ENGLE205F

Module 4

Skills and strategies for listening

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Introduction

This module provides a detailed review of the listening process and the skills and strategies involved in listening effectively to spoken English. In *Module 8*, we will apply what you learn in this module to preparing for the IELTS Listening test.

Listening effectively to spoken English involves both skills and strategies. You can improve your listening skills – such as being able to distinguish main ideas from subordinate information in a lecture or talk – through practice. You can also learn listening strategies that can help you to increase your listening efficiency. An example of a listening strategy would be making use of your expectations about what a speaker is going to say in a particular situation to help you understand what the speaker actually says.

After discussing the listening process in general, *Module 4* introduces you to the listening skills and strategies which will help you to improve your listening ability. You will learn about: listening for specific information; prediction strategies; the skills you need to listen to and understand lectures and talks; and the kinds of tasks we perform when we listen. The module provides you with activities to enable you to put each skill and strategy into use in listening to conversations, lectures and talks and completing tasks similar to those you will face in the IELTS Listening test.

Because listening is tested *indirectly* by means of various testing techniques, it is important that you understand these techniques if you are going to be able to demonstrate your listening ability in a test situation. For this reason, this module concludes by bringing all the skills, strategies and listening tasks together and looking at the most common type of listening test question – multiple choice. We give you examples of the different kinds of multiple-choice questions, followed by short activities enabling you to practise them.

To summarize, in this module, you will:

• review the listening process in general and understand the nature of skilled listening;

• learn about the structure of lectures and talks, identify the speech signals which will help you follow and learn how you can listen to lectures and talks more effectively;

• think about the tasks you need to carry out as you listen;

• consider how the skills and strategies of listening are applied in multiple-choice questions; and

• practise each skill, strategy and task with listening material on topics related to health matters, environmental protection and conservation.

The listening process

This first section of the module looks at the listening process. First, we try to answer the question 'what is listening?', and then we examine some skills for more effective listening. We also look at some special strategies that are useful for listening to general conversations, and to academic discourse, particularly formal academic lectures.

What is 'listening'?

A simple definition might state that listening involves the purposeful processing of spoken language. The purposes for listening vary from a desire to participate socially through conversation, to the acquisition of information delivered in lectures and talks. Both kinds of listening are tested in IELTS.

Being an active listener

In real life, listening is nearly always an *active* as well as an *interactive* skill. When you are engaged in a conversation, you are constantly interacting with the other people, responding to and commenting on what they say and making your own contribution to the ongoing conversation. If you don't fully understand something, you can ask them to repeat or clarify. You can even ask them (politely, of course) to slow down if they are speaking very quickly. You can also get meaning from the other speakers' body language and facial expressions, and you can use your body language and face to show them that you do or don't understand. Even in a formal academic listening situation such as a university lecture, you can get extra meaning from a speaker by looking at his/her facial expressions and gestures, and by referring to any audiovisual aids that the speaker uses.

Unfortunately, you don't have these sorts of comprehension aids in a listening test. You cannot interact with the speaker to ask him or her to repeat information and you cannot see the speaker. Therefore, in a listening test, you have to be an especially active listener. You must work very hard to engage with what you hear. This involves *activating background knowledge* which will help you to understand what you hear. We activate background knowledge by thinking carefully about the topic of a lecture, talk or conversation before we listen. This enables us to *predict* what we will hear and use the strategy of *selective listening*.

Selective listening

People are not tape-recorders and it is physically impossible to catch and record every single word we hear. Natural listening is selective and guided by purpose. While listening, learners often make the mistake of trying to attend closely to everything they hear. This can only lead to

frustration. When we listen to a lecture, talk or conversation, we should not even try to catch every single word. Instead, we should develop a *clear purpose for listening*. This will help us to *focus on important words and messages*, and to ignore some words or phrases that are not so significant for our purpose.

Knowing your listening purpose

Whenever you listen to a conversation or monologue, you should try to ask yourself 'why am I listening to this?' and 'what information do I need to gain from the language that I am listening to?' For example, when you listen to a weather report, your aim or purpose is usually to find out what tomorrow's temperatures will be, and whether you will need to take a jacket or an umbrella with you when you go out. Rather than trying to catch every word in the forecast, you will probably try to direct your attention to just key words such as the numbers for the temperatures, and key adjectives such as 'rainy', 'windy', 'overcast' or 'sunny'.

Activity 4.1

1   Look at the following listening situations, and think about what *your main listening purpose* is in each case. What kinds of words or phrases do you think you probably need to focus on in each of these contexts?

   a   listening to a recorded telephone message about today's film screenings

   b   listening to an announcer call a horse race

   c   listening to one person ask another person for directions to a railway station

   d   listening to three friends discussing what to cook for a party

   e   listening to a university lecturer telling you about the course assessment requirements for the coming semester.

2   Imagine that you are attending a talk about food hygiene. A trained chef is telling you how to handle food in a hygienic way so that you don't become sick as a result of bad food preparation:

   •   What do you think your listening purpose during this talk will be?

   •   What sorts of words or information do you think you should focus on?

   •   What grammatical structures are you likely to hear?

Note down your listening purpose, make a list of words or phrases that might be emphasized in the talk, and note the grammatical structures you expect to hear. When you have finished, you can look at our suggestions in the feedback at the end of the module, and then listen to Audio CD 2 track 1 to see if your predictions were correct.

Focusing your listening

Earlier we mentioned the impossibility of attending to each and every word in a conversation or a lecture and we introduced a more natural listening strategy – to be selective so that we can focus on what is most important and related to our purpose in listening. When we listen we need also to learn how to *distinguish main ideas from less important ideas*. Having a sense of your listening purpose helps you to do this. One way of getting clues about the importance of words or phrases in a sentence is by attending to a speaker's use of *word stress*.

In English, the words that we stress are *new information* words or important ideas:

I ordered some *red roses* for *my wife*.

The roses are for *her birthday*.

Her birthday is *tomorrow*.

The stressed words in a lecture or conversation usually carry the information that we need to concentrate on. The other, unstressed words are usually less important, and often we don't need to pay such careful attention to them when we are processing meaning from a lecture, talk or conversation. *Unstressed words* tend to be small words like prepositions, articles, auxiliary verbs and conjunctions, and words which do not carry the central message.

Activity 4.2

Look at the following transcript of a talk about food hygiene. (This is the same talk that you listened to in Activity 4.1.) Read through the transcript and then listen to the recording. As you listen, underline the words that the speaker stresses (or emphasizes) in each sentence.
Can you see how the speaker's word stress helps you to focus on the key ideas of the talk and emphasizes the main 'dos and don'ts' of food hygiene?

If you're not used to cooking for yourself, you probably need to know the basics about food hygiene. It's really easy to catch stomach bugs if you don't prepare food properly.

The most important thing is that you wash your hands frequently and every time you handle food. Make sure that you put fresh food and frozen food in the refrigerator as soon as possible. And always keep cooked and raw food away from each other. Always be sure to look carefully at expiry and use-by dates. Don't take risks. If something has passed its date or smells a little strange, throw it away. Better safe than sorry. Don't try to rush your cooking. Meat needs to be thoroughly cooked to be safe, so take your time. Reheating food is a risky business. Wash all your cooking utensils and implements carefully after you use them.

Dirty kitchens lead to food poisoning. So be careful with your food preparation, and enjoy your cooking!

After you have listened to the talk and underlined the stressed words, look at the feedback at the end of the module and compare your answers with ours.

The following listening activity helps you to practise listening *selectively.* You don't need to hear and note every word but you do need to listen for five key words. These words are emphasized in the recording.

Activity 4.3

Listen to Audio CD 2 track 2 for a talk about what to do if you injure yourself, and then note the *key words that are stressed* when the speaker explains the 'FRIES' formula. The first letter for each word has been given to help you:

1   F_____

2   R_____

3   I_____

4   E_____

5   S_____

After you have listened to the talk, look at the feedback at the end of the module and compare your answers with ours.

