

DEVELOPING
LISTENING SKILLS:
A GUIDE FOR
LANGUAGE
TEACHERS



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USING THIS GUIDE

- ▶ This guide aims to provide a resource for teachers looking to explore and develop listening skills with their language learners.
- ▶ Definitions of terms marked with an asterisk (*) can be found in the Glossary of terms.
- ▶ Look out for the Top tips boxes.

Top Tips



These boxes give extra ideas, resources and commentary related to developing this skill.

Trinity's approach to language skills

Trinity believes that authentic communication is fundamental in language learning and assessment. As such, a collaborative, dynamic approach to learning and teaching is central to developing learners' language skills, reflecting how language is used beyond the classroom. This includes exploring not only each of the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) in isolation, but also how the skills relate to and are used in combination with the others.

Top Tips



Video resources



These can be particularly useful listening resources because of additional visual clues. Using a wide range of clips can also help expose learners to a variety of global Englishes.



Understanding listening

When exploring listening with our learners, it's important for both teachers and learners to be aware of how and why we listen, and some of the processes and sub-skills* involved.

1. In our day-to-day lives, we listen for different purposes. For example, in general conversation we respond to what others have said to us, in an academic context we might listen to lectures and take notes, and when travelling we might listen to public announcements and compare these to a written timetable.
2. We listen in different ways in different contexts. For example, when we listen to a podcast while commuting or doing housework, we probably won't listen attentively to every utterance. Compare this to how we might listen (and relisten) to an online video which demonstrates how to cook a new recipe.
3. When listening to a longer turn of speech (eg a lecture or presentation), we may not understand or hear everything that is said. However, we can use our previous knowledge of the topic to help us 'fill in the blanks' and understand the main ideas.
4. It can take time to adjust to a speaker's pronunciation, accent and speed at which they speak, and this may require a listener to ask for clarification, repetition, etc.
5. In the real world, background noises like other conversations, traffic and loud music, can hinder our ability to hear. This may also require listeners to ask speakers to repeat or speak louder.

Top Tips



Transcripts/subtitles



These support the learning process. Learners can use them to check answers, highlight new or relevant language, compare spelling to pronunciation, etc. Differentiate your tasks and empower your learners by giving them the choice to use the transcript at any suitable stage in the lesson.



Classroom techniques

There are many approaches to developing listening skills. Whichever you take, the following techniques will help address the key points noted above.

1. Provide listening materials from a wide range of situations that learners will need to engage with outside the classroom in their professional, academic and social lives. For example, interviews, lectures and conversations.
2. Plan activities that develop different listening sub-skills* and strategies. These include matching headlines to excerpts from a news broadcast (listening for gist), taking notes on specific dates, times and events while listening to a lecture (listening for detail), and sorting speakers who agree or disagree with a suggestion in a meeting (inferring meaning and attitude).
3. Approach listening tasks, in terms of pre-, while-, and post-listening activities. Pre-listening tasks generate interest in the topic and set the context. While-listening tasks guide the learner through the listening text as they practise different listening sub-skills that they will need to apply outside of the classroom. Post-listening tasks give the learners an opportunity to reflect on and react to the content of the listening text, or decode* extracts.
4. Integrate listening tasks with speaking activities, simulating real-world communication. For example, ask learners to take notes as they listen to each other's presentations and encourage them to ask follow-up questions on the content.
5. Expose learners to authentic examples* of spoken English from around the world. This will prepare them for the natural language they will hear outside the classroom. As teachers we tend to speak slowly and grade our language to the learners' level in class, so including other sources of listening is essential.
6. Spoken English may contain certain pronunciation features* that can impede understanding. Including some regular focus on features of connected speech such as intrusion, elision and assimilation will aid learners in decoding* the overall message.

Top Tips



Decoding

When decoding, it's best to choose short extracts that exemplify features of connected speech, or sections that learners have trouble understanding. This helps keep the focus on the learning outcome of the task.



