

# ASSESSING LISTENING



## [Assessing Listening: 6'22"]

If you need to assess your students' listening skills there are a number of factors you need to consider. These include considering the test taker and their needs, the kind of information you want to know about their listening skills and the most appropriate ways to assess these skills so that your test is appropriate and accurately scored. Listening is a vital skill but it can be challenging to assess.

### A. BEFORE YOU WATCH

**1. What is the difference between hearing and listening?**

For example:

Hear = hear sound

Listen = understand sounds

**2. What are the different things we need to do when we listen in order to understand what we hear?**

For example: understand context, attitude, structures and vocabulary used, facial expressions, body language, gestures.

**3. How much do we rely on context to help us understand what we are hearing?**

Example answer: It gives us background knowledge and expectations about what we will hear in that situation, which prepares us for listening.

## B. WHILE YOU WATCH

### Listening skills

#### 4. Which activities help us make sense of what we have heard? Complete the summary.

First we check if what we hear are the *sounds* of language and match these with *words* we already know. Then we group *them* together into *phrases*, which helps us decide what the *topic* is. Finally, we make *connections* between what we think we have heard with our pre-existing knowledge. So tasks must try to copy real life use of language.

#### 5. Tick the types of tasks we can use to test listening skills.

- ✓ *Pick out a word*  
Spell words correctly
- ✓ *Recognise the correct tense*  
Change the tense given
- ✓ *Deduce meaning of unknown words from context*  
Write about the situation
- ✓ *Identify the main ideas*
- ✓ *Summarise through speaking or writing*
- ✓ *Listen for specific information*
- ✓ *Listen for attitude, inferring or deducing*  
Listen for pronunciation

#### 6. Complete this list of formats we can use to assess listening.

- A. reading aloud *live*
- B. *audio* recording
- C. listen to simulated *live discussion (or talk)*
- D. answer questions by choosing the *best response* or by writing an answer

### **Scoring and grading**

**7. What is important for test takers to understand?**

*How the test will be scored.*

**8a. What is weighting?**

A. Giving more than a single mark for each test item

*B. Giving different marks to different skills assessed*

C. Giving more marks to higher scoring students

**8b. What is partial credit?**

*A. Giving marks to answers which are partly correct.*

B. Giving more marks to lower scoring students.

C. Giving different marks to different skills assessed.

**8c. Which of these might be a problem when deciding on scoring?**

A. Answers which are partially correct

B. Deciding how the task affects scoring

*C. Deciding if spelling and grammar matter in written responses*

*D. Limiting the number of correct answers possible*

E. Making the test fair for weaker learners

**9. Why is listening considered to be the most widely used skill?**

*Because we cannot have communication without understanding*

## C. AFTER YOU WATCH

- 10. Look at this listening test item. What do you think this item is testing? How do you know?**

Listen to two people planning a meeting.

1. Where is the meeting?
2. What time is the meeting?
3. What is the reason for the meeting?
4. What problem might the people attending the meeting expect?

*[N.B. The above task is adapted from APTIS.]*

*This item appears to test a range of listening skills, i.e. detail (1 & 2), explanations (3), deduction (4) so it is NOT a good test item.*

*Multiple choice question (MCQ) test items should focus on one aspect of a skill, i.e. all detail or all reasons, etc.*

- 11. Read this information about a teaching context. Do you think the task in (10) is useful for these learners? Why? / Why not?**

*Learners are a class of 17 year olds studying general English. They are currently at B1 level.*

*No, not only because it is a weak test item but also because it is focused on business, not the general English of a teenager.*

- 12. What might be the reason for including both monologues and dialogues in an assessment of listening skills?**

*To assess a range of listening skills, i.e., that the test taker can understand extended text and interaction*

**APPLY >>>>>>>>>>**
**THE TASK**
**13. Think about your own learners:**

- A. What kind of listening do they struggle with?
- B. What are the contexts in which they normally need to listen?
- C. How can you make sure a listening task is fair for learners?

**RATING**
**14. Which listening skill would you prioritise? Why? How would you balance 30 marks across the test?**

- Listening for detail
- Listening for main idea
- Listening for attitude

*You can choose here, but remember it depends on what the test takers have learnt, e.g. if you have been working on listening for attitude in class then you might want to assign more marks to this part of the test. Or it may be evenly balanced if you want test takers to focus on all three sub-skills.*

**To learn more about issues to consider when developing a test of listening, you may access Appendix D in the APTIS General Technical Manual (pp. 48–51)**

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