

Speaking opens up
our mouths.
Listening opens up
our minds.

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SPEAKING AND LISTENING SKILLS

New Tutor Training #9



READ TO LEARN

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Speaking and Listening Skills

Reading is only one component of literacy. Other types of skills are needed as well – speaking, listening, and writing. Your learner may read English better than they can speak it – this is common. However, while continuing to improve their reading skills is important, we cannot overlook these other skills in the process.

Speaking is key to communication and critical for functioning in everyday activities. Your learner may feel embarrassed or shy about speaking due to their lack of language skills.

It is important that we differentiate the ability to speak (communicate orally) from improving *pronunciation*. We are NOT a pronunciation class, but you can help your learner be understood more clearly and speak more fluently by modeling the correct pronunciations of sounds/words they have difficulty saying.

We are also NOT a conversation class. Conversation, though, is a “side effect” of tutor/learner interaction, so your learner will have practice while in class. Your site may also offer group discussions each week. These are at the discretion of the Site Supervisor.

The ability to speak with confidence helps your learner:

- 🎬 Be understood by others
- 🎬 Become more credible as a result of being understood
- 🎬 Build better understanding and use of the language in different social settings
- 🎬 Develop independence and self-confidence in a variety of settings

What a good speaker does

- 🎬 Takes turns, participates in give and take with others
- 🎬 Spontaneously initiates or responds with appropriate phrases (“Excuse me” or “Can you help me?”)
- 🎬 Uses appropriate vocabulary for subject they are talking about
- 🎬 Shares specific information with others
- 🎬 Participates in small talk, casual conversations, and personal interviews (ex. doctor’s office, school, neighbors, coworkers, etc.)

Ways to improve the speaking skills of your learner

- 🎬 Minimize your talking time
- 🎬 Speak slowly and clearly
- 🎬 Allow wait time – be patient as they try to form the words and sentences
- 🎬 If appropriate, use visuals (pictures, charts, real-life examples)
- 🎬 Always be positive and continue to praise them for speaking
- 🎬 DO NOT OVER-CORRECT; model for them or guide them (“Maybe it’s better to say...” or “Try saying...”)
- 🎬 Avoid **Yes/No** questions; ask questions which will make them speak more
- 🎬 **LET THEM TALK!**

Learners need to be speaking English as often as possible. As with any skill, the more you practice it, the better you become. Allow your learner to talk as much as possible and to even repeat the same dialog or story aloud three or more times for fluency practice.

Weekly practice *in class* may include:

- 🎬 Reading a passage/paragraph/short story orally
- 🎬 Telling about the past week or weekend
- 🎬 Relating something they read at home
- 🎬 Sharing a story about their family
- 🎬 Asking questions about something they didn’t understand

Daily practice *outside* of class may include:

- 🎬 Small talk with family at meals, before and after school or work (ex. “What are you doing today?” “Who did you eat lunch with today?”)
- 🎬 Call tutor or a friend. Talk for five (5) minutes or leave a message with specific information.
- 🎬 Chat with neighbors when out for a walk or other parents at a sports event.
- 🎬 Talking with community members – librarian, store clerk, etc

LISTENING

Listening is important to understanding speech and responding appropriately to what was heard. Learners should be encouraged to take advantage of any opportunity to listen to English. Suggested opportunities include:

- 🎬 while driving/riding in the car
- 🎬 taking a walk
- 🎬 getting ready in the morning
- 🎬 exercising
- 🎬 while cooking/cleaning/doing laundry

Like speaking and reading, listening to English should be done every day.

It is important to emphasize that listening needs to be active and have a specific purpose. If it is difficult for your learner to pay attention to a speaker (their tutor, a receptionist, someone on the phone), the learner's ability to effectively communicate will be extremely limited. While in class, learners must be able to listen to and understand information and instructions given by the Site Supervisor and/or their tutor.

