

HOW TO TEACH GOOD LISTENING SKILLS

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Nowadays every educated person wants to know English well. A lot of people learn it for different reasons. Some just need English to use it while travelling, others to read some literature for their thesis. Still there are many others for whom English is their profession. They want to know it fluently and the first step to master the language is to learn it at a professional level at a specialized university. There are four main skills of the language that a person should acquire: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Today I would like to speak more about teaching listening skills.

Teaching listening skills is one of the most difficult tasks for any teacher. Successful listening skills are acquired over time and with lots of practice. It's rather complicated for students because there are no definite rules. Listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This involves understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary, and grasping his meaning (Howatt and Dakin). An able listener is capable of doing these four things simultaneously.

Listening is one of the fundamental language skills. It's a medium through which children, young people and adults gain a large portion of their education--their information, their understanding of the world and of human affairs, their ideals, sense of values, and their appreciation. Listening involves many other basic processes such as linguistic competence, previous knowledge that is not necessarily of a purely linguistic nature. Lack of social, cultural, factual, and contextual knowledge of the target language can present an obstacle to listening comprehension and it can cause a lot of difficulties.

Here we can speak about a mental block. While listening a student may not understand what is being said and he starts panicking. At this point, many students

just tune out or get caught up in an internal dialogue trying to translate a specific word. They get distracted and it creates problems. The role of a teacher then is to convince them that not understanding is OK. Only practice makes it perfect. Students need to listen to English as often as possible. Encourage them to get a film, or listen to an English radio station. Students should often listen, but they should listen for short periods - five to ten minutes, four or five times a week. Even if they don't understand anything, five to ten minutes is a must for those who want to improve their skills in listening comprehension. Still it won't happen too quickly as it requires time.

In order to teach listening skills, a teacher should firstly state the difficulties. For a student of a foreign language, accurate and intelligent listening is a necessity, and the teacher is responsible to help learners to acquire this skill which provides the very foundation for learning and functioning in a language. In listening the learner can exercise no controls over the structural and lexical range of the speaker to whom he is listening. Nevertheless, any listener can learn to focus on significant content items, he can learn to listen selectively.

Listening is a receptive skill, and receptive skills give way to productive skills. If we have our students produce something, the teaching will be more communicative. So how to stimulate students' interest in the material they are going to listen to? First you should draw on students' previous knowledge and opinions by aiding comprehension through vocabulary and guided listening exercises. In a lot of discussion activities the students will finally integrate new information with previously held opinions. What exercises can be of great use?

1. Predicting.

Students read the title and try to guess what the story is going to be about. It will also develop their communicative skills.

2. Think ahead.

Some questions can be put before listening to the story to discuss the issues in the listening material. All students can be divided into several groups, discuss it and then share their opinions with other groups.

3. Vocabulary.

Some tasks can be given to prepare the students for vocabulary and expressions used in the listening section. Here I can recommend such exercises as vocabulary in a reading text, in sentences, in word groups.

4. Task listening.

It is a kind of general understanding of the material grasping some ideas only. Students should focus on an important point in the recorded material.

5. Listening for main ideas.

The students hear the material for the second time and are given questions to guide their listening.

6. Listening for details.

Here the students are asked to focus on detailed information, clarify any item from the recorded part. The teacher should encourage students to defend their answers and convince all the other students in the rightness of the opinion of the defender. It is important to know that some of the questions require interpretation or interference.

7. Looking at language.

Here we may highlight the use of grammar, idioms or another aspect of the language. Students should practice the language in a new context.

8. Follow-up activities.

This can include discussion questions, essay topics, interactive processing activities. During these activities students will have an opportunity to examine creatively their beliefs about the issues presented.

So as you see while planning exercises, listening materials, task and visual materials should be taken into consideration. The teacher should produce a suitable discourse while using recordings. A preset purpose, ongoing learner response, motivation, success, simplicity, and feedback should be the things considered while preparing the task. Visual materials are useful for contextualization. We can also categorize the goals of listening as listening for enjoyment, for information, for persuasion, for perception and lastly for comprehension and to solve problems.

Since most of the actual listening the student will be exposed to outside of the class is likely to be real-life conversation, it seems wisest to use materials cast in real-life situations for listening comprehension exercises. The teacher can easily adapt to listening exercises those situations through which the text presents oral drills and communicative activities, just by giving them a slightly different twist. Listening exercises should be as natural as the situations from which they grow. In other words, an exercise in listening comprehension must be as close as possible to real life. By means of this, a teacher has a lot to do, and has to be a very creative person in order to teach listening communicatively.

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