

## Reading Homework due Week 5

### Task:

Read the attached text and take notes for the following questions. These are for class group discussion and will not be collected.

Questions:

1. What is the difference between top-down and bottom-up processing? What kind of activities are suitable for focusing on each one?
2. Why do you think it is important to check comprehension using a variety of response types (p.116)? Can you think of more activities using this formula "Listen and ...", for example listen and point, listen and match, etc.
3. Choose a listening material, for example a story or a song video (try YouTube). Think about how you would structure a lesson using the ideas on pp.118-119.

# 4

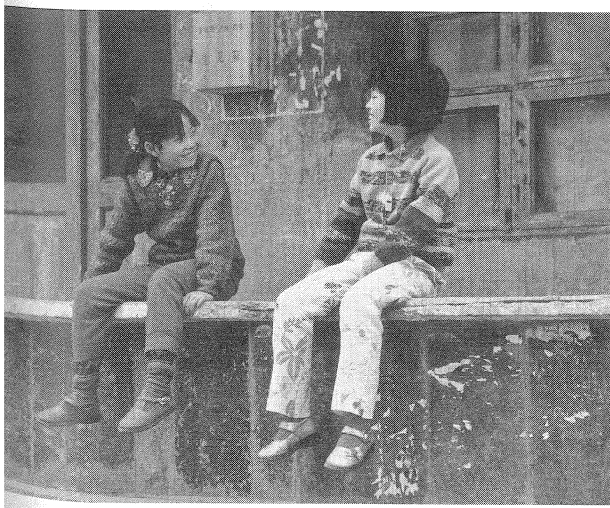
## Teaching Listening and Speaking

### ■ Getting Started

The purpose of this chapter is to look at some basic principles behind the teaching of listening and speaking for young learners. It will explore ways to make listening input comprehensible and check comprehension. In addition, it will look into aspects of vocabulary building and pronunciation work while building communicative abilities of students. This chapter will give examples of specific techniques and activities that are appropriate and effective for primary classrooms. This includes fun activities for teaching aural and oral skills including Total Physical Response, songs, rhymes, chants, games, and more.

#### Think About It

Think about everyday life for a child. What are some real-life examples of listening that a school-aged child might hear? Imagine what they are listening to inside the classroom, outside the classroom, and at home.



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Think about real-life communication that children engage in on a day-to-day basis. What types of conversations are primary school-aged children engaged in? What are the kinds of speaking that children do every day inside the classroom, outside the classroom, and at home.

## Discovery Activity

### Brainstorming Table

Now that you have thought about the kinds of authentic or real-life listening and speaking the young learners are engaged in on a daily basis, write down your ideas in the table below. Also consider the kinds of listening and speaking activities that very young learners versus young learners do every day.

	Listening	Speaking	Both
VYLs	<i>Example: TV cartoons</i>	<i>Example: Singing songs</i>	<i>Example: Buying candy at the store</i>
YLS			

## ■ Theory, Planning and Application

### Considerations for Teaching Listening and Speaking

Now that you have thought about authentic listening and speaking that children do in their real lives, it is important to think about how to incorporate these types of tasks in the classroom. As Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 both emphasize, we should use activities related to children's interests and real lives including their lives in other classes in school. Children may be listening to language while they watch a cartoon on TV or when they hear an announcement by their teacher at school.