Ways to improve the listening skills of your learner

- 🎬 Speak slowly and clearly
- 🎬 Allow them to ask for clarification or repetition if they missed something
- 🎬 Use real-life activities to practice listening
- 🎬 Guide them to listen for some specific purpose – listen actively

ADDENDUM

Listening for a Purpose

Good for authentic homework activities or using the internet during class
from <http://busyteacher.org/17878-esl-listening-activities-7-types.html>

Listening for the Main Idea:

The purpose of this type of listening is to train learners to grasp the main points or general information presented in the audio. Learners often get stuck on a detail, a word or phrase they don't understand and fail to see the bigger picture. So, this is a great exercise for this type of learner.

Listening Exercise: Choose a short audio track that presents information that may be easily summarized, like a news report. **Breaking News English** offers some excellent audio tracks for different levels. Have learners summarize the main points in one or two sentences. It is important to clarify that they aren't expected to deliver details, like numbers, names or statistics but rather express the main point in a concise manner.

Listening for Detail:

Here, the purpose is to train learners to grasp specific information, details that are relevant, important or necessary. The goal is to help learners obtain the detailed information they may need like hours, dates, names, etc...

Listening Exercise: Biographies tend to have lots of great details. Choose an interesting one – ManyThings.org has several in their **People** page, as well as cool **Places** to learn about. Prepare a short list of questions they must read before listening, of the *what, when, where, how* type. Learners listen for these details, then report their answers after the listening.

Listening for a Sequence:

Quite often, learners receive instructions in English, information they will need to act on or orders they will need to follow. It is vital that they get the order right, that they understand the sequence correctly and what each step entails.

Listening Exercise: **VideoJug** has great how to videos, like **How to Clean Your Microwave with a Lemon** or this interesting one on **How to Stop Being Lazy**. Have learners listen as they write the series of steps, or give them the steps and have them put them in the right order.

Listening for Specific Vocabulary:

Listening activities offer great opportunities to teach new words or review vocabulary previously taught. Here, the purpose is to identify and remember a series of words, which are usually easily categorized, like types of food, sports, animals, etc...

Listening Exercise: Choose an audio track or song that lists words that may be included in a category, like **Ylvis' The Fox** (great song for young learners and teens!) You can ask learners to listen and write down all of the animals they hear mentioned, as well as the sounds they make. Or create a matching exercise.

Listening for Cultural Interest:

With a carefully selected listening activity, you also have the opportunity to teach learners about a special holiday or tradition that is popular with another culture. The purpose is to expose the learner to this cultural aspect through a listening activity.

Listening Exercise: Choose an audio track that speaks about a popular American holiday like **Thanksgiving**. Have learners listen and answer some comprehension questions. Then ask: Is this holiday celebrated in their country of origin? If not, is there a festivity that is similar in their country?

Listening for Attitude and Opinions:

Sometimes learners have to listen for what someone is really saying, not what they're literally saying, but what they actually mean. Attitudes, opinions and feelings can all be conveyed in varying degrees from strong disagreement to mild criticism. Advanced learners should be able to discern different attitudes and positions, as well as identify how the speaker feels.

Listening Exercise: Listen to this conversation regarding a man's **personal problem**. Apart from the actual loss of hair, what else concerns him? (Enduring ridicule, not being accepted as he is, being made fun of, etc...) How does his friend react to this problem? (She's not concerned, doesn't think it's a big deal, etc...)

Listening for Functional Language:

Very often, we teach functional language in the classroom, expressions learners can use to accept/decline invitations, give suggestions, give advice, etc... The purpose is to show learners how these expressions are used in a conversation.

Listening Exercise: Listen to this conversation between a man **whose father has passed away** and a friend. What words/expressions does the woman use to express her condolences? (*I'm really sorry to hear about your dad...*) What else does she say? (*My heart really goes out to her.*) After the listening, learners can practice these expressions in similar conversations.

Internet resources:

Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab www.esl-lab.com

A variety of different scenarios for listening to conversation purposefully

ESL Holiday Lessons <http://www.eslholidaylessons.com/11/thanksgiving.html>

A variety of listening articles about holidays with activities to check for comprehension.

You Tube videos with song lyrics

Video Jug <http://www.videojug.com/search?keywords=How+to>

A variety of “how to” videos to listen and learn about something of interest.

Many Things - <http://www.manythings.org/>

A site with a variety of interesting things for ESL learners, including listening activities

