

1 Listening

Introduction

Listening activities in course books

All course books provide some kind of listening material. This can be either audio or video, but, on balance, there is likely to be more audio material. Listening material has two key roles to play in English language programmes:

- it gives students an opportunity to practise and develop their listening skills;
- it provides a context for specific language items: grammar, expressions, vocabulary and pronunciation features.

Figure 1.0a (page 10) is an example of a course book listening lesson that includes typical steps (or stages) in a listening lesson. *Figure 1.0b* (page 11) is the audio script of the listening.

Broadly speaking, the material follows the steps of a listening lesson that combine the two key roles of listening material noted above (listening practice and language feature contextualisation):

lead in → initial listening → second, more detailed listening → follow up speaking activity → focus on a language feature

While this broad overview applies to a wide range of listening lessons, the nature of the listening text will result in variations – these are examined below.

In *Figure 1.0a*, exercise 1A is the lead in activity. As is usually the case, this involves some kind of speaking, and course books will often provide visual prompts to stimulate spoken language. Apart from providing spoken fluency practice, lead in activities also aim to generate student interest in the topic or theme of the listening text, and perhaps activate any related background knowledge they might have. Activating background knowledge can often compensate for gaps in students' linguistic knowledge and any possible deficit in their language competence. Exercise 1A above encourages students to speculate on how these different images might be linked and predict the content of the listening text. To some degree, it creates a kind of mystery that students might be curious to solve. This gives them motivation to listen.

Exercise 1B is the initial listening activity. Students listen without reading the audio script and find out whether their predictions about the photographs are correct or not. In order to complete this task, students will not need to understand a lot of detailed information in the listening text, so they 'listen for the gist'. The principle here is that it would be too difficult and unfair to expect students to understand a lot of detail the first time they listen to a text or a conversation, particularly when they are at a lower level. It is likely to have a negative impact on their motivation if we expect them to understand a lot of detailed information during an initial listening. However, providing them with a task that requires a gist understanding of the listening text is likely to be more manageable.

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1 LISTENING



- A **PREDICT** Look at the pictures from an unusual event. Can you guess what it is?
- B **1.44** Listen to a news report about the event. Was your prediction correct?
- C **1.44 LISTEN FOR DETAIL** Listen to the report again and answer the questions.
- 1 Where does the festival take place?
 - 2 Where do the bats come from?
 - 3 What moment are the people waiting for?
 - 4 How many bats are there?
- D **1.45 PAIR WORK** What other things do you think happen at the festival? Think of four to six possibilities. Listen and check your ideas.
- E **THINK CRITICALLY** Not everyone in Austin likes the festival. Think of who these people are. Why don't they enjoy it? Would you like to go to the festival? Why or why not?

2 PRONUNCIATION: Listening for single sounds

- A **1.46** Listen. Focus on the letters in **bold**. Can you hear one or two sounds?
- 1 We know them from bad **d**reams.
 - 2 Bats are really scary.
 - 3 There's so much happening.
- B **1.47** Find two letters in the sentences that can connect to make one sound. There are two pairs of letters in sentence 1. Listen and check.
- 1 They can eat ten thousand kilograms of insects in one night.
 - 2 It's home to music festivals and car racing.
 - 3 I can't wait to try the barbecue.
- C **Complete the sentence.**
 Two sounds often become *one / three* if they are *similar / different* at the end of a word and the start of the next word.

Figure 1.0a: Clandfield, L., B. Goldstein et al. (2019) *Evolve 2*, p. 40.

In most cases, the more students listen to a text or conversation, the more they understand. As a result, course books usually provide a second listening task that aims to help students understand more information in the listening text. Again, students listen, but they do not follow the audio script. Exercise 1C encourages students to do this. Given that students have already listened to the text once, this should be an achievable task. Also, the questions in exercise 1C focus the attention of the listener, and the

Lesson 4.4, page 40, Exercises 1B and 1C

Reporter We know them from bad dreams and scary movies. Creatures of the night that drink our blood and become vampires! I'm talking, of course, about bats! But not everyone thinks bats are really scary. There is a place where these little animals are very popular. So popular, in fact, that once a year there is a festival to celebrate them. That place is Austin, Texas, and the festival is Bat Fest.

Every year, bats from Mexico fly north and spend the summer under the Congress Avenue Bridge in downtown Austin, right under my feet. At the moment it's daytime, so they're sleeping. In a few hours, when the sun starts to go down, it's dinnertime. And these bats are hungry. Together, they eat about 10,000 kilograms of insects in one night. That's what everyone at Bat Fest is waiting for now – the moment when 1.5 million bats wake up, leave the bridge, and fill the evening sky. And I'll be right here to see it.

