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## **TEACHING LISTENING IN THE ESL CLASSROOM: VIDEO ACTIVITIES FOR ESL LISTENING COMPREHENSION SUCCESS**

*Стаття висвітлює питання, пов'язані з формуванням навичок аудіювання в учнів, що вивчають англійську як другу мову. Що таке, власне, аудіювання, його роль у формуванні комунікативної компетентності учня, шляхи розвитку навичок аудіювання та проблеми, що при цьому виникають, і способи їх усунення. Підкреслена роль відео в навчанні аудіювання, запропоновано критерії відбору відеоматеріалів та вправи, що покращують навички аудіювання.*

All we hear defines the world around us. Whether you're hearing a child's laughter, a babbling book or a frat boy belching in your ear — sounds shape our world. Listening is a major part of life experience. Unfortunately, lots of people are so wrapped up in the speaking part that they forget this. Sounds give us clues about our surroundings, while stimulating our thoughts with new feelings.

In the linguistic world, the phonemes and phonological structures of individual words, phrases and sentences serve to enrich our communication. They all add a colorful layer of meanings and emotions to our speech. Because sound plays such an important role in our experience, sharpening your ESL students' listening skills will help them to enjoy and apply English comfortably and interactively.

While sadly neglected in many ESL classrooms, listening is every bit as important as speaking. In fact, appropriate and accurate interpretation of a communicated message will encourage even your shyest ESL learners to participate more vigorously in communicative situations. Why? Because listening goes beyond the mere act of hearing something. Listening is an art, a way we connect with others.

Becoming efficient listeners is especially critical for ESL students because:

- ESL students spend most of their class time listening as opposed to reading or writing.
- Efficient listening promotes healthy communication.
- Having proficient listening skills enables ESL students to understand instructions and information, allowing them to follow or respond appropriately.

According to Frankfurt International School, “Listening is NOT a passive process; it is an active skill of interpreting the verbal and non-verbal output of the speaker in order to understand the message.”

Communication is a two-way street, because there’s a speaker and a listener in every interaction, an efficient conversation is promoted when the speaker can communicate a thought clearly, while the listener can competently *receive* the communicated message, *understand* the words and their meaning in the associated context, *evaluate* the intent of the speaker and *respond* with socially and culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal forms.

In ESL teaching and learning, “listening” is a skill that involves more than just hearing. We want our students to be able to listen to English with confidence and understanding. From time to time, teachers try to test and evaluate their students’ level of skill in listening, but this can be quite stressful for students for a number of reasons.

Teachers should be aware that:

- sometimes students just don’t hear well. Maybe they have a physical limitation, or maybe there is a lot of other noise around, or maybe the equipment used to play audio material is not good enough;
- what we think of as “listening” can involve more than just sound cues. It may be better to watch live action, or a video, rather than just using audio material;
- sometimes students panic and stop listening when they come across a word they cannot immediately translate. It’s important to encourage students to pick up what they can without trying to translate.

So, how can we teach the skill of listening?

It is easier to teach facts and knowledge than to teach a skill. But teachers *can* improve students' listening skills and confidence by

- teaching them strategies that they can use to listen more effectively;
- providing them with activities that exercise the strategies we have taught.

So, how can we increase listening skills and confidence? First of all, here are three basic principles.

#### 1. Limit the use of translation.

Your students need to be able to understand and respond without having to translate in their heads all the time, especially when they are listening rather than reading. At first it might seem like the easy, comfortable way to learn a language, but if it develops into a habit then they will never be able to speak English fluently.

Translation is a habit that needs to be limited because

- students tend to start to panic when they find they don't know every word.
- using those electronic translators especially can give warped ideas of meaning.

This doesn't mean that you *never* let them translate. *Sometimes* having an equivalent from their first language is the only way to move them forward, but quickly move on and don't allow them to keep returning to it.

In general, there are better ways to handle running into new vocabulary while listening.

When students hear a new word or expression, they need something to tie it to. As their teacher, you can help them with this by providing

- **context:** Help them to find clues to the meaning in the context of the listening "text.";
- **pictures:** Show them a picture so that when they hear the word or expression again later, the picture will come to mind;
- **action:** Get them to perform an action so that when they hear the word or expression again later, they will remember that particular action;
- **English synonyms or antonyms:** Their understanding of English will grow by leaps and bounds if they can explain an English word with other English words. Encourage (and guide) them to look up unknown words in an *English* dictionary.

Help students to relax, and not to panic, as they listen to material (especially the *first* time) and to find out how much they can understand. They will probably be pleasantly surprised. For some students, this in itself can be a real confidence booster.