Adapting and creating listening resources

Finding or adapting listening texts to use in the classroom can be a rewarding and engaging experience for both the teacher and learners.

Authentic texts*, from shorter social media videos or news clips, through to longer video presentations or interviews, can be used in their original form or adapted, depending on their appropriacy and the learners' level. Coursebooks and classroom resource sites also provide texts suitable for a particular language learning context and proficiency level which can be shortened or otherwise adapted to better suit the interests and needs of your learners. With their permission, you could also create listening resources by recording conversations or 'vox pop' interviews with fellow teachers, friends and family.

Whatever the source of the text used in class, it is important that the questions and tasks associated with them are appropriately designed to effectively develop listening sub-skills*.

The table on the following page provides some ideas as to how to structure questions with a focus on a particular sub-skill. These could be used in a number of ways, such as multiple-choice, gap fill or discussion questions.

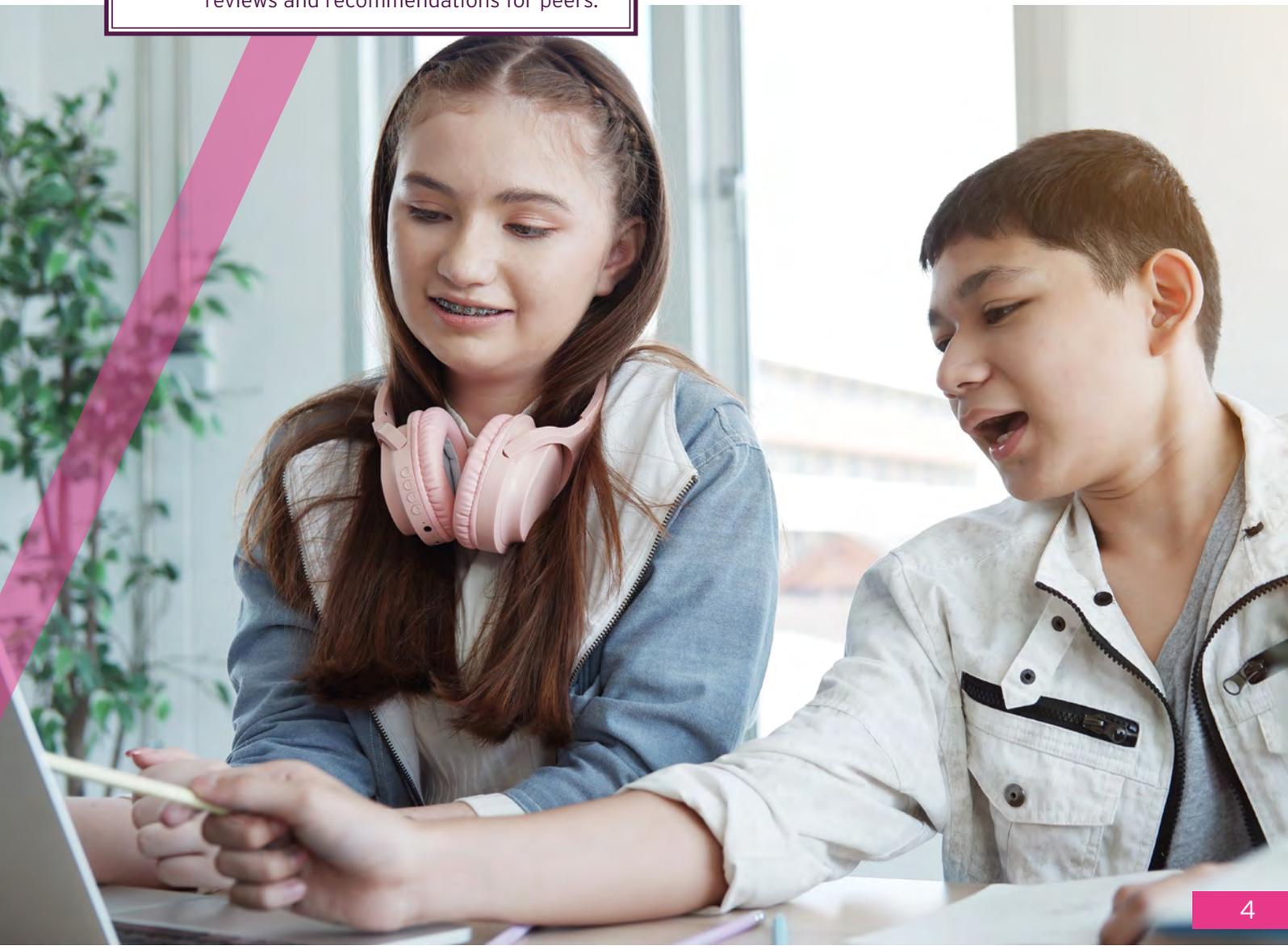
Top Tips



Extensive listening



Learners can find English language films, series and podcasts to enjoy outside class. They can then report back to the class on what they have enjoyed, or write reviews and recommendations for peers.



| FOCUS ON | CAN DO | EXAMPLE QUESTION STEMS |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Lower order questions | | |
| Understand specific detail | The listener can pick out information relating to main ideas, key and supporting details and identify the speakers' goals, attitudes and feelings. | <p>Factual Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much does X cost? • When did the speaker first try X? • How often does the speaker X? <p>Attitude or feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does speaker A agree with X? • How does speaker A feel about speaker B's idea? • How do the speakers show they are excited about X? |
| Overall text understanding | The listener can recognise the overall point and/or purpose of a listening text, or of parts of a text. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the speaker's main concern? • Why did speaker A call speaker B? • How does speaker A's opinion change? • Who is the target audience for this presentation? |
| Higher order questions | | |
| Inference | The listener can identify contextual, grammatical and lexical cues to deduce or interpret implicit and implied information, events, meanings and ideas from texts. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the speaker understand about X? • What does the speaker suggest about X? • What does the speaker imply when they say X? |
