



MAXIMISE PROGRESS IN LISTENING AT KS2 AND KS3

Turn your students into active listeners – inside and outside the languages classroom – with these practical tips

Make sure listening is an active experience for learners



Students can watch target language YouTube videos for visual cues



PROFILE

Liz Black

Liz has worked cross-phase for many years. She is a member of the ALL Primary Special Interest Group and the ALL Council.



PROFILE

Carol Hughes

Carol worked for over 30 years in secondary schools and is now a trainer for Edexcel. She is also one of our Resource Reviews Editors.

Listening in the context of foreign language learning is not just a neurological process, but also a cognitive one. Not only do listeners hear sounds, they also need to translate those sounds phonetically into words and decode the words and structures to make sense of what they hear. In addition, listening may include understanding nuance through the way the utterance is spoken by the speaker.

Training a pupil at an early stage of their language learning to think about this and the tone of the voice pays dividends. Asking pupils in KS2 to listen carefully and reflect whether they are hearing a happy, joyful sound or possibly an angry or enquiring one supports the point above, helping learners make sense of the sentence or text. Improving learner dispositions, particularly encouraging sustained concentration when listening, is vital to maximise progress.

The listener may have other clues at their disposal to support their understanding of what they hear, such as images or context.

“Listen to an argument on a particular topic and look at the language used to present the pros and cons”

Using video rather than just audio material adds the support of a visual element. It is useful at this point to consider that listening habits are changing. During the recent World Cup, live streaming figures showed that football fans watched games online in record numbers. Music events are also streamed through websites on a bigger scale than ever before. Exploiting this and encouraging listening out of the classroom increases students' exposure to the language.

LEARNING TO LISTEN

Despite best efforts, listening is still particularly challenging, so let's consider how much and what sort of target language listening takes place in the language classroom. Pupils listen to the teacher's instructions and interactions with themselves and the rest of the class. They listen to each other and to recordings linked to the course they are following.

We need to ensure that in the classroom listening is a valued skill, not only used for interaction but also for taking the learning of the language forward. It is important to discuss longer term goals with learners and encourage reflection on how they listen in their own language, such as listening to TV, a song or instructions at home. The sooner they realise that listening in the target language needs to be an active experience, the greater the chance of encouraging a sense of ongoing success. According to student voice surveys,

many pupils feel that listening is a test so it is important to adopt a teaching and not a testing approach. Using your voice or recordings as a regular teaching activity, ideally some form of listening every lesson, even in short bursts, will help learners to develop these vital skills effectively.

1 TEACHING PHONICS helps beginner learners to understand links between the spoken and written word and supports them in decoding word meanings. Games can encourage learners to discriminate between similar words and sounds and can be followed up with creative activities, such as practising their own dialogues, using apps like Texting Story, or writing poems. This approach, frequently used in KS2, is equally effective in Year 7.

2 PLAN PRE-LISTENING TASKS, such as the teaching of new, potentially tricky vocabulary. Ensure students focus on the context and any visual clues, which can support understanding. Start by listening to certain words, order particular words as they are heard, or focus on how many times a word is heard. Ticking words as they are heard from a list can engage students and support them.

If you consider a listening task particularly difficult then think about whether reading

“A listening resource is only as difficult as what teachers want learners to do with it”

the task out first may yield more gains. Don't hesitate to use a transcript. Martine Pillette suggests that changing words encourages pupils to really concentrate on identifying which words have been changed and can be motivating and increase engagement. Activities such as listening and saying the next word when the teacher pauses, can precede comprehension work.

3 DIFFERENTIATING TASKS by suggesting initially that students have to identify when they have heard an answer without writing it down will support those more challenged by listening. You can adapt activities to be more manageable. A listening resource is only as difficult as what teachers want learners to do with it. Offer support where necessary, chunking down longer listening tasks. Listening should never be a memory task. Select material by considering carefully the level of difficulty and its length, and be aware of those who

find it too challenging by looking at students' body language.

4 INCREASING THE CHALLENGE. Listening can also be used to improve both the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

Harvesting really useful phrases from a listening task and then working with these ensures they will become part of students' active working vocabulary. Listening to an argument about a particular topic, working out who is presenting which point of view and the type of language used to present the pros and cons of an argument, can maximise progress and support spoken and written language production.

5 SORTING ACTIVITIES work well with songs and YouTube clips, as do gap fill tasks. When using the latter, it is worth putting the words to be inserted at the side and in alphabetical order.

Listening for gist and listening for pleasure should be promoted. Listening for pleasure can introduce a greater cultural element through songs and the numerous wonderful videos of target language countries on the internet. These might just get students 'hooked' so that they enjoy learning languages as much as we do!