



TI-AIE

Strategies for teaching listening

Secondary English

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What this unit is about



In our English classes, we tend to practise reading and writing, but don't often practise speaking and listening. Our textbooks don't have listening exercises, and there is no listening exam. I know that it is important that my students understand spoken English, but whenever I try to speak English with them they have trouble understanding me. How can I help my students to improve their listening skills?

In the past, the school curriculum for English language teaching in India privileged the teaching of reading and writing. However, policy documents like the National Curriculum Framework (2005, p. 40) now also recognise the importance of teaching listening and speaking:

Speech and listening, reading and writing, are all generalised skills, and children's mastery over them becomes the key factor affecting success at school. In many situations, all of these skills need to be used together.

Listening and speaking are now taught because they are very important parts of being able to use English to communicate. Listening skills are also crucial to the development of speaking skills. Listening to other speakers helps students to develop their pronunciation and fluency in English.

Successful listening skills are acquired over time and with lots of practice. Your students need exposure to spoken English to be able to develop their listening skills. However, students in some parts of India may not have many opportunities to listen to English outside the classroom.

This unit offers ideas about how you can use resources creatively to develop meaningful listening activities in your English classes that involve all pupils.

What you can learn in this unit

- How to design meaningful listening activities for your English class.
- Asking questions to help students actively listen.
- Ideas for using audio recordings for listening activities.

1 Involving students in listening

You listen to many different things in your home language (or other languages) every day. Think back to your day so far – what have you listened to already? Maybe you have noted some of the following:

- a weather report on the radio
- a colleague at work talking about a new school policy
- a friend phoned you to tell you why he is going to be late.

You probably have many other things on your list.

In each of these situations you were not a passive listener. You actively listened to what the person said in order to find out information. When you have a reason to listen, you listen actively.

When students are doing a listening activity in the classroom, there should be a reason for them to be listening. In Case Study 1 the teacher tries one approach to his class.

Case Study 1: Mr Khan tries the ‘listen and draw’ activity

Mr Khan is a secondary English teacher. He recently went to an English language teacher training workshop on how to help students improve their listening skills in English. Read his account of how he tried to apply what he experienced there.

The trainer showed us an activity that we can do with our students. The activity was called ‘listen and draw’. The trainer told us to follow her instructions and draw what she said. She told us to draw:

- a tree
- three birds in the tree
- two flowers under the tree
- a sun on the left side.

Each of us had a paper and pen and we had to draw what the trainer said. At first I thought it was strange to do some drawing, as I’m not a very good artist. But the trainer told us just to play along and be quick. It was fun and it also made a nice change from listening to the lectures. At the end, we compared our drawings to those of the person sitting next to us. We all laughed to see how the drawings differed.

While this was a fun activity, I realised that it could help my students to practise listening. It could also help them to practise language structures like prepositions (such as ‘in’, ‘under’ or ‘on’). I decided to try the activity with my class as soon as I could.

I saw a good opportunity when my students were reading the story ‘The Bond of Love’ by Kenneth Anderson from the Class IX textbook *Beehive*. The story has a few illustrations in it. I decided to use the picture on page 117 for a ‘listen and draw’ activity (see Resource 1).

To start the activity, I told my students:

I'm going to read out a few instructions and as I talk, you have to draw. You don't have to worry about your drawing – it's not an art exam. It's just that I am checking to see whether you follow the instructions given in English. Is this clear? Is there a question, or is the activity clear to everybody?

After I was sure that they had understood I started by saying:

Right, so close your textbooks please. You all have pens with you. Can I see your pens? Right, draw a bear on the left side of the page. Now, draw a cage around the bear. After you have drawn the cage, draw a woman sitting on the ground to the right of the bear. Draw a picnic basket to the right of that woman. Then draw some apples in the picnic basket. Draw a cake next to the basket ...

Some of my students looked surprised or worried at first. Some complained that they were not very good at drawing. I explained that this was not a test of their drawing skills, but that it was a chance to practise listening to English. I told them: 'Don't worry about how good your drawing is. This is not art class, it's English class! Just draw quickly.' As they drew, I walked around the room to encourage them, saying things like 'Nice bear!' or 'Good, the woman is on the right side of the page.'

After giving the instructions, I told my students to compare their pictures with each other [Figure 1]. They laughed as they looked at each other's drawings because they were very different. One student noticed that she had drawn her bear on the right side of the page instead of the left. Then I then told them to look at the illustration on page 117 of the *Beehive* textbook.



Figure 1 Students comparing pictures.

This was a great activity for helping my students to practise listening. It also helped the students to prepare for reading the story. By talking about the illustration, they now had some ideas about the text before reading it.

My students liked this 'listen and draw' activity, so I decided that I would repeat it from time to time in the future, using simple illustrations from the textbook. I also thought that once my students were used to it, they could perhaps do the activity in groups or pairs – one student could look at a picture and describe it to their classmates, who would listen and draw it. This way, they would practise listening *and* speaking.

Activity 1: Try in the classroom: listen and draw

The 'listen and draw' activity in the case study is a simple activity that you can do with any age group, and with many different pictures. This activity:

- helps students to practise listening
- helps students to practise language in context (for example, prepositions)
- involves all the students
- can prepare the students for a reading from the textbook. They will be introduced to some vocabulary and ideas from the text before reading it.

Follow the steps below and try using the activity in your classroom:

- 1 Before class, choose a simple picture with a few objects that are simple to draw. You will need to make sure that both you and your students know most of the words for the objects in the picture. It is probably best to choose a picture that does not have too many objects in it so that it is relatively easy to describe and draw. If the picture is too complex, it might take students a long time to draw it. To speed the activity up, encourage students to do a very quick drawing. You could

demonstrate how quickly they could draw by drawing an example of the picture on the board.

- 2 Think about (or write down) the instructions that you will give to students to draw the picture. (Resource 2 includes some of the classroom language you might need to do this activity.)
- 3 When you introduce the activity to your students, tell them not to worry about how good their drawing is.
- 4 Read the first instruction and give students some time to draw – but not too much time! Encourage your students to draw quickly.
- 5 Repeat each instruction as many times as you feel your students need. If they still don't understand, use a different word. You can also use their home language to help them understand. But remember you are helping them to listen in English, so try not to use the home language very often.
- 6 After you have read the instructions, tell your students to compare their drawings. Have them note any differences and then tell them to compare their pictures with the one in the textbook.

If your students enjoy this activity, you could get them to do it in pairs or groups. One student can choose a picture from the textbook and describe it to their classmates. The classmates draw the picture from the description (and should not look at the textbooks). You could also tell your students to choose a picture and ask you to draw it on the board.

