

Module 9 – How to teach Listening and Reading

I. Listening and reading: receptive skills	2
1. Receptive is not passive.....	2
2. Listening activities: imitating real-life situations.....	2
3. The importance of developing reading skills.....	3
4. Skimming and scanning: two reading strategies.....	4
II. Planning a receptive skills lesson	6
1. Things to bear in mind	6
2. The stages of a listening and reading lesson	6
III. Ideas for listening lessons	9
1. Some useful activities	9
2. Using songs in your lessons	9
IV. Ideas for reading lessons.....	12
1. Follow-up activities.....	12
2. Building a bank of activities	12

I. Listening and reading: receptive skills

1. Receptive is not passive

Here you will find out ways to help your students develop their listening and reading comprehension skills, which are referred to as receptive skills. Don't let the term mislead you – receptive does not mean passive. Both reading and listening require active involvement and effort on the part of the student. In fact students need to develop their own strategies in order to work with written material or the spoken word.

2. Listening activities: imitating real-life situations

In real situations, the listener will often need to take action based on information that has been provided, so it is important that they are able to understand what is being said. Action-based scenarios include listening to announcements at the train station or tuning into a weather report. Non-action based listening scenarios might be watching television, listening to a story or watching a play at the theatre.

Your challenge as a teacher is to develop listening activities in the classroom which try to imitate real-life listening circumstances and thus help develop students' abilities to cope with them and improve comprehension. Here is a list of characteristics of real-life listening situations. Remember these qualities when devising listening activities in class. They will help the activities to be more authentic and useful to the student.

Chunks or phrases

Conversations consist of taking turns; often utterances are only a few seconds each. E.g:

A: What's the matter? You don't look very happy at all.

B: Nothing, it's just that...

A: Go ahead, what is it?

B: Never mind.

A: Come on, tell me.

B: Well...

A: Did you fail the test?

B: Yeah, actually I did.

Pronunciation

Words are often pronounced differently from how they are written, e.g. 'I'm going to...' becomes 'I'm gonna...', 'I want to...' becomes 'I wanna', 'I don't know' becomes 'I dunno'.

Grammar

Informal speech is often ungrammatical. For example, speakers can turn statements into questions simply by using interrogative intonation without putting an auxiliary verb at the beginning. 'You're going to Frankfurt?' 'He likes champagne?'

Fillers

Conversations contain lots of fillers, e.g. 'I mean... Well, ...' Students need to learn to recognise them and understand that they are not to be taken literally.

Visual clues

There are visual clues such as body language. Learners should pay attention to such clues and also be aware of the differences between the body language in their country and that in English speaking countries. For example, smiling is more of a habit for Americans whereas in many other places it usually means the speaker is amused or extremely happy.

Taking the listener into account

Usually the speaker directs the conversation at the listener and responds depending on how much the listener has understood.

3. The importance of developing reading skills

Equally important to building students' listening skills is helping them develop their reading skills.

Teaching **reading** can reinforce students' understanding of new information they are learning. It is recognised that general language acquisition is helped enormously when students read a lot; this is because when they are reading, they assimilate and review chunks of language subconsciously.

Another reason why it is good to help your students get into the habit of reading and to find it enjoyable is because it is something they can do on their own. For this reason, in addition to the materials provided by your school/ organisation, you can help motivate your students to develop this skill by selecting texts that you read or think that they might be interested in and by adapting them for your reading skills lessons.

Your students will be able to use their reading skills every day, and in some cases it could be very important that they are able to read!

Here are some instances where your students will need to use their reading skills:

- Following a recipe (you need to use the right ingredients and measurements. Also think about potential health implications, such as allergies?)
- Road warning signs
- Newspapers
- Official documents
- Timetables (you don't want to miss your train on the first day of work)
- Medicine prescriptions
- Instructions
- Weather reports
- Important letters or bills that need paying.

When you teach, consider using these types of reading materials. Also consider creative writing, such as poems, songs, short stories, novels or advertisements.

4. Skimming and scanning: two reading strategies

Working on reading skills during class time allows students to develop two different reading strategies: 'skimming for gist' and 'scanning for specific information'.

Skimming refers to reading in order to understand the main ideas within a passage. People skim when they have a lot of material to read in a limited amount of time.

How to Skim:

- Read the title.
- Read the introduction or the first paragraph.
- Read the first sentence of every paragraph or every other paragraph.
- Read any headings and sub-headings.
- Notice any pictures, charts, or graphs.
- Notice any italicized or boldface words or phrases.
- Read the last paragraph or summary.

