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Practical Tips for Increasing Listening Practice Time

Now I will do nothing but listen …
–Walt Whitman, Song of Myself

Learning a language—like learning to dance ballet, weave carpets, or play the saxophone—takes time and practice. In general, it's safe to say that the more practice you get, the better you will become. That's how I feel about understanding a foreign language, too. The more listening practice you get, the better you understand the language.

The problem is that students get little dedicated listening practice in their classes—and in some cases, they get almost none. The reasons are many. Teachers lack materials or equipment. They think their classrooms are too noisy or crowded. They value speaking, reading, grammar, or vocabulary over listening. Their curricula are driven by standardized tests without a listening component.

But the main reason is a perception of what listening practice *is* and *is not*. In a poll of 254 teachers from 40 countries, 84 percent felt that "any time the teacher is speaking to students in English it is a listening task" (McCaughey 2010). Now, it is true that students will get exposure to English through teacher talk. But it begs the question: If teachers assume students get listening *anyway*, why bother to design listening-specific activities?

This article will, I hope, help teachers of English reconsider how we think about listening tasks. It will provide guidance for increasing classroom listening practice through short, *dedicated* listening tasks. The emphasis is not on the science or theory of processing language—many other articles cover that—but on the practical business of setting up and "class-managing" listening activities in order to give students more practice.

Implementing new listening tasks is easy if we keep in mind five tips:

1. Students Do During
2. See It
3. Keep It Short
4. Play It Again
5. Change It Up

Before we advance to a detailed explanation of these tips, we need to examine a slippery notion, one that you may have objected to when you first read it a few paragraphs above: that "students get little dedicated listening practice in their classes—and in some cases, they get almost none." Unfortunately, as I will explain next, there is a lot of *not listening* happening.

NOT LISTENING

The last teacher-training workshop I attended on the subject of listening actually provided a

good illustration of *not listening*. After a lecture on pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening, the trainer offered a demonstration. He played the role of teacher while we participants were students. The notes I wrote on the structure of the lesson appear in Figure 1.

Pre-listening	1. Introduction: Teacher asks the class if they like animals. Students volunteer answers.
	2. Teacher presents several riddles about animals. Students guess answers.
	3. Teacher brings out a bag. Inside are stuffed animals that students can't see. Students ask questions until they determine what animals are inside.
While-listening	4. Students receive a handout with three True/False statements. They listen to a recorded dialogue about animals and tick True or False. They listen once.
Post-listening	5. Students check answers.
	6. Students create follow-up questions about animals. The teacher writes these on the board.

Figure 1. Listening demonstration lesson

At first glance, this looks like a classic listening lesson, well-organized and varied. Participating teachers enjoyed it, too. The topic of animals was appealing. We were not overburdened with grammar. And the guessing game, featuring the realia of toys in a bag, was a fun surprise. Neither participants nor trainer doubted that the primary focus of this lesson was listening. After all, the while-listening task took a central position.

I had a stopwatch, too, and timed each segment of the lesson. The result, shown in Figure 2, offers a different picture of what actually happened during the lesson.

One minute of listening was supported by 23 minutes of *not listening* activities.

You might contend that the other tasks supported the central listening segment. Maybe. But those tasks did not target listening practice. Or you might argue that there were elements of listening in Steps 1 and 2 of the pre-listening portion of the lesson because students would need to understand the teacher to form responses. And maybe there were some listening elements. But what if students did not understand? There was no provision for that. The teacher took verbal answers from volunteers and moved on. The teacher could not gauge exactly who understood or identify or help those who did not.

If the participants of this demonstration lesson had been students and not teachers, perhaps the trainer might have played the audio two or three times. That's an improvement, but even so, pre-listening and post-listening time dominated the lesson.

The question is: How much preparation does a 65-second audio warrant? If our goal is to increase listening practice, the answer should be "Very little." Usually, even within portions of class devoted to listening, actual listening gets short shrift.