Listening for specific information

The selective listening discussed in the preceding sections involves focusing on the information you need to fulfil your listening purpose. There are, of course, times when it is important that you record information accurately. When someone is giving you a telephone number or an address, you need to pay attention in order to avoid getting the number wrong or getting lost. Don't worry – these things happen to native-speakers of English just as often as they do to second language learners! That's all the more reason to practise them briefly before we go on to look at more strategic listening in the later sections.

Numbers

These come in many forms: ages, telephone numbers, units of quantity, etc.

Points to remember in relation to numbers

- It is easy to confuse -teen and -ty ('fourteen' and 'forty').

- Not all ordinals end in -th. Don't forget 'first', 'second' and 'third' and their written short forms, e.g. 21st, 42nd, 83rd.

- The number 0 can be said as 'oh', 'nought', 'zero'.

- In a telephone or similar sequence of numbers, 44 can be said as 'four four' or 'double four'; 333 can be said as 'three three three', 'treble three' or 'triple three'.

- A number like 1,300 can be expressed as 'one thousand, three hundred' or 'thirteen hundred'.

Activity 4.4

Listen to Audio CD 2 track 3 and write the appropriate numbers in the blanks. Then compare your answers with the feedback at the end of the module:

1 _____ patients

2 _____ tablets

3 Ricky is the _____ patient with flu.

4 telephone no.: _____

5 telephone no.: _____

6   _____ patients

7   bar-code: _____

8   cost: £_____

9   _____ people

10 _____ beds

11 pulse rate: _____

12 blood pressure: _____

13 _____ cigarettes

14 postal code: _____

15 _____ interviewees

Units

The metric system commonly used in English-speaking countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, may present problems for second language learners.

Points to remember in relation to units

- temperature: °C

- time: second (sec), minute (min), hour (hr)

- weight: gram (g) or (gm), kilogram (kg)

- speed: kilometres per hour (k/h)

- length: centimetre (cm), metre (m), and kilometre (km)

- liquid: centilitre (cl), litre (l)

- currency: The UK uses the pound (£), divided into 100 pence. Australia and New Zealand use dollars – AUD and NZD – divided into 100 cents.

Note: 2 can be expressed as 'a couple'; 12 can be expressed as 'a dozen'; a 'fortnight' is a period of two weeks.

Activity 4.5

Listen to Audio CD 2 track 4 and practise using units:

1   85.7 _____

2   today's forecast temperature: _____

3   Come back in _____ weeks' time.

4   90 _____

5   time taken: _____

6   time waiting: _____

7   minimum temperature: _____

8   amount: _____

9   4 _____

10   _____ 119

Addresses

In English, addresses are given from smaller to larger units, e.g. house number, street, town. Email addresses may also occur. They are written without capitals or spaces; and @ is read as 'at' and . is read as 'dot'.

Activity 4.6

Listen to Audio CD 2 track 5 and practise writing addresses. Then compare your answers with the feedback at the end of the module:

1   _____ Kings _____ , _____

2   _____ _____, Fulham

3   _____

4   _____

5   Flat 5B, _____, _____ Ave,

   Georgetown, _____, _____

Dates and times

Times can be given according to the a.m./p.m. system with 12 noon and 12 midnight or they can be given using the 24-hour clock with 1200 and 2400.

Dates are expressed going from smaller to larger units, e.g. 6/12/06, 6 January 2006.

Activity 4.7

Listen to Audio CD 2 track 6 and practise writing times. Then compare your answers with the feedback at the end of the module:

1   time: _____   day: _____   date: _____

2   time: _____   date: _____ August

3   opening hours:_____

4   new appointment: time: _____   day: _____
    date: _____ June

5   public holiday on _____

Suggestions for further practice

- Listen to the English radio and watch English television, and write down any numbers that are given – for example, phone numbers or prices during advertisements, scores and results for sports news, and any dates, numbers or place names given on the news.

- Listen to the traffic news and take notes on the main trouble spots.

- Ask a friend to read some addresses. Listen and write them down.

- Call information lines that give recorded times of films, etc. Write down the information given.

Prediction strategies

There are a number of prediction strategies that you can use to get more meaning from lectures, talks or conversations. We look at the following ones:

•   using your *knowledge of a topic* to guess likely vocabulary and grammatical structures

•   using your *knowledge of grammar* to anticipate certain kinds of words and structures in a conversation

•   using your *knowledge of word groups* and *collocations* to guess which words might go together

•   using your *subject knowledge to distinguish words* that sound the same or similar

•   using your *knowledge of different speaking situations* to anticipate when information will be given.

When we come to look at test question types at the end of this module and in *Module 8*, you will see that knowledge of the type of question is important in helping you to use prediction strategies effectively.

Using your knowledge of a topic

Whenever we listen to a lecture, talk or conversation, we bring some *background knowledge* to the listening – but we have to activate this knowledge for it to be useful. We can then use this background knowledge to help us predict what will be said. For example, think about the sorts of words that might be used in a conversation between two friends about the different kinds of films they like. Using your general knowledge about different types of films, make a quick list of words that they might use in this conversation. Our guess includes words such as 'movie', 'film', 'story', 'actors', 'director', 'stars', 'action', 'comedy', 'thriller', 'Western', 'romance', 'classic'.

Now think about someone telling another person how to cook something. What sorts of words do you think might be used? What sorts of verb tenses and prepositions might be used? Our guess is that you would hear action verbs in the imperative form, such as 'cut', 'boil', 'stir', 'fry', 'add', and prepositions that sequence the actions, such as 'after', 'before', 'then', 'finally'.

Activity 4.8

Look at the dialogue below between Rose and Mrs Green about herbal medicine. Only Rose's part in the conversation is given. Even without hearing Mrs Green's responses, we can guess the general meaning of what she might say. Try to use your knowledge of the topic and the cues of Rose's questions to guess Mrs Green's responses.

Then, listen to Audio CD 2 track 7 to see if your predictions were correct. (You can also look at our notes in the feedback section.)

Rose: Hello, Mrs Green, how are you today?

Mrs Green: _____

Rose: Oh, I'm sorry. If we were in Hong Kong I'd take you to the herbalist and get some herbs to make a tonic for you. I really miss visiting my herbal doctor. Do you know much about Chinese herbal remedies?

Mrs Green: _____

Using your knowledge of grammar

In the activity above, when Rose asks Mrs Green '*Do you know much about Chinese herbal remedies?*', we can safely predict from our knowledge of grammar that Mrs Green will answer either yes or no, and probably elaborate a little. What do you think Mrs Green would have said if Rose had instead asked '*How much* do you know about herbal medicine?'

Now, think about Mrs Green's possible answers if she were asked these questions:

   How did you learn about herbal medicine?

   Who told you about herbal medicine?

   When did you learn about herbal medicine?

   What do you know about herbal medicine?

   Where are the herbal medicine shops?

   What time do the herbal medicine shops close?

We can use our knowledge of the grammar of sentences to guess or check possible information in an answer. For example, if we were listening to someone answering a question such as 'How long have you lived in Australia?', we would know that he or she needs to say either 'for' + '___ months/years' or 'since' + a year or time (e.g. 'since 1998' or 'since Christmas last year').

Our knowledge of grammatical rules can also help us to predict *correct word forms*. For instance, phrases that have auxiliary or modal verbs such as 'They must …' or 'He will …' can only be followed by a *base form of a verb*, whereas a preposition such as 'before', 'while' or 'after' will be followed by a *gerund* (*-ing* form).

