

NEW WAYS OF TEACHING LISTENING AND PRONUNCIATION

HEAR & SAY

24 POWERFUL TEACHER-TESTED STRATEGIES YOU SHOULD BE USING

SAVE TIME
LEARN WHAT WORKS
AND WHAT DOESN'T

TRY
SOMETHING NEW
EVERY SINGLE DAY

ENJOY
INSTANT RESULTS

HOW DO WE TEACH
LISTENING &
PRONUNCIATION
SMARTER,
NOT HARDER?

TIRED OF THE SAME OLD
'BY-THE-BOOK' LESSONS?
HERE'S SOMETHING
YOU'LL LOVE

🔧 #1 ON EVERY BUSY TEACHER'S LIST ~ STEP BY STEP INSTRUCTIONS ~ WE'VE MADE IT EASY FOR YOU

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5 Easy Listening Games for ESL Beginners

ESL BEGINNERS MAY NOT BE ABLE TO SAY A WHOLE LOT, AFTER ALL THEIR VOCABULARY AND GRAMMAR ARE RATHER LIMITED. BUT IN ORDER TO START SPEAKING, THEY HAVE TO START LISTENING.

And not just listening to the correct pronunciation, intonation and stress. I mean really listening. Listening for meaning. Listening for context. Listening for real comprehension.

You may think there isn't a whole lot beginners can comprehend, but you'll be surprised. Try playing these simple listening games. They may be easy, but for students who are just starting out in their English learning journey, they can be highly effective ways to train in the basic skills they will use on a daily basis in the near future!

HOW TO HELP ESL BEGINNERS IMPROVE THEIR LISTENING SKILLS: 5 EASY GAMES

1 LISTEN FOR IT!

One of the most essential listening skills your students should develop involves listening for key information, which often includes numbers, facts, hours, dates or other essential info. To help them train for this skill, first give them some context: You will listen to a man asking for information at the train station. Then, before they listen, give them something they will have to find out: What time does the train to Boston leave? Now here comes the "game" aspect of it. You can:

Divide the class into teams and have a team member raise their hand/ring a bell as soon as they hear the answer. Then, you do the same with another short audio track. You ask a question and play the audio -- the team that answers first gets a point. And the team with the most points at the end wins.

Have each student participate individually, but make sure everyone participates, not the same students over and over again.

2 UNMUSICAL CHAIRS

This easy listening game works great with young learners. Arrange chairs as if to play musical chairs. Students will walk around them, but in this case they won't be listening to a song. They will listen to a conversation. As always, give them the context and ask them a question: What is Tom's favorite food? Students walk around the chairs as you play the audio and the student/s who hear the answer to the question sit/s down. Pause the audio. Those who are seated answer the question, and if it's correct they will remain seated. If several students sit down at the same time, that's fine, but ask them to whisper the answer in your ear to make sure they all heard the answer from the audio.

Ask another question (whose answer will come up next in the audio). The students who were left standing now walk around the chairs till they hear the answer. Go on asking questions and giving students the opportunity to secure a seat. The last student left standing, like the usual game of musical chairs is left out of the next round. A chair is removed from the circle and so it continues until you have one chair and two students competing to answer the final question.

It's convenient to have the script of the audio so it's easier for you to ask the questions. Also, bear in mind you will play longer with a longer audio, but you can also play with several short ones. The game will go much faster if several students sit down (have the answer) at the same time, but only those who got it right should remain seated.

3 WHICH ONE IS IT?

Something that is particularly difficult for ESL students is listening to the subtle differences between words that have a different, but similar spelling. These are words like leave/live, fill/feel, tree/three, fit/feet, etc. So here's a great game you can play. Have a set of cards printed out with these troublesome words. Divide the class into two teams.

Students take turns. You place the two cards on the desk in front of them: live and leave. Say one of the words out loud: live. If the student chooses the right card, the team gets 2 points. Now, if the student is unsure, he/she may choose to request "an example", i.e. the word used in a sentence: I live a few blocks from here. If the student chooses the right card in this case, the team gets 1 point.

4 WORD OF MOUTH

Here's another game you can play with the same easily confused words from above. Divide students into two teams. Whisper a word to a student, who must then whisper it to the student next to him/her, and so it goes until the last student in line has to say the word out loud. If he/she pronounces it correctly, the team gets a point. A variation of this would be not to whisper to the first student but show him/her the word written down on a piece of paper.

5 STEP BY STEP

Another important listening skill students must develop is learning to understand step by step instructions. Try this fun listening game, which also helps them practice asking for and giving directions. You'll need a "city map": you can use a real map, or better yet create one with your students' desks, so they have actual "streets" to walk on. Start at any give point, say the "bank", and have a students ask for directions to another location. Tell them how to get there. The student must trace his/her finger along the route you indicated, or walk all the way there. Students who manage to reach their destination/ don't get lost win points!

FROM THESE EXAMPLES YOU CAN SEE THAT'S IT NOT DIFFICULT TO MAKE LISTENING PRACTICE INTO A GAME, ONE THAT IS NOT ONLY FUN, BUT ALSO GIVES YOUR ESL STUDENTS THE LISTENING SKILLS THEY NEED TO SUCCEED.

5 Simple Steps to Teaching the Perfect Listening Lesson

AS ENGLISH TEACHERS, WE KNOW HOW TO LISTEN. BUT NOT MANY OF US HAVE TAKEN LISTENING CLASSES, AT LEAST NOT IN ENGLISH. HOW THEN DOES A PERSON TEACH LISTENING WHEN SHE'S NEVER HAD A LISTENING CLASS OF HER OWN AND HAS NO MODEL TO FOLLOW?

We do listen in English, but those skills come instinctually. And when we have no experience of our own to fall back on, how does a new teacher know what to cover in a listening lesson? The perfect listening lesson is easier to accomplish than you think. With 5 simple steps you can take any listening material and use it to create a successful educational opportunity for your ESL students. Here's how.

HOW TO TEACH A PERFECT LISTENING LESSON

1 WAKE UP THEIR BRAINS

Before your students ever listen to the material you will be using during your lesson, it is important to get them thinking about the topic it will address. Your students already know more than they think they do about your topic and their own English skills. When put on the spot, though, it is hard for anyone to remember what they already know about a topic. By discussing the general topic that will be covered in your listening material, your students will bring any knowledge they already have about the topic to the forefront of their brains. For ESL students, this may include specific vocabulary and grammatical structures as well as content knowledge. In addition, learning makes connections between the things that we already know and the new information presented to us. When you present new information to your students in conjunction with what they already know, they will retain the information faster and for a longer time than if you present the information cold. So if your students will be listening to a zoologist's presentation, ask them to share stories of their favorite animals or a trip to the zoo.

When listening to a conversation at a restaurant, have students discuss who they like to eat with and what they talk about when they are out. In addition to talking about the subject, you can give your students some basic knowledge about the material they will listen to and have them make predictions about it.

2 GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER

A good listening lesson gives students a chance to listen to the material multiple times. Each time they listen, though, they should have a different goal. The first time through, you will want your students to get the overall message of your listening material. After your students have discussed what they already know about the topic and made some predictions, present the listening material to your class for the first time. This first time though, your students should be listening for main ideas. Taking notes is optional at this point. You can have them discuss the general points of the listening material in groups after they listen or have them write down the main points of the presentation.

3 FEEDBACK FUNCTIONS

Now that you have gotten your students thinking about the subject and given them a chance to listen to the material once through, have your students go back to their original discussion groups and questions. They should spend a few minutes talking about what they got right and what they got wrong. This is also a good time to clear up any major confusions. Do your students have any general questions about what they heard? Have individuals share these with their groups and see if the other members can clear up any confusion. Your students will then be ready to listen the second time through.

4 WHAT'S THE NITTY GRITTY?

Your students should already have an

understanding of the listening material, so now it's time to get to the specifics. As your students listen this time, they will be taking notes and listening for specific information. You might want your students to take notes as they listen and then answer comprehension questions. (Give them the questions before they listen to the material again.) You can also have students fill out an outline as they listen. If you are teaching specific vocabulary, have students listen for and write a definition for each new word. You can even ask students to make inferences based on the information in the listening passage. Don't feel like you have to limit your students' listening to only two times, either. Play the selection for them as many times as they need to hear it to get the information you are asking for. If you are asking for two or more types of information (vocabulary, comprehension questions, etc.) give your students a listen for each set of information you want them to note.

5 STEP IT UP

Now your students have listened to the passage multiple times and should have a thorough understanding of what they heard, it is time to apply that information to another context. Think about what your students could do with the information they heard. If they heard instructions on how to care for a dog, ask them how they could care for a cat. Ask your students to write about how they would go about finding a new job if they listened to a lecture on job searches. If your students listened to a conversation between two people at a café, have them role play a conversation between two people on a dinner date. The point in this final step is to take the information they received and apply it to a different situation or use it to complete another task. Be creative but be practical. Your students will appreciate a real life application of the information they have worked so hard to understand!

How to Use Popular Music to Teach ESL

I spend a lot of time listening to popular music — not originally by choice.

But I have an adolescent daughter, hence I spend a lot of time shuttling her to music and basketball practice and other commitments, and hence she has taken control of the car radio. She likes a specific local station that professes to “play all the hits,” which seems to be about ten songs — presumably the top ten — rotated in a constant loop. Therefore, I have memorized most of these songs and in fact have them stuck in my head — originally to my chagrin, but not only have I grown to like some of this music (I have a particular fondness for the group Maroon 5), but also I see some of the songs’ value as teaching tools. Much like poetry, these songs can teach rhyme and meter, complex vocabulary, and multiple meanings. The songs also reveal interesting aspects of not only popular culture but also deeper sociological issues: what is “pop” or popular with a culture at the moment, after all, speaks volumes about that culture. My daughter, of the same generation of most of my students, has served as a “guide” to this music through discussions about it.

HOW TO TEACH ESL WITH POPULAR MUSIC

1 AMBIGUITY

Most literature can be taken in more than one way. The songs “Misery” and “We Are Never Getting Back Together” show the messiness of relationships. “Misery” by Maroon 5 has the repeated lyric from the narrator “I’m going to get you back,” which I originally thought meant the speaker meant wanted to win back the affections of his loved one, - on further analysis, however, the full lyric is “You got me good, now I’m going to get you back,” suggesting the song is really about “retaliation,” as my daughter put it. This demonstrates that idioms like “to get someone back” mean different things depending on the con-

text. Similarly, in Taylor Swift’s “We are Never Ever Getting Back Together” the narrator reiterates throughout her claim that she and her boyfriend will never reunite, get back together, after their latest breakup. But given the couple has this pattern of breaking up and then reuniting, is this really a kind of declaration of independence from a bad relationship, as it seems at first, or is it denial?

2 METAPHOR

Maroon 5’s “She Will Be Loved,” the girl who will be loved is described as “the girl with the broken smile.” What does this lovely image mean? I’ve always taken it to mean the young woman has been in some way hurt by life, hence “broken,” yet she continues to smile. To other listeners the lyric will mean something else. In Kenny Rogers’ “The Gambler” from an earlier generation the entire song is an extended metaphor of gambling for life as the older gambler gives some advice to the young drifter narrating the story. And metaphor is also a great way to teach vocabulary, in just taking a phrase like “broken smile” and coming up with associations with it: “hurt,” “bravery,” and so forth, and in that way building students’ vocabulary.

3 STORYTELLING

“The Gambler” by Kenny Rogers is also an example of music as pure storytelling, telling the story of the narrator meeting up with the gambler on a train one night and who “for a taste of my whiskey” offers some advice, which he does — the extended metaphor of cards as life: “You have to know when to hold them, know when to fold them, know when to walk away, and know when to run...” At the end of the song, the gambler “breaks even,” or dies, but leaves the narrator “an ace that I could keep.” A more recent example of great storytelling is Fun’s “Some Nights,” concerning the narrator’s experiences of going to war and youthful enthusiasm for it: “Boys, this is war! This is what I’ve been waiting for...” and subsequent disil-

lusionment: “I sold my soul for this? Washed my hands of God for this...?” The story then turns to the narrator’s sister: “My heart is breaking for my sister and the con that she called love...” and concludes “But then I look into my nephew’s eyes and see what amazing things can come from some terrible lies.” The story suggests then that both siblings have been exploited, the boy by the lie of war and the girl by the lie of love, but that there is redemption in the end in the form of the narrator’s nephew.

4 THEME AND MESSAGE

The recent song “Thrift Shop” concerns the narrator, with “only twenty dollars in my pocket,” forgoing the mall and fifty dollar t-shirts and going to the “thrift shop down the street,” where he and his friends buy used clothes — some of them their grandparents’ cast-offs — that look “incredible.” The song is meant in high humor, of course, but also carries a serious underlying message about the importance of living within one’s means — especially important for a nation and people who has repeatedly failed at that. An important note here is that the song is in a nonstandard dialect of English that may be hard to understand, a problem with many pop songs, even for native English speakers. A partial solution to the problem is online in the form of free websites that can be accessed through simply searching the song’s title and which will then give the printed lyrics for free. They are often a surprise, again even to native English speakers.

