

TO THE TEACHER

TEACHING LISTENING AND SPEAKING CLASSES

As a teacher, what do you do in a listening class? Or if you teach in an integrated program, what kinds of activities are good listening activities? And how does speaking or discussing interact with listening? Can you have listening that does not involve speaking or speaking that does not involve listening?

Some teachers find that it is certainly a challenge to teach listening and speaking. Learners need listening activities that give them an opportunity to hone their listening skills through focusing on both the larger message (*top-down activities*) and key words or phrases (*bottom-up activities*). In top-down activities, learners may listen for the gist or main idea of a message. In bottom-up activities, learners might have to identify a word as having a specific sound (/s/ vs. /z/, for example). In either case, what is most important is that learners have activities that are manageable, that is, at the correct student proficiency level of English, and that are short and focused.

No listening can happen without speaking, and no speaking can happen without listening. Therefore, it is only natural that a book that hones students' listening ability should include a large number of speaking activities. In a listening class, students need opportunities to listen to the recording and also to listen to each other.

The benefit of working with recorded activities should be obvious. The recording can be stopped at any point, and it can also be played numerous times so that students can focus in on both specific and general aspects of the message. These kinds of activities require active participation and attention on the learners' part in order to be completed successfully.

The benefit of speaking/discussing activities is that they provide learners with a chance to produce output in English. This output serves as input for their own language growth. In addition, this output is the basis of any negotiation of meaning with their fellow learners. Real learning will take place when students' communication breaks down due to mistakes in pronunciation or listening comprehension and learners then negotiate either within their own minds or with the other interlocutors to figure out what is happening. It is during this negotiation of meaning that the proverbial lightbulb comes on and learners make important realizations about aspects of their English. They notice the gap between what they were producing and what they should have been producing.

These speaking/discussion activities are highly interactive. All parties must participate or the activity cannot be completed. Let's use a tennis analogy, where the goal is to play against an unknown player who plays very well (i.e., the native speaker). Good players become good players by practicing with a ball machine or with a coach, hitting the same shot over and over until they

almost perfect it. Some of these drills are easy; others are tough. Some we do only a few times; others we do numerous times. This is the equivalent to the listening practice that we have in recorded listening activities. In addition, good tennis players sometimes practice all of their shots with a hitting partner. Sometimes they hit with someone better for a challenge; other times they hit with someone slightly weaker to improve certain shots. This is the equivalent to the listening practice that occurs during a discussion or speaking activity.

In *Targeting Listening and Speaking*, we have included about 70 percent listening activities and 30 percent speaking activities. However, you should keep in mind that very few exercises are listening only or speaking only. In fact, nearly all activities practice both important skills.

TEXT ORGANIZATION

Targeting Listening and Speaking consists of eight units. Units 1–7 are new lessons, and Unit 8 is a test or comprehension check unit.

Each of the seven units has a general theme around which all exercises are built. Because the single most important nonlinguistic skill in ESL/EFL listening is *prediction*—i.e., the ability to anticipate what the speaker will say—having a theme for all the material in the unit helps learners make better predictions about what the recordings will say. The unit themes are:

- Unit 1. Studying English
- Unit 2. Food
- Unit 3. Animals and Pets
- Unit 4. Free Time and Hobbies
- Unit 5. Spending Money
- Unit 6. Family and Friends
- Unit 7. Travel

Unit 8 consists of four listening tests. Each test has 25 multiple-choice items. We recommend that these tests be administered as a progress check every few weeks in the term. It is also possible to administer these tests as a pretest and posttest format. Teachers (and students) should remember that these tests are only one type of measure. We prefer to view these four tests as progress check opportunities rather than as tests since listening and speaking are true skills, when compared to more concrete, learnable language areas such as grammar and vocabulary. Thus, it is easier to test students' knowledge of newly acquired vocabulary than it is to do the same for listening growth.

TYPES OF INTERACTIONS IN THE EXERCISES

Units 1 through 7 have approximately 20 exercises per unit. In the following general format of a sample unit, the (L) refers to a listening exercise, (S) to a

Beginning of unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (L/S) Listening Activity • (L) Dictation in a Dialogue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (L) Extra Practice. Listening Practice (S/L) Extra Practice. Dialogue Practice • (L) Skills • (L) Skills • (S/L) Speaking/Discussion (preparation) • (S/L) Speaking/Discussion • (L) Skills • (L) Skills • (S/L) Speaking/Discussion (preparation) • (S/L) Speaking/Discussion • (L) Understanding Simple Conversations • (L) Skills • (L) Skills • (L/S) Sound Practice: Minimal Pair Discrimination • (L/S) Sound Practice: Minimal Pairs in Sentences • (L) Understanding Simple Lectures • (S/L) Pair Talking • (S/L) Speaking/Discussion (preparation)
End of unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (S/L) Speaking/Discussion

speaking exercise, (L/S) to a listening activity that requires or fosters some speaking, and (S/L) to a speaking activity that requires listening on the speakers' parts.