Using your knowledge of word groups

We can also use our knowledge of word groups or collocations to predict key vocabulary before we listen. For example, if you are listening to a waiter in a restaurant asking people where they want to sit, you can guess that the words 'smoking or ...' will be followed by 'non-smoking'. Other words naturally go together:

- verbal collocations – 'pay attention', 'work hard', 'sleep well'

- partitive nouns – 'a loaf of bread', 'a jar of jam', 'a box of chocolates'

- compounds – 'global warming', 'economic recession', 'public holiday'

Complete these examples:

a bottle of _____

a carton of _____

(on an exam paper) Write _____ and read the instructions _____.

Is the car air- _____?

Do I need a British driving _____?

What words do you think might naturally follow these phrases?

To get to the bank, you need to *turn* _____.

Is your ticket, *one-way* or _____?

Today's *weather will be* _____.

(A person in a travel agency asks:) How often do flights go to Vancouver? (The agent replies:) Four *times per* _____.

Using subject knowledge to distinguish words

You should also try to activate word sets that belong to *a particular topic*. This will help you to distinguish among words which sound similar and choose the correct written form for what you hear:

health/airport – 'flu'/'flew'

music / government action / cookery – 'band'/'ban'/'pan'

patriotism/accommodation – 'flag'/'flat'

Activity 4.9

Look at the sentences below in which a doctor describes a patient.
Use your knowledge of the subject of health and medicine, grammar,
and word collocations to make some predictions about the missing
words:

1   The patient had a bad _____.

2   He said it was _____ his sleep as he coughed so hard
    at times.

3   I asked the patient if he smoked and he said he _____.

4   The patient's temperature was a little higher than _____.

5   His pulse was also _____.

6   … he had been sweating a little more than usual, but not to an
    _____ degree.

7   The patient's eyes were clear and the _____ seemed to
    have a healthy colour.

8   It seemed likely that he had had a bad cough and was recovering, but
    for the _____.

9   I told the patient to heat his bedroom as _____ air might
    make the cough worse …

10 I suggested he take an aspirin or paracetamol to _____ him
    sleep peacefully.

When you finish, compare your predictions with ours in the feedback
    section. Finally, listen to Audio CD 2 track 8 to confirm your
    predictions.

Activity 4.10

Spend time looking through the text below. Use your knowledge of
    the subject of food and nutrition, your knowledge of grammar, and
    your knowledge of word groups and collocations to predict possible
    answers. Then, listen to Audio CD 2 track 9 to see if your predictions
were accurate. After that, you can also check the feedback which lists the
words used in the recording.

Eating well is the key to staying fit and (1) _____. Coming to study in a foreign country can be (2) _____ and the climate may be different from the one you are used to, so you need to pay attention to having a balanced diet with plenty of (3) _____. You need to ensure that you have something from each of the main food (4) _____ every day. You need carbohydrates from bread, (5) _____, pasta or cereals; you need minerals from dairy products, such as (6) _____, cheese or yogurt; you need a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables; and you need (7) _____from meat, fish, beans, eggs or nuts.

Using your knowledge of different speaking situations

Your knowledge of different kinds of speaking situations can also help you to predict what might be said. For example, at the beginning of a TV or radio news report, the announcer usually gives the headlines first, and then elaborates on each story in the same order as they were given in the headlines. The content of a conversation varies with the degree to which the speakers know each other. Conversations between very close friends are more difficult for an outsider to comprehend, but when the speakers are relative strangers to each other, certain formalities are observed for introductions and greetings which make prediction easier.

Use your knowledge of different speaking occasions to guess words that might naturally be used to finish these sentences:

• When introduced for the first time, strangers say: 'Pleased to …'.

• Looking at an empty chair in a crowded café, a customer says: 'Do you mind …'.

• At the beginning of a concert, an announcer says: 'Please turn off …'.

• At the end of a meal, a diner asks: 'Can I have the …?'.

• A university professor says: 'Today, I'm going to …'.

The last example illustrates what you will normally hear when you listen to lectures: the lecturer often begins by telling the audience what the main topic will be, then briefly mentions key ideas or points that will be covered, and outlines and explains each of these main points. Lectures and talks are often highly structured, and understanding and making use of this structure can help the listener to understand them better. We now move on to look in detail at the skills involved in listening effectively to a speaker delivering a lecture or talk.

Listening to lectures and talks

Like a well-structured piece of writing, a well-structured lecture or talk
will have an introduction, main body and conclusion. The introduction
will include an overview of what the speaker intends to say, and the
conclusion will include a summary of the main points the speaker has
covered. When the speaker is experienced, a lecture will have a highly
predictable organizational structure which can help you to listen more
effectively. At each of these stages, the speaker will use speech signals
that mark the stage he/she has reached. Effective listening involves
recognizing these speech signals and using them to guide your
understanding of what the speaker is saying.

Signals which help you to follow the stages of a lecture or talk

A speaker will signal a new stage in a lecture by means of expressions
such as 'I'd like to', 'I'm going to', 'I want to', 'I intend to'. These
expressions may be presented in an indirect form:

	I'd like to		
	I'm going to		
What		do	is …
	I want to		
	I intend to		

In a less formal talk, the beginning of a new section will be marked by
speech signals such as:

Alright   Good   Now   OK   Right   So   Well

In a more formal lecture, especially in an academic context, more formal
markers are used to signal the new stage:

I'd like to move on to …

I'd like to look now at …

Turning now to …

Moving on now to …

Having looked at …

Let's now consider …

Let's now pass on to …

Activity 4.11

Listen to the opening section of a talk on the topic of stretching on
Audio CD 2 track 10. As you listen, try to identify the
speech signals the speaker uses to help the listeners follow the stages of
his talk. Tick the speech signals that you hear. One has been done for you
as an example. When you have finished, turn to the feedback section at
the end of this module and check your answers.

Alright …	☐
Good …	☐
Having looked at …	☑
I intend to …	☐
I want to …	☐
I would like to move on to …	☐
I'll start by giving you …	☐
Let's now consider …	☐
Let's now move on to …	☐
Right …	☐
So …	☐
Then …	☐
Turning now to …	☐
What I intend to do is …	☐
What I would like to do is …	☐

Signals which help you to identify important information

Speech signals are used to mark important information in a lecture or talk.

Article	Adjective	Noun
The/an	essential important obvious	difficulty … drawback … element …
The/a	basic central crucial/salient key/main/major principal significant	factor … issue … point … problem … question …

The listener's attention may be drawn to these central pieces of information by the use of adverbial markers, as in the following table.

| Obviously/naturally,
Of course / clearly,
Essentially/principally,
Significantly/interestingly, | I | must / want to
should /ought to | emphasize …
make clear … |
| | it's | essential to
useful to | point out …
underline … |

In his book *Study Listening*, Lynch (1983, 68)[1] identifies three principal ways in which a speaker can draw attention to the central ideas in what he or she is saying:

1   by speaking about him/herself:

> I want to underline/stress/emphazise …
>
> My (main) point is …
>
> What I'm getting at is …

2   by speaking to the audience:

> It's important to notice/note that …
>
> Don't forget that …
>
> Remember / bear in mind that …

3   by speaking about the lecture or talk :

> The essential/crucial/important/main point is …

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[1]   Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Activity 4.12

A doctor is talking to a group of students on the topic of
stretching. He doesn't believe in the value of stretching
in preventing injury, although he recognizes that
stretching may have other benefits. In the right column of the table below
are the main arguments the doctor makes against stretching in his talk.
Look carefully at the arguments and use some of the speech signals you
have learned about in this section to introduce the ideas in a way that
adds emphasis to the arguments. Two have been done for you as
examples.

Speech signal	Main idea
I should make clear that …	… experts continue to recommend stretching before exercising.
	… you need to warm up before exercise and cool down afterwards.
	… you need to take other precautions to prevent injury.
A significant drawback is that …	… the increased flexibility that stretching promotes may actually impede performance.
	… rigorous bouncing is more likely to cause injury than prevent it.
	… there are alternatives to stretching.

