

Technology Across the IEP Curriculum

--- Listening Skills

Overview:

So, how do students become better active listeners in and out of class? Understanding the factors that promote better listening, rather than just testing it, are the building blocks of effective teaching and learning.

Furthermore, as teachers, we need to emphasize that listening and speaking are reciprocal skills that are very dependent on one another for better communication.

Some Contributing Factors:

Mere exposure to a foreign language is not enough to improve listening skills---as if we were able to learn by osmosis. Both receptive and productive skills must be put into play. Certain elements including students' slow processing speed, lack of background knowledge, and limited vocabulary affect their ability to grasp a language.

Teaching Techniques:

As teachers, we need to teach and train students to listen better. However, limiting our classroom activities to only simple fill-in-the-blank or multiple choice oversimplifies the listening process. Furthermore, it doesn't mirror reality (i.e., what learners will actually need in everyday life).

Blending Technology

First, determine your objectives and needs BEFORE you invest in any technology so you don't end up with underused resources. More is less! In fact, a cassette player might be what you need instead of an expensive iPod. Basic Mp3 and digital voice recorders players might suit your needs as well as Web-based applications like Google Talk (www.google.com/talk/) or Gabcast (www.gabcast.com) for speaking/listening blogs.

General Concepts

- Listening and speaking are reciprocal skills.
- **Testing** listening is not **teaching** it.
- Listening strategy training may help students identify useful skills for deciphering meaning.
- Not providing such training may give students the feeling that there are only certain dimensions of communication.

Comprehension Factors

- The language text or topic
- Rate of speed in decontextualized speech . . . including acoustic blur
- Vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structures
- Paralinguistic utterances and false starts
- Lack of background knowledge
- Limited short-term memory
- Number of visual cues

Keys to Teaching Listening

- Help students discover the factors that affect comprehension through careful listening activities.
- Use a mixture of top-down/bottom-up exercises.
- Progress from semi-authentic (simulated) speech to genuine authentic speech.
- Don't use tasks that result in cognitive overload. Design tasks that are success-oriented.
- Build upon learners' background knowledge.
- Allow time for collaborative listening and discussion to clarify and restate ideas

Multimedia Web Sites for Improving Listening Comprehension Skills

These sites represent a very small collection of multimedia resources on the Internet.

[media format | online use and/or downloadable | level]

ESL Oriented

- Breaking English* - (news and commentaries)
<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com>
[MP3 | download | intermediate to advanced]
- Daily ESL* – (everyday conversation topics)
<http://www.dailyesl.com>
[Win | online | high beginning to intermediate]
- English Language Listening Lab Online* -
<http://www.ello.org>
[Flash, MP3 | online-download | beginning to advanced]
- English Listening Lounge* – (unscripted interviews)
<http://www.englishlistening.com>
[Flash | online | beginning to advanced]
- ESL Podcast* –
<http://www.eslpod.com>
[MP3 | download | intermediate to advanced]
- Eviews* – <http://www.eviews.net> (interviews)
[MP3 | download | intermediate to advanced]
- Fonetiks* – (pronunciation)
<http://www.fonetiks.org>
- Learn a Song Podcast* – (folk songs)
<http://www.manythings.org/songs>
[Flash | online | beginning to intermediate]
- Learning Resources* –(news stories)
<http://literacynet.org/cnnsf/home.html>
[Real | online | intermediate to advanced]
- Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab* –
<http://www.esl-lab.com>
[Real / Win | online | all levels]
- English Trailers* – (movie previews)
<http://www.english-trailers.com>
[QuickTime | online | intermediate to advanced]
- Train Your Accent* – (accent reduction training)
<http://www.trainyouraccent.com>
[Win | online | intermediate to advanced]

General Audience

- BBC World Service* -
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/>
[Real | online | beginning to advanced]
- Digital Story Telling* -
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/digitalstorytelling>
[Real | online | beginning to advanced]
- History And Politics Out Loud* – (famous speeches)
<http://www.hpol.org>
[Real | online | advanced]
- Living on Earth* – (environmental issues)
<http://www.loe.org/>
[Real / MP3 | download | advanced]
- National Geographic* -
<http://pulseplanet.nationalgeographic.com>
[Real / Win | online | beginning to advanced]
- National Public Radio* – <http://npr.com>
[Real / Win | online | beginning to advanced]
- Online NewsHour* -
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/newshour_index.html
[Real / Win | online | beginning to advanced]
- Pulse of the Planet* – (nature and science)
<http://www.pulseplanet.com>
[MP3 | download | advanced]
- Radio Diaries* - <http://www.radiodiaries.org>
[Real / MP3 | download | advanced]
- Sound Portraits* – Documentaries of everyday people
<http://www.soundportraits.org>
[Real | online | intermediate to advanced]
- Voice of America Special English* –
<http://www.voanews.com/specialenglish/>
[Real / MP3 | download | advanced]

Other Resources:

- Anderson, A., & Lynch, T. (1988). *Listening*. Oxford University Press.
- Buck, G. (2001). *Assessing listening*. Cambridge: Cambridge.
- Cuban, L. (2001). *Oversold and underused: Computers in the classroom*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Nunan, D., & Miller, L. (Editors). (1995). *New ways in teaching listening*. TESOL: Alexandria, VI.
- Oppenheimer, T. (2003). *The flickering mind: The false promise of technology in the classroom and how learning can be saved*. New York: Random House