

Independent listening task: How to write a summary using note-taking skills

Level: ISE III

Focus: Independent listening task

Aims: Listening for gist and listening for detailed information

Objectives: To identify the main ideas in a listening task, to develop summarising and note-taking skills

Topic: Listening skills

Language functions: Summarising

Lexis: Language related to listening skills, signposting words and expressions (eg firstly, to conclude)

Materials needed: One worksheet per student and the audio script for, or an online connection to play, a news item or the '5 ways to listen better' TED talk (see pages 59-60)

Timing: 45-60 minutes

Preparation

1. Print or copy one worksheet per student.
2. Find a news report in English of two to three minutes or listen to the TED talk '5 ways to listen better'. Prepare to read out the audio script in class (see pages 59-60 for the TED talk) or to play the audio during the class. Alternatively, you could make a recording to play in class.

In class

1. Tell the students they are going to spend this lesson developing their summarising and note-taking skills in preparation for the ISE III Independent listening task. This task involves students listening to spoken English in the form of, for example, lectures, complex discussions, debates, podcasts, radio programmes or documentaries. After the first listening they report the gist in a few words. During the second listening they can take notes. After the second listening they have one minute to give an answer to the examiner's summary question using their notes.
2. Ask the students what is meant by the term 'gist'. Write some of their ideas on the board. For example, explain that gist is the main focus of the discussion, the main idea.
3. Ask the students what they understand by 'a summary'. Write some of their ideas on the board. Explain that a summary is selecting the main points from all the information given, and then putting them all together in a logical order.
4. Explain to the students that for the ISE III Independent listening task, they will be given a blank piece of paper to make notes on. However, for this task they will use a worksheet, which will help them to make notes during the Independent listening task in the exam. Inform the students that in today's lesson, they will also practise this part of the test. Write '**What is a summary?**' in large letters on the board. Ask the following questions in open-class (the correct answers are in brackets):
 - ▶ Does a summary include background to the issue? (no)
 - ▶ Does a summary include small details? (no)
 - ▶ Does a summary include the student's own views? (no)
 - ▶ Does a summary include data (eg 23% of homeowners) (no)
 - ▶ Does a summary involve detailed explanations? (no)
 - ▶ Does a summary involve direct quotes? (no)
5. Warm-up discussion: Write the following on the board in large letters '**Summarise the talk in five sentences**'. Explain that they will practise the skill of 'summarising' today. Put the students into pairs and give out one worksheet per student, asking them to discuss all of the questions in task 1. Give the students approximately five to eight minutes to complete this task.
6. Go through the answers to task 1 in open-class. Write up the answers, if necessary.

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7. Explain to the students that they are now going to listen to some audio. The first time they are only listening for gist. Play or read the recording.
8. Now ask the students to discuss with their partner what the gist of the talk was. If you are using the TED talk, possible answers include: '*we are not listening anymore*', '*we are not listening properly*', '*our listening skills are becoming worse*', and '*listening skills need to be taught in schools*'.
9. Now explain to the students that they are going to listen for a second time, but this time they will be making notes to enable them to give a summary of the talk. Ask them to make notes as they listen in the boxes in task 2 on the student worksheet.
10. Play or read the recording for a second time.
11. Go through the notes the students have made in open-class, encouraging feedback from each group. Decide as a class which of the main points should be included in a summary.
12. In pairs, tell students they are going to work together to build a summary (task 3 on their worksheet). If you are using the TED talk, you could write the following on the board to help the students focus on the main information:
 - ▶ **Current situation**
 - ▶ **Some key techniques for listening**
 - ▶ **How to improve our listening**
 - ▶ **Why we need to improve our listening**
13. Listen to some pairs giving their summaries orally (the number will depend on class sizes etc but shouldn't last more than 15 minutes). Give feedback and encourage other students to also give feedback by asking them to score each pair from 1-10 as they hear it. Ask the students why the summary with the highest mark scored so highly.