Figure 3 is a quiz of sorts that you and fellow language teachers can take individually and then discuss. In the quiz, you will see descriptions of activities. Decide whether each activity offers true listening practice or whether it requires students to spend

Pre-listening	16 minutes	1. Introduction	4 minutes
		2. Riddles	3 minutes
		3. Guess the toy	9 minutes
While-listening	1 minute, 5 seconds	4. Listen to recording: True/False	1 minute, 5 seconds
Post-listening	7 minutes	5. Check answers	1 minute
		6. Follow-up questions	6 minutes

Figure 2. Timed segments of the listening demonstration lesson

most of their time on some other skill such as vocabulary, grammar, or writing. Discuss answers with colleagues and think about how you give students listening practice in your classes. My answers to the quiz appear in the Appendix, though you are free to disagree.

PREPARING FOR THE LISTENING TASK

I have heard experienced trainers say that "No listening exercise is too difficult if there is enough pre-listening." What they mean is that, with enough scaffolding and language support prior to listening, learners can understand difficult or long audio texts. It's a sensible dictum—but sneakily *anti*-listening. It tells us that students succeed at listening tasks if they have lots of *not listening*.

Is vocabulary preparation critical for understanding an audio text? Sometimes. But vocabulary preparation is not listening. What about a game that uses core ideas from the listening text? Not listening, either. What if, in the middle of an audio, you encounter the natural surfacing of the past perfect progressive tense—something you had just introduced to your class the week before? Isn't that the perfect opportunity to review? Maybe. But then you are no longer focused on listening skills. The common goals of pre-listening—"activating prior knowledge, making predictions, and reviewing key vocabulary" (Richards 2005, 87)—are valuable in supporting listening activities, but they are not listening practice themselves.

And yet, in a poll of 118 teachers from more than 25 countries, 31 percent considered that in a listening task, the largest chunk of time should be devoted to pre-listening (McCaughey 2010). Another 9 percent chose post-listening. A significant 40 percent, then, did *not* consider while-listening the most important part of a listening task!

As some have pointed out (Cauldwell 2014; Field 2002), teachers often see listening as

Does each activity provide a lot of listening practice?	Yes	Sort of	No/Not really
1. Four students, one in each corner of the room, are reading a list of their ten favorite foods and drinks. The remaining students move to each corner, in any order they want, to listen and write down each reader's list.			
2. The teacher describes a scene: a park with trees, people, and benches. Students draw the scene as the teacher describes it.			
3. Students in pairs do a vocabulary matching activity on a handout. The vocabulary comes from the audio text they just listened to.			
4. Students listen to a song several times. They have a copy of the lyrics with some of the words missing—a gap-fill or cloze activity.			
5. Students in pairs read a dialogue from the textbook out loud, each student taking on one role.			
6. The teacher tells the class about something that happened on the way to school that morning.			
7. After students listen to an audio, the teacher asks the whole class comprehension questions. Students volunteer answers.			

Figure 3. A "quiz" for discussion on what constitutes real listening practice

serving other language-learning goals. That idea prompted Nunan to refer to listening as the "Cinderella skill … all too often … overlooked by its elder sister—speaking" (2002, 238).

We need to think in terms of listening for the sake of listening practice. We must not label a segment of the English class *listening* just because the teacher talks in English. We should realize that when we use a listening text as a springboard for activities we are more comfortable with, like discussions, vocabulary practice, writing, or grammar, students are not getting the actual listening practice they may need.

LISTENING-SPECIFIC GOALS

A dedicated listening task focuses on listening goals. A goal might be understanding the text—in part or as a whole. It might be focusing on global gist or on discrete elements like single phrases. We do not need to follow up with writing or speaking in order to justify the listening task. Listening for the sake of practice is a reasonable goal.

When I observe a listening activity in a classroom, it usually follows this pattern: students listen to a complete audio text and afterwards answer comprehension questions posed by the teacher. (In the past, I did listening tasks this way, too.) This model is probably based on how we use written texts for reading comprehension: read the article and answer the questions. But listening texts, unlike the written word, do not remain unmoving in front of our eyes; listening texts move past our ears in real time. The student doesn't have the opportunity to go back, review a sentence, or look up a word in the dictionary. Answering comprehension questions *after* an audio is mostly a test of memory. The focus is on outcome, on "product rather than process," and ignores the specific difficulties students may have experienced during the actual listening phase (Field 1998, 111).