5 CULTURAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

One Direction’s “What Makes You Beautiful,” Bruno Mars’s “Just the Way You Are,” and an earlier generation Sammy Kershaw’s “She Don’t Know She’s Beautiful” all carry a theme of a beautiful woman who somehow lacks insight into her own physical beauty and which everyone else seems to be aware of. I person-

ally have not met a beautiful woman who was not aware of the fact. As my daughter succinctly summarized it: she can look in the mirror like the rest of us, she's likely been told by many that she's beautiful, and she's probably had a boyfriend or two. We also agreed on why this, the beautiful woman who doesn't know it, would be a particular male fantasy. A beautiful woman is, it almost goes without saying, a kind of prize: not only can the male enjoy her beauty, but she also increases his status in having gained the affections of this beautiful woman. And if she doesn't know she's beautiful — well, that's even better! That's the jackpot. Because she's insecure and unaware of the power she might hold, she's unlikely to leave and more easily controlled. In summary, while such a song is on its surface simply a celebration of a specific woman, it also shows some of the inequalities rife in a patriarchal culture. Analysis like this of current popular culture can reveal some interesting sociological/psychological implications.

POPULAR MUSIC, LIKE MOST THINGS "POPULAR," OR "OF THE PEOPLE," CAN SEEM AT FIRST BLUSH TRIVIAL AND NOT WORTHY OF THE TIME OF THE SERIOUS LANGUAGE LEARNER.

However, Shakespeare was also a "popular" writer — he wrote for the general population of London, not its elite. Is some study of music to turn our classes into conservatories? Of course not, - much of this music is almost impossible to sing by anyone besides a professional. The point is to study and perhaps even enjoy it. Popular music in a language class, in a way that more serious literature often doesn't, can speak to a young audience and also reveal volumes about contemporary culture — the one it is derived from.

Why Use Music in Class & What Students'll Think When You Do

ALMOST EVERYONE LIKES MUSIC. THOUGH DIFFERENT PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT MUSICAL PREFERENCES, ALMOST EVERYONE LIKES ONE SORT OR ANOTHER, AND VERY FEW PEOPLE FIND NO MELODIES THAT APPEAL TO THEM.

And if that alone wasn't reason enough to use music in your ESL classroom, think about this. Music and language learning are related. Both are human communication through sound. If you have used music in your ESL classroom, you know what an enjoyable and effective means it can be for language learning. If you haven't tried using music in the classroom, you should. Here are some reasons why.

WHY YOU SHOULD USE MUSIC IN THE ESL CLASSROOM (AND WHAT YOUR STUDENTS WILL THINK WHEN YOU DO)

1 MUSIC IS FUN

Since almost everyone likes one sort of music or another, your students will enjoy bringing a melody into the classroom. Music keeps students engaged and increases participation. Students who have fun learn better, and music can bring a new kind of fun to learning for your students. Using a variety of music styles in the classroom will help you engage the majority of your students. Include classical music, simple tunes and today's popular music when possible. Encourage your students to share their favorite songs when appropriate, and make sure your students respect and accept the tunes their classmates share.

2 MUSIC TEACHES LANGUAGE

Music can help your students learn more about language itself. Besides teaching new vocabulary, language learning set to music will help your students understand rhythm, stress and intonation. You can also use mu-

sic to teach pronunciation, pacing and rhyme. Simple jingles are an entertaining and engaging way to teach dry grammatical concepts, and students will remember these rules better when they find themselves humming the lyrics several times throughout the week.

3 MUSIC HELPS LEARNING

Studies on music have shown that it increases concentration, improves memory and decreases stress. (Ask your students and you are sure to find they are interested in all three.) Simply playing classical music in the background as you instruct or your students study will make a difference in their performance. And let's not forget that music is also one of the learning styles many of your students will possess, so including music in your classroom will help your students pay attention and remember the information you present.

4 MUSIC CAN SET A MOOD

Music can do more than teach concepts. Background music can improve overall learning (particularly classical music), or music can help you transition your students from one topic to another, from one mood to another. Particularly in a classroom of children, music can give instructions and help students change their mindset from one activity to the next. Use music between subjects or activities or for putting instructions in a more attractive package.

5 MUSIC TEACHES CULTURE

When you take a close look at the music of any culture, you will find there the values that culture possesses. Using English music in your classroom can teach your students about the culture in which they are now living, and giving your students a chance to share music from their own countries will open the door to easy communication between your students and you. Use music as a starting off point to talk about cultural is-

sues or to communicate values. Also, paying attention to the music your students like will give you insight into their values as well.

TEACHERS OF CHILDREN'S ESL AND THOSE TEACHING ADULT ESL STUDENTS MAY FIND STUDENTS REACT DIFFERENTLY TO USING MUSIC IN THE CLASSROOM, BUT BOTH REACTIONS WILL MORE THAN LIKELY BE POSITIVE.

Both children and adults will learn better and more quickly when music is part of the curriculum. In addition, most people will have fun when a pretty melody sweetens a dry grammatical concept. Children may be more energetic and enthusiastic when you use music in their classrooms, but that doesn't mean your adult students don't value or appreciate music in their classrooms, too. Finally, music is an instant attention getter! If you find your students getting off topic or unfocused, a song is all you might need to bring them back to task.

5 Real Life Listening Skills Your Students Need

LISTENING IS SOMETHING WE DO EVERY DAY.

Whether in a first language or a second language, people are constantly hearing and processing language. But what exactly do we do when we process language? And what do we need to teach our ESL students to do? These five real life listening skills are the keys your students need to understand what they hear every day.

5 LIFESAVING LISTENING SKILLS FOR YOUR STUDENTS

1 THEY NEED TO DETERMINE WHAT THEY ARE HEARING

Are they listening to a lecture? Are they part of a negotiation? Are they the recipient of small talk? Before they can make sense of what they are hearing, your students will need to determine what they are hearing. It's because the reason someone is speaking affects what their listeners will need to do with it. In other words, the type of speech determines what listening skills they will need to engage. Different listening skills are necessary for having a conversation than for listening to a lecture or watching a television program.

2 THEY NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE HEARING

Once your students know why they are listening to someone, they need to understand what they are hearing. But that doesn't mean they need to process every word the speaker sends their way. Trying to understand and remember every word in sequence is more than the short term memory can handle. When students understand and remember chunks of language or ideas, their comprehension increases. Encourage your students to focus on phrases, patterns of speech, and ideas. They should avoid mentally translating every word they hear into their native language but should try to

understand the ideas instead of the words. This listening strategy affects the ESL teacher, too. So when you assess your students, don't ask about specific words or quotations. Instead ask about units of meaning, ideas and how they relate to each other.

3 THEY NEED TO GUESS WHAT IS COMING NEXT

Your students have determined what type of speech they are hearing and decided what its purpose is. They are listening and understanding and processing the information as it comes in chunks of words or ideas. But listening is more than just taking in what you hear. As they are listening, it is important that your students predict what information will be coming next. When they do make mental predictions, they will be better able to understand and process the language that is to come. Think of it this way. If you knew you were having a piece of furniture delivered, you would make a space for it to go. You wouldn't wait until the couch was at the front door before determining where it should go and what you have to move to put it there. Language is like that. When a listener has an idea of what is coming, he or she can have a mental place ready for the information as it arrives from the speaker.

4 THEY NEED TO REMEMBER WHAT THEY ALREADY KNOW ABOUT THE SUBJECT

Learning is about making connections. Every learner will understand and retain information better when they link it to something they already know. Think of the mind as an ever increasing collection of Lego blocks. The new blocks are easier to hold on to when they snap into one of the blocks already there. The sooner your students can remember what they know about a given subject, the better their comprehension and retention will be with the new information they are given. Helping your students remember what they already know before

or during listening practice will make their listening exercise more productive. If you can, get your students thinking about today's subject before the listening exercise with discussion questions or a K/W/L chart. In real life, though, your students will not always get a heads up on a conversational topic. That means as they are listening they should also be thinking about what they already know.

5 THEY NEED TO DECIDE WHAT THE SPEAKER MEANS

Understanding words and ideas are essential to determining meaning, but they are not the only important pieces of that puzzle. Sometimes meaning goes deeper than the words that are said. Sometimes a speaker's meaning is implied, that is, the speaker means something deeper than the words on the surface. For example, someone might say, "Is it hot in here?" The speaker could just want an answer to his question, but if you are sitting next to the window, he might mean for you to open the window. Your students need to be able to determine the intended meaning of the speakers with whom they speak. Sometimes the meaning is literal, your students can take their words at face value. But they also have to be prepared to decipher an intended meaning beyond the surface of the words they hear and understand.

ONCE YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THESE FIVE ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOR REAL LIFE LISTENING, YOU WILL BEGIN TO SEE THAT LISTENING IS NOT A PASSIVE ACTIVITY. LISTENING IS AN ACTIVITY THAT INCLUDES COMPREHENSION, PREDICTION, RECALL AND ANALYSIS. LUCKILY, WITH A LITTLE PRACTICE, YOUR STUDENTS CAN BECOME EXPERTS AT EVERY STEP.

Starting off Strong: Excellent Listening Skills Diagnostics

SO YOU'VE BEEN ASSIGNED TO YOUR FIRST ESL LISTENING CLASS, AND MAY BE FEELING A LITTLE AT A LOSS.

Perhaps you've never taught ESL listening skills before and don't quite know what to cover. Perhaps you're waiting desperately for your copy of the textbook — maybe you'll get some ideas there — or desperately searching the Internet. Those aren't necessarily bad places to look, and some great ideas might be available. But the most important place to start is with your students and their needs. There are a number of skills to keep you busy all term in a listening class, and a good diagnostic will guide you toward which skills to teach.

SO WHAT NEEDS TO BE ON A LISTENING SKILLS DIAGNOSTIC?

Several skills should be tested on an ESL listening diagnostic: understanding directions, getting the main point of a lecture, and following the details of a story, for example, are all skills that students should become proficient in and should be on a diagnostic to determine how much proficiency students already have. In addition, anything on a standard syllabus for the class should be covered on the diagnostic: if understanding instructions, for example, is listed as a skill, that is something that should be taught during the semester and therefore should be assessed in the beginning to determine where students are going into the class. Any skill that will be taught in the class, in other words, should be first assessed, to determine students' existing skill level and how much needs to be taught.

SO HOW DO I DESIGN A LISTENING SKILLS DIAGNOSTIC?

1 MAKE IT THOROUGH

A good listening skills diagnostic should be thorough. It should assess, depending on student level and

course demands, students' ability to understand a conversation's main points and details, to comprehend common questions and their appropriate responses, to note directions and instructions, to understand unfamiliar vocabulary using context, and to take basic notes on an academic lecture. So at the beginning ESL level, for example, it would be appropriate to test students' ability to answer common personal questions and follow basic instructions while at a more advanced level students should be able to understand unfamiliar academic vocabulary in context and take notes on a simple college lecture.

2 KEEP IT SIMPLE

A good listening skills diagnostic should also be simple while covering a number of skills students need in school and outside: the test should be no more than three pages, four at the most. The teacher, however, can keep the test simple while also being thorough, a matter of conciseness. One way to accomplish this is by testing more than one skill at a time. Having students answer questions about a short story, for example, tests their abilities at understanding main ideas and details as well as the ability to answer short questions (if the questions are given to them about the story in oral form) and to understand unfamiliar vocabulary in context.

HOW DO I USE A LISTENING SKILLS DIAGNOSTIC?

Okay, I've collected the data, I've assessed my students' class entry listening skills. Now what do I do with this information? This is a general problem in the contemporary world, as any user of the Internet will tell you: from the endless surveys people are asked to take, it would seem we're very focused on collecting data. But one wonders on how much we actually use the data: does it get used to improve services or products, or does it just sit in some database? Having

gone to the effort, on both the teacher's and students' parts, to collect this information on the diagnostic, of course it should be used. The question becomes "how?" How does the instructor analyze and use the data from the diagnostic in the classroom?

1 LOOK FOR GENERAL PATTERNS

In reviewing students' completed diagnostics, the instructor is likely to see repeated points of concerns: most students will have trouble understanding vocabulary in context, for example, as this is a very difficult skill, requiring a strong grasp of the language of instruction, and most students will also have trouble noting a precise set of directions in correct sequential order. These are then the skills that should be focused on over the course of the semester, rather than too much focus given to understanding main ideas of a story, which is a relatively easy skill to get, and if most students in class seem to have mastered it.

2 CONNECT THE PATTERNS TO POINTS OF INSTRUCTION

Once the data is collected and analyzed, the instructor can then develop a set of specific points of instruction: she knows that students have trouble with instructions and directions, so it would not be unreasonable to devote several weeks to instruction in taking directions as we do this so often in so many different forums, both face-to-face and on the phone, and in so many forms: driving directions, product assembly and use instructions, and so on. A particularly common and complex recent example of this form of listening is getting directions on how to get your computer working again, over the phone, from a very patient, but usually speaker of English as a second language, technical support person: a task that tries the listening skills of a native English speaker.

3 CONNECT THE POINTS OF INSTRUCTION TO THE SYLLABUS & COURSE OBJECTIVES

Again, any course has, or should have, a set of general course objectives. The diagnostic should be designed with these objectives in mind: e.g., if “listening for main ideas and details” is featured prominently on the course syllabus, then the instructor should certainly test for that. Once the assessment has been taken and analyzed, the instructor can then go back to the syllabus in deciding where, exactly, to fit these skills in the course of instruction: if students have a lot of trouble, for example, with understanding details related to a main idea, and this is a skill emphasized on the syllabus, then syllabus and diagnostic are in agreement, and nothing has to be adjusted or “tweaked.” However, if students have few problems in listening for details, while the syllabus seems to focus on it, the teacher can just devote a minimum amount of required time to the skill, perhaps engaging in some review of the skill, while meeting the demands of the course design and satisfying student need.

