

# HOW TO TEACH LISTENING LIKE A PRO

30 TOP SECRETS EVERY LISTENING TEACHER SHOULD KNOW

LISTENING  
MAY SEEM LIKE A  
PASSIVE EXERCISE  
BUT THERE'S  
NOTHING  
"PASSIVE"  
ABOUT IT

TAKE YOUR STUDENTS'  
LISTENING SKILLS FROM  
PASSIVE AND BORING  
TO ACTIVE AND SHARP

TEACHING  
LISTENING  
DOESN'T HAVE  
TO BE DULL

LEARN HOW TO  
CREATE ENGAGING &  
INTERACTIVE LESSONS  
THAT FOCUS ON  
LISTENING SKILLS



THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS NOT *WHAT* THEY LISTEN TO, IT'S *HOW*

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# Guide Your ESL Students towards Better Listening...Step by Step

Of all of the skills ESL students need to develop to improve their overall English fluency, listening is probably the most frustrating. Think about it. They can take as long as they need to read or write. They can carefully choose what to say when they speak, if they choose to speak at all. But weak listening places students in the most frustrating situations. Fortunately for them, there is a way to slowly but steadily improve their listening skills, and you can guide them every step of the way!

## HOW TO IMPROVE WEAK LISTENING

When students have to work on a particularly weak area, it is best for them to focus their efforts on improving this specific skill. I'm not saying they should neglect the usual homework and do something that is tailor-made just for them. They should complete the planned coursework, just like everyone else, but in addition to this, they should work on improving the skill that needs work – in this case, listening. I cannot emphasize enough that the strategy I will outline below is for students to implement after school and in their own time.

Will they have to work harder? Of course! Will it take up more of their time? Naturally!

Simply remind your students of the popular saying: no pain, no gain! So if you want to guide your students towards better listening, here's what to do:

## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TOWARDS BETTER LISTENING

### 1 INSTRUCT THEM TO START EASY

Choose short audio or video segments that are appropriate to your student's level. Do not encourage them to attempt to listen to and understand a CNN news story or a movie right from the start. This is the biggest mistake ESL students make. It's too difficult. So they get frustrated. It takes them hours to get a small part of the conversation. So they give up altogether.

The best type of audio or video component they should work with at first is the very same audio included with the coursebook, and very likely the same one you hear in class. They should start with a short listening exercise. They should listen to it as many times as they want. They can listen only. They can listen and read the script. But they should work with this material until they start noticing some improvement in their listening skills.

### 2 MOVE TOWARDS SOMETHING THAT'S A LITTLE MORE DIFFICULT

Again, it will depend on your student's level and vocabulary, but could they possibly tackle a longer conversation? Maybe an extended listening from the book? At this point, they should still stick to material that has been created for students, with vocabulary they are familiar with or included in their book.

### 3 REPETITION AND TIMEFRAME

Depending on the student, they may have to listen to the same audio file several times. Tell them that this is the best way – repetition gets results, no matter how boring it gets. Picture someone who's learning to play tennis. He or she stands in the same spot hitting one ball after another, till they get the technique right. It's the same with any skill. Also, this type of listening helps students incorporate set phrases and expressions, which they'll be able to recall and use when the opportunity arises. It also helps them learn correct pronunciation and intonation. To sum up: repetition gets results!

### 4 USE THE SCRIPTS

Coursebooks include the audio scripts for a good reason. They help students with weak listening learn. If the scripts are available in the teacher's book and not the student's, copy them. You can instruct your student to do this:

- First listen to the audio and read the script at the same time
- Then, listen to the audio without reading
- Repeat as many times as necessary

- The goal is to gradually wean the student off the scripts altogether and have them just listen for comprehension

### 5 SUGGEST SPECIAL MATERIAL

There are magazines or monthly publications that are specifically targeted to ESL students and come complete with reading material, exercises and CDs. They often provide interesting articles and are very similar to any Time or Newsweek, but are specifically published to give ESL students exposure to more "real-life" material. Some of the most popular are Speak Up and Today in English. Check out your local newsstand for similar publications that you can recommend to your students.

### 6 TIME FOR THE "REAL" STUFF!

Finally, after months of hard work, your student should be ready to tackle real life audio and video material. They should start with shorter audio and progress to longer material. For example, business English students can listen to the short videos available on CNN.com before sitting down in front of the TV and listening to the full news broadcast. Students who want comedy or more casual conversations should first watch a couple of sitcoms (most are 20-minute episodes) before moving on to feature-length films. With TV series and movies on DVD, they also have the option to turn the subtitles on or off (see the strategy above for audio scripts). When choosing series or movies, guide the student towards selecting those where the actors speak clearly and without too much slang.

**ABOVE ALL, THERE SHOULD BE A NATURAL PROGRESSION, AND YOUR STUDENT MUST UNDERSTAND THIS. SOME ARE TOO EAGER TO POP IN A DVD AND ARE TERRIBLY DISAPPOINTED WHEN THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND A THING.**

They should try one particular strategy for a few weeks or till they notice improvement. Don't forget to monitor their efforts. This could also realistically take years to accomplish if we're dealing with beginners. But you will have started them on the right road.

# Do You Hear What I Hear? 8 Activities to Improve Listening Skills

**LISTENING IS THE GATEWAY TO UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATING AND, THEREFORE, IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS OF ALL SKILLS.**

If students struggle to listen carefully, they will miss out on important interactions both inside and outside of the classroom.

The problem with listening instruction is that it is commonly thought to be boring and passive - students simply sit and listen. However, teaching listening doesn't have to be dull! There are many ways to create engaging and interactive lessons that focus on listening skills. Here are eight different ways to build students' listening skills:

## **TRY THESE 8 ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE LISTENING SKILLS**

### **1 VOICE BLOGGING**

Using a free website (such as Voice Thread) have students record voice journals about their week. Encourage students with semi-personal topics or hypothetical questions (e.g. What would you do if you had one million dollars? Describe your best vacation. etc..) to prompt speaking. This works just like a blog but with student voices rather than writing. Even if your school doesn't have computers with microphones or recording capabilities, with VoiceThread students can use any phone to record their voice blog.

Students can then be assigned to listen to several of their classmates and give each other comments. By listening to each other and giving encouraging comments, you are building a positive classroom environment and cooperation within the classroom all while students build their listening skills.

### **2 LISTEN FOR THE HIDDEN PHRASE**

An engaging whole class activity is to pair students up and give each pair

a "secret" word or phrase. For easier dialogues, give a simple phrase such as "I love soccer," or "My father works a lot..." etc. To challenge students, give a slightly more obscure phrase, such as "John does yoga every Saturday," or "I saw a UFO in my yard last night."

Students are then tasked with developing a dialogue with their partner that somehow uses this phrase. Students may script the dialogue if they wish, but only give them limited planning time (5-10 minutes). After they have prepared their dialogue, students perform the dialogue in front of the class, and the other students listen carefully to hear which words or phrases seem extra carefully planned to find the secret phrase. If you have individual white boards, have the students write down the phrase as they hear it and then show their board after the pair has finished the dialogue. If they found the correct secret phrase, they get a point. If no one finds the pair's secret phrase, the pair that developed the dialogue gets a point.

### **3 LISTEN FOR THE WORD**

Using popular culture media is always a good way to practice listening skills. Using songs, watching TV shows, or even listening to podcasts will help build skills. To go an extra step, have an additional task while listening to the song or TV show such as assign students different words to listen for and have them keep track of how often they hear these words. This is particularly helpful with reductions like gonna, wanna, hafta.

Listening to various media is also a good time to practice unfamiliar words. Encourage students to write down words they have never heard before. Without subtitles or lyrics, students will have to rely on the sounds they think they heard to make a guess at how to spell this unfamiliar word. Encourage students to write down other surrounding words to help you decipher what the word might be or to write down the time when they heard the word so

you can go back to the spot and listen again. These are important skills for students to master so that they can continue learning even outside of the classroom by hearing new words.

### **4 STUDENT-DESIGNED QUIZZES**

If students are in a computer lab or if they have iPads/iPhones, give each student a dialogue, lecture, or song to listen to. These can be easily found on various free listening websites. Have students listen to the lecture multiple times and then create a quiz for another student to take. Students will be excited to "play teacher" by creating quiz questions, and they will have to rely on their listening skills to write accurate questions.

### **5 DESCRIBE THE...**

Place students into pairs and have them sit back to back. Give one student in the pair a unique picture with a lot of simple shapes drawn on it. I prefer to draw my own pictures with randomly placed hearts, flowers, stars, houses, stick figures, etc. Put these shapes in different places, angles, and with extra features as desired. Give the second student in the pair a blank piece of paper. The student with the picture must dictate to his/her partner how to draw the picture. Make sure to emphasize no cheating or peeking! When finished, change the pictures around the groups and have the partners switch roles. When everyone has drawn once, the team with the most similar pictures win!

### **6 PUT THE CELEBRITY IN THE RIGHT PLACE**

Similar to the picture describing game, this game has a similar setup but without the drawing. Give students a chart with many different celebrities in the boxes/grid. This can be easily done by creating a table in a word processing program and pasting internet images of celebrities in the table. Be sure to make several different versions with

celebrities in the different spaces. It's okay if the students don't know all of the celebrities - in fact, it may be better if there are some they don't know, so they have to rely on describing physical features rather than giving names. Print a second blank grid with the pictures of the celebrities cut out into individual pieces but not attached to the grid.

Students should sit back to back and be instructed to not peek or cheat. The student with the table with pre-assigned celebrities should give the other student instructions on how to fill in his table with the celebrity picture pieces. For example, the first student might say "The picture of Brad Pitt goes in the first square, and Angelina goes in the square below Brad Pitt." It may be helpful to pre-teach the vocabulary "columns" and "rows."

heard by lining up their note cards in the correct order.

### STUDENTS ENGAGE IN LISTENING EVERY DAY, SO IT'S IMPORTANT FOR ESL STUDENTS TO CONTINUE DEVELOPING THEIR LISTENING SKILLS.

Engaging them in fun listening activities will hopefully motivate them to practice more listening and take advantage of all opportunities around them.

## 7 STAND UP/SIT DOWN

When working on individual sounds, give students a target sound and then read a script out loud that contains multiple examples of this sound. For example, if you are practicing the /ae/ sound (like in "cat," "hat," etc., you could read the following script. "Yesterday, my cat ate a plastic toy and swallowed it fast." Whenever students hear this sound for the first time (cat), they should stand. When they hear it again (plastic), sit down. Read slowly enough for them to have time to stand up or sit down. This activity is great because it gets them out of their seats and lets them get some excess energy out!

## 8 VOWEL DISCRIMINATION

Another good activity to do when you are studying specific vowel sounds is to give students two different color note cards (e.g. one red card and one blue card). For a review activity, assign one vowel to the red card (e.g. the /ae/ sound as in "bat") and another card to the blue card (e.g. the /ei/ sound as in "bay"). When you read a word, have students raise the card in the air for the correct vowel/sound they heard. For a more advanced game, give students several colors of cards to correspond with several different vowels. Also, you could give the students several cards and read a sentence where each word represents a different vowel. Students must recreate the pattern of sounds they



# How to Teach Listening Skills: Best Practices

TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS PRESENTS A SERIES OF CHALLENGES. IT IS PERHAPS THE MOST EPHEMERAL OF LANGUAGE SKILLS, HARD TO UNDERSTAND, TEACH, AND ASSESS.

How do you really know that someone understood you correctly without asking after every sentence “Do you understand?” (And students are often programmed to respond “yes” even when they didn’t.) This problem may also apply to reading, the other “receptive” language skill, in that its focus is largely on the comprehension of another speaker’s production. However, while the teacher has some understanding of how to teach someone to read in English by teaching context clues, for example, to help students comprehend text, how do you really teach someone to listen better (especially when even many native speakers of English often have difficulties with this)? However, while teaching listening may seem ambiguous, there are actually a number of principles that apply in teaching listening skills in English.

## PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD LISTENING

Following are a number of listening skills, most of which not only benefit the ESL student but also the native speaker.

### 1 BASICS: PAY ATTENTION

Even native speakers need help with this. Focus on the speaker. Look at him or her because facial expressions and body language can communicate as much as language. For example, there will usually be more engagement with the listener in making eye contact and use of hand gestures if what the speaker is saying is of importance to him or her. In addition, it’s easy to mistake what someone actually said if you are not focusing on him or her and are engaged in some other task, such as reading or texting.

### 2 PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING

Ask the speaker to slow down or repeat when you don’t understand or just want to be certain about what you heard. Repeat back what you think you heard him or her say, as there can often be a gap between what we thought we heard and what the speaker intended. This gap can be addressed by letting the speaker know what you heard: for example, “So what I’m hearing from you is that you would like more quiet and fewer distractions after 9 p.m. so that you can study.” This is called “active listening,” in which the listening portion of a conversation becomes as active as the speaking part in communicating a message, and not only helps the listener in understanding what the speaker is saying, but also can help the speaker in organizing his thoughts and clarify what he wants to communicate: e.g., the speaker may be spluttering something about the late hour and her test tomorrow, and may not consciously know what she is trying to ask for—or is too reticent—until the listener clarifies.

### 3 PAY ATTENTION TO STRUCTURE

In a formal lecture or speech, the speaker will usually let you know ahead of time the organization of the discourse: “Today we will discuss the two types of diabetes, Type One and Type Two, although as we will see, there is some overlap—” and then what will follow is a description of Types One and Two, with the overlap probably addressed at the end. These devices, called “discourse markers,” actually help the listener in organizing and understanding the lecture. Even in less formal conversation, speakers will often structure their discourse, especially if they want to make certain they are understood: “Okay, there are a few issues I need to raise with you....” With this informal marker of “there are a few —” and the use of the word “issues,” the speaker sig-

nals the importance of what follows. “A few,” it may be noted, is a vague expression, and what follows may be anywhere from two to five or six issues. The listener may clarify when the “issues” are covered by asking “Is there anything else?” when the speaker pauses.

### 4 LISTEN FOR KEY WORDS

What words does the speaker emphasize? Usually the speaker will let you know by stressing the main point: “Let’s talk about the TIME we will meet tomorrow...” The stressed word “time” signals that the time of tomorrow’s appointment is the main point, as does the marker “Let’s talk about—”

In addition, certain words signal importance by themselves, such as “issues,” as seen above: whatever follows “issues” is of importance. Other key words signaling importance are “concerns” and “points.”

### 5 KEY PHRASES OR MARKERS

In formal lectures the speaker usually also “marks” main points with key phrases: “The main point is...” or “On the other hand, some people take an opposing viewpoint...” But even in everyday conversation the speaker often uses less formal markers: for example, “I guess what I’m trying to say is —” is often used before a main point.

## TEACHING PRINCIPLES OF LISTENING

### 1 MAKE IT EXPLICIT

Even native speakers, who actually use markers or key vocabulary, may not have consciously thought about these devices. Introducing some key markers and vocabulary is often welcome it makes explicit how to understand and manage conversations, which may have been some-

thing a mystery (such as why a friend reacts with anger at your student ignoring a raised “issue”). In addition, key terms such as “active listening” and “discourse marker” should be introduced and exemplified.

## 2 MODEL

For new concepts, such as active listening, a model is needed. This can be provided by traditional print example dialogues as well as film clips, and teacher modeling with volunteer students: e.g., the teacher might say, “Gina, tell me something of importance to you, and I’ll listen actively. The rest of the class, pay attention, and then let’s discuss what goes into active listening.”

## 3 PRACTICE

This might be especially important in active listening, which few people, native or nonnative speakers, really know how to do, as we are used to either sitting quietly while a speaker finishes his speech (or diatribe, if he or she is angry), or interrupting, when we think he or she is wrong, or sitting and planning what we will say in response, etc. Active listening takes practice, but is worth it in terms of improved listening skills and relationships.

**TEACHING GOOD LISTENING SKILLS IS DIFFICULT AS IT IS SO DIFFICULT TO DEFINE AND EXEMPLIFY, AND FEW OF US, EVEN NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH, REALLY DO IT WELL.**

But by making explicit the qualities of good listening and then practicing it, our ESL students can become good listeners in English, and often better than their native speaker peers.

# Loud and Clear: Three Listening Activities Adaptable for Any Level

## HAVING AN ARSENAL OF EFFECTIVE AND ENGAGING LISTENING EXERCISES IS A MUST FOR ALL ESL TEACHERS.

Once you organize listening exercises, it is beneficial to be able to reshape exercises for all levels. Try out these three listening activities adaptable for any level and hear loud and clear how much they will improve overall listening skills.

## TRY THESE 3 LISTENING ACTIVITIES EASILY ADAPTABLE FOR ANY LEVEL

### 1 DICTATION

Dictation is one of the most adaptable and valid listening exercises that can be utilized at every level. One exceptional value of dictation is that it can be done spontaneously or with great forethought. If you find yourself with a spare ten minutes in class, one tool you can employ is to offer a quick dictation. In addition, if you have a particularly difficult grammar point or one that users really need reiterated, creating a substantial dictation exercise can really drive the point home. Dictation has so many different applications that you can continually use it without it becoming stale.

An example of utilizing dictation for beginner students is for work on numbers. You could read out numbers between one and a million, and have students write out the correct number, or if you really want to challenge them ask them to write out the number with words. Be sure to write down the numbers as you speak them so that you keep track of what numbers the students have been given. You can also involve students by asking them to take turns giving the class a number. To make correction of the dictation interactive, you could do it in rounds, offer prizes for the three best scores, or ask students to take turns writing their answers on the board. You could apply this same practice using phone numbers, addresses, or time.

