

# IIT Madras

ONLINE DEGREE

**English - 1 (Basic English)**  
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**Indian Institute of Technology-Madras**

**Lecture - 04**  
**Listening**

Hi, welcome back.

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**THE FOUR SKILLS**

Listening      Speaking      Reading      Writing

- Listening
  - Good listeners
  - Become good speakers
- Reading
  - Good readers
  - Become good at writing

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So just to recap once again, the four skills of language are listening, speaking, reading and writing. People who are good listeners generally tend to become good speakers. We will see why that happens as we proceed. And people who are good at reading and develop the reading skill also become good at writing.

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## WHY IS LISTENING IMPORTANT?



- Only if we listen can we understand/comprehend and only then can we assimilate ideas/thoughts that are spoken
- It is also important because listening leads to thinking
- Thinking leads to decision making



So why is listening important. Only when we listen, we tend to understand, we comprehend, and then only we will assimilate ideas, thoughts that are spoken. It is also important because listening leads to thinking. When we are listening to somebody, now that you are all listening to me, I am sure it is already triggered some thought process, and you want to know what she would be saying next and what are the kind of things we are going to learn today.

So listening definitely leads to some thinking happening. And thinking then leads to decision making, whether you want to continue with this course, you want to listen to this person, all that decision happens when you are thinking.

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- Research shows that poor listening habits and skills can cause as many failures of communication as ineffective expression of ideas.
- We have to understand that successful listening is not a passive act.
- It involves active processing, reformulation and revision.

*Idea*  
↓  
*Blank slate*  
↓  
*Your own*  
*ideas*  
↓  
*Fresh*  
*ideas*  
↓  
*Concepts*



So actually research shows that poor listening habits and skills can cause as many failures of communication as ineffective expression of ideas. To expand on this, what does it mean? So, people who are poor at listening, they will not be able to communicate because they have not listened to what somebody has said. Let us take the example of the classroom.

So in the classroom if a student has exhibited poor listening habit and has not paid attention to what the teacher or the lecturer is saying, they will be not able to communicate effectively in a test, a written test or an oral test, they will not be able to express their ideas well. So successful listening in that sense is not a passive act. It involves active processing, reformulation and revision.

See when we come into the classroom, we already have some idea about what we are going to listen to. So in that sense, we are not a blank slate, right. So we are we come with a certain idea or certain concept in our head, and when the teacher starts talking about it, then those ideas get added. So as I was saying, it is not a blank slate you come with your own ideas, then you listen.

So both of them get added, and now there are fresh ideas, concepts in your head about that topic. So in that sense, it is not a passive act. So that is where we say you are processing, you are reformulating. So you already have some idea or some thoughts about that topic. Now with the new ideas that assimilation happens, you reformulate, and then you revise your understanding of that concept.

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## LISTENING-THE FIRST LANGUAGE SKILL



- Most children come to school armed with only one way to learn – listening.
- Almost all of us were born doing it.
- Indeed, for the first few years of formal education, listening is an integral part of teaching.
- But something happens around first and second grade, when students learn to read.
- Slowly the read aloud books and story time are phased out, replaced instead by silent reading.



So listening is the first language skill, right. Most children come to school, armed with only one way to learn, and that is listening. These days we send children at two and a half years, three years to school and what they come when they come from home? They only know listening. Almost all of us were born doing it. Indeed for the first few years of formal education, listening is an integral part of teaching.

So, children who have gone through a good amount of their time, classroom time listening, they will do very well in future. But what happens? Somewhere down the line, you know till they are in first and second grade, students start reading, and slowly the read-aloud books and storytime are phased out, replaced instantly by silent reading. So when this transition happens, they have not sufficiently prepared we can say to transit from listening.

They come to the school; they are just listening. But immediately the schools and the formal system is in a hurry to introduce speaking, to introduce reading, and also writing. So in all this, listening actually takes a backseat. The teachers only want them to listen to their instructions. Listen to me, listen to the instruction, listen to what I am saying; only this happens. But they are not exposed to listening in a very focused manner, which we will see as we proceed in this course.

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# WHAT DO WE LISTEN FOR?

