

Strategies for Developing Listening Skills:

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. Listening strategies can be classified by how the listener processes the input.

Top-down strategies are listener based. The listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text, and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. Top-down strategies include

- listening for the main idea
- predicting
- drawing inferences
- summarizing

Bottom-up strategies are text based; the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. Bottom-up strategies include

- listening for specific details
- recognizing cognates
- recognizing word-order patterns

Strategic listeners also use metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening.

- They plan by deciding which listening strategies will serve best in a particular situation.
- They monitor their comprehension and the effectiveness of the selected strategies.
- They evaluate by determining whether they have achieved their listening comprehension goals and whether the combination of listening strategies selected was an effective one.

Various planned materials and activities may be used to enhance the listening skills of the learners. The listening materials used in the formal language learning setting for enhancement of the listening skill are principally of three types:

- i. Authentic Listening Materials
- ii. Recorded Listening Materials
- iii. Live Listening Materials

Authentic listening materials signify real speech recorded in real life situations and may serve as a means of valuable exposure to the target language for the learners of second language. The pronunciation, stress or intonation in such cases are not planned, paced or artificially designed, but taken directly from real life and thus provide effective exercises in listening comprehension as well as sound perception. The different paces, repetitions, lack of clarity or the level of the language used may not be suitable for the level of the learners, and yet it provides scope of relevant exercise in listening skills since the learners get a taste of real life use of English and can train their ears accordingly. Recordings of Sports commentary, speeches, conversations, announcements made at railway stations or airports etc. may serve as valuable authentic listening materials.

Recorded listening materials are carefully planned and scripted by the language teacher according to the level of the learners. Learning materials designed in form of audio-CDs and worksheets provide planned exposure to the learners and are thus suitable to their age and needs. The range of accents and intonations are not haphazard but carefully designed and graded and thus allow better ear training needed for sound perception and listening comprehension. They also allow the learner to practice the listening skill at his/her own pace.

Live listening materials are the most widely used and perhaps the easiest mode of enhancing listening comprehension. The teacher himself/herself may serve as the source and hence may simplify, accelerate or slow down and modify the speech according to the needs of the learners. Scripted listening passages may be avoided and the teacher can create and recreate the listening material at his/her will according to the immediate needs of the learners. However the listening material produced in any form must be a model for hearing and there should not be over emphasis on the content or text. The materials are mostly graded on the basis of lexical and structural difficulty to facilitate optimal listening comprehension and sound perception for the learners.

Various activities designed to promote listening skills may be summarized as follows:

- Dictation: It is one of the oldest and most common listening exercises where the teacher may plan a host of meaningful and effective activities to incite active participation of

the learners. Dictating from graded texts is a common practice, but several modifications have been achieved on the basis of this exercise. John Morgan and Rinvoluceri (1983) shows an interesting mode in which the teacher dictates a series of words at a considerably fast pace. The learners naturally fail to grasp each and every word and write down the words they have been able to grasp. They are then urged to develop a story from these. The teacher may also dictate parts of stories to different groups of learners with each group again dictating to each other. In this way all the groups get the full story partially from the teacher and partially from the learners. This enhances the listening skill of the learners.

- Dialogue as spoken aloud or recorded: The teacher speaks aloud or plays a recorded version of a conversation and then provides worksheets with the lines with missing parts, that the learners have to fill up from what they have heard.
- Listening to telephone call and writing messages: The learners may be exposed to telephonic conversations, mostly recorded and urge to write messages on the basis of what they hear.
- Following verbal instructions: the learners may be urged to act out the various verbal instructions provided by the teacher or the audio inputs.
- Listening and following a route: Verbal dictations are given to learners who are urged to create a route map on the basis of the instructions.
- Listening to audio clips and reporting to peers: A section of the learners may be allowed to listen to audio clip and then return to the rest and narrate what they have heard. The listeners are then allowed to listen to the original clip and find out possible gaps and errors.
- Jigsaw Listening: learners are divided into groups and are allowed to listen to parts of a whole story. Each group is allowed to listen to different parts. Then some members from each group are sent to other groups and are encourage to ask questions to collect then missing links in the story. After that they return to their original groups and discuss the collected components to create an intelligible coherent whole. Each group may be assisted by the teacher finally.
- Texts taught in class are scripted and learners are assigned roles with specific lines. They are paired and the partner is urged to listen to the spoken line and respond instantaneously on the basis of what he hears and understands.
- Listening to mark a ground plan: Learners may be urged to mark a ground plan for any school event on the basis of verbal instructions provided by the teacher.