When you have done this, listen to Audio CD 2 track 11 and compare the
speech signals the doctor uses with those that you chose. You can also
check the feedback section at the end of the module.

Knowing when to listen less intensively

A mistake which learners often make is to attempt to listen too
intensively in the belief that if they miss something they will not
understand the meaning completely.

As has been already pointed out, a listener cannot function like a tape-
recorder. Effective listening is selective listening guided by a clear
purpose. It involves using your knowledge of the topic, of grammar, of
word groups and subject matter to tell you when to concentrate and to
enable you at times to listen less intensively.

In a well-structured lecture or talk, the speaker will recycle information in order to ensure that the audience can follow it. At these times you can relax your listening effort. You can also use these recycling phases to check your understanding of what has already been said.

According to Lynch (1983), there are three main types of recycling in spoken English:

- reformulation (saying something again in different words)
- repetition (saying something again)
- summary.

A speaker may use signals to tell the audience that he/she is reformulating or summarizing.

Reformulation	Summary
In other words, … Now let me put that a different way … What I am trying to say is that …	So … We've seen that … In short/brief … In conclusion … Summing up / to sum up / to summarize …

Activity 4.13

You are going to listen to part of the second talk given by the speaker we met in Activity 4.11. In the first talk, he talked about *stretching*. In this one, he goes on to talk about the related topic of *flexibility*. As is natural when presenting a new concept, he begins by giving a definition. Reformulation is particularly important when a speaker defines terms. Often a definition is difficult for the listener to grasp as it is usually a written definition and the words are very carefully chosen to establish a precise meaning. The definition of 'flexibility' the speaker gives is as follows:

> the absolute range of movement in a joint or series of joints that is attainable in a momentary effort with the help of a partner or a piece of equipment.

In the table below are five strategies the speaker uses to reformulate the definition in order to make the meaning clear to his audience. As you listen to Audio CD 2 track 12, put the numbers in the correct blanks to match up each reformulation strategy on the left with the way the speaker implements the strategy on the right.

	Reformulation strategy		How he implements it
A	He translates the definition from scientific into simple language. __	1	'This means, for example, that …'
B	He uses speech signals. __	2	'This definition *tells us that* …'
C	He reinforces the first definition by quoting another source. __	3	he mentions the front splits and the side splits
D	He further translates the supporting definition. __	4	'in other words', 'put another way'
E	He gives examples to illustrate what the definition means. __	5	'according to "SynerStretch" …'

When you have finished, check the feedback section at the end of the module.

What we do when we listen – authentic listening tasks

Whatever kind of listening we do – whether it is listening to a lecture or following directions – having a specific task to perform can often help us to follow what is being said. When we listen to lectures, we take notes for this purpose. While note-taking is a specialized skill outside the scope of this course, there are a number of other tasks which we can perform while listening which will help us to follow the speaker's meaning. In this section, we look at some of these listening tasks and practise using them to help in listening for main ideas.

There are many occasions when a speaker is discussing something concrete or spatial. A good example is when someone is giving you directions. As you listen, you might draw a simple map yourself to help you follow the directions; and often the speaker will be referring to a map when giving the directions. Here, the listening task requires you to identify features the speaker describes in order to locate a specific position or follow a route on the map.

Orienting yourself to a map or floor plan

When interpreting a map (like the one below) or a floor plan, you need to orient yourself first. Check if there is a north indicator, or establish clearly in your mind where right and left are. There may be a 'You are here' arrow or dot. If there is an access road or entrance, you may find that the speaker's description starts from it.
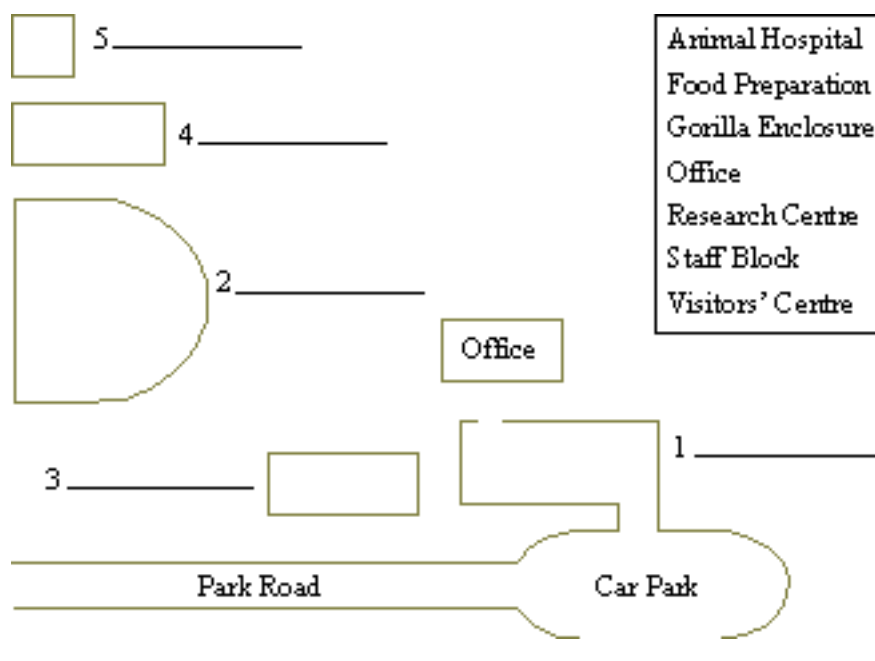

Look too for key landmarks that are labelled on the map or floor plan and think about how, if you were giving the directions, you would describe

missing data in relation to these landmarks. For example, try to *predict the prepositional phrases* that may be needed to describe missing data in relation to the landmarks given (e.g. 'in the top left corner', 'three blocks to the right', 'in between X and Y').

A number of activities follow, giving you practice in handling tasks involving labelling maps and floor plans.
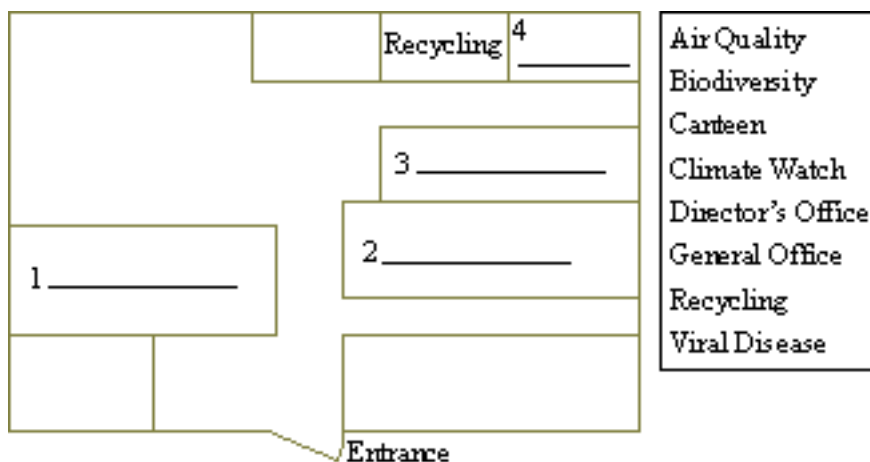
Activity 4.14

Listen to Audio CD 2 track 13 and label the five blanks on the map. Choose your answers from the box.

5 _____

4 _____

2 _____

| Animal Hospital |
| Food Preparation |
| Gorilla Enclosure |
| Office |
| Research Centre |
| Staff Block |
| Visitors' Centre |

Office

1 _____

3 _____

Park Road   Car Park

Activity 4.15

Below is the floor plan of an Environment Centre. Listen to Audio CD 2 track 14 and label the four blanks in the floor plan. Choose your answers from the box.