Listening-specific goals can address difficulties of understanding as they are happening. They can deal with utterances, specifically tackling differences in oral and written language like hesitations, false starts, pauses, background noise, variable speed, and variable accent (Rost 2002, 171). Our dedicated listening tasks might also draw attention to reduced forms and connected speech that occur naturally when speakers drop consonants (Wednesday = *Wenzday*), leave off endings (going = *goin*), or blend sounds together (that will = *that'll*). Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006, 2) have identified nine of these processes: "word stress, sentence stress and timing, reduction, citation and weak forms of words, elision, intrusion, assimilation, juncture, and contraction." There's no reason that most students—or even most teachers—need to know these terms or how to differentiate between the processes. But students will benefit from repeated exposure to examples. They will see that words are often not pronounced the way they are spelled and that their pronunciation changes at times, even when spoken by a single person. The language teacher—like any teacher—shouldn't shelter students from reality.

For instance, in my classes I have used an audio recording of my father telling a story. In the first sentence, he uses the word *probably*. Except he doesn't actually say *probably*. He says *prolly*. Sometimes students have to listen a few times to hear this, and they express surprise that a word can lose two separate "b" sounds and one full syllable, yet still be comprehensible. And if one speaker pronounces a word one way once, it doesn't mean the same speaker will pronounce it the same way the next time. Most English students are familiar with *gonna*, a reduced blend of "going to." (*Gonna* appears often in writing.) My wife, a non-native speaker of English, pointed out to me that when I say "I'm going to," it comes out as "I'm unna" [ajm *ʊnə*], with the "g" disappearing entirely. And yet teachers should not get the idea that they are promoting slang or dialects in pointing out features of connected speech, for "it is commonly used in all registers and styles. Even the most formal pronunciation of a

language will typically contain some aspects of these phenomena" (Brown and Kondo-Brown 2006, 5).

Is it any wonder that students express difficulty in understanding English speech outside their classroom environments?

Pointing out the aberrations of spoken language—or better yet, letting students discover them through our guidance—is a shortcut toward understanding authentic speech:

> When second-language learners learn some new element of a language, at first they have to pay conscious attention and think about it; that takes time, and their use of it is slow. But as the new element becomes more familiar, they process it faster, with less thought, until eventually the processing of that element becomes completely automatic. (Buck 2001, 7)

Many activities we do in the course of a listening lesson are actually *not listening*.

We want to put our students on the road to that automatic processing. Is it frustrating for students that language doesn't conveniently bend to the rules written in their textbooks? It might be. But according to Brown (2006), students enjoy learning about reduced forms because it's new information. In my own experience, I've found that students treat the discovery of, say, an elision or glide that suddenly makes two words comprehensible as a kind of secret key to unlocking mysteries of the language and putting them ahead in the learning game. And the bottom line is that students feel good about understanding authentic English.

FIVE TIPS FOR INCREASED LISTENING PRACTICE

At this point, we should have two key ideas foremost in our minds:

- First, many activities we do in the course of a listening lesson are actually *not listening*.
- Second, we can increase listening practice by including simple activities with *listening-specific goals*.

The five tips below will make the design and setup of listening practice in the classroom easy and effective.

1. STUDENTS DO DURING

A good listening task is one with "active responses occurring during, or between parts of, the listening passage, rather than at the end" (Ur 1984, 4). In fact, a great model for a listening task is the children's game Simon Says. In Simon Says, one person (in a classroom setting, usually the teacher) gives commands:

> Simon says, "Put your hands on your head."
>
> Simon says, "Lower your hands to your sides."
>
> Simon says, "Lift your left leg."

