

# Alternative ways to develop students' listening skills

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# Work with your partner and write a list of stages for a listening class

Lead in

Pre-teach blocking vocabulary

Prediction

1<sup>st</sup> Listening: Gist Task

2nd Listening: Specific Information/Detail

Response to the task/content follow activity

Language Follow on

# The Art of Lesson Planning by Mike Cattlin



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Stage	Aim	Example procedure
1. Lead-in.	To generate interest in the topic of the text and to activate their background knowledge of it.	Students discuss questions relating to the topic of the text.
2. Pre-teach vocabulary.	To pre-teach the meaning of words necessary for the task(s) to be set.	The teacher pre-teaches lexical items which they think will prevent students answering the questions to be set <sup>20</sup> . If such words are only required for the more detailed task, these items can be covered at a later stage in the lesson.
3. Prediction.	To generate interest in the text itself, to activate students' schemata <sup>21</sup> relating to similar texts and to prepare them to read or listen.	The teacher orientates students to the text and gets them to think about its possible content (i.e., predict) by relating it to their own experience or knowledge of the interaction, by looking at photographs or headlines or by considering key words, for example.

4. Gist task <sup>22</sup> .	To orientate students to the overall content of the text and to practise / develop their abilities to read / listen for gist / general understanding.	Students read or listen to the text. It is vital they have a reason for doing so (nobody reads without a purpose) and so the teacher must set a task <i>before</i> the students start to read or listen. The task should be one which focuses on a general understanding of the <i>whole</i> rather than details; for example, they can check their predictions (it's always a good idea to link the prediction stage to the first task) or decide on the best title for the text, etc.
5. Pre-teach vocabulary (optional).	To pre-teach the meaning of words necessary for the second task to be set.	The teacher pre-teaches lexical items which they think will prevent students answering the specific information / detailed questions to be set. These items could have been covered in the earlier pre-teach stage.
6. Specific information / Detail task.	To practise / develop students' abilities to read / listen for specific information / detailed comprehension <sup>23</sup> .	The teacher sets the questions for the second task and gives students time to read them (especially relevant for listening — again, it is vital to set the <i>task-before-the-text</i> ). Students read or listen to the text to answer the questions. If the text is for reading, a time limit should be set (longer than for the first task). Students then check their answers in pairs.

<p>7. Response-to-the-text task.</p> <p>Content follow-up activity.</p>	<p>To allow students to express their opinions on the text as one would in real life.</p> <p>To exploit the content of the text for production (speaking or writing).</p>	<p>Students respond to the content of what they have read / listened to by, for example, expressing their opinions about it through paired discussion followed by open class feedback. This is quite a quick task but, alternatively (or additionally), students could use a reading text for writing a similar text of their own or a listening text to take part in a role-play — such longer tasks may well be postponed until after the language follow-on (if there is to be one).</p>
<p>8. Language follow-on.</p>	<p>To exploit the text for the language in it.</p>	<p>As referred to in Stage 5 of the Text-Based Presentation, the teacher can now focus on some of the language in the text, e.g., by drawing students'</p>



## Listen and answer the questions:

- 1) What does the speaker call the people who are watching the athletes to arrive?
- 2) Which word does the journalist use to describe Steve Oaks' victory?
- 3) What problems did Steve Oaks have? (2)
- 4) Who is Steve thanking? (2)



## Listen and answer the questions:

1) What does the speaker call the people who are watching the athletes to arrive? ONLOOKERS

2) Which word does the journalist use to describe Steve Oaks' victory? TREMENDOUS

3) What problems did Steve Oaks have? UNFOUNDED ALLEGATIONS \_about\_\_ DRUG ABUSE  
ANKLE /UNCLE

4) Who is Steve thanking? SUPPORTERS lucky  
STARS



Listen again and deduce from the context  
what the following phrases mean:

... who have braved the elements

... I can't take it all in

... let alone the gold medal...



what the following phrases mean:

... who have braved the elements = were not afraid of the weather

... I can't take it all in = can't absorb all what happened

... let alone the gold medal... = not to mention...



