

Listening Skills: Teacher's Guide

Listening is more than merely hearing words. Listening is an active process by which students receive, construct meaning from, and respond to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.

Here are some basic explanations for each of the listening strategies found on the first page of the Listening Inventory.

	Listening Strategy	Explanation
Pre-Listening	Have a specific purpose for listening and attempt to ascertain speaker's purpose.	<p>Students understand better if they know the purpose of a presentation. One of the first things they should do is to determine the purpose, i.e. for information; to be critical or to evaluate; for entertainment or enjoyment; and to give support and understanding to the speaker.</p> <p>The purpose for the presentation in this lesson is to gain information.</p>
	Think of background knowledge on subject before listening.	Students should think about the subject of the presentation and determine if they already know something about it. This allows them to create a foundation of knowledge on which to build meaning from the presentation.
	Tune in and pay attention.	It is very important for students to focus their minds on the presentation. They should put other mental distractions aside so that all of their mental energy is on the presentation.
	Minimize distractions.	Students should try to physically seat themselves in the room so that distractions, such as hall noise, friends, and/or disruptive students do not impede their focus on the presentation. Sometimes this is difficult due to seating restraints within the room. This is where their ability to tune in really comes into play.
During Listening	Give complete attention to listening task and demonstrate interest. Maintain eye contact.	Students' eyes tell all. You can tell whether students are "getting it" or not simply by looking at them, specifically, their eyes. Furthermore, it is almost impossible to fall asleep when looking someone directly in the eyes, so the ability to concentrate should improve.
	Resist distractions.	Students should keep reminding themselves that they are listening to someone else. Distractions should be ignored. They should keep their minds on what is being said.
	Search for meaning in what is being said.	It is important for students to think about what is being said, not just hear the words. They must cipher the multitude of words into the essential meaning of what is being presented.

<p>Look for signal words, such as “remember,” “for example,” “to summarize,” and “finally.”</p>	<p>As students listen to a presentation, they can find key points by listening for particular words. Here are some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •To introduce an example: "For example, there are three reasons why...." •To signal support material: "For instance...." "Similarly...." "In contrast...." "On the other hand..." •To signal a conclusion or summary: "Therefore..." "In conclusion...." "Finally...." "As a result...." •To signal importance: "Now this is very important...." "Remember that...." <p>By listening for these key words, students can garner the important points, therefore creating meaning and focus for the presentation.</p>
<p>Respond to the speaker—answer questions and/or nod for indication of understanding.</p>	<p>It is important for students to let the speaker know that they are listening and either they are understanding or not understanding what is being said. This can take the form of asking and answering questions to nodding to show understanding or non-understanding or smiling appropriately at the speaker’s attempts at humor.</p>
<p>Ask questions.</p>	<p>Students should be encouraged to form questions while they listen. Some speakers will allow questions while they are presenting. Students can immediately clarify their understanding by asking questions concerning the material. If the speaker postpones questions to later in the presentation, then students can write the questions in their notes and ask later. Questioning creates meaning.</p>
<p>Constantly check understanding of the message by making connections, making and confirming predictions, making inferences, evaluating, and reflecting.</p>	<p>The crux of active listening is the processing of the information. Students are less apt to be bored or daydream if they are doing something with the information being presented.</p>
<p>Take fewer, more meaningful notes--outline, map, categorize the information as it is given.</p>	<p>Students complement the strategy above by writing down important information as it is being presented. They should be encouraged to only write down the important points. Understanding coming from this process will be much more meaningful if students give note taking the thought necessary to be organized by outlining, mapping, or categorizing.</p>
<p>Distinguish message from speaker.</p>	<p>An important skill for students is to try to divorce the message from the speaker. Sometimes the characteristics of the speaker may get in the way of the messages. Mannerisms, witticisms, and looks can distract from the information of a presentation. Students must be able to ignore these negative characteristics in order to focus on the information being presented.</p>

	Consider the context and "color" of words.	If students are presented words in which they are unsure of the meaning, then they can infer meaning from the context of the word. They can also write the words in their notes to look up later or ask for a clarification of meaning by questioning the speaker.
After Listening	Follow up on the presentation by reviewing notes, categorizing ideas, clarifying, reflecting, and acting upon the message.	<p>Listening is often a fast and unforgiving process. Committing information from a presentation into long-term memory can be difficult for students. The learning process should not stop at the conclusion of the presentation. Students should be encouraged to employ post-listening strategies. These strategies involve doing something with the information from the presentation. The following are several strategies that students can use to clarify and ingrain the information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students can review their notes then identify questions concerning any misunderstandings or add information that they might have overlooked during the presentation. •Students can talk about what was said, identify misconceptions, and look for parallels from their lives. •They can summarize the presentation orally or in writing. Other summary devices might include time lines, flow charts, diagrams, webs, or maps. <p>*As a teacher, you might augment the above strategies by asking the students to do activities, such as writing in journals and learning logs; reading articles or books that further their understanding of the topic; designing a book jacket illustrating the topic; or reenacting the material through a role play or mock trial.</p>

The following were used as sources for the Listening Skills Inventory, Listening Skills Inventory, and the Self Assessment Listening Skills: Teacher Notes.

- Saskatchewan Education. (1997). English Language Arts 10: A Curriculum Guide for the Secondary Level. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Education. (<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/xla/index.html>)
- Kishwaukee College Website: <http://kish.cc.il.us/campus-centers/lsc/listening.html>