Listening Activity

Units 1–7 each contain two exercises labeled **LISTENING ACTIVITY**. One of these opens each unit, and the other is about three-quarters of the way through the unit. In these activities, students will listen to language that explains an interesting situation or set of facts. In the unit on pets (Unit 3), for example, listeners will take a test about cat facts. The questions are spoken, but the answers are on the page. In the unit on travel (Unit 7), students will complete a quiz about the location of some of the top travel destinations in the world. After students have answered the questions and perhaps talked with other students, learners must listen to the information in order to check their responses. In other words, learners have a real reason for listening: Listening helps them to verify their answers.

Dictation in a Dialogue

We believe that dictation is a good thing. Students need to practice the details that come out through practice in dictation, e.g., did you say *he* or *she*? We do not, however, want to use dictation of isolated sentences. Listening very much involves prediction, and it is difficult to predict consistently without some sustained context. For these reasons, we offer a new twist on dictation, **Dictation in a Dialogue**.

In this exercise, two (or more) people are talking about something related to the theme of the unit, such as travel or spending money. Students see the entire dialogue written out **except for seven sentences**. These seven sentences have been replaced by longer blanks. Two numbers are connected to each blank. The number in front of the blank is the sentence number (1–7). The number after the blank is the number of words in the missing sentence.

Students will hear only the seven missing sentences on the tape. First, they'll hear number 1. Students will be told to listen and repeat the sentence. This is important for students to capture the sentence in short-term memory and replay it in their heads a time or two. Then number 1 will be read again, and students are to write the sentence that they hear. Again, students are encouraged to “hear” the sentence in their heads as they write it out. Then, after a short pause, students will hear the sentence a third time to check what they have written. The format is always: **listen/repeat, listen/write, listen/check**. This is done for all seven missing sentences.

Following this exercise are two **EXTRA PRACTICE** activities. The first is **Extra Practice. Listening Practice**. Here, students can hear the whole recording of the dictation practiced. We encourage students to attempt this without opening their books. You only have one chance to hear something for the first time. If students have their books open and read along the first time and then listen to the dialogue with books closed for the second round of listening, *it is not at all the same practice*. For this reason, we *strongly* recommend that students listen with their books closed the first, and maybe even the second, time in order to have real listening practice. Then we recommend having students follow along with books open if they wish.

The second activity is **Extra Practice. Dialogue Practice**. Students should take turns reading the dialogue out loud. They should work in pairs (or small groups). If students are working in threes and the dialogue has two people (person A and person B), then one person can read A, another can read B, and the other can listen with book closed. In the second practice, the person who only listened can read A, the person who read A before can read B, and now B can listen. In the third practice, students switch roles one more time. In this way, students have a chance to build fluency through consistent practice.

Skills

Each unit contains seven to ten **Listening Skills** exercises. With rare exception, these skills focus on bottom-up areas. Students work on listening for the difference in numbers (for example, 15 vs. 50) or the difference in names of letters (*E* vs. *I*) or in number at the sentence level (*He has a history book* vs. *He has some history books*).

If students have already completed a particular exercise but need further practice, they should write their answers on a sheet of paper. For example, if students are to tell if the sentence that they hear is affirmative or negative (*All of the cups are on the table* vs. *All of the cups aren't on the table*) by circling + for affirmative or – for negative, the teacher can have the students mark + or – on their own papers. Since the students will have the correct answers in their books from the first time that they did the exercise, the teacher can direct students to open their books to correct their own papers.

Speaking/Discussion Preparation and Speaking/Discussion

Each unit contains three interesting **Speaking/Discussion Activities**. We strongly believe that it is not good practice to give students a topic and ask them to discuss. Second language research shows that ESL learners produce more language and more targetlike language when the activity is a **closed task** (i.e., there is one or a limited set of answers), requires (not just encourages or hopes for but actually *requires*) an exchange of information, and contains a planning phase (instead of students just being confronted suddenly with a topic).

In the unit on spending money (Unit 5), for example, one of the speaking/discussion exercises asks students to come up with gift ideas for several people (e.g., your 88-year-old grandmother who has everything she needs or your boss who likes to read but whose reading taste you do not know well). Since the whole class will hear each group's ideas, students could vote on the best gift ideas. Because there would be one answer at the end, this could be a **closed** task.

Two of the three important aspects of speaking/discussion activities have been covered. The final one is **Preparation**. In this book, each speaking/discussion exercise is preceded by a preparation exercise, in which students must read the problem and write out their answers. Again, second language research shows that students' performance is significantly different when students have a chance to plan their ideas and language. (For further information on this research and application to ESL materials, see the Preface in *Discussion Starters* [Folse 1995], *More Discussion Starters* [Folse and Ivone 2001], and *First Discussion Starters* [Folse and Ivone 2002].)

Preparation is extremely important for the success of a good listening-speaking class. The design of this exercise plays an important role in ensuring that students actually practice speaking *and* listening in this exercise. In addition, the topics used in this exercise are intriguing, and students will want more! For these reasons, each unit contains three speaking/discussion activities.

