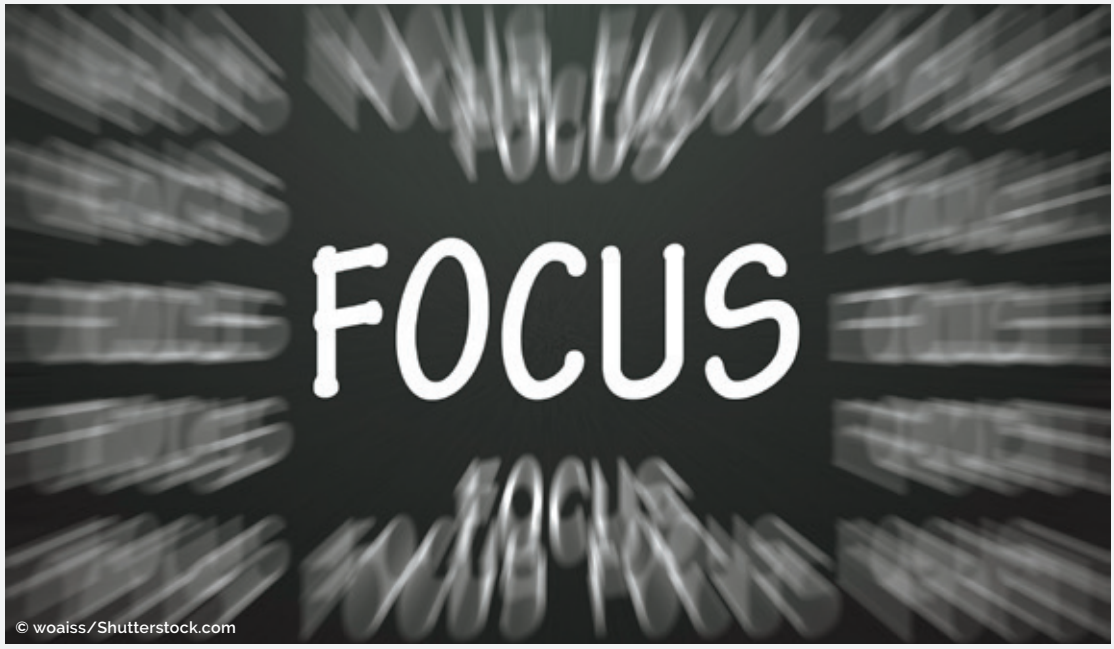
Guided Meditation in the English Language Classroom

by AMY JENKINS



We live in a busy world with frequent distractions and many things to think about. The speed of the Internet, noise pollution, smartphones, and instantaneous thought-sharing on social media keep our world in constant motion. Students entering the classroom are thinking about a thousand things: Did I get my homework done correctly? Who will I eat with at lunch? Why didn't my friend stop at my locker to say hi? Is my hair a mess? Students also have burdens from home on their minds. But when they come into the classroom, teachers expect them to be ready to learn, ready to receive information and retain it. How can students do this with so much on their minds?

As a teacher of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL), I have concerns specifically related to English learners. Krashen's (1982) theory of the "affective filter" is often on my mind. I could have a lesson packed with excellent activities delivered in a safe classroom environment, but a student experiencing anxiety will struggle to acquire the day's language. Research has shown that anxiety can affect a language learner's ability to acquire a language. "Low anxiety appears to be conducive to second language acquisition, whether measured as personal or classroom anxiety" (Krashen 1982, 31). What can a teacher do to reduce anxiety and lower a student's affective filter? One answer may be to use guided meditation at the beginning of

English class. Meditation may help students achieve a relaxed state and become more open to acquiring a language.

BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

Meditation has been linked to increased ability to focus and to lowering depression, anxiety, and stress. Meditation is an act of focusing one's thoughts completely and fully. It is being present in the moment, silencing other thoughts and noise running through our minds. Neuroscience has shown that the brain can absorb information and retain memory when in a relaxed state. Meditation can help one achieve such a state, thereby improving a student's memory and attention (Machado 2014).

Schools that have implemented meditation school-wide have found a reduction in suspensions, increased student attendance, and fewer behavior problems—results that lead to increased focus and learning (Campbell 2013; Kirp 2014).

HOW TO MEDITATE IN THE CLASSROOM

Knowing that I needed my students to focus and to have a low affective filter to acquire English, I tried using meditation in my classroom. I was teaching seventh-grade (ages 12 and 13) ESL classes with students representing over a dozen ethnicities.

