

Independent Listening Task: Prisons

At a glance

Level: ISE III

Focus: Independent listening task

Aims: Students practise listening to a lecture, first for gist, then for detail, and taking notes while listening

Objectives: Students show that they are able to place information in a wider context, they clearly distinguish main and subordinate points and recognise the speaker's line of argument and they infer meaning of unfamiliar words

Topic: Prisons

Language functions: Summarising information, ideas and arguments, deducing, inferring and expressing opinions tentatively

Grammar: Mixed conditionals, correct verb patterns after *wish* and *hope*, verbs followed by gerund and/ or infinitive and complex forms of the passive with modals

Lexis: Vocabulary related to crime and punishment

Materials needed: Whiteboard, paper and pens, recording of the transcript or the transcript for the teacher to read from, one copy of the student worksheet per student and copies of the transcript for weaker students

Timing: 85 minutes

Procedure

Preparation

1. Pre-record the audio if possible. If not, you will need to read the tape script yourself in class.
2. Make one copy of the student worksheet per student.

In class

1. Tell students they are going to perform a listening task similar to that in the ISE III Speaking & Listening exam. Tell them the listening will be about the arguments for and against prisons. Ask the class to give you one argument for and one argument against as an example.

2. Divide the students in to small groups of three or four students. Ask half of the groups to list arguments in favour of prisons, and the other half to list arguments against. Give the students 10 minutes to complete this task.
3. Divide the board into two columns:

For	Against

Elicit an argument from each group and summarise in the correct column on the board.

4. Give out the student worksheet. Ask the students to read question 1. Explain that the summary should include the main topics of the lecture, and the conclusion reached. Play or read the tape script, then give the students 5 minutes to write their answer to question 1.
5. While students are writing, monitor and identify 2 or 3 good summaries to use as model answers. Ask these students to write their answers on the board. *See the model summary on the answer sheet to help you to identify good summaries.*
6. Tell students they will now hear the listening again and ask them to read question 2.
7. Play or read the tape script, then give the students 10 minutes to write their answers to question 2.
8. Give students 5 minutes to compare their answers with a partner.
9. Elicit answers and add to columns on board (see answer sheet).
10. In pairs, students discuss the questions in 3 on the student worksheet. Monitor and note down errors. After 10 minutes, stop the students and write up any common errors on the board.

Extension activity

Students who are able to complete the worksheet after listening just once can be asked to note down new vocabulary during the second listening. They can then check spelling against the audio script.

Further support activity

Students who struggle during the first listening can be provided with the audio script during the second listening.

After class

Assign each student a position (for or against prisons). Ask them to expand, develop and memorise their arguments for a debate in the following lesson.

Audio Script

Academic lecture – semi-formal presentational speed and style some foregrounding of main points.

In this brief talk I am going to present some of the arguments for and against prisons, which you can then explore further in your seminar groups. Let's start with the arguments in favour. Prison advocates say that depriving criminals of their liberty is an effective way of shaming and punishing them. Furthermore, prisons ensure that offenders are out of circulation and that they cannot commit more crime while they are inside. A further argument is that prison acts as a deterrent to would-be offenders.

Critics contend that subjecting a human-being to decades of monotonous hopelessness in a living tomb is an inhumane punishment. Furthermore, prison does not force people to take responsibility for their actions or face up to what they have done. On the contrary, many people who spend a significant time in prison seem to become further accustomed to criminal attitudes and emerge less able to function normally in society. Prisoners experience long-term isolation from the rest of society, and often lose their jobs, homes and family ties. This may make them more likely to re-offend.

A counter argument is that there are many education and training schemes in prisons that tackle problems associated with re-offending. However, it would appear that due to overcrowding and lack of resources, most prisons do not effectively provide such services.

Some people suggest that community penalties are an effective alternative to prison. These punishments focus on criminals giving back to society and changing their behaviour. This type of punishment may be considered better than prison because it does not take offenders away from their families and homes, and provides continuity so that they may continue to work or study. It should also instil a sense of responsibility in the individuals. Research has shown that well-resourced and well-managed community punishments can be very effective in reducing re-offending.

A more extreme argument is that capital and corporal punishment may be more effective than prison. Corporal punishment such as flogging doesn't require that large chunks of a person's life be lost, together with their relationships and mental well-being. Execution is seen by some as an appropriate retributive punishment for the worst crimes; especially as such offenders are unlikely to ever be successfully rehabilitated.

I'll conclude by sharing my own personal opinion. I believe that there is still a place for prisons in our society, although not in their current state. A complete transformation of prison regimes and a system of support for offenders when they are released from jail are entirely necessary. In other words, we need to create prisons with a purpose.

Student Worksheet

Independent Listening Task:
Prisons

Practice for the ISE III Independent listening task.

You're going to hear a lecture about prisons. You will hear it twice.

1. Listen once then write a one or two sentence summary of the lecture.

2. Listen again and complete the table.

Arguments for and against prisons	
Arguments for?	Arguments against?
Extra notes:	

3. **Discuss the following questions in pairs.**

- a) Do you think the speaker adopts a particular position?
- b) Can you think of any further arguments for or against prisons?
- c) What is your personal opinion?

Answer Key

1. Model summary:

The lecturer outlines some arguments in favour of and against prisons, as well as suggesting some alternatives. He concludes that a transformation of the prison system may be necessary.

2.

Arguments for and against prisons
<p>Arguments for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective way of shaming and punishing them. • Offenders out of circulation so cannot commit more crime. • Deterrent. • Education and training schemes prevent re-offense.
<p>Arguments against?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhumane punishment. • Prisoners not forced to take responsibility for their actions. • Prisoners become further accustomed to criminal attitudes. • Prisoners lose contact with society. • Education and training not provided due to overcrowding and lack of resources. • Community penalties, or even capital and corporal punishment, may be effective alternatives.

3.

a) The speaker believes that there is still a place for prisons in our society, although a complete transformation of the system is necessary.

b) Possible answers:

Further Arguments for and against prisons
<p>Arguments for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inmates have the opportunity to receive treatment for drug and alcohol dependencies. • Inmates may receive counselling for psychological problems. • Inmates are not able to hurt themselves.
<p>Arguments against?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May enable gang affiliation. • Paid for by the tax-payer. • Not enough of a deterrent.

c) Students' own answers

Original sources

<http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/page.php?135>

<http://www.philosophersbeard.org/2012/07/why-prison-doesnt-work-and-what-to-do.html>

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jul/27/prisonsandprobation.youthjustice>

<http://www.matrixknowledge.com/vendor/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Matrix-prison-report-2007.pdf>