Extension activity

The more advanced students can practise retelling the talk which should involve giving as much information about the talk as possible.

Further support activity

Students finding the task difficult can be asked to listen to the first part of the talk and the last part, this will give them two main points, or they can be asked to listen to the middle part to get the gist.

Homework

Ask students to find another talk about something related to their homework that week and do the same exercise.

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Task 2 – Listening

1. Listen to the recording for the first time and answer the following question:

What is the gist of what the speaker is talking about?

2. Now listen to the recording a second time and make notes on the key points.

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Task 3

Make a summary of the key points made during the talk.

Answers: How to write a summary using note-taking skills

1. What makes a good summary?

Selecting the main points from the information given, and then putting it all together logically. Use these keywords to explain: *general, essential, concise, connected, logical*.

2. Which of the following might be included in a summary?

Essential information, the main idea and why it's relevant, a conclusion.

3. How should you decide what to include in the summary?

Which points are mentioned, and then developed, with possible examples given. Also, sequencing words and cohesive devices (signposting words) are a good indicator for when a main point is being mentioned.

4. The gist of what the speaker is talking about (for TED talk '5 ways to listen better')

The importance of listening skills, why they are in decline, and why they need to be improved so we can all live in peace and harmony.

Task 3 – Model answer of summary (for TED talk '5 ways to listen better')

We need to improve our listening skills as they are getting worse. We are able to distinguish sounds from one another, for example, when our name is called in a crowded place. If we focus on listening to something we have better results. The skill to listen is being lost in part, because of advanced recording technology so, we can hear things again and again. In addition to this, the world is noisy so it's tiring to listen.

We are also very busy therefore we're becoming impatient and we're becoming desensitised as all sorts of media is thrown at us. It's vitally important that we listen to each other as listening creates understanding.

In order to improve our listening skills, the lecturer recommends: three minutes of silence per day, focusing on hearing the different streams of sound wherever you are, focusing on everyday sounds and making them special, for example, the sound of your tumble dryer. Finally, by practising all of these techniques, you can improve your listening skills. He also suggests that you could ensure you appreciate who is talking to you by making little noises like '*hmm, oh*' etc and asking your interlocutor questions.

We need to listen to each other to stay connected. We need to teach it in schools so that everyone knows how to do it. It is possible to do this to create a world of connection, understanding and peace.

Audio script of TED talk '5 ways to listen better'

Read out this tape script as naturally as you can (normal speed delivery, or record it and play it back in class).

We are losing our listening. We spend roughly 60 per cent of our communication time listening, but we're not very good at it. We retain just 25 per cent of what we hear. Now not you, not this talk, but that is generally true. Let's define listening as making meaning from sound. It's a mental process, and it's a process of extraction.

We use some pretty cool techniques to do this. One of them is pattern recognition. So in a cocktail party like this, if I say, 'David, Sara, pay attention' – Some of you just sat up. We recognise patterns to distinguish noise from signal, and especially our name. Differencing is another technique we use. If I left this pink noise on for more than a couple of minutes, you would literally cease to hear it. We listen to differences, we discount sounds that remain the same.

And then there is a whole range of filters. These filters take us from all sound down to what we pay attention to. Most people are entirely unconscious of these filters. But they actually create our reality in a way, because they tell us what we're paying attention to right now. I'll give you one example of that: intention is very important in sound, in listening. When I married my wife, I promised her that I would listen to her every day as if for the first time. Now that's something I fall short of on a daily basis. But it's a great intention to have in a relationship.

But that's not all. Sound places us in space and in time. If you close your eyes right now in this room, you're aware of the size of the room from the reverberation and the bouncing of the sound off the surfaces. And you're aware of how many people are around you because of the micro-noises you're receiving. And sound places us in time as well, because sound always has time embedded in it. In fact, I would suggest that our listening is the main way that we experience the flow of time from past to future. So, 'Sonority is time and meaning' – a great quote.

