

Approaches to Listening Comprehension

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In this article I will illustrate various approaches to listening or auidial comprehension. As Theodore Huebeau said, "The aim of the first step in language teaching is to establish auidial comprehension." Listening comprehension thus should not be neglected as a learning activity even at a more advanced level.

Listening comprehension, though mainly a passive activity, is a special skill which can be developed and achieved.

The materials to be illustrated in this article are suitable for Form four and Form five Malay medium schools, but they can be modified or adopted for other levels. One important point to bear in mind in selecting or writing one's listening exercises is that the diction should be suitable for the level for which the materials are intended as they are meant for listening, not reading.

Sound Discrimination Activities

Verbal language is sounds. The ability to discriminate between sounds will help in accurate listening, hence accurate comprehension of what they have heard. Perhaps then, developing pupil's ability in sound discrimination should be the first step in listening comprehension.

Here are three suggested activities:

(i) Read to pupils pairs of words which may or may not rhyme. Pupils listen to them and write down 'S' for similar sounds/words and 'D' for different sounds/words.

Example: bead bead — S
 beat bit — D

(ii) Give pupils or hand out words in two columns – the left column consisting of single words and the right column consisting of several words. One word in the right column will have the same sound as the word in the left column. As the teacher reads out each word in the list, pupils listen and circle the words in the right column which has the same sound as the word in the left column.

Example:

bee	cheese,	lake,	drone,	grain
need	inch,	bus,	least,	shung

pill	bribe,	ship,	lap,	soil
bitch	himp,	list,	wheeze,	rag
seal	nil,	drung,	jet,	heat

This is an exercise in which pupils are required to discriminate between the vowels i: and i.

(iii) Words to be contrasted on flash cards. Two pupils come forward to hold a card each. The teacher reads out two sentences which contains one of the two words of the cards. The class is to say which word has been used in the two sentences and to point to the pupil holding the card with the particular word.

Example: That's my luck.

That's my lake. – (one card has the word 'LUCK' the other – "LAKE".)

These three activities may be used as games and pupils can work individually or in groups. The advantage of group work in such games may give pupils a chance to use English in verbal communication and these games may even stimulate their competitive spirit thus resulting in perhaps greater achievement in the score for the games.

Listening Comprehension Material

There are four types:

Type A : True/False (short passages)
 Type B : True/False (short dialogues)
 Type C : Multiple Choice (short passages)
 Type D : Yes/No (short passages)

There is no serious grading of these four types of materials. Time limit of each exercise is at individual teacher's discretion, so are the number of exercises given per week. Too large a dose of anything at one time is not always good so it is advisable for teachers to use one or two exercises per week before or even after the lesson proper.

All examples of listening comprehension exercises here are designed as a script for recording. Some suggestions when recording:

- Different voices* (example: a girl's or a boy's voice) may be used in dialogues.
- Different voices may be used for giving instruction,*

reading passages and giving answers. This is to expose pupils to different speakers and to avoid the monotony of using only a single voice.

- (c) *Acoustics.* This is a problem and can affect the quality of the recording. So interference should be kept to a minimum.

Note: In schools where a tape-recorder is not available, the teacher presents the material orally in class. Pupils also have a chance to participate actively by taking turns to read parts of different people in the dialogues.

Type A Material

Example and Procedure.

Listen carefully to this short passage. Later, you will be asked two questions on what you have heard, so pay careful attention.

Listen:

Muhammed is a good runner.

He is running against his classmates.

He is chosen to run against boys from other schools.

Did you listen well? Check your memory. Listen to these sentences. If they are right, write 'T' on your paper. If they are wrong, write 'F'.

- (a) Muhammed is good at running.
(b) Muhammed runs for his school.

Did you listen well? Check your answers.

- (a) T, Muhammed is good at running.
(b) T, Muhammed runs for his school.

This example may appear to be too elementary, but this is intentional as this is considered as introductory material – a first-step. Another reason is it seems so simple to tackle that pupils gain confidence quickly and are thus encouraged to proceed to other types which are progressively and more detailed.

Type B Material

Example and Procedure

Listen to this dialogue carefully. You will be asked two questions.

Mary: Ali and Rosni aren't in school yet. Do you know why, Kok Meng?

