

1. Receptive Skills

The two receptive skills are reading and listening. There are several similarities between teaching them so the general description to be given here applies both to listening and reading. Though reading and listening are receptive skills it does not mean that the reader or the listener is only a passive participant of communication, as both skills involve active participation. Reading and listening are sources of both finely- and roughly-tuned input.

1.1. Reasons for reading and listening

We can divide reasons for reading and listening into two broad categories: instrumental and pleasurable listening or reading. We can speak about instrumental reading or listening when we want to achieve some clear aim. For example, we read instructions on a machine because we want to know how to operate it. A brochure is read if tourists need some pieces of information about a spot of interest etc. Pleasurable reading or listening takes place for pleasure. People read magazines or listen to a talk on the radio to while away their free time. In both types of reading/listening readers/listeners are interested in the topics either because they find them useful or because they find them interesting.

1.2. Sub-skills of Receptive Skills

According to Harmer (2003) the processes we go through when reading a short story or listening to a poem are likely to be different from those we use when we are looking for some data in a manual or we want to know how to operate a machine. The use of these different skills will depend on what we are reading or listening for. While reading a text we use the following sub-skills:

- ✚ **identifying the topic** – readers and listeners are able to identify the topic of a text very fast with the help of their techniques of how to get into the idea of what is being talked/written about. This identifying ability makes it possible for them to process the text more effectively.
- ✚ **predictive skills** – having identified the topic both readers and listeners guess what is being written or talked about. They try to predict what is coming. Their subsequent reading or listening helps them to confirm their expectations of what they have predicted.
- ✚ **skimming** – this term means to get a quick idea of the gist of a text while running your eyes over it. It is very useful for the teachers to ask their students to have a quick look at the text before plunging into it for detail to get some specific pieces of information.
- ✚ **scanning** – this term means reading or listening for specific information. In contrast to reading and listening for gist we often read or listen to a text because we need specific details. For example, we want to read about the weather or we want to extract some facts from the news.
- ✚ **extensive reading** – means reading/listening for pleasure. We use this type of reading/listening while reading an interesting model or a short story or an article taken from a popular paper etc.
- ✚ **intensive reading** – means reading/listening for detailed information. Sometimes we read/listen to a text in order to understand everything we are reading in detail. We use this technique when we want to understand instructions or directions or when we are preparing for an exam.
- ✚ **interpreting texts** – this sub-skill is used by readers/listeners if they want to understand the meaning of words beyond the literal meanings. Successful interpretation of this kind depends on shared schemata between the speaker and the listener and the writer or the reader. The question 'Can you tell me the time?' is not to be answered in the following way: 'Yes, I can.' but the reply must refer to a time expression such as 'It's nine o'clock.'

- ✦ **inferring opinion and attitude** – a good reader/listener will know from various clues he receives, whether the writer or speaker approves of the topic he is discussing, or whether his opinion of the person he is describing is favourable or not. It is based on the recognition of linguistic style.

1.3. Methodological Principles for Teaching Receptive Skills

Listening is the skill that children acquire first. When students start to acquire a foreign language, they can pick it up in many ways. They have a lot of extracurricular sources (songs, films, native speakers, etc) at hand. The same refers to reading, students can benefit from walking in the street when they read various boards or signs written in English as well as English food labels at supermarkets. The reading process can be subdivided into two stages: decoding and interpreting. When we speak about teaching receptive skills, we have to emphasize the importance of choosing an age-relevant, interesting or useful content which is practicable in everyday life. Let us focus on the content, purpose of reading/listening and the expectations of readers and listeners.

1.3.1. The content of the texts

As it has already been mentioned, we can distinguish instrumental and pleasurable reading/listening. In instrumental reading the usefulness of texts is very significant so we can say that the texts must meet the requirements of communicative language teaching according to which the texts must be experiential which means they should contain very useful and practicable words and expressions for everyday life. Authentic texts must be used so that the learners should not have any difficulty decoding brochures, manuals, instructions in the target country. To meet the demands of pleasurable reading and listening we have to choose stories, articles, novels, etc which are age-relevant and which deal with the problems of the target group of learners. The category of interest includes reading and listening for enjoyment, pleasure and intellectual stimulation. People read/listen to language because they have a purpose for doing so. The purpose may be to discover how to operate a hot-drinks machine or to have a pleasurable reading. The purpose may be to find out what has been happening in the world.