Another example for more challenging dictation for higher levels is to focus on a specific grammar point. Try reading out a short script or role play. Then give them a task such as writing down all the present perfect verb usage they hear, or noting down any idiomatic phrase as they heard it. These tasks can then lead to discussions of the grammar, of the topic or of usage in general. Whatever task you give them, there should always be time to debrief about how they felt during the exercise, and answer any questions. Think about using dictation for comprehension checks, listening for specific attributes, or as a jumping off point for discussion. You'll find that whether you yourself perform the dictation or whether you use recordings from books or the internet, students will become accustomed to increasingly challenging and varied dictation exercises.

### 2 RUNNING STORIES

The activity titled Running Stories combines writing, reading, speaking, and listening for a tremendous whole language experience. Here's how it works. Divide the class into two teams and then split the teams in half. One half of each team stays seated and the other half stands at the board. It works best if each team is an equal distance from their seats to the board. Each team is given an envelope with a cut-up excerpt. You can use a piece of a reading, a dialogue, or a conversation. The seated-half teams must quickly assemble the jumbled up reading into what they believe is the cohesive story. Give them a certain amount of time to do this—maybe a minute or two. Then the seated students stand in line at their desks each with a slip of paper from the reading, in the order that they desire to be. This is where it gets crazy and loud. The students at the board should each have a marker and each student takes a turn writing a line on the board. The student with the first slip of paper must clearly shout what it says so the student at the board—a fair distance apart—can write down

the line word for word. You can establish as many rules as you like, but the fun part is not letting them linger on any one line for very long. Use a timer or buzzer to designate when the next student is up. This activity breaks the monotony of routine, allows the students to be loud, and hones listening and speaking skills in an organic fashion. Try it with beginners or take it to the next level with your advanced students.

### 3 LISTEN, REMEMBER, REPEAT

Spoken memory games are a treasure of listening and speaking diversion for every ESL level. You can tailor memory games to grammar, to vocabulary, or to a specific theme or topic. One of the most popular of these is, I'm going to grandma's house and I'm going to bring... Apples, Bingo, Carrots, Dragons, etc. Each student has to name an object, food, or whatever you designate for their letter and they have to repeat each statement that was spoken before them. It's a classic as an ice-breaker or spontaneous exercise. Another adaptation is to use adjectives or verbs. For example, I am going to the beach and I am going to Act, Bake, Canoe, etc. For adjectives the first day name game works really well. I am Joyful Juan, He is Silly Steve, she is Pretty Petra, etc. There's no end to the challenges you can create with memory games and they are the perfect cure to a sleepy class or boring topic!

## WAKE UP THE SENSES AND TRY THESE VERY VERSATILE AND ORIGINAL LISTENING EXERCISES.

Students will practice natural listening skills and these activities will also inspire competition, lively discussion, and loud and clear vocalizations.



# The Right Stuff: Three Brilliant Beginner Listening Activities

**ENGAGING BEGINNER LEVEL STUDENTS WITH USEFUL LISTENING EXERCISES IS CRUCIAL TO THEIR SUCCESS AS LEARNERS AND CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT.**

Listening tends to be an extreme area of challenge for these students and it is necessary to bring in brilliant, bright listening activities to build confidence and stimulate conversation.

For any listening exercise it is essential that the directions and the aims are clearly defined. The exercises should always contain communication tasks so that learners are actively listening and also using their listening skills to speak up. Some options might be to have listeners obtain facts, find the main idea, follow directions, or display general understanding in order to respond or craft questions.

**TRY THESE 3 BRILLIANT LISTENING ACTIVITIES WITH YOUR BEGINNER STUDENTS**

## 1 CHINESE WHISPERS OR TELEPHONE

Chinese Whispers, otherwise known as Telephone is a popular and easily adaptable game that can lead to a lot of fun listening and speaking. The game consists of one phrase or line being whispered from student to student until the end when they discover if they were able to replicate it accurately. The bigger the line of people the whisper must go through the more humorous and numerous the errors will be. The rules of the game are simple, but you could always add more guidelines if you want to make play more challenging. First, students must whisper the phrase or sentence to each other. Second, it is a good idea to have a list of the phrases, sentences or sayings that you want students to practice. You could write them on cards or on folded pieces of paper. You want to make sure that only the person who begins has access to the card. Often with beginners, the teacher should be the originator of the sentence that will go around. It not only takes the

pressure off student number one, but it ensures that the sentence is read correctly at least once. However, once the class has played a few rounds, it's wise to challenge the first student to decipher the message on the card and then whisper it to the next person. The whispering is an interesting element because students are not used to talking so quietly and it takes more effort to announce when whispering. It's not just a listening exercise, but one that focuses on speaking and the miscommunication that can so often occur during communications. Students of all ages and levels really get a kick out of the game Telephone.

## 2 STORY-TELLING

Storytelling, even in a very simple form demonstrates natural language, and on-the-spot comprehension. Start out by explaining that you are going to tell a brief story about something that happened in your life the previous week. For example: "I went to Prague this weekend. I met some friends and had a great time." It is then the students job to think of questions to gain more detail about your experience. They should refer back to the board for question structures, and utilize Wh-questions like who, what, where and when. After they have exhausted all the options of questioning, tell them your story utilizing all the answers to the questions that they asked you. This shows them not only how to tell a story, but what details to include, and how to listen and ask for specific details.

If you want to add more detail to this activity, you could put students in pairs and have each partner talk briefly about something that happened to him/her last week. The second member of the pair listens and asks follow up questions trying to form a question for each of the six Wh- information question words. The first member answers the follow-up questions, elaborating on the story as initially told. Members of the pair switch roles so each person has a chance to tell a story and answer questions.

This activity can be adapted for different grammar points, and is especially good for practicing beginning tenses. Students could talk about their daily routine, explain their family, outline a future goal or challenge, or explain a sequence. This activity can be as short or as detailed as you desire, and students can put their own spin on the stories as well as the questions.

## 3 INTERVIEWS

Putting students into pairs to do short, simple interviews on a variety of topics is a wonderful way to get them acquainted while they are speaking and listening intently. For beginners interviews should focus on question creation, tense work, and familiar vocabulary. Because beginners often rely heavily upon using exactly the structures that are detailed out for them, interviews challenge them to combine everything they are learning into one conversation. Any chance to work on different types of questions and how to create them will be an invaluable resource for students at this level. You can organize interviews by giving groups of words that they must then create into questions and ask their partner. For example family/weekend would lead to questions about what the family did this weekend, perhaps utilizing some question types written out on the board. You could also do interviews that are more free-form, where you give the students a topic like hobbies. They would then ask each other 5 to 7 questions on that topic. With any interview, you want to be sure that each half of the pair takes turns asking the questions. You will also want to be sure to build in time for each set of pairs to debrief or paraphrase what they discussed to the larger group.

**LISTENING EXERCISES FOR BEGINNERS ARE CENTRAL TO THEIR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND EACH AND EVERY CLASS SHOULD INCORPORATE MANY DIFFERENT EXERCISES FOCUSED ON LISTENING.**

Keep students involved, motivated, and listening to one another for stellar results!

# Around the Water-Cooler: Building Listening Skills for Employment

One lofty goal of many advanced-level ESL students is to gain employment in an English-speaking workplace. If this is the focus of one of your groups, there is a lot you can do to develop listening and speaking skills with career-motivated activities. Help learners find success around the water-cooler by devising listening skills geared for employment.

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 A NETWORKING EVENT

It is vital that students are able to talk about their skills and interests, but also to display fluency in understanding. By approaching interviewing with a few different methods, learners will begin to hone natural speaking under pressure as well as pointed listening skills. One way to approach this is to set up a date in the future when you will host a mock job fair or networking event. It doesn't have to be formal with employers in your area. Simply bring in a few people the students have never met, and they can represent a company or job field that the students have showed interest in. You could have the guests perform short one-on-one interviews with the students and provide feedback, or devise a panel so the students ask the guests questions as if they are employers. You could also try a mingling exercise that mirrors a networking event. Mingling is a great use of time, but you need to be sure that all students are participating and getting the requisite practice. You might want to have some kind of incentive like small prizes for the three students who make the best impression or for those who have the most interesting interaction. However you decide to arrange the event, the weeks leading up to this day are very important. There are lots of elements to touch upon in lessons before the networking event. You'll want to gear students up for talking about themselves, listening to others', and devising questions.

### 2 SMALL TALK

A huge element in attaining a job or maintaining relationships once you get a job is the ability to interact with a

lot of different people. Structuring lessons around small talk will be beneficial to any student on the prowl for employment. Small talk has huge ramifications for both speaking and listening skills. It shows that students are able to use natural language, listen to others, and comment accordingly. Students should first analyze what topics are appropriate for small talk, and try them out in a natural setting. Topics could include: the weather, comments on a commonality, or asking a benign question. Practice in class by discussing small talk they have overheard, performing role plays or talking in pairs. After they have gotten their feet wet in class, a great place for the students to try their hand at small talk is the grocery store. There is ample time while waiting in line or while getting rung up. Cashiers are particularly used to small talk, so it is a safe way for students to try out some natural interaction. Give them some guidelines and have each of them report back on their experience. Other opportunities ripe for small talk might be a waitress, the local coffee or tea house, or just about anywhere where you have to pay for anything. If students are in their native country, you may want to have them (embarrassingly) look for foreigners that they could approach in a non-creepy way to try out some of the same small talk elements.

### 3 INTERVIEWING ROLE PLAYS

Devise role plays and group work that allow students to critique one another and to work together to approach problems. Structure many different exercises around interviewing to develop targeted listening and speaking. First off, provide the ten most asked interview questions for your region. A few examples are:

- Tell me about yourself
- What are your three greatest strengths or weaknesses?
- Tell me about a time you solved a conflict and how you approached it?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Why are you the best person for this job?

Obviously these questions are difficult

for native speakers, so students need a lot of practice. Several aspects should be approached that combine listening and speaking. A few are: vocabulary, tone, etiquette, content, analysis of speaking, and understanding of natural language. Students can prepare answers that are both general as well as specifics. Students should also listen intently and make sure they are hearing the speaker accurately. If they don't understand or if there is a miscommunication, they should ask for clarification and apologize.

### 4 DESCRIBING SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

Many students have great difficulty talking about themselves, especially when it comes to selling themselves in job interviews. Before they can be successful at interviewing or networking, they first must analyze their own skills and decide what attributes they would like to bring into focus. Through listening to other students discuss their skills, each student will gain the confidence to sell themselves. This can be done by presenting new vocabulary as a jumping off point for discussion. Create a list of twenty attributes that are important in the workplace and have students pick and choose which ones apply to them. Then they can come up with a few examples for each one to display the skill. These could include: honest/loyal/trustworthy, punctual, hard-working, innovative, creative, driven, and people-person. You'll be surprised with what students come up with on their own so definitely involve them in the creation of the list. Allow them to practice explaining their skills in front of the group and answer questions. Also consider giving them the option to devise their one-minute elevator pitch, which is a description of themselves that they could communicate in the time it takes to ride the elevator.

**THERE ARE INNUMERABLE ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN SHARPENING STUDENTS' LISTENING SKILLS FOR THE WORKPLACE. GIVE STUDENTS AS MUCH REAL-WORLD PRACTICE AS YOU CAN, AND BE SURE THAT EACH EXERCISE STRENGTHENS AND CHALLENGES THEIR LISTENING ABILITIES.**

# Do You Recognize These 9 ESL Listening Mistakes?

**MOST ESL STUDENTS IDENTIFY THE GOAL OF ESL CLASSES AS HELPING THEM TO SPEAK ENGLISH BETTER.**

But to speak better, they have to listen better. Speaking and listening comprehension are like the two sides of the same communication coin. Students who lack the proper listening skills will have a much harder time communicating in English.

## NO RULES

One of the hardest things about improving listening comprehension is that you can't give your students a set of rules like the ones you give them for correct grammar and proper speaking. Students simply practice listening – either they get it or they don't.

Now, there is of course a set of things you can do, certain ways to approach listening exercises to maximize the listening comprehension potential. Here, I'll focus on the mistakes ESL students make when approaching listening practice. Teach them to work on eliminating these, and they'll be better prepared to meet a listening challenge.

## 5 LISTENING MISTAKES ESL STUDENTS MAKE

### 1 GIVING IN TO MENTAL BLOCK

When you're not a native speaker, listening takes massive amounts of effort and concentration. Just to picture what your students have to face, try listening to an interview in a foreign language you barely speak: it's hard, isn't it? What happens after a few minutes? You simply decide you don't understand, give up and shut the audio off. What do our students do when they don't understand a conversation in a real life situation? Of course, they can't shut it off, but they might just decide it's too hard, and simply tune out. Give up.

What to do: Tell students that in a real life situation, there's nothing wrong with asking the native English speaker to slow down, repeat or rephrase. Native speakers are often polite, understanding and absolutely willing to help out. Students must be taught right from the start to lose the fear of asking for repetition or clarification.

### 2 TRANSLATING IN THEIR HEADS

Some students have the nasty habit of translating what you say, in their heads, as you speak. This is terribly tiring, it does not help students develop fluency, and in fact, it hinders it as they must constantly pause to translate before they can reply.

What to do: Teach students early on (even if they're beginners!) about the importance of thinking in English. Translating is hard enough as it is: it takes professional interpreters years of practice to get simultaneous translation just right. Remind them that they are not training to become translators - they are learning to speak English. And if they want to speak it, they gotta think it!

### 3 BEING TOO AMBITIOUS

There's nothing better than having students who are motivated take their listening practice into their own hands. They buy audio and video CDs, listen to music or podcasts or even watch entire movies in English. The problem arises when they don't recognize their own limitations. They buy a CD that is not appropriate for their level. They watch an entire movie where the protagonists are gansta rappers and then feel absolutely deflated because they did not understand a single word.

What to do: When you catch students biting off more than they can chew in terms of listening practice, you'll need to steer them in the right direction. Recommend films where the actors speak very, clear educated English and instruct them to approach the listening in steps. First they watch with subtitles in English and then they turn off the subtitles. Maybe they should watch the movie in parts and not all of it in one sitting. Also, tell them that a short, but focused listening exercise is a lot better than a longer listening where you have more chances of getting lost.

### 4 DOING OTHER THINGS AS THEY LISTEN

Depending on the listening exercise, they might have to take notes as they listen. But happens when students write things down or look up words in the dictionary right in the middle of a conversa-

tion? Though it is useful for them to find out the meaning of a word they don't understand, this type of behavior won't help them improve overall listening comprehension.

What to do: Students must understand that sometimes it's more important for them to understand the conversation in general, than the meaning of a single word. Convey to your students that, in fact, it's not necessary for them to understand every single word all the time. Listening comprehension takes time to build, and they start by listening and getting the gist of a conversation. Then, they are able to listen and pick up more details. In time, there will be few words they won't understand.

### 5 NOT USING THE RIGHT LISTENING STRATEGIES

We've already established that listening (really listening, not just hearing) takes a great amount of effort. To really make the most of this effort and not let the listening practice become just another tiresome task, students must employ certain listening skills. A lot of students don't know they exist, least of all know how to use them.

What to do: Familiarize students with the different types of listening strategies, which include:

- Listening for gist – students try to get the main idea/context
- Listening for key words – students try to listen for a specific word, idea or thought, for example, a date, historical fact or piece of information
- Listening/checking for comprehension – a great strategy is listening to what someone has to say, like directions to get to a place, and then saying them back to check for comprehension

**YOU CAN'T GIVE YOUR STUDENTS RULES FOR LISTENING LIKE YOU DO FOR SPEAKING OR WRITING, BUT YOU CAN GIVE THEM A POWERFUL SET OF TOOLS.**

Listening comprehension is not an exact science, not in any language, and not even for native speakers (sometimes we hear what we want to hear, right?) Help students set realistic expectations and goals, and provide them with the set of tools that will get them there.



# The 3 Most Successful Approaches for Better Listening Skills

## ACTIVE AND ACCURATE LISTENING SKILLS ARE CRUCIAL FOR STUDENTS TO OPERATE THE LANGUAGE OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM.

It can sometimes be difficult or frustrating coming up with natural ways for students to practice listening and sharpen it.

We have come up with the three most successful approaches we've found for creating all-around better listening skills.

## ALL-AROUND BETTER LISTENING SKILLS

### 1 USE MUSIC, MOVIES OR OTHER FORMS OF RECORDINGS

This is my all-time favorite tip for teaching better all-around listening. If you can find topics the students are really interested in — fashion, politics, music — then you can tap into a whole world out there of people speaking, singing, explaining, and discussing. I often used NPR in my classes, but also found that children's movies were a terrific resource as were some of the best bands of all time like the Beatles or the Rolling Stones. Supplemental programs like Rosetta Stone are also excellent starting points for additional listening exercises. Students are interested in fun, real-life ways to hear and process language. You can use fill-in-the-blank song lyrics to teach tenses or other grammatical points while enhancing listening skills. You can find all kinds of videos online that show people in different circumstances, speaking more slowly than in TV or movies. Use the resources out there and get creative. Students will liven up when you bring music or movie clips into the classroom. It gives them a break from listening to you and their classmates and they can experience different accents, slang, real speed language, just to name a few.

### 2 BRING IN GUESTS

Something you can do regularly is to bring guest speakers into your class. Have them present on a topic relevant to the class and make sure students are prepared for this in advance. Have each student ask at least two questions, and then do group activities following the visit such as paraphrasing, reporting speech, or simply discussing the speaker as well as the topic. This is another way for the students to get exposure to listening to someone other than their classmates all the time. The more interaction they can have with the speaker, the better. Sometimes students clam up in these situations, so be sure to have some motivating reasons for them to actively participate.