Bats or no bats, Austin is a cool city. It's a college town, so there are a lot of young people. It's also home to music festivals and car racing. People in Austin like to celebrate everything, so why not the bats? But Bat Fest is about more than bats. There's so much happening.

Figure 1.0b: Kocienda, G., G. Jones et al. (2019) *Evolve 2 Teacher's Book*, p. 174.

information in the questions themselves provide students with clues about the information in the text. In other words, providing some kind of focused task makes detailed listening easier than it would be if the teacher gave a very general instruction such as 'listen again for more details'.

Exercise 1D provides students with a third opportunity to listen in more detail. As is the case with exercises 1A and 1B, students are asked to predict and then listen to check their ideas. However, this time, they do so on the basis that they are already familiar with some of the information in the listening text. Exercise 1D is a less typical detailed listening task, but it is an interesting one because it gives students some degree of choice in terms of what information they are listening for.

The follow up speaking activity is found in exercise 1E. This asks students to respond to the content of the listening text in a critical light and is likely to take the form of a discussion in pairs or small groups. Follow up speaking activities do not always involve critical thinking skills and will often get students to personalise information in the text, voice their own opinion of it or perhaps do a role play that is similar to the conversation they have just heard.

The next stage of a typical course book listening lesson is to focus on a particular language feature. In the example in *Figure 1.0a* above, exercises 2A–C focus on pronunciation. Students listen to examples from the news report that illustrate a feature of connected speech – the way adjacent consonant sounds can combine to become one sound (known as 'assimilation'). At this stage in a

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listening lesson, students can be asked to listen for any language feature: grammar structures, useful expressions and individual words. This kind of very intensive listening requires bottom-up processing of language. Not all course books include this step in a listening lesson.

Listening subskills and texts

In outlining typical stages of a listening lesson, some listening subskills have been referred to. Students might practise some of the following core listening subskills:

- listening for gist
- listening for detail
- listening for language items
- scan listening
- listening to infer information (e.g. speaker's point of view)
- listening for text or discourse patterns

The kind of subskill they practise will depend on the nature of the listening text and the task that the course book or the teacher provides. In the example material above, listening for the gist of a news report is a reasonably natural way to listen. However, if the listening text were a series of flight announcements at an airport, then it would be less natural to practise gist listening and it would make more sense to provide a scan listening task where students have to pick out individual flight and gate numbers – as travellers do at an airport.

Conversely, if the listening text is a university lecture (or an excerpt from one), then a first listening task that asks students to scan listen for key vocabulary items in the lecture would not be a natural response to that listening text. It would make more sense to get students to understand the main ideas in the lecture (the gist) and perhaps get them to listen and understand if the structure of the lecture follows some kind of specific text pattern, for example, the lecture might introduce a problem and then provide a solution. As you consider listening lessons in course books, it pays to evaluate the tasks critically to see that they practise the listening subskill they say they aim to practise, and whether that subskill is natural in relation to the nature of the listening text.

Methodological considerations

Teachers also need to think about the way they deliver listening lessons from course books. Some very simple ideas can ensure that students feel supported and get benefit from listening. Here are four key steps that can be good practice to follow:

- 1 Set listening tasks before playing the audio, so students know what they are listening for and have a reason to listen;
- 2 Get students to check their answers together in pairs before you check their answers – this gives them more confidence and students can often learn from each other when checking their understanding in pairs;
- 3 Monitor students carefully during pair checking stages and try to determine how well they have understood the listening text;
- 4 Play the audio more than once if necessary, particularly for detailed listening activities – students will usually understand more with each subsequent listening.

Listening

Many course books provide an audio script of listening material at the back of the book. After following the four steps above, it would be an appropriate time for students to listen again and follow the audio script. It is a good way to round off a listening activity, particularly at lower levels. This can be an opportunity for students to resolve any uncertainties they might have had, and for you to answer any questions they might have about language. It is also a way of helping learners tune into differences between the way English is written and the way it is spoken.

Issues with listening lessons

The description of course book based listening lessons above is often described as the ‘comprehension approach’ to listening (Field 2008). Criticism of this approach includes the following:

- students have little control over the listening text;
- when students use English outside the classroom, they not only have to listen but they also have to speak;
- there is not sufficient attention paid to bottom-up processing of spoken language.

Some of the activities in this chapter suggest ways of helping with these challenges, but these are key points for teachers to consider whenever they are planning listening lessons. They also suggest that teachers need to encourage their learners to listen outside the classroom as much as possible. Digital technology and the amount of material that is freely available online has made this a far more achievable goal.

