

College of Education for Humanities

Department of English Language

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Ch8

Teaching Students to Comprehend Spoken English

Q1: What does the act of listening include?

The act of listening includes active listening, mental processing of what we hear, and listening for different purposes. Listening is not passive; it requires attention, concentration, and involvement. Active listening happens in face-to-face conversations, phone calls, lectures, and media, as well as in intrapersonal communication, such as talking to oneself. Listeners respond mentally or verbally by agreeing, questioning, or reacting to the message.

Q2: How do people process spoken language and what are the purposes of listening?

People process spoken language through **bottom-up** and **top-down processing**. Bottom-up processing involves recognizing sounds, words, and grammatical structures to understand meaning. Top-down processing depends on background knowledge, previous experience, and expectations about situations and cultural norms. Both processes work together to help listeners comprehend messages. Listening serves **interactional purposes**, which focus on social connection and maintaining harmonious relationships through casual and non-controversial topics, and **transactional purposes**, which focus on accurately understanding and exchanging important information, such as instructions, lectures, or advice.

Q3: What kinds of listening activities do EFL/ESL teachers use, and why are they important?

EFL/ESL teachers use a variety of listening activities to help students develop both bottom-up and top-down listening skills, as well as interactional and transactional listening abilities. These activities expose learners to different listening purposes, help them understand spoken English more effectively, and prepare them for real-life communication.

Q4: What activities help students identify linguistic features of spoken English?

Activities that focus on identifying linguistic features mainly develop bottom-up processing. Their goal is to help students notice sounds, stress, rhythm, and pronunciation in spoken English. Examples include recognizing blended sounds (such as *didja* for *did you*), identifying sentence stress, and distinguishing minimal

pairs (like *liver* and *river*). These activities strengthen students' perception of spoken language rather than focusing on meaning or interaction.

Q5: How do teachers use listening activities that involve responding to requests and commands?

Teachers often use listen-and-respond activities, which require students to understand specific words and grammatical structures. One common method is Total Physical Response (TPR), where students physically respond to spoken commands. Commands use action verbs combined with nouns, such as *stand up*, *touch your nose*, or *open your book*. Games like Simon Says and songs like the Hokey Pokey are also used to reduce anxiety, increase attention, and make listening enjoyable.

Q6: What activities focus on interactive listening?

Interactive listening activities help students learn how to maintain social relationships during conversations. These activities involve both bottom-up and top-down processing. Examples include watching short video conversations to identify safe topics and listener behaviors, such as nodding or using encouraging responses. Eavesdropping activities teach students to listen to real conversations to understand authentic language use. Another activity, matching, focuses on copying speakers' nonverbal behaviors to improve cultural and conversational awareness.

Q7: How do teachers help students comprehend extended speech?

To develop transactional listening, teachers use activities that focus on understanding stories, lectures, or longer spoken texts. Examples include ordering pictures based on a story, drawing visuals from a weather forecast, completing cloze listening tasks, and taking notes during extended speech. These activities help students focus on meaning and organization of information.

Q8: What are problem-solving listening activities?

Problem-solving listening activities are transactional and require students to use both bottom-up and top-down processing to understand content and reach conclusions. For example, students may listen to a recorded story about a crime and complete a chart of suspects' alibis. By analyzing the information they hear, students solve a problem, which makes listening purposeful, engaging, and cognitively challenging.

Q9: How do EFL/ESL teachers use media to teach listening?

EFL/ESL teachers use different types of media—such as radio, television, songs, films, and videos—to expose students to authentic spoken English. Media provides a wide range of listening materials, including advertisements, talk shows, news, weather forecasts, movies, documentaries, and songs. These materials help students hear real pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, and everyday language use.

Q10: How are songs used to teach listening skills?

Songs are used to give students enjoyable exposure to authentic English. Teachers select songs appropriate to students' levels and teach them in ways that make the lyrics understandable. This often includes pre-teaching vocabulary and grammar, listening for general meaning, and then completing focused tasks such as fill-in-the-blank exercises. Singing, repeating lines, and using actions or pictures—especially with children—help make the language more comprehensible.

Q11: How do teachers use video and television programs for listening practice?

Teachers use video clips from TV programs, films, commercials, and teacher-made recordings to create interactive listening activities. Videos help students understand context, body language, and social interaction. Teachers design tasks that encourage prediction, inference, and discussion, making listening more active and meaningful.

Q12: What techniques help students process authentic video materials?

Teachers use several techniques to help students understand authentic video:

- **Silent viewing**, where students watch without sound and guess what is happening
- **Soundtrack only**, where students listen without seeing the video
- **Beginning-only or ending-only viewing**, where students predict events
- **Split viewing**, where students share different pieces of information to build full understanding

These techniques help students use both **bottom-up and top-down processing**.

Q13: What problems do some EFL/ESL teachers face when teaching listening?

Two major problems are the outdated listening lab and difficulty judging the authenticity of commercial listening materials. Traditional listening labs often limit

interaction and rely on repetitive tape listening, which students may find boring and ineffective.

Q14: How can listening labs be improved?

Listening labs can be transformed into active learning spaces by using interactive tasks such as problem-solving, jigsaw listening, and student-selected materials. Multimedia labs with audio, video, computers, and internet access allow students to work at their own pace and engage with authentic materials like songs, lectures, and films. Teachers act as guides and resources rather than monitors.

Q15: What does authentic listening material include?

Authentic listening materials include natural pronunciation, blending of sounds, varied intonation and stress, realistic grammar, interruptions, overlapping speech, background noise, and attention signals such as *uh-huh* or *mmm*. Authentic materials reflect how people really speak, rather than overly simplified or scripted language.

Q16: Why is judging authenticity important when choosing listening materials?

Teachers must balance authenticity with comprehensibility. While realistic language helps prepare students for real-world communication, materials that are too authentic may overwhelm learners. Teachers should evaluate whether listening materials are appropriate for students' levels and adjust or select materials accordingly.