OF INSTRUCTION, THE INSTRUCTOR CAN BOTH DESIGN AND USE AN EXCELLENT ESL LISTENING SKILLS DIAGNOSTIC THAT WILL INFORM INSTRUCTION FOR THE SEMESTER.

4 FOCUS ON GLOBAL OR IMPORTANT ISSUES FIRST

Finally, the larger or global issues should be considered first. If students have trouble with both understanding main ideas and comprehending specific academic vocabulary, the focus should be primarily on understanding main ideas and points as this is a skill that is needed in almost any listening situation. However, comprehending specific academic words applies to relatively few situations, mostly related to college lectures, so less attention should probably be paid to it, although some is still warranted, especially if students are planning to do further study in a university setting. And the two skills of course interrelate: understanding academic vocabulary will affect students’ ability to understand the main points of an academic lecture or discussion.

DESIGNING, ANALYZING, AND THEN USING THE DATA FROM A LISTENING SKILLS DIAGNOSTIC IS NOT EASY. HOWEVER, BY CAREFULLY CONNECTING THE DIAGNOSTIC TO STUDENT LEVEL, THE COURSE SYLLABUS, AND THE PLAN

Help Your ESL Students Improve Their Listening: 7 Ideas that Work

IT'S NO BIG SECRET. ESL STUDENTS WON'T GET VERY FAR IF THEY HAVE WEAK LISTENING SKILLS.

While “practice makes perfect” is a great approach, our students need a lot more guidance: listening to a variety of audio materials for hours on end may not be the most effective approach. They need to view listening as another “exercise”, like those they do for grammar, writing, reading or speaking. So how do we guide our ESL students towards improved listening skills? Here's how:

HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR ESL STUDENTS IMPROVE THEIR LISTENING: 7 IDEAS THAT WORK

1 LISTENING WITH A PURPOSE

A student puts on a pair of headphones and hits “play” on the computer screen. He/she is sitting down to watch a movie – in English – in order to improve his/her listening skills. What's the purpose of this exercise? While “improve listening comprehension” sounds like a good purpose, it's not. Students need specific exercises, each with a specific purpose that goes beyond mere “listening”. They can listen to a podcast with the purpose of identifying three future online shopping trends. They can listen to a conversation with the purpose of identifying the speaker's vacation plans. But there should always be a purpose to the listening exercise. Be sure to communicate what it is.

2 FROM PASSIVE TO ACTIVE

In the above situation where the student sits back and just listens, there is a misconception that he/she will passively improve his/her listening skills – just by listening. Students must be active in their listening exercises. They must be thinking of answers, options or ideas.

Give them questions to answer or information to find out, and have them

report back their findings. Separate them into groups and have one group listen for one set of information and the other group for another, and then get together and share. Just make sure they are not simply “sitting and listening”!

3 CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS

Do they have to complete a True/False exercise after the listening? Fill in blanks as they listen? Write down the answers to the questions, or raise their hands and say them out loud? Students must be absolutely clear on what is expected of them.

4 USE VARIETY

Do you always give your class song lyrics with gaps they must complete? Add some spice to your listening exercises and mix it up! What if you give two different groups two different sets of worksheets where the gaps are different? Students in Group A must then work with students in Group B and ask each other questions to find out the missing information. The class listens to the song at the end to confirm that the answers are right.

5 KEEP IT REAL

We're all more than familiar with the handy little audio CDs that come with our beloved course book. You should absolutely take advantage of the amount of listening material you have available there, but don't forget to use some real audio from time to time. Now, movies, TV shows and songs are what usually comes to mind, but what about TV commercials, weather reports or podcasts? There are many more sources of real audio out there, most of which are not too hard for students if they are approached correctly.

6 DO THE WORK

If students are really committed to improving their listening, they must understand this one crucial fact: they gotta do the work. This usually involves doing at least one short listening exer-

cise, several times a week – even every day. They can watch a short video on YouTube or CNN.com every morning. Or listen to an audio book for 10 minutes every day. In class, be sure to give them listening comprehension exercises every day, maybe even several in one class. The more work they do, the faster they'll improve.

7 TEACH THEM TO CHECK

Just as essential as understanding when they listen is the checking for comprehension or asking for clarification. If students learn to ask someone to clarify a point, they'll increase their odds of improved communication – what they didn't get at first, they may understand the second time around. Be sure to teach them to:

- Check for meaning: He said he was feeling blue. Does that mean he was feeling sad?
- Ask for clarification: What did he mean when he said he was feeling blue?
- Re-phrase: He said he was feeling unhappy and sad, right?

THESE ARE STRATEGIES THAT GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS IMPROVING LISTENING COMPREHENSION. TEACH THEM THESE SKILLS, AND YOU'LL BE TEACHING YOUR STUDENTS TO BE ACTIVE AND TAKE THEIR LISTENING COMPREHENSION INTO THEIR OWN HANDS.

Students often believe that to improve their listening they must simply exercise their “ear”. But it's important for students to understand that it's not as simple as that – the ear is not a simple muscle to train -- listening comprehension is a lot more complex than that. Merely sitting and listening to something for hours won't do the trick, but they can learn a lot more from a focused 15-minute listening exercise.

7 Great Places to Look for ESL Listening Material

IF YOU'RE AN ESL TEACHER LIKE ME, YOU'RE ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR NEW LISTENING MATERIAL.

If you're an ESL teacher like me, you feel the CD that comes with the coursebook is not enough to really boost students' listening comprehension. If you're an ESL teacher like me, you're gonna love these seven websites. They offer audio and video that you can use in the classroom or recommend to students so they can work on improving listening comprehension in their own study time.

7 GREAT PLACES TO LOOK FOR ESL LISTENING MATERIAL

1 ESL CYBER LISTENING LAB

ESL teacher Randall Davis put together a very impressive site, filled with listening quizzes. One of the things you'll notice about the ESL Cyber Listening Lab (www.esl-lab.com/) at first glance is that the quizzes are divided into Easy, Medium and Difficult. Each quiz comes with a pre-listening activity, a multiple-choice quiz based on the listening and post-listening activities that include vocabulary exercises. These are wonderful ready-to-use listening activities for any level.

2 NEWSY.COM

Newsy features short news segments across a variety of topics from business to entertainment, international to US news. One of the best things about Newsy is that each video is posted with a transcript of the news report, giving ESL students the choice of just listening, or listening and reading. It's a great site for students who need something a bit more challenging. The added bonus? The site offers an app for iPhone, iPad, Android and Blackberry – perfect for students on the go!

3 VOICE OF AMERICA

Voice of America (learningenglish.voanews.com/) is a multimedia platform that delivers news to English learners across the globe. The site features MP3 audio and video that are public domain, which means you may not only use the files in the classroom but also download them through VOA Direct (<https://direct.learningenglish.voanews.com/>). Each video is less than three minutes long and comes with subtitles. They may be downloaded in video format or as MP3 files students can listen to anywhere. VOA also has a handy little app for iPhone and Android, a Mobile Wordbook that teaches students how to say and use a word in a sentence.

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4 TALK ENGLISH

Talk English (www.talkenglish.com/Listening/listen.aspx) has listening lessons for Basic, Intermediate and Advanced students. Students have the possibility to listen to a conversation, complete a multiple choice quiz and read a script of the audio. Teachers and students can use the website online free of charge or pay a small one-time fee for unlimited downloads – we're talking hundreds of dialogues in different levels. Additionally, there is an app for iPhone and Android.

5 ESL FAST

ESL Fast (www.eslfast.com/) offers 365 short stories with audio and text for intermediate students. The best thing about this site is the sheer number of stories available. At the bottom of the page, you'll see a vocabulary list for each listening, plus a variety of exercises, including dictations. The site also offers easy conversations for beginner ESL students who have the unique opportunity to listen to short conversations on a variety of topics and speak to Mike, a "robot" that replies to questions and statements students type in a dialogue box, thus creating an actual, virtual "dialogue".

6 EASY LISTENING FOR KIDS

This website (www.rong-chang.com/easykids/) has short and easy listening audio tracks that are tailored to young learners. Each audio track comes with the text for reading, a vocabulary list, and exercises your young learners won't have any trouble completing. There's a second website (www.rong-chang.com/children/index.htm) with additional listening exercises for children.

Special Note: While the listening exercises are great, the sites are filled with ads, so be sure to monitor browsing for content that may be inappropriate for children.

7 ELLLO.ORG

Elllo provides a wealth of listening exercises in video or audio format. You can sort search results by level, topic, country or media, the last option allows you choose from games, audio or video. All of the exercises come with vocabulary lists, additional exercises or quizzes, as well as download links. Unlike the other websites, this one includes audio with English speakers of different nationalities, thus effectively exposing students to a variety of English accents like Australian, Scottish, South African, and others.

NO MATTER WHICH SITE YOU CHOOSE, YOU'LL BE GIVING YOUR STUDENTS AMPLE OPPORTUNITY TO FINE TUNE THEIR LISTENING AND HONE THOSE SKILLS THAT MAY BE A LITTLE RUSTY.

Don't forget to encourage them to try as many listening activities as they can in their free time. The awesome thing about these sites is that they offer scripts, vocabulary lists and plenty of other resources that won't leave your students navigating alone in a sea of English listening exercises. Most of these sites are tailored specifically to English learners and the audio is high quality, with conversations spoken by native speakers. What more can you ask for?

6 Steps to Design Your Very Own ESL Listening Quiz

THERE COMES A TIME IN ANY ESL CLASS WHEN THE TEACHER REALIZES STUDENTS ARE BORED WITH THE LISTENING MATERIAL OFFERED WITH THE COURSEBOOK.

So, the ESL teacher decides to give the class some extra fun listening practice. There are some really great websites that offer video and audio geared at English learners, and they even come with vocabulary lists and quizzes to test students' listening comprehension. Sweet!

But you want to work with real audio like a CNN news report, a podcast or a TV series. And those don't come with ready-to-use quizzes. Don't let that discourage you from using real audio for listening practice. You can create your own listening quiz in six simple steps and here's how:

HOW TO DESIGN A LISTENING QUIZ: 6 STEPS

1 CHOOSE THE AUDIO

The first thing you'll have to decide is which source of real audio you'll use. Will it be a TV commercial, weather report or movie trailer? Base your decision on the course work. Did you recently teach words related to the weather? Then the weather report is a good choice. Did your students just learn words related to health? Then you should go for the news report about a recent outbreak of the flu. Are there grammar points you need to review, like a verb tense? Choose an audio file that features the tense you have to review. A report about what will happen to the environment if we don't implement changes is a great way to review the first conditional. Review and sharpen listening skills at the same time.

What about the audio format? Will you play a cassette or CD in class, or show them a video? Will you play a video online? Or will you send them a link to the listening assignment for homework? A good rule of thumb is to give

students variety, so if all you've been doing is listening to CDs, give them an online video to watch. Change it up!

2 CHOOSE A PURPOSE

The purpose of the listening quiz will be connected to Step 1 and the reason you chose a particular audio file. What is it? Is it to review words related to shopping? Is it to review a verb tense, like the Simple Past? Or is it to hone a specific listening skill, like listening for gist or listening for specifics?

3 CHOOSE A QUIZ FORMAT

Will you type out the quiz on a Word document and print it out for students to use as they listen? Or will you design a quiz online? Your decision should be based partly on when and where your students will take the quiz. If you're planning on giving them the quiz in class, then the printed version is the easiest way to go. But if you're giving them the quiz for homework, they can easily work online with the links you give them. Some great quiz makers are ProProfs (www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/), Quizlet (quizlet.com/) and AlltheTests.com.

4 CHOOSE THE TYPE OF QUIZ

Will it be True or False, or multiple choice? Will they have to fill in the blanks? Again, your choice should depend on what you want to test them on. If you're using the listening exercise to help them review the Simple Present, maybe they should have blanks that they must fill with the right verb. If they are listening for specific information, a multiple choice exercise will do the trick.

5 STUDY THE AUDIO SEGMENT

Before you can start designing your quiz, you'll have to listen to the audio/video carefully – several times. Make a note of key vocabulary and ques-

tions you could possibly ask, as well as the things you'll test them on. You may have to choose another audio file altogether if you see this one in particular does not fit your purposes after all.

6 PROCEED TO CREATION!

If you decide to simply type up a Word document, it shouldn't take you too long, as you've already decided what type of task you'll be focusing on in the previous steps. You'll also have all the information you'll need from having listened to the audio. If you decide to use an online quiz maker, the software should guide you through the steps.

A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN WRITING QUIZ QUESTIONS:

Each type of quiz has its own particularity, but they all have one thing in common: they are tricky. For instance, for True or False statements, you can make the false sentence very similar to the true statement except for one little detail. This is a great opportunity to practice things like minimal pairs or homophones.

The neighbor is giving away three puppies. (False. He's giving away free puppies.)

You can do the same with a multiple choice quiz:

The neighbor is giving away:

- Three puppies
- Free puppies
- Three guppies
- Free guppies

MAKE YOUR LISTENING QUIZ CHALLENGING!

It doesn't matter if you create a basic Word document or an online quiz with all the bells and whistles. What matters is that you create a quiz that is tailored to your students' listening needs.

Beyond the Coursebook: 5 Ways to Hone Students' Listening Skills

Don't get me wrong. I have nothing against the coursebook or the audio component that comes with it.