1.3.2. Methodological Steps of Developing Receptive Skills

In a lesson when the teacher's aim is to develop receptive skills the first step to do is to introduce the topic of reading/listening. So, the first step to do is planning a warm-up activity. When we want our students to read a text about London for example, we are supposed to show a picture of London or to present a song about the capital of Great Britain etc. Here we have to exploit the following characteristic of language users, he will have expectations about what he is going to read/hear before he does so. A reader who sees the headline 'Storm in the Houses of Parliament' expects to read about a political debate in the British Parliament. So, when we choose a text, we are to activate the predictive skills of our students. The learners are expected to extract the specific information from the text and they are expected to find out one or two facts. That is the reason why we always have to set **pre-reading/pre-listening tasks** before reading or listening. At this stage the teacher aims to focus the students' attention on certain facts mentioned in the reading/listening. The next purpose of the teacher will be to sustain the students' attention while they are reading/listening to the extract. As a **while-reading/listening task** a teacher can ask the students to underline certain words or phrases or on hearing certain facts or data the students can clap or raise their hands.

After reading/listening to a text the students are expected to do some **post-reading/listening tasks**. They have to get the general picture which means that they have to infer the opinion or attitude of the writer or the speaker. The ability to infer opinion and attitude is largely based on the recognition of linguistic style and its use to achieve appropriate purposes. Another post reading/listening task for the teacher can be to make students deduce meaning from context. The point is that the deducing of meaning is important for a language user who will often mean unknown words and we will try to train students in the same way to guess the meaning of unknown words. Teachers can make students recognise discourse markers, styles and registers as well. It is important for the teachers to develop students' discourse competence in addition to their linguistic/grammatical competence as well. Teachers are also expected to focus on the intercultural aspects of language teaching. This is the way how social-linguistic competence of students can be developed. For example, London can be

compared to Budapest as a post-reading/listening task. On requiring our students to use synonyms, antonyms and circumlocution the teachers can develop students' strategic competence as well. This is the way how we can develop reading/listening skills in a communicative way.

Bloom's Taxonomy has been one of the most influential books in planning reading tasks and has been widely used by American educators in planning their teaching programme. The following categories can be used to develop students' thinking skills while they are reading a story. This is the way how teachers can make reading a story a holistic activity.

Category	Thinking process cues
Knowledge (remembering and retaining)	Say what you know, what you remember. What happened in the story?
Comprehension (interpreting and understanding)	Describe in your own words, say what it means, explain, compare, relate. Why did it happen that way!
Application (making use of the story)	How can you use it? Where does it lead to? What would you have done in a situation like this?
Analysis (taking apart)	What are the parts, the order, the reason, the solutions? Which part did you like best?
Synthesis (putting together)	Develop, create in your own way. What did you think of the story!
Evaluation (judging and assessing)	How would you judge it? Will it work?

In: Bloom, B. S. (1956)

Adapted from Applied Linguistics I
for BA Students in English

NOW HEAR THIS! Teaching Listening

TASK 1 All ears

In this task, you compare listening to English inside the classroom and listening to your first language in real life.

Complete the following table; it compares listening to LI *outside* the classroom with listening to English *inside* the classroom.

Listening in the English Classroom		Listening in the real world (L1)	
Reasons we listen	Things we listen to	Reasons we listen	Things we listen to

Listening tasks

Step1: In this task you examine and evaluate ten listening activities and decide on their aims. Match each of the Listening aims (1-10) in the table below with the instructions to the learner in Listening activities A-J by writing the letter of one or more activities (A-J) in the right- hand column. Some aims apply to more than one activity. One example has been done for you.