	Recycling 4 _____	Air Quality
		Biodiversity
		Canteen
	3 _____	Climate Watch
		Director's Office
	2 _____	General Office
1 _____		Recycling
		Viral Disease
	Entrance	

Predicting information from graphs and charts

In academic talks and lectures, graphs and charts are very commonly used to present information succinctly. To help you to follow what the speaker is saying, you may need to label or write notes on a graph such as the one below.

UK house prices

Source: http://www.nationwide.co.uk/archive.htm.
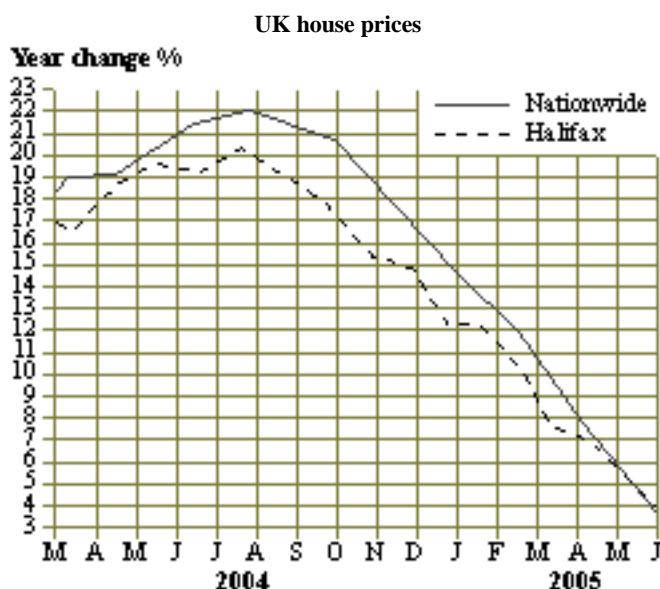
Using prediction skills will help you to gain much more meaning from the speaker's description of the graph. The prediction skills for labelling graphs and charts are essentially the same:

• Look for any *trends* or *exceptions*. Note where peaks or troughs occur in line graphs, and what the smallest and largest segments are in pie charts. Also look for and anticipate *logical relationships* between data.

- Read the *words* in the graph or chart so that you are more ready for the vocabulary you will hear the speaker use. Note what both the *x* and *y* axes represent, and think about associated words that might occur with the vocabulary already provided.

- Use your *subject knowledge* to predict missing data. For example, if a graph is about oil-producing countries, you can expect to hear the names of major oil producers such as Saudi Arabia and Russia.

Activity 4.16

Two people are discussing the world oil production pie chart below. The names of three countries have been left blank. Listen to the conversation on Audio CD 2 track 15 and write in the names of these three countries according to what you hear.
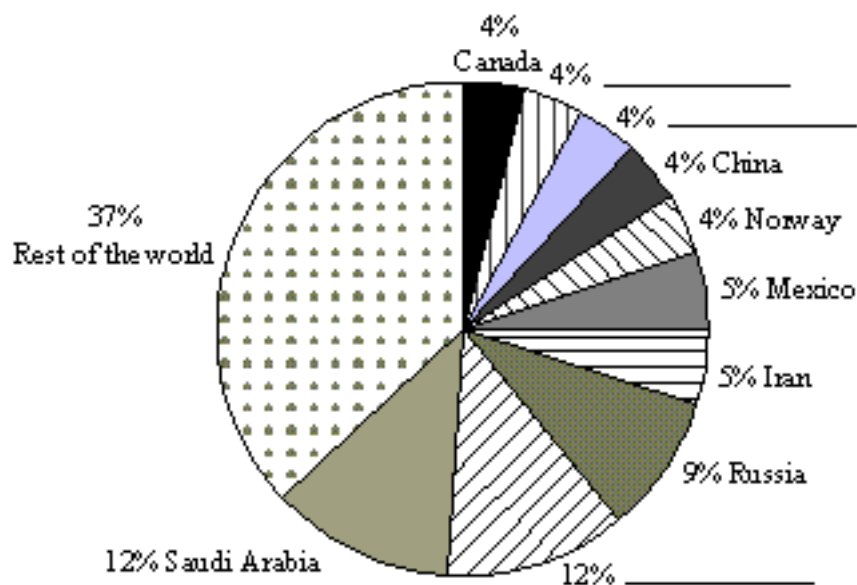
Source: Adapted from www.nigc.org/eia/nonopec.asp.

Following a process description

In a lecture or talk about a process or procedure, a speaker may use a visual aid such as a flowchart or a diagram to represent the process or procedure. In these situations, your knowledge of the *language of processes* can help you to anticipate both grammar and vocabulary. For example, procedural texts usually use:

- *the simple present tense* (in the active or passive voice) to describe how things work or how the stages in a process are related;

- *sequencing* or *staging prepositions* and prepositional phrases (such as 'first', 'then', 'next', 'after this', 'at this point', 'when this occurs');

• *action verbs* (such as 'flows', 'moves', 'leads to', 'follows', 'causes'); and

• verb phrases that *signal cause and effect* (such as 'leads to', 'results in').
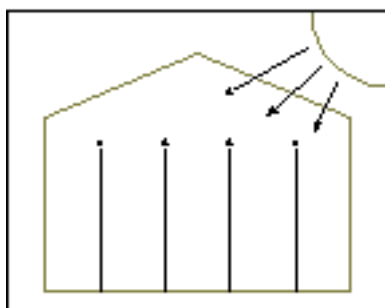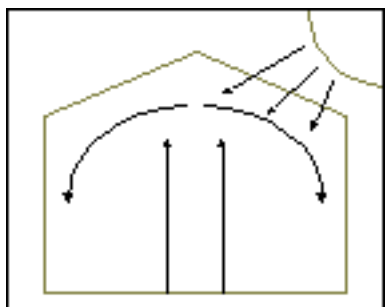
Activity 4.17

Two students are attending a talk about the Eden Project, an environmental centre. Below are the four diagrams presented in the talk. Listen to Audio CD 2 track 16 and complete the diagrams by filling in the missing information in the labels.
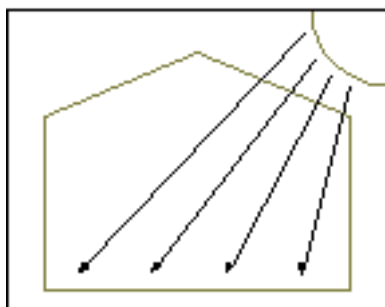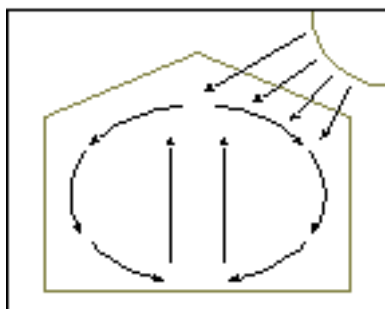

(1) _____ from sunlight heats up the greenhouse floor.

(2) _____ heats the layer of air at the bottom of the greenhouse.

The lower density (3) _____ rises to the top of the greenhouse.

(4) _____ replaces the heated air at the bottom, becomes heated in turn and also rises.

Source: Drawings adapted from http://science.howstuffworks.com/eden.htm/printable.

Using spoken cues in descriptions to identify and label graphs and diagrams

Sometimes you may need to identify something by listening to its description. For example, in a lecture, the speaker may be describing one of a set of graphs. You need to be able to distinguish between the different graphs. It is helpful to prepare for listening by looking for these differences and trying to anticipate key words that might be used to describe them.