In fact, I use it quite often. But it's so predictable. Students are familiar with the crisp, clear pronunciation. They know exactly what to expect in terms of exercises: Listen and repeat. Listen and answer the questions. And so it goes. They also know the conversation they'll listen to will include mostly vocabulary and grammar they know. No surprises there.

Sometimes, you need to step away from the CD player and give your students listening practice that goes beyond the audio material that comes with the coursebook. If your students' level allows it, you should give them real audio from authentic sources, not just those that cater to ESL students. So if you really want to hone your students' listening skills, here are 5 ways to go about this daunting task.

TRY THESE 5 WAYS TO HONE YOUR STUDENTS' LISTENING SKILLS

1 WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY?

This is a great strategy you can use to fine tune your students' listening. Choose an audio or video segment that clearly answers these four questions. Here's a great example from Newsy (www.newsy.com/videos/bieber-cancels-concert-as-will-smith-counsels-him/). Start with a warm up to introduce the topic: What are some reasons why a concert or event might be cancelled? Next, introduce any words that may be new to students. Play the video once so students may get the gist or main idea. Finally, tell students they will watch a news segment and all they have to do is listen carefully and be prepared to answer these four questions.

What? *Justin Bieber cancelled a concert.*

When? *On March 12.*

Where? *In Portugal.*

Why? *For personal reasons... He's had a bad week, problems, etc.*

2 IN THE SPOTLIGHT

This is a great approach to use with interviews. Find an audio track or video segment with an interview – it can be anyone from a famous celebrity to a local doctor. The important thing is for the interview to be clear and appropriate for your students' level. After going through the warm up and introduction of new vocabulary, tell students that they will listen to an interview.

For the first listening, ask them to write down the questions asked. Now, they don't have to write every question word for word, just the main idea. For example, if the interviewer asks, "Where are you from?" students may simply write "birthplace" or "nationality". For the second listening, students should take notes on the responses to these questions, and yes, notes, not full answers. Remind students that this is a listening exercise not grammar practice.

Students then take turns asking each other the same questions and giving the same responses as the person interviewed. If the student asking the question thinks that the other student's response is wrong he/she may call him/her on it and demand a replay of the audio/video to confirm that indeed that is not what the person said.

3 ROLE PLAYS WITH A TWIST

This technique puts not only your students' listening skills to the test but also their thinking caps on. Choose a conversation to have them listen to, one where opposites may be applied. For example, if the conversation mentions good weather conditions, the opposite would be bad weather conditions. After going through a warm up and introduction of new vocabulary, play the conversation for students to listen to. Play it a second time and instruct students to think of opposites for some of the words. Divide students into pairs and have them recreate the conversation but saying the opposite of what was originally said.

If the conversation started with I had the most awful day yesterday, students must start by saying, I had the best day yesterday.

4 CHECKING FOR COMPREHENSION

Another strategy that always works in listening comprehension activities is having students check to make sure they understood correctly. Find an audio file that sets forth a set of instructions. For example, a YouTube how to video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngA6t1Pvuek). Play the video for the class. Then have a student repeat the instructions/steps to make sure they got them right. Other students may raise their hands if they notice a discrepancy.

5 CONVERSATION SNIPPETS

This is another strategy that is guaranteed to boost students' listening skills. Play a conversation, but leave out the part where they mention a key aspect. For example, say the conversation starts with someone saying where they went on vacation and then going on to describe in detail where they went. Start the audio after they mention the name of the place they went to. Students will only hear the description of activities. And based on the part of the conversation they do hear, they will have to infer that key piece of missing information.

Example:

Man: *How was your vacation, Karen?*

Woman: *It was great! We went to Rome and saw some stunning art and architecture. We went to the Coliseum and visited the Vatican. They have some breathtaking art in there. Then we went to several smaller churches and museums. All in all, it was a wonderful vacation, everything I'd hoped it would be.*

Play the audio to start from *We went to the Coliseum...* Students have to listen carefully and figure out the speaker went to Rome.

TRY TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX. DON'T JUST GIVE YOUR STUDENTS QUESTIONS TO ANSWER OR TRUE/FALSE EXERCISES – NOT ALL OF THE TIME.

Challenge them to really put their listening skills to the test.

Top 10 Sources of Real Audio for Advanced ESL Learners

WHEN YOU'RE AN ESL TEACHER, YOU CAN NEVER GET ENOUGH ESL LISTENING MATERIAL.

Because listening is something that students need to practice – a lot – the audio CD that comes with the course-book simply falls short.

There are some great places to look for ESL listening material, but for advanced students the real deal is the best deal. They need to be challenged a bit more and need to develop an ear for speech that is delivered at a normal flow and not slowed down for students. Here are my top 10 choices for sites that offer authentic listening material that is ideal for advanced ESL learners.

CHECK THESE WEBSITES

1 BBC (ONLINE)

(www.bbc.co.uk/news/world_radio_and_tv/) The news broadcasting site offers a lot more than news articles and reports. Advanced ESL students may take full advantage of the BBC's World News TV service, with hundreds of short videos and programs to watch. The video page has one-minute world news reports, plus plenty of other short videos on business, science and entertainment.

2 BBC (RADIO)

BBC Radio (www.bbc.co.uk/radio/) is a separate service that allows users to listen to radio programs online or with a mobile app. There are countless radio programs to choose from, but I recommend starting with the categories page. There students will be able to choose from news, sports, entertainment or documentary programs to listen to.

3 CNN.COM

Like its British counterpart, CNN provides an excellent video channel, on which students are able to catch the latest news. CNN also offers a podcasting service with shows for a

wide variety of interests. And there's more. CNN offers transcripts for some of these very same shows, giving students an additional resource to improve listening skills with.

4 REPEAT AFTER US

Repeat After Us (www.repeatafterus.com/) was created by a high school student with a true love of literature. Here, students will find a variety of recorded texts, classified into three categories: beginner, intermediate and advanced. There is a lot of original material in this site, so for listening practice, students should go to recorded texts, and from there choose poetry, drama, prose or even children's short stories if the previous categories prove to be too difficult. Listening practice and English literature combined!

5 CBC PODCASTS

The Canadian broadcasting company (www.cbc.ca/radio/podcasts/) has an astounding variety of news, sports, and entertainment programs – and a whole lot more. Students may download the MP3 file or subscribe via iTunes so they won't miss any of their favorites.

6 NPR.ORG

National Public Radio offers 24-hour Program Stream or Hourly News summaries students may want to listen to. Additionally, it offers podcasts on topics that range from animals to world news.

7 THE BRITISH COUNCIL

There are some great podcasts that can be downloaded from the British Council's website (bit.ly/mhabg). All of which feature native speakers and come with a script students may choose to read as they listen.

8 NEWSY.COM

Of all of the websites that offer news reports on video, Newsy is my favorite because they offer the tran-

script directly below the video, a big plus for ESL students. Still, students may choose to display the transcript or keep it hidden for more challenging listening practice.

9 THE WEATHER CHANNEL

You'd think The Weather Channel (www.weather.com/tv/) offers mostly the weather forecast on video, but it provides a lot more than that. It has very interesting TV shows, like the fascinating Hurricane Hunters, which are great for adventure-seeking students. The clips are short and the audio that is difficult to hear due to weather conditions is subtitled.

10 SCHACKNE ONLINE

For additional sources of authentic listening material, students may visit Schackne Online (www.schackne.com/). This website offers a very comprehensive list of listening resources, including links to video sites, like YouTube and UStream, and podcasts, like CBS Radio Mystery Theater, a show that students who enjoy a good mystery will enjoy. Schackne Online also lists podcast directories like Podbean. The number of video sites and podcasts is staggering. Please be advised that some of this content may not be appropriate for all audiences. Adult students should be warned and proceed with caution when choosing a video channel or podcast (some comedy shows may have offensive language, for example). Children should not be selecting podcasts or any type of audio material on their own.

TRUTH BE TOLD, SOME OF THESE WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR SOME OF YOUR LEARNERS, NO MATTER HOW ADVANCED THEY ARE.

But at this level, there is nothing better for them than to try and try again. Don't let them get discouraged and make sure they don't feel bad if they must still rely on a script. Everything they do helps, and soon enough their efforts will pay off. They will have better listening skills to show for it.

7 Keys to Effective ESL Listening Lessons with Video

OUT OF ALL OF THE LISTENING MATERIAL YOU CAN GIVE YOUR ESL STUDENTS, VIDEOS ARE THE MOST ENJOYABLE, AS THEY HAVE IMAGES THAT HELP STUDENTS GRASP MEANING.

But if the video is too hard, your ESL learners will tune out. If it's too easy, they will sit back, relax and simply enjoy the show. If you want to show your students videos that will effectively boost their listening, you'll need to consider a few things.

EFFECTIVE VIDEO LESSONS: 7 KEYS TO SUCCESS

1 AUTHENTIC OR MADE FOR ESL STUDENTS?

The first thing you'll need to consider is whether you'll show your class a video that was especially made for English teaching or authentic video, like movies, cartoons or TV shows. Each has its own set of advantages and disadvantages:

- Authentic material is usually far more interesting to students and also much more realistic. Actors speak at a normal pace, and this can be good or bad depending on your students' level. The video may be too hard to understand, but perfect for advanced students who need a challenge. The one obvious disadvantage is that this material does not come with worksheets or activity books. You have to design your own or get them elsewhere (lucky for you, there are plenty available at BusyTeacher.org!)
- Video made for ESL students comes ready to teach, with activities and exercises. It's also made to suit a particular level, with scenes that target a specific set of vocabulary or grammar, so there's no guesswork there. The main disadvantage is that this material often fails to engage learners – the acting is exaggerated and the situations seem contrived.

ESL videos for beginners and authentic material for more advanced learners, but try to show beginners authentic video once in a while, even if it's a short weather report or movie trailer.

2 WITH OR WITHOUT SOUND? OR PICTURE?

Any teacher who has shown a video to a class knows that it's not as simple as popping in the CD and pressing play. At least, effective video lessons shouldn't be this way. They need a little work. There are several ways in which you can show a video to maximize listening:

- Play video without sound, first. Then play it with sound. This way they can get the gist of what the action will be, what feelings will be aroused and be ready to listen to what will be said.
- Play video without picture, first. Students will be forced to really listen to figure out what's going on. Will they get it right? Play the video a second time with audio and picture to confirm.

3 WITH OR WITHOUT SUBTITLES?

This is another thing that may depend on your students' level. As a rule of thumb, more advanced students should not have the subtitles on. But this may depend on the video (authentic or made for ESL) and each particular group. In any case, if students watch a video with subtitles, they should be in English, and you should at some point be able to turn them off.

4 COMPLETE OR PAUSED?

Will you show the complete video through to the end, or pause in the middle to check for comprehension or do an activity? This again, depends on the group, but more so on the length of the video. Movies should definitely be paused at some strategic points, in fact, they may be watched over the course of several days. If you're also teaching a grammar point or reviewing

vocabulary, you might want to pause the video to review these concepts. Unless the video is very short (less than 5 minutes), I like to divide it into parts.

5 LENGTH? CONTENT? QUALITY?

This may seem like an obvious step, but teachers often make the mistake of trusting the CD or video file, and not checking it before class. This is especially important if you'll be using authentic video and not the kind prepared specifically for ESL students. Be especially careful with YouTube videos. How long is the video? Is there anything about the content that may not be appropriate for children? Is it good quality video or does it end abruptly for no apparent reason?

6 DO YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED?

Leave it Murphy's Law. Anything that could go wrong will go wrong in your video lesson. Do you have all of the necessary accessories/power cords for the computer or DVD player? Are there batteries in the remote? Is your laptop battery fully charged? You may think these are minor details, but believe me, you don't want to lose precious minutes of your lesson or worst of all have students staring at the ceiling while you sort out your technical problems. If possible, arrive early to set everything up and make sure everything is working properly.

7 WHAT WILL THEY DO DURING THE VIDEO?

What type of worksheet will you give them? What will be the task? Listening for gist? Or answering comprehension questions? If you decide to use authentic video, you'll have to create one yourself.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE A VIDEO'S ABILITY TO HELP IMPROVE LISTENING – AND ENTERTAIN IN THE PROCESS. IT'S A TREAT THAT STUDENTS OF ANY LEVEL WILL WELCOME!

My general recommendation is to use

Getting Young ESL Learners to Listen: 9 Tips

ANY TEACHER WHO HAS TAUGHT YOUNG LEARNERS CAN TELL YOU, IT'S SOMETIMES HARD TO GET THEM TO LISTEN.

I'm not just talking about getting them to listen to you as you give them instructions, but also listen so they can hone their listening skills – real, focused, targeted listening, not just the passive listen-to-get-by kind. If you want to motivate your young learners to listen, these tips might help.

9 TIPS TO GET YOUR YOUNG LEARNERS TO LISTEN

1 THINK ACTIVE, NOT PASSIVE

Don't mistake receptive for passive. Listening is receptive in the sense that students receive input in the form of audio (contrary to speaking or writing which is productive), but students should still be active in their listening and actively engaged. For ways to keep young learners actively engaged, keep reading.

2 CHOOSE ENGAGING LISTENING TASKS

The types of listening tasks you'll give your young learners are very different from what you'd give adult learners. Adult learners often listen to dialogues and answer comprehension questions. Although you may try to do this with young learners, they will seldom be engaged by listening to conversations. So what types of listening tasks engage young learners?

- First, they must be age appropriate.
- Second, what do children love? Songs, stories and videos.