Reference

Field, J. (2008) *Listening in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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A Before listening

1.1 Role play first

Level	B1 and above
Time	10 to 15 minutes
Outline	In this activity students do a role play of a conversation in the same situation as the listening they are going to listen to.
Aim	To get students interested in the topic; to prepare them for listening; to provide speaking fluency practice.
Preparation	Copy the role cards below to use with the <i>Figure 1.1a</i> below or create your own role cards for another listening text.
Rationale	A typical way of leading into a listening activity is by getting students to discuss questions about the topic of a listening. This activity is a variation on this typical lead in. Getting students to do a role play more actively puts them in the speaker's role and it may help generate ideas that they don't consciously think of in a normal lead in. You can also focus students on some of the content of the listening in the role cards you give them. In addition, a role play provides extra speaking practice, of course.

Procedure

- 1 Establish the topic or the situation of the role play and pre-teach any useful vocabulary students can use.
- 2 Hand out role cards and give students time to prepare.
- 3 Put students in A–B pairs to do the role play.
- 4 Do whole class feedback and make notes on the board.
- 5 Students listen to the audio and see if it's similar to the conversation they had.
- 6 In their pairs, students discuss similarities. Then do whole class feedback.

Notes

Possible next steps in the lesson are for students to do a detailed listening task and then listen and follow the audio script in order to notice useful language items. You could then ask students to repeat their role play trying to include new ideas and language they have noticed from the listening. This follows a task-teach(noticing)-task approach to the skills work.





Learner reflection questions

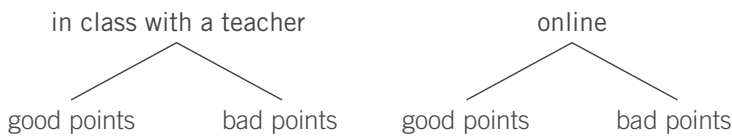
- 1 What ideas from your conversation were similar to the ideas in the listening?
- 2 How did this help you to understand the listening?
- 3 When you practise listening on your own, is it a good idea to think about the topic of the listening before you listen? Why / Why not?

Teacher reflection

How motivated were students to listen to the conversation the first time? Why do you think this was the case?

1 LISTENING AND SPEAKING

- a**  Look at the different ways of learning and answer the questions.
- reading about a topic
 - listening to someone explain
 - group work
 - online or with an app
 - in a classroom with a teacher
 - one-to-one with a teacher
 - studying on your own
- 1 What different ways have you experienced?
 - 2 Are there any other ways you can think of?
 - 3 Which ways do you prefer?
- b**  **3.19** Listen to Janina and Roberta talking about online learning. Who is worried about online learning? Why?
- c**  **3.19** Listen again. Are the sentences true (*T*) or false (*F*)? Correct the false sentences.
- 1 Janina's going to do an online course next year.
 - 2 Roberta prefers learning in a classroom.
 - 3 Roberta likes to choose when she studies.
 - 4 Roberta couldn't meet her teachers during her online course.
 - 5 Roberta liked reading the students' online profiles.
 - 6 Janina needs to have excellent IT skills for the course.
 - 7 Janina must do the introduction course very soon.
- d**  Make a list of good and bad points for studying in class with a teacher and studying online.



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ROBERTA Hi, Janina. What are you reading?

JANINA I'm just looking at the course information for next year.

R Oh, OK.

J It says that one of the psychology courses I have to do is going to be online.

R That's good.

J You think so? I've never done an online course.

R I did one this year – it was great. I wouldn't mind doing my whole degree online.

J Really, Roberta? What's so good about it?

R Well, we only had about two classes on the whole course. And they recorded them and put them online anyway. I was free to study whenever I wanted. Good for people like me who are always late for classes!

J Yeah, I don't have a problem with that but it sounds good.

R I mean, you still have to write essays and hand things in on time and all that kind of thing.

J Of course.

R And I got good grades on that course.

J But did you ... I mean, didn't you miss asking your teachers questions? And what about meeting other students?

R Well, we could go and meet the teachers if we wanted to ... you know, make an appointment and ask about something one-to-one. And at the beginning of the course, we had to write an online profile. We had students from all round the world in our class, so the profiles were really interesting.

J How many international students were there?

R About 15, I think. And from all kinds of different places – Colombia, China, Morocco, Turkey, Oman – all over the place.

J And did they talk about their countries a lot?

R Yeah, that's what I really enjoyed.

J The only thing I'm not sure of ... well, you know that my IT skills aren't very good. Like, I'm OK making documents and using the Internet. But this could be a bit more ... I don't know ... difficult?

R Not really. You don't need any special skills. It's quite easy. And there's an introduction course you can do.

