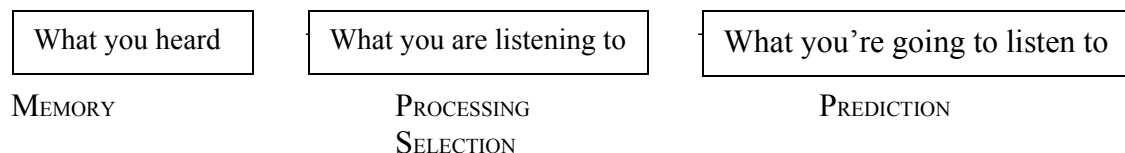


“I’m sorry, I didn’t catch that.” Ways to help students with listening.

The listening skill involves doing these things all at the same time:



Problems for students:

- Too fast. Can’t distinguish separate words.
- Can’t follow the rhythm. Unfamiliar intonation patterns don’t allow them to recognise sense groups, questions, inferred message, or mood.
- Difficult accents.
- Background noise or distraction.
- Unfamiliar context or text-type.
- Unknown vocabulary.
- Lack of time to process information, anxiety about length of text and concentration span.

Most of these problems relate to processing i.e. not listening but actually hearing and making sense of the text.

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS IMPROVE THEIR LISTENING:

A Live listening. More natural. Teacher can expand, reformulate, explain vocab, check understanding as they go along. Can be interactive – encourage sts to ask questions. Look at sts’ faces to see if they’re OK. Task can be VERY minimal. Do a follow up to check. e.g. has anyone had a similar experience? How similar?

B Students work together. It isn’t a test, so get students to confer and help each other. Obviously can’t listen together but can compare what (they think) they’ve heard after every listening. A great confidence builder and useful for you too.

C Prediction work pre-listening. An essential part of the listening process (and not in exams!) coming from students as much as teacher. Discuss the topic or situation OR students predict what they expect to hear (e.g. which of these words/topics would be included). Feed in useful vocab/ideas at this stage to prepare students for what they’re going to hear. **NB** Read the tapescript first!

D Pulling out language from the text to work with first. Pre-teaching or brainstorming vocabulary OR true/false sentences OR Who Said What OR even grammar. Discuss and think about the meaning before listening.

E. Get students to read the text first – why not if it’s not a test? Don’t let them read AND listen here (see **J**), but read THEN listen. This is very good for students who have big problems with listening (the hard of hearing, for example): they can read at home before the class. It can also be done as a jigsaw reading in class, with different students reading different sections and then discussing them.

- F Working with the written text pre-listening.** Students are given the text to work on i.e. not just to read as in E. This could be unjumbling paragraphs or dialogue, filling in gaps in the text (words or longer sections) etc.
- G Identifying specific language** Can sts hear the words or phrases worked on in C or D? (Not as easy as you might think; it can be challenging.) Help lower level students by putting phrases in order, just playing the relevant bit of text, or both.
- H Chunking the text.** Play small parts, checking understanding as you go along. Ask questions related to that part, both before (aids prediction) and after (memory not a problem) playing. Repeat parts if necessary. Work on prediction too. eg. asking students What do you think she will say next? Or even, what word comes next.
NB Consider playing whole text first time around (with gist task or to spot words or phrases) to allow students to get used to accent.
- I Psychology.** Tell sts it's difficult, i.e. it's not that they are useless. Play text as many times as necessary to lessen anxiety. Play again **after** they know the answer to ensure they **do** hear it in the end – this is very satisfying. Encourage questions. Aim: zero uncertainty – in other words, that students feel they have fully understood the text or as much as they wanted to. Praise and encourage students, but don't go over the top.
- J Focus on problem phrases.** In open class build up what students have heard on the board in a kind of mini-dictation approach. Play the sentence or phrase several times, writing up words students have heard correctly as you go along, discarding wrong ones and indicating missing words with a line. Helps solve mysteries or mishearings.
- K Use the tapescript** as a final listening and reading activity. Students can fill in their gaps and ask questions if they want to. It also helps with pronunciation issues.
- L Follow up work on sounds and connected speech:** word linking, sound changes, sound versus spelling, schwa /ə/ etc. Understanding will aid processing in future. Sts can listen and mark script for chosen focus. THEN get them to practice reading aloud before finally reading along with the tape.
- M Follow up work on sentence stress and intonation.** Mimic the speaker and look at intonation patterns. Can also change to create a different impression. E.g. more friendly/angry/rude or whatever. Mark sense groups on tapescript.
- N Follow up work on language.** Consider choice of language (register) or grammar structures or lexical fields or referencing. Now sts have understood the context for language (listening text) use it!
- O Dictations or dictoglosses.** Important to read at a natural speed with natural connected speech, sentence stress etc. Use the same scripts as the listening, perhaps in another class. For dictogloss, you could use the CD/tape itself rather than you.