below.




Polina Todorova

Editor of the Lifestyle section

"I graduated from university with a solid Intermediate level and have not formally studied English since then. I improved the language during travel and in conversations with foreign friends, so there are no problems with speaking.

The purpose of the course is to brush up grammar and perhaps learn useful expressions that will enrich my speech.

Pain points: I still put articles at random; I do not understand when to use the Perfect tense, when the RESULT of an action is MORE IMPORTANT than its TIME (I was taught that the main thing is not victory, but participation). And can't you just do with Past Simple?"




Alice Berkana

Editor of the Technology section

"Last year, my level of English was Intermediate. After taking a test at the university, I put the grammar textbook on the bottom shelf and became so lazy that Google Translate forever settled in the tabs of my browser. That's how I slipped back to **Pre-Intermediate**

The purpose of the course is to brush up grammar, improve my spoken English, restock my vocabulary and get a grip on the Perfect Continuous tense.

Pain points: I don't put 'to' between verbs, I forget to put articles, I use gerunds inappropriately.



Lyudmila Chumak

Editor of the Opportunities section

"I had weak English teachers at school and university, so in my freshman year I began to realize that it was time to improve my language to the level when I can communicate abroad without "errr" and "ummm". I never got round to it - I remained at the **Pre-Intermediate** level: I vaguely remember something from grammar, I can read articles in English (sometimes with Google Translate) and buy latte abroad.

The purpose of the course is to improve my spoken English, recover my vocabulary and finally understand the use of tenses.

Pain points: tenses and long monologues in English."


A month has passed. We tell you what we learned and how it went.

What we learned in a month at Skyeng



How it all began and my pain points

The acquaintance with Skyeng was pleasant. The day before the first lesson, I was thoughtfully sent an SMS with a reminder of the lesson time, and the next day an hour before the class, they once again gallantly reminded me of it. For me, it's a real



Alice

Editor of the Technology section

blessing, because everything that is not work related flies out of my head completely.

Ten minutes before the start of the class, I had to log into Skype so that the curriculum supervisor could add me. Exactly at 9:00 a.m., the first introductory lesson began. The lesson lasted 45 minutes, but the time flew by. First we talked in English, then tried different assignments to determine my English competence level.



We agreed that I have an incomplete Pre-Intermediate level, and need to refresh my old knowledge, practise conversational speech and restock my vocabulary. I didn't try to argue becoz my English is really very bad

I know my pain points very well, and they were quickly discovered by the curriculum supervisor. We agreed that I have an incomplete Pre-Intermediate level, and need to refresh my old knowledge, practise conversational speech and restock my vocabulary. I didn't try to argue becoz my English is really very bad.

What is great is that the service has a lot of cool features which make it easy to learn the language. The bad thing is that because of the amount of information I was given, in the attempt to tell me everything about Skyeng at once, I remembered almost nothing.

The beginning of classes and my first cock-up

I managed to be late for the next class. The teacher's name was Yana. This pleasant and easy-going girl communicates well, is stress-free, and understands my silly jokes, which especially pleases my inner John Dorian.

The lesson was scheduled for 10:00. I remembered it at 10:20, when I tore my face off the monitor with text on it to pour myself some coffee. I saw a missed Skype call, apologized to the teacher and was going to call Skyeng to beg for forgiveness. While looking for the number, Yana managed to write that she still had time to have a lesson.



Results of the lesson: I was glad that I did not google the last remnants of grammar. As for vocabulary... I learned a new word - to revise. Otherwise, it's easy.

I made a sip from the fourth cup of coffee in the morning with relief, and we started.

We talked, did several tasks on Present Simple and Present Continuous. I was glad that I didn't translate the last remnants of grammar. The last task was an audio recording about a Toulouse-Lautrec painting, which I was supposed to listen to and place cards with names according to the corresponding characters in the image. As for vocabulary... I learned a new word - to revise. Otherwise, it's easy.

How the lessons went and what I didn't like

In the second lesson, we again did exercises on Present Continuous, with which I have no problems, unlike Present Perfect and Present Perfect Continuous. For some reason, we practised using who and which. I don't know if it's possible to confuse that the former refers to people and the latter to objects, but we brushed this up as well.