Students follow these commands bodily. They do this while listening, or to be more precise, in those spaces between spoken commands. The actions are an immediate response to the spoken word. I call this kind of task a "do-during" task because students need to *do something during* the listening portion of the activity. (Full instructions for how to play Simon Says can be found in a video at www.howcast.com/videos/258347-How-to-Play-the-Simon-Says-Game.) Many audio texts—especially those where the teacher's voice is the audio source—can easily be paused or segmented, so that students respond immediately. Take, for example, a picture dictation.

Picture dictation

Each student, working with a blank piece of paper, has a pencil or colored pen or marker. The teacher dictates instructions one by one, and students draw accordingly:

> Teacher: We are going to draw a monster. We just learned the word *lopsided*, right? Draw a big lopsided circle near the top of your paper. … Okay, give your monster two big eyes. … Give your monster two large ears. … Now put an earring in his left ear. … Good. Let's give our monster very curly hair. …

We can sense the natural pauses here as the teacher walks around the room, observing the progress of every student. Again, students are responding immediately, during the listening activity.

Sound-clip dictation

This *Students Do During* principle also applies to writing or dictation that is based on listening. In the following case, I've taken a single sentence, one of the most famous lines in American film, spoken by the actor Marlon Brando in 1972's *The Godfather*:

> I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse.

The teacher can voice the sentence, of course, but such authentic sound bites are easy to find online (on YouTube.com, for instance, or search for "movie sound clips"). And with a recording, you can play it again and again as a loop, giving students lots of exposure to the language. Students write while they listen.

Single-sentence gap fill

Using another single-sentence text, you could pinpoint attention on reduced speech. Write the following gap fill on the board:

> (1) _____ be great if (2) _____ get it done early this year.

Next, play a recording of the sentence or read it as many times as necessary. Repeating the audio many times is not a problem—it's just three seconds long—and students may need the repetition to figure out what's missing, especially since the missing words do not sound the way they look in writing.

The missing words are (1) *It'd* and (2) *we could*. (Who says only one word can be missing in a blank?) In this authentic audio, (1) *It'd* is pronounced [ɪdəd] to rhyme with *lidded*, and (2) *we could* is pronounced [wikəd].

Many students, even advanced students, are not aware of the contraction *it'd*. But after this short listening task, they will be, and catching it in a natural conversation will start to become automatic.

2. SEE IT

In the above activities, the key is that *Students Do During*: whether they are moving their bodies, drawing, writing, or gap-filling, students react immediately to the listening text. The great advantage to this arrangement is that no matter what the students are doing, the teacher can *See It* every step of the way. The teacher sees exactly who understands and who doesn't, which groups are fast and which are slow, who is struggling and who needs an extra challenge, and what everyone understands and perhaps what no one understands. The teacher can actually discern student comprehension and measure progress in real time.

Let's return to Simon Says to test whether the *See It* principle applies. The teacher says, "Simon says, 'Stand on one leg.'" The teacher can *see* who in the class understands because those students are standing on one leg. The game features built-in discernible comprehension. True, some students look at others and imitate what they are doing, but the teacher sees that, too. (Fix that problem, by the way, by having students wear blindfolds or close their eyes.)

Follow the map

For another example, let's take a map activity. Students receive a handout of a simple city

map and have it in front of them. Each student gets a paper clip or some other small object to represent his or her car. The teacher gives oral instructions:

> You are in the parking lot on Monkey Street. … Turn left on Javelina Street. … Go two blocks to Giraffe Park. …

The teacher walks around the room while giving the instructions and can see whether students' cars are at the right place at every stage, thus being able to help those who need it. And if all students seem to be following instructions with ease, the teacher can add a little more challenge, speeding up the language or offering more complex directions:

> Now make a U-turn, go two blocks, and turn right. Do you see the Little Cat Café? Don't stop there; keep going until you get to Old King Mighty Food—it's a huge grocery store right before the river.

Seeing answers

You can improve any question-and-answer task by applying the *See It* idea—for instance, when you ask questions about an audio text or about a reading text, or even when you ask for students' opinions. Resist the temptation to ask students to raise their hands to answer. This tends to give an artificial picture of student participation. The same students tend to answer, and we have no idea how to gauge whether those who don't raise their hands understand.