| Evaluation | The listener can reflect on the content of a text in terms of relationships and relevance. | <p>Relationship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does the speaker compare X to Y? • Why is X critical of Y's views? • How are X and Y connected? <p>Relevance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do the speakers say to justify/support/explain X? • Why does the speaker mention X? |
| Synthesis and integration | The listener can compare and contrast the views and opinions of different speakers, drawing implications or conclusions based on the different perspectives that they hear. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to speaker A, what is the best approach for the issue described by speaker B? • What do speakers A and B have in common? • Which speaker disagrees with the others about X? |

Trinity language support resources

Trinity offers a wide range of free English language resources and teaching materials. These support our qualifications, which cover every stage of learning, from beginner to advanced. We offer two-skill oral assessments (GESE: Graded Examinations in Spoken English) and four-skill assessments (ISE: Integrated Skills in English).

Visit trinitycollege.com/qualifications/english-language/English-support-resources to find these.

Top Tips



Replaying a recording



Replaying a text (or section of a text) provides further opportunities for learners to develop different listening sub-skills. Consider empowering your learners by giving them control over how many times to listen, within practical boundaries.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Authentic materials

Materials originally created for a purpose other than classroom use, eg podcasts, film clips, news features.

CEFR

The Common European Framework of Reference for languages. An international standard for describing language proficiency.

Decoding

Using knowledge of language, content and context to make sense of words, phrases and utterances within a stream of speech.

Differentiation

Identifying and addressing the different needs and abilities of learners in a group to help everyone achieve the learning goals.

Higher/lower order questions

Relating to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) which categorises different levels of learning.

Listening sub-skills

Processes that proficient speakers use to help understand spoken communication. These include listening for gist, listening for detail, prediction and recognising signposts.

Pronunciation features

Common features include intrusion, elision, assimilation, stress and the use of schwa /ə/.

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