### 3 TRY TO AVOID TRANSLATION

A certain amount of translation is okay depending on the class and what is being translated. What I mean here is to definitely get students away from the habit of first listening to English and then translating it into their language and then back into English again. It is too time consuming, and will only lead them to frustration and confusion. Generally this is allowed for real beginners, but after they have learned an arsenal of words, they must begin listening and really hearing the language to comprehend it. You will notice that most student notebooks are littered with translations. That is fine as long as it leads them to understanding. Often they are using the translations for literal pronunciations in their language at first and then gradually will begin to write more and more purely in English. When they are listening, try to curb others from translating for them or for them to constantly consult electronic dictionaries. It takes practice to get used to anticipating what they are going to hear so that they can respond. Encourage them in every way you can to think in English for that hour or two a day.

## LISTENING SKILLS CAN QUICKLY BE INCREASED WHEN YOU FOLLOW THESE TIPS.

Students may struggle at first, but that is part of the process. Once they can begin really hearing the language they are learning, they will be able to function much more independently.

# 7 Ways to Get the Most out of Listening Comprehension Exercises

## IMPROVING LISTENING COMPREHENSION TAKES PRACTICE. THERE'S NO WAY AROUND THAT.

Still, if you want to maximize the opportunities for improvement, listening practice must be done just right. Here are some ways in which you can take your students' listening skills from passive and dull, to active and sharp!

## HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION EXERCISES: 7 WAYS

### 1 INTRODUCE KEY VOCABULARY

You could give your students something to listen to and then go over vocabulary they may not understand. But it's a whole lot better when you introduce key vocabulary before the listening, thus giving your students a better chance of getting the gist of the conversation.

### 2 PLAY IT TWICE

You know for a fact that when you listen to something, you pick up a lot more the second time. So, play the audio once to let students get the gist or answer basic true/false comprehension questions. Then, play it a second time and have them answer more specific questions or complete a worksheet. And if you have time why not have a third listening? After a third listening students may be asked to paraphrase or retell the situation in their own words.

### 3 REUSE KEY WORDS OR PHRASES

It's important for students to not only understand new words or expressions but also understand when and how they can use them. Say you listen to a conversation with some idioms related to health like "fit as a fiddle" or "under the weather". Once students under-

stand what they mean in the given context, ask them in which other situations they might be able to use these idioms: "When I catch a cold I feel under the weather."

Bear in mind that words are the main carriers of meaning. The harder you work to help students remember new words, the more they will improve their overall listening comprehension.

### 4 AVOID AN EXCESS OF NEW WORDS

If in a three-minute listening exercise students encounter 10 new words, they will probably have a hard time understanding – even if you went over the new words first. They are still too many for them to grasp at once. Introduce 3-5 new words for each listening exercise, and tell them they should focus on these. Try to choose audio tracks or songs/lyrics for listening practice with only a few new words – avoid those that are filled with them.

### 5 COMMUNICATE THE GOAL

When we do listening practice we don't just "listen", and maybe hope students will understand and be able to answer questions later. Each listening exercise has to serve the purpose of a larger learning goal and must have its own specific objective.

Let's see an example. Say you are practicing the present perfect because your goal for the day is to talk about things you've done and things you've never done before. You have a conversation your students can listen to that deals with this very topic. Their goal is to listen for what each speaker has already done and what they haven't done yet. Be specific as you communicate this goal: Find out the two things Maria has already done and the one thing she hasn't done yet.

There are songs that could serve the same purpose. Just be sure to choose audio that works for your students' listening comprehension needs AND

works for you.

### 6 PROVIDE CONTEXT, IF NECESSARY

I wouldn't ordinarily recommend pressing play and letting students figure out what the context is, not unless you have advanced learners. Try to provide some context so students know what to expect. It's as simple as saying: You're going to listen to a conversation between two friends who are planning a surprise birthday party.

### 7 ELIMINATE BAD HABITS

Some students can be very "high maintenance" when it comes to listening exercises and engage in behavior that is not conducive to achieving the listening goal. This is the type of behavior you should discourage:

- Raising hand/Interrupting to ask questions during the listening
- Asking you to stop and rewind before the listening is done
- Taking extensive notes/Attempting to write everything down
- Expecting to understand every single word

Be sure to tell students that none of the things mentioned above are necessary. Tell them you have planned the exercise with a purpose and tell them what it is. It may be to get the gist, but it may be to find specific information. It will definitely not be for them to understand every single thing being said. Tell them they should be patient and try to listen to the whole audio before asking questions, especially if it's a just few minutes long.

### LISTENING MAY SEEM LIKE A PASSIVE EXERCISE, BUT THERE'S NOTHING "PASSIVE" ABOUT IT.

There are no rules like those we have for speaking, but that doesn't mean listening does not take a real, conscious effort. Still, this effort is not something that comes naturally to students. They must be taught the right listening strategies. And it's our job to do just that.

# Hear Ye! Sure-fire Ways to Boost Your Students' Listening Skills

Weak listening comprehension is one of the things that discourages students the most. Young learners who don't understand what they're hearing will just tune out and not participate. For adult learners, it can be downright frustrating. Unlike children, they want to understand more, they need to understand, whether their goal is to learn English for business or pleasure. This is why it is absolutely essential to include activities that specifically target your students' needs and help them improve their listening comprehension skills. Songs are probably the most popular choice among ESL teachers, because they're so easy to use in class, but videos and podcasts are very big today. However, the problem is not what you give your students to listen to, - it's the how.

## SONGS

There are over 150 Songs and Lyrics worksheets available at BusyTeacher.org, and you may choose any that suit your students' level and needs. Most exercises include fill in the gaps, comprehension questions, word order or sentence order. No matter which worksheet you use, or if you decide to make your own, keep in mind these essential points to ensure the listening exercise is effective:

### 1 WARM-UP

Always introduce the song with some background information on the artist or band, the topic covered in the song, or the historical context. Here are some examples of worksheets that include great warm-up exercises: This Used to Be My Playground by Madonna ([bit.ly/U3H16S](http://bit.ly/U3H16S)) – Although children's pastimes are not mentioned in the song, this warm-up activity is a great introduction to the topic of the song.

### 2 INTRODUCE KEY VOCABULARY OR EXPRESSIONS

If the song you choose is loaded with words, idioms, or expressions your students might not understand, it's highly recommended that you go over them before listening to the song. This worksheet for Where Is the Love by Black-Eyed Peas ([bit.ly/WDCbOa](http://bit.ly/WDCbOa)) provides a list of words and expressions the students may not be familiar with, but it's better to review these concepts before the listening

to enhance comprehension.

### 3 FIRST LISTENING

The first time students listen to the song they should be required to get the general idea or the gist of what the artist or band is trying to say.

### 4 SECOND LISTENING

For the second listening you may require your students to complete a gap-filling or matching exercise, but it must be the type of exercise that provides some information, which your learners must then complete or organize. In the worksheet for I Don't Want to Miss a Thing by Aerosmith ([bit.ly/WYGvH6](http://bit.ly/WYGvH6)), there are different exercises like these.

### 5 THIRD LISTENING

For the optional third listening, and if time allows, you may ask your students to answer more open-ended comprehension questions, or even discussion questions that specifically relate to the information provided in the song. In the above mentioned worksheets, there are several suggestions for comprehension questions, as well as some that are great for sparking discussion.

## DIALOGUES

If you choose to use the conversations or dialogues that are usually provided in the audio material that comes with course books, make sure you follow the same steps: warm up, introduce vocabulary, first listening, second listening and exercise, and third listening or discussion. It's also a great idea to follow up with a role play where students pair up and have a similar conversation.

## VIDEO

Videos literally come in all shapes and sizes, the variety of material available in some type of video format is astounding, from short news pieces on CNN.com to entire movies. The advantage of video material is that students not only listen to the information that is being presented, they also have images to accompany their listening, which provides better chances for comprehension. If you want to use video to boost your learners' listening skills, the first thing you must do is choose the right video.

*How do I choose a video?*

First, consider your students' needs. Are they business people who want to do business in English? Any of the short business news videos available on YouTube or CNN.com will do nicely. But what if your students are teens? You may wish to show them an interview of their favorite pop star. What about the length of the video? The more advanced your learners are, the longer the video should be, although for practical purposes, a video shown in class for targeted listening practice should be no longer than 15 minutes. After you've chosen the right video for your class, prepare the warm up activities and exercises just as you would for songs.

## PODCASTS

Podcasts are all the rage right now. These usually consist of an audio file, usually in MP3 format, which is downloaded to an iPod or MP3 player. Now, podcasts may go from 20 minutes to 2 hours, so this type of listening is recommended for advanced students. Most usually sound like pre-recorded radio shows, with interviews, discussions, or commentaries on recent events, and there are podcasts about any topic you can think of, from hobbies to popular TV shows, sports to technology. The selection process is similar to how you'd choose a video. Make sure it's appropriate for your students in terms of length, content, and level of difficulty. The added advantage of a podcast is that it can be downloaded by your students and listened to for homework. Just provide the link for download and the worksheet or comprehension questions, and assign! Pick an interesting podcast, and it'll be one assignment your students will be looking forward to.

**AS MENTIONED EARLIER THE IMPORTANT THING IS NOT WHAT THEY LISTEN TO, IT'S HOW. OF COURSE, YOU MAY WISH TO SHOW THEM AN ENTIRE MOVIE JUST FOR FUN. BUT USING AUDIO OR VIDEO MATERIAL SOLELY FOR THE PURPOSE OF IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS REQUIRES PLANNING AND A GREAT DEAL OF THOUGHT. ONLY AFTER YOU'VE THOROUGHLY PLANNED A GREAT LISTENING EXERCISE, ONLY THEN, YOU'LL BE READY TO PRESS PLAY.**



# 3 Secrets to Successful Listening Comprehension

**LISTENING COMPREHENSION CAN BE, FOR ESL STUDENTS, ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE FLUENCY. WORDS WRITTEN ON A PAGE ARE ONE THING, BUT A SET OF SOUNDS THROWN OUT INTO THE AIR CAN BE FAR MORE CONFUSING.**

Even if a nonnative speaker understands all the vocabulary and grammar that a native speaker is using, if he can't decipher the aural clues the speaker is giving, all his book knowledge will be for nothing. To make sure your students are ready to tackle the challenge of listening to a native speaker, point out these clues to keep an ear out for.

**DO YOUR STUDENTS KNOW THESE 3 SECRETS TO SUCCESSFUL LISTENING COMPREHENSION?**

## 1 WORD STRESS

Speakers naturally stress the more important words in their speech, and they do so without a conscious thought. Sometimes, understanding which words are stressed can make the difference when it comes to understanding what a native speaker is trying to say. Stressed words are important words. English speakers stress words by using careful pronunciation, a higher pitch and a higher volume. When your ESL students are listening to native speakers, they should listen for the words that stand out. These are often clues to understanding what the speaker is trying to say.

Sometimes, a stressed word can determine the meaning of a sentence, and if the listener misses that word they might completely misunderstand the message. For example, "I can help you." and "I can't help you." sound almost identical except for the stress on can't. The negative modal is important information in the sentence, and most speakers will enunciate the vowel more for the negative form.

Word stress can also give clues for unusual grammatical constructions. Phrasal verbs are a perfect example. These verb phrases are often a verb paired with a preposition. When these prepositions don't follow normal grammar rules, a nonnative speaker can easily become confused. Knowing that native speakers usually stress the last word of a phrasal verb will clue listeners in when they hear a phrasal verb new to them.

## 2 REDUCTIONS

Reductions are a natural speech modification by native speakers. Words and syllables are reduced and often blur together. "I could have gone" becomes "I coulda gone". Modal verbs are often the greatest targets for reduction though they are by no means the only ones. For English students who study reductions, knowing how to translate reduced phrases to grammatically correct word combinations can be the key to comprehension. Students who have no experience with reductions may have to ask for clarification several times before they understand a native speaker's speech. Students who wish to sound as fluent as possible should practice using reductions, but all ESL students should become familiar with reduction patterns to make sure their listening comprehension is top notch.

## 3 SENTENCE INTONATION

Sentence intonation does more than make a language sound pretty. Sometimes the most important information in a sentence is in how the speaker uses inflection in the delivery. For example, a sentence may be a statement according to its grammar, but inflection makes it a question. "So you're studying English?" Rising intonation at the end of the sentence makes this statement into a question. Likewise, a single word can be a question when it uses rising intonation. "Do you like tomatoes? Cucumbers?" Effective listeners need to recognize this intonation pattern so they can respond appropriately during discourse.

Imperative statements offer grammatical clues when they drop the "you", but recognizing the intonation can also clue a listener in that action is required. A stress at the beginning of the statement followed by falling intonation signals that the speaker has an expectation of the listener. Recognizing this intonation pattern will confirm for the listener that a command has been given.

Sarcasm doesn't come through in writing, and if a listener does not know the intonation clues it may not come through in speaking, either. One key clue to understanding sarcasm is recognizing that inflection and intonation are the opposite of what they should be. Rising intonation on a stressed word rather than falling intonation, for example, signal that the speaker means the opposite of what he is saying. Monotone delivery can also signal sarcasm, and effective listeners should be able to recognize these patterns.

**LISTENING CAN BE A CHALLENGE FOR EVEN THE MOST FLUENT ESL STUDENTS. WHEN THEY UNDERSTAND THE FINER POINTS OF SPEECH ALONG WITH THE MORE COMMON ONES, YOUR STUDENTS WILL BE EFFECTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL LISTENERS.**

# How to Open Their Ears and Get Them Listening to Each Other

**IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT ESL STUDENTS GET LOTS OF GOOD LISTENING PRACTICE. A SURE WAY TO DO THAT IS TO GET THEM REALLY TUNED INTO ONE ANOTHER, AND INCREASING THEIR SKILLS BY UTILIZING ONE ANOTHER.**

It's crucial that students learn to listen to each other, ask for clarity, and interact with everyone in the class.

Following the tips below will aid students in opening up their ears and listening to each other naturally and effectively.

## **HOW TO GET STUDENTS LISTENING TO EACH OTHER**

### **1 FORM STRONG CLASSROOM BONDS AND TRUST**

If the students come into your classroom and are accustomed to a friendly, safe environment they are much more likely to speak up and reach out to one another. It is the facilitator's job to make sure the class is learning not just from you, but from each other. If they have trust and don't feel inhibited, they will begin guiding each other naturally, stepping in to help each other, and get accustomed to different speaking styles and accents.

### **2 PLAY GAMES AND DO ROLE PLAYS**

Creating an interactive, fun classroom atmosphere is one way to start students both speaking and listening. If you play a lot of games, get students out of their chairs and interacting, they really have no choice but to listen. Games are critical for this, but role plays are even better. Role plays are unscripted practice, so the students have to respond to each other in the moment. These are the best activities to get students listening to each other in an organic way. You could also include one-on-one interviews or mingling exercises which require students to report back to the group individually. It combines asking suitable

questions, requesting clarification and reporting answers accurately. These activities produce wonderfully targeted listening practice while being fun and interactive.

### **3 INCORPORATE ROUNDS INTO DAILY PRACTICE**

Rounds are something that can be done easily and often with little to no effort or planning. They can be used to do comprehension checks, have students practice new grammar points or refresh old points they haven't practiced in a while. The best thing about rounds is they combine speaking and listening and students must listen to one another in order to do the activity successfully. With rounds you have one student question the next student. After the student answers, he turns to the next student and asks her a question. It goes around and around as long as you see fit. You can alter rounds in so many ways that students will never get bored. During rounds is a perfect time to do corrections, guide students having trouble, and find teaching moments along the way. The best part is that students' ears are wide open and they are actively listening to one another.

### **4 CREATE EXERCISES WHERE STUDENTS HAVE TO CORRECT MISTAKES**

Creating exercises in which students correct each other can be tricky, but if you set it up right, everyone wins. Create a game where all students get corrected in some way, so that there isn't any awkwardness about singling each other out. One way to do this is to give one student a cue to begin speaking on a topic, and the class is supposed to stop the student any time they hear a mistake. Secretly tell the student speaker to purposely make a few mistakes to see if the class catches them.

### **5 LET STUDENTS TEACH**

Giving students opportunities to teach a small piece of a lesson can be

especially fun and enlightening. Make sure that all students get a chance to do this, and give them time in advance to prepare. When students get up in front of the class to "play the teacher" you'll want to provide perimeters for them to follow and assign them a task that they are comfortable carrying out. Some good tasks for student teachers are: setting up a game or activity, reviewing a grammar point that they know well, introducing their own warm-up activity, or directing the reporting portion or wrap-up of an activity.

**WHEN YOUR STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO LISTEN AND COMPREHEND ONE ANOTHER ON A REGULAR BASIS, THEIR COMPREHENSION OF THE LANGUAGE CAN GROW TREMENDOUSLY.**

Incorporating the above tips into your regular classroom activities will enhance students' classroom experience and get them listening on a whole other level.

# 5 Real Life Activities for Listening Practice

LISTENING HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FUN SUBJECT FOR ME AND MY ESL STUDENTS. TODAY'S AGE OF INFORMATION OFFERS SO MANY CREATIVE AND INTERESTING SOURCES FOR LISTENING MATERIAL.

But what should your students do with that information once they have it? What are some real life applications of listening exercises? Here are some activities you can use in your ESL classroom to give your students a practical and realistic way to apply their listening skills.

## 5 REAL LIFE LISTENING ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 FILLING OUT FORMS

Not all of your students will end up working at jobs that require listening to English speakers, but some will. So why not challenge everyone in your class to listen and record personal information from their conversation partner? Have your students role play in which one person must fill out a form with personal information from his conversation partner. The form could be a school application, a job application, a survey for information, or a vacation planner. If you can, get a native speaker to play the part of the information giver and let your students listen for the information they will need to fill out their forms.