Scanning is the technique used when you want to find specific information quickly. You have a question in your mind and you scan a passage only to find the answer. You ignore all unrelated information.

How to Scan:

- Try to anticipate how the answer will appear and what clues might help you locate the answer. For example, if you are looking for a certain date, quickly read the passage looking only for numbers.
- Use any aids, such as headings and sub-headings, that will help you identify which part of the text contains the necessary information.
- Selectively read and skip through sections of the passage.

II. Planning a receptive skills lesson

1. Things to bear in mind

In order to help students develop their receptive skills and get the most out of any text or recording, it is a good idea to plan a well-staged lesson. Ideally, a lesson should begin with a general treatment of the text or recorded material and gradually take on a more specific focus.

Listening

When you plan a listening skills lesson, bear in mind that your class will benefit from listening to an unfamiliar voice – so use recordings when you can.

Recordings will help develop receptive skills. When planning the stages of your listening skills lesson, try to make your activities progress from overall (global) understanding to detailed understanding. Done like this, the class will have more progressive focus, but it does mean that you will need to do a certain amount of preparation before the activity can begin.

Reading

When you plan a reading skills lesson, be aware that it is not going to be helpful for you to read the text aloud. You want students to expand their reading skills and these skills are different from listening ones.

Likewise it is unhelpful for your students to read the text aloud themselves (unless you are particularly focusing on pronunciation skills). The reason for this is that when students read aloud, they do not focus as well on the content of the text. They tend to focus on understanding one word at a time and are usually so concerned about pronunciation that their reading comprehension is compromised.

When they listen to others, they do not take in the content in the same way as when reading silently on their own.

2. The stages of a listening and reading lesson

Pre-listening/reading Stage

1. Create an interest: Before the students read or listen, find a way to spark their curiosity about the text or recording.

2. Pre-teach vocabulary: Focus on any key words or phrases which students need to understand in order to carry out the listening or reading tasks. Either elicit the words (i.e. find out whether

they already know the words) or present the words they don't know. Give words within a context as you elicit/present.

3. Set up the gist listening/reading task: To ensure that students understand a general idea of what they have read or listened to, provide them with just one or two very general questions before having them read or listen. These are often referred to as gist, or global, questions. For example 'What is the text about?' or 'Who is the main character and does the author like him?' Setting these prior to listening/reading will help them focus as they listen or read, improve their comprehension and also boost confidence as they almost always find they are able to successfully carry out the task.

During listening/reading stage

1. **Listening/reading for gist.** Students read the text to read or listen to a recording. In a reading lesson, set a time limit (keep it short!) to make sure that students skim the passage rather than read it word for word.
2. **Pair/group work.** Students check their answers to the gist questions. Checking together reduces the anxiety of the student, gives them speaking and listening practice time and allows the teacher to monitor.
3. **Feedback to the whole class.** If students have not achieved a global understanding, play the tape or ask them to read the text again.
4. **Set detailed questions.** For example, 'What did Mary give to John for his birthday?' 'Why was John surprised when he saw the present?'
5. **Listening/reading for specific information.** In a reading skills lesson, give students ample time to scan the text looking for specific information.
6. **Pair/group work.** Ask students to check their answers in pairs or groups.
7. **Feedback to the whole class.** Ask for personal responses in a class session. If there is any disagreement on an answer, use the recording/text to focus on the relevant part.

Post-listening/reading stage

1. Follow-up. This might be a discussion/ role-play /writing or vocabulary exercise. The follow up activity gives students the opportunity to use the new vocabulary, practise their speaking and listening skills, personalise the lesson and gain a sense of achievement.

2. Homework. Set another follow-up activity as homework, e.g. an essay based on the text or recording.

In a listening lesson, students will need to listen to a recording (or someone reading a text) at least twice.

The first time is called a "gist listening" and is carried out to help students understand the main ideas in a text.

· The second time students listen they have to focus on the specific details in the text. One way to help them do this is to provide them with a thorough list of questions that we have them read through before having them listen to a text a second time.

This said, there are more ways we can help students understand the details of a listening text and it is nice to change your approach from one lesson to the next in order to keep students interested.

III. Ideas for listening lessons

1. Some useful activities

Here are some popular and useful activities which you can incorporate in your listening lessons.