3 DO SEVERAL LISTENINGS WITH DIFFERENT TASKS

Whether you choose a song or story to have them listen to, or a video to watch, have them listen to it several times and give them a different type of activity each time. For example, you decide to play the audio for or read a short story. The first listening should help them grasp the

general idea of the story, who the characters are and what they do. Next, they should listen again and do a gap-filling exercise. Finally, they should listen one last time and complete one more activity, which may be a drawing based on the story or a writing assignment if they're old enough.

4 CONSIDER ALL TYPES OF ACTIVITIES THEY CAN DO

Young learners can do several things with a listening exercise:

- They can listen and produce something based on what they heard, such as a drawing, a clay model or any type of craft.
- They can listen and repeat or mime.
- They can listen and predict what will happen next.
- They can listen and reply, as in a conversation where they hear only one side and respond to what the speaker says.
- They can listen and write a story or summary about what they heard.
- They can listen and match, fill in gaps or complete any type of worksheet based on the listening.
- They can listen to a story as model for pronunciation and then read the story themselves.

And you thought there was very little they could do!

5 BE A MODEL!

Remember that you don't necessarily have to play an audio file in MP3, CD or video for effective listening practice. You can read something out loud, too! The importance lies not in the format of the audio, but rather in the content – make sure it's an engaging story or activity, and they'll be hooked!

6 MAKE IT FAMILIAR

Young learners can be great little listeners, but they need to listen to things they are familiar with, or they'll tune out. Children are typically familiar with things that other kids and families do. They may be interested in what kids in other countries do but be careful with

the accents. If they've been largely exposed to an American English accent, they may not understand a kid from Northern Ireland talking about a typical festivity or holiday. They may not understand accents from other regions.

7 INTRODUCE NEW VOCABULARY

With older children, you may want to open a window to the rest of the world, and show them things they wouldn't ordinarily see. But make sure you introduce new vocabulary and explain the context, whether it is a local tradition or festivity, before you actually play the video.

8 ALWAYS INCLUDE LISTENING

While it's great to plan activities that are specific for listening practice, try to include listening in most of the things you do, like games, for example. When students are engaged in the activity you set forth, you can bet they will prick up their ears and listen to every word you say.

9 CHOOSE SONGS CAREFULLY

Children love to listen to and sing songs. But the latest Lady Gaga tune may not be the best song for our goal. What is our goal? Let's consider first what it is not. It is not to teach them how to sing the songs they like. Our goal is to use songs to help teach the language and help them improve listening skills. So with this in mind, choose songs that are easy to understand and contain language students are familiar with. It is also helpful if songs are related to something you have taught, whether it is vocabulary or grammar. For instance, after a lesson about animals, the logical choice for a song is Old McDonald. Finally, songs with lines that repeat or those that have actions students can do are also great choices.

TO BE ABLE TO BOOST STUDENTS' LISTENING, YOU FIRST HAVE TO GET THEM TO LISTEN. GET THEM ENGAGED IN THE LISTENING TASK, AND THEY WON'T TUNE OUT.

And the Oscar Goes to... How to Use Movies and TV for Listening

WHO DOESN'T LOVE MOVIES AND TELEVISION? YOU CAN TAP INTO BOTH MOVIES AND TV FOR LISTENING EXERCISES THAT WILL EXCITE YOUR STUDENTS AND DELIVER ENTERTAINING AND EFFECTIVE OUTCOMES.

Do some detective work and find out what your students would really enjoy, and you might just find yourself in the position of a movie star, accepting all kinds of accolades from elated students!

HOW TO USE MOVIES AND TV FOR LISTENING EXERCISES

1 AWARDS SHOWS

If your students happen to be movie or TV fanatics, they might be very interested in doing some activities surrounding the Oscars, the Emmys, or any of the other numerous awards shows out there nowadays. You can organize lessons on current shows or utilize the internet to locate archives of particular years, stars, or movies. You may also weave in lessons that include the history of particular films, movie clips of favorite actors, or famous scenes or lines. You could also include modeling your own awards show after a particular one you watch. Utilize the awards show by looking for specific language points. Superlatives is an obvious one, as is the different presentations of thank you. These are also wonderful examples of scripted humor, emcee monologues, and formal speeches. Excite students by allowing them to plan, for example, an Oscar viewing party in which you choose the three awards the class would like to see and watch them being presented. Students can answer set comprehension questions, describe their favorite moments or lines, or even do imitations of some of the acceptance speeches. These listening exercises coupled with lead-in reading and speaking activities provide a whole language experience. There are a lot of ways to engage students by bringing in awards shows.

Gear up in advance, focus on delivery and vocabulary, and of course discuss what people were wearing!

2 TV VIEWING

Do you ever discuss popular TV shows with your class? Are they following a particular show in their language that could be a candidate for them to view in English? If you answered yes, it's a pretty safe bet that your students would be excited and motivated to do some studying by watching TV. It's easy to use the internet to find clips of popular TV shows, movie trailers, or TV show previews. You could try searching YouTube or Hulu to find what you need. When considering showing any amount of TV to your class, it is much easier to devise listening exercises based on short clips or previews than it is on whole episodes. TV shows offer real dialogue at an incredibly fast rate of speech. Don't overwhelm students by having them watch too long of a clip. You want to be sure to go over necessary new vocabulary beforehand, and include either some cloze listening exercises, comprehension questions, or an introduction to the theme of what they will view.

One very popular TV show that you could utilize is 'Friends'. Students in many countries are familiar with it, and if you take it in small enough increments you could do a lot with it. Sitcoms, in particular, offer a lot to the ESL Learner. Often, these shows are familiar, accessible, and provide life lessons as well as interesting dialogue and characters. Students can often relate to subject matter that is approached in sitcoms and the humor is pretty family-friendly for the most part. Idiomatic speech runs rampant in these shows, so if you have advanced-level learners, you could get their feet wet by allowing them to watch an entire 20 minute episode.

One other interesting option to consider is locating some bloopers from familiar TV shows. This is an effective

way for students to see a variety of mistakes being made and to attempt to comprehend what went wrong. TV can be a source of education and learning if you use it in the right way. Bring some TV viewing into your classroom, and students will have a lot to share after their listening experience.

3 DISNEY MOVIES

Disney movies can bring magic into your classroom in that you will have students undivided attention in a way like only Disney can do. Students big and small are fans of Disney's animated features as well as some of the other family-friendly options. Animated films are perfect for listening exercises in and out of the classroom. A true benefit of introducing Disney to students is that you can make good use of the movie's subtitles. For example, you could watch a few scenes only in English, stop the video and then jump into discussion or comprehension exercises. If students ran into trouble understanding a chunk of the scene or if they have multiple questions, one option is to go back and watch the scene with subtitles of their local language. This works well for uni-cultural classrooms, but if you have a multi-cultural situation you may just want to watch the movie in English with the English subtitles on. Utilizing the English subtitles can open up a new world for students who can then trust their listening because it is combined with reading. Disney movies are also wonderful to focus on idiomatic speech, life lessons, and also provide great vocabulary skill building.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO APPROACH TV AND MOVIES FOR LEVELS THAT CAN HANDLE IT AND FOR CLASSES THAT SHOW AN INTEREST.

You can approach these listening exercises with creativity or you can keep it to simple comprehension and discussion. However you go about it, students will enjoy listening to and watching TV and movies in English.

Authentic Listening Opportunities for the ESL Learner

IN ORDER TO DEVELOP STUDENTS' ADEPT LISTENING SKILLS, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO PROVIDE VARIED, INTERESTING PRACTICE WITH AN EMPHASIS ON AUTHENTIC SPEECH.

Watch how excitedly your learners will respond to these real-world listening exercises that break the mold on the usual, hum-drum book exercises!

AUTHENTIC LISTENING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ESL LEARNER

1 EHOW VIDEOS

eHow (www.ehow.com/) is an unbeatable resource for ESL teachers. EHow furnishes a variety of how to videos in every category and subject you can think of. Just a few of the options are: health, parenting, gardening, arts, travel, business, careers, fashion, etc. The list goes on and on, and you can easily pinpoint what you are looking for by doing google-like searches. Be sure to involve the students in the choice of the types of videos they will watch, and also decide whether they will do individual or group activities. If students have access to computers, it is an effective site for them to spend some time browsing around for topics that appeal to them, and possibly for building ideas for project-based work. You can have students do homework exercises, or in-class listening exercises and discussions. One other option is to first present a video to the entire class with no sound. See if they can determine the subject of the video, pick out some words by reading lips, or discuss things like eye contact or body language. You can then follow that up with your listening activities.

The videos are short, usually between two to three minutes, so organizing lessons around the theme of the video is pretty simple. The speakers are diverse, and most often subject matter experts in the particular topic, which lends credibility to what the students are viewing. American accents are the most common, but students

will also be exposed to many types of people, all with a variety of regional accents. Because the topics are very specific, the videos present in a very conversational way. The people featured don't talk exceptionally fast or slow. Every video is accompanied by a word-for-word transcription which you can include in exercises or debriefs. It's also productive for students to observe up-close a person talking about a topic that is familiar and interesting to them. Use eHow as an opportunity to go beyond just answering comprehension questions. Challenge students to make observations about intonation and tone, decipher idiomatic speech, pick out new vocabulary, or examine body language and facial expressions.

2 INTERVIEWS WITH FAMOUS PEOPLE

Speaking of videos, do you ever use YouTube in your classroom? One of the best ways to utilize YouTube is to locate interviews to grab students' attention. Students in all countries love famous people, and one great motivator is to allow them to watch interviews of their favorite stars. It's easy to search and locate video clips from a range of talk shows and other sources. You can find almost anyone, from the Spice Girls to Justin Bieber to Julia Roberts. YouTube is archived so you can locate interviews from ten years ago, or find the latest and greatest. It's fun to have students explore interviews from a long time ago and then have them make observations. The observations can be things like physical appearance, changes in idiomatic language, or reference in the conversation that strike them as outdated or different from modern times.

There are a lot of options for how you can organize these lessons. You could have students listen for very particular things like how many times they can count hearing a certain grammar point or expression. You could give students a list of comprehension questions that they determine through a

certain amount of viewings. You can devise all kinds of creative and entertaining ways to use these YouTube interviews to further students' listening skills. Go for general comprehension or very pointed themes, but whatever you choose be sure that you allow the students to explore, listen repeatedly, and discover new things for themselves.

3 LOCAL NEWS

News is a great source for natural listening exercises, and also for building vocabulary. You can either enlist the help of the internet or do it the old fashioned way and assign students some TV viewing. Whichever way you choose, you want to be very specific about the goal of the listening and what you want students to take away from the newscast. It is easy to find local news clips that include headlines, weather, problem solvers, and other specific segments that you can tailor your lesson to. With all good listening exercises, you want to focus on vocabulary and speech delivery. Utilizing local news works really well because newscasters use a different type of speech and vocabulary. Students may also be familiar with some of the local TV personalities. You may want to do some lead up lessons where students analyze how news is delivered, have them discuss their favorite anchor people, or use the news as a jumping off point for current events discussion or debates. If you can wrap in other facets before you approach the listening exercises, students will be confident about the subject matter and will most likely be very excited to get to watch TV as a part of class work.

TAKING SOME TIME OUT OF THE USUAL TO EXPLORE AUTHENTIC LISTENING EXERCISES IS BENEFICIAL FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ALIKE.

Not only will it be entertaining, but students will listen intently and never forget these memorable real-world activities.

Around the Water-Cooler: Building Listening Skills for Employment

ONE LOFTY GOAL OF MANY ADVANCED-LEVEL ESL STUDENTS IS TO GAIN EMPLOYMENT IN AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORKPLACE.

If this is the focus of one of your groups, there is a lot you can do to develop listening and speaking skills with career-motivated activities. Help learners find success around the water-cooler by devising listening skills geared for employment.

BUILDING LISTENING SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT

1 A NETWORKING EVENT

It is vital that students are able to talk about their skills and interests, but also to display fluency in understanding. By approaching interviewing with a few different methods, learners will begin to hone natural speaking under pressure as well as pointed listening skills. One way to approach this is to set up a date in the future when you will host a mock job fair or networking event. It doesn't have to be formal with employers in your area. Simply bring in a few people the students have never met, and they can represent a company or job field that the students have showed interest in. You could have the guests perform short one-on-one interviews with the students and provide feedback, or devise a panel so the students ask the guests questions as if they are employers. You could also try a mingling exercise that mirrors a networking event. Mingling is a great use of time, but you need to be sure that all students are participating and getting the requisite practice. You might want to have some kind of incentive like small prizes for the three students who make the best impression or for those who have the most interesting interaction. However you decide to arrange the event, the weeks leading up to this day are very important. There are lots of elements to touch upon in lessons before the networking event. You'll want to gear students up for talking about themselves, listening to others, and devising questions.

2 SMALL TALK

A huge element in attaining a job or maintaining relationships once you get a job is the ability to interact with a lot of different people. Structuring lessons around small talk will be beneficial to any student on the prowl for employment. Small talk has huge ramifications for both speaking and listening skills. It shows that students are able to use natural language, listen to others, and comment accordingly. Students should first analyze what topics are appropriate for small talk, and try them out in a natural setting. Topics could include: the weather, comments on a commonality, or asking a benign question. Practice in class by discussing small talk they have overheard, performing role plays or talking in pairs. After they have gotten their feet wet in class, a great place for the students to try their hand at small talk is the grocery store. There is ample time while waiting in line or while getting rung up. Cashiers are particularly used to small talk, so it is a safe way for students to try out some natural interaction. Give them some guidelines and have each of them report back on their experience. Other opportunities ripe for small talk might be a waitress, the local coffee or tea house, or just about anywhere where you have to pay for anything. If students are in their native country, you may want to have them (embarrassingly) look for foreigners that they could approach in a non-creepy way to try out some of the same small talk elements.