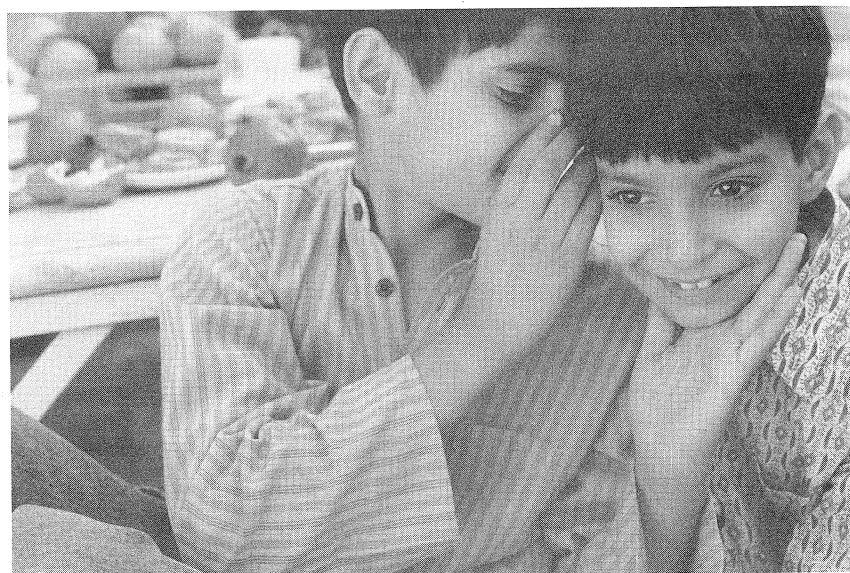
They might listen to their grandmother sing a traditional song or hear a pop song over the radio while in a restaurant. Teachers should try to bring real-life listening like these examples that children can relate to into the classroom. Although there could be some one-way listening, like hearing a song or watching TV, children are also engaged in different kinds of two-way conversations. It is important to teach students to communicate orally in real conversations, recognizing that with real communicative acts it is impossible to separate the skills of listening and speaking. Children might interact with the cashier in a candy store or have a conversation about the school day with their mother during dinner. They often have conversations with their peers about what they like and don't like. The foundation of an effective approach for teaching listening and speaking in the EYL classroom is the use of meaningful text types and a focus on building oral communication skills.

In this part of the chapter, we look at important considerations for teaching listening and speaking in the EYL classroom by defining each skill and establishing some basic principles for teaching each skill. Of course, it is impossible to completely separate the two skills, so in each case there is reference to the other skill.

## Considerations for Teaching Listening

First, we will explore how to approach teaching listening. This skill might be overlooked because it seems passive. When people listen they do not move their lips or take any outward action that can be perceived. However, as this chapter will show, it is an active process that requires different kinds of skills and strategies. It is important for EYL teachers not to overlook this skill even though it is not visible to the eye or audible to the ears. Morley (2001) points out that listening is actually used more than any other skill. "On average, we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write" (p. 70). As the most used of the four language skills, it is essential to make sure our young learners are able to listen well and gain meaning from listening input. To find the best way to teach listening, it is important to gain an understanding of what listening is. This section will address the following aspects of listening:

- What is listening?
- Bottom-up and top-down listening
- Principles for teaching listening to YLs



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***What Is Listening?*** It is important to remember that the process of listening is active. The listener must interact with what is heard and interpret the message accurately in order to make sense of it. This is a complex process that happens so quickly in our native language that we can easily forget all the steps that must occur for a message to be understood through listening. Peterson (2001) describes listening as “a multilevel, interactive process of meaning creation” (p. 88). From a cognitive psychology point of view, Anderson (2009) defines listening comprehension in three stages: perceptual processing, parsing, and utilization. In the first stage, there is a sound encoded with language that is perceived and recognized as language; then the language is decoded and stored in short-term memory; finally, comprehension occurs in the utilization stage as the listener matches the language heard with ideas stored in long-term memory. Of course this process can be quite difficult for a second language learner, who is still learning the language, and especially for a young learner, who does not have much information or schemata stored in long-term memory.

***Bottom-Up and Top-Down Listening*** Listening is an interpretive skill, like reading. Interpreting language is often broken down into two psycholinguistic processes: bottom-up and top-down. Bottom-up processing starts with interpreting the sounds linguistically and gaining meaning by decoding parts of the language, whereas top-down processing refers to interpreting the message through the context in which the message is being delivered. Think about the popular Berlitz television commercial that shows a young German Coast Guard radio dispatcher on duty who has an ill-timed misunderstanding caused by his faulty bottom-up listening skills.