Set the tone

When my students entered the classroom, they sat down and worked on a "bell ringer." This is a daily exercise that gets students settled and working quietly at the beginning of class. It is typically a sentence with errors in it that students need to rewrite correctly.

After we shared the correctly written sentence, we did guided meditation for about three minutes. (You can do this longer, but I found that three to five minutes reaped the results I was looking for.) Meditation works as a classroom management technique, a way to introduce new vocabulary, and a quick way to create a calm, focused environment that leads to a lower affective filter.

Before the first guided meditation with my students, I explained meditation and the benefits of meditating. I told students that meditation will help to clear their minds and prepare them for learning. Meditation increases their focus and opens their minds to receive and remember information. I told them that our classroom is a safe place to relax and feel calm. I also described how we would use a meditation message each day, and then I demonstrated the meditation.

Choose a word

There are various forms of meditation; however, I chose to use guided meditation with my students because it provided an opportunity for vocabulary learning.

For each meditation message, I like to use one word that summarizes the thought students will meditate on. This focus word can be a new vocabulary word, a review word, or a word that is a theme of the students' current literary study. You may choose a vocabulary word from the reading of the day or any other word you like. Once you decide on a word, you may define it and provide examples of the meaning. You may also pull examples of the meaning from a text you will read in the day's lesson. For more advanced students, you may choose a famous quote that relates to the word. You can tailor the daily meditation messages to your students' level, making the messages basic or more advanced in thought and word usage. You may also provide pictures to illustrate the message.

And you don't have to choose only positive words. You can also select a word that normally carries a negative connotation and use it to help students find the positive. It is important, however, to demonstrate a positive message overall because this helps build students' self-confidence and motivates students to learn, thus lowering the affective filter.

The Sample Meditation Messages below give examples of a positive word and a negative word; messages can be adapted for a variety

of age groups and levels of learners. The Word Bank provides suggestions of other positive words you can use.

Set the scene

To set the scene for the meditation, you may play a calming sound in the background. I like to use a sound machine that plays the sounds of ocean waves, rain, a waterfall, a rainforest, and a heartbeat. You could play gentle, calming, relaxing music, or you can have silence. You may have students stay in their seats, or you may have them sit or lie in an open area in the room, depending on how much space there is.

Once you have set the scene, read the message in a positive, calm, clear voice as students begin meditating.

SAMPLE MEDITATION MESSAGES

Sample 1 (*happiness*):

Before class, write the focus word, along with its definition and examples of the word in short sentences, on the board:

> *Happiness (noun)—"the state of being happy"* (Merriam-Webster). *Happiness is floating in the pool. Happiness is the calm beauty of a sunset. Happiness is my friend's smile.*

You may also put up pictures to help students understand the word. For this message, you could show a picture of someone floating in a pool, a picture of a sunset, or a picture of a smiling friend. Read out loud with students the word, meaning, and usage.

Next, use a spoken script such as this to guide students into meditation:

> *Now clear your mind of all your outside thoughts. Be present, be here, in this moment. Let's focus on one thought. Happiness. Think about what happiness is to you. Think of a moment when you were happy. As you close your eyes, picture happiness. As you breathe in, see your picture. As you breathe out, let yourself feel the happiness you are picturing and say silently to yourself, "I am happy." Feel yourself relax and feel happy. Breathe in. Breathe out. "I am happy." Breathe in. "I am happy."*

Give students a couple of minutes to focus on their breathing and say silently to themselves as they breathe out, "I am happy."

Once the time is up, fade any background music or sound to a quiet stop and say in a soft, energized voice, "You may open your eyes now. Let's learn English!" Then move directly into the lesson for the day.

If you need to transition students back to their seats, I suggest saying, "You may now open your eyes and slowly stand up. Walk quietly, mindfully back to your seat, ready to learn English." You may also do extension activities such as journal writing about the meditation message.

Word Bank to get you started on meditation messages

kindness	energy	uplift
mindfulness	laughter	praise
compassion	balance	thankful
empathy	tolerance	health
love	integrity	gratitude
power	trust	creativity
strength	peace	healing

Sample 2 (*failure*):

Write on the board the focus word, its definition, and examples of its usage:

> *Failure (noun)—"omission of occurrence or performance … a state of inability to perform a normal function … a lack of success"* (Merriam-Webster). *Everyone experiences failure; it is a part of life. Failure can often lead to discoveries and eventual success. We learn from our failures.*

When going over the definition and examples, you might give examples of famous people your students are familiar with. If they know Bill Gates, tell them that Bill Gates' first business was a failure. Or you could use a name from a unit you've studied; for example, if your students have studied American inventors, you could use the following quote by Thomas Edison: "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." You could also ask students if they remember a character in a book your class has read who experienced failure and later found success.