3 INTERVIEWING ROLE PLAYS

Devise role plays and group work that allow students to critique one another and to work together to approach problems. Structure many different exercises around interviewing to develop targeted listening and speaking. First off, provide the ten most asked interview questions for your region. A few examples are:

Tell me about yourself

What are your three greatest strengths or weaknesses?

Tell me about a time you solved a conflict and how you approached it?

How do you work under pressure?

Why are you the best person for this

job?

Obviously these questions are difficult for native speakers, so students need a lot of practice. Several aspects should be approached that combine listening and speaking. A few are: vocabulary, tone, etiquette, content, analysis of speaking, and understanding of natural language. Students can prepare answers that are both general as well as specifics. Students should also listen intently and make sure they are hearing the speaker accurately. If they don't understand or if there is a miscommunication, they should ask for clarification and apologize.

4 DESCRIBING SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

Many students have great difficulty talking about themselves, especially when it comes to selling themselves in job interviews. Before they can be successful at interviewing or networking, they first must analyze their own skills and decide what attributes they would like to bring into focus. Through listening to other students discuss their skills, each student will gain the confidence to sell themselves. This can be done by presenting new vocabulary as a jumping off point for discussion. Create a list of twenty attributes that are important in the workplace and have students pick and choose which ones apply to them. Then they can come up with a few examples for each one to display the skill. These could include: honest/loyal/trustworthy, punctual, hard-working, innovative, creative, driven, and people-person. You'll be surprised with what students come up with on their own so definitely involve them in the creation of the list. Allow them to practice explaining their skills in front of the group and answer questions. Also consider giving them the option to devise their one-minute elevator pitch, which is a description of themselves that they could communicate in the time it takes to ride the elevator.

THERE ARE INNUMERABLE ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN SHARPENING STUDENTS' LISTENING SKILLS FOR THE WORKPLACE. Give students as much real-world practice as you can, and be sure that each exercise strengthens and challenges their listening abilities.

Did You Say You Got a Fax or a Fox?

Tips for Teaching Pronunciation

IN THE TEST-BASED SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT THAT SURROUNDS OUR CLASSROOMS, THE SKILLS OF READING, WRITING, AND GRAMMAR ARE INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT TO OUR EFL STUDENTS AND TO US AS TEACHERS.

Whether preparing for the TOEFL, IELTS, or a state-achievement test, we focus on developing our students' reading and writing skills. In the meantime, speaking skills get pushed to the back burner in the classroom as they're not frequently formally assessed. And yet, when our students interact with others in their daily life, whether interviewing for a job, asking for directions, or ordering at a restaurant, their speaking is constantly being assessed by those around them.

Speaking in a foreign language is stressful. When you think you're misunderstood and have to repeat your self, you become even more stressed. As your stress level rises, the quality of pronunciation tends to decrease. In order to give our students the confidence they need to face the real world, we need to teach practical ways to teach clear pronunciation. Here are a few teaching tips when working on pronunciation with your students.

HOW TO WORK ON PRONUNCIATION EFFECTIVELY

1 VOWEL LENGTH

One of the biggest difficulties in clear pronunciation is vowel length. Short vowels aren't short enough and long vowels aren't long enough. Do contrasting exercises where long vowels are extra long (e.g. 'seeeeeat') and short vowels are very abrupt (e.g. 'sit'). This is especially great if you are doing short/long minimal pair exercises. It's important to exaggerate in the beginning so that students can hear the difference more clearly. Do competitions where students see who can hold the sound the longest. Over time, make the vowels shorter and shorter until they are the appropriate length.

Long vowels (& diphthongs): The vowels in: *beat, boat, boot, bait, bite*

Short vowels: *bet, bot, but, bat, bit*

2 MOUTH POSITIONS

Studies have shown that explicit instruction in how to position the mouth while speaking greatly helps learners tackling difficult sounds. First, demonstrate with videos and exaggerate making the sounds yourself. Then pass out mirrors and have students observe their own mouth positions while forming the sounds. Here are some of the most important mouth positions for tricky English sounds:

Open mouth: *bot, bought* (note: for some English dialects, there is no distinction between these vowels)

Round mouth: *boat, boot,*

Neutral position: *but, bit, bet*

Corners of mouth pointed down (makes a frown): *beat / bat*

Tongue between teeth: *threat, let*

3 PRACTICE LISTENING

You need to hear it before you can say it. Encourage students to get as much listening experience outside of the classroom as possible. Assign listening reports in order to check in and see what kinds of English students are listening to outside of class. Listening doesn't have to be boring: tell students to listen to popular music, TV shows, movies, anything in English will work!

4 WRITE TONGUE TWISTERS

Everyone knows that tongue twisters are a great way to practice pronunciation, but instead of doing all the work, share the load with your students. Having students create their own tongue twisters helps them to not only practice their pronunciation, but be more aware of which sounds are in the words they know. They will have to really think about how to say words to know which ones to include in their tongue twister, and everyone will have a laugh sharing the crazy sentences that result.

5 FEEDBACK

It's incredibly important that students get feedback early and often be-

fore they begin bad pronunciation habits that are difficult to adjust as later learners. As a teacher, it can be difficult to maintain a large classroom and give individualized pronunciation feedback to many students. A good way to manage a large classroom is to make notes while students are speaking, for example during role plays or individual presentations. Make note of specific words/sounds that students struggle with while speaking in front of the class, and after the class, focus on the most frequent pattern of errors for that particular student. Keep a note card for each student that you can make notes on and then give to the student. You can also have the students keep track of errors on their note card: for example, if you correct them during class, they can make a note of the mispronounced word on their card so they can remember to practice later.

Alternatively, you can seek outside help for pronunciation feedback. There are some software programs and websites that can evaluate pronunciation. One of the best ones is www.EnglishCentral.com. The website has a few free features, but as a paying subscriber, students can receive individualized feedback on their spoken pronunciation. The subscription fee is quite reasonable for the services it provides, and if you sign up as a class, you can get reports on all of your students.

Self-reflection feedback is also critical. If you're working with more advanced students, have them record themselves speaking and ask them to evaluate their own speech. If you're working with lower level learners, record yourself reading a passage or give them a recording of a native speaker reading a passage. Give them the same passage and have them record it. Tell them to listen to the two recordings multiple times to identify any words that don't sound the same. Repeating this task often will help them to monitor and be more aware of common errors.

6 PUT THE STRESS ON STRESS

Often times, our students are misun-

derstood when speaking not because of the individual sounds, but because of inappropriate stress. Think about the word “A-luh-BAM-uh.” Now, try saying it with inappropriately placed reduced syllables “AL-uh-buhm-uh.” The word is essentially unrecognizable. Do stress marking activities where you can give students a list of words they already know and have them identify stressed and unstressed syllables until they understand the idea of stress. Practice knocking on the desks for each syllable: knocking extra loudly on the stress syllables and very gently for unstressed.

7 PRACTICE WORD STRESS WITH VOCABULARY

English has incredibly erratic word stress patterns which are rather difficult to learn due to all of the exceptions to the rules. The best way to learn word stress is to practice as you introduce new vocabulary words. As students study their new vocabulary, tell them which syllable to place the stress mark on so they can practice accurate pronunciation while learning the word.

YOUNG LEARNERS TEND TO DEVELOP GREAT PRONUNCIATION SKILLS; HOWEVER, THE OLDER THE LEARNER GETS (HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND), THE MORE DIFFICULT IT CAN BE TO HAVE GOOD PRONUNCIATION HABITS.

While they may not develop a native-like accent, the tips of above can help make them comprehensible and clear!

The 10 Best Online Resources for ESL Pronunciation Practice

ESL STUDENTS STRUGGLE WITH A LOT OF THINGS.

Many of these they can practice with the use of self-study materials. They can do as many grammar exercises as they want, they can work with audio and video to improve listening, they can even join native English speakers in their free time for some extra speaking practice. But it is not likely they will correct your students' pronunciation. Pronunciation is one of those things that only teachers correct – in the classroom. Friends and acquaintances will usually let pronunciation mistakes slide for the sake of keeping the conversation flowing.

So what can your students do in their self-study time to improve their pronunciation? In today's technological age, the best solutions to any of our problems are usually found online or in apps. And here some pronunciation tools you can recommend to your ESL students.

TOP 5 MOBILE APPS FOR PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE

1 SOUNDS: THE PRONUNCIATION APP

Published by Macmillan Publishers, **Sounds: The Pronunciation App** (www.soundspronapp.com/) is probably the most popular pronunciation app in the market. The app features an interactive phonemic chart in both American and British English, a "How do you say..." option that allows students to not only listen to how a word is pronounced but also record and playback their own voice, and even the possibility to buy additional wordlists once they have mastered the ones included in the app. Available for iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch and Android devices. There's a free download, but it only offers some of the features.

2 ENGLISH FILE PRONUNCIATION

Developed by Oxford University Press, this app also allows students to switch between American and British English. It features an interactive sounds chart,

over 200 sample words and a pronunciation game, and gives students the option to record and playback their own voices. Available for Android and iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad. The free demo comes with limited functionality.

3 PRONUNCIATION: CLEAR SPEECH

Pronunciation: Clear Speech (www.cambridgeapps.org/pronunciation/pcs.html) was developed by Cambridge University Press and provides a little more fun in pronunciation practice. It includes four games students can choose from for intermediate English pronunciation. Available for iPad, iPod Touch and iPhone. There is another version for pre-intermediate learners, Basic Pronunciation: Clear Speech from the Start (www.cambridgeapps.org/pronunciation/bpc-sfs.html).

4 HOWJSAY PRONUNCIATION DICTIONARY

The online dictionary, howjsay.com, is also available for download from iTunes and GooglePlay. This app features over 150,000 entries (the largest English pronunciation dictionary in the world!), all easily accessed with just one click.

5 PRONUNCIATION KING

Pronunciation King is an app that comes in two versions, one for UK English and one for US English. This app is very easy to use and works offline.

TOP 5 ONLINE TOOLS FOR PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE

1 PRONOUNCE IT RIGHT

How do you pronounce "Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche"? Pronounce It Right (www.pronounceitright.com/) will tell you exactly how! This is a website that takes the guesswork out of pronouncing the names of famous composers, philosophers or writers. And good news! There's also an app available for Android and iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch. The app comes with 1000 famous

names and works offline.

2 BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

Within its Learning English site (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learning-english/grammar/pron/), the BBC offers excellent pronunciation tips and opportunities for British English pronunciation practice, featuring the sounds and features of English pronunciation as well as interactive quizzes and three radio programs. An invaluable resource for both ESL students and teachers.

3 RACHEL'S ENGLISH

Rachel's English (www.rachelsenGLISH.com/) is a website I can't recommend enough. In her series of free videos, Rachel shows students not only how to pronounce specific consonant or vowel sounds, she also covers all aspects of intonation and stress. This website is the ideal companion for any student who wants to devote some extra time to pronunciation practice.

4 THE SEPTIC'S COMPANION

The aubergine is a vegetable in British English and more difficult to pronounce than its American counterpart, the eggplant. The Septic's Companion (septiccompanion.com/showcat.php?cat=places) offers definitions of common British English slang, including foods, sport and places. Not recommended for children as it includes colorful insults as well.

5 INOGOLO

At Inogolo.com students will be able to hear the English pronunciation of names, places and a variety of other things. They also have very interesting pronunciation guides, in which students can hear the pronunciation of words and names in a variety of topics.

WITH THE RESOURCES LISTED ABOVE, STUDENTS SHOULDN'T HAVE ANY EXCUSES FOR NOT PRACTICING PRONUNCIATION AT HOME. ON THE CONTRARY!

They'll be too eager to practice as these apps and websites certainly make pronunciation more fun!

7 Excellent Exercises to Improve ESL Intonation and Stress

You ask a student, "What did you do last weekend?" And the reply is, "I went to the park?"

No, your student is not hesitating about what he/she did. They are making an intonation mistake. Just like when they ask a question that sounds like a statement: "Did you correct our exams." How about students who say hotel instead of hotel?

Intonation and stress mistakes are common, particularly when we have students who come from countries whose language is not stressed like English. But there's no need to dwell on the differences between English and your students' native language. Simply go over the common rules and characteristics of English pronunciation and give them plenty of exercises to practice stress and intonation. Here are some to get you started!

TRY THESE 7 EXCELLENT EXERCISES TO IMPROVE ESL INTONATION AND STRESS

1 WORD STRESS

Placing stress on the wrong syllable is a pretty common pronunciation mistake among ESL students. Try giving them this exercise. Prepare a chart as a hand out or make one on the board depending on whether you want to work with your students individually or as a group. The chart should have three columns if you're working with three-syllable words. At the top of each, write the numbers 1, 2, and 3 to represent each syllable, but in each column one of the numbers should be underlined to show the syllable that is stressed.

<u>1</u> - 2 - 3	1 - <u>2</u> - 3	1 - 2 - <u>3</u>

Give your class a list of three-syllable words (telephone, magazine, religion, etc.) and ask them to place each in the corresponding column.