Sailor on sinking boat: *Mayday mayday. . . Hello, can you hear us?  
Over.*

*We are sinking.*

German Coast Guard: *Um . . . hello? Zis is zee German Coast  
Guard.*

Sailor on sinking boat: *We are sinking! We are sinking!*

German Coast Guard: *What are you zinking about?*

The commercial ends with “Improve your English” after this sketch that makes fun of the Coast Guard dispatcher who cannot hear the difference between “th” and “s” and responds to “We are sinking!” with “What are you thinking about?” Of course, in reality this would be an impossible scenario because within the context of the Coast Guard and communication with boats, there is no way to confuse the communication. In other words, top-down processing skills would prevent this scenario from ever happening! However, it does illustrate the difference between bottom-up and top-down listening skills and shows the importance of developing both in our learners.

Bottom-up processing means that listeners are using linguistic knowledge to make sense of an utterance, starting with the smallest parts of language and putting them together to construct meaning. Listening from the bottom up means a learner may proceed from sounds to words to sentences to literal meaning. This means putting the smaller parts of language together to figure out what someone is saying. This is what the Coast Guard radio dispatcher was doing; he was putting together the sounds he heard into an utterance he thought was “We are thinking.” Thus, bottom-up techniques for teaching listening usually focus on sounds, words, intonation, grammatical structures, and other discrete components of spoken language.

Some examples of listening activities for young learners that focus on bottom-up processing skills are:

- Students listen to a pair of words and circle if the words are the same or different.
- Students match a word they hear with its picture.
- Students listen to a series of sentences and distinguish the subjects from the verbs.
- Students listen to a short dialog and fill in the blanks of a transcript.

However, top-down processing starts with schemata or background knowledge based on the context of the communication. It also includes the listeners’ knowledge of the text type within the context. Instead of focusing on

linguistic parts of the utterance, learners learn how to gain meaning from the context and might be able to predict what will be said. Like the Berlitz commercial, the context of the Coast Guard and the predictability of boats calling in to the radio dispatcher when there is a problem makes it impossible to believe that the young dispatcher could have interpreted the utterance “We are sinking” as the opener for a casual friendly conversation. The text type would be a distress communication with “Mayday, mayday!” and would already be known to the listener.

In order to work on top-down techniques that focus on the activation of background knowledge and the meaning of the text, teachers can do the following with their young learners:

- Before students listen to an announcement, they are shown the context of an airport and predict what they might hear.
- Students listen to some utterances and describe the emotional reaction they hear: happy, sad, etc.
- Students listen to a conversation between a doctor and a patient and choose a picture showing the correct location of the dialog with the correct people having the conversation.

It is important to use both bottom-up and top-down techniques when teaching listening. With young learners who are at the beginning stages, it could be easy to focus more on bottom-up techniques that focus on isolated language structures, because they are learning the building blocks of language from letter to word to sentence. However, as Pinter (2006) explains, “In comparison with adults, children have less developed schematic knowledge about many topics; they know less about the world in general and therefore guess and infer meaning with more difficulty. The younger the children, the more this applies” (p. 46). Therefore, for young learners, teachers need to also focus the listening activities on meaning and help them develop strategies for top-down processing in the foreign language. Teachers of young learners should be sure to strike a good balance between the two.

***Principles for Teaching Listening to YLs*** In EYL classes there is an enormous amount of listening. It is the main source of communication for instruction between teacher and YL students. They are not only learning to listen but also listening to learn. For VYLs in particular, there is minimal reading since they are just beginning to gain literacy skills in both the native and foreign

language, so the majority of language input for students is through listening. Curtain and Dahlberg (2010) state that “Listening is considered by many teachers and researchers to be the cornerstone of language development. In beginning classrooms, listening is the main channel by which the student makes initial contact with the target language and its culture” (p. 71). In fact, the main source of listening input is the teacher giving instructions and demonstrations. Therefore, teachers of YLs have to be very conscious about their approach to giving students listening input.

When designing listening activities for young learners, it is important to remember the following seven principles.