Look at these four graphs. What are the differences between them?
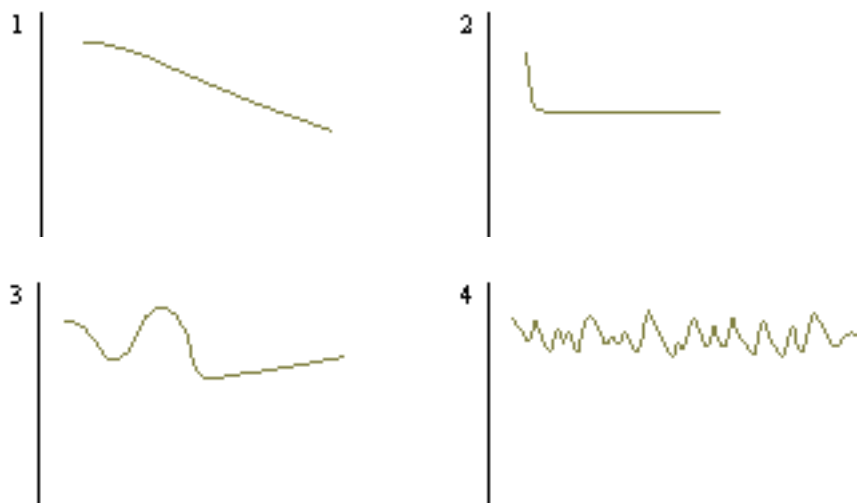
- The first shows a steady fall from a high start.

- The second shows an initial sharp fall followed by a period of stability.

- The third shows a fall followed by a sudden rise then another fall and a slight rise.

- The fourth shows a great deal of short-term variation but overall stability.

Activity 4.18

From the graphs above, identify the one A and B are talking about:

A Well, it could be worse I suppose.

B Yes, although the fish population has gone up and down sharply, there's no real evidence that stocks are threatened.

A I hope so. Unless the instability is a sign of stress and the recovery doesn't continue.

The answer would be the third. Speaker B's slight optimism means we must be looking at either the second or the third. The talk of going up as well as down rules out the second.

Activity 4.19

Look at the conversation between A and B and indicate which graph represents the following birds:

- red weaver
- greentail
- woodpecker
- spotted goose.

A   Since that drought a few years ago when the species was really harmed, red weaver numbers have been fairly stable.

B   Yes, though I wish they would start to go up. Recovery should be taking place faster than this. At least things look good for the greentail. That rise seems to be continuing.

A   On the other hand, I don't know what's happening to the woodpecker. The figures seem to vary a lot.

B   Yes, we need some research. There has to be an environmental factor behind all these fluctuations.

A   The spotted goose is in bad shape.

B   Every year its habitat gets less, so there are fewer of them. In a few years we won't be seeing any.
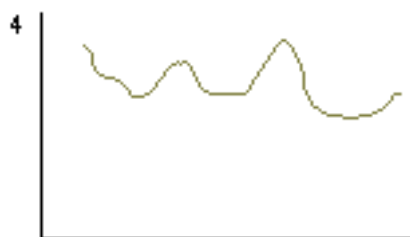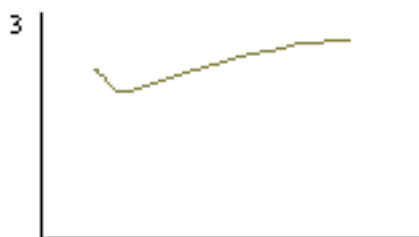
Did you give the following answers?

- The red weaver had one bad drop followed by stability without improvement. (Graph 2)

- The greentail also had a drop, but has been rising steadily ever since. (Graph 3)

- The woodpecker has erratic figures with rapid rises and falls. (Graph 4)

- The spotted goose is in continual decline. (Graph 1)

Activity 4.20

This activity gives you practice in identifying and labelling charts and floor plans.
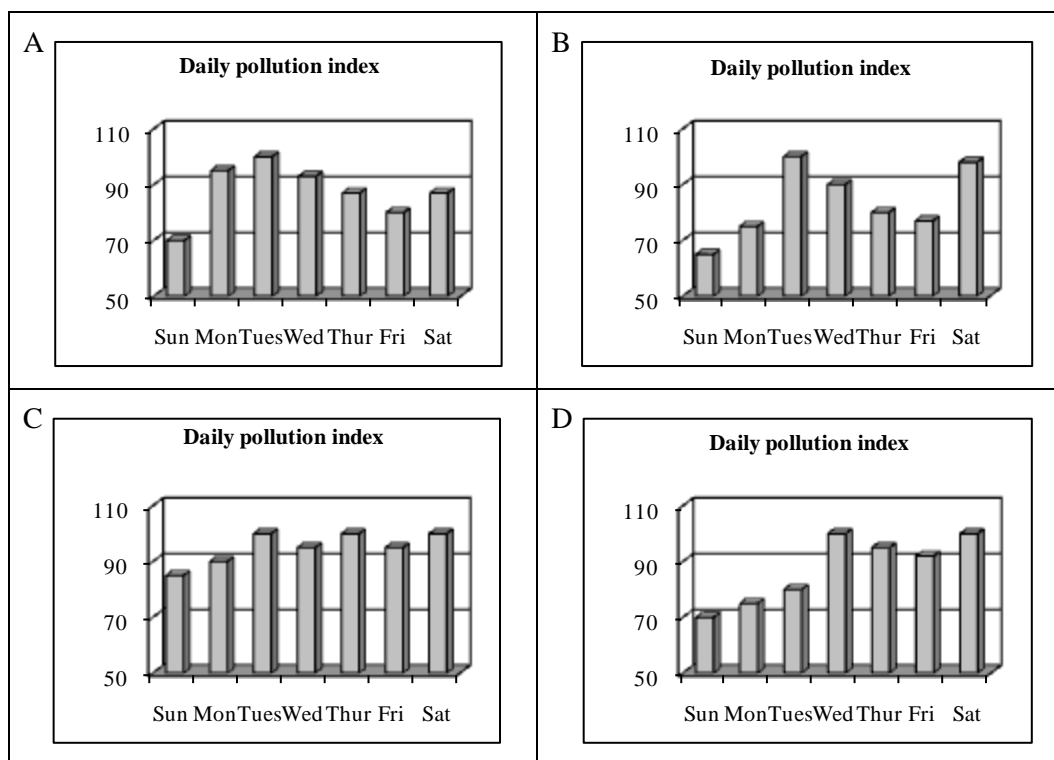
Look, listen to Audio CD 2 track 17, and answer.

1 Daily pollution index bar charts

Which bar chart is the speaker referring to?

