

# **2021 Teacher Takeaways: Practical ideas for classroom teaching**

## **Q&A List**

### **Teaching Listening**

**Date: 12 October 2021**

**Time: 16.00 – 17.00**

Question	Answer
<p>How to train students effectively to have a better attention span and focus more to follow the flow better when they are doing listening?</p> <p>Is there any good suggestion or pedagogical idea for that in a long term and in a short term course?</p>	<p>Students may lose concentration for a number of different reasons. For example, the language in the audio may be too challenging for them, or they may be distracted by the actions of fellow students. They may also lose concentration because they don't know what they are supposed to be listening for. Finally, they may lack confidence in their listening and be discouraged by the first unfamiliar word that they hear. You can help by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preparing students for the listening and pre-teaching key words and phrases that may be unfamiliar.</li> <li>2. Giving them a clear listening task, so that they have a purpose for listening.</li> <li>3. Breaking up longer listening into shorter chunks and checking understanding before moving on. This should ensure that all or most students are on task and reduce disruptions from disengaged students.</li> </ol> <p>For students who lack confidence, you can do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassure them that it is normal not to pick up and understand every word you hear. This happens when we listen in our first language too.</li> <li>• Show them how to cope when they miss part of the listening. You can do this via a “think aloud” where you play a listening and then model the strategies that you yourself use to try to make sense of it. You can learn more about Think Alouds at this link:  <a href="https://www.teachervision.com/problem-solving/think-aloud-strategy">https://www.teachervision.com/problem-solving/think-aloud-strategy</a></li> </ul>
<p>Hi Robin, would you please share with us your view on what kind of speaking activities best improve listening comprehension ability?</p>	<p>Thanks for the question. At beginner level, any kind of speaking task could be beneficial. The idea is simply that students themselves become used to producing the sounds of English, as well as hearing them. Mimicking the sounds that students hear from their teachers or the audio can be useful practice for pronunciation, but speaking activities can also include short dialogues, role-plays and presentations.</p>

What's the task "dictation" for? So if it's better for us to focus on giving students the dictation about sentences or words?

Dictation links sounds to writing. It mainly focusses on features of writing, such as spelling, punctuation and grammar, but it can definitely help students become more effective listeners too. For example, dictations can help students become more sensitive to word boundaries, contractions and auxiliary verbs.

What to focus on will depend on the level of your students. With beginner students, dictating new vocabulary words can be a very helpful activity, as it helps them to link sounds to spellings. It is important to use this as a teaching activity and not just a test. You can do this by giving students support while you dictate, for example:

Teacher says: "Thursday" (normal speed), "th\_ur\_s\_d\_ay" (slowly, sound by sound), "Thursday" (normal speed).

If students are struggling, the teacher can tell them/remind them that:

- the letters 'th' spell the sound /th/ as in [thing](#)
- the letters 'ur' spell the sound /ur/ like in [fur](#)
- the letter 's' spells the sound /z/ like in [is](#)
- the letters 'ay' spell the sound /ay/ like in [play](#)

With more advanced students, dictation can help practice features of punctuation and grammar – especially contracted forms and possessives, like "they've gone fishing", "she's not here", "he's Bobby's brother", etc

In the session, we also looked at how to use a kind of dictation activity called "ear-training". With advanced students, this can help to focus on how the sounds of English change in connected speech.

For example:

	<table border="1" data-bbox="701 193 2121 365"> <tr> <td data-bbox="701 193 1411 365"> <u>Slow careful speech</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have got to go.</li> </ul> </td> <td data-bbox="1411 193 2121 365"> <u>Connected speech</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• /vɒtəgəʊ/</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table> <p>Students can write whatever sounds they hear, and compare against the slow, careful version. They can discuss how the sounds change in connected speech. With the example above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I” disappears</li> <li>• ‘have’ is reduced to /v/</li> <li>• “got”, “to” and “go” run together and the vowel sound in ‘to’ is a shwa.</li> </ul>	<u>Slow careful speech</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have got to go.</li> </ul>	<u>Connected speech</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• /vɒtəgəʊ/</li> </ul>
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<p>Should we summarize some common accent differences and liaisons before class? Or is it better to let students find these through class activities?</p>	<p>It’s best to do this when students hear a new, unfamiliar accent. This allows them to apply the learning immediately. Otherwise, the information can seem abstract and difficult to remember.</p>		
<p>I usually speed up the records after the students understand the idea, is that help? or I always ask students to catch each single sound from the normal speed listening.</p>	<p>Thanks for the question. Personally, I am not sure that speeding up the recording will be very helpful. Speeding up the audio might distort the sounds of the words in unnatural ways. Rather than speeding up the recording, it may be helpful to use examples from more authentic audio. Examples can include TED Talks, songs, or extracts from news or weather broadcasts (eg BBC, China Daily).</p> <p>Incidentally, I don’t know how you check that students “catch each single sound” when they listen. However, it’s worth noting that when we listen, we normally remember the meaning of what is said, but quickly forget the actual words that were used.</p>		

<p>Reciting the listening part is useful to improve their listening or just following the original listening?</p>	<p>It can be helpful to get students to mimic parts of the recording that they found difficult to catch, or which contain useful phrases that you would like the students to remember and use later. Also, if the listening is a dialogue, it can be helpful for students to act it out as a skit.</p>
<p>Will it be overwhelming for students to use materials with various accents?</p>	<p>Younger students may struggle more if they hear a very large variety of accents early in their studies. However, older students should adapt fairly easily.</p> <p>All students are familiar with the idea that speakers from different regions pronounce words slightly differently, since this happens in their first language too. The teacher can help by demonstrating the way that the sounds in some English words change, depending on the accent of the speaker that students are listening to. Support like this can help students to adjust more quickly and easily.</p>
<p>Can you introduce more interesting activities for dictation?</p>	<p>As mentioned in an earlier answer, it is important to see dictation as a teaching activity, rather than always using it as a test. This means finding ways to support students to achieve the task. Dictation requires a lot of concentration and effort from students, so it is often better to use short extracts rather than very long ones.</p> <p>One activity that makes dictation more collaborative is <a href="https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/eal-programme/guidance/effective-teaching-of-eal-learners/great-ideas/dictogloss/">Dictagloss</a>. You can find a video explaining this process here: <a href="https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/eal-programme/guidance/effective-teaching-of-eal-learners/great-ideas/dictogloss/">https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/eal-programme/guidance/effective-teaching-of-eal-learners/great-ideas/dictogloss/</a></p>
<p>I mean when we do dictation to students wo do words or sentences? or it depends on students level?</p>	<p>Yes, that's right. Please see the answer to the third question in this document, above for more details.</p>
<p>I try to use simple English to help my beginning ss understand what I say, I'd like to know what are the other</p>	<p>Using words and phrases that students are already familiar with is important. There are some other techniques that you can use too.</p>

ways to help ss understand what I say. Thanks.

- If you are telling students a story, you can point at pictures to help them understand what you are referring to. You can also use gestures and tone of voice.
- If you are explaining a classroom activity or a game using English, students will understand more clearly if you demonstrate the activity, rather than explaining it.
- You can also check students' understanding by asking Concept-Checking Questions (CCQs) and Instruction-Checking Questions (ICQs).
- Finally, it can be helpful to get students to discuss what they have understood, in pairs, using their first language. Monitoring these discussions will allow you to quickly work out what students have and have not (yet) understood.