I said at the beginning, we're losing our listening. Why did I say that? Well there are a lot of reasons for this. First of all, we invented ways of recording – first writing, then audio recording and now video recording as well. The premium on accurate and careful listening has simply disappeared. Secondly, the world is now so noisy, with this cacophony going on visually and auditorily, it's just hard to listen; it's tiring to listen. Many people take refuge in headphones, but they turn big, public spaces like this, shared soundscapes, into millions of tiny, little personal sound bubbles. In this scenario, nobody's listening to anybody.

We're becoming impatient. We don't want oratory anymore, we want sound bites. And the art of conversation is being replaced – dangerously, I think – by personal broadcasting. I don't know how much listening there is in this conversation, which is sadly very common, especially in the UK. We're becoming desensitised. Our media have to scream at us with these kinds of headlines in order to get our attention. And that means it's harder for us to pay attention to the quiet, the subtle, the understated.

This is a serious problem that we're losing our listening. This is not trivial. Because listening is our access to understanding. Conscious listening always creates understanding. And only without conscious listening can these things happen – a world where we don't listen to each other at all, is a very scary place indeed. So I'd like to share with you five simple exercises, tools you can take away with you, to improve your own conscious listening. Would you like that?

Good.

The first one is silence. Just three minutes a day of silence is a wonderful exercise to reset your ears and to recalibrate so that you can hear the quiet again. If you can't get absolute silence, go for quiet, that's absolutely fine.

Second, I call this the mixer. So even if you're in a noisy environment like this – and we all spend a lot of time in places like this – listen in the coffee bar to how many channels of sound can I hear? How many individual channels in that mix am I listening to? You can do it in a beautiful place as well, like in a lake. How many birds am I hearing? Where are they? Where are those ripples? It's a great exercise for improving the quality of your listening.

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Third, this exercise I call savouring, and this is a beautiful exercise. It's about enjoying mundane sounds. This, for example, is my tumble dryer. It's a waltz – One, two, three, One, two, three, One, two, three. I love it. Or just try this one on for size (the sound of a coffee grinder). Wow! So mundane sounds can be really interesting if you pay attention. I call that the hidden choir. It's around us all the time.

The next exercise is probably the most important of all of these, if you just take one thing away. This is listening positions – the idea that you can move your listening position to what's appropriate to what you're listening to. This is playing with those filters. You remember, I gave you those filters at the beginning. It's starting to play with them as levers, to get conscious about them and to move to different places. These are just some of the listening positions, or scales of listening positions, that you can use. There are many. Have fun with that. It's very exciting.

And finally, an acronym. You can use this in listening, in communication. If you're in any one of those roles – and I think that probably is everybody who's listening to this talk – the acronym is RASA, which is the Sanskrit word for juice or essence. And RASA stands for Receive, which means pay attention to the person; Appreciate, making little noises like 'hmm,' 'oh,' 'okay'; Summarise, the word 'so' is very important in communication; and Ask, ask questions afterwards.

Now sound is my passion, it's my life. I wrote a whole book about it. So I live to listen. That's too much to ask for most people. But I believe that every human being needs to listen consciously in order to live fully – connected in space and in time to the physical world around us, connected in understanding to each other, not to mention spiritually connected, because every spiritual path I know of has listening and contemplation at its heart.

That's why we need to teach listening in our schools as a skill. Why is it not taught? It's crazy. And if we can teach listening in our schools, we can take our listening off that slippery slope to that dangerous, scary world that I talked about and move it to a place where everybody is consciously listening all the time – or at least capable of doing that.

Now I don't know how to do that, but this is TED, and I think the TED community is capable of anything. So I invite you to connect with me, connect with each other, take this mission out and let's get listening taught in schools, and transform the world in one generation to a conscious listening world – a world of connection, a world of understanding and a world of peace.

Thank you for listening to me today.

Source: www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_5_ways_to_listen_better