1. Prepare teacher talk carefully.
2. Use listening activities that reflect real-life listening.
3. Use listening activities that are developmentally appropriate.
4. Use a variety of techniques to make listening input comprehensible.
5. Check comprehension using a variety of response types.
6. Keep listening active—always give learners a listening task.
7. Equip your students with intelligent guesswork strategies.

**1. Prepare teacher talk carefully** Children will spend most of their time listening to the teacher giving instructions, modeling language, singing songs, doing chants, dramatizing dialogs, and telling stories (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2004; Pinter, 2006). Therefore, teachers need to carefully plan how they use language in the classroom. In fact, Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (2004) comment specifically about the use of L1: “The teacher will have to decide how much of the general ‘classroom language’ such as instructions, questions or praise will be in the pupils’ L1 and how much in English” (p. 98). The decision to use L1 to give more complicated instructions for an activity or for classroom management purposes should be very deliberate and absolutely necessary to give optimum time for YLs to listen to and use English that is at an appropriate level for them.

However, when preparing teacher talk in English, think about both the level and the amount as you prepare for your lessons. It can be overwhelming to have long stretches of explanations when students have low levels of proficiency. In addition, YLs have short attention spans, so long stretches of input that is not comprehensible will likely be the cause of students zoning out or acting up.



## Teachers can start by teaching YLs to understand and respond to some basic classroom language:

- Come in.
- Sit down.
- Be quiet.
- Listen carefully.
- Let's begin!
- Look here.
- This is . . .
- That is . . .
- Are you ready?
- Great!
- Come to the board.
- Open your books.
- Turn to page . . .
- What is the answer?
- What is . . . ?
- Where is . . . ?
- Who is . . . ?
- When is . . . ?

Try to prepare short segments or comprehensible listening input when giving instructions, doing demonstrations, or explaining language.

**2. Use listening activities that reflect real-life listening** Activities should involve authentic language and real-world contexts as much as possible to make the learning more meaningful, motivating, and useful for students. As Chapters 2 and 3 established, using real-life text types helps YLs use English to mirror and contextualize language instruction. The following are some often-used examples of text types that reflect real-life listening and are motivating for YLs:

- Songs (traditional songs, children's songs, pop songs)
- Chants and raps
- Stories
- Plays
- TV shows (game shows, comedy shows, soap operas)
- TV commercials
- Radio ads
- News reports
- Weather reports
- Announcements (school, airport, train station)
- Cartoons
- Movies

- Documentaries
- Jokes and riddles
- Tongue twisters
- Dialogs (conversations)

**3. Use listening activities that are developmentally appropriate** If the activities are developmentally appropriate (see Chapter 2), they will be more intrinsically motivating and comprehensible. All activities should take into consideration learners' age, background knowledge, and interests. For example, for VYLs you can use children's songs like "Itsy Bitsy Spider," or nursery rhymes like "Hickory Dickory Dock." However, with older YLs in grades 4–6, you may start to use pop songs or rap instead of traditional songs and chants. It helps to find out what cartoons, TV shows, and movies interest children at different ages and try to incorporate them or similarly themed activities into instruction. A good place to find appropriate materials that are grouped by age is the Web site of Common Sense Media ([www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org)). This is an American organization whose mission is to provide trustworthy information about the media to help families make good decisions about the media children are exposed to. They suggest good cartoons, TV shows, movies, books, and so on for children by age, and it could be a good place to see what kinds of media are attractive as well as appropriate in terms of content and delivery by age group.

**4. Use a variety of techniques to make listening input comprehensible** Preparation for a listening activity: Because young children are still new to our world and do not have a lot of background knowledge, it is important for teachers to help make input comprehensible by preparing students for the context. In other words, the teacher needs to consider how to tap into students' background knowledge and build schemata that may not be there in order to understand the listening context in an activity. In addition, young learners of English do not have a high proficiency in English and their English vocabulary is limited. Therefore, teachers should prepare students with vocabulary needed to understand the listening activity. Preparing context clues like pictures and realia are helpful, too. Marley and Szabo (2010) did a comparison with kindergarteners and first graders to see if there was a difference in listening comprehension during storytelling when pictures were shown versus when students were given objects that they could manipulate. They found that physical manipulation of objects that are described in the story enhanced listening comprehension and

increased recall of information more than the use of pictures that depicted the story. This supports the use of realia and hands-on activities with young learners to support listening comprehension. As Chapter 2 explained, children are active learners and will gain more comprehension and remember more when hands-on activities are used.

