MONASH College

Week 2: Note-taking
Sub-topic Listening Strategies

Listening Strategies

"It should not be difficult to realise the importance of listening when we consider that it occupies about **45 per cent** of the time adults spend in communication. This is significantly more than speaking, which accounts for 30 per cent, and reading and writing, which make up 16 per cent and nine per cent respectively" (Ahmed, 2015).

**Task 1:** What can help us improve our listening skills?

In a group try to come up with some listening strategies.

1. Predicting Content

Depending on the context – a news report, a university lecture, an exchange in a supermarket – you can often predict the kind of words and style of language the speaker will use. Our knowledge of the world helps us anticipate the kind of information we are likely to hear. Moreover, when we predict the topic of a talk or a conversation, all the related vocabulary stored in our brains is 'activated' to help us better understand what we're listening to.
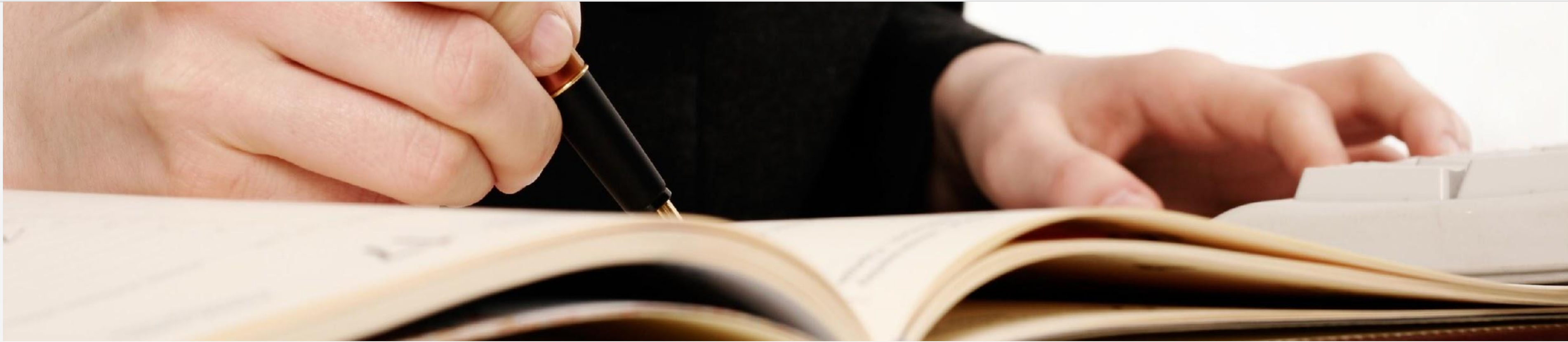
2. Listening for Gist

When listening, it is also possible to get the 'whole picture' but with one crucial difference: information comes in a sequence. And in that sequence of information, there are **content words** (the nouns, adjectives and verbs) that can help you form that picture. We often call this listening for gist.

For example, the words 'food', 'friends', 'fun', 'park' and 'sunny day' have their own meanings, but when you hear the words in sequence, they help form the context of a picnic.
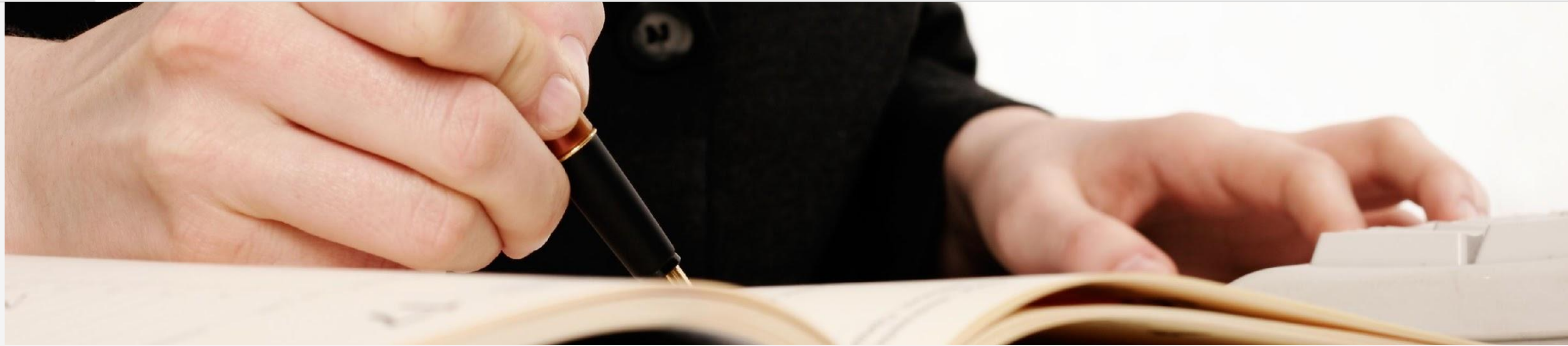
3. Detecting Signposts

Just like the traffic lights on roads, there are signposts in language that help us follow what we're listening to. These words, which link ideas, help us to understand what the speaker is talking about and where they are taking us. They're particularly important in presentations and lectures.

4. Listening for Details

When listening for details, you are interested in a specific kind of information – perhaps a number, name or object. You can ignore anything that does not sound relevant. In this way, you are able to narrow down your search and get the detail you need.

In a listening test, if you are asked to write down the age of a person, listen for the words related to age ('old', 'young', 'years', 'date of birth', etc.) or a number that could represent that person's age. If it is a conversation, you might wait to hear someone beginning a question with 'How old…?'

5. Inferring Meaning

Using clues and prior knowledge about a situation to work out the meaning of what we hear.

Similarly, we can infer the relationship between people from the words they use, without having to find out directly. Take the following conversation:

- *A: Tom, did you do your homework?*
  B: I did, sir, but the dog ate it.
  A: That's a terrible excuse. You'll never pass your exams if you don't work harder.

We can infer from the use of the words 'homework' and 'exams' that this is a conversation between a student and his teacher. By using contextual clues and our knowledge of the world, we can work out what's being said, who is speaking and what's taking place.