Hint: Get familiar with the charts first and note where there are striking differences.
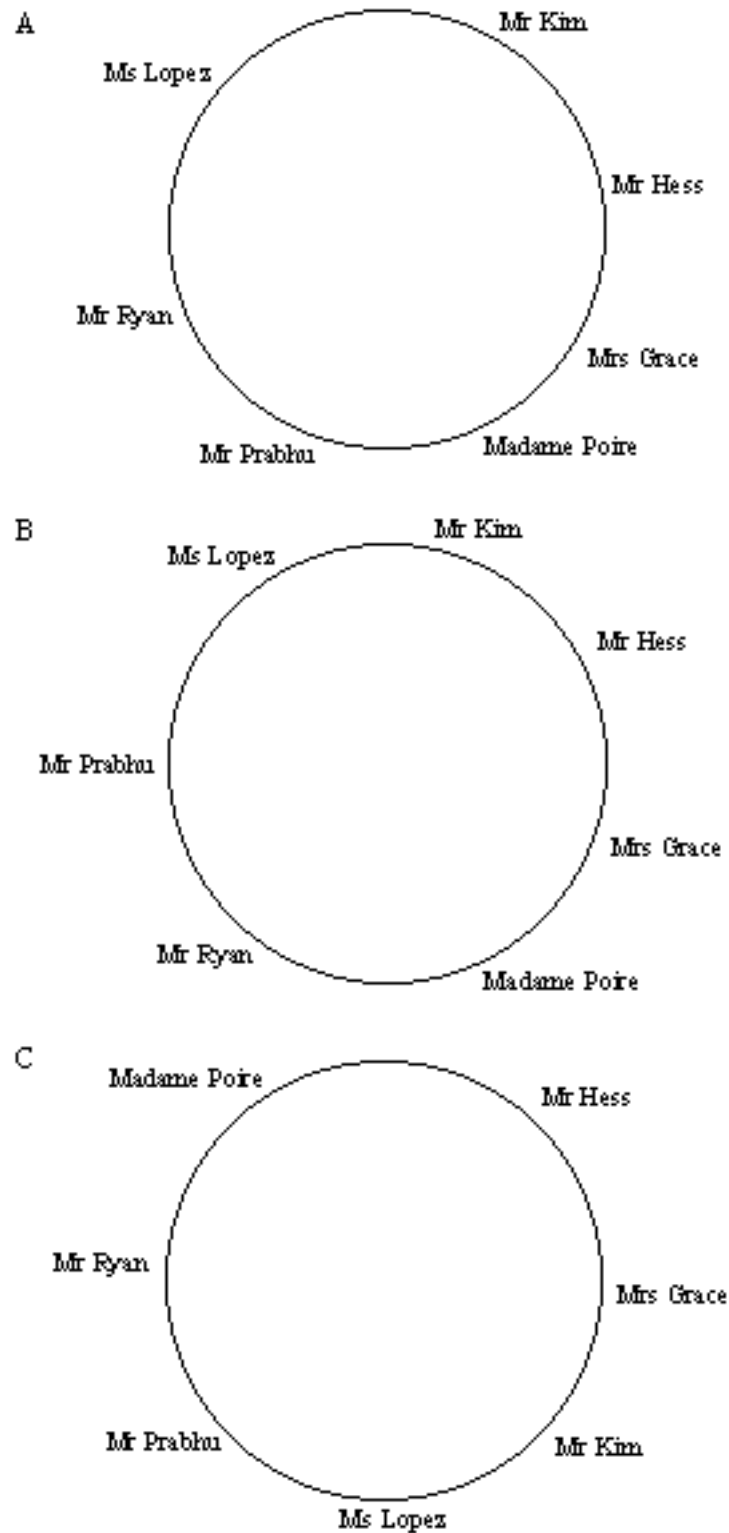

2 Layouts of a meeting place

Which plan do they decide on?

Hint: Count rows, etc., before listening so that you can react quickly.

A

B

C

3   Seating plans

Which plan do they follow?

Hint: Practise the pronunciation of the names so that you are ready when you hear them.

A

B

C

Classifying and categorizing information

When listening to a lecture, talk or conversation, you often need to categorize and classify information. The speaker may, for example, be accepting some ideas, asking for others to be modified and rejecting others. Such questions demand sensitivity to detail. Sometimes the information may be expressed indirectly and *listening for implications* is important. In doing this, it is valuable to be able to identify synonyms for key words or categories

Identifying synonyms and alternative phrases

The following activity helps you to practise identifying *synonyms or alternative phrases* when categorizing or classifying information you hear.

The activity asks you to listen to a conversation about animals that are endangered and then to classify each animal in the left column into a category that describes its endangered status. It would be too straightforward (and very repetitive) if the speaker simply used the words 'endangered' or 'not endangered', 'quite endangered' or 'very endangered' to describe the status of each animal. You, therefore, have to assume that the people in the conversation will use synonyms for the words 'endangered' and a range of positive and negative modifiers.

What words or phrases might be used as alternatives for the following words?

> endangered
>
> quite endangered
>
> not endangered
>
> very endangered

Activity 4.21

Listen to Audio CD 2 track 18 and put ticks in the table to show which category each animal belongs to.

	Not endangered	Quite endangered	Very endangered
Harper's squirrel			
Tibetan ibex			
Mongolian black rabbit			
blue goose			
French bear			
North American white eagle			
brown alligator			
Amazonian spotted monkey			

Putting it all together in a listening test

When you attempt a listening test, you are essentially bringing together all your listening skills and strategies and putting them into practice. In addition to the listening skills and strategies you have learned about in this module, however, performing well in a test of listening involves an additional range of test-taking skills. In other words, you need to become 'test wise'.

The essential first step to becoming 'test wise' is to understand what the question is asking you to focus on as you listen. In order to gain this understanding, you need to consider the way the different testing techniques operate. In this section, we begin our exploration of listening test items by looking at multiple-choice questions.

The three- or four-option multiple-choice question is one of the most common types of listening test question. You will already be familiar with such questions, and may even have developed strategies for handling them. In this section, we look at the various types of multiple-choice test questions that you often find in listening tests, and discuss ways of responding to them most efficiently.

Types of multiple-choice questions

Multiple-choice items can concern matters of *fact*:

The speaker feels that the most important factor in good health is

A   diet.

B   exercise.

C   emotion.

Other types of question ask you to *sum up what you have heard*, *identify the overall purpose of a lecture*, or *state a speaker's attitude*:

Which of these best represents Dr Peters' view?

A   Long life is a matter of luck.

B   Long life is a matter of genetics.

C   Long life is a matter of lifestyle.

Fiona is speaking to the group in order to
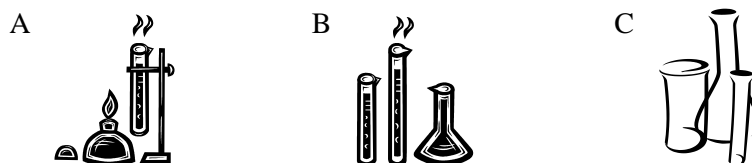
A   give advice to them.

B   teach them.

C   entertain them.

Ms Frank's attitude towards homeopathic medicine is

A   positive.

B   neutral.

C   negative.

The options you have to choose between may not be words or phrases. Instead, *drawings or charts* may be used:

Which of these represents the sort of tubes described by the doctor?

A   B   C

Options in these graphical items may not be set out in the traditional A, B, C order. Questions may require you to choose among a number of different charts or graphs, or different parts of a chart or graph:

Which column of the bar chart shows the number of sports injuries treated in the Centre in 2003?
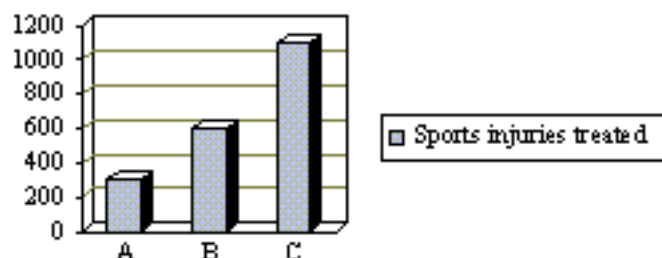
A slightly different form of multiple-choice question involves a table:

Tick the appropriate boxes to show how often the treatments are available.

Treatment	Never	Sometimes	Every day
1 acupuncture			
2 cosmetic surgery			
3 osteopathy			
4 physiotherapy			

Let's now go on to consider how you should approach multiple-choice questions when you are doing a listening test.

Strategies for responding to multiple-choice questions

Firstly, consider the *structure of the question* and think about *the sort of answer* that is required.

Analysing question structures

In terms of multiple-choice question structure, there are three types:

1 *Question stems* that need *completion*:

The new invention can be used to

A reduce air pollution.

B improve efficiency.

C save water.

2 Questions that involve selecting an appropriate *answer*:

Which animal is the most endangered?

A the tiger

B the panda

C the rhinoceros

3 Questions that ask you *to select from a longer list*:

Which TWO rainforest areas are being deforested fastest?

A the Amazon

B South-West China

C Siberia

D Borneo

E Sumatra

F Scandinavia

In these kinds of questions, you can often use your background knowledge of a topic to eliminate one or two *distractors* (or wrong answers) from the list of possible correct answers. For example, Scandinavia and Siberia are unlikely to be classified as rainforest areas, so you can safely assume that these are not possible correct answers. (Perhaps they have been included in the list because they sound a little bit like 'Sumatra'.)

