
How to test Listening skills?

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Abstract

Language is a 'complex skill' comprising four basic skills (skill of listening, skill of speaking, skill of reading and skill of writing). The four language skills are also known as the different modes of communication. Listening and reading are the receptive skills which are involved in the decoding process of communication. The other two skills are the productive skills which perform the encoding process of communication. Listening, Speaking Reading & writing standards require learners to learn skills so that evaluation of the same present challenges for teachers and students. These challenges play out in the teaching-learning process and during assessment activities. Effective formative assessment practices are part of effective instruction

The key words used are listening skills, interactive and communicative segments.

Interestingly our communication has been happening through a host of channels, such as gestures, posture, speech, and facial expressions in addition to text (Atkinson, 2002; Biswas, et al., 2010; Graesser, Jeon, &Dufty, 2008; McNamara et al., 2007)

Although listening has been a relatively neglected skill in terms of research and the ways and means of it to be introduced to language learners, is gaining significance.

Recent methodologies for the teaching of listening (Brown, 1991; Ur, 1984; Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Rost, 1990; Brown & Yule, 1983) point out that listening develops through the process of exposing learners to listening texts on which they perform tasks specially designed to promote the development of certain sub-skills.

One of the main advancements to come out of research into listening strategies was the understanding that listening exercises could be divided into three main parts: **Pre-listening, While-listening, Post-listening activities**. This format has proved useful in taking the attention off of continually testing listening and has allowed learners to do other things with the information that they listen to.

Stage 1:Pre-Listening Task

Today we are going to listen to a program about the festivals in India on the radio/TV/Internet for ten minutes. Before we listen, who has made a trip recently? Where did you go? What did you see? The radio guide tells us the program about India. What do you know about India? What would you like to know about India? What kind of information do you think the presenter will give us? ·

Stage 2:While-Listening Task

While you listen to the program, try to listen for the main things the presenter recommends doing while you are in India. Don't try to write anything down, only listen to the program and see how much you can understand.

Stage 3:Post-Listening Task

In groups of three have a short discussion about what you heard from the program? Would you like to go to India based on what you just heard? Why or why not? In using the radio in the way suggested here we allow learners access to the speaker models, something which might be missing from their normal classroom experiences.

One of the ways of testing listening skills involves everything from **interactive exercises to multimedia resources**. Listening skills tested through simple, engaging activities that focus more on the learning process. Whether you are working with a large group of students or a small one, you can use any of the following examples to develop your own methods for teaching students how to listen well.

Instructional Tips

Whatever method you use for testing listening, keep a few key instructional tips in mind that will help both you and your students navigate the learning process.

1. One, keep your expectations simple, as even the most experienced listener would be unable to completely and accurately recall the entirety of a message.
2. Two, keep your directions accessible and build in opportunities for students not only to ask clarifying questions, but also to make mistakes.
3. Three, help students navigate their communication anxiety by developing activities appropriate to their skill and confidence level, and then strengthen their confidence by celebrating the ways in which they do improve, no matter how small.
4. In addition, there are many sites you can find around the Internet to help. Segments for free listening English can easily be found on YouTube or any other video site, such as

video.about.com. Look for segments in which the speaker speaks clearly at a natural speed. For beginner in listening, the speed will seem difficult, but in time it becomes very easy. If you want to increase your technical vocabulary at the same time, look for debates online.

5. To increase the challenge and difficulty of your listening, start listening to a wide variety of talks/songs.... in English. Without the video in the background, the speed changes, or even the music in the background, this makes for very challenging English listening.
6. Download short stories from the Internet and read them out loud to yourself or a partner.
7. A tricky thing that comes up often in English listening practice is a homonym. These are words that are pronounced or spelt the same, but have different meanings. A good English listening exercise will have several of these, which you should be able to figure out from the context of the narrative.
8. Remember, a good vocabulary is the base of good listening. Free listening English tapes from the library, bookstore or audio MP3s on the Internet can help in increasing the base vocabulary.

1. Interpersonal Activities

One of the ways to develop stronger listening skills is through interpersonal activities, such as **mock interviews** and storytelling. For example, you may have one student interview another for a job with a company or for an article in a newspaper. Even a **storytelling activity**, such as one that answers the question "What was your favorite movie from last year?" can give students the opportunity to ask one another questions and then to practice active listening skills.

2. Audio Segments

You can also test listening skills through audio segments of radio programs, online podcasts, instructional lectures and other audio messages. First, instruct students to prepare for listening by considering anything that they will want to learn from the content of the audio segment. Once they have written down or shared these ideas, then play the audio segment. You can use shorter or longer audio segments, and you can choose more accessible or more challenging material for this type of exercise.

3. Video Segments

Another helpful resource for testing listening skills are video segments, including short sketches, news programs, documentary films, interview segments, and dramatic and comic material. As with audio segments, select the portion and length of the video segment based on the skill level of your students. With your students, first watch the segment without any sound and discuss it together. Encourage the students to identify what they think will be the content of the

segment. Then, watch the segment again, this time with sound, allowing students to take notes if helpful for their skill level. After the completion of the video segment, you can have students write a brief summary of the segment, or you can take time to discuss as a group how the segment compares with the students' expectations.

Authentic materials and situations prepare students for the types of listening they will need to do when using the language outside the classroom.

4. The materials used should not be a *One-Way Communication*

- Radio and television programs
- Public address announcements (airports, train/bus stations, stores)
- Speeches and lectures
- Telephone customer service recordings

5.Procedure:

- Test the students identify the listening goal: to obtain specific information; to decide whether to continue listening; to understand most or all of the message
- Test students outline predictable sequences in which information may be presented: who-what-when-where (news stories); who-flight number-arriving/departing-gate number (airport/railway station announcements); "for [function], press [number]" (telephone recordings)
- Test students to identify key words/phrases to listen for.

6. *Emphasis should be given to a Two-Way Communication too.*

In authentic two-way communication, the listener focuses on the speaker's meaning rather than the speaker's language. The focus shifts to language only when meaning is not clear.

7. The test, for these, consists of three parts, each of which assesses the ability to comprehend a different type of listening material: short sentences (20 items), short conversations (15 items) and talks or longer conversations (15 items).
8. Secondly, the division of the test into three parts, testing three different types of listening: **isolated utterances, short dialogues and longer stretches of speech**, allowed for comparison and more detailed analysis of scores.

9. **Listening materials** should be compiled on the basis of available materials. The materials could be selected in a way to ensure that there was a range in terms of varieties of English (i.e., British/ American/Indian.....), number of speakers (monologues and dialogues), length (one to ten minutes), topics (mostly topics of general interest, such as health, environment and politics), density of information (e.g., news versus casual conversation between friends), and genres (for instance, lecture, conversation, interview).
10. All materials could be 'controlled authentic', that is the speakers **did not read a written text**, and **features of speech such as hesitations, fillers, repetition and incomplete sentences could be kept**; however, noise and other factors which would affect listening to a cassette (without contextual and visual information) could be controlled. The following **types of tasks** were included: note-taking, gap-filling, multiple-choice, true/false sentences, filling tables and answering questions.

Conclusion

These tests were practiced in my classes and they have been indeed very fruitful too. As in most cases our syllabus is designed in such a way that emphasis is not given to primary skills of listening and speaking. Instead in most of the cases only writing and to some extent reading skills are given importance. This paper has attempted to give importance to one of the primary skills in the learning of English that is Listening Skills

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