

CONCOURS DE CONTRÔLEUR DE L'INSTITUT NATIONAL DE LA STATISTIQUE ET DES ÉTUDES ÉCONOMIQUES

ANNÉE 2025

ÉPREUVE FACULTATIVE D'ANGLAIS

(durée : 1 heure 30 – coefficient 1)

Le document comporte 3 pages

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The Surprising Benefits of Talking Out Loud to Yourself

When Ellie Shoja goes for a walk, she slips on her headphones and starts talking—but there's no other voice ricocheting through the speakers. It's merely a convenient way to disguise the fact that she's engrossed in a conversation with herself.

"As far back as I can remember, I've talked to myself," says Shoja, 43, who lives in Los Angeles. "If I'm processing something, I'm 100% talking it out with myself. When I put my earbuds in on my walk, that allows me to gesture and be able to talk a little more loudly, instead of whispering."

When Shoja wakes up in the morning or hits the gym, that dialogue turns motivational: "You got this. You can do it." Throughout the day, she talks out ideas for the writing group she runs, as though she were in conversation with another person; when she makes dinner, she chatters away whether someone else is in the kitchen or not. She credits the habit with helping her achieve a state of calmness and confidence. "It slows down your thinking just by the nature of verbalizing something," she says. "You have language that limits the amount of chaos, because you have to express it. You become more focused, and your anxiety levels and stress actually lower significantly."

Shoja is far from alone: Many people talk out loud to themselves—which is commonly called external self-talk or private speech, as opposed to inner speech, which is the silent dialogue running through your mind. Yet as Shoja's headphone strategy suggests, talking to an internal audience can be associated with a perception of, well, strangeness. We asked experts whether that's warranted—and what they see as the upside of conversing with yourself.

Why people talk out loud to themselves

Thirty years ago, when Thomas Brinthaup became a new parent—and was in the thick of long, sleep-deprived days and nights—he started coping by talking out loud to himself. That inspired him to research why people engage in this type of self-talk. A few key reasons have emerged, including social isolation: As you might expect, people who spend lots of time alone are more likely to keep themselves company by chit-chatting out loud. (Brinthaup's mother lived by herself, and after he overheard her solo conversations, she told him talking to herself helped her get through the day.) The same goes for only children—who engage in self-talk more frequently than those with siblings—as well as adults who had an imaginary companion they talked to when they were kids.

The other main reason why people talk out loud to themselves is to deal with "situations that are novel or highly stressful, or where you're not sure what to do or think or feel," says Brinthaup, a professor emeritus of psychology at Middle Tennessee State University. Studies have found that when you're anxious or experiencing, for example, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, you're much more likely to talk to yourself. Upsetting or disturbing experiences make people want to resolve or understand them—and self-talk is a tool that helps them do so, he says.

There's also an age factor involved. Young children talk out loud to themselves as they're learning social roles, but eventually, that becomes internalized as inner speech. Older adults are particularly likely to engage in self-talk, Brinthaup says. "Maybe it's to help them

remember, or maybe it's lowered inhibitions," he says. "My mom used to say, 'I don't care what other people think. I'm talking to myself.' The rest of us in the middle still have that inhibition. You don't want to do it too much, because people might question your sanity." Are people who talk out loud smarter? Or, well, the inverse? Very limited research has explored the connection, but Brinthaup did find that college students' GPA only has weak associations with tendency to engage in self-talk. He points out that GPA isn't a great measure of intelligence. If he had to guess, he speculates that, on an "extreme level," people with genius-level IQ levels might engage in higher levels of self-talk than others. But overall, "I think intelligence doesn't really matter," he says. Still, he notes that it would be interesting to research how self-talk content (are your convos with yourself positive or negative?) and function (why do you do it?) vary among people with different IQ levels.

Is it a good thing?

Talking out loud to yourself is perfectly normal—and even beneficial. It can facilitate problem-solving and improve how well you perform at a task, says Gary Lupyan, a psychology professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who has researched self-talk. One of his studies involved asking people to search for different objects, like a picture of a fork among a set of random photographs. When participants said the name of what they were looking for out loud, they were able to find it much faster than when they didn't. "The idea is that it helps keep its visual appearance active in your mind as you're searching," he says. That means if you lose your car keys, it might be helpful to chant "keys, keys, keys" to yourself as you dash around the house looking for them.

Self-talk can be motivating, too, Lupyan points out. In one study, basketball players performed faster and better when they talked through their moves out loud in an encouraging or instructional way. It can also help keep you focused, especially in a situation that requires lots of different steps. "Language is good at sequencing things," he says. "It helps people stay on task and know when to switch."

By [Angela Haupt](#)

November 19, 2024

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Answer the questions in your own words :

- 1 - What are some of the reasons people talk out loud to themselves, according to the text? (3 pts)
- 2 - How can talking to oneself improve performance, based on the research mentioned in the article? (3 pts)
- 3 - According to the article, when do people tend to talk out loud to themselves the most? (2 pts)

Essay question : Do you think talking out loud to yourself can be an effective way to manage stress and improve focus? Discuss your opinion and provide examples based on the text or from your own experience. (12 points)