Randall’s ESL Cyber Listening Lab

www.esl-lab.com
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Description:
- **Randall’s ESL Cyber Listening Lab** is an online, multimedia listening Website designed to help ESOL students improve their listening comprehension skills in English. It has also been used widely in the US by the hearing impaired with cochlear implants.
- The use of the online activities is completely free and requires no login. Students and teachers from over 150 countries have visited the site since 1998.
- Website supported through contextual advertising related to topics on the site.

Background:
- Lab first established in 1998 in Japan as an independent educational project and is currently being developed in Utah, USA.
- The original idea for the lab sprang from the realization that few listening materials existed online specifically designed for language learners.
- All of the materials, including the transcripts, questions, activities, and audio/video, are created and recorded by Randall and his support team.

Features:
- The **use of streaming audio and video technology** for developing multimedia content for language learners;
- **Over 300 original learning quizzes and activities** cover both functional language topics (e.g., making invitations, checking into a hotel, buying a used car, etc.) as well as interviews, news broadcasts, and simulated TV and radio programs;
- The Website can be used for **teacher-directed instruction** or for **self-access learning**. Listening quizzes are **arranged according to level** based on topic, lexicon and syntax, rate of speech, use of paralinguistic utterances, and background noise;
- Quizzes contain **a variety of learning tasks** to (a) accommodate different learning styles and (b) derive the greatest benefit from sound pedagogical practice and theory (i.e., from drill and practice and task-based activities to problem-solving Internet activities);
- Additional **pre-, listening, and post-listening activities** support and build on each listening quiz for a more well-rounded learning experience;
- **Low-bandwidth media files** in Flash and Windows Media™ formats make the material accessible to slow Internet connection rates around the world;
- **Play speed settings** in the Windows Media Player™ allow learners to slow down the audio playback for more precise listening;
- Use of **adult and children’s voices** to cover a wide range of conversational styles while trying to preserve natural speech that hasn’t been overly predigested (i.e., simplified) for the consumption of learners;
- **Self-study guide** helps visitors organize their study goals and objectives.

Sixty-seven percent of language students and teachers surveyed through an online poll stated that the types of learning materials they want to see more of on the Internet were those focusing on listening and speaking skills. Only five percent said grammar.

--- Davis, Online Research Survey
How to Use the Site:

► **Pre-Listening Exercises**
First, users select a quiz from the main page. Each listening activity provides details on the level of difficulty, topic, type of recording (conversation, news report, commercial message, etc.) of each quiz.

This is followed by a Pre-Listening Exercises to help the learner prepare to receive the message, that is, to simulate background knowledge about the topic so learners can begin to predict possible ideas that will come out of the conversation.

► **Listening Exercises**
The learner is presented with a number of multiple-choice questions, with three or four possible responses.

The questions are designed to check the learner’s understanding of main ideas, inferences, prediction, cause and effect relationships, and comprehension of discreet-point items like numbers and dates.

► **Media Files**
The media files have been created in two formats: (1) Flash and (2) Windows Media Player™. The user can download this free software to listen to the audio and video. Users select the answer for each question and then click on the “Final Score” button to check their scores. The files have been prepared for low-bandwidth users around the world who often access the Internet on slower, and sometimes, unreliable Internet connections. The Windows Media Player has variable Play Speed Settings, which allow you slow down the audio for precise listening (see www.esl-lab.com/players.htm for more information.)

► **Post-Listening Exercises**
Listening tends to be a passive language skill, and thus, learners need opportunities to apply the language skills in spontaneous conversation after listening to the conversation. This section provides topics of discussion that encourages learners to share their ideas, experiences, and opinions by using the vocabulary, grammar, and theme with others. Furthermore, these exercises include online investigation tasks where students use the Internet to collect, compare, and report on information they find. Thus, rather than just memorizing information from the activity through simple drill-and-practice exercises, the student is now given opportunities to create totally new language based on what they have learned.
Listening Transcripts and Vocabulary Building

Learners also have the option of reading the transcript of the conversation as they listen along with the recording.

1. Key vocabulary words throughout the conversation are highlighted in red, and when the computer mouse is passed over them, a pop-up window will open below the word, revealing its definition.

2. When users click on the key word, they will be taken to the bottom of the page which lists the word and its definition, along with a sample sentence with the word used in context.

3. Visitors can then do a variety of interactive exercises to help recycle and review the key vocabulary in a variety of situations. These include multiple-choice, matching, and rearranging mixed-up sentences. The end results are that students learn to use and apply the vocabulary beyond the exercise in other situations.

Final Note: You can read more about the background of this site at: www.esl-lab.com/faq.htm. Contact Randall with your comments and suggestions about the Website at rdavis@esl-lab.com.