<u>1</u> - 2 - 3	1 - <u>2</u> - 3	1 - 2 - <u>3</u>
telephone	religion	
magazine		

2 WORD STRESS – CUISENAIRE RODS

This is probably the ideal way to teach children about word stress. Cuisenaire Rods come in different lengths: each rod can be used to represent a syllable. Use the longer rods to represent the stressed syllable. Hand out several rods to each group of students and call out words they must represent, one rod for each syllable. To reinforce what they've learned, ask them to write down each word and underline the stressed syllable.

3 SENTENCE STRESS

Try this matching exercise to practice sentence stress. On one side of the worksheet write several sentences of varying length. On the other side, the sentences represented by a series of numbers: underline the number for the word that is stressed. For example: *I bought my sister a present.* => 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6
Mike didn't break the window. => 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

Mix up the order in which the sentences appear on the left side. Say each sentence out loud, emphasizing the stressed word. Students must then match each sentence with its representation in numbers.

4 SENTENCE STRESS – CUISENAIRE RODS

Just as you use Cuisenaire Rods to practice word stress, you can use them to teach sentence stress. This time each rod represents a word. Divide your class into groups and hand out several rods to each. Make sure the rods are of equal length except for one which should be longer. Say a sentence out loud and show them which word is stressed by representing it with the longer rod. Next, say another sentence and have students show which word is stressed: I didn't **buy** a car. Say the same sentence but shift the stress to another word: I didn't buy a **car**. Discuss with your class how the stress affects the meaning of the sentence. Have them copy each sentence and underline the stressed word.

5 SENTENCE STRESS – FOCUSING ON CONTEXT

Give your students a series of sentences to read. This time you will not be saying them out loud. They must figure out which word is stressed based purely on the context. For instance:

I was so **angry** at John. He forgot to call me on my **birthday**. He said he **had** remembered, but that it was too late to call. There may be more than one correct answer: differences in which words students choose to stress may be a good lead in for a discussion.

6 RISING OR FALLING?

Give your students a series of questions they must evaluate. Tell them that they must indicate whether each has a rising or falling intonation.

Did you remember to buy the milk? (rising)

Where did you buy that? (falling)

See if students can see a pattern (yes/no questions have rising intonation, wh-questions have falling intonation).

7 INTONATION AND FEELINGS

For students to convey the right intonation, they must first understand it. Try an exercise in which students can see that the intonation, not the words, is what conveys real meaning. Make this a multiple choice exercise. For each question, write a short sentence or phrase. Below it write several options students may choose from.

I have something to tell you.

How does the speaker feel?

- happy and excited
- sad and worried
- nervous and worried

Now, read each sentence/phrase out loud. Make sure you convey the right feeling. For instance, say, "I have something to tell you" in a way that conveys that it is a serious matter that worries you, and you're nervous talking about it. Students listen to each one and circle the right feelings.

PRACTICING INTONATION WILL HELP STUDENTS NOT ONLY COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY, IT WILL ALSO HELP THEM UNDERSTAND SITUATIONS BETTER. Practice intonation with your class, and there won't be any misunderstandings about what they really mean.

The 9 Best Online Resources for ESL Pronunciation Practice

AS ESL TEACHERS, WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR COACHING OUR STUDENTS TOWARDS BETTER AND IMPROVED PRONUNCIATION.

But it is also our responsibility to coach them in better ways to study and practice on their own. Here are some online resources that every ESL student – and teacher – should access for reference and continued pronunciation practice.

TRY THESE 9 ONLINE RESOURCES FOR ESL PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE

1 OKANAGAN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

This Canadian college offers a comprehensive practice guide (international.ouc.bc.ca/pronunciation/) to English pronunciation, divided into 13 units. Each unit focuses on a particular sound or set of sounds and is packed with activities to help students practice them including video, audio and dictation. Students have the option to record their voice in a conversation. Of particular use to teachers are the workbooks available for each unit – available in MP3 audio, too!

2 UNIVERSITY OF IOWA – PHONETICS FLASH ANIMATION PROJECT

The University of Iowa (www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/) offers an amazing flash interactive guide to American English pronunciation. It is a complete guide to phonetics, presented in a clear, concise manner that even ESL students should be able to grasp. A series of buttons help students navigate the different aspects of vowel and consonant sounds, which are demonstrated with animation with sound and video.

3 SOUNDS OF ENGLISH

The website (www.soundsofenglish.org/pronunciation/index.htm)

provides a great guide to how to pronounce different sounds in English. The sounds are presented in contrasting pairs (like heat and hit): click on each and you have access to a description of how each sound is produced, plus video and audio files for each. And there's a bonus for ESL teachers – a "Tips for Teachers" section with some fabulous ideas for pronunciation activities.

4 ESL STATION

San Jose City College has an excellent ESL department, which in addition to its regular course, provides and online lab called ESL Station. It offers interactive pronunciation activities (www.eslstation.net/quia-pron-activities.htm) that include Syllables and Stress Patterns, Stress Patterns in Words and Rhythmic Patterns. It also has a very complete pronunciation guide (www.eslstation.net/Pronunciation/index.htm) with listening exercises and quizzes.

5 MANYTHINGS.ORG

ManyThings.org has an American English Pronunciation Practice page specifically designed for ESL students. It offers great minimal pair practice with Flash and MP3 audio. The site also features "Listen and Repeat" videos that are really useful for students to practice pronunciation at home.

6 SPOKENSKILLS

SpokenSkills (www.spokenskills.com/index.cfm?type=15&content=studentactivities) is a site that has tons of resources for the ESL student and teacher, but in terms of pronunciation practice, be sure to check out the exercises for vowel and consonant sounds. For each sound, there are lists of practice phrases that students can hear. They may also record their own voice and repeat the process till they are satisfied with the results. There are also intonation exercises and minimal pairs for practice.

7 LEARNER'S DICTIONARY

Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary (www.learnersdictionary.com/pronex/pronex.htm) has Perfect Pronunciation practice exercises, including 15 sessions in all, each featuring a different set of sounds and five exercises for each. Students first listen to a set of words with the same sound, then listen again and repeat each one. Finally, there's a quiz to test a student's ability to recognize different sounds. There are also exercises for syllable stress and those labeled as sentence practice, review everything learned during the session.

8 WORDS AND PICTURES

And just when you thought there weren't any resources for young learners to practice pronunciation with, here comes the BBC with their Words and Pictures site (www.bbc.co.uk/schools/wordsandpictures/index.shtml). Through a variety of fun, interactive games, little ones can practice consonant and vowel sounds, as well as CVC words. Probably the best way to introduce young ESL learners to phonemes.

9 SOUND-O-MATIC

Also great for young learners, the Sound-O-Matic (www.eslgame.com/activities/sound-o-matic/) lets them choose different vowel-consonant combinations like –as, –an, –ap, –at, etc. and explore the different words that can be made with these combinations.

EVERY YEAR, THE INTERNET GETS BIGGER AND BETTER IN TERMS OF VIDEO AND AUDIO QUALITY, AND INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE BECOMES INCREASINGLY MORE SOPHISTICATED.

This can only mean good news for ESL teachers as we have access to more resources and not just simple lists or exercises to copy. We have access to technology that can put ESL students in the driver's seat and really take charge of their self-study time.

Which is More Important? Discrete Speech Sounds v. Stress & Intonation

In my beginning years as an ESL instructor, the general wisdom in teaching ESL pronunciation was that it was not so much the individual speech sounds that mattered but rather the “supersegmentals” — that is, the issues of intonation and stress.

If a student had mastered the basics of native-sounding stress and intonation in American English, then that was going to contribute much more to her overall general comprehensibility than whether or not her “r” or “th” sounds were clear. (Or the “l” sound. Or the “ee” or “eh” sound. And so on.) Being a dutiful beginning teacher, I plowed on, teaching students to really stress those content words and reduce the structure or grammar words. I taught five or six kinds of sentence stress: information questions, yes/no questions, basic sentence stress for affirmative sentences, and so on. My students’ intonation and stress improved. And I tried to ignore that even though they sounded native-like, approximately, I really couldn’t understand them. More and more I was reminded of a Saturday Night Live routine in which a comedian, a very talented actor, used to play a teacher or a drill sergeant and come out give orders or ask questions of his troops or students, which the audience could recognize as questions or commands by the intonation patterns, but not specifically what the guy was saying because the specific speech sounds were so inaccurate. And the students’ or soldiers’ befuddlement was hilarious because its origin was not only in not understanding but also in thinking that they should be able to understand, they almost understood. But they didn’t.

Stress and intonation are important. But clear articulation of individual speech sounds is also important. So how do you proceed in teaching your pronunciation class, and what do you focus on: stress and intonation patterns or discrete speech sounds?

HOW TO TEACH PRONUNCIATION

1 STUDENT NEED

As in most things educational, let

student need guide you. Start by administering a pronunciation diagnostic to all students at the beginning of the term, preferably taping each student in a short segment that assesses his vowel sounds, different problem area consonants such as “th,” “l” and “r,” question intonation, sentence stress, and so forth. When doing the assessments, note problem areas for each student, and then look for common problem areas for the entire class: most ESL students, for example, have trouble with sentence stress, and many have trouble with the “th” sound. The common areas will dictate the course curriculum: it makes little sense to focus on the “sh” and “s” distinction, for example, if no student is having trouble with that, and focus should be moved to where many students are having trouble, such as basic sentence stress and reductions.

2 PLAN OUT THE SEMESTER

The instructor might begin, for example, by giving a general overview of English vowel sounds, if this is where most students have trouble, or in different intonation patterns. From this general plan, the instructor can do more specific weekly and daily planning. If a week is to be devoted to intonation patterns, for example, then at least several days should be devoted to question intonation.

3 ASSESS FREQUENTLY: INFORMALLY AND FORMALLY

Frequent assessment, both informal and formal, is required in an ESL class to monitor student progress and mastery. A focus on more informal assessment is usually best: a teacher often learns more about student progress from just walking around her class and seeing how students are doing with yes/no questions and short answers, for example, (e.g., “Can you cook?” “Yes, I can”) than she will on a large midterm that covers a number of question types. In addition, frequent short quizzes, such as weekly quizzes focused on the instructional point of that week, usually give more information the instructor can actually use — “It seems they have mastered front vowel sounds, it’s time to move on” — than a

large test that covers a number of instructional points (“Well, they have some mastery of vowels, I think, but I’ll have to look closer to determine who is proficient in which ones.”) In addition, frequent small tests/quizzes are less stressful for students: if they blow one, their whole semester grade isn’t ruined. Finally, frequent assessment also reduces a need to schedule make-ups if three students suddenly have doctor or dentist appointments they just can’t miss on the day of the big test: the teacher can say she’ll drop one weekly quiz grade for all students to cover such emergencies.

4 BE FLEXIBLE

It may be you had only planned to spend a day on the “t” and “th” distinction, but your informal assessment of student progress indicates they need more time on this: so devote another day for this. You will probably need less time in some other area and can “borrow” time from “ed” endings, for example.

5 DON’T FORGET PRAGMATICS, OR HOW LANGUAGE IS USED

Pragmatics has to do with how we actually use language: for example, speakers don’t go around using the “ee” vowel sound in isolation, of course. However, in English we do use this sound a lot for numbers and related speech acts such as asking the price of something: “How much is this dish?” and then having to clarify the price, as even native speakers frequently have to: e.g., “Did you say thirteen or thirty?” This clarification is often followed by having to say the actual number (again, as even native speakers have to sometimes as the words sound so alike): “That’s thirteen dollars! One-three. Not three-oh.”

6 COMBINE INSTRUCTIONAL POINTS

For efficiency and transfer of learning, combine when possible instruction in the larger, global areas of pronunciation (the intonation and stress patterns) with the discrete speech sounds. Using the example above, teaching the pronuncia-

tion of numbers is an ideal opportunity to also teach information questions: "How much does it cost?" "How long does the sale price last?" "What other colors does it come in?" and forth. At the same time, the instructor is also teaching the pragmatics of discussing purchases.

Deciding the focus of an ESL pronunciation class isn't easy, especially as common pronunciation teaching practice can contradict conventional wisdom and experience. However, with careful assessment and planning, the instructor can create a term of meaningful activities that will result in student progress and development of pronunciation skills.

Knowing Where to Begin: Excellent Pronunciation Skills Diagnostics

Once a number of years ago at the beginning of a pronunciation skills class, a young man came up to my desk and introduced himself as “Asher.”

I shook his hand, at the same time wondering about his name choice — it's not uncommon for ESL students to Westernize their names, but Asher? Why this name of a relatively obscure Jewish prophet? The student was writing his name out for me at the same time, on his student profile, and I felt silly when I saw it was “Arthur,” a much more reasonable choice for an ESL student's Americanized name. And I was glad that he was in the ESL pronunciation class as he had chosen the Western name he could not pronounce — well, there was a lot of work to be done, clearly. And I knew that the pronunciation of the “th” sound would be featured early. However, most ESL students will not so obligingly provide an informal diagnostic like this in the first moments of class. So this leaves the ESL pronunciation teacher wondering where to begin. The answer is on face value easy: begin with the students and their needs. How then do you know student needs? A good informal ESL pronunciation assessment will lead you to student needs and the course curriculum.

ELEMENTS TO ASSESS IN ESL PRONUNCIATION

“Suprasegmentals”: the More “Global” Issues of Stress and Intonation. These issues of stress and intonation are not the most important pronunciation issue, necessarily — pronunciation of individual speech sounds also matter — but these concerns affect pronunciation across words, phrases, and sentences.