## 1. Understanding detailed information for a purpose

Can understand straightforward factual information about common topics; understand simple technical information

## 2. Understanding & interpreting a range of features of context

- Can follow the main points of extended discussion

*Required  
Lang.  
Listened  
on that topic  
in the past*

So what do we listen for? So first, we listen to understand detailed information for a purpose. Can understand straightforward factual information about common topics. Understand simple technical information. For example, you are all sitting in this class today. So you are sitting here to get some factual information about what listening is.

When you go to a computer class, you are sitting there and listening for how to operate a computer, how to go into the internet, how to log in, how to log out. So basic, simple information. So that is detailed information for a purpose. You check-in into a hotel; they give you information, you know, take the key, this is the floor, this is how you go into the room. These are the facilities available.

So there is a purpose behind which you know, you are standing there and listening. And you must have realized when you fail to do that, you go to the room, and there are so many questions. But all those questions have actually been answered at the reception, but you have not paid attention. So that is very specific information that we are listening to. The second is understanding and interpreting a range of features of context.

So what does this mean? Basically, it means if there is a discussion. If three or four of us, you are sitting together and talking about something. There is a discussion happening on the political situation, on an economic issue or general discussion on fashion. Then to be able to follow the discussion of what each person sitting there is saying, what each point of view is, and how the discussion is proceeding.



Only then you can be part of the discussion. I am sure many times you have felt sitting in you know conversation group where there are five or six people, and you do not know what they are talking about, and you are not aware of that topic, then you just become a quiet part of the whole group, and you are not able to contribute to the discussion.

The reason being either you do not have the required language for that topic because you have not listened on that topic in the past, right. So these could be the reasons why, you know, you are today unable to follow the main points of an extended discussion. We will see more examples as we move on.

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3. Understanding the topic & the main points

- Can understand the main points of familiar matters; can understand the main points & information content of news bulletins & TV programmes

Handwritten diagram:

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graph TD; MT[Main topic] --- FN[Foreign news]; MT --- L[Local]; MT --- P[Political]; MT --- E[Economic]
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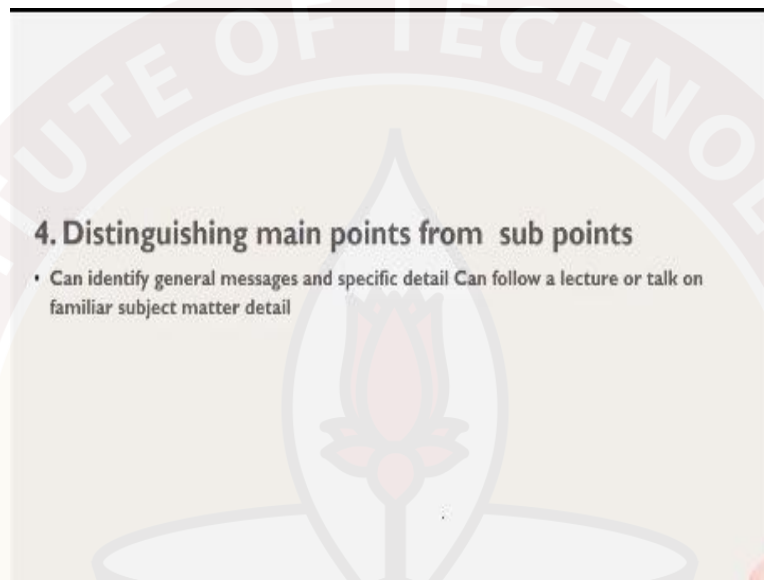
Now and the next reason why we listen, understanding the topic and the main points. When does this happen? This happens when we are listening to a news bulletin for example, on a television or a or radio even, right. So if they are talking about an election result, so that is the main topic, and then under that, what else is the information that the newsreader is conveying to you.

So that is where there comes the main topic. Then it has subtopics. There will be news on, for example, foreign news, local, political, economic. So the main topic is the news for the day, and under this, there could be a variety of subtopics. Now there could be out of this only one that actually interests you. So you may pay attention to

that one area. So if you are interested in politics, for example, you may pay attention to that particular news.

So you will get exposed to the language, the words, the expressions that are specific to political news. That is called jargon, the political jargon. The term that we use for any particular set of words and expressions, which are used for one area, they are called the jargon, right.