- The learners may be divided into groups and each group may be given a different listening task (e.g. different questions). Then their answers may be swapped and the learners are made to listen again and check their classmates' answers.

All the strategies discussed above must be planned by the teacher with certain parameters in mind. The listening activity must be constructed around a contextualized task. Contextualized listening activities approximate real-life tasks and give the listener an idea of the type of information to expect and what to do with it in advance of the actual listening. A beginning level task would be locating places on a map (one way) or exchanging name and address information (two way). At an intermediate level learners could follow directions for assembling something (one way) or work in pairs to create a story to tell to the rest of the class (two way).

Each activity should have as its goal the improvement of one or more specific listening skills. A listening activity may have more than one goal or outcome, but be careful not to overburden the attention of beginning or intermediate listeners.

Recognizing the goal(s) of listening comprehension in each listening situation will help learners select appropriate listening strategies.

- Identification: Recognizing or discriminating specific aspects of the message, such as sounds, categories of words, morphological distinctions
- Orientation: Determining the major facts about a message, such as topic, text type, setting
- Main idea comprehension: Identifying the higher-order ideas
- Detail comprehension: Identifying supporting details
- Replication: Reproducing the message orally or in writing

The level of difficulty of the listening text must be assessed before exposing the learners to it.

The activities chosen during **pre-listening** may serve as preparation for listening in several ways. During pre-listening the teacher may

- assess learners' background knowledge of the topic and linguistic content of the text
- provide learners with the background knowledge necessary for their comprehension of the listening passage or activate the existing knowledge that the learners possess
- clarify any cultural information which may be necessary to comprehend the passage
- make learners aware of the type of text they will be listening to, the role they will play, and the purpose(s) for which they will be listening
- provide opportunities for group or collaborative work and for background reading or class discussion activities

Sample pre-listening activities are as follows:

- looking at pictures, maps, diagrams, or graphs
- reviewing vocabulary or grammatical structures
- reading something relevant
- constructing semantic webs (a graphic arrangement of concepts or words showing how they are related)
- predicting the content of the listening text
- going over the directions or instructions for the activity
- doing guided practice

While-listening activities relate directly to the text, and learners do them during or immediately after the time they are listening:

- Learners need to devote all their attention to the listening task and so one must be sure they understand the instructions for the written task before listening begins so that they are not distracted by the need to figure out what to do.
- Writing must be kept to a minimum during listening. The primary goal being comprehension and not production, compulsion to write while listening may distract learners from this primary goal.
- Organization of activities so that they guide listeners through the text. Global activities such as getting the main idea, topic are to be combined and matched with selective listening activities that focus on details of content and form.
- Use of questions to focus learners' attention on the elements of the text crucial to comprehension of the whole is important. Before the listening activity begins, have learners review questions they will answer orally or in writing after listening. Listening for the answers will help learners recognize the crucial parts of the message.
- The learners may be urged to review what they are hearing to see if it makes sense in the context of their prior knowledge and what they already know of the topic or events of the passage.

Sample while-listening activities

- listening with visuals
- filling in graphs and charts
- following a route on a map
- checking off items in a list
- listening for the gist
- searching for specific clues to meaning

- completing cloze (fill-in) exercises
- distinguishing between formal and informal registers

Post-listening activities:

This is conducted after the learners have completed the listening activity and speaking or writing skills may be ideally integrated with listening skill in this phase.

- Learners may be urged to compare their notes and discuss what they understood in pairs or small groups.
- The learners may be urged to respond to what they heard and encourage debate.
- The teacher may tell pairs to write a summary of the main points and then have them compare their summaries and check if they covered all the main points.
- The recording may be played again and again and the teacher may tell learners to call out 'Stop!' when they hear the answers they were listening for.
- The learners may be put into groups and told to make a list of comprehension questions to ask each other.
- The learners may be told to make a list in their notebooks of any new vocabulary they feel is useful.