



How to Teach & Develop Listening Skill in Your Students

A Simple Guide for EFL Teachers to Teach and Develop
Their Students' Listening Skill



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About the Guide:

It is a simple guide to teaching listening in the classroom including practical step by step plan for teachers of English as a foreign language to teach and develop EFL listening skill in their students.

It's a useful guide for teachers' professional development to control their teaching and developing the listening skill in their students.

Introduction

Many teachers find difficulty when teaching or developing listening in their students because they don't know enough information about this skill. They should know the following if they want to achieve success when teaching and developing listening in their students:

- A description of listening as a process in TEFL.
- Factors affecting listening.
- Guidelines to consider when teaching listening.
- How to teach a listening task.
- Some examples of listening activities that should be applied in the classroom for practicing and developing listening in students who learn EFL.
- Types of cognitive processing occur when students listen.
- Stages of teaching a listening task & the role of the teacher in each stage.
- And finally, the teacher should know how to help weak students develop listening skill.

That is what we are going to elaborate on the following pages.

Continue reading if You are Interested.

What is listening?

"Listening" is receiving language through the ears. It involves identifying the sounds of speech and processing them into words and sentences. When we listen, we use our ears to receive individual sounds (letters, stress, rhythm and pauses) and we use our brain to convert these into messages that mean something to us.

Listening in any language requires focus and attention. It is a skill that some people need to work at harder than others. People who have difficulty concentrating are typically poor listeners. Listening to a foreign language requires even greater focus.

The listening process should involve the following:

- Receiving the words while we listen.
- Understanding what we have received & remembering what was said.
- Processing what we've received by producing it with our own words.
- Responding to what we listened to by doing some tasks to assure understanding.

Why to teach listening?

Listening plays a critical role both in communication and in language acquisition; however, it is one of the least understood process in language learning.

Research and theories point to the benefit of providing a silent or pre-speaking period for beginner learners to give them the opportunity to store information in their memories. This silent period could be several class periods of listening activities that foster vocabulary and build comprehension such as using Total Physical Response teaching approach.

The teacher can plan for this silent period as follow:

- Give a series of commands and demonstrate or act out each command.
- Learners show their comprehension by acting out the commands as repeated by the teacher.
- Learners themselves begin to give the commands to each other as they feel comfortable speaking.

The silent period may also include learners listening to tape-recorded conversations two or three times for each conversation before answering questions on its content.

Factors affecting listening:

1. The listener:

- The more interest the listener has in the topic, the more comprehension will occur when teaching listening.
- Having listeners got background knowledge about the listening topic facilitates teaching the listening lesson, enhances understanding of the listening content and encourages students to participate in the listening activities.
- Understanding the key vocabulary embedded in the listening text fosters listeners' attention, comprehension and participation.

2. The speaker:

- Exposing listeners to the colloquial language and reduced forms that the speakers usually use will facilitate comprehension.
- Making listeners aware of the speakers' corrections, use of rephrasing and some functional expressions assists comprehension.

3. Content:

- The more familiar vocabulary, structures and functional expressions are for students, the more comprehension will occur when teaching listening.

4. Visual support:

- The availability of videos, pictures, diagrams, facial expressions, body language and any other visual aids increases students' comprehension and participation.

Two types of cognitive processing occur when students listen:**1. Top-down processing:**

Students utilize background knowledge to give meaning and interpret the text.

2. Bottom-up processing:

Students give meaning to the text using the incoming language data such as sounds, words, grammatical items, phonology features: stress, rhythm and intonation.

Guidelines to select good listening activities and techniques:

1. Relate listening to students' interests, goals and experiences to keep their motivation and attention high.

2. Select authentic material both in language and tasks. You should reflect real language discourses by using videos, audio tapes and TV or radio broadcasts of actual exchanges.

3. Give opportunities to develop both top-down and bottom-up processing skills
 - Top-down activities discuss what students already know about the topic.
 - Bottom-up activities practice components of the language (sounds, words, intonation, grammatical structure).

4. Encourage development of listening strategies such as predicting, asking for clarification, using non-verbal cues, ... that increase the chances for successful listening.
 - e.g. When using videos:
 - When sound off, students make predictions and answer questions about setting, actions, interactions, ...
 - When sound on, students confirm or modify predictions.

5. Teach activities not test them:
 - Don't focus on memory rather than on the process of listening.
 - Don't give practice rather than help students develop listening ability.

e.g. * Having students listen to a passage followed by true/false questions might focus on the learners' ability to remember rather than help them to develop the skill of determining main idea and details.

* Pre and post listening activities should help students focus attention on what they listen so that they can transfer the listening skill to the world beyond the classroom.

The following are the main purposes for listening:

- Listening for general information: An overview of what is included in the listening text.
- Listening for details, for groups of words & phrases at sentence level.
- Listening for specific information, for information at word level.
- Listening for recognizing & guessing the meaning of some words.
- Listening for confirming or denying predictions made before listening.
- Listening for identifying emotion or the mood of certain speakers.
- Listening for inferring the relationship between speakers.
- Listening for recognizing context; who are speaking, where & when the conversation takes place.
- Listening for identifying opinions or the attitude of certain speakers.
- Listening for extracting the main ideas expressed in the whole recording.

The following are the main listening comprehension skills:

- Recognizing communicative functions of utterances according to situations, participants and their goals.
- Distinguishing between literal & implied meanings.
- Using nonverbal clues; facial expressions & body language to describe meanings.
- Detecting key words and guessing the meaning of them from context.
- Recognizing that particular meanings may be expressed by different grammatical forms.
- Recognizing reduced forms of words.
- Recognizing English stress at the word or sentence level.
- Recognizing the different patterns of intonation and the function of each.
- Recognizing tenses, word classes and patterns.
- Deducing causes and effects and detecting relations between ideas; main idea, supporting ideas, new or given information,
- Recognizing and using phrases and expressions used in spoken discourse.