Instead, distribute to each student two small squares of paper, one green and one red. Ask Yes/No questions or give True/False statements. For each Yes/No question, every student responds by raising one of the colored papers: green for "Yes" and red for "No." Adding a third paper, a white square to mean "I'm not sure," is even better. It allows students to take part while admitting they do not have an answer yet. The teacher can spare these students stress by not calling on them or asking them follow-up questions. A large number of "I'm not sure" squares are a signal that students need to listen to the text again.

The *See It* tactic works with all sorts of questions, not just Yes/No questions. Try asking personal opinion questions to the entire class, with each student signaling an answer through movement.

Teacher: Stand up if you like ice cream.
Sit down.
Stand up if your favorite color is blue.
Sit down.
Stand up if you drank tea this morning.
Sit down.

Try Yes/No questions the next day. Tell students to stand up for a "Yes" answer.

Teacher: Are you 38 years old?
Is today Tuesday?
Am I wearing glasses?
Do you like eating snakes?
Do you like rainy weather?
Are the windows open?
Is Shanghai the capital of China?

The next day, mix things up: tell students to stand up for a "No" answer.

You can even practice grammar forms in listening. Here is an example where students are required to understand and differentiate between events associated with certain times—in this case, present perfect vs. simple past structures. A warning, though: avoid the trap of naming or explaining the grammar. Once that happens, you are no longer doing a listening activity.

> Who has had coffee before?
>
> Who bought a coffee somewhere yesterday?
>
> Who had coffee this morning?

Who hasn't had any coffee this week?

Who has tried iced coffee?

Who has never had iced coffee?

Who had iced coffee this morning?

Who didn't have iced coffee this morning?

We can also introduce variability into student responses. Write guidelines on the board:

Yes	No	Sometimes
Stand up	Remain seated	Wave your arms

And we can easily go beyond Yes/No questions. Here is a guideline for responding to questions of "How often … ?":

How often do you brush your teeth in the morning?

How often do you go swimming on weekends?

How often do you see monkeys on your way to school?

Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Jump up	Hold a book in the air	Put one hand in the air	Put your hands over your eyes

These simple tasks, led by the teacher and with virtually no preparation, can considerably increase student listening time. Students give responses during listening, and teachers can discern who understands throughout.

3. KEEP IT SHORT

For most of the above activities, the teacher is the source of the audio. Thus, the teacher can provide pauses for students to do something during the activities. But often, you will want to use recordings, too. The Internet offers a practically unlimited source of audio files, many of which are free.

It's best to work with very short audios. By "short" I mean from a few seconds in length up to a minute. What are the advantages of using short audios? Short audios mean short activities. Short activities require little preparation. You don't need to make handouts. You can write a gap fill on the board. You can dictate. Short activities are easy to squeeze into the class schedule. And there's even a benefit to classroom discipline. Short audios get students to quiet down and focus. They shush each other so as not to miss the beginning. They are like 50-meter sprinters, bracing themselves and cocking their heads to hear the starting gun. They know that there is little chance that a ten-second audio will bore them.

All these benefits make short audios low-risk, too. If an activity based on a 20-second audio goes wrong, there's little harm done. But if a long-audio activity (say, one that is based on a ten-minute speech) goes wrong, the teacher has wasted a lot of time—the teacher's own and the students'. For Scrivener (2005, 176), "[t]wo minutes of recorded material is enough to provide a lot of listening work," while Rost (2002, 145) reminds us of the "well-known limitations to short-term memory that occur after 60 to 90 seconds of listening." Lewis and Hill (1985) put the concentration of lower-level students at about 20 seconds. For the average teacher, this is great news: preparing short audio takes very little time.

Some secondary-school students may be preparing for university classes where they will listen to long lectures in English. Your short activities will help them, too. Just increase the level of difficulty by finding audios that are faster or that contain more complex vocabulary. These activities will build confidence, give students practice with authentic spoken language, and increase students' awareness of reduced forms.