Analysing question content

Consider also the *content* of the question. Is the question asking you to give specific information or describe a speaker's (positive, negative or neutral) tone? In terms of content, there are four types of multiple-choice questions:

1 Questions asking for *information*:

> The most harmful chemical is
>
> A   sulphur dioxide.
>
> B   carbon monoxide.
>
> C   hydrochloric acid.

For information questions, one needs to listen for key words. Remember that key words are also usually *stressed* words. It's possible that, in the case given above, the speaker will not use the exact phrase 'most harmful', but will use a synonym or an equivalent expression, e.g. 'worst', 'the one that demands the most urgent attention', etc. Therefore, when faced with an information question, try to look at the 'signal' words at the beginning of the question and think about synonyms for these words.

2 Questions asking for *explanation*:

> Carcinogens
>
> A   cause cancer.
>
> B   cause loss of memory.
>
> C   damage the environment.

For explanation questions, your skills of *predicting meaning from context* will be needed. Your *background knowledge* about the topic of cancer, for instance, could be useful here. Remember too to listen to *other sentences in the talk*. If there are descriptions about tumours or people getting sick and needing radiation therapy, you can logically guess that a carcinogen belongs to word groups describing cancer.

3 Questions asking about the *purpose* and *main message* of a talk:

> The speaker wants to
>
> A   persuade.
>
> B   inform.
>
> C   amuse.

For questions asking about the purpose and main message, you need to think about *the whole speech* and notice the *style*. A lecture might include questions meant to stimulate thought, whereas a persuasive speech might use questions to encourage agreement. To find the main point, you need to distinguish between the speaker's topic sentences (listen for signal words such as 'the main idea', 'principally…', 'the key thing I'd like to mention…') and the supporting detail and examples.

4   Questions asking about *tone*:

What is the speaker's tone?

A   angry

B   neutral

C   sarcastic

Tone may be suggested by the speaker's voice (angry people raise their voices, patient people speak calmly and quietly) and vocabulary choices ('disgraceful', 'wonderful', 'surprisingly', etc.). Notice whether *positive or negative* adjectives or adverbs are used. Remember that *prefixes* such as un-, and dis- usually signal negative qualities. If no strongly positive or negative words are used, the tone may be *neutral*.

The two activities that follow will give you practice in responding to the different types of multiple-choice questions reviewed here. In Activity 4.22, you will listen to a short conversation among three people on the topic of diet; and Activity 4.23 involves listening to a talk. This type of listening exercise is common in academic listening tests.

For all these activities, remember to:

•   read the questions carefully before listening;

•   think about what each question is asking you to provide (and eliminate any illogical distractors);

•   think about possible key words (and their synonyms);

•   try to identify the topic in advance;

•   listen to which words are stressed;

•   listen for positive or negative words; and

•   listen to the speaker's tone of voice, emotion and volume.

Activity 4.22

Listen to Audio CD 2 track 19 and choose the best answers.

Remember to read the questions carefully first before you listen.

1   The glycaemic index is about

   A   vitamins.

   B   calories.

   C   carbohydrates.

2   The index is most frequently based on

   A   bread.

   B   glucose.

   C   rice.

3   Foods high on the glycaemic index

   A   give you a lot of energy very quickly.

   B   make you feel very full.

   C   release sugar slowly into the blood.

4   What is the correct formula for finding the glycaemic load of a food?

   A   weight of food consumed $\times$ glycaemic index number

   B   (Index number $\times$ grams of actual carbohydrate) $\div$ 100

   C   index number $\div$ 100 $\times$ grams of actual carbohydrate consumed

5   The male speaker's attitude towards the Atkins' Diet is

   A   positive.

   B   neutral.

   C   negative.

6   Which food is high on the index?

   A   melon

   B   tomato

   C   apple

7   Which food is low on the index?

   A   potatoes

   B   peas

C   carrots

8   Hyperactivity is caused _____ by eating food high on the
    glycaemic index.

    A   hardly at all

    B   partly

    C   mainly

9   The male speaker's attitude towards the use of the glycaemic index is

   A   positive.

    B   neutral.

        C   negative.

Activity 4.23

In this activity you will hear a talk given to new students entering
university. Listen carefully to Audio CD 2 track 20 and choose the
best answers.

1   Narcolepsy involves

    A   insomnia.

    B   sudden collapse.

    C   feeling nervous.

2   Which figure represents the number of people suffering from
    narcolepsy?

    A   1 in 200

    B   1 in 2,000

    C   1 in 20,000

3   A sign of suffering from sleep apnoea is

    A   heavy snoring.

    B   daytime sleepiness.

    C   depression.

4   EDS stands for

    A   'excessive daily sleep'.

    B   'early day sleepiness'.

    C   'excessive daytime sleepiness'.

5 Which column represents the number of students claiming serious sleep disturbance?
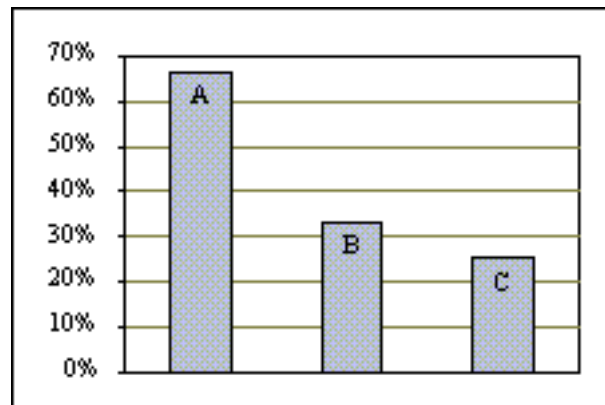
6 Which represents the normal pattern of sleep?

A

B

C

KEY

REM sleep

Non-REM sleep
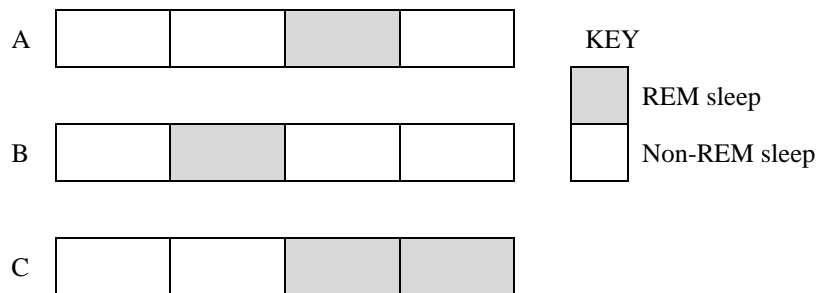
7 Put a tick in the appropriate boxes to show the speaker's attitude to each piece of advice.

Advice	Suggested, if possible	Strongly recommended	Essential
Follow a fixed routine.			
Do not worry.			
Use bedroom only for sleep.			
Make bedroom quiet and dark.			
Get up for a while if you cannot sleep.			
Avoid caffeine.			
Take exercise.			
Do not sleep			

during the day.			

8   Which best describes the purpose of the talk?

A   to teach a class about sleep

B   to warn students not to sleep in class

C   to give health advice

Conclusion

In this module, we have:

- reviewed the listening process and the skills and strategies of effective listeners;

- practised listening for specific information involving numbers, dates, times and addresses;

- looked at the prediction strategies which can make you a more effective listener;

- examined the structure of lectures and talks, and the strategies you need to listen to them;

- considered some of the tasks involved in authentic listening, including:

  - orienting yourself to a map and floor plan;

  - anticipating information found in graphs and diagrams;

  - following a process description;

  - using spoken cues to identify and label diagrams; and

  - classifying and categorizing information; and

- considered types of multiple-choice questions and the strategies for responding to them.

Finally, you have become more familiar with vocabulary items relating to health, the environment and conservation.