

UNIT 4 Teaching Listening Skills in EFL

1. What is the Listening Skill?

Listening is the ability to **receive, understand, interpret, and respond to spoken language**. In language learning, listening is not passive; it is an **active cognitive process** where learners decode sounds, understand vocabulary and grammar, and construct meaning from what they hear.

Listening is often the **first language skill acquired** in both first and second language learning.

Key Characteristics

- It is **receptive** but **mentally active**.
- It requires **attention, interpretation, and memory**.
- It integrates **linguistic knowledge and world knowledge**.

Illustration: The Listening Process

Sound Input → Recognizing Words → Understanding Meaning → Interpreting Message → Responding

Example:
A student hears:

"The meeting has been postponed until tomorrow."

The listener must:

1. Recognize the words.
2. Understand their meaning.
3. Interpret the message.
4. Adjust plans accordingly.

2. Components of Listening Skill

Listening comprehension involves several **interrelated components**.

1. Phonological Recognition

The ability to recognize **sounds, stress, and intonation patterns**.

Example:

- Distinguishing **ship / sheep**
- Understanding rising or falling intonation in questions.

2. Vocabulary Knowledge

Listeners must understand **the meaning of words** in context.

Example:
If students do not know the word "*postponed*", they cannot understand the message.

3. Grammar Processing

Understanding **sentence structure** helps listeners interpret meaning.

Example:
"If it rains, the match will be cancelled."

Learners must recognize the **conditional structure**.

4. Background Knowledge (Schema)

Listeners rely on **previous knowledge about the topic**.

Example:
If the topic is **air travel**, students activate vocabulary like:

- airport
- boarding
- luggage
- flight

5. Listening Strategies

Learners apply strategies such as:

- predicting
- inferring
- guessing meaning from context

3. Types of Listening Activities

Listening activities are usually classified into **two major types**.

1. Intensive Listening

Definition:

Listening to **short texts carefully** in order to understand specific details.

Characteristics

- Focus on **language forms**
- Usually done in the **classroom**
- Short recordings

Examples

- Dictation
- Listening for specific words
- Gap-fill exercises

Example Activity

Students listen to:

"The train leaves at 7:30."

Task:

Fill the gap:

The train leaves at _____.

Answer: **7:30**

2. Extensive Listening

Definition:

Listening to **longer texts for general understanding and enjoyment**.

Characteristics

- Focus on **overall meaning**
- Often done **outside the classroom**
- Uses **authentic materials**

Examples

- Listening to podcasts
- Watching movies
- Listening to stories or lectures

Example:

Students listen to a **5-minute podcast** and answer:

What is the main topic of the talk?

4. Strategies for Teaching Listening Skills

Teachers should train learners to use **different listening strategies**.

1. Predictive Listening

Students **predict what they will hear before listening**.

Techniques

- Look at the **title**
- Observe **pictures**
- Discuss **background knowledge**

Example

Title: *Life in the Desert*

Teacher asks:

- What animals live in the desert?
- What problems might people face there?

Students activate knowledge before listening.

2. Listening for Gist

Students listen to **understand the general idea**.

Teacher Instructions

Listen and answer:

- What is the speaker mainly talking about?

Example options:

- A. Travel problems
- B. Healthy food
- C. Studying abroad

Students choose the **main idea**.

3. Listening for Detail

Students listen to **specific information**.

Example Task

Listen and complete the table.

Name	Age	City
John	?	London

Students listen for **exact information**.

5. Using Authentic Materials

Authentic materials are **real-life listening resources** not designed for teaching.

Examples

- Podcasts
- News reports
- Interviews
- YouTube videos
- Movie clips
- Songs

Classroom Example

Material: **News clip (1 minute)**

Tasks:

1. Pre-listening: Discuss the topic.
2. While listening: Identify the main idea.
3. Post-listening: Discuss opinions.

6. Techniques to Help Students Become Independent Listeners

Teachers should help learners develop **autonomous listening habits**.

1. Strategy Training

Teach students how to:

- predict
- infer meaning
- ignore unknown words

2. Note-Taking Skills

Students write **keywords while listening**.

Example:

Listening text:

"Climate change is affecting global temperatures and sea levels."

Notes:

- climate change
- temperatures ↑
- sea levels ↑

3. Repeated Listening

Students listen **more than once**.

1st listening → general idea
2nd listening → details

4. Self-Practice Outside Class

Students can use:

- podcasts
- English movies
- audiobooks
- language learning apps

7. Issues in Assessing Listening Skill

Assessing listening comprehension presents several **challenges**.

- Listening happens **in real time**, and students **cannot review the input easily**.

Problem:

Students may miss information.

Solution:

- Allow **repeated listening**
- Use **short recordings**

2. Students must **remember information while listening**.

Example:

A long instruction may overload memory.

Solution:

- Use **short segments**
- Provide **visual support**

3. Different accents may affect comprehension.

Example:

British vs American pronunciation.

Solution:

Expose learners to **various accents gradually**.

4. Students may feel **nervous during listening tests**, which reduces comprehension.

Solution:

- Provide **practice tests**
- Use **clear instructions**

5. Designing Fair Listening Tasks

Listening tests must be:

- **Clear**
- **Level-appropriate**
- **Authentic**

Common test formats:

- Multiple choice
- Gap filling
- Matching
- True/False