4. PLAY IT AGAIN

In the summer of 2003, I was studying Russian in the United States. My teacher played a Russian song in class one day. She had prepared a gap fill with about 12 words missing. It was exciting because as a teacher myself I had used songs hundreds of times, but this was, amazingly, my first time experiencing a gap-fill song as a learner.

I wrote down missing words as the song played. But I couldn't write them all; there just wasn't time. When the song ended, we checked answers. The teacher called on me once. That was for a word I just didn't happen to catch—one of the two words I'd missed. Somehow that didn't feel fair. The teacher—who was actually wonderful—had decided to play the song only once, perhaps because it was four minutes long and playing it again might have seemed like a waste of class time. Playing the audio just once, though, was a mistake. It meant that none of us had a chance to succeed at the task as it was designed, to understand and fill in all the missing words. It is too bad we didn't repeat the song, perhaps playing it in segments and repeating certain lines multiple times.

Most trainers and course books recommend playing an audio two or three times. Sometimes that's enough. But a better rule of thumb is to play the audio (or speak it) as many times as the students need in order to succeed at the task. That is another benefit of *keeping it short*: you can play or speak the audio again and again, and students can succeed at the task, without a huge investment of class time.

Students should have specific tasks, something to do during the audio, and that enables the teacher to monitor progress and comprehension. Everybody wins.

Longer audios can—as we've mentioned—always be segmented, turned into short audios. These segments can be played over and over. All the while, students should have specific tasks, something to do during the audio, and that enables the teacher to monitor progress and comprehension. Everybody wins.

5. CHANGE IT UP

Increasing the variety of our audio sources will make bringing more listening to the class easy. Below are some of the choices you will make when selecting an audio.

Recorded audios or teacher's voice?

The teacher's voice is a great audio source. Give your students a do-during task, and then provide them with content: read a newspaper headline, recite a short poem, or sing a song. Audio recordings work well, too, and thousands are available for free on the Internet. Sources for freely downloadable audible content include American English (americanenglish.state.gov), English Teachers Everywhere (www.etseverywhere.com), BBC Learning English (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish), and sources mentioned in the sections below.

Non-authentic or authentic texts?

Non-authentic texts are designed for learners of English, not for native speakers. Voice of America's Special English recordings (learningenglish.voanews.com) are read at two-thirds normal speed and are, thus, not authentic. When a teacher reads a dictation to the class, this is also non-authentic. It is not a natural form of communication; it is an exercise to learn English. However, non-authentic recordings are useful: their clarity and limited vocabulary allow students to understand large chunks of English.

Outside the classroom, authentic texts are much more common. These are real, natural communications, intended for purposes beyond English learning. A radio advertisement to sell soap is authentic because the goal is to sell a product, not to teach

English. A conversation in English in a café is also authentic.

Teachers should not avoid using authentic texts just because they have low-level students or because they think authentic texts are too difficult. The teacher's task is to design the listening activity so that students will succeed, whatever the text. Keeping that text short will almost always help.

Scripted or unscripted texts?

We can make a further distinction among authentic texts. Some are scripted (or written), while others happen spontaneously. The dialogue in a TV show or film is usually scripted. So are the lyrics to songs. These scripted texts are still authentic, though, since they are created for entertainment and not for language learning.

Unscripted language develops spontaneously, like the conversations you have every day with friends and family. Interview responses are usually unscripted. The interviewee may have a general plan but is not reading the answers. It is in unscripted language where we find the most examples of reduced speech, and so it is important that we provide our students the opportunity to experience and decipher these potential points of frustration. A good source for free unscripted audios is the English Language Listening Lab Online (elllo.org).

Native speakers or non-native speakers?

Listen to CNN or BBC news and you will hear reporters from Scotland, Abu Dhabi, South Africa, and Argentina, among other places. Your students, if they travel, are more likely to encounter other second-language English speakers than native English speakers (Graddol 2006). Non-native English speech can be as authentic as native English speech. Students need to hear a variety of English accents and dialects. They do not need repeat-after-the-audio drills, though; reproducing dozens of accents is not the goal. Instead, listening practice that leads toward understanding the broad array of 21st-century Englishes is the goal. If anything, we as teachers should probably increase listening practice from non-native-speaking sources. Even more than a decade ago, in 2004, 74 percent of 750 million international travelers were non-native English speakers traveling to non-English-speaking countries (Graddol 2006). What does that tell us about sticking only to native English models of speech?