In the third lesson, we practised listening, with which I have big problems. There are a lot of cool tasks that really help to understand another person's speech better. I also like the homework tab where it is convenient to do homework - it shows approximate time of tasks and the quality of the work done.



I got the impression that I don't study English, but I'm calling an old friend - it's very cool

About the downsides - the system sometimes lags and shows the completed tasks as failed. In general, there is too much listening and boring vocabulary. There are very few new words, but the teacher is wonderful. The rest of the classes we practised grammar; I was taught how to build sentences correctly and put stresses. We talked a lot about different topics.

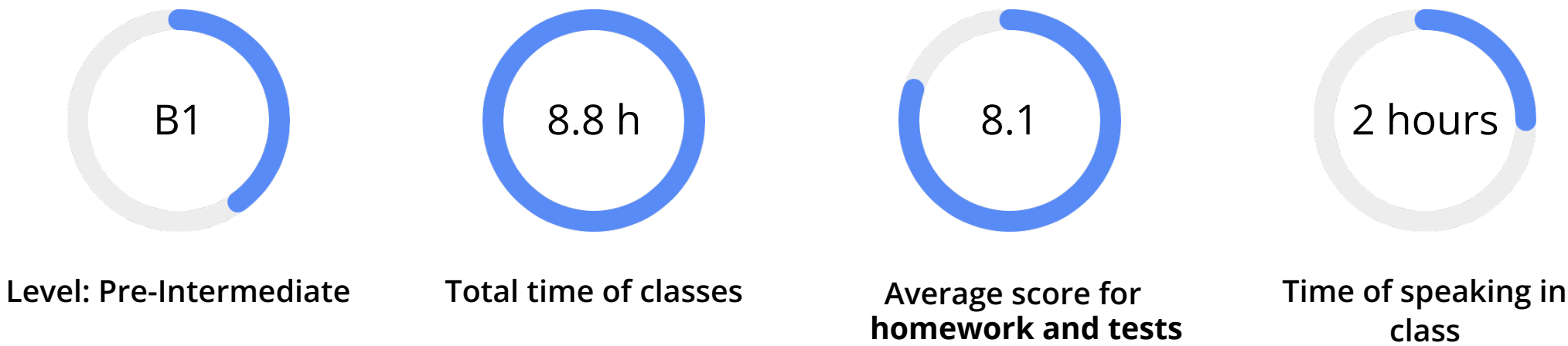
My progress in a month and who I don't advise to go to Skyeng

I got the impression that I don't study English, but I'm calling an old friend - it's very cool. I'm a pretty lazy creature, but **Skyeng** is no drag and conducive to learning. I was also pleased with the service itself, as you can reschedule the lesson to another day or change the time of the lesson without any problem.

Yes, it's hard to feel any results in a month, but on an emotional level you can already feel a little progress - I can do more. My shyness to speak English was gone, there was a desire to learn the language further. Despite the small bugs of the system itself, the Skyeng service is the most convenient one I've seen so far.

I don't advise those who need to be kicked all the time to go to Skyeng. If you have problems with self-discipline, these guys won't help, because no one will learn English for you. Skyeng is not a guarantee of perfect English, but only a tool there to be used.


Alice: progress in one month



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Background

The last time I took English tests was at university. Then I had a solid Intermediate, at the same time I couldn't speak - the notorious language barrier and lack of practice made themselves apparent. After university, I set myself the task of talking, started travelling, made a bunch of friends from couchsurfing, with whom I stayed in touch. Surprisingly, regular parties with couch surfers, independent travel and meetings with foreigners worked. Everyone praised "my English," which is why I lost my fear to the point that I started holding interviews in English and even became a translation editor.



Polina
Editor of the Lifestyle section

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I had two main requests: to brush up grammar and learn useful business and everyday vocabulary to sound as convincing as possible in those interviews.

At the same time, I remind you that I did not study English formally after university. I had two main requests for Skyeng: to brush up grammar and learn useful business and everyday vocabulary to sound as convincing as possible in those interviews.

Start of classes and first teacher

After passing the test, I was assigned to Upper-intermediate and at my request two teachers were appointed: Russian-speaking and American.

The Russian speaker turned out to be a nice girl from Odessa named Veronica. She was

keenly interested in my life and provoked dialogue, laughed at my jokes and was generally very nice. It would seem that that would be already enough. But no: she also turned out to be a good teacher. She clearly followed the lesson plan, explained the rules, words and expressions, while entering them in my personal dictionary, taught me how to work with the platform. In addition, Veronica has a very good American pronunciation, and you immediately begin to trust her.