Understanding Simple Conversations

One of the more immediate goals of most ESL/EFL students is the ability to understand a conversation between two native speakers. In **Understanding Simple Conversations**, students listen to a conversation about a topic related to the general theme of the unit. In addition, a more specific idea of the conversation can be deduced from the title just after the exercise number at the beginning of the exercise. For example, the general theme of Unit 4 is Free Time and Hobbies, and the title of the **Understanding Simple Conversations** exercise is Free Time Plans. As might be expected from the title, the two people talk about what they are going to do in the near future. Because prediction plays such an important role in developing good listening skills, it is important for the teacher to help students make predictions that they can verify as they listen to the material. Teachers should not take this skill for granted. It is pedagogically sound to ask adults what they think the conversation will be about before playing the recording and then to discuss afterward why certain predictions were or were not realized in the recording.

After students listen to the material, they must then answer five to eight questions about the information.

Sound Practice

Each unit contains one or more exercises that focus on an individual sound or sound problem. The sounds presented are those encountered by a wide array of first language backgrounds, including speakers of Spanish, Korean, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese, Portuguese, French, Russian, and German.

The sounds/problems covered are:

Unit 1: problem letters (**A/E**, **E/I**, **G/J**, **B/P**, **L/R**, **S/Z**)

Unit 2: problem letters (**A/E**), minimal pair—/s/ and /z/

Unit 3: problem letters (**E/I**), pronunciation of the ending -s (/s/, /z/, /ɪz/)

Unit 4: problem letters (**A/E/I**), pronunciation of the ending -ed (/d/, /t/, /ɪd/)

Unit 5: problem letters (common combinations), minimal pair—/b/ and /v/

Unit 6: problem syllables (-teen/-ty), minimal pair—/ch/ and /sh/

Unit 7: problem endings (-st, -nd, -rd, -th), minimal pair—/l/ and /r/

There are two minimal pair listening activities in units 3, 5, 6, and 7. In the first one, students hear one word that has one of the two sounds in it. The student book page has three sections for this exercise—beginning, middle, and end—to indicate where the sound in question occurs in the word. For example, in Unit 6 with the /ch/ and /sh/ pair, students hear “wish.” On the blank, they must write *sh* to indicate that they have heard this sound. This exercise has twenty items, and each one-third of the items practices the sounds in the initial position, the middle position, or the final position. After the listening exercise, there is an expansion task, also divided by the beginning-middle-ending distinction, in which students are encouraged to come up with their own (and perhaps more relevant to them) examples.

In the second exercise, students see the two words with the minimal pair sounds, such as *cheese* and *she’s*. Students first read the two words to themselves and then hear a complete sentence, which provides more real-world context to assist with listening. Students are asked to circle the word that they believe that they have heard.

Understanding Simple Lectures

Good listening skills must be applicable to a variety of types of listening. Listening only to other students about daily topics is one kind of listening. In this exercise, students listen to a monologue about a topic that is related to the general theme of the unit. Again, the title found next to the exercise number will help students in using schema knowledge to predict the information in this activity. Students listen to the material and then answer five to eight questions about the material. This activity helps prepare students in academic settings for more rigorous listening tasks.

Pair Talking

In this exercise, students must describe people and things in illustrations so that the listener is able to identify which picture is being described. Students work in pairs. Student A works on one page, and student B works on the next page. It is important that students not look at each other’s page.

Pair Talking always has six questions, and each question consists of four illustrations that have similar visual cues (each of the four pictures has some of the same people and a tree, but the placement of the people around the tree varies) or linguistically (there is ice in one picture; in another there are eyes). In other words, the pictures are very good distractors to make careful explanation of the details more necessary for the student to be able to identify the exact picture that the partner is describing.

Student A describes questions 1, 3, and 5. On student A's page, numbers 1, 3, and 5 already have a picture marked with a black dot. Student A must describe the picture with the dot well enough so that student B can put a dot by the exact same picture. Student B is encouraged to ask as many questions as possible at the same time to ascertain which picture is being described. Student B does the same thing with questions 2, 4, and 6.

Though the four pictures for any number (question) are the same four pictures, they are in different order on student A's page than they are on student B's page. If not, students could just say, "It's the second picture." In this way, students must really describe the picture, not its location on the page, and that need helps build fluency.

Rapid Vocabulary Review

One of the single most important aspects of building better listening ability in any second language is vocabulary growth. Knowledge of many individual vocabulary items—including words, phrases, idioms, expressions, and whole sentences—is crucial. Not knowing a few words in a passage might *hinder* comprehension; not knowing enough vocabulary or certain key vocabulary will *prevent* comprehension.

A unique feature is **Rapid Vocabulary Review**, which at the end of each unit of *Targeting Listening and Speaking* contains 25 multiple-choice vocabulary items.

Each unit in this book also has five additional vocabulary recycling activities that can be found on the companion Web site (www.press.umich.edu/esl/compsite/targetinglistening/). We strongly urge students to take advantage of these activities and record their scores in their books.

Vocabulary learning is essential to better listening skills.

ANSWER KEY AND SCRIPT

Both the answer key and script are available on the companion Web site for this book: (www.press.umich.edu/esl/compsite/targetinglistening/).