

Do your listening lessons sometimes go badly? Do your students often look anxious when you say that you are going to do listening practice in a lesson? This lesson will help you understand why this is sometimes the case and will give you strategies for making listening lessons more manageable for your students. Before you complete this task, it may be helpful to have looked at *Listening 1: Listening sub-skills and a typical lesson*.

Task 1 – Frank’s disastrous lesson



Frank’s listening lesson went really badly. Most of the things he did or didn’t do in the lesson did not help the students. Look at all the things he did. Only one of these actions was a good idea. Put X next to the good idea. Then check your ideas in the answer key below. 🗝️

The things Frank did/didn’t do

1. He didn’t cue the tape before the lesson and it took him some time to find the right text on the tape.
2. He didn’t bother giving the students a gist task.
3. He wrote on the white board with a squeaky pen during the gist listening.
4. He handed out the detailed listening task after the tape had started.
5. He got students to check their answers in pairs before doing feedback.
6. He didn’t bother doing feedback on all the questions in the detailed task.



Task 1 Feedback

Action 5 was the only really good idea in Frank’s lesson.

Key Skill

For many students, listening is the most challenging of the four skills. Often listening lessons are like tests for them and teachers need to find ways of making these lessons more manageable and less threatening.

Task 2 – Advice for Frank



What advice can you give to Frank to help him improve his lesson? Write some advice for each problem 1 – 5 below. Begin with the phrase “Make sure” and give him a reason beginning with “because”. Look at the example to help you.

Problem	Make sure...	Because...
1. The tape wasn't cued at the right place and it took him some time to find the right text on the tape.	eg ... you cue the tape before you go in the classroom	eg ... trying to find the correct place on a tape in class can wastes a lot of time and looks unprofessional.
2. He didn't bother giving the students a gist task.		
3. He wrote on the white board with a squeaky pen during the gist listening.		
4. He handed out the detailed listening task after the tape had started.		
5. He didn't bother doing feedback on all the questions in the detailed task.		

Check your ideas in the answer key. 🗝️

Key Skill

Listening lessons need to be thoroughly prepared and planned. This means thinking of suitable tasks and preparing all materials associated with the listening in advance. During the lesson, tasks should be set before playing the tape and teachers should maintain as low a profile as possible.

Task 3 – What makes listening difficult?



Listening in the classroom is harder than reading. Numbers 1 to 6 show different reasons why this is so. Sort them into two categories, according to whether the problem is related to the listening process itself or to the nature of listening texts.

The process of listening	Nature of listening texts

Reasons why listening in the classroom is harder than reading

1. Students have no control over the speed of the text.
2. Speakers in listening texts often have different accents that may not be familiar to students.
3. Students have no time to pause and think about the content of the text.
4. There is often background noise in the recordings that is a distraction from the voices of the speakers.
5. Sometimes the speakers in a dialogue speak very quickly.
6. Listening happens in real time.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Challenges associated with listening are largely beyond your students’ control. However, it is possible to make sure that the nature of listening texts are manageable for the level you are teaching, particularly lower levels. The next task gets you to think of some ideas for how to achieve this.

ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook

Listening 2: Learner-friendly listening lessons: Unit 3 b)

Task 4 – Creating listening texts



When you create and use your own listening texts, there are things to consider that can make the process of listening and the nature of listening tasks more manageable. Think of a good idea for each consideration. Look at the example to help you.

Consideration	Good Idea
1. Number of speakers	eg. Don't include too many speakers in a taped conversation, as it can be difficult to work out who is who.
2. Gender of speakers	
3. Kinds of tasks	
4. Speed of delivery	
5. Pausing the tape	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Keep a note of listening lessons that you give with one particular group of students over an extended period of a month or more. Note down the topic of the text, the number and type of speakers, the length of text and then rate it in terms of level of difficulty. (You can create your own scale of difficulty.) The aim of doing this is to try and establish whether there are any trends that you can note in terms of what challenges your learners.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Look back at the ideas suggested in task 4. Have you tried all of these strategies at some time in your teaching experience? If not, try them out over a period of time. If you feel that there are problems with a listening text that will be too difficult for your students (e.g. speed of delivery), you can try re-recording it using your colleagues.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 187 and 188 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (4th edition) by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is a useful discussion on alternative sources of listening materials and formats for students and teachers.

On pages 181 - 184 of *Learning Teaching* (2nd edition) by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there are ideas for some alternative approaches to listening lessons.

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to this topic:

- **Unit 2 a) Listening 1:** Listening sub-skills and a typical lesson (*recommended as a precursor to this lesson*)
- **Unit 3 d) Reading 2:** Setting tasks for reading texts (*a useful focus on another receptive skill, highlighting the need for learner-friendly tasks to accompany reading texts*)

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

2. Make sure you give students a simple gist listening task because it gives them a reasons to listen and if it is easy, it gives them confidence.

3. Make sure you don't do anything to distract your students when the tape is playing because they need to concentrate as much as possible.

4. Make sure you hand out the task before you play the tape because students need time to read the task before they listen to the text. The task will also help them understand 'how' to listen.

5. Make sure you do feedback on all questions in the task because students often feel unsure if they have really understood and like confirmation of their understanding.

Task 3 – Feedback

Process of Listening = **1, 3, 6**

Nature of listening texts = **2, 4, 5**

Task 4 – Feedback

2. If you have 2 speakers, it is often easier if one is male and the other is female. For students, this makes it easier to distinguish between the 2 speakers.

3. Don't give tasks that are too challenging or turn the listening practice into a test. The aim of the task should be to give students a reason to listen.

4. Make sure the speakers of a recorded conversation speak at a natural speed, but don't let them speak too quickly, particularly for low level students.

5. If the listening text is very long, it may help students if you pause the tape occasionally to give them a little bit of thinking time.