### 2 FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS

Whether it is how to get to the library or where a party will be held, your students will have to listen to and follow directions in English. Give your students a town map (either real or one you design for classroom purposes) and give them directions to various places in the town. After students listen to a set of directions, ask them where in the town they are. This activity is also a great lead to review directional words as well as U.S. vs. metric measurements.

### 3 SCHEDULING APPOINTMENTS

Do you need to make a doctor's appointment? Are you scheduling auto repairs or a cleaning service? Whatever the reason, your students can simulate phone calls in which they schedule appointments. Have students work in pairs role playing a phone conversation in which one person makes an appointment and the other person schedules that appointment. Make sure each student gets a chance to play both parts during the pair work.

### 4 INTERVIEWING

If possible, have a native English speaker record some information about herself that she might share during a job interview, or ask her questions and let her respond. Then have your students take on the part of the interviewer. Students can listen to the recording, make notes about the speaker, and then decide if they would hire her for whatever job they are filling. If you like, have your students listen to recordings from three different people and then decide who they would give the job to. Make sure each person gives the reasons they think their choice is the best qualified.

### 5 LECTURE NOTES

Most lectures may happen in the college classroom, but that is not the only context in which one person must understand and learn information another person presents. Give students some practice listening to and learning a monologue of information in a variety of contexts. You may want to include a classroom lecture, a server giving information about menu items at a fancy restaurant, a political debate, an infomercial, or a doctor giving a patient medical information and instructions.

MATERIAL, BUT THEORETICAL LISTENING ACTIVITIES CAN ONLY TAKE YOU SO FAR.

Giving them real life tasks based on listening tasks will give them a practical and hands on outlet for their listening practice.

ESL TEACHERS HAVE SO MANY SOURCES WHEN IT COMES TO INTERESTING AND LIVELY LISTENING



# 10 Great Sources for Real Listening Practice: Part One

**AS LANGUAGE TEACHERS, WE KNOW THAT IT IS IMPORTANT FOR OUR STUDENTS TO PRACTICE THEIR LISTENING SKILLS.**

In fact, it is often the most important aspect of language study for international students who come to U.S. English programs. More often than not, their experience has been limited to reading and writing, and even intermediate and advanced students may have the oral/aural levels of beginners. Exposing your students to many authentic types of language use is important, but there is good news. Here is a list of just a few real life materials you can use for listening practice. As the numbers on the list get higher, the challenge for your students increases, so pick a point along the spectrum and work your way to the more difficult resources!

## **WHERE TO FIND AUTHENTIC LISTENING FOR YOUR CLASSROOM**

### **1 GUEST SPEAKER**

Bringing a guest speaker into your classroom is a great benefit to your students. If you have taught ESL for any length of time, your speech has modified even if you do not realize it. Whether you know it or not, teachers of ESL naturally slow their speech, articulate more and exaggerate intonation. In fact, anyone who talks to a nonnative speaker does these things! A guest speaker will not have experienced that shift in pronunciation and speaking style if she does not work with internationals, so although your speaker may present a challenge to your students' listening comprehension, it will also be a good time for them to practice. You can bring in a speaker on any topic that you are covering in class, or just bring in someone who has the free time to talk about something that interests them! Follow up with a general review of what the person said and how much your students were able to understand.

### **2 ANOTHER TEACHER**

Another teacher makes for a good guest speaker, too, and you should be able to arrange a class swap fairly easily. When you have another teacher come and give your class a lesson, try to get someone who is not an ESL teacher and who is the opposite gender. Exposing your students to a different quality of voice is beneficial to their language learning process. If that teacher presents content material to your class, you can follow with a short quiz. If not, lead a class discussion asking what the other person said and what your class learned from him or her.

### **3 TV COMMERCIALS**

TV commercials are short and often simple. Though you may not want to advertise a particular product in your classroom, the actors use clear but somewhat natural speech that should be easier for your students to understand. Though they will not get some of the comprehension clues they would from a live speaker, they will still be able to see facial expressions and the context of the language. You may want to talk about how the advertisers try to communicate their message through the commercial. Before, after or while watching, you might want to point out specific vocabulary, words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to your students, especially slang, and challenge your students to guess the meaning of the words based on their context.

### **4 WEATHER REPORTS**

The next step up on the listening activity difficulty spectrum would be using a weather report that has appeared on the news. Though its benefits are similar to that of the commercial, there is less context for your students to infer meaning as they watch. After playing the report for your students two or three times, ask some comprehension questions to see just how much information they are ab-

sorbing. You can also ask about the symbols that the actor used as a visual message with his or her report and whether they aided your students' understanding.

### **5 MOVIES & TV**

Movies and television shows are the next step up in listening comprehension practice. An entire movie may be too long both for your class periods and for how much information your students can take in at one time. Try to limit your selection to about ten minutes. With movies or television, your students still get visual input, but the speech will be more natural than the language used on news programs. In addition, you may have characters with accents, which will most likely be a difficult challenge for your students. After watching a segment two times, ask your students to write a summary of what happened in the scene. You can also review any unfamiliar vocabulary that was present or ask general comprehension questions.

### **6 RADIO**

The era of the cassette may be behind us, but that does not mean you should rule out radio clips as teaching aids! The benefit of radio voices in a news segment, weather segment or talk segment is that pronunciation is clearer, easier for your students to understand. The challenge with a radio clip will come with the lack of visual input that your students have to assist them. Surprisingly, being present where a conversation takes place is of great help for nonnative speakers and their comprehension, so taking away that visual will challenge your students. You can ask your students to listen for answers to specific questions or challenge them to infer the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary from the context.

**IF YOUR STUDENTS ARE BEGINNERS OR INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS, ANY OF THESE LISTENING MATERIALS MAY BE A GOOD POINT FOR YOU TO START.**

# 10 Great Sources for Real Listening Practice: Part Two

## GIVING YOUR STUDENTS REALISTIC MATERIALS FOR LISTENING PRACTICE IS A CHALLENGE FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED.

As teachers, sometimes we do not know where to start when it comes to listening materials, and for students the challenge is in understanding what they hear. 10 Great Sources for Real Listening Practice: Part One started with less challenging materials for beginning and intermediate students. Part Two continues with five even more challenging materials to use for practicing aural skills.

## WHERE TO FIND AUTHENTIC LISTENING FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

### 7 VIDEO LECTURES

A video-recorded lecture is one step up in difficulty from radio material. Many schools and libraries have these materials available to check out at no cost to you. You can also find instructional videos online quite easily. Though your students will have visual input if you use a lecture as a listening exercise, the speaker's use of English will be far more natural than the language you would use in a lecture. In addition, your students will not be able to ask clarifying questions, which will add to the challenge. Try following the listening exercise with a short true/false quiz on the material the professor presented, and then put your students in groups to discuss their answers. Challenge them to recall what the person said that made them answer as they did.

### 8 AUDIO BOOKS

Now that your students are getting quite proficient at listening, try a recorded book for a listening exercise. Of course, you will want to take a short selection for students who have less experience and proficiency in English, but advanced students should be able to listen to material in segments of at least fifteen minutes. An audio book takes away the visual that the recorded lecture provided but uses more careful pronunciation and speaking rhythm. That does not mean that it will be easy for your students. Audio books often use different accents for different characters, and that may present quite a challenge to your students. For a less challenging activity, play a part of a book you are reading as a class. For something more challenging, play something

your students are not familiar with. You can then follow the listening activity by asking for a summary of what the speaker said or for predictions as to what will happen next in the story.

### 9 YOUTUBE VIDEOS

Real people using real language is a real challenge for nonnative speakers. The time has finally brought us to YouTube videos. You can find a video for just about anything you are looking for: instructions on how to play the guitar, funny things that kids say, cooking programs, social interactions, - the possibilities are almost endless. The challenge is that these are real people, not actors clearly delivering a line. They have real, and sometimes ungrammatical, speech patterns. They speak with accents and at a higher rate than your students are probably used to hearing. This material will not be easy for your students. With that said, be sure to warn them! You do not want them to be overly intimidated or have too high expectations, so much so that they feel like giving up after they listen to cousin Jake explain how he modified the motor in his ATV. Whatever segment you choose, you will need to play it for your students more than one time, and start your follow up by asking just how much they were able to understand. Review any unfamiliar vocabulary and play it again. Then give your students some comprehension questions and play the video yet a third time. Encourage your students that if they are successful with this type of listening material, they should be very proud of their language skills!

### 10 RECORDED CONVERSATIONS

Very similar to the YouTube video but without the visual input, a recorded conversation between two or more people will be the ultimate challenge for your students. Take note, this is not a scripted conversation between people who know they are being recorded, the type that may come along with your grammar or listening textbook. To give your students this type of listening material, you will have to do one of two things. The first option is to ask some friends to let you record them for your class and then edit out the first part of the conversation. If they know they are being recorded they will most likely start their conversation

carefully with unnatural speech patterns. Edit this section out to get to the challenging material that will surface when they are no longer paying close attention to their speech. The second option for this type of material is to record strangers in a public place having a conversation. The first option will give you a better recording but chance that the speech will not be completely natural. The second will ensure that your students are exposed to real, authentic speech, which will be challenging to listen to, but the quality of your recording may suffer. This type of listening exercise would work well with a cloze exercise – transcribe the conversation and remove every fifth word, and then challenge your students to fill in the blanks as they listen. It won't be easy since natural speech flows together, not clearly separating one word from the other, so your students will have to listen carefully. Give them a chance to listen to the whole thing first and then present the cloze the second time they listen. They will not have any video input to assist their comprehension, so this will be the ultimate challenge for your ESL students!

### 11 BONUS

As a bonus, do not forget the great benefit that conversation partners offer your students. If you are able to recruit volunteers who are native speakers to simply come and talk with your students from time to time, their listening abilities will improve. This requires no lesson plans, though you can give some discussion questions to stimulate discussion if necessary, and no special materials. Many native English speakers will be willing to be a conversation partner for the social benefit or the exposure to individuals from foreign lands.

**FINALLY, KNOW THAT ONE BENEFIT OF BEING A TEACHER IS THE FLEXIBILITY YOU HAVE IN THE MATERIAL YOU COVER AND THE MEANS BY WHICH YOU COVER IT.**

You can use any of the follow up activities with almost any of the listening activities, so if you find an exercise that your students like and from which they benefit, by all means do it. If teaching listening were easy, your students would come to their English programs with more proficiency in the subject. You can help them improve no matter where they are on the scale now.

# Authentic Listening: What ESL Materials Lack and How to Get It

There are an infinite number of quality ESL materials available on the market today. For practically any purpose, any skill level, any topic, ESL teachers can find listening activities target for just that combination. Unfortunately, listening materials designed for use with ESL classes lack several elements present in non-ESL targeted material. There is a way, though, to get beyond the ESL bubble and into the world of authentic listening activities.

## WHAT ESL MATERIALS LACK

ESL materials, like any teaching materials, are modified from authentic language sources to encourage learning and accomplishment for the student. However, listening activities created for ESL classrooms lack several elements present in authentic spoken English. This may not be an issue with early learners, but more advanced students should be challenged to work with authentic materials and further their listening skills. If you limit your class materials to those designed for ESL use, your students will lack exposure to the following qualities of authentic speech.

ESL listening materials lack realistic intonation which tends to be less exaggerated. Exaggerated intonation may aid in comprehension but more likely is seen as silly or is perceived as irritating by adult students. Additionally, the rate of speech in formulated materials tends to be steady rather than varied in speed like that of native speech. The pronunciation will also be unrealistic. Speakers will enunciate more and lack assimilation and elision that are present in natural speech. There will also be differences in syntax. Speakers will use simple sentence structures and clearly composed, complete sentences. In authentic speech, speakers more often speak in incomplete sentences and lengthy, sometimes ungrammatical sentences. Conversations recorded for ESL materials also have clear turn taking between speakers. More realis-

tically, native speakers of English will interrupt and speak over one another. Native speakers also tend to speak more or less in a conversation, and in prefabricated materials, there is usually a relatively equal division of speaking time. There are also vocabulary differences between fabricated and authentic listening texts. ESL texts tend to lack use of slang and limit the amount of vocabulary used. Finally, in authentic listening situations there is often background noise and other aural stimuli distracting from the listening text which is not found in classroom materials.

## 5 TYPES OF AUTHENTIC LISTENING MATERIALS AND HOW TO GET THEM

### 1 PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

One way to bring authentic listening activities into your classroom is to record a listening text in a public place. This type of listening text will have audible distractions and interference while still presenting identifiable information to your students. Try recording an announcement on a bus, subway or plane. Then prepare your students before listening by telling them the context and ask them what they expect to hear. Play the recording for your students multiple times, and then ask them to answer questions about what they heard.

### 2 WEATHER FORECASTS

Allow students to listen to a radio weather forecast. This will challenge them to understand content without visual clues. Apply this information by planning activities for the day or choosing what clothing to wear.

### 3 SONGS

Present students with an incomplete set of lyrics to a popular song. Play the song for the students challenging them to fill in the blanks of

the missing lyrics. You can play the song multiple times. This challenges students to guess at missing information in what they hear. Of course, once their lyrics are complete play the song again and give them the opportunity to sing along.

### 4 RADIO COMMERCIALS

Radio Commercials can be used for a variety of activities. They are especially useful if they are by local and nonprofessional radio personalities. These texts will give students exposure to realistic pronunciation, intonation and speed. You can play a selection of commercials for them and ask them to write down particular information, or you can ask them to match various commercials with pictures of the people who recorded them.

### 5 CONVERSATIONS

Take your students into situations where many groups of people are talking at the same time, a party or cafeteria for example. Ask your students to “eavesdrop” on four conversations just enough to note the topic of conversation. Ask students to comment on if they would like to join in each of the conversations. What would they say? This will expose students to varieties in style and also challenge them to guess at missing information in the conversations.

**THOUGH BETTER THAN NOT INCLUDING THEM AT ALL, THESE AUTHENTIC LISTENING ACTIVITIES WILL BE MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN THEY RELATE TO OTHER AREAS OF STUDY OR INTEREST ON THE PART OF YOUR STUDENTS.**

Authentic listening does not happen in isolation, so try to include as many authentic listening activities as you can so long as they relate to what your students are learning. Your students will always be challenged to actively listen when using English. Why not prepare them while they are still students as to what real challenges await them in the listening world of English?



# 10 ESL Activities That Will Bring Music to Your Ears

**NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE FROM, NO MATTER WHAT YOUR NATIVE LANGUAGE IS, YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH MUSIC. MUSIC HAS THE SPECIAL ABILITY TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND SOMETIMES TO DRIVE THEM APART, BUT THERE IS MORE TO MUSIC THAN JUST FEEL GOOD EMOTIONS.**

Music is a chance for individuals to understand one another more and respect the values that others hold, so whistle while you work as your class entertains these music themed lessons.

## TRY THESE 10 MUSICAL ESL ACTIVITIES

1

Start your class with a discussion. What type of music do you listen to? Have each student share either with the entire class or with a small group. Each person should explain his answer as well. What groups do you like best? How did you first get interested in this type of music? What is it about this type of music that is appealing? If possible, allow each student to share a bit of his or her favorite music with the class. YouTube is a good resource for finding music on line if you have internet access in your classroom. Otherwise, ask your students to share from a portable music device.

2

A discussion of favorite music will naturally lead into the topic of genre. Explain to your students what the word genre means, and then as a class brainstorm a list of musical genres. You may want to print this extensive list of genres available from Wikipedia (or from [www.music-genreslist.com/](http://www.music-genreslist.com/)) and give it to your students. How many genres are they familiar with? Which have they never heard of? Which have you never heard of? Set small groups of students to do a little research either in

class or for homework, and ask each group to give a presentation on a musical genre that is unfamiliar to them. Their presentations should include a description of the genre as well as an example from that genre if possible.

3

To take a more whimsical approach to music, give your students a list of the most popular music titles from a previous era. You may want to use a decade like the 1960's, 1970's or 1980's. If your students are all the same age, try getting a list of the top 100 songs from the year of their birth. Then have your students read the titles of these popular songs and then share their reactions. Do they have any comments on the titles of the songs? Do they seem strange or silly or just fine? What is most striking about them? Do they think songs with these titles could be popular today?

4

After looking at a list of these titles and playing some excerpts for your students if possible, ask your class to discuss how popular music has changed over time. What qualities did successful songs and musical groups possess in the past? How have those qualities changed for bands today? You may want to have your class create a Venn diagram in which they list the qualities of popular songs of the past and those of popular songs today. Then have your students write a paragraph in which they affirm or reject how popular music has changed.

5

If you have the hardware for it, you can download the free application "Top 100 Hits" which lists the top 100 songs from many countries around the world. You can also listen to samples of those songs with the app. Let your class explore this popular music, and then ask them to share their opinions on the songs. Do they notice any changes from one country's popular

music to another's? What do they like about the music from other countries? Are there any consistencies across cultures? Are there any songs which show up on more than one list? If you desire, allow your students to share some of their favorite music from their home countries.

6

If you want to give your students a challenge, ask them to translate a favorite non-English song into English lyrics. Duplicate the lyrics and then share them with your class. Does the idea and message translate when its language changes? What cultural elements can be found in the songs?

7

Do any of your students play an instrument? Some countries have traditional instruments for traditional music. If any of your students plays one of these culture centered instruments, invite him or her to share a song with the class. Have each student who performs explain how to play the instrument, and then allow the rest of the class to ask questions about the instrument or the music that their classmate played. If you do not have any of this type of talent in your class, ask your school's music teacher (if you have one) whether he knows of anyone who might be able to come to class and share some live music with your students.