**Interactional modifications** In addition to preparing ways to help students understand the listening input in a lesson, teachers should be ready to make interactional modifications during the activity—for example, repetition, comprehension checks, and gestures. These interactional modifications have been studied in young learner EFL classrooms, and research found them to be highly effective in promoting comprehension of listening input (Cabrera & Martínez, 2001; Peñate & Bazo, 1998). Peñate and Bazo found in their study of primary EFL teachers that repetition, comprehension checks, and gestures were the main interactional modifications used. Cabrera and Martínez found that teachers who used these three interactions in a primary EFL class increased young learners' understanding of oral discourse, specifically storytelling. They found statistically significant differences in levels of comprehension between groups of 10-year-olds when the teacher used repetition, comprehension checks, and gestures as interactional modifications during storytelling and when the teacher did not.

**5. Check comprehension using a variety of response types** Often we ask students, “Do you understand?” Of course, the response is always, “Yes, Teacher!” But how can you know if students truly understand without something concrete or observable? Teachers can check comprehension using a variety of response types that should be both verbal and nonverbal. For young learners who have a beginning level of proficiency, it can be very stressful to show comprehension by having to produce language and respond verbally using new language. There are many ways that a learner can respond.

Lund (1990, p. 259) provided a comprehensive list of ways to check students' comprehension:

- **Doing:** Listener responds physically (i.e., TPR, making a recipe)
- **Choosing:** Listener selects from alternatives such as pictures, objects, texts, or actions (i.e., matching, placing pictures in right order, picking up objects according to description)
- **Transferring:** Listener transfers information into another form (i.e., drawing, tracing a route on a map, constructing a table or chart)

- **Answering:** Listener answers questions about the message
- **Condensing:** Listener reduces the message (i.e., outlines, notetaking, oral or written summaries)
- **Extending:** Listener provides text that goes beyond what is given (i.e., giving the end of a story, solving a problem, filling in missing lines)
- **Duplicating:** Listener repeats exact message (i.e., dictation, translation, oral repetition)
- **Modeling:** Listener uses text as a model for imitation (i.e., ordering a meal after listening to a model)
- **Conversing:** Listener is active in face-to-face conversations

This is a useful taxonomy for conceptualizing the ways teachers can check comprehension of a listening activity. Detailing Lund's (1990) taxonomy more specifically can give lots of practical ideas to teachers for planning appropriate ways to check comprehension for young learners. For teaching young learners, many sources express the activities using a "Listen and . . ." format (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2004; Cameron, 2001; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990; Slatterly & Willis, 2001). In this chapter, we will suggest "Listen and . . ." activities that are commonly used in EYL classrooms. They are classified into three main categories that take into account level of difficulty:

- **Nonverbal demonstration of comprehension**, such as listen and do, point, move, mime, choose, etc.
- **Nonverbal demonstration of comprehension but require some reading**, such as listen and choose, transfer, sequence, match, classify, etc.
- **Demonstration of comprehension with production**, either oral or written, such as listen and transfer, answer, condense, extend, duplicate, model, converse, etc.

**6. Keep listening active—always give learners a listening task** Every listening activity should give YLs a purpose for listening and, better yet, a task to complete. All too often teachers will say "Listen to this," and then sing a song or play a tape without giving learners a task or a reason to listen. YLs have short attention spans and can't always focus themselves on a learning activity. Instead, teachers should say "Listen and . . .," filling in the blank with an appropriate task. For example, a teacher could ask students to listen and then point to the correct picture, with three pictures of different contexts to choose from. If the students know they must point to the correct picture after listening, then they will pay attention to the listening in order to figure out which picture is right. It will focus them on the listening and make them more active in the listening process.