How to teach a listening lesson:

Presenting a listening task goes in three stages . In each stage there are some steps that should be followed:

#1. Pre-listening stage:

* Prepare pupils for the listening activity by:

- 1- Introducing the topic of listening; say the title of the topic.
- 2- Activating pupils' existing knowledge; lead discussion around the topic to elicit what pupils already know about the topic and what they need to know or what information they anticipate to listen to.
- 3- Building prior knowledge; provide appropriate background information about the speakers, the topic, concepts and vocabulary embedded in the text and motivate pupils' interest to listen.
- 4- Defining a purpose for the listening activity; ask a pre-question pupils think of its answer while listening or identify a task for pupils to complete during listening.

#2. During listening stage:

* Pupils listen to the text at least twice:

- 1- The first time allows pupils to answer the pre-question, get a general idea about the topic and verify the accuracy of their predictions.
- 2- The second time and subsequent times help pupils to derive the information they need to complete the tasks identified in pre-listening stage.

* Examples for some tasks to be done during listening:

- Answering some questions on specific information in the listening text.
- Completing a map, chart, or graph using information listened to.

#3. Post-listening stage:

* Pupils act upon what they have heard to give evidence that they understood the text.

* Examples for some post-listening tasks:

- Summarizing the main ideas of the listening text either orally or in writing.
- Writing a composition based on the material acquired during listening.
- Outlining the material they listened to in writing using charts, diagrams, etc.

e.g. having students to compare, fill forms, answer comprehension questions etc.

The following are the main nine listening tasks that you should have your students practice in pairs or in small groups.

The main nine listening tasks

1. **Doing:** the listener responds physically by actions.
2. **Choosing:** the listener selects from alternatives; pictures, words, objects, ...
3. **Answering:** the listener answers questions about the text.
4. **Condensing:** the listener takes notes or make outlines.
5. **Extending:** the listener continues a story or solve a problem.
6. **Duplicating:** the listener repeats or translates a text.
7. **Transferring:** the listener draws a route or fill in a form.
8. **Modeling:** the listener performs a similar task. E.g. giving instructions as he listens.
9. **Conversing:** the listener plays a role in face-to-face conversations.

After the listening task students should be able to:

- tell the reason for listening.
- recall what they know about the topic.
- use their background knowledge and context to predict and confirm meaning.
- recall important words and structures.
- guess unknown words and expressions.
- organize what they hear.
- discriminate between sounds.
- use expressions in real life situations.
- use intonation and stress when saying grammatical structures.
- tell the main idea of the listening text.
- use content words in sentences of their own.
- understand and use reduced forms.

Seven tips for teachers to help low-achievers in listening tasks:

1. Know well who low-achiever students are. They are students who usually:
 - lack basic knowledge or skills.
 - have difficulty in comprehension.
 - lack concentration.
 - confuse easily in the classroom.
2. Change your attitudes towards them.
3. Give them clear, step by step instructions.
4. Be ready to give them extra help or explanation.
5. Motivate them all the time using all possible ways.
6. Be aware of their learning or studying habits and try to improve them.
7. Know their leaning styles and adapt your teaching to them.

Steps help weak students develop listening skill

At the pre-listening stage, the following must be done:

- Revising or presenting key vocabulary.
- Revising or presenting key grammatical structures.
- Revising or presenting key functions and phrases to express them.
- Determining a clear purpose for listening.
- Identifying the listening skill to improve.
- Creating a simple task based on the listening text to be done during listening.
e.g. a very easy question, a gap-filling task, ... etc.

During listening, the following must be done:

- Using visual support; wall sheet, diagrams, to clarify meanings.
- Using body language; gestures, facial expressions, ... etc. to show meanings.
- Reading the listening text with the tape or again after the tape from the tapescript if it is helpful to students.

At the post-listening stage, the following must be done:

- Encouraging students to answer the very easy questions that are stated before.
Make weak students have a feeling of success.
- Writing more questions on the listening text to make it understandable to students.
- Asking students to guess the meaning of a key word or phrase included in the listening text.
- Asking students to role play the conversation or read the text aloud.

In brief, you can teach listening tasks in eight steps:**Before:**

1. Determine a reason for listening.
2. Give a general idea of the topic.
3. Identify the type of speech (conversation, radio ad, passage, ...) and the functions included in the text (persuade, request ...).
4. Present and practice the lexis included in the text.
5. Ask students to predict the information they will listen to.
6. Recall background information that relates to the text.

During:

7. Show & point to a visual support to assist the meaning.

After:

8. Give some exercises or activities to check students' understanding of the information they've listened to.

Conclusion

Developing students' listening comprehension is a challenge. It depends both on the teacher's and student's attention. Knowledge of the listening process and factors that affect it enable teachers to select, create and teach listening texts and activities in the way that meets the needs of their students. Then, teachers should weave these listening activities in the curriculum to create the balance that mirrors the real-world integration of listening with speaking, reading and writing.

Final word

From my educational & supervisory experience I find many problems that result in weak students & poor learning environment originate basically from the teachers themselves. Who miss something can't give it anyway. If the teacher could not help the students to learn, who else have the ability and qualifications to achieve this mission?!!!

Hints:

1. the information included in this guide is for developing EFL teachers professionally, achieving progress in their career and getting control of teaching the listening skill.
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