Veronica was keenly interested in my life and provoked dialogue, laughed at my jokes and was generally very nice. It would seem that that would already be enough

Interestingly, after the first lesson, I got a call from the Skyeng call center, they asked me if I liked everything. I said that in the first lesson I wished there had been an introduction and announcement of what we would do in class. Because after the greetings, we immediately rushed to do exercises, and I didn't understand what we were working on. And what do you think? In the second lesson, Veronica, as if following the script, announced the topics and structure of the lesson, and then proceeded directly to the exercises. Veronica, I appreciated it!



Photo: Skyeng

About the downsides: since we only followed the lesson plans on the Vimbox platform, some topics were not interesting to me, and the tasks that had to be performed during the lesson were boring. For example, placing cards with words into suitable places in the sentence or answering questions about the text that I felt too lazy to discuss.

American

I studied with Robert for the second half of the month. Robert is ("only," as he stated) 68 years old. 50 of them he is happily married. 11 years ago he retired, and since then he has been traveling with his wife and two dogs in a trailer, from where he conducts classes. Robert emphasizes that Skyeng is a hobby for him. He only works in the morning from Monday to Thursday. And he travels around America on weekends. The money earned at Skyeng (\$20 per lesson) covers everyday expenses. Otherwise, as Robert likes to joke, he and his wife "are spending the inheritance of their children."



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Robert is a very cool character. He doesn't have a higher education. After school, he got married, and had to look for a job right away. Thanks to natural charisma and communication skills, he built a career in sales, became a corporate coach and even founded a free oratory club, which, I think, he still runs. He lived in Canada, Mexico, China and who knows where else. In Mexico, if my memory doesn't betray me, Robert was paid to teach how to fish.



Why do I know so much about him? It's simple: Robert loves to talk about himself.

He talked most of the lessons, encouraged me to ask him questions about him and life in America. If I ran out of questions, he waited patiently for me to come up with the next one. Sometimes he asked something, but it was noticeably less frequent.

In those moments when we didn't talk, we read aloud, which, in general, is useful - I almost never read aloud in English. At the same time, from the very first lesson, Robert praised my pronunciation and reading skills (he was surprised that I read 'muscle' without 'k'), but continued to make me read and did not offer any other activities in the lesson. It looked like he really liked the way I do it.

Did I manage to improve my English in a month?

On the one hand, I practised conversation, which is never superfluous, and built up my vocabulary. But no fundamental changes have taken place. They say it takes 60 lessons to get through one level of English. I had 8. So you can count.

Pros and cons of the platform

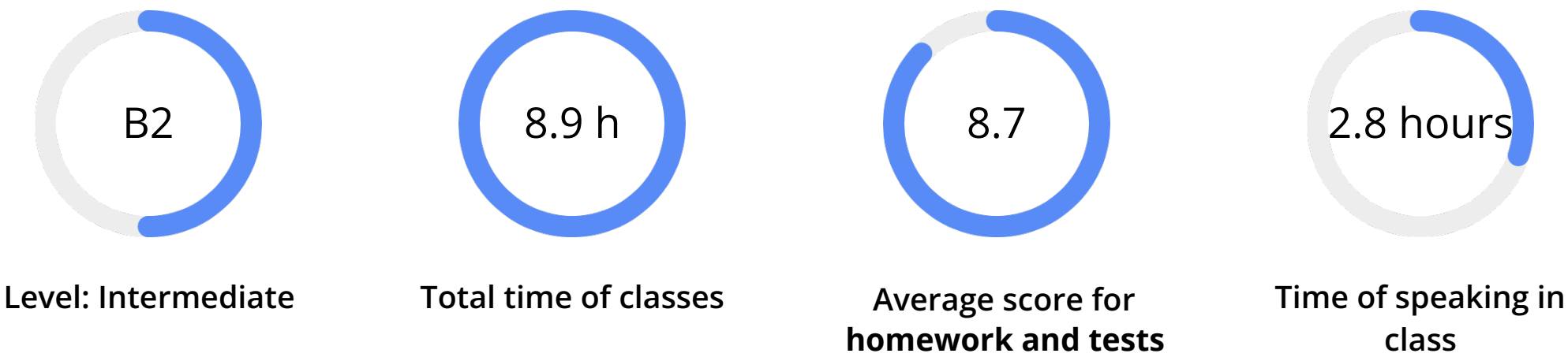
If we talk about the platform itself, I have several complaints. The most important thing: there are so many buttons in your personal account that you can't figure it out the first time (and the eighth time). There is no intuitive interface to speak of. At the same time, there are really useful features - for example, a dictionary and notes in which the teacher can enter unfamiliar words and explanations of the rules during the lesson. Everything is fine while you're following a class on Vimbox. But when you come across a new word somewhere else and decide to