## 2. Avoid confusing listening skills with literacy skills.

When you *first* introduce a new listening text (e.g., video, story, song, podcast...) concentrate on listening and don't provide subtitles or written script (yet). In real life, there are no subtitles, so let your students have a go just listening. (Later you can add subtitles or a written script as well as literacy-related activities.)

Once they have listened without seeing subtitles or script the first time, and you have discussed some issues, then you can listen and watch again with the assistance of subtitles or text.

## 3. Use videos because students can also watch.

We want to prepare our students to take part in conversations. We want them to be able to listen, understand and respond. A large part of that listening involves reading a speaker's facial expressions and body language, which can vary from culture to culture. So, most of the time, your students need to practice their "listening" skills by watching videos, or watching you talk or tell stories.

A great source for visual material is [FluentU](#), an immersion platform with real-world videos—like music videos, movie trailers, news and inspiring talks—that are ready-made for focused listening. FluentU makes it easy to create productive ongoing listening activities by allowing your students to access the same high-quality material at home and in the classroom.

There are four main considerations to keep in mind when selecting a video or clip for your students to watch:

### 1. Age Appropriate

Adults can appreciate a wide range of video types, whereas younger students will find themselves bored with long monologues. Choose appropriate clips that don't contain any foul language, excessive violence, sexual actions or possibly offensive material.

## 2. Language Level

Presenting a Shakespearean play on video to a class of beginning students will simply cause confusion. It's very important to select videos that will stick to mostly known vocabulary. Animated videos for younger children tend to have simpler words, but may be dull for older students, so keep an eye out for appropriate options.

## 3. Humor

Funny videos are not only more interesting to watch, but they also teach students about humor in their new language. It can be difficult for those from a different culture to get used to the jokes that abound in English, so give them a head start with a comedy.

## 4. Interest Levels

How exciting is an episode of "Thomas the Train Engine" for you, as an adult? When you were a child, would you have been content to sit through a long documentary on coral reefs? Take your students' interests into consideration when deciding on a good video to show them.

Once you've selected a video clip, don't just roll the video and leave it at that! Use the following activities or come up with your own to really engage the students and get them listening.

### **1. What's Next**

Let students watch an exciting video and stop it right in the middle of the action. Ask them to tell you what they think will happen next, based on the story so far. Have each student write down their guess and then watch the ending to see who was correct. You can stop the video multiple times if you like, for multiple guesses.

Alternatively, stop the video and allow students to come up with their own ending to act out. You can even divide a larger class into smaller groups and have each one come up with a possible finale to the video. This works particularly well with season finales for television shows.

### **2. Step by Step**

For this exercise, you'll want a tutorial video. This can be anything from a cooking show to a demonstration on how to dig a hole. Before watching the video, let students know that they should pay close attention to the steps. Next, have each student write down the steps to the tutorial and then play the clip again so they can check their work.

Start with fairly simple tutorials that only have a handful of steps. Once your students are adept at this activity, you can increase the number of steps required.

### **3. Describe the Setting**

Let students know before you watch the video that they should be looking at where the scene is taking place. After the clip, ask students to describe the setting to you and explain what happened.

### **4. Judge and Jury**

Show two video clips that have opposite view points. For example, you might show one that argues for creationism and the other for evolution, or any debatable topic. Have students write down the arguments for each side as they watch. They should then work in smaller groups to decide which arguments are most important and finally, come to a conclusion based on the points presented in the videos. They can debate between themselves and come up with a unanimous decision.

### **5. Quiz Time**

Prepare some questions ahead of time and let the students know that they should pay careful attention to the dialogue while they are watching the video. Once it is over, ask them the questions. These can range from "Did Bob get angry because his wife burned the spaghetti or because she forgot to feed the dog?" to "Why did Jean think babies shouldn't eat broccoli?"

If the students have trouble with the questions, watch the clip again so they can find the answers, rather than simply telling them. It's a good way to practice listening with them.

### **6. Create a Storyboard**

Watch a fairly short video that has some different action and plenty of dialogue. The video should have several distinct parts that will be easy to map on a

storyboard. Allow students to watch the whole thing while taking notes, then go back and watch each segment. Pause between segments so students can draw the scene and note what happens between the characters.

Another option is to make the storyboard on the whiteboard at the front of the class, calling on students to tell you what should be included. They can take their own notes and then help you design the actual storyboard.

### **7. Pick a Character**

Have each student choose a character to pay particular attention to. They should observe everything from how the person reacts to various situations to how they speak and how emotional they are. After the video, have students write down diary entries for their chosen character. To make things a little more interesting, give students specific scenarios for their characters to react to in their character journals. If you're using characters from a television show, this could be an ongoing listening and writing activity.

Videos can easily be a more interesting way to practice listening comprehension than simply talking in groups. If your class needs a little something to spice it up, show your students some video clips and try out these activities—and then watch their comprehension explode!

### **References**

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