

Planning a Listening Activity

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Listen... no seriously... listen. In the classroom, what do you hear?

- Students talking
- A door opening
- Papers rustling
- The air conditioning running
- Outside traffic
- You talking

In a language classroom, I bet it is easy for students to choose not to speak, to choose not to read, to choose not to write. However, can students choose not to listen? Even if students plug their ears, sounds have an amazing way of seeping in.

Yet, I would argue that listening is the most important, and most neglected, skill in ESL/EFL teaching.

With most classroom activities, there should be a beginning, middle, and end. Here's a quick summary of how you might want to enact a listening activity:

Prelisting:

The purpose of the Prelisting Activity is to prepare students for listening, to ensure student success, and to get students excited about listening. Prelisting Activities should motivate students and answer the questions, "Why are we doing this?"

Three parts to Prelisting (you should do all three)

1. Think-About: Here is where we want to activate our students' prior knowledge.
2. Vocabulary: Give students the new words to be listening for...
3. Predicting: Educated guessing is such an important part of teaching.

Prelisting: Why are we doing this?		
Think About <i>Some sample activities:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give an opinion• Share knowledge about a topic• Look at photos• Brainstorm a topic• Talk about a map, chart, photo, etc	Vocabulary <i>Some sample activities:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review vocabulary• Match words with pictures or definitions• Give word list and ask students for a short summary• True/false quiz	Predict <i>Some sample activities:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connect Think About with vocabulary• Predict from the title what will be said• Study a character chart• Outline missing parts of a paragraph

While-Listening:

Students tend to listen carefully if they have a purpose or a task to perform based on the listening. A thorough procedure could be like the following. Students should:

- Listen to the entire passage (maximum 2 minutes in length). [Don't let students do anything. Their job is to just listen.]
- Ask for clarification if something is unclear. [If at all possible, give clarification in English.]
- Complete the task; use the notes if necessary.
- Listen again and check answers, fill in missing parts.
- Compare work with a classmate(s) before teacher checks student work.
- Go over answers or responses as a whole class.

Remember: While-Listening Activities answer the question: "What are we listening to?"

Three Choices for While-Listening (you should only do one)

- Listen to Main Idea: This listening is for understanding the general picture.
- Listen to Specific Events: Good for making timelines and categorizing.
- Listen to Details: close activity, multiple choice questions, etc.

While-Listening: What are we doing?		
Listen for Main Idea <i>Some sample activities:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draw what is described in the passage• Jot down key phrases and some details	Listen for Specific Events <i>Some sample activities:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outline a process• Categorize or rank according to the passage• Match or order pictures	Listen for Details <i>Some sample activities:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do a cloze exercise• Complete a chart or graph• Take a phone message

Some places to find free listening passages:

Breaking News English: <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/>

BBC: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/index.shtml>

Voice Of America: <http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/index.cfm>

English Listening Online: <http://www.ello.org/>

Nursery Rhymes: http://www.eaglesweb.com/Mother_Goose.htm

Podcasts (narration): <http://www.eslpod.com/>

Podcasts (jokes): <http://www.manythings.org/jokes/>

Podcasts (links): <http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Listening/Podcasts/>

Postlistening:

There should always be some follow-up after listening, not necessarily for the purpose of checking comprehension, but to give the students the satisfaction of knowing they can apply what they have just heard to their learning or, even, to their life. The postlistening activities are often based on something from prelistening or while-listening activities.

Postlistening should not be looked at as testing. It is merely checking to see if the

students understood the passage and can use what they heard in the future. “How can I apply this to my life?”

Postlistening: How does this relate to my life?

Teacher’s Choice

Some sample activities:

- Students can “make a phone call” to the main character from the listening and comment on something they found interesting
- Students can imagine a different ending to the listening passage
- Students can make a new title for the listening passage
- Students can make a story map of what took place and what would take place if the listening passage continued.
- Students can draw the most important scene from the listening passage.

However... do not test them on their speaking or writing skills. Remember, this is a listening activity.

A Listening Sequence example activity:

Below is a handout you could give students when doing a listening activity. This is the joke that goes with the handout.

A man was walking a lion down the street when they were stopped by a police officer. The police officer said, “You shouldn’t be walking that lion down the street. You need to take him to the zoo.”

The man replied, “Okay.”

The next day the man and the same lion are walking down the same street. They saw the same police officer and the police officers said quite angrily, “I thought I told you to take that lion to the zoo.”

The man replied calmly, “I did. And today I am taking him to the movies!” ☺

Most importantly, read all the instructions aloud! A listening activity is just that... listening. It is okay if all the answers are in a student’s L1... as long as the answers are correct.

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Joke: “A walk with a Lion”

Prelistening:

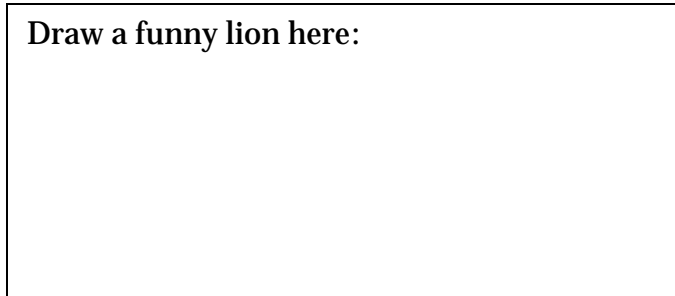
Think About: Make a list of things that make you laugh.

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-
-
-

Predicting:

What would make a lion funny?

Draw a funny lion here:



Vocabulary: Review these words: *police officer, lion, replied, zoo, movies*

While-Listening Activity

DIRECTION 1: Listen carefully to the joke your teacher will read called:

“A walk with a Lion”

DIRECTION 2: Below, list the Beginning Events, the Middle Events, and the Ending Events of the joke. Draw or write the events, as you heard them, in the boxes below:

Beginning Event:	Middle Event:	Ending Event:

Postlistening Activity: Inference/Humor

Are you a good joke teller? Practice telling a classmate your favorite joke. Listen to a classmate tell a joke.