add it to your dictionary, you won't be able to do it. I often missed such a functionality.


Note: Skyeng later reported that the Vimbox extension solved this problem. But if you are not familiar with the product, it is not obvious that in order for the function to work, you need to install a special extension.

In general, I liked the format of interaction with the teacher on Skype. It's nice that a whole hour is spent on you alone, and it's noticeably more effective than group classes. Will I continue to study? Maybe. If I find my teacher or if the user experience improves so much that it will become impossible not to use the service.

Polina: progress in a month



When our editorial office started to discuss a special project with Skyeng, I already knew that I wanted to be part of it because I have been really keen to improve my English for about eight years. Of course, I have slightly improved it since my school days: there was "self-medication" (Murphy's textbook, that I never finished), and TV series in English, and communication in games (guilty as charged) with English speakers. But there was not enough methodology.



Lyudmila
Editor of the Opportunities section

Zero lesson

Zero lesson at Skyeng is a lesson with a curriculum supervisor who assesses your level, finds out your needs and appoints a teacher. Veronica, my curriculum supervisor, talked to me for about an hour. We talked, listened to recordings, did grammar assignments, and she passed her verdict - Pre-Intermediate. During our session, I also told Veronica why I needed English in the first place: I like to travel, I needed it for work, and, generally speaking, my poor knowledge of English is bothering me. Towards the end of the lesson, Veronica spoke

about the Vimbox platform on which classes are held, about the additional capabilities of the school and so on.

About the platform and service

I'll tell you about the "attributes of learning." The cornerstone of everything is the Vimbox platform, which is a combination of Skype and an English textbook. At first, it is quite difficult to understand the platform, but curriculum supervisors show and explain everything. There is a communication window in the upper left corner. Teachers love to communicate by looking at the student. I got away without a camera with Veronica, but I had to switch it on with Denis, who was appointed as my teacher.

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The student should honestly say whether he could remember the word or not, and the system checks it in every possible way: in some cases you are required to arrange words in the correct order; in others - letters, and sometimes you need to type in the word yourself, or choose the correct image

The main page of the platform is taken up by activities: texts, grammar exercises, audio recordings. The teacher, just like the student, sees where the interlocutor's cursor is, and can always give a hint and correct. On the left, under the video call window, there is a field where you can enter your note (in my case, Denis typed in his phrases, which I could not pick up on by ear), there is also a dictionary there. There are other tools that I didn't use, and thus don't remember. The Vimbox platform also allows students to complete their homework and tests given after a month of studies.