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The other thing that we listen to is to be able to distinguish the main points from sub-points. So, for example, let us take what I have been talking about now, for the past 15 minutes. I have talked about, what is the main point? Talking about listening; developing, listening as a skill. Under that, we have discussed various sub-points. Under each sub-point, we are further discussing examples, further going deeper into the understanding.

So there are main points, and there are sub-points. This usually happens in a lecture or in a talk where you have gone for a particular talk because you are familiar with the subject matter, but you want to know more about that topic. So you go and sit in that lecture. So there is the main topic that the speaker talks about. And then he further takes you into the other aspects of the topic.

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## WE LISTEN FOR:

- **Comprehension**
- **Acquisition**
- Listening and listening comprehension are one and the same thing. It is believed that people listen for understanding the spoken language.
- When we say listening for acquisition it means listening will provide us inputs for developing our second language skills. In this case English

So, from the point of view of, you know the language, what do we listen for? We listen for comprehending or comprehension, and we listen for acquisition. So listening and listening comprehension are the same thing. It is believed that people listen for understanding the spoken language. Imagine yourself in a situation where you are sitting among people who do not speak the language you understand.

And you have to sit there for an hour or so. So would it not be a strange situation that you have got yourself into where you do not understand what the other person is speaking. So when we listen, the urge to comprehend and to understand is very strong. So that is what is listening for comprehension. And when we say listening for acquisition, it is at a little you know higher level.

It means listening will provide us with inputs for developing our second language skills. We listen for specific words. Okay, maybe I can use this word next time when I am talking in the class or when I am conversing with my friends. So we are also listening to you know, improve our own vocabulary fund, our own active vocabulary, right? In this case, it is English, right?

That is what we are trying to understand. But for any language, any language, these two things work. Even when if you are thinking of learning French, German, any language in this world, these are the two reasons for which we actually listen.

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- It means when we listen we also acquire vocabulary of that language, words, phrases and how to use them and where to use them while speaking or writing.
- The challenge of listening is the manner in which the speaker is delivering the spoken language, their pronunciation, intonation and above all speed of delivery.

So it means as I said, we listen to acquire the vocabulary of that language, words, phrases, and how to use them. So when you listen to a speaker, you also try to get those expressions, the style of using, in what context those words and expressions are being used. And probably if you have used them in the past and made some mistakes, oh, okay, so this is how I am supposed to use it. That understanding also comes.

The challenge of listening actually is the manner in which the speaker is delivering the spoken language, the pronunciation, intonation, and above all, speed of delivery. So this is something that we all face on a day to day basis, especially in a country like India, where the regional language influence is very strong. So there might be two people conversing in a room who come from one from the southern part of India and one from the northern part of India.

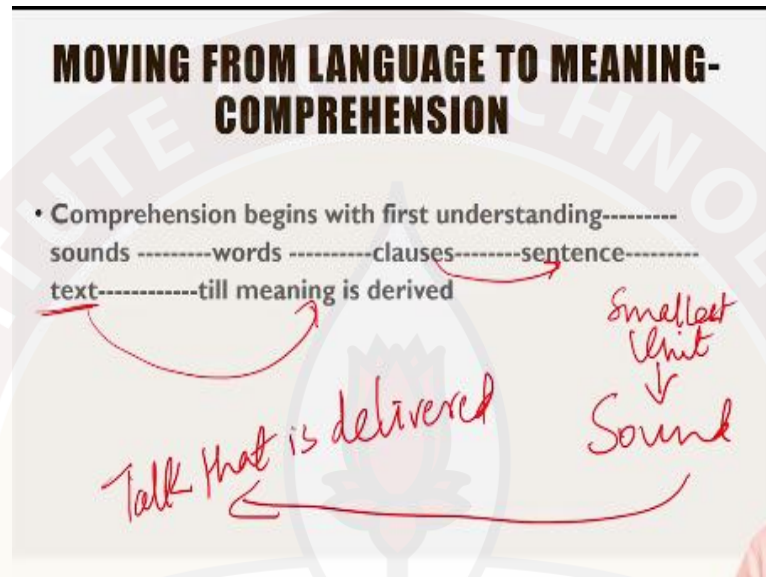
So they will have their own mother tongue influence when they deliver English. Their pronunciation will have that influence. Their intonation pattern may have, and their speed of delivery could not be as it should be for the English language. So these are the things that distract, that becomes a challenge, and you might find that you do not follow the speaker. So now, when we listen to somebody, we need to pay attention to the way they pronounce the words.