J Yeah, I was just reading about that. At least it's free.

R Yeah, you should do it, Janina. It's only two weeks long and you can do it any time. It really helped me.

J OK – sounds like a good idea.

Figure 1.1a: Doff, A., C. Thaine et al. (2015) *Cambridge English Empower B1*, pp. 94 and 173.

Role cards

Student A

Read the instructions and write answers to the questions. Speak to Student B who has already done an online course.

You are planning to study university courses next year. One of the courses you really want to do is online.

- What is the topic of the course?

You're not sure you want to do a course online. There are some things you're not sure about.

- What do you want to know about online studying?

You're not sure if your IT skills are good enough.

- Why not?

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PHOTOCOPIABLE

Student B

Read the instructions and write answers to the questions. Speak to Student A.


Student A is your friend. She/He is thinking about doing a university course online next year, but she/he isn't sure about it. You did an online course last year and really enjoyed it. You liked being free to study when you wanted.

- What other things did you enjoy about the course?
- In what ways are online courses similar to face-to-face courses?

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PHOTOCOPIABLE

For the listening exercise in *Figure 1.1b*, you could also provide students with some of the useful language on the role play cards.

- 3**  **1.50 Listen to Gemma talking to an activity guide. What is she going to do?**



- 4 Complete the conversation with the useful language.**

Useful language

Where can I sign up?
 Can I ask you a few things about (...)?
 What about ... ?
 What do I need to bring?
 How long is ... ?
 Does the price include (...)?

Gemma: Can I ¹ ... *ask you* ... a few things about the canyoning trip?

Guide: The **Blue Canyon** one? Sure. What would you like to know?

Gemma: Well, is it only for people who've already done it?

Guide: No, you don't need any experience. We give training with qualified guides, and the **Blue Canyon** is fine for **beginners**.

Gemma: Great! ² ... need to bring? I haven't got a **wetsuit or anything**.

Guide: That's OK. We provide a **wetsuit, helmet, shoes and life jacket**. Just bring your **swimsuit and towel** and **some warm clothes for after**.

Gemma: OK, good! How ³ ... is the trip to **Blue Canyon**?

Guide: It's **all day**, from **nine until six**.

Gemma: I see. ⁴ ... **food**, then? Does the price ⁵ ... ?

Guide: **Food is included** in the price. We look after everything, so you just enjoy the adventure!

Gemma: Wow! It sounds fantastic. Where ⁶ ... sign up?

Guide: Right here!

Figure 1.1b: Goldstein, B. and C. Jones (2015) *Eyes Open* 3, p. 48.

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1.2 Find someone who first

Level	A2 and above
Time	15 minutes
Outline	Students do a <i>Find someone who</i> activity related to the topic of the listening before they listen in order to personalise the topic and create interest in the listening text.
Aim	To activate background knowledge and interest in the topic by relating it to students' previous experience; to revise question forms; to provide spoken fluency practice.
Preparation	Copy the <i>Find someone who</i> worksheet below to use with the example listening activity <i>Figure 1.2a</i> or create your own question prompts for another listening text.
Rationale	Another way to bring lead in questions to life is by turning them into a <i>Find someone who</i> activity. These activities are often done as a post-listening speaking task, but they can work just as well as a pre-listening activity. It means that students relate the topic to their own experience before they listen, and it gets them up and moving before having to sit still and listen.

Procedure

- 1 Check that students know something about the topic of the listening – Black Friday sales in *Figure 1.2a*.
- 2 Give students prompts for *Find someone who* questions and tell each student which question they should ask other students. Allow time for students to think of the question they should ask and monitor and help if needed.
- 3 Students stand up and move around and ask and answer questions. Each student asks their question to as many other students as possible. If they get a 'yes' answer, they should ask a follow-up question using the suggested question word.
- 4 Put students in pairs and get them to tell each other what they found out about their classmates, and then do whole class feedback.
- 5 Set the first listening task and ask students to listen and see if anyone in the conversation says something similar to what their classmates said.

Notes

The *Find someone who* worksheet below is only a suggestion. You could, for example, easily create a *Find someone who* worksheet for the material in activity 1.1 above, about students' experiences of learning online and in class. The more you can relate the questions to what you know about your students' interests the better. With a weaker class, you may need to elicit examples of the direct questions students will need to ask from the *Find someone who* prompts.

Learner reflection questions

- 1 Who in your class had a similar experience to one of the speakers in the listening?
- 2 What language from the *Find someone who* activity helped you with the listening?

Teacher reflection

What is likely to be the difference in energy levels with the *Find someone who* activity compared to students discussing the lead in questions in pairs?