

REAL LIFE LISTENING SKILLS YOUR STUDENTS NEED AND HOW TO IMPROVE THEM

Whether it is in their first language or second, people are constantly hearing and processing language. But what exactly do we do when we process it? And what do we do to teach our students to listen?

What we need to understand is that teaching listening skills presents a series of challenges as it is the most complicated task to tackle, hard to understand, teach and assess. And we often, being English teachers, know how to listen. But not many of us have taken listening classes. How then do we teach listening when we have never had a listening class of our own and have no model to follow?

We do listen in English, but those skills come instinctually. Therefore here are a few real life listening skills which are the keys our students need to learn to help them understand what they hear every day. Firstly, they need to define what they hear. Is it a lecture, a conversation, an argument, or a small talk? In other words, the type of speech determines what listening skills they will need to engage.

Once they know what they are listening to, they need to figure out what exactly they are hearing. Students should focus on phrases, patterns of speech, and ideas. It is a good idea to encourage them to make notes in English rather than translate what they hear. When students understand and remember chunks of language or ideas, their comprehension increases.

When students know what type of speech they hear and understand the message, they should try and guess what is coming next whether it is a lecture, a conversation, or a negotiation. When they can make mental predictions, they will be better able to understand and process the language that is to come.

Another thing that can help students in improving their listening skills is their previous knowledge. They need to remember what they already know about the subject matter of the piece of information they are listening to and make connections. If it is possible, get your students thinking about the subject before the listening exercise with discussion questions or a chart. In real life, however, your students will not always get a heads up on a conversational topic.

Another real life listening skill is deciding what the speaker means. Sometimes meaning goes deeper than the words that are said. Sometimes a speaker's meaning is implied, that is, the speaker means something deeper

than the words on the surface. Students need to be able to determine the intended meaning of the speakers and decide whether words are used literally or figuratively.

Once students acquire these listening skills, they will begin to enjoy listening more as they can comprehend better. But real life listening skills taught in class are not always authentic which often leads to a few issues that students need to handle. Among them are intonation, the rate of speech, pronunciation. Differences in syntax may cause another problem. In authentic speech, speakers more often speak in incomplete sentences and lengthy, sometimes ungrammatical sentences. There are also vocabulary differences between fabricated and authentic listening texts. And, finally, the background noise is often absent in classroom listening tasks while we are distracted by ambient noises all the time in real life.

So, our next task is to help our students improve their listening skills and get them to listen and understand everyday authentic English. Here are a few ways to achieve this. If there is such an opportunity and you can invite a guest speaker, it will be of benefit to your students. They might find it difficult to communicate with the person at first, but if you ask your guest to discuss the topic you are teaching at the moment, the students will be ready to talk and they will appreciate the chance to communicate with an English-speaking person. It is not always easy to find an English-speaking person in the neighbourhood, so your guest speaker could be a colleague of yours, which might also do the trick.

Other sources for real life listening practice include TV commercial, weather reports, movies and television, radio, audio books, YouTube videos, video lectures, webinars, recorded conversations, etc. There are always lots of ways to practice and improve one's listening skills. However, the main message is that perfection lies in regular and persistent practice.