A native speaker, so if you listen to somebody from the UK, for example, the British because it is their language, they are the native users of that language. So if you expose yourself continuously listening to BBC, etc., then you will, over a period of

time, develop that pronunciation, you will watch out for specific words and how those words are pronounced.

So you can listen to people regularly to ensure that you do not make mistakes when you are speaking, and people do not find it difficult to comprehend what you are talking.

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So now, let us understand what happens actually in the process of comprehension. When we say that we are comprehending a language, it first starts with understanding sounds. From sounds, you move to words. From words, you move to clauses. And from clauses to sentences and from the sentence to the text. And there where you will know whether actually the meaning has been derived, whether you have understood.

So basically, it starts with the smallest unit, which is the sound. And from there, you finally reach the entire talk that is delivered. So it is we can also call it the bottom-up approach. I will talk a little more about it later.

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## MOVING FROM MEANING TO LANGUAGE-ACQUISITION

- In the second method we move from meaning to language.
- For this the listener need to have background knowledge of the topic of discourse.

Then when we say moving from meaning to language, which is acquisition. For this, the listener needs to have background knowledge of the topic of discourse. So I come from an English background, for example, and if somebody says that there is a lecture on nanotechnology and I have to go and sit in that lecture, I need to have some understanding of what nanotechnology is.

So what are the kind of expressions, what are the things they might talk? Unless and until I have that background knowledge, I may find myself groping in the dark. After 15 minutes, I might become disinterested in what the speaker is saying. He might be the best speaker on that topic. But because I do not have the background knowledge, I kind of fail to understand what the speaker is talking about.

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## UNDERSTANDING BOTH PROCESSES

- Let us take an example to understand both the processes.
  - Situation: Visit to a doctor.
  - Your friend tells you she is going to visit her doctor in the evening as she has been having stomach ache. She tells you that the pain is severe.
  - First process:
  - Words and expressions:
  - Stomach Ache
  - Visit the doctor
  - In the evening
  - Severe pain
- These chunks help us identify the underlying meaning the words express.*

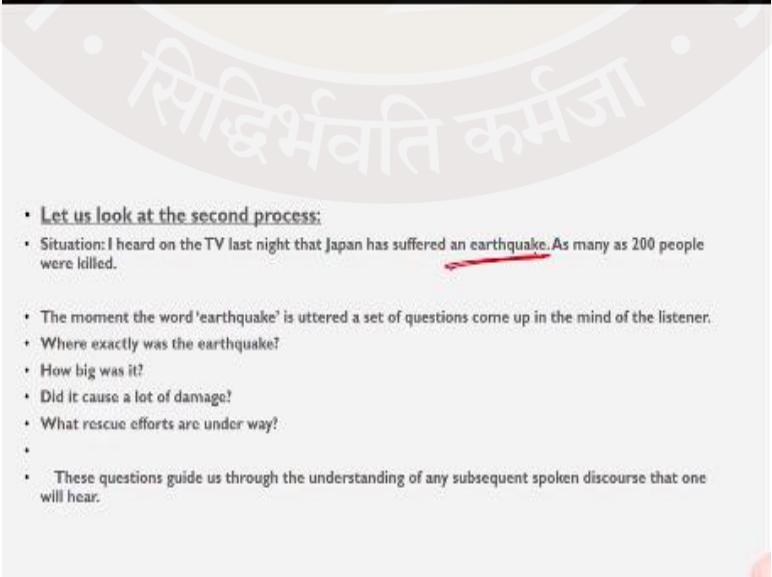
So to reach this stage where you have acquired, you need to start bottom-up, right. So let us understand both the processes. That is comprehension and acquisition. So I am going to take an example here. The situation is visiting a doctor. So your friend tells you she is going to visit a doctor in the evening, as she has been having a stomach ache. She tells you that the pain is very severe.

Now when we talk of from the comprehension process point, what are the words and expressions here? Stomachache, visit the doctor, in the evening, severe pain. So these four, five words, these are chunks that help you identify the underlying meaning of the words right, these words express. So you catch on to these words, you latch on to these words, and you try to understand the whole discourse of what your friend is saying.