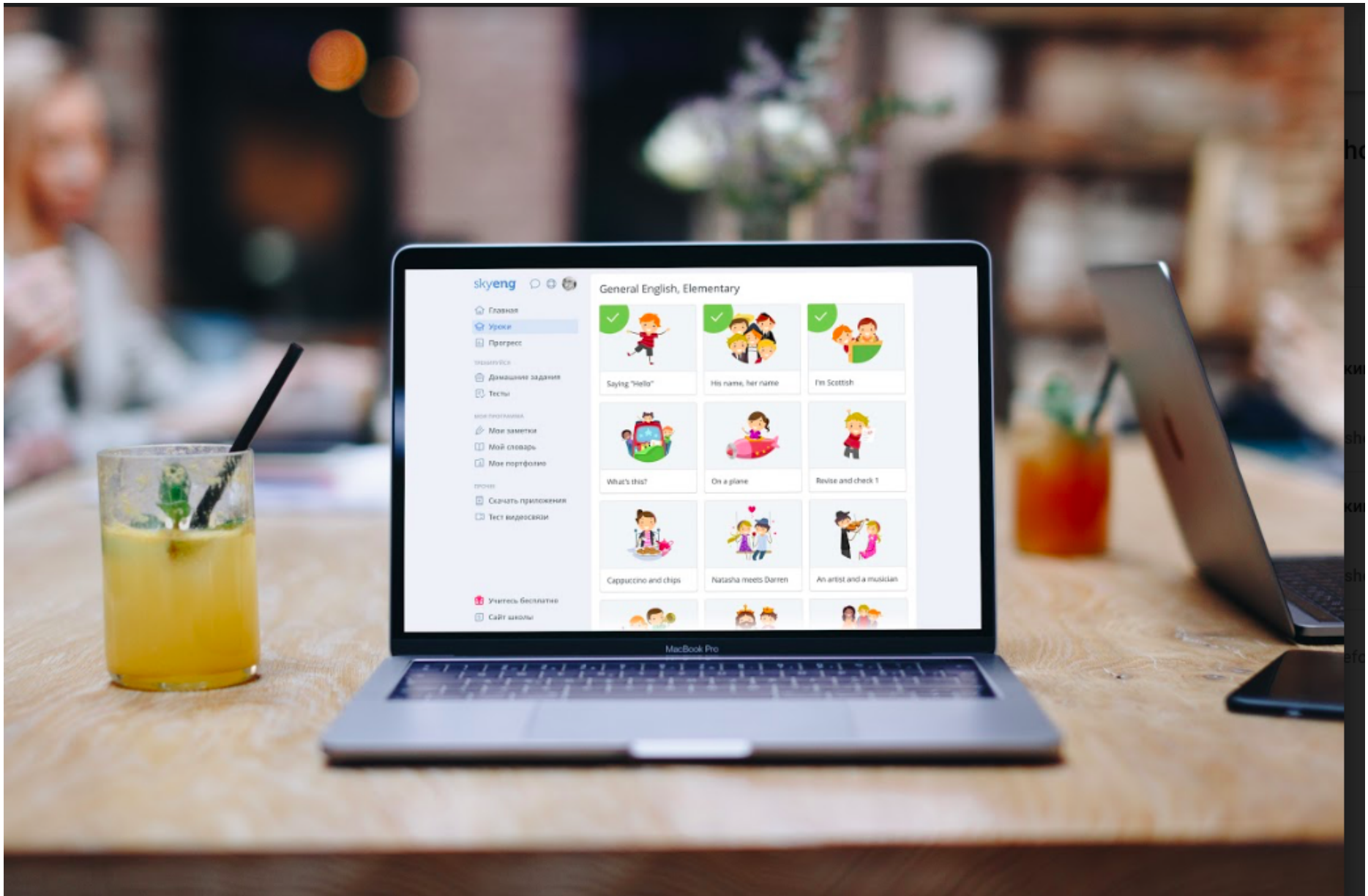


Photo: Skyeng

In addition to the main platform, Skyeng has two mobile applications: one is a dictionary (you can also manage your lesson schedule there), the other one is comprehension training. I dutifully downloaded both apps, however, comprehension practice was postponed until better times. But I actively used the dictionary app. Its essence is straightforward: it provides a word and its translation, plus an image. The student should honestly say whether he could remember the word or not, and the system checks it in every possible way - in some cases you are required to arrange words in the correct order, in others - letters, and sometimes you need to type in the word yourself or choose the correct image. Images (most of which are stock) are at times bewildering. For example, why does the word 'need' come with a photo of a girl with question marks above her head? In general, the system remembers words where the student makes mistakes and gives them more often. Words can be added independently through the catalog in the application or on the platform during lessons. Some words are added by the teacher during classes.

RB.RU

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It turned out that my teacher Denis, although Russian, lived abroad for many years, so he is basically a native speaker. There were a couple of funny moments when I couldn't explain something to him in English, and he didn't understand me in Russian

Skyeng also has thematic newsletters for almost every taste. I honestly signed up for five of those and still haven't opened a single one. In addition, there is a speaking club, the main purpose of which is to improve students' speaking skills. Despite the fact that I am an extrovert, I successfully ignored this part of the school.