## Why did I ask these very questions?

1) What does the speaker call the people who are watching the athletes to arrive? **Because I wanted students to learn a new word ONLOOKERS using the context**

2) What word does the journalist use to describe Steve Oaks' victory? **I wanted TREMENDOUS to be the answer because I foresaw that it's possible to make a chain of synonyms with it and expand students' vocabulary**



## Why did I ask these very questions?

3) What problems did Steve Oaks have? **When I listened to the recording, I heard that the pronunciation of [an ankle] is closer to [an uncle], so I thought that my students will be struggling with this part. I drew their attention to this point because I wanted them to OVERCOME the difficulty of comprehension, because only by OVERCOMING difficulties DO our students LEARN. Learning in itself is the process of OVERCOMING not BYPASSING them.**

4) Who is Steve thanking? **(the lucky stars – see the reason in point 3)**



# Compare

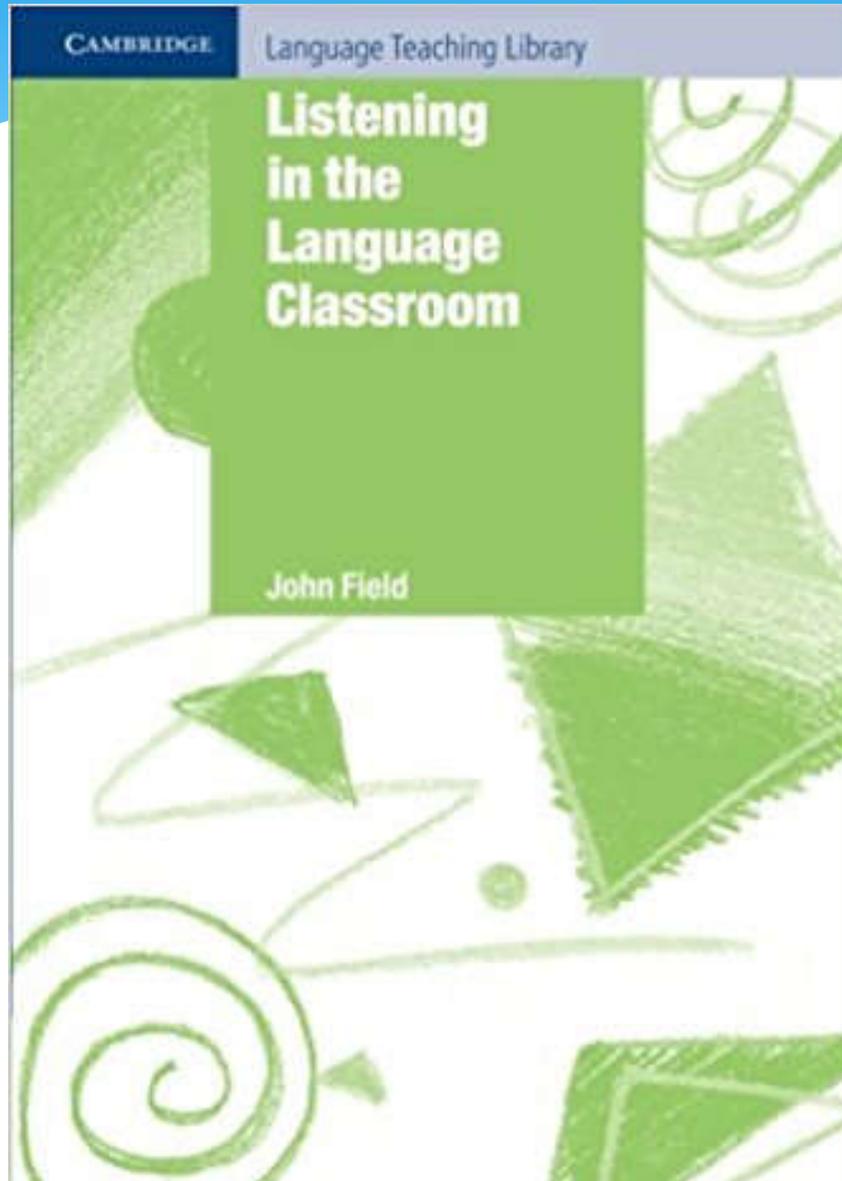
## Mike Cattlin

1. Lead in
2. Pre-teach blocking vocabulary
3. Prediction
4. 1<sup>st</sup> Listening: Gist Task
5. 2nd Listening: Specific Information/Detail
6. Response to the task/content follow activity
7. Language Follow on

## John Field

- 1) Prepare the lesson in detail
- 2) Abandon pre-listening
- 3) First play: no task
- 4) Set questions between the first and second play.
- 5) Check the reasons for listeners' answers
- 6) Replay parts that you and the class have identified as perceptually difficult.
- 7) Get the class to transcribe short sections
- 8) Give the transcript and homework based on it

# John Field



# John Field

- \* **John Field** has been writing about the teaching of L2 listening for some 35 years. His book, *Listening in the Language Classroom* (CUP 2008) has become a standard work for teachers and trainers (and won the [IH Ben Warren Prize](#)). Much of his thinking draws upon his background in psycholinguistics, on which he has also written books and articles.
- \* John currently does research (especially on the testing of listening) at the CRELLA Institute, University of Bedfordshire. In an earlier life, he was a teacher trainer, inspector of private language schools and materials writer. His materials included national coursebooks for Saudi Arabia and skills-based courses for Hong Kong schools; and he wrote TV programmes for Mainland China and two ELT radio series for the BBC.