Kok Meng: No, I don't. Perhaps they have missed the bus. Or perhaps Rosni is ill. She told me she had a fever yesterday.

Mary: Then perhaps Rosni has gone to see doctor.

Did you listen well? Check your memory.

You will be given two sentences. If the sentence is right, write 'T' and if it's wrong, write 'F'.

- (a) Kok Meng knows why Ali and Rosni are not in school yet.
(b) Mary said Rosni had gone to the hospital.

Check your answers.

- (a) F, Kok Meng does not know why Ali and Rosni are late.
(b) F, Mary did not say Rosni had gone to the hospital.

This material requires two voices. It is suggested that in dialogues a girl and a boy read the parts to help in better understanding. Type B is not necessarily the second step, it is really a variation of the same thing.

Note: Teachers may ask pupils to write Right/Wrong or Yes/No answers instead of True/False answers in the above materials.

Type C Material

Example and Procedure

You will listen to a question. It is followed by a short passage. You will find the answer to the question in the passage.

Listen to this question:

What is a fable?

What is a fable?

Now listen to the following passage. The answer is in the passage.

Listen.

"A fable is a short story that teaches a lesson. Usually the characters in the fables are animals. English fables are very popular, though most of them have come from other languages. Some of the most famous fables come from Aesop who was a Greek. All children in English-speaking countries are taught fables at school."

Do you know the answer now?

Listen to the following sentences. One of them is the answer to the question. "What is a fable?" Choose the right answer and write down the alphabet of the answer you have chosen.

Listen:

- (a) A fable is a story about animals.
(b) It is a story that has a lesson.
(c) It is a popular story.
(d) It is a story taught in all countries.

Which answer did you choose?

Was it (b)?

In this type, pupils are given the task of finding the answer in the passage. They are directed to listen for

something specific and then to select the right answer. Where/How/Why/When questions are also possible questions besides 'What' questions. After practising with Type A & B materials, Type C should not pose any problem to pupils when doing such exercises.

Type D Material

Example and Procedure

Listen to this short story. It is called 'Good News'. It is about a surprise Osman received when he went to see his employer, Tuan Awang.

"The Secretary told Osman that the manager, Tuan Awang, would like to see him. Osman felt very nervous when he went into Tuan Awang's office. Tuan Awang did not look up from his desk when Osman entered. After he had sat down, Tuan Awang told Osman that business was very bad. He told him that the firm could not afford to pay high salaries. Twenty people had already left. Osman said in a weak voice, "Tuan Awang, I"

"Don't interrupt me," Tuan Awang told him. Then he smiled and told Osman that he would receive an extra \$1000 a year!"

How well did you listen? Check your memory.

Listen to the following sentences.

If they are right, write 'Yes'. If they are wrong, write 'No'. Ready?

Listen.

- (a) Tuan Awang's secretary told Osman to see Tuan Awang.
- (b) Osman was happy to see Tuan Awang.
- (c) Tuan Awang's firm was making a lot of money.

- (d) Osman's salary was increased.

Check your answers. Put a cross for any wrong answers.

- (a) Yes, Tuan Awang's secretary told Osman to see Tuan Awang.
- (b) No, Osman was not happy to see Tuan Awang.
- (c) No, Tuan Awang's firm was not making a lot of money.
- (d) Yes, Osman's salary was increased.

All the materials given test the power of the pupils to recall what they have listened to, but the fourth type is more demanding in that pupils have to recall more details or facts. The Yes/No answers here may be True/False or Right/Wrong and the story is preceded by a brief expose and the title is given too. It is suggested that more of Type C and D material be given rather than Type A and B which are really practice material to familiarise pupils with the procedure so that they know what is expected of them..

The writer herself is a practising teacher in a Malay medium school, and has had valuable training in teaching English as a Second Language at RELC, Singapore. She does not profess that her materials are the best ways to develop listening skill but she hopes she has succeeded in showing what can be done. She hopes too that the materials illustrated will serve as a guide or example to other teachers of English who are keen to experiment with ideas and to try at producing materials for their own use and particular situation for she is convinced that a teacher need not be an English expert or a linguist in order to write instructional materials. When trying out some of these exercises, she found that her pupils were attentive and interested. They understand the instructions and were able to do the exercises.