1 WORD STRESS.

Often words are unintelligible if the stress is on the wrong syllable, so it is important to learn some general principles of word stress: many “everyday” or “conversational” nouns receive their stress on the first syllable, for example, while related verbs do on the second syllable (e.g., the “effect” and to “affect”, related noun and verb pronounced the same except for the stress). Also, a big difference in meaning between two different words is often in the word stress (“Give the teacher a message” versus “Give the

teacher a massage”). Assessing student understanding of word stress to find areas to focus on for instruction is therefore important.

2 DECLARATIVE SENTENCE STRESS.

A good understanding of spoken English requires control of the stress of declarative sentences (i.e., sentences that are not questions). A sentence in spoken English has a definite pattern of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables, with the major content words, the words that carry meaning, receiving the most stress, while “grammar words” without much individual meaning (e.g., “the”, “a”, “and”) are unstressed and reduced.

3 QUESTION INTONATION

Because students typically have a lot of questions, they should also learn correct intonation patterns for English questions.

1. Yes/no questions.
“Yes/no questions” (questions that may be answered simply “yes” or “no”) have a rising intonation: e.g., “Do you want coffee?” The intonation starts low with “Do” and proceeds up the scale to finish with “coffee” on the highest note. The intonation pattern is so distinct that I could just say “Coffee?” with rising intonation, and my listener will correctly interpret this as a question: “Do you want coffee?”
2. Information questions.
Information questions are those questions that cannot be answered “yes” or “no” but rather with some information: e.g., “How do you take your coffee?” The intonation in this kind of question rises and then falls at the end, with the highest pitch typically on the next-to-last syllable: “How do you take your COFfee?”

4 LIASON.

Liaison involves connecting words in a predictable pattern: e.g., “Do you want coffee?” comes out in conversation more like “Duhyuhwan coffee?” It is a mark of a native-speaker to use liaison effortlessly. However, with practice, ESL

students can achieve the much the same kind of control.

ALSO ASSESS DISCRETE SPEECH SOUNDS:

In addition to the suprasegmental elements of stress and intonation, individual speech sounds, like the “th” sound in English, are important to being understood. Common problem areas for ESL students should be focused on. Many students will have trouble with the use of the “schwa”, the “uh” sound, in unstressed syllables: e.g., “American” is really pronounced something like “uh-MERuhcun”, with only the second vowel in the stressed syllable a full vowel, the rest of the vowels in unstressed syllables are reduced and pronounced as schwas. Because most unstressed vowels are pronounced as schwa, it is an important individual speech sound to learn. Other speech sounds for probable focus are the “ee/eh” distinction as well as the “t/th” distinction.

METHODS TO ASSESS ESL STUDENT PRONUNCIATION

1 TAPE STUDENTS INDIVIDUALLY.

This is good for initial assessment, getting a taped speech sample of each student in such tasks as reading aloud from a book and having a short dialogue with the teacher, as well as giving an impromptu speech on an everyday topic such as “My First Day at College.” Such an assessment will provide a permanent record of student performance in such areas of stress of content words, reduction of grammar words, question intonation, concerns with discrete speech sounds, and so forth. The teacher then can use these assessments not only to track individual student progress over the course of the semester, if he tapes students periodically, but it also gives a starting point to the term if many students show similar pronunciation concerns.

2 LISTEN TO STUDENTS IN CONVERSATION AND TAKE NOTES.

This is good for ongoing assessment, to

see if students are learning the curriculum. Just walking around and noting student performance in simple dialogues with each other can yield a wealth of information of how much more focus needs to be given to stressing content words and reducing grammar words, or the “s/sh” distinction, for example.

INSTRUCTOR CAN GET A CLEAR PICTURE OF STUDENT INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS AND PROGRESS.

3 INTERVIEWS.

Another good way to assess student pronunciation is the interview. Interviews should be individual and ongoing, perhaps at entry, midterm, and exit, during which time the instructor can ask informal questions about students' lives, educational progress, work experiences, and so forth. Interviews are not only a good way to note student progress but also to check in when each student and get to know him or her.

4 FREQUENT QUIZZES.

Frequent small quizzes are often more valuable than the one big midterm or final: they keep students and teachers updated about progress and what needs to be reviewed and what has been mastered. In addition, frequent small tests are not as anxiety-provoking to students as they know their grade is not dependent on a single quiz, allowing them to focus their energy on learning rather than on worrying about the test.

5 OCCASIONAL BIG TESTS.

This is not to say, however, that occasional big tests — the midterm, the unit final — are without value. Big tests carry psychological importance: passing the midterm is a kind of milestone, signaling some mastery to the student and teacher. A well-constructed midterm or other large test that covers a number of skills learned in class also reveals a more complete picture of an individual student, his strengths and weaknesses, as well as general trends in the class and what has been learned well and what needs to be revisited.

TEACHING ESL PRONUNCIATION IS NOT EASY; EVEN MORE DIFFICULT MAY BE ASSESSING PRONUNCIATION. HOWEVER, BY USING MULTIPLE METHODS OF ASSESSMENT, AND ASSESSING FREQUENTLY THROUGHOUT THE TERM, THE

Stress About It: Tips for Teaching English Intonation

SOMETIMES ESL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS JUST NEED TO STRESS ABOUT STRESS.

Well, maybe not stress about it but at least pay some attention to it. However, stress isn't something most teachers know how to talk about. That's why sentence stress may not get all the classroom attention it deserves, and it takes some patience and planning on the teacher's part to teach students how stress can change the meaning of English sentences. When you are ready to tackle stress in the classroom, here are some ideas to get you going.

HOWTO: 7 TIPS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH INTONATION

1 TEACH IT

Intonation is not the most popular topic of instruction in ESL programs. Whether it's because teachers have so much other material to cover or because students do not think it's important, stress is often ignored. The first step to teaching your students correct and effective sentence stress is to bite the bullet and teach it in the first place.

2 EXPLAIN IT

Help your students understand that stressing different words in a sentence gives the sentence different meanings. You can do this by using a simple sentence and showing how stress can change the meaning. Start with the following sentence: You think I saw the monster. Discuss with your class what this sentence means. Then stress one word in the sentence at a time. As you do, talk about how the meaning of the sentence changed.

You think I saw the monster. (You are the one who thinks this is true.)

You **think** I saw the monster. (This is your belief, but you are not be correct in it.)

You think I saw the monster. (Maybe someone saw it, but it wasn't me.)

You think I **saw** the monster. (I did something with the monster, but I may not have seen it.)

You think I saw the **monster**. (I saw something, but it may not have been the monster.)

3 QUESTION IT

With close examination, you and your students will find that the word which is stressed is the idea which is in question. By stressing a particular word, the speaker implies that part of the sentence isn't or may not be true. Go back through the different examples of word stress and show your students how the stressed word is the idea in question.

4 GUESS AT IT

Having your students practice sentence stress is the next step in perfecting its use. Have pairs take turns stressing each word in the example sentence. Each person should listen for the word his partner is stressing and then point to that word on a piece of paper. The speaker should then say whether their partner is correct.

5 USE IT

Once every person in class has had a chance to practice stressing different words in the sentence, it's time to see if they understand what it means. In the same pairs, have one person say the sentence stressing the word of her choice. Her partner must then give a reply that is appropriate based on the stressed word. For example, if the speaker says, "You think I saw the monster?" her partner might answer, "You didn't see it? Then who did?" Pairs should continue until each person has had a chance to stress each word and give an appropriate response.

6 LISTEN TO IT

Using a short dialogue, have students listen for stressed words while reading a transcript of the dialogue. After listening to the dialogue once, have students listen again this time marking the words they think are stressed by the speaker. Give students a third listen to check their answers. Then have small groups of students work together to compare answers. If your groups find they disagree, give them another listen before pointing out which words the speaker is indeed stressing.

7 HAVE FUN WITH IT

What can a speaker communicate with only one word? More than you might think. To see, give each student in your class a card with one word on it. The words should be a random collection of familiar words. Then put your students in groups of three and give them a scenario. You are getting ready to take a vacation. It is one of the student's birthdays. Someone in the classroom is a thief. The groups then have a conversation, but they are only allowed to use one word at a time, and it must be one of the words on the group's cards. Students should use stress and intonation to communicate their meaning with one of the three words. This game is good practice as well as good fun for your students!

TEACHING STRESS IN ENGLISH DOESN'T HAVE TO BE STRESSFUL.

With some patience and practice, your students can begin to understand the subtleties of English stress and start using it in their own speaking.

Phonics in the ESL Classroom – Is It Right for You?

PHONICS IS SOMETIMES A CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT AMONG ESL TEACHERS.

I know my linguistics program taught that phonics was not a good choice for ESL students. Then I worked at a school where phonics was required for all students, especially those studying English. Today, traditional classrooms are pushing for sight words and deemphasizing or totally eliminating phonics. For ESL teachers, the question of whether to use phonics with students learning English is sometimes a difficult one to answer. Though much of English follows phonetic rules, sometimes the exceptions seem to be in greater numbers. Do the drawbacks of phonics outweigh its benefits? Is phonics a better way to teach pronunciation and reading? Or will it do ESL students more harm than good? If you are struggling with the phonics question, as I have, here are some of the pluses and minuses attributed to phonics to consider as you answer the phonics question for yourself.

BENEFITS OF PHONICS

1 ALPHABET

Phonics is helpful for students who are just learning the English alphabet. Students whose first language does not use the same alphabet as English does (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Hebrew, etc.) have an extra challenge as they learn English. They are learning a new alphabet and the sound that are associated with it. For these students, phonics can be a great help. Students learn what sounds each letter or combination of letters makes, and that helps them in their reading and pronunciation, especially with new words.

2 SPELLING

Because it helps students break down words into their components, phonics helps students become better spellers. They are able to sound

through each part of a word and determine the letters needed to write it.

3 UNKNOWN WORDS

Students of phonics are also better at reading unfamiliar words. They can sound out the letters and letter groups in new vocabulary and often accurately pronounce them on the first try.

4 WORD ROOTS

Because phonics enables students to see phonemes within words, students who learn phonics may have an advantage to decoding English words from their word roots. They may recognize spelling patterns more easily and make connections between spelling and meaning. This may help them when they encounter new words that follow the spelling patterns they already know.

5 CONFIDENCE

Learning phonics can give your ESL students a boost in their confidence as well. When learners have the tools (in this case the rules of sound and spelling in English) they will gain a certain confidence because they have the tools they need for success. This success will increase your students' confidence which will spill over from reading and spelling into other areas of language learning. Because one key to language learning success is the courage to use the language that you know, students with the confidence boost that comes from learning phonics may find themselves bolder and more willing to experiment with English in other language situations.

DRAWBACKS OF PHONICS

1 READING WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING

ESL students who become successful at phonics may become what is

known as false readers. They may be able to read aloud easily and pronounce unfamiliar words when they encounter their written forms. But for ESL students, comprehension is far more than reading a word on a page. For students of English, seeing and understating a word in meaningful context is essential. Therefore, ESL students who are successful at learning phonics may seem to understand what they are reading, but in reality know nothing more than a word's pronunciation. If students cannot understand a word's meaning in context and use that word appropriately, they do not really know it. False readers, then, seem to understand and read a word when in reality they do not know the word and are unable to use it.

2 NO HELP WITH FAMILIAR WORDS' RECOGNITION

Phonics is a linking strategy. For native speakers, particularly children learning to read, phonics helps them recognize in writing words they already know in their aural form. ESL students do not have that base knowledge of vocabulary because, unlike native speakers, they have not been using English fluently for years before they learn to read. Being able to read and pronounce a new word does not necessarily allow the ESL student to link it to previous experience with that word. Native speakers may have a different result when they use phonics to read a word correctly. They already know the words though they are not familiar with the written form. Though phonics is a benefit to native speakers in recognizing the written forms of words they already know, ESL students will not find this same effect from phonics.

3 TOO MANY EXCEPTIONS

Though phonics does teach the rules of spelling and pronunciation, English sometimes seems to be composed more exceptions than words that follow phonics rules. Your students can become frustrated when

they depend solely on phonics as a reading and spelling strategy. Because pronunciation of English words has changed over decades while spelling has remained the same, your students will need to understand and be patient with the myriad exceptions in English. Students must also be careful when learning new words. In some cases, using phonics to decode an unfamiliar word will result in incorrect pronunciation of that word because it is an exception to the rules of phonics.

4 TOO MUCH EXTRA EFFORT

Teaching phonics requires a lot of work on the teacher's part. You must constantly label and point out the letter patterns in words and help your students recognize and remember them. If you teach phonics, it will become a part of not only every day's material but each lesson itself. You will have to show the phonic breakdown of every new vocabulary word your students learn until they are able to do it themselves (which can take a year or more).

PHONICS HAS SIGNIFICANT ADVANTAGES AS WELL AS DISADVANTAGES FOR THE ESL STUDENT, AND EVERY TEACHER MUST DETERMINE FOR HIMSELF OR HERSELF WHETHER TO USE IT IN THE CLASSROOM.

Ultimately, no one system will be enough to teach your ESL students flawless use of English. Most ESL teachers find that a balanced program best serves their students. Emphasizing the oral aspect of language – speaking, listening, phonology – will help students of phonics develop a more well-rounded and more effective English learning strategy. Each teacher will find the balance that is right for him or her with a little effort and some experimentation. It will be up to you to find the right balance for you.