- Obeying the speaker's instructions, e.g. drawing shapes and pictures
- Ticking off items (words) you hear; for example "Listen to the dialogue about travelling and tick the means of transport which the people mention"
- Answering yes/no questions or determining true/false statements based on the recording
- Multiple choice – selecting the option which is correct according to what the speakers say
- Filling in clozes , for example: Michael travelled to _____ because he was invited to attend _____. Students fill in the blanks with the information they hear.
- Guessing definitions: asking what some words used by the speakers might mean.
- Filling in a timetable or chart. For example, 'Listen to the policeman's story about catching a criminal and put the events in the correct order'.
- Answering comprehension questions: wh-questions requiring longer answers
- Note-taking and summarizing. Students can be asked to listen to a presentation, jot down the main points and summarize
- Note-taking and paraphrasing : jotting down information from the recording and rewording it in a different way
- Interpretation. For example, 'Listen to the scientist describing the sources of pollution and draw a graph which illustrates the ratio of each source.'

2. Using songs in your lessons

Songs are an enjoyable part of classroom language learning, and recordings of your favourite songs are a valuable language resource. You can use them to consolidate grammatical structures and vocabulary, to initiate a discussion, for revision, to focus on word order or simply as a useful 'filler'. Here are some examples of how songs can be used in the classroom to work on different language areas.

Grammatical structures

"Morning has broken" by Cat Stevens

Present Perfect

"A Hard Day's Night" by The Beatles

Present Perfect

"Yellow Submarine" by The Beatles

Present Simple and Past Simple

"The River of Dreams" by Billy Joel	Prepositions
"Under the Boardwalk" by The Drifters	Prepositions
"Tom's Diner" by Suzanne Vega	Present Continuous

Vocabulary

"One Hand in My Pocket" by Alanis Morissette	Adjectives
"You've Got a Friend" by Carole King	Seasons, times of the day

Topics

"Baggy Trousers" by Madness	School Days
"Father and Son" by Cat Stevens	Family relations/generation gap
"You're in the Army Now" by Status Quo	War and military service
"Manic Monday" by the Bangles	Daily routine
"Candle in the Wind" by Elton John	About M. Monroe/ Good for rhymes.

Pronunciation

As songs tend to rhyme, they are a useful way of practising pronunciation, e.g. "Wonderful Tonight" by Eric Clapton.

"Every breath you take" by The Police	Good rhymes
---------------------------------------	-------------

Possible stages for using a song in a lesson:

1. Elicit the topic of the song or the name of the group with a visual image or story.
2. Play the song for a general task such as what the song is about.
3. Feedback on the task.
4. Play the song for a detailed task such as gap filling.
5. Students check their answers in pairs and then with the whole class.
6. Final listen and sing-a-long.
7. Follow-up activities such as discussing a topic raised by the song, e.g. sexual stereotypes ("Boys Don't Cry" by The Cure).

Ideas for song tasks:

1. Gap fill
2. Reordering lines of the song that you have written out, cut up and shuffled
3. Pronunciation work (rhyming)
4. Identifying wrong words from a handout of the song's lyrics (with mistakes)
5. Group response by standing up/raising hands when hearing specific grammatical structures in the song
6. Sing-a-long
7. Put pictures in order (following the story of a song).

IV. Ideas for reading lessons

1. Follow-up activities

After your students have completed and understood a text, you will want to move on to follow up activities so you can develop the ideas and themes in a fun and creative way. Here are some of the many ways this can be done.

- Do-it-yourself questions - in groups/pairs, students write comprehension questions for the other students to answer
- Provide a title
- Summarise
- Continue the story
- Preface the story (What happened before the activity in the text began?)
- Fill in gapped text
- Correct mistakes in the text - students have two texts and have to compare/contrast by asking each other questions about the texts.
- Discussion/debates based on themes in the text
- Revision - rewriting the story using pictures, storyboarding, graphs and pie charts
- Role play or interview
- Write a dialogue in pairs/groups and then perform it for the class
- Write an article, letter, diary entry, etc
- Further work on vocabulary

2. Building a bank of activities

Now that you have learned the basic elements involved in planning a receptive skills lesson, you can start to build up a repertoire of how to exploit songs and texts. There are plenty of activities for before, during and after reading a text or listening to a song. Here are some examples to which you can add your own ideas:

Pre-listening or reading activities could include:

- Predicting what a song is about from the title alone
- Passing around photos or pictures relating to the topic
- Predicting words that could appear in the text or song
- Pre-teaching difficult words or phrases

Activities during the task could include:

- Inventing titles for each paragraph or verse
- Taking dictation from a song

- Writing a summary of a text or song
- Answering questions during the song

After the exercise you could try asking your students to do the following:

- Write alternative lyrics/an extra verse to the song
- Write an interview between two of the characters in the text or song
- Re-write the text from someone else's point of view
- Discuss the theme of the song or text