Listening aims	Listening activity
1 Listening for the main ideas / gist	
2 Listening for specific information	
3 Listening to check if your answers are right or not	
4 Listening to check for mistakes	
5 Listening for dictation	
6 Listening to re-order a jumbled dialogue	
7 Listening to take notes	
8 Listening to complete a picture	
9 Listening to other learners	
10 Listening to match pictures with descriptions	H, D

Listening activity, A

Listen to the story about Michael's big surprise Write down what Michael's big surprise is.

Listening activity, B

Listen to the sequence of sounds on the cassette Make a list of the things you heard, e.g. a *baby crying*, a *door dosing*. **In** pairs, compare lists.

Listening activity, C

Listen to two conversations. What's the time in each conversation? Write the times in numbers.

(Learners cannot see tapescript.)

Presenter: Tapescript 42. Listen and write the times. Conversation 1. *Burglar 1:* What's the time?

Burglar 2: *Ssh!*

Burglar 1: What's the time?

Burglar 2: It's twenty-five to four.

Presenter: Conversation 2.

Man: Excuse me. Could you tell me the time, please?

Woman: Yes, of course. It's quarter to three.

Man: Thank you.

Listening activity, D



Look at the picture and listen to ten sentences. Say together 'Yes, that's right' or 'No, that's wrong'.

Example: The café is number 3.

Listening activity E

Answer these questions about Susan's room. As you listen, note down either *Yes, she has* or *No, she hasn't*.

- 1 Has Susan got a big bookcase? *Yes, she has.*
- 2 Has she got a picture of a kangaroo on the wall? *No, she hasn't.*
- 3 Has she got an easel?
- 4 Has she got two pianos?
- 5 Has she got a cassette player?

Listening activity, F

1. Here is a dialogue between Anna and Mr. Baker. Read it to yourself and put it in the right order.

Mr. Baker How many envelopes? Can I have a newspaper, please?

Anna Can I have a newspaper, please?

Mr. Baker Hello, Anna. I'm fine thanks. And you?

Anna Hello, Mr. Baker. How are you?

Mr. Baker Yes, certainly. Here you are.

Anna Thank you. And can I have Let's see... five pencils, three exercise books, a rubber, and, er, ten envelopes.

Mr. Baker Good.

Anna Ten, please.

Anna I'm Ok, thanks.

Mr. Baker Right. Here you are. Anything else?

2. Now listen to the dialogue. Did you have it right?

Listening activity, G

Show your project to your teacher and your friends. Look at your friends' projects and talk about them.

Listening activity, H

Listen to the recording and put the dialogue in the right order. Then Match a,b,c with Dave's family 1,2,3.

- a. This is my brother Peter.
Is he nice?
No, he isn't. He's horrible.
- b. Who's this.
He's my grandfather.
- c. This is my sister Jane.
Is she nice?
Yes, she is.



1 2 3

Listening activity, I

Listen and write the missing words.

- A Where's Peter ____?
- B ____'s from G____.
- A Is Mary from ____?
- B No, ____ isn't
She ____ from ____ ____.

Listening activity, J

Copy the plan of the empty living room. In the conversation you will hear, a man and a woman are moving house and are bringing their furniture into their living room; as they talk, draw in the furniture. Draw the two sofas, the lamps, the coffee table, the mat, the bookcase, the stereo and the television.

Step2: Discuss the following focus questions:

1. Look at the listening activities A-J again.

a. Which of the activities require a silent response (drawing, writing)?

b. Which activities require a short response (written, spoken)?

c. Which require a longer answer?

d. What are some advantages of making short responses during or immediately after listening?

e. What are some disadvantages of making longer responses during or immediately after listening?

2. Which listening activity from A-J do you prefer? Why?

3. Think of, or find from course books, three other forms of listening activities. What is the aim of each type of task? Give one advantage and one disadvantage of each of the listening activities you found.

Adapted from Tasks for Teacher Education

Please send the completed tables in **Task1 and **step1** and the answers of the questions in **Step 2** in a WORD doc to my email by the 2nd of May.**