7. **Equip your students with intelligent guesswork strategies** In order to develop students' ability to listen more effectively, it is important to incorporate various listening strategies in your instruction. Peterson (2001) wrote, "When things are going well, the listener is not conscious of using skills at all. At the point when the comprehension breaks down for some reason, the listener becomes aware of the need for repair and seeks an appropriate strategy for comprehension" (p. 90). Equipping our YLs with a whole range of strategies can actually help them improve their listening comprehension beyond the classroom, which is one of our goals.

Using prediction strategies will help learners make intelligent guesses and then check whether their predictions are correct. Even if the students do not know all the vocabulary or language structures presented, they can still make sense of the listening text using these strategies and guess meaning based on the context. The more you can connect these strategies with real-life listening, the better it will be for listening that happens outside the classroom.

In terms of listening strategies for YLs, Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2004) wrote that developing "intelligent guesswork" is a very important skill for young learners (p. 99). They suggest the following strategies: predicting, working out the meaning from context, and recognizing discourse patterns and markers (p. 100). Within these important listening strategies, we can put together a list of the most helpful ones for YLs to develop in order to gain meaning from the listening.

- **Predict what a listening text will be about:** Any real-life listening will be embedded in a context. For example, in a candy store, the clerk will probably ask if you need help finding something, if you are ready to pay, and tell you how much the candy costs. If students are presented with a context, they can probably predict what they will hear.
- **Predict what will happen next (or the ending):** In most contexts, it is possible to predict what someone will say next. In a conversation between a student and a school nurse, after the school nurse asks the student a series of questions, students can probably predict the school nurse will make a prognosis or give some advice.
- **Use discourse markers or signal words to guess what happens next:** Real discourse makes use of signal words such as first, then, finally, but, so, etc. to guide the listener. For example, when students are given instructions on how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, they can follow along each step, which is introduced by a marker: "First you take the peanut butter, and you spread it on the bread. Then you take the jelly, and you. . . ." Helping students automatically recognize these signal words is a strategy they can use to improve their listening.
- **Use background knowledge of the context:** Students' own background knowledge of the context can help them make sense of the story. For example, in a story like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, the

students can understand the meaning of the new words, like caterpillar, cocoon, and butterfly, based on their background knowledge of the life cycle of a butterfly. If not, then the teacher has to build the background knowledge before the story or through the story.

- **Listen for the main idea:** We listen for the main idea of a listening text to help gain comprehension. For example, if you are telling your YLs the story *The Tortoise and the Hare*, even if students do not understand all the vocabulary, they can still understand the gist of the story, which is that the tortoise wins the race even though the hare is a faster animal. Then the teacher can help build comprehension of the language starting with students' understanding of the main idea.
- **Listen for specific details:** If the activity is to listen to a description of a person and figure out in a picture who is being described, then students can listen for specific descriptions that match the different people in the picture, i.e., gender, height, hair color, clothes, etc.
- **Listen for key words:** In real-life listening, we can pick out key words that we understand which can help us comprehend the message. For example, if the listening text is a weather report, then you can get your YLs to listen for certain key words, like sunny, rainy, cold, warm, hot, etc.
- **Look for nonverbal cues to gain meaning:** In real life, there are usually nonverbal cues from the speaker, such as facial expressions, hand gestures, and body language, that can help interpret meaning of the language input. For example, when people learn simple greetings, students can understand from body language cues, like shaking hands or waving hello.
- **Guess the meaning of unknown words:** Using a variety of strategies in combination, YLs can guess the meaning of unknown words. For example, if YLs are listening to a commercial for a department store, which might be a familiar context, they can catch the gist of the commercial, which is to make you want to buy toys at the store. Then they may notice there are higher and lower prices for each toy. From these different strategies working together, they may be able to guess the meaning of difficult unknown words used repeatedly, like sale or clearance.

These are some intelligent guesswork strategies that teachers should help young learners develop through listening tasks. If learners can develop the use

of these strategies independent of the teacher, then they will be improving their ability to listen effectively on their own.