A spoken script to guide students into meditation could read as follows:

> *Today let's clear our minds of negative thoughts, and let's dare to fail and learn by trying. See yourself trying and learning more each time you try. Clear your mind and let yourself feel the happiness you feel once you learn from something that didn't work. Now focus on your breathing. Breathe in. And as you breathe out, say to yourself, "Through failure, I learn." Breathe in. "Through failure, I learn."*

CONCLUSION

Meditating in class helped my students to be more focused and open to language acquisition. The technique described here can be used for nearly any age and for any language level.

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Amy Jenkins holds an MA in TESOL from Teachers College, Columbia University, and has taught ESL/EFL for ten years both overseas and in the United States. She works for the U.S. Department of Education with English Programs.

Speed Drawing for Vocabulary Retention

by SARA HENDRICKS

This exciting drawing activity helps students remember vocabulary. I created the activity when I was working with beginning students at a middle school in Japan. The students were 12 to 14 years old and had a limited vocabulary. Speed drawing was a fun and successful way to help them practice asking questions and using targeted vocabulary.

The activity can work in any style of classroom with a minimum of supplies. The only things necessary are a vocabulary list, scraps of paper, and things that students can use to draw pictures (e.g., pencils, pens, markers). In order to save paper, you may cut the paper into small squares so that students use a small amount of paper for each drawing.

When going over the definition and examples, you might give examples of famous people your students are familiar with. If they know Bill Gates, tell them that Bill Gates' first business was a failure. Or you could use a name from a unit you've studied; for example, if your students have studied American inventors, you could use the following quote by Thomas Edison: "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." You could also ask students if they remember a character in a book your class has read who experienced failure and later found success.

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The activity can work in any style of classroom with a minimum of supplies. The only things necessary are a vocabulary list, scraps of paper, and things that students can use to draw pictures (e.g., pencils, pens, markers). In order to save paper, you may cut the paper into small squares so that students use a small amount of paper for each drawing.

Begin by providing a list of about 12 new English vocabulary words; the activity works best if the words are nouns, especially at lower levels of proficiency. This list can be written on the board or a piece of poster paper, taken from a textbook, or distributed on a handout. Go over the meanings of the words. The students should have some time to study the words, but it's not necessary to memorize them, as the students can refer to the list during the activity. You can lead the class in repeating the words or allow students to read and practice saying the words alone, in pairs, or in small groups. Familiar vocabulary can be mixed in and used for review as well.

It's often good to have the words center on a theme, like animals, occupations, or weather. One reason is that it focuses students' attention on words that are related thematically. Another reason is that using nouns that may be similar—such as a dozen words about animals—really makes the drawing and guessing parts of the game challenging and fun.

After a few minutes, explain that the students will play a drawing game so that they can practice using the words. Emphasize that the goal is to practice English, rather than to showcase artistic talent. For a lower-level class, you might say, "This is English class. Which is more important? Practicing English or drawing a picture?"

Once students feel reassured that they don't need to be artists to participate, you can explain that they will pair off and take turns choosing a vocabulary word and trying to draw it so that their partner can guess which word it is.

But wait! It's not that easy! The students will have only ten seconds to draw their picture. And wait again! They must also close their eyes while they draw!

At this point you should model the activity by closing your eyes and drawing a picture either on the board or on a large piece of paper while counting to ten (or, better yet, have the students do the counting). Once the picture is "finished," encourage the students to guess what it is, even if they aren't sure about the answer. Obviously, the picture will be terrible because of the time limit and closed eyes; that's what makes this activity fun. The point here is for students to practice saying

the vocabulary words over and over again, so if they need to guess three or four or nine words, that's just more practice. Depending on the students' level, you can provide simple phrases (either on the board or through speaking practice) for students to use—for example, "Is it a table? Is it an oven?" You can also provide responses, such as "Yes, that's right!" or "No, it isn't. Please try again."

For higher levels, you might ask students to provide and model a few useful phrases, such as the following:

- "I think it might be a _____."
- "I'm