So once she tells you that she has a stomachache and she is planning to go to the doctor in the evening, actually after that many times we even switch off. She goes on to tell you more in detail about what has been happening, why it has been happening, and you are actually not paying attention. And you realize that after a few minutes, if she tells you, hey, where are you?

Oh, I did not pay attention; I only know that you are going to the doctor. Probably you have stopped processing once you know the main information was kind of given to you, right.

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- Let us look at the second process:
  - Situation: I heard on the TV last night that Japan has suffered an earthquake. As many as 200 people were killed.
  - The moment the word 'earthquake' is uttered a set of questions come up in the mind of the listener.
  - Where exactly was the earthquake?
  - How big was it?
  - Did it cause a lot of damage?
  - What rescue efforts are under way?
  - 
  - These questions guide us through the understanding of any subsequent spoken discourse that one will hear.

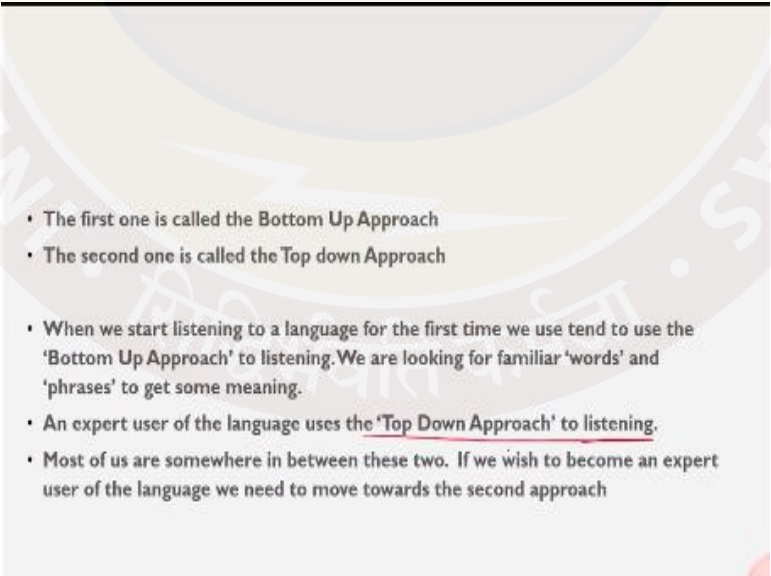


Now looking at the second process. The situation is, I heard on the TV last night that Japan has suffered an earthquake. As many as 200 people were killed. Now the moment the word earthquake is uttered, what happens? It triggers a set of questions that come to your mind. Where exactly was the earthquake? How big was it? Did it cause a lot of damage? What are rescue efforts underway?

So here because the earthquake is something that you know about, you know about earthquakes, you know why it happens, you know that there is a tectonic shift maybe, you know all that. So the moment the word earthquake is uttered, immediately there are questions that come to your head, right. So these questions guide us through the understanding of any subsequent spoken discourse that one will hear.

So already these questions have come up in your mind, and you are waiting for the speaker to give out this information. So as the speaker continues, it is literally like filling in the blanks. Oh, where exactly was the earthquake? So fill in the blank. This is where in Japan, it happened. How big was it? So what was on the Richter scale? What was the intensity? Immediately you fill it in there? So this is what is from the acquisition point of view.

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- The first one is called the Bottom Up Approach
  - The second one is called the Top down Approach
  - When we start listening to a language for the first time we use tend to use the 'Bottom Up Approach' to listening. We are looking for familiar 'words' and 'phrases' to get some meaning.
  - An expert user of the language uses the 'Top Down Approach' to listening.
  - Most of us are somewhere in between these two. If we wish to become an expert user of the language we need to move towards the second approach

So the first one is called the bottom-up approach. The second one is called the top-down approach. When we start listening to a language for the first time, we use, we tend to use the bottom-up approach to listening. We are looking for familiar words



and phrases to get some meaning, okay. You want to latch on to those words, sounds, and immediately try and create the meaning in your head.

An expert user of the language uses the top-down approach to listening. So this is the difference. So we all have to reach the top-down approach, and that is what is an expert user of the language. Somebody who, just as the speaker utters the word can connect can bring his own background information, can listen for more detail, and fill in the blank all the questions that come to his or her mind as he or she is listening to the speaker.

So at this point, we would end today's class, and there will be a worksheet that you need to do and some exercises to follow. Thank you.