8

If you are looking to bring a little creativity to the musical classroom, challenge each of your students to create his or her own original instrument. This can be done either on paper with a drawing or in three dimensions by creating working models. Have each student describe how it was made and give instructions how to play it in a class presentation. You can then have the class vote on awards for the most original, the most beautiful sounding and the strangest overall instrument.

# 9

Your students may or may not have heard of the Blue Man Group, so introduce them to this atypical musical group with one or two videos available on YouTube. Then play this interview about the group for your class. What makes the Blue Man Group different from other groups? How did the group come about? Ask your students to answer these questions. You may want to play the interview three or four times before asking for the answers.

# 10

The Blue Man Group is well known for using nontraditional materials to make music. Have each of your students write a personal letter to the group suggesting a material that they could use in their performance and what they could do with it.

**MUSIC CAN BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER OR PUSH THEM APART, AND SOMETIMES MUSIC MAKES US WONDER, "JUST HOW DID THEY DO THAT?"**

Whether your students have musical talents of their own or simply admire the talents of others, they will enjoy your class when it is filled with these musical activities!

# Take a Musical Trip Around the World With These ESL Activities

## MUSIC IS ONE OF THE MAGICAL THINGS THAT CAN BRING TOGETHER NATIONS.

People all over the world find pleasure and enjoyment in listening to music. Because music is something to which you and your students will probably relate, at least on some level, why not use it as a starting point for a language unit? Your students will appreciate the opportunity to share some of the music that is important to them, and they can use the musical studies as a chance to further increase their language skills!

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 A CLASSICAL APPROACH

Music is special in its ability to tap into the very center of our beings. Simple strings of notes connected together to make a melody can sometimes penetrate the very center of our selves. Classical music is unique in that it not only touches its listeners, but it also frees the mind to imagine a story or an image to go along with the wordless music. Using a piece of classical music for inspiration, have your students write a description or story based on a selection of your choice. To do this, choose a piece of music that does not have lyrics to play for your class. A five to ten minute selection is probably a good length, depending on the age of your students. You should give your students a large piece of blank paper and some crayons, markers, pastels or other drawing materials. As you play the selection, ask your students to draw something inspired by what they hear. They may want to draw something that progresses with the music, such as a story or scene. They may also want to draw something more abstract, reacting to the music in one ever-expanding image. Explain to your students that either approach is acceptable.

Once the music is over, give your students some class time to write about what they have drawn. They may write a story that they found in the music. They may describe a person or a location that they heard the music describing. They may choose to write something completely different. Encourage creativity

and originality in your students' writing, and make sure they know they have the freedom to write anything they choose. Once your writing time is up, put your students in pairs to talk about what they heard in the music and what they wrote during the writing session. You may then want to ask volunteers to share what they have written with the entire class. One advantage to approaching this activity with art first and then with writing and conversation is that you eliminate the language barrier as your students listen to the classical selection. This will allow them to be more creative and gain more inspiration from the music, which can then be channeled in to their speech and writing.

### 2 A PIECE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Stephen Foster is considered one of the greatest musicians in American history. His earthy music written in the 1800's speaks to a simpler time in the history of the United States. One unique quality that his songs hold is their geographical references. Many of his songs mention different areas of the U.S. Some of these songs include Oh, Susanna!, Swanee River, Camptown Races, and My Old Kentucky Home. Break your class into groups and assign one of these songs to each group. Then have the groups research two things. First, have each group research the geographical region mentioned in the song. What information can your students find out about that region today and that region in the 1800's? How has it changed over time? Why would this be a good location to write about? Second, have your students do some research on the song itself. What types of people sang it? Why did they sing it? Why did Foster write it? If you like, you can use this as an opportunity to explain how to do library research. If you have computers available to your students, they can also use the internet to locate their information. After they have completed their research, ask each group to create two posters, which explain the information they discovered during their research – one for the geographical region and one for the song. If possible, dedicate a bulletin board in your classroom to the research results.

Draw or post a map of the United States on the bulletin board and then display the posters near the geographical regions they mention.

### 3 A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

If you have the resources, you can download the free app "Top 100 Hits" by Sixpack. This music application lists the top 100 songs in twenty-three countries around the world. Your students may enjoy exploring the music that is most popular in their home countries and those of their classmates. This can be done best in groups of two or three students. Have your students take note, as they explore, which songs are popular across national borders. Encourage your students to share in a class discussion any thoughts or feedback they have on their experience.

Follow this activity with some class presentations. Ask each person to bring in a song he or she would like to share with the class. (Plan ahead what resources you will need to play the music for the class.) Each person should talk about the song he has chosen. Have your students share what the song means, why they like it, and whether or not they would like to meet the singer or group who sang the song.

If you like, follow up by having each person write either 10 interview questions she would ask the group and the answers she thinks they would give or an article about the artist to be featured in a music magazine. You may want to have some copies of Rolling Stone or other music magazine available for your students to use as a model. Then compile all the interviews and articles into your own class magazine which features music from around the world.

## MUSIC IS A SPECIAL MEDIUM OF EXPRESSION.

It has the ability to touch the very cores of our being and elicit emotional responses from us as we listen. Giving your students an opportunity to make a musical connection with their English studies will help them learn in a new way and give them the chance to share with you and the class on a more personal level.



# "Excuses" and Methods to Incorporate Music in the Classroom

A lot of Americans are phobic about singing and singing publicly, some are even convinced they are "tone deaf" (there actually is no such thing: a truly tone-deaf person would not be able to speak normally since all languages have tone, intonation, the rise and fall of pitch.)

In fact, many people excuse themselves from singing in public because of this alleged disability. In general, it seems we'd like to leave the singing to the professionals. So with this uneasiness surrounding it, why use singing in your ESL class?

## REASONS FOR INCLUDING SINGING IN THE ESL CURRICULUM

### 1 MUSIC IS A UNIVERSAL

All cultures have some kind of music, and so it is something students will relate to. Students may also be familiar in their own language with a song the teacher introduces and so will more easily learn the English version.

### 2 RHYTHM, STRESS, AND INTONATION

What better way to teach the critical language components of rhythm, stress, and intonation than through song, where these elements become emphasized and put to a beat? For example, the four-quarter time rhythm of most rock music mirrors the natural STRESS unstressed Stressed unstressed rhythm of English. When singing a song, the musical beat forces students into using the correct intonation pattern in a way they are not with a straight dialogue.

### 3 CLASSROOM BONDING

Singing together can have a magical effect of bonding you to those with whom you are singing. You become a community. It is probably for this reason that many religious groups

have communal singing as part of their worship and that most nations have an anthem that citizens might sing together at public events.

## POSSIBLE SONGS TO INCLUDE

Below is a list of songs I've included in my ESL classes with some success. This is by no means exhaustive and is just an example of the kind of songs that might be incorporated in your class.

### 1 QUE SERA, SERA (WHAT-EVER WILL BE, WILL BE)

Despite its title, this song is sung mostly in English, except for the line "Que Sera, Sera," which is immediately translated, "What Will Be, Will Be." The song is the story of a child's query to her mother "What will I Be?" and the mother's response. I've had success with it as both the language and melody are simple and demonstrate multiple forms of the future tense, such as questions and affirmatives.

### 2 IF I WERE A RICH MAN (FROM THE MUSICAL "FIDDLER ON THE ROOF")

I've usually taught this song when showing the musical it comes from, "Fiddler on the Roof," but it also works well on its own. The song features the main character, Tevye, a poor dairyman, and his musings on what he would do if he were rich. It's particularly good in an ESL class because not only can most students identify with Tevye's sentiments, the song models multiple forms of the unreal conditional: questions, affirmatives, and negatives.

### 3 THE CAPTAIN'S GREETING, FROM HMS PINAFORE, GILBERT AND SULLIVAN'S LIGHT OPERA

I use part of this song, the ship cap-

tain's morning greetings to his crew, in which he brags about his various accomplishments, like "hardly ever" being sick at sea or swearing. Again, the song is simple, and I use it to teach the frequency adverbs "ever," "hardly ever," and "almost never," which are all featured in the song's chorus.

### 4 PHILADELPHIA BY BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

"Philadelphia," Bruce Springsteen's haunting song from the movie with the same title, about the lead character's struggle with AIDS. I've included it because of its memorable, descriptive language and to supplement a class discussion on AIDS.

## PRINCIPLES FOR INCORPORATE SINGING IN THE ESL CLASS

Again, you don't have to be an accomplished musician to use singing in your classroom. I have found, however, there are some guidelines to follow.

### 1 ONLY USE IT WHEN IT FITS IN WELL

Singing is a tool in the class, not the class itself. It should be incorporated sparingly and when it fits in well with the class. For the HMS Pinafore song above, for example, I didn't have access to the whole song's lyrics and indeed did not even know them as I had not planned on using the song that day. However, the opportunity arose to use a line or two from the song that modeled adverbs of frequency: "I am never sick at sea." "Never, ever, sir?" "Well, hardly ever!"

### 2 MODEL THE LYRICS

Model the lyrics. Either sing the lyrics yourself for the students, as I do with "Que Sera, Sera," because of its simplicity, or play a CD, as I do with "Philadelphia," because in the song Springsteen can do musical gymnastics.

tics with his voice that I can't imitate. The students then, from you or the CD, can get an idea of how the song should sound.

### 3 ANALYZE THE LYRICS

Pass out, or write on the board, the lyrics to the song. Have students analyze and discuss the lyrics in terms of their grammar and vocabulary.

### 4 STUDENTS SING

Now after hearing the song and analyzing the lyrics, students are ready to sing themselves. I actually, however, offer this as an optional step in most cases: again, when the song is simple. I would not ask ESL students to sing the "Philadelphia" song, especially when I can't myself sing it. However, if students are eager to sing, I proceed — oftentimes, in fact, students come from a more musical background than mine and are used to performing in church choirs or just singing at home with their families. If they are willing to proceed, then the instructor can include a variety of methods --- besides just having students sing as one group, the room can also be split in two, for example, with one side playing the captain and the other the crew in the HMS Pin-afore greeting.

#### **OFTEN TEACHERS AVOID SINGING IN CLASS; IN THE WAY THEY TEND TO AVOID IT IN THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.**

However, if they can get past the discomfort, teachers will probably find singing has a positive effect on the class. They may even find they actually enjoy singing and aren't such bad singers after all!

# How to Teach Using Songs

**SONGS CAN BE A USEFUL TOOL WHEN TEACHING ESL BECAUSE THEY GIVE STUDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO LISTEN TO SOMEONE OTHER THAN YOU, THEIR TEACHER.**

Often students become familiar with how one person sounds and may have difficulties understanding others. Songs can be a challenge for students because they are often faster than an instructor's speech however they can also be enjoyable and serve to reinforce certain aspects of English.

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 GRAMMAR

Often songs can be used to practice particular grammar points. Some textbooks spend enormous amounts of time on particular topics and creating new activities may become challenging so songs are something you can turn to. You can find song worksheets and suggestions for certain English grammar points on [BusyTeacher.org](http://BusyTeacher.org). Using songs in ESL classes has become quite common. For instance, when teaching the present perfect tense, songs such as "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" by U2 and "We Are the Champions" by Queen may be appropriate. Students are unlikely to grasp the entire meaning of the song but giving a brief summary or including the translation would be beneficial. When using songs, it is common to have a worksheet where students must fill in certain words. For this present perfect lesson, you can remove the present perfect verbs altogether and have students try to fill in the blanks with the appropriate words. If this is too challenging, including the present tense of each verb will assist students immensely.

### 2 MAD LIBS

Mad Libs are a great way to practice parts of speech. You can really use any passage to make a Mad Libs activity but it can be fun to use songs too. For example, you can use "Frosty the Snowman" to make your worksheet. Simply take the song and delete particular words leaving blanks for your students, this will be the second worksheet they receive. Then

make up a list with parts of speech that correspond to the blanks. If the first blank is "Frosty the \_\_\_\_\_ man" then the first word in the list would have to be a noun. To conduct this activity, give students the list with parts of speech and have them work individually, in pairs, or in groups to complete it. When they have finished, give them the second sheet and have them fill in the blanks with their words. Usually the result is very funny. Seeing as you used a song to create this activity, you can finish the class by listening to the song and having students write down the missing lyrics.

### 3 HOLIDAYS

Using songs in your holiday lessons can be fun too! Songs such as Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer can be easily explained even to beginner and lower intermediate students. There may not be a particular point to using the song in your class besides to conduct a listening activity using a popular holiday song, but sometimes that is sufficient and your students are sure to enjoy it. If your students are willing, it may be appropriate to practice singing the song too. Some classes will enjoy such an activity and some certainly will not so it is important to gauge how your students will respond.

### 4 DISCUSSION

Certain songs can be used to lead into discussions. This type of activity would be appropriate for more advanced learners. You can use a song such as "Another Day in Paradise" by Phil Collins for this purpose. Initially, have students listen to the song and complete a fill in the blank exercise. Listening to the song several times would be appropriate but once the answers have been checked, have students read the lyrics trying to understand the meaning of the song. You can ask general questions to test comprehension. If you are not exactly sure what kinds of questions will be appropriate, you can start off with very simple ones such as "Is this a happy song?" and when students say "No" ask them why not? This can lead into a discussion about people's indifference, homeless people, or something

similar.

When choosing songs, please be aware of their speed.

The song "Last Christmas", for example, can be useful however if you choose a version which is much too fast, students will not be able to follow along. This song, by WHAM, is a good speed for ESL learners. Organizing your worksheets so that the verses are clearly laid out will also help students because even if they get lost during one verse, they can be prepared when the next one begins. Songs should generally be played at least twice before checking the answers and then once again after the correct answers have been given so that students can listen carefully to parts they missed.

**SONGS ARE JUST ANOTHER WAY TO ADD SOME VARIETY TO YOUR LESSONS AND EXPOSE STUDENTS TO A DIFFERENT CULTURE'S MUSIC.**



# What You Can Do With a Song:

## 5 Creative ESL Listening Activities

Practicing listening skills in class can be a real drag to a student, marking the correct answer in their workbook, while listening to repetitive dialogues voiced by the same people, over and over again. This is where the student's mind begins to shut down and take a five-minute breather, and whatever happening outside captures their wandering attention. Listening involves a great deal of concentration, and so when the brain has switched off and gone for lunch, the listening skills follow suit.

*How can teachers avoid this from happening, you ask?*

Well, the answer is simple. Why not try something a little different. Think outside of the box and provide the students with something that you may not have tried before. Songs provide a great alternative to listening tasks, as they are effectively the same dull listening exercises, but dressed in disguise as something that's entertaining and fun. Another reason why songs are great in the classroom is that they can be used as part of an entertaining and amusing, yet thoroughly educational warmer that will set right tone for the remainder of the lesson.

You don't have to do a song and dance about it? Just a song on its own would be fine, thank you. Adding the occasional song along with an accompanied activity to your class every once in a while, you're giving the students more variety in the class. This keeps their attention towards you, their brain's switched on and a stronger ability to listen for detail in the long run.

Here's some creative activities that are aimed to not only entertain students, but to inspire and educate as well.

### 5 CREATIVE ESL SONG ACTIVITIES

#### 1 AN OPENER FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS AND DEBATES

Before getting started on a debate, a song could be played to give an idea of the situation. So for example, a classroom discussion on crime and punishment is on the cards, an oldie but a goodie like The Clash and Bobby Fuller Four's 'I Fought The Law' (see the Green Day's ver-

sion here: [busyteacher.org/4419-song-i-fought-the-law.html](http://busyteacher.org/4419-song-i-fought-the-law.html)) provides a great little opener while getting the students thinking about the concept of "Fighting the law" and the law winning. This can also lead to some interesting topics such as why people turn to crime, justice, as well as the consequences of crime.

#### 2 TENSE EXPLANATIONS

As English grammar is heavily reliant on whether an action is completed or unfinished, songs can help paint a clear picture of the timing implications tense. A great song that provides a good example is Stevie Nicks and Fleetwood Mac's 'Landslide.' A much simpler explanation, for example between present tense and past tense is 'Yesterday' by the Beatles. An easy lesson plan for pre-intermediate level students is to print out the lyrics, play the song numerous times, and get the students to underline the present and past tenses in different colours. An adaptation to this activity give the choice between the present and past tenses, with the students required to underline the correct form of the verb. Boring exercise made fun with the simple introduction of a song.

#### 3 CONDITIONALS

There are literally hundreds of sounds out there that involve conditionals. Using a song like Beyonce's 'If I Were A Boy' will not provide a clear image to the concept of conditionals, but also bring you to new levels of "cool" in the eyes of your students. The entire song details some of the things she would do if she was just a boy for one day. Getting your students to put their thinking caps on and be a little creative, get them to talk about if they could do something for just one day. The whole class will surely have a laugh at some of the hilarious responses.

#### 4 NEW VOCABULARY BUILDER

Songs can also be used as an aid to build the vocabulary of students. With songs on practically every topic on the planet, it's incredibly simple to find a song relating to a specific topic and using examples from the song to teach the students. One example of this is a note tak-

ing activity using the song 'New York' by U2. If, for example, the topic of the class is cities, the students would be instructed to take notes about specific details in the song relating to one of the most famous cities in the world, New York. Note taking is an important skill for students as many will one day be faced with that challenge in their professional lives, while the song adds an element of depth to the class.

#### 5 WORKING OUT THE CONTEXT

One of the great things about some of the more lyrical songs is that they don't serve the answers up to the student on a silver platter. They involve the student to think about what is really going on, based on not just the words but also the feelings, emotions and other variables. One example of a song that really gets students thinking is the song 'Father and Son' by Cat Stevens. What makes this song quite a brain bender is Stevens' singing both the parts of the father and the son. If students can work out the context of what is being said, the answers become blindingly obvious. An exercise like this works out great with a conversation class as the students can put forward their ideas about what is happening in the song.