# What can we tell teachers? 1

- 1) Prepare the lesson in detail** – identifying parts of the recording that are perceptually difficult
- 2) Abandon pre-listening** (Simply specify the context and the speakers, i.e. things an audio recording can't show)
- 3) First play:** listeners adjust to speakers' voices
  - Listeners listen globally without focusing on Qs
  - Listeners listen without using Qs to guess in advance what the text says
- 4) Set questions between the first and second play.** Check understanding of questions

# Adopt a diagnostic approach

- 1) **Check the reasons for listeners' answers (Why did you say that?)**
- 2) **Replay parts that you and the class have identified as perceptually difficult.**
- 3) **Get the class to transcribe short sections**

**In other words use the conventional listening task to**

a) **Where learners' problems lie.**

They might be perceptual – inability to match sounds to words and conceptual or inability to follow the speaker's argument

b) **Practice mapping from speech to words and phrases**

# What can we tell teachers? 2

**One of major problems of whole-class listening is the fact that listeners are individuals, each with their own problems within a recording.**

- 1) Give learners a transcript at the end of the lesson and ask them to listen again.
- 2) Set listening homework so listeners have to work on their own pace and wind and rewind to find answers
- 3) Provide listening facilities where learners can practice listening on their own. Ideally provide 3-4 minute recordings followed by perceptually difficult extracts.

Let's try to understand what the skill  
is that we are teaching

**Listeners don't need to bother  
too much about the content of  
the signal. They can usually rely  
upon **context** to tell them what  
is happening.**

# The role of context

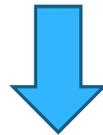
Unless the listener can make sense of quite a lot of the speech signal, there is **NO context** to work with.

# 5 stages of listening

Speech signal



Words



Meaning

Decoding



Word search



Parsing



Meaning Construction



Discourse Construction

# Decoding the speech signal

**Listeners have to:**

- 1) Adjust to the speaker's voice** (pitch – speech rate – precision – pitch movement)
- 2) Match a set of squeaks and buzzes in the ear to the sound system of English**

**Big question: Is there such a thing as phoneme?**

## Spectrograms of [k]

- key



- car



# The answer

Probably not. Phonemes are highly variable depending on the phoneme before and after them

It may be that listeners map straight from a group of sounds to a syllable or a word.

**Footnote:** there is some evidence that our awareness of phonemes is mainly acquired as part of learning to read an alphabet.

# Handling words

## Lexical search

- 1) Divide connected speech into possible words
- 2) Recognise spoken word forms
- 3) Link the word's form to what is known about it including a range of possible senses

## Parsing

- 1) Store a series of words in the mind as they occur
- 2) Recognise a grammatical structure in them
- 3) Work out a word's correct sense within its co-text (e.i. right in VS write in)

# Handling meaning

## **Meaning construction**

1. Put new information into a context
2. Interpret new information in relation to the situation
3. Infer information the speaker has taken for granted
4. Link words like SHE/HE/THIS to what they refer to
5. Discourse construction
6. Follow line of argument
7. Distinguish major and minor points
8. Work out the speaker's overall intentions

# Listening proficiency

An expert listener can handle the perceptual processes (word recognition – word search – parsing automatically) That leaves plenty of attention free for thinking about how to interpret what has just been heard – and the bigger picture.

**Learners up to level B1 have** to focus a lot of attention on perceptual information; this limits their ability to tap in to wider meaning.

**Learners from B1+ become** more capable of meaning construction + discourse construction

# Why do learners find listening difficult?

Listening and reading can be practised in similar ways (i.e. answering comprehension questions)

# Listening = reading ILLUSION

## **Words in written form are:**

Represented in a standard form (spelling)

Represented with boundaries clearly marked

All of equal prominence

## **Words in connected speech are:**

Highly variable in form

Not marked for boundaries

Of different level prominence

# Listening = reading ILLUSION

- \* Written language usually provides input in a permanent form
- \* A reader proceeds at his/her own speed
- \* A reader can regress
- \* Speech is transitory. This requires on-line processing
- \* A greater burden on memory
- \* Result: listening has to be a more approximate operation than reading. Even L1 listeners may not succeed in identifying a word until 2 or 3 words later

# Dangerous assumption

## Knowing a word = recognizing it in speech

**Vocab teachers teach words in citation forms, but speakers say:**

Tem pounds

Ni club

Ha past

Dunno

**There are no gaps in connected speech**

ðeɪgetəbædræpɪfjəθɪŋkəbaʊtɪt