About the teacher

When Veronica was finishing the class with me, she asked me what kind of teacher I wanted - a native speaker or a Russian-speaking one, and whether I had any gender and age preferences. I said that I didn't really care other than the fact that I would rather have a Russian-speaking teacher, so as not to subject a foreigner to my "London is ze capital off Great Britain". In the end, I was assigned Denis, with whom I was supposed to have classes every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. There I was in for a surprise: it turned out that Denis, although Russian, lived abroad for many years, so he is basically a native speaker. He told me about it in my first class. There were a couple of funny moments when I couldn't explain something to him in English, and he didn't understand me in Russian.



Exactly at the appointed time Denis would write to me "Are you ready?", I either answered "Yes" or "Two minutes, please." Denis would wait patiently and two minutes later write "How about now?"

All in all, I got lucky with the teacher: Denis is quite a sociable young man, likes to tell funny stories from life, recommends movies and TV series. For example, when discussing some topic specified in the task, he could ask me: "What would you do in this situation, have you had a similar experience?" - and then we could share our life experiences for ten minutes.

How the classes were held

The lesson usually takes an hour - the teacher does not delay the student, but the student may well keep him waiting. Exactly at the appointed time Denis would write to me "Are you ready?", I either answered "Yes" or "Two minutes, please." Denis would wait patiently and two minutes later write "How about now?" (in English, of course). However, our classes never ran longer than planned, even if half of the lesson we shared our life stories. Denis would just say: "We're running out of time, we'll continue in the next class," then he would talk me through my homework, and that's it.

By the way, teachers don't insist that you do your homework. Exercises are checked by the system automatically, but if you don't understand something, you can discuss it with the teacher later.

Bottom line: learn English online - yay or nay?

On the whole, I'm glad I took part in the project: this is the push that I needed to get my English in order. It's needless to say that in just one month I did not make any breakthroughs (I never understood slogans like "English in a week", although at school I somehow learned the basics of working with InDesign in a week, but that was just the basics).

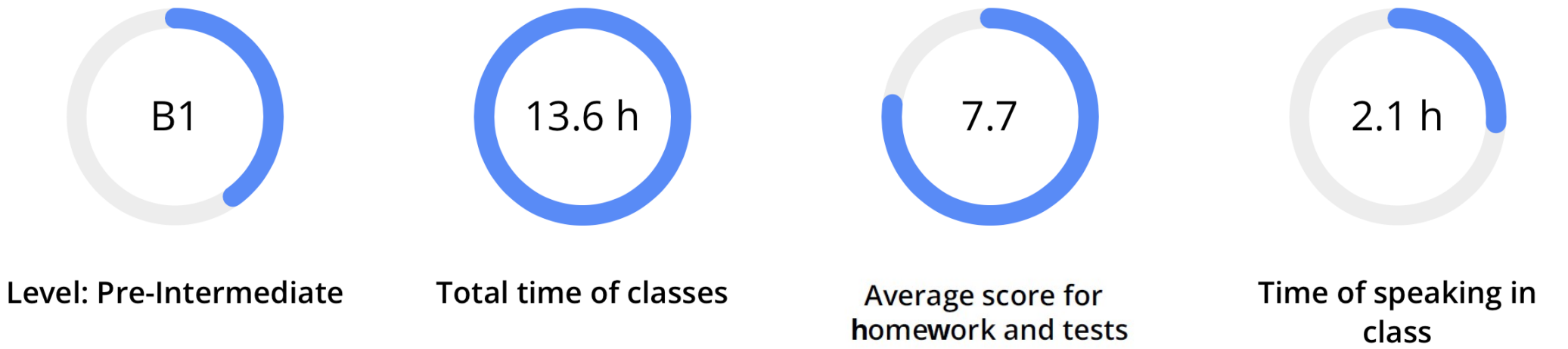
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What did I learn? 'Would can' - people would laugh at that, London is pronounced as "Lund-an", and finally I got my head around 'if' type conditionals!

What did I learn? 'Would can' - people would laugh at that, London is pronounced as "Lund-an", and finally I got my head around 'if' type conditionals! As for the school - very polite staff, they call you to get feedback on the lessons, and provide good customer support.

I like the format of classes - I can study anywhere and anytime, as long as there is an Internet connection and a laptop. At the same time, there are no group lessons with other people who might make me feel shy or bored. The bottom line is, I don't know about Alice and Polina, but after a short break I will continue my classes with Denis.

Lyuda: progress in a month



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