**SO THERE YOU HAVE IT, A FEW SIMPLE ACTIVITIES THAT WILL ACCLAIM FROM YOUR STUDENTS AND ADD THE ALL-IMPORTANT VARIETY INTO YOUR CLASS.**

All it takes is a little bit of adaption and some creative thought, and you will be almost as much of a genius as me. A few final points of advice for using songs in the classroom:

- If you use a cassette tape to play the song, anyone in the class born after 1995 will look at you in total confusion and puzzlement
- Don't play songs like Bob Dylan – Subterranean Homesick Blues, not even we know what he's talking about there.
- Listen to the CD before you play it in class. The last thing your four-year old kindergarten students need is to hear your mix tape of death metal or happy hardcore.

# Classroom Songs:

## 16 Creative Ways

FOR A LOT OF TEACHERS SONGS ARE SOMETHING THEY ONLY USE TO GIVE THEIR STUDENTS A BREAK. HOWEVER, THERE'S A WHOLE LOT MORE TO USING SONGS IN THE CLASSROOM THAN JUST TAKING A POT OF CORRECTION FLUID TO THE WORDS AND CREATING A CLOZE GAP FILL.

In our Song Worksheet Section we have already got a nice collection for you to use for teaching various grammar and vocab items, now it's time to review creative ways we can use to work with songs in the classroom.

From Abba to Bob Marley there's much more you can do than just play songs in the classroom on a Friday afternoon as a wind down to the weekend: Grammar practice, vocabulary, a change in pace, listening skills, lead-ins to discussions, teaching culture or ethics/values, and much more, - the list is almost endless:

### 1 BRAINSTORMING

With evocative titles they can be used for brainstorming vocabulary. Students can make up a story given the keywords from the song.

### 2 AMEND THE SONG

Insert wrong words into the song. This can be used with synonyms or antonyms. You could make two versions changing different words in each so that students can check with a partner.

### 3 ADD EXTRA WORDS INTO THE SONG

Students must listen and strike out the extra words.

### 4 ORDERING THE SONG

Cut up the song into manageable chunks and students can reorder as they listen. Students order pictures representing the song. Split sentences in two so students must match up the first and second half of sentences.

### 5 USING THE TEXT OF THE SONG

Give the students true or false sentences from the text of the song. Students find synonyms and antonyms in the song to words given on a handout.

### 6 BINGO

Students select 9 keywords from a selection of about 20 on the board and insert them into a 3 by 3 grid. When students listen to the song they tick the words off until they have 3 in a row and then a full house. Using keywords the students retell the story of the song in a narrative.

### 7 EXPAND THE SONG

Students can write an extra verse for the song. Students can compose a verse perhaps using keywords from an original verse and then compare it with the original. Students can write a letter from or to the singer or a character in the song.

### 8 PRONUNCIATION

Rhyming words can be extracted from the song. Weak forms, contractions and unstressed words are commonplace in song lyrics. Make out a survey for students to rate the song from 1-10. You can include questions like: Does this song make you feel happy? Does it make you feel sentimental? How would you rate the lyrics? How would you rate the tune? Will it be successful? Would you buy it? would you want to listen again? Is it suitable for background music? etc.

### 9 SONG REVIEW

You need at least 20 questions. Students answer the question while or after they listen. Next they can write up a review of the song. If you have the facilities you may get them to do different songs or as a homework exercise they can do it at home with a favourite song in English or their mother tongue.

### 10 GRAMMAR PRACTICE

Structures (especially modals and conditionals) and tenses are often repeated in the song. Blank these out as reinforcement of the grammar. Transfer lyrics from direct to reported speech.

### 11 COLLOQUIAL

'Ain't' and 'gonna' and other colloquial words which are often neglected in lessons frequently come up in songs.

### 12 CLOZE ACTIVITIES

Blank out all the verbs, adjectives, rhyming words, etc. Give students a chance to predict the missing words before they actually listen. Students must choose from a multiple choice which could be used for synonyms or confusing words. Give the students the missing words in a jumble on the whiteboard.

### 13 STORYBOARD

All the words are blanked out so that students put the song together starting from nothing.

### 14 MUSIC WITHOUT LYRICS

Play a piece of music and students write down any words that come into their heads and explain this to the group afterwards. Students draw as they listen and afterwards explain their picture.

### 15 GAMES TO PLAY

In pairs students listen for words ending in '-ing', rhyming words, adjectives etc. Play charades using song titles.

### 16 MISCELLANEOUS

Students can act out the story of the song. You need a suitable song and give them time to prepare for this. e.g. 'Don't you want me?' by The Human League.

# We're Never Getting Back Together: Pop Music to Teach English

*I spend a lot of time listening to popular music — not originally by choice.*

But I have an adolescent daughter, hence I spend a lot of time shuttling her to music and basketball practice and other commitments, and hence she has taken control of the car radio. She likes a specific local station that professes to “play all the hits,” which seems to be about ten songs — presumably the top ten — rotated in a constant loop. Therefore, I have memorized most of these songs and in fact have them stuck in my head — originally to my chagrin, but not only have I grown to like some of this music (I have a particular fondness for the group Maroon 5), but also I see some of the songs’ value as teaching tools. Much like poetry, these songs can teach rhyme and meter, complex vocabulary, and multiple meanings. The songs also reveal interesting aspects of not only popular culture but also deeper sociological issues: what is “pop” or popular with a culture at the moment, after all, speaks volumes about that culture. My daughter, of the same generation of most of my students, has served as a “guide” to this music through discussions about it.

## HOW TO TEACH ESL WITH POPULAR MUSIC

### 1 AMBIGUITY

Most literature can be taken in more than one way. The songs “Misery” and “We Are Never Getting Back Together” show the messiness of relationships. “Misery” by Maroon 5 has the repeated lyric from the narrator “I’m going to get you back,” which I originally thought meant the speaker meant wanted to win back the affections of his loved one, - on further analysis, however, the full lyric is “You got me good, now I’m going to get you back,” suggesting the song is really about “retaliation,” as my daughter put it. This demonstrates that idioms like “to get someone back” mean different things depending on the context. Similarly, in Taylor Swift’s “We are Never Ever Getting Back Together” the narrator reiterates throughout her claim that she and her boyfriend will never re-

unite, get back together, after their latest breakup. But given the couple has this pattern of breaking up and then reuniting, is this really a kind of declaration of independence from a bad relationship, as it seems at first, or is it denial?

### 2 METAPHOR

Maroon 5’s “She Will Be Loved,” the girl who will be loved is described as “the girl with the broken smile.” What does this lovely image mean? I’ve always taken it to mean the young woman has been in some way hurt by life, hence “broken,” yet she continues to smile. To other listeners the lyric will mean something else. In Kenny Rogers’s “The Gambler” from an earlier generation the entire song is an extended metaphor of gambling for life as the older gambler gives some advice to the young drifter narrating the story. And metaphor is also a great way to teach vocabulary, in just taking a phrase like “broken smile” and coming up with associations with it: “hurt,” “bravery,” and so forth, and in that way building students’ vocabulary.

### 3 STORYTELLING

“The Gambler” by Kenny Rogers is also an example of music as pure storytelling, telling the story of the narrator meeting up with the gambler on a train one night and who “for a taste of my whiskey” offers some advice, which he does — the extended metaphor of cards as life: “You have to know when to hold them, know when to fold them, know when to walk away, and know when to run...” At the end of the song, the gambler “breaks even,” or dies, but leaves the narrator “an ace that I could keep.” A more recent example of great storytelling is Fun’s “Some Nights,” concerning the narrator’s experiences of going to war and youthful enthusiasm for it: “Boys, this is war! This is what I’ve been waiting for...” and subsequent disillusionment: “I sold my soul for this? Washed my hands of God for this...?” The story then turns to the narrator’s sister: “My heart is breaking for my sister and the con that she called love...” and concludes “But then I look into my nephew’s eyes and see what amazing things

can come from some terrible lies.” The story suggests then that both siblings have been exploited, the boy by the lie of war and the girl by the lie of love, but that there is redemption in the end in the form of the narrator’s nephew.

### 4 THEME AND MESSAGE

The recent song “Thrift Shop” concerns the narrator, with “only twenty dollars in my pocket,” forgoing the mall and fifty dollar t-shirts and going to the “thrift shop down the street,” where he and his friends buy used clothes—some of them their grandparents’ cast-offs—that look “incredible.” The song is meant in high humor, of course, but also carries a serious underlying message about the importance of living within one’s means—especially important for a nation and people who has repeatedly failed at that. An important note here is that the song is in a nonstandard dialect of English that may be hard to understand, a problem with many pop songs, even for native English speakers. A partial solution to the problem is online in the form of free websites that can be accessed through simply searching the song’s title and which will then give the printed lyrics for free. They are often a surprise, again even to native English speakers.

### 5 CULTURAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

One Direction’s “What Makes You Beautiful,” Bruno Mars’s “Just the Way You Are,” and an earlier generation Sammy Kershaw’s “She Don’t Know She’s Beautiful” all carry a theme of a beautiful woman who somehow lacks insight into her own physical beauty and which everyone else seems to be aware of. I personally have not met a beautiful woman who was not aware of the fact. As my daughter succinctly summarized it: she can look in the mirror like the rest of us, she’s likely been told by many that she’s beautiful, and she’s probably had a boyfriend or two. We also agreed on why this, the beautiful woman who doesn’t know it, would be a particular male fantasy. A beautiful woman is, it almost goes without say-



ing, a kind of prize: not only can the male enjoy her beauty, but she also increases his status in having gained the affections of this beautiful woman. And if she doesn't know she's beautiful—well, that's even better! That's the jackpot. Because she's insecure and unaware of the power she might hold, she's unlikely to leave and more easily controlled. In summary, while such a song is on its surface simply a celebration of a specific woman, it also shows some of the inequalities rife in a patriarchal culture. Analysis like this of current popular culture can reveal some interesting sociological/psychological implications.

**POPULAR MUSIC, LIKE MOST THINGS "POPULAR," OR "OF THE PEOPLE," CAN SEEM AT FIRST BLUSH TRIVIAL AND NOT WORTHY OF THE TIME OF THE SERIOUS LANGUAGE LEARNER.**

However, Shakespeare was also a "popular" writer — he wrote for the general population of London, not its elite. Is some study of music to turn our classes into conservatories? Of course not, - much of this music is almost impossible to sing by anyone besides a professional. The point is to study and perhaps even enjoy it. Popular music in a language class, in a way that more serious literature often doesn't, can speak to a young audience and also reveal volumes about contemporary culture — the one it is derived from.

# The Best Shows/Movies for a Children's ESL Video Lesson

## IF YOU WANT TO HELP YOUR STUDENTS IMPROVE THEIR LISTENING COMPREHENSION, NOTHING WORKS BETTER THAN VIDEOS.

But this begs the question: which movies/TV shows should we show them in class? Clearly this is not a case of "anything goes", particularly with young learners who often lack enough vocabulary to understand a full-length feature film in English. So, to eliminate the guesswork on your part, here is a list of the best videos to show your young learners - movies and shows that will not only entertain them, they will also help them hone those listening skills!

## TRY THESE SHOWS & MOVIES FOR YOUR NEXT CHILDREN'S ESL VIDEO LESSON

### 1 SESAME STREET

The American children's TV series has produced solid, educational content for over 40 years. The series features short segments, videos, and songs targeted to very young children, content that is highly appropriate for young English learners of ages 3-5. The best part about the Sesame Street videos is that teachers can access them in multiple ways. SesameStreet.org has a Video page where you can access very short video segments that help children polish their counting skills, for example, or say the alphabet in English, among many others. Most of the videos are less than a minute long and are great fillers or ways to complete an activity. You can also watch the videos on Sesame Street's YouTube Channel ([bit.ly/GIFMkl](http://bit.ly/GIFMkl)), or order the videos from Amazon.

### 2 DR. SEUSS

Dr. Seuss' books and silly rhymes have entertained children for decades. His work is also available on video, and though most of it is fantastical and features characters that are out of this world, the rhymes are great for pronunciation practice. Also, most stories have an important message you can

discuss with you class, - with this movie review worksheet ([bit.ly/vLznKW](http://bit.ly/vLznKW)), you can watch The Lorax with your class and discuss the effects of pollution and the importance of preserving our trees. Or watch this short excerpt about the Sneetches ([bit.ly/gB5Bhp](http://bit.ly/gB5Bhp)): it presents a very relevant discussion point regarding prejudice and discrimination.

### 3 CHARLIE BROWN

Charlie Brown is a boy that most children can easily relate to. He has a group of friends he likes to play baseball with, and has a dog - a very special one. Snoopy is not your typical canine buddy, but we would love to have a dog like him. This is why the Peanuts cartoons have fascinated children of all ages for decades. Several movies and TV specials have been made based on the Peanuts gang, the most popular and the best ones to watch with your ESL class being the holiday specials like It's the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown, It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, or A Charlie Brown Christmas.

### 4 YOUTUBE GEMS

YouTube has come a long way from being simply the video sharing site where we could watch people's home videos, jokes and silly gags. Thousands of videos with educational content are uploaded on a daily basis by ESL teachers and schools. A quick search should give you dozens of options to watch with your class. One noteworthy YouTube channel is DJCKidsMedia ([bit.ly/XsGvPy](http://bit.ly/XsGvPy)). The children's book and DVD publisher has a YouTube channel filled with short, engaging videos that can teach your young learners to tell time, count to 10, or phonics for the letters of the alphabet. Be sure to check out this YouTube channel and others, but before you show your class any video on YouTube, make sure you see it first to check for any inappropriate content.

### 5 ANIMATED CLASSICS AND FEATURE FILMS

As far as animated or feature-length

children's films go, the sky's the limit. There is a large variety to choose from, but for the purposes of your ESL class, please remember the following. It's essential that you choose a movie, not only for the entertainment value, but one that is a good fit for your student's ages and levels. As these movies are longer, you may opt to show just one scene or a few, and not the entire film. If you choose any of the classics you may have the added advantage that your students will probably have already seen them in their native language, thus giving them better chances of following the plot and dialogue.

Some of the classics we recommend are:

- Charlie and the Chocolate Factory - BusyTeacher.org has this great worksheet for you to use ([bit.ly/Y5xZm3](http://bit.ly/Y5xZm3)).
- Toy Story 1, 2 or 3
- Puss in Boots
- Finding Nemo

## TIPS FOR SHOWING VIDEOS TO YOUR CLASS:

Always have a lesson plan for a video lesson, or make sure the video fits into one. Never show a video "just because", - even if it is a 2-minute filler, it should still serve a purpose within your lesson goal, like review something they've been practicing, like the alphabet, for example. If you want to take an entire class hour for a video lesson, that's fine, just make sure you allow plenty of time for your students to complete a warm up (previewing activities), as well as viewing and post viewing activities.

## ALWAYS REMEMBER: THIS IS NOT ABOUT YOU SIMPLY SHOWING A VIDEO TO YOUR CLASS.

This is about maximizing their learning opportunities and helping them hone their listening skills. If you manage to give them a special treat with a fun movie at the same time - so much the better!

# English Video Lessons: Winning Strategies for the ESL Class

Video lessons give ESL students a wealth of learning opportunities. Naturally, they're great for listening practice, but never underestimate their value when it comes to teaching vocabulary and grammar. However, to really tap into the potential of video lessons, these must be thoroughly prepared and activities must be targeted to your goals.

There are two layers to video lessons. One is related to your teaching goals. Will you show your students a video for listening, vocabulary or grammar practice? What is the language element you want them to learn? The second layer is the structure of the lesson itself. Even if you're sure you want to show a video to improve listening comprehension, it's not as simple as just pressing "play". Each video lesson must be accompanied by its own lesson plan, and the lesson plan must be targeted to meet your teaching goals. Each video lesson plan must include: pre-viewing activities, viewing activities, and post-viewing activities.

Here are some strategies for each type of activity:

## PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

The pre-viewing activities would be like the warm-up exercises that we usually have for other types of activities. There are several pre-viewing activities you could do, but try to use those that are aligned with your goals.

- If your goal is to teach vocabulary through a video, then in the pre-viewing activity you should introduce this new vocabulary, in context, in conversations, through a matching exercise, guess the meaning of the word activity, etc.
- If your goal is to work on listening comprehension, introduce the topic of the video, so your students will know what it's about and be better prepared to grasp information. This introduction may be done in numerous ways, but the most usual is a series of warm

up questions about the topic.

- If your goal is to practice grammar, then the pre-viewing activity should be a review of the tense or grammar point you want to practice. Some great activities for pre-viewing practice are games, fill in the blanks exercises, or any of the grammar worksheets you'll find at [BusyTeacher.org](http://BusyTeacher.org).

## VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Viewing activities consist of tasks that students must complete while watching the video, and these should also be targeted to your goals:

### WHEN TEACHING VOCABULARY:

Activities should focus on helping students learn and retain the new words introduced in the pre-viewing activity. One great way to do this is to give students a worksheet with sentences with gaps that students must fill with the new words. Students watch the video and complete the sentence with the missing word. Students may also be asked to look for specific information. In this Winnie the Pooh and Halloween video worksheet ([bit.ly/12HuzNW](http://bit.ly/12HuzNW)), young learners are required to identify the costumes each of the characters are wearing, and they can easily do this while viewing.

### WHEN WORKING ON LISTENING COMPREHENSION:

Gap filling exercises also work great, but for this goal, gaps should be longer, and students should be required to fill them with information rather than just new words. Comprehension questions are always a great way to test listening comprehension. You may choose to give them a few questions to focus on before the video starts.

