

Listening: Strategies to build confidence and perseverance



Key principles

1 Maximise teacher and student use of the target language.

This is listening practice in itself, ideal because students tend not to be anxious, the context is predictable but the details can be unpredictable. The more often students hear and work through the target language the better they are able to process it.

→ Think of all speaking activities as listening activities too and let this influence your planning. For example, verbal tennis, speaking lines, role plays are as much about listening as they are about speaking.



2 Use explicit strategies to make listening a task not a test.

Students tend to fear listening and perceive it as a test, when the teacher plans it as a learning task. Subvert this anxiety in a variety of practical ways:

- Learners work in pairs and listen for alternate number answers and then share their answers before listening a second time. On feedback their approach is “we think that no. 1 is.....”
- Give the answers first and ask learners to anticipate (written or orally) what language they will hear (even scripting a suggested dialogue/monologue). When they listen, they compare what they’ve anticipated with the audio material.
- Encourage students to ask for the passage to be repeated, as necessary.
- No questions first time around. Learners listen for intonation, tone of voice clues to speaker mood and opinion. Second time learners listen for key words. Third time respond to details for comprehension.
- Learners respond to material heard by ordering cards. The focus can be the on structures, where learners sort the activity cards into columns to denote present, past or future or opinions, where the categorising is into positive and negatives or simply on the order in which the items on the cards are mentioned in the passage.
- Learners are the source of listening themselves. A text is posted on the wall – learners read and memorise as much as they can and run back to their group and repeat it. Learners have to respond to the text by answering questions or filling in a grid or completing a multiple choice activity. (if learners write down what is said, this is called ‘running dictation’).
- Pre-teach some key language. Teacher selects some key language crucial to the listening passage and flags this up, defining it in the foreign language for learners before listening. This activity is a listening task in itself and can greatly enhance learners’ comprehension of the text when they come to listen to it.
- Use listening as a stimulus for speaking as often as you can, rather than an end in its own right.
- Learners make their own listening material in groups (as a revision activity at the end of a module) and the whole class completes the different activities.



3 Use authentic materials as much as possible.

This increases the challenge and ensures that learners encounter unfamiliar language, which is required at GCSE. There is far less of this in the text book.

- Move away from the 'disembodied voices' of CD by using video extracts for listening tasks (Youtube, foreign television channels, short tv adverts, bbc online clips)
- Use songs. Gap fill and or responding using a simple proforma to identify key features, key language and elicit opinions.



4 Mix and match text book and past exam paper audio.

Alternative text books / courses will include different vocabulary even when the theme is the same, so the challenge is increased. Past exam papers also include a combination of topic areas in one question.

5 Use listen and read – make multiple use of transcripts.

With more challenging passages it makes a lot of sense to have subsequent listenings that involve listening and reading at the same time. This really helps in the formative stages. It helps students sort out for themselves which words they didn't understand because they couldn't process the familiar language quickly enough OR the messages they didn't understand because the words were unfamiliar.

6 Encourage repeated listening to the same passage.

Repeated listening develops resilience. Students believe that Spanish (Fr, Gm) people just speak faster than we do – they are not convinced initially that this is just their perception because their brain is having to work harder, taking longer to process the information in the foreign language. They don't initially believe that just by listening again and again (and again) they will get more, but this is in fact what happens!

- Repeat listening exam papers a couple of lessons later or the following week (after you have gone through and marked it. This really improves confidence which in turn impacts on performance.

7 Use self-created, differentiated passages (hard → easy).

This is a really good way to encourage perseverance especially within a mixed ability class. By the end the answer will be obvious, but at the beginning it is not. All will eventually succeed, but some will get there sooner than others. This is very effective at developing the willingness to listen for longer, even to harder material.

8 Teach prediction and note-taking explicitly.

I tell students that prediction is the way to perform at least 0.5 grade higher in the listening. I have no empirical evidence that this is the case, but I intuitively feel that this is even an underestimation! Students need to do it, to be taught to do it as a very deliberate strategy every time they approach a listening task.

Note-taking is also extremely valuable when it comes to recording thoughts during a listening that could help you to pick the answer up a 2nd time.