Give students variety. Expose them to a wide range of English. Let them understand that English does not have one single correct form.

Furthermore, native English itself is full of dialects. Give students variety. Expose them to a wide range of English. Let them understand that English does not have one single correct form. This exposure may have the added benefit of letting students realize that their own variety of English is perfectly legitimate and has a rightful place in the world of communication.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

I hope I have convinced you that adding listening activities to the class hour need not be difficult. But I realize that for many, there are obstacles. The curriculum, for instance, is packed. Teachers may have little time to add anything. In this case, think *small*; think *short*. Reminder: an audio text can be a few seconds long. Dictate a single sentence now and then.

For other teachers, the problem is technical. They have no audios, no CD player or cassette player—or they have one, but the class is just too huge and noisy for students to hear the audio. There are possible solutions here. Use your voice as the audio source. Bring in a guest. Is there a video player at school? Use that for audio only. Ask your school to purchase an MP3 player, or borrow one from somebody. Take the students to the computer lab. Or use your phone; today many cell phones can play audio files. Of course, they

won't be audible to the whole class, so change the arrangement: bring the students to the audio source. Create a listening station in the corner of the class where a few students at a time rotate in to listen. Whatever solution you find, keeping the audios short and making sure students have a task to complete when they listen are the keys to productive listening practice.

CONCLUSION

Many students of English eventually travel abroad, where they are shocked to discover how unprepared they are for understanding real speech—whether native or non-native English. A teacher who attended one of my training workshops had had that experience: "After studying English for many years," she said, "I was able to understand only my teachers, nobody else."

Comments like that one are evidence that students are not getting the listening practice they deserve. So often, we are sidetracked from listening goals and drift back towards the familiar safety of teaching vocabulary and grammar. We need more listening for the sake of listening. We need to give students practice. We need to give them while-listening practice. And it can be easy to do. Keep audios short. Let listeners respond right away. Make sure their responses are visible; make sure that you can discern how much they understand and can measure the progress they make. Take advantage of the huge variety of listening texts available on the Internet.

Keep in mind how important it is to have your students "do nothing but listen." You can, of course, keep teaching vocabulary, writing, reading, and speaking. But don't let those activities steal from the listening portion of class.

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APPENDIX

Answer Key to "Quiz" on What Constitutes Real Listening Practice

Note: These answers are the opinion of the author and are not definitive.

1. **Yes.** It's a type of dictation. Students are writing down words that they hear. Writing is involved, but the primary emphasis is on listening. It sounds like fun, too! Besides, students will need to practice listening while there's lots of noise around. That happens in real life. This task might not be the greatest listening task ever invented, but it's worth doing now and then. We like variety.

2. **Yes.** This is a picture dictation. Students must listen and understand, and they immediately draw. It's a useful comprehension task.

3. **No.** Students are working on vocabulary. They are not actively engaged in any listening.

4. **Sort of.** Students listen closely and write the missing words simultaneously. I say "sort of" here because when there is a lot of text, students are likely to rely primarily on their reading skills. Sort-of listening activities are okay sometimes—as long as we have a lot of variety and are also doing true listening activities.

5. **No.** This is reading and enunciation practice. Does one student truly listen (and do something) while the other reads? I say no.

6. **Sort of.** Students may get some listening practice here. Or they may understand almost nothing. It really depends on how the teacher speaks. And does the teacher provide some "do-during" tasks? Natural, spontaneous talk is helpful now and then, but it should not entirely replace well-designed do-during activities.

7. **No.** Answering comprehension questions does not really constitute listening. Yes, students have to comprehend the teacher's questions, but the audio text is no longer playing. This is more of a memory test. Students can remain quiet and hope the teacher does not call on them. Very little listening is going on at this stage.