Also, you may choose to introduce different levels of listening. Start by

covering the TV or computer screen with some cardboard or cloth, and have students only listen to the video. Then, they answer some general comprehension questions about the gist of what they heard. Then, have them watch a second time, but this time listening and viewing, and ask them to complete a gap filling exercise. Finally, ask them to watch for a third time, but this time they have to raise their hands every time they hear the answer to a more specific question. You can introduce as many levels and as many viewings as you want, but make sure each level is more challenging than the previous.

### WHEN PRACTICING GRAMMAR:

Because of their very nature (songs are usually short and often repeat phrases, words, and structures), music videos are the best for practicing grammar. We Are the Champions by Queen ([bit.ly/X3EmXy](http://bit.ly/X3EmXy)) is a great song to use to practice the present perfect. Frank Sinatra's New York, New York ([bit.ly/YSJuQv](http://bit.ly/YSJuQv)) shows students ways in which the future with going to and will can be contracted. The most common type of viewing activity with music videos is a gap-filling exercise, but you can get creative and try some others – see some good examples in this Eurovision song worksheet ([bit.ly/XsUHRw](http://bit.ly/XsUHRw))

## POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Post-viewing activities are a nice way to wrap-up the video lesson and a great opportunity to consolidate everything your students have learned in a production or performance activity.

### WHEN FOCUSING ON VOCABULARY:

First you introduced some new words, then, your students saw how they were used in the video. Now is the time for your students to use these



new words themselves. Divide them into pairs, and ask them to write a conversation or report using this new vocabulary. If your goal was to teach vocabulary related to weather, and you showed a video of a TV weather report, ask your students to write the weather forecast for next weekend.

## **WHEN FOCUSING ON LISTENING COMPREHENSION:**

Your goal was to improve your students' listening skills, so ask them to produce something that shows just how much they understood. This production may be anything from a picture, a PowerPoint presentation that summarizes the video, or a role play.

## **WHEN FOCUSING ON GRAMMAR:**

If your goal was to offer some extra grammar practice, ask them your students to produce something that specifically requires them to use this grammar point. Let's say you showed them an interview in which an actor talks about his life to practice the past simple tense, - your students can write a short biographical report on what they learned about his life.

The best part of incorporating video lessons into your ESL classroom is the vast amount of material available, from short news pieces on CNN.com to a full episode of a popular TV series, a movie trailer or a full-length feature film on special occasions.

**JUST REMEMBER TO INCLUDE THE  
RIGHT PRE-VIEWING, VIEWING, AND  
POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES AND  
YOU'LL HIT YOUR TARGET EVERY  
TIME!**

# How To Use TV In Your Classroom: 6 Creative Approaches

One of the best ways to educate students across all skills is via the means of television. While many teachers and parents are probably under the impression that their child or student is NOT learning much when watching TV, in the right circumstances a TV show or a news bulletin can provide a fun alternative to regular classroom activities.

Television programs also provide students with realistic conversation and dialogues, which aid listening skills by offering a diverse range of accents for the students to hear. Another advantage is that the majority of TV programs use relatively simple language, otherwise they provide the viewers with a clear explanation. Television can be used in a number of ways to add that all-important element of depth to your class. Here's a few of our favourites.

## 6 CREATIVE WAYS TO USE TV IN YOUR ESL CLASSROOM

### 1 ENTERTAIN

Ah, yes. Entertainment. Where would we be without it? And especially television. Well, just like we get bored with monotonous things, our students do as well. So in order to give them a short break from books, grammar and structures, television programs work a treat. However, teachers shouldn't use this as an excuse to be lazy: even entertainment lessons, for example, at the end of a course, should contain a worksheet or simple task to go along with it. Best TV programs – Any appropriate movie or a TV episode that fits well into the class.

### 2 IMPROVE LISTENING SKILLS

50 percent of TV involves us listening to it, so why not leave the 15 year old cassette player in the teachers' room, and bring in a DVD to add a little variety to your class. Even preparation for IELTS and TOEFL classes can benefit from watching an appropriate TV show in class. Teachers simply have to create a worksheet containing ques-

tions in the style of TOEFL or IELTS that relate to the content. One TV show that I like to use with these classes, and can be used with practically any class is Man Vs Wild. Man Vs Wild makes for a great classroom activity, and will have the students sitting on the edge of their seat. It's even better to see their faces when he eats a worm or a frog.

Best TV programs – Man Vs Wild, Air Crash Investigation, House MD.

### 3 LEARN ABOUT CULTURE WITH NEWS

I am a strong believer that classes should not just be about English, but also contain elements of cultural tid bits that the students use if they travel overseas at a later date. One quick and easy way to gain a deep insight into various cultures around the world is through an ordinary nightly news bulletin from any commercial broadcaster. Commercial broadcasters are ideal as they aim to appeal to the masses, maintaining a simple level of language and popular stories.

Best TV programs – Any news bulletin from BBC, CNN or Al Jazeera, or for a laugh, try Fox News.

### 4 INTRODUCE ASSIGNMENT WORK

Keeping the class up to date on current affairs of the world is fun for me, as a news junkie, while offering variety for the students. BBC News offers a very short news program called 'Around the World in 80 Seconds', which provides brief snippets of news from around the world. I like to use this as an introduction to assignment work on world news. Students will watch the broadcast two or three times while taking notes. They can then pick one of the issues heard in the broadcast to research and write about, handing it in the following week. While not only improving their English skills, it also prepares students with some of the research that they may have to undertake at university.

Best TV Program to use – BBC's Around the World in 80 Seconds.

### 5 "LEARN ENGLISH" TV PROGRAMS

If you feel that you're students may be more responsive to a TV than you, simply let the TV do all the work! Well, not really, use it sparingly as a tool to maintain a good mix of variety. While it's not as interactive as a teacher, it can provide some very good examples. I have found myself trying to explain a point, and later seen it in a "learn English" TV show explained with succinct explanations and easy-to-understand examples. These are a good way to complement what the students learn in class while providing a mix of accents and voices that provide enough variety for the students to practice.

Best TV Program to use – There's so many out there, but I find 'Australia Network' to have the most comprehensive range of "Learn To Speak English"-style programs, including 'Study English', 'English Bytes', and much more. 'Australia Network' also features one of the best IELTS tips programs of anywhere I have seen. IELTS teachers should take a look at "Study English - IELTS Preparation 1 & 2".

### 6 A VISUAL EXPLANATION

If a picture tells a thousand words, then obviously a video must tell a whole lot more! Television programs can provide a detailed explanation on topics that can be quite difficult to explain. Some localised sports, such as cricket or curling can be an incredibly difficult for an ESL student to comprehend, which is where visual aids, such as videos, come in amazingly handy.

BY PUTTING ON YOUR THINKING CAPS AND USING SOME OF THAT GREY MATTER THAT'S IN YOUR HEAD, VIDEOS CAN PROVIDE US WITH PEACE AND QUIET, WHILE OUR STUDENTS TAKE ADVANTAGE AND PRACTICE THEIR SKILLS WHILE HAVING A GOOD TIME.

As a teacher, you will benefit as well. Most TV programs and activities that work well can be re-used over and over as you teach new classes.

# What to Do With a TV Series:

## 8 Creative Ideas You Can Use

One of the fantastic things about ESL teaching is that it can be incredible for both the student and the teacher. Compared with other subjects, such as maths, chemistry or physics, languages can be learned using a number of different mediums and stimulate learners in many different ways.

One popular saying is that one person's trash is another person's treasure. It's a sentiment that is quite close to the truth with the idea of watching TV in the classroom. But ESL teachers are a resourceful bunch, and we can easily make educational gold out of what others believe has no place in the classroom. The truth has it that a TV series can help provide a balanced mix of entertainment with education, not to mention your rise in status to Ms, Mrs, or Mr Popularity with the students. Before we begin to show you some of the cool things that can be done with a TV series, we thought we would cover some important points to think about when choosing a series.

### YOUR CLASS IS THE AUDIENCE, NOT YOU

As much as you love watching House MD and the team unravel their way through a range of diagnoses' from aortic dissection to Neurofibromatosis, we would bet that your students hate it. Choose a series with simple theme and a relatable story line. Glee is a fine example of this, as it is based around school life, which is something that we can all relate to. Mr Bean works excellently for lower levels and children.

### EDUCATIONAL VALUE

A good teacher ensures that whatever they are showing to their class has some educational value. Showing a movie, series or TV show to a class without a reason is a 'must avoid' habit.

### NO SURPRISES

Pre watch the material before you play it in class – it's common sense, have a quick run through prior to using it in your class just to make sure that all

content is suitable for your students.

So, here we go. All the neat and cool things you can use a TV series for in the classroom.

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

So the little dears have worked incredibly hard lately, reward them by adding some variety into the class by showing them a popular series. On the other hand, if they have been evil, punish them by showing them a video... But giving them some difficult worksheets and questions to go along with it.

### 2 SHOW THE CLASS AUTHENTIC HUMAN INTERACTION

TV series are one of the best ways that students can experience two or more native speakers having a conversation. As opposed to monotonous dialogue that's voiced by a couple of English teachers on the hunt for extra cash, showing a TV series can help really put the usage into perspective. Get the students to take notes of some of the expressions that they felt were interesting, and then try to get them to incorporate those expressions into a conversation.

### 3 THE 'ALL-IMPORTANT' CONTEXT

English is just one of those languages where sometimes you really need to keep track of the context, or else you'll find it pretty difficult. Many of the students are left bewildered at the unspoken context of speech. By providing the students some clear examples of the subtle nuances and idiosyncrasies that we often use in conversation, they will be able to recognise this more in everyday speech, which will, in turn, help their listening skills. In a very easy-going lesson

without too much going on, stop the video after an inference is made and ask the students if there was any hidden meaning or if anything else was implied other than the words spoken. Higher levels may pick up on some of the subtleties, but lower levels may require some explanations.

### 4 ROLE PLAYS

A favourite for virtually any class, role plays provide a great chance for students to put the language, grammar, and structures into practice, as well as help contribute to a fun and lively classroom atmosphere. Many teachers like to show the students a clip from a highly dramatized episode, and then get them to act it out as naturally as possible.

### 5 LISTENING FOR IMPORTANT INFO

One of the key skills required for international examinations such as TOEFL or IELTS is the ability to listen for essential information. In the IELTS examination, students are required to listen to dialogues in order to dissect and disseminate information. For higher levels, prepare some questions about the episode they have just watched - in the style of IELTS or TOEFL, and present them to the students to complete in a "test-like" environment. The students enjoy this as it provides them with a wide range of skills that they can use in the exam, while providing topics which are more interesting than found in the usual test material.

### 6 PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE

For the lower levels, a good idea is to find a lower-level series that uses a wide variety of common English expressions or greetings. Stop the DVD or video after a target phrase, word or expression and have the students repeat it, trying very carefully to mimic the accent and minimise their own accent. This is also good as it builds



confidence and the students find the TV series interesting at the same time. Both the student and teacher can have a lot of fun with this.

## 7 FOLLOWING THE DIALOGUE

Whether to turn the subtitles on or off while watching a video in class is an age-old question that has as many different answers as the number of people you ask. For lower levels, we find that having English subtitles displayed while watching a TV series can actually help bring the students up to speed with their speaking and listening skills. Following the dialogue on the screen as it is spoken can work wonders in helping the students increase the pace in which they can listen and speak. Students can practice in pairs, in front of the class, or even in a one-on-one situation with the teacher.

## 8 OPINIONS

English teachers working in some countries around the world will understand that getting some creative and independent thought from a student can be like drawing blood from a stone. In these cases, you may want to play an open-ended plot from a well-known TV series and stop it just as an important turning point is about to take place. Ignoring the sighs of disgust and annoyance of the students, instruct them to decide how it ends. Students can free write an idea of how the story ends, what happens to the characters, and then present to the class. If you're a nice enough teacher, you can show them the actual ending of the show.

**SO THERE YOU HAVE IT, AFTER PUTTING ON OUR THINKING CAPS WE'VE MANAGED TO COME UP WITH A DECENT LIST OF SOME OF CREATIVE METHODS TO INCORPORATE A TELEVISION SERIES INTO YOUR CLASS.**

Using a TV series will make your students excited about learning, while providing them with a wider range of interesting materials to learn from. Oh yeah, this also makes you a better teacher!

# Incorporate Movies in the Classroom and Keep them Riveted

*Once or twice a semester, teachers will sometimes get the idea of "Let's watch a movie!"*

Often the movie happens to be a personal favorite of the teacher. (I'm a big fan of "My Big Fat Greek Wedding.") Movie days can be a break from the regular curriculum, and valuable learning can take place as movies use contextualized language and teach culture.

However, there is the danger of students nodding off or texting their friends rather than watching the movie. What are ways to prevent this?

Sometimes the movie itself is a problem. It isn't necessarily easy to choose a movie that is engaging, appropriate, and in some way instructive. Following is a brief list of films I've had success with. Needless to say, the instructor should always preview the film to make sure it will be appropriate for her individual class:

## FIVE ENGAGING FILMS FOR THE ESL CLASS

### 1 FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Classic musical of Tevye the milkman and his family in a Jewish village in turn of the twentieth century Russia. Students relate to Tevye's struggles and dreams.

### 2 WEST SIDE STORY

Musical retelling of the Romeo and Juliet story set in Manhattan between two warring gangs, The Crips and The Jets. Much of the story is still relevant after sixty years, such as the theme of trying to survive in a hostile urban environment.

### 3 MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING

Romantic comedy between the Greek American Toula and her WASP fiancé, Ian. Students respond readily to the cultural conflict between the two families.

### 4 INVENTION OF LYING

In this Jennifer Gardner comedy, her character, Anna, lives in a fictional world with the main character, Mark — a world where lying hasn't been invented yet. Mark works as a screen writer where "actors" just read aloud real-life stories. After Mark invents lying, the real complications ensue. Good for ethical and cultural discussions about when it would be appropriate to lie and when not.

### 5 ERIN BROCKOVICH

Julia Roberts plays Erin Brockovich, in a real-life story of a single mother who discovered PGE dumping waste materials in a town's water supply and fought them in a landmark case. Students find the character inspirational.

## TEN METHODS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH A MOVIE

### 1 SET THE MOVIE UP

Introduce the movie a day before hand, as you would a reading, discussing its plot and characters and relate it to the curriculum. For example, when showing "Fiddler on the Roof," I've explained the major conflicts in the movie related to the characters' being cultural minorities, which mirrors many of the students' situations. I also give out the lyrics to "If I Were a Rich Man," which models the unreal conditional.

### 2 LIST OF QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

To keep students attuned to the movie, give them a series of questions to focus them. The questions should focus on both global aspects of the movie: "Where is the story set?" and more detailed aspects of it: "What is the name of the restaurant owned by Toula's family?" to really make sure students are paying attention.

### 3 NEW VOCABULARY TO WATCH FOR

Give students a list of less frequent words used in the movie. See if they can write a definition using the context.

### 4 WRITE A SUMMARY

Summarizing is an important academic skill, and somehow students understand more about what to summarize with a movie — just the highlights — than they do with a written text, perhaps because they are used to orally summarizing movies and events for friends in a way they don't with written text. Have the students summarize as if for a friend who hasn't seen the movie.

### 5 BE THE REVIEWER

After summarizing, discuss the difference between evaluating and summarizing, two skills students tend to confuse. Summarizing is telling what happened, while evaluating is telling the reader your opinion of what happened. Reviewers evaluate, - they don't summarize. Discuss what to evaluate in a movie: the acting, the sets, the script, and so forth. Have students form "panels" and each individual within the panel give their evaluation in the form of stars (1 star = bad, 5 stars = excellent.) Have the reviewers defend their number to each other.

After giving their oral review, have students write their reviews in paragraph form, starting with a topic sentence that gives their overall evaluation of the movie and then details to support it.

### 6 DISCUSS THE MOST LIKED OR MOST HATED MOVIE CHARACTER

Students select one character each they liked most (or least) and explain why. This may be followed up also in written form. This is a good assign-

ment for teaching paragraph structure for the descriptive paragraph. For example, students start with a topic sentence that names the topic, or the character, and then comments on that topic with why the character is loved or hated, which is the controlling idea: e.g., "Toula in 'My Big Fat Greek Wedding' is an independent woman." Following should be details that support that controlling idea: "She has the courage to change her life, going against her family traditions."

## 7 WRITE A MONOLOGUE FOR A MOVIE CHARACTER

After the more analytical assignments, students can then engage in some creative ones, such as writing a monologue for one of the characters. Explain what a monologue is: a one-way extended conversation in which the character is either addressing the audience, himself or herself, or some unseen or silent character.

I like to give students the assignment to have a character explaining to someone "Rule Number 1." If a character explains Rule 1: e.g., "Rule number 1, man, you don't go out with your best friend's ex," this shows the character's value system.

## 8 REWRITE THE DIALOGUE FOR A SCENE

Many beloved movies have dialogue we wish were different. Have students make the characters say what they'd like them to see.

## 9 REWRITE THE ENDING

What would happen to hero and heroine Tony and Maria if Tony didn't die at the end of *West Side Story*? Rewrite the ending and show us.

## 10 CHANGE THE SETTING: SET THE STORY IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES OR IN THE PAST

In many movies, the setting seems integral to the story—*Gone with Wind*, for example, is hard to imagine set anywhere but the Civil War South. Other stories have more universal appeal. Have students experiment by resetting a Sherlock Holmes movie to contemporary United States for example.

## MOVIE DAYS AREN'T JUST AN EXCUSE FOR THE TEACHER TO PLAY A FAVORITE FILM, GRADE PAPERS, OR TAKE A BREAK.

They can be a powerful language learning tool if engaging before, during, and after activities are given.



# Top 10 Christmas Songs for ESL Classes

In the northern hemisphere, there are lots who dream of a white Christmas, whereas in the south of the world the holiday season is best enjoyed by the pool while sipping cool drinks. No matter where we are in the world for the holidays, two things remain the same: we all look forward to getting together with family and friends, and we sing Christmas songs.

Some Christmas carols have become so popular and so well-loved, they've been translated to several languages, and are sung in countries where snow and hot chocolate have nothing to do with Christmas. For students of English as a second language, there are songs that are timeless classics, which should definitely be taught as another way to make students more familiar with English-speaking cultures.

## HERE ARE THE TOP 10 CHRISTMAS SONGS FOR ESL CLASSES.

Here you'll find some classic, traditional carols and some modern favorites. We've provided some background information on each song, which you may share with your students, together with lyrics and some suggestions for activities.

## HOW TO PROCEED

### 1 JINGLE BELLS

This is probably the single, most popular Christmas song ever, although it was originally written for Thanksgiving. Bogglesworld ([bogglesworldsl.com/christmas\\_carols.htm](http://bogglesworldsl.com/christmas_carols.htm)) offers a short version that is perfect for ESL classes.

### 2 SILENT NIGHT

This classic carol was actually originally written in German, but is now sung in over 44 languages. About.com ([esl.about.com/od/holidayresources/a/sc\\_silent.htm](http://esl.about.com/od/holidayresources/a/sc_silent.htm)) offers the lyrics and a short list of vocabulary you might want to go over before listening to the song in class.

### 3 JOY TO THE WORLD

And what a joy indeed it is to lead your class in this happy hymn! For lyrics and list of recommended vocabulary words, go to About.com ([esl.about.com/od/holidayresources/a/sc\\_joy.htm](http://esl.about.com/od/holidayresources/a/sc_joy.htm)).

### 4 WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS

This 16th century English carol has stood the test of time and remains a very popular Christmas song to this very day. Lyrics also available at Bogglesworld ([bogglesworldsl.com/christmas\\_carols.htm](http://bogglesworldsl.com/christmas_carols.htm)).

### 5 O CHRISTMAS TREE

This song was originally a traditional German carol called "O Tannenbaum" (fir tree in German). Although the best known version is from the 19th century, the original melody dates back to the 16th. Lyrics in both English and German are available at SongsforTeaching.com ([songsforteaching.com/christmas/ochristmastree.php](http://songsforteaching.com/christmas/ochristmastree.php)).

### 6 RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER

Who can name all of Santa's reindeer? Few probably can, but there's one name that stands out among young and old: Rudolph, the reindeer that was at first ridiculed for his big, red nose, but later saves the day as he deftly leads Santa's sleigh through the fog. Lyrics are available at About.com ([esl.about.com/od/holidayresources/a/sc\\_rud.htm](http://esl.about.com/od/holidayresources/a/sc_rud.htm)), but don't forget to try the activities recommended at ESLKidStuff ([eslkidstuff.com/ChristmasGames.htm](http://eslkidstuff.com/ChristmasGames.htm)): there's a pin the tail on the reindeer game that is sure to provide lots of holiday fun for the little ones.

### 7 WHITE CHRISTMAS

When we think "White Christmas", we think "Bing Crosby". The song written by Irving Berlin has actually made it into the Guinness Book of World Records as the all time best-selling

single. Here is a wonderful worksheet for beginners, guaranteed to put their listening comprehension to the test: [busyteacher.org/1784-christmas-song-white-christmas-bing-crosby.html](http://busyteacher.org/1784-christmas-song-white-christmas-bing-crosby.html)

### 8 I SAW MOMMY KISSING SANTA CLAUS

This fun song reached the number one position on the charts in 1952. The story is as endearing as any Christmas tale: an unsuspecting child endeavors to sneak up on Santa Claus and finds him (presumably his father) kissing his mother underneath the mistletoe. Here's a great worksheet based on the cover recorded by the Jackson 5: [busyteacher.org/1788-christmas-song-i-saw-mommy-kissing-santa-the.html](http://busyteacher.org/1788-christmas-song-i-saw-mommy-kissing-santa-the.html)

### 9 ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS YOU

One of the most recent additions to the list of holiday classics, this song was released in 1994 in Mariah Carey's Merry Christmas album. Lyrics and activities are available in this worksheet: [busyteacher.org/1060-all\\_i\\_want\\_for\\_christmas.html](http://busyteacher.org/1060-all_i_want_for_christmas.html)

### 10 DO THEY KNOW IT'S CHRISTMAS

This is the perfect song to raise awareness among your students of the hardships others may face in other parts of the world. In 1984, Bob Geldof wrote this song and put together a group of English and Irish artists, called Band Aid. All proceeds from this song went towards relief for the famine in Ethiopia. The video and lyrics are available at Engleo.com ([www.engleo.com/2009/12/do-they-know-its-christmas.html](http://www.engleo.com/2009/12/do-they-know-its-christmas.html)).

**SOME OF THESE SONGS ARE GREAT LEAD INS FOR DISCUSSION, OTHERS ARE SIMPLY FUN TO SING. WHETHER YOU MAKE YOUR OWN WORKSHEETS OR USE THE ONES WE'VE PROVIDED, MAKE SURE YOU GIVE YOUR STUDENTS PLENTY OF NEW THINGS TO LEARN WITH THESE WONDERFUL HOLIDAY CLASSICS!**

# Listen Up: Using Online Resources to Amplify Listening Skills

There are many different websites to help you bring adventurous and unique listening exercises into your classroom.

You can find just about anything you might need for every level language learner, and students in today's classroom are looking to be engaged in many different ways. If you have an internet connection, speakers and a projector there is a whole world of online listening resources awaiting you!

## TRY THESE GREAT ONLINE RESOURCES TO AMPLIFY LISTENING SKILLS

### 1 RANDALL'S ONLINE LISTENING QUIZZES

Utilizing online listening quizzes is one of the best ways to supplement book exercises and provide students with additional challenges. One of the best, most organized websites to find a surplus of listening quizzes is Randall's ESL Cyber Lab ([esl-lab.com/](http://esl-lab.com/)).

Randall's site is well-organized, user-friendly, and applicable for every level. In addition each listening quiz is put together with pre and post listening exercises, vocabulary activities including idiomatic speech, a quiz script, and conversation. You can choose how you want to present the activities, and you could use it either for individual listening practice or for group work as a class. One of the best ways to utilize the site is to project the quiz onto the screen while the conversation is playing. You can decide whether you want to make the listening conversations part of practice, an opportunity for a group quiz, or simply take bits and pieces of what is presented and create your own activities. The conversations are perfect for launching into discussions and also provide substantive support materials for a range of topics. Students enjoy the challenge and stimulation of these real-world dialogues. It's so constructive that the conversations are presented in natural

speech, and are not slowed down or unnatural as many books often present.

Another website created by Randall is the Train Your Accent website ([www.trainyouraccent.com/](http://www.trainyouraccent.com/)). It is a newer site with not as much content, but the content provided is rich with more real-world language to train students in listening and also in speaking. There aren't many websites out there dedicated to helping students understand different accents and also work on their own. This website has short listening exercises accompanied by a script, reduced speech script, and ideas for a few activities. This website would also be very useful for self-paced study or individual projects.

### 2 MUSIC AND MOVIES

Music and movies are another wonderful resource to facilitate natural listening exercise which also add an element of playfulness and change of pace. Creating lessons with music can be time-consuming as can finding movies that are appropriate for ESL audiences. One website does the work for you, and if you are looking for visuals to go along with the listening, all these resources are videos. The website is ESL Video ([www.eslvideo.com/](http://www.eslvideo.com/)).

There are videos of songs, movies trailers, and short movie clips. Each exercise comes ready made with questions, transcript, and notes. The videos are catalogued by level, but you can also perform a search if there is something particular you are looking for. One other cool aspect of this website is that you can register for free in order to create your own video quizzes. The resources are presented expertly and the possibilities for utilizing these videos is only limited by your imagination.

There is another stellar website that is designed for learners to practice not just listening, but reading and writing as well. It is ESL Fast ([www.eslfast.com/](http://www.eslfast.com/)).

It provides a wealth of stories and conversations, many of which have an audio file accompanied by a script or story. The listening exercises use authentic speech and interesting language to provide a very effective resource for discussion, question and answer, or independent practice. Each listening exercise also comes with a list of vocabulary words, yes/no questions, cloze, crosswords, keys, and even dictation. These exercises are designed to be worked through online, but can easily be printed out or used with an overhead projector. There is no limit to how you could utilize these conversations and stories!

### 3 PODCASTS

Podcasts have become so popular, why not bring them into your ESL classroom? NPR and the BBC have hundreds of podcasts on all types of topics. Most of them are at least 30 minutes in length, so you would need to choose excerpts for your advanced level students. Podcasts are an interesting resource for students who really want challenging, thought-provoking listening activities. Podcasts would be an effective assignment for project-based work that speaks directly to students and their interests. The topics and language are challenging, spoken in natural English with American and British accents, and there are no scripts available.

**LISTENING EXERCISES DON'T HAVE TO BE ROTE OR RUN-OF-THE-MILL. AS WITH ALL ONLINE RESOURCES, BE SURE THAT YOU HAVE A SOLID PLAN IN PLACE BEFORE PRESENTING EXERCISES TO THE CLASS, AND DON'T RELY COMPLETELY ON THE WEBSITE TO DO YOUR WORK FOR YOU.**

There are tremendous resources awaiting you, and using these websites combined with your own creative style, you can surely amplify your students' skills.

# Voicethread, Voki, Listen & Watch: Homework for Listening

RECENTLY, THERE HAS BEEN A MOVE TOWARDS ORAL ENGLISH OR ENGLISH CONVERSATION CLASSES IN COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS HAVE SHIFTED FROM TEACHING SOLELY GRAMMAR TO TEACHING PRONUNCIATION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

Teachers of these types of courses struggle with giving meaningful homework assignments as traditional homework tasks focus entirely on reading and writing. Fortunately, if your students have computer and internet access, you can make use of new technology to encourage more speaking and listening practice outside the classroom. By providing your students with new opportunities to practice speaking English, you will help them learn and improve more rapidly.

Voicethread.com, Voki.com, and the Listen & Watch section of the British Council website are great sites to start with because they are fairly straightforward. The first two offer free basic accounts but you and your students will all need to create accounts so having one class in the computer lab, assuming that one is available to you, to get students used to these sites is ideal. The British Council site does not require an account to access the material but an initial session in the computer lab is still preferable because it would give students the chance to participate in a guided exploration of the site. Asking students to explore sites entirely on their own could be frustrating for some of them so this approach is highly recommended.

## HOW TO ENCOURAGE LISTENING AND SPEAKING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

### 1 VOICETHREAD

Here is how you can use Voicethread for your classes. First, you have to create a Voicethread by uploading a series of images or videos.

It would be best if there were a theme to the Voicethread such as animals, hobbies, environmental problems, countries, food, or art that related to your current unit of study. The theme will obviously depend on the level of your students. Before sharing the Voicethread with students, create a comment that includes the directions as well as a model of what you expect from students. For homework, ask students to comment on one or more of the images or video clips. Comments can be made orally or in writing. You can encourage students to leave oral comments but the flexibility is also good since some students may not initially feel comfortable recording themselves speaking. After students are familiar with the site, you can require oral comments and even ask students to make their own Voicethreads to tell stories about their lives, introduce themselves, or give short presentations about topics they are interested in.

### 2 VOKI

Voki.com is another free site that can be used for speaking practice. To create a Voki, choose and customize a character and record a short sixty seconds of speech. It is really that simple. You could use Vokis for practicing descriptions by asking students to customize a character and then use a sixty second recording to describe the character they have created. Since characters are not limited to people, this could be a very fun and enjoyable activity for students at many levels. Students could also use this program to create a personalized Voki and record oral responses to homework questions. Rather than requiring students to create a Voki right from the start, start off using it as an alternative to short written assignments. Once students have seen some examples that you or peers have created, they could be encouraged to create their own. If you want to guarantee that students practice speaking English for these assignments, specify that they are not allowed to use the text to

speech feature.

### 3 BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council makes a lot of materials available for English language learners so you can direct students to what you would like them to listen to or watch. Many of the activities on the British Council website include their own tasks which you could ask students to complete or ignore depending on your purpose for using the material. You can also just ask students to prepare a comment or question for the following class period. This site section ([learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/listen-and-watch](http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/listen-and-watch)) could help your students focus on their listening skills but if combined with Voicethread or Voki, students could do both listening and speaking activities for homework which is perfect for oral communication classes.

IT IS ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO SPEAK ENGLISH AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE AND THESE ACTIVITIES ALSO HELP STUDENTS IMPROVE THEIR COMPUTER LITERACY WHICH IS EQUALLY, IF NOT MORE, IMPORTANT THESE DAYS.

On the other hand, if students do not have computer access, it is still possible to encourage students to practice their speaking skills by asking them to prepare and practice speeches or conduct short interviews. If reading and writing are getting too much attention in your communication classes, consider using some of these resources and ideas in the future.



# yes Yes YES! How to Teach Sentence Stress

“Stress” is part of the rhythm of a language, the pattern of stressed or emphasized syllables and unstressed syllables of which English sentences are made up. Appropriate sentence stress is important for native-like or even comprehensible speech: if the stress pattern is incorrect, then listener comprehension will suffer.

Many ESL students lack an understanding of English sentence stress, however, often giving each syllable equal length, resulting in monotonous and difficult to understand speech.

## WHAT ARE METHODS TO TEACH NATIVE-LIKE SENTENCE STRESS?

### 1 START BY DISCUSSING STRESS

Read a sentence aloud from the textbook without stressing content or main idea words. Ask students if they think it sounds right. They will probably say no. Then read the same sentence with the correct stress pattern. Ask them what they think now. This will raise their consciousness about stress.

### 2 INTRODUCE SYLLABLES

Stress in English interacts with syllables: that is, syllables alternate between stressed and unstressed within a sentence. Select a sentence from a dialogue in your textbook and model “beating out” the syllables on the desk. Have students do the same. Have them count the syllables in the sentence.

### 3 ELABORATE ON STRESS

Explain the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables. Explain the stressed syllables are louder and longer. Stressed syllables tend to occur in content words such as nouns and verbs, while structure words such as articles and prepositions are usually unstressed.

### 4 PROVIDE EXAMPLES

Model stressed and unstressed syllables by selecting a sentence from your book and writing it on the board, marking the stressed syllables with a dash or a dot. Then read the sentence aloud, emphasizing the stressed syllables. Have students practice with you.

### 5 DEFINE SCHWA

Explain that most unstressed syllables in English are reduced and pronounced as a “schwa.” Teach the schwa sound (the “uh” sound as is the second syllable of “station”). Modeling the expressions “Uh-huh” (for “yes”) and “huh-uh” (for “no”) is a humorous way to teach this sound. The American English greeting “How are you doing?” for example is really pronounced /how’r yuh doin’/ --the structure words “are” and “you” get reduced to schwa.

### 6 PRACTICE SENTENCE STRESS

Practice the sample sentences on the board again, emphasizing the stress pattern, making the stressed syllables louder and longer and reducing the unstressed syllables. Ask students about the content and structure words and which are stressed and unstressed.

### 7 MARK

Have students on their own pull sentences from the same dialogue in their books and mark the stress patterns.

### 8 COMPARE

Students can then compare their markings with a partner.

### 9 PRACTICE IN PAIRS

Practice the dialogue in pairs, focusing on the stress patterns.

## MORE ADVANCED ACTIVITIES

**1** Teach specialized use of stress and how meaning can shift based on the stress pattern and what the speaker wants to emphasize. “I love my sister,” “I love my sister,” “I love my sister” and “I love my sister” all carry different meanings.

**2** Give out a dialogue with the content words deleted. Have students listen to a recording of the dialogue for the content words and fill them in. They can then practice the dialogues in pairs.

**3** An alternative to this, for more advanced students, is to have them predict the content words that belong in the blank spaces. Have them fill in the dialogues, check them against the tape, and then students can practice.

**4** Play “telegrams”: explain a telegram was something like a precursor to a text message—a message in which all the structure words or were deleted: “Mom sick. Come home.” Give out a page of “telegrams.” Have students add the structure words and practice reading with appropriate sentence stress.

**5** The above activities can also be done with popular songs. Play the song and hand out the lyrics, with content words or structure words deleted. Have students listen to the song and fill in the words.

**6** Poetry is also a great way to practice sentence stress as poetry

is actually based on regular stress, or meter, patterns. Teach students a simple poem, such as Frost's "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening." Have them practice reciting it. They may try writing their own similar poems after, imitating Frost's style and stress/meter patterns.

## 7

Humor is often based on the stress pattern, or "delivery" as comedians call it. Tell a well-known joke and show how the humor is affected by the way the speaker uses stress by delivering it first with the correct stress and then without.

## 8

Give out index cards with content words students are currently learning written on them. Have students line the cards up into "sentences," adding structure words as necessary, and mark the correct stress pattern then practice saying the sentences.

## 9

Do a "drawing" activity by handing out a dialogue and having students "map" the stress of each sentence in the dialogue over the sentence, with high peaks representing stressed syllables and dips unstressed.

## 10

Have students bring in idioms that they've heard or want to learn about and go over the stress patterns.

### **FREQUENTLY REVISIT THE PRINCIPLES OF SENTENCE STRESS, TAKING TIME REGULARLY TO MODEL THE STRESS PATTERNS OF SENTENCES SELECTED FROM DIALOGUES.**

Add to students' existing knowledge base by teaching stress related to different types of sentences, such as information ("Wh-") questions and "yes/no" questions.

Participating in a variety of related activities will result in a higher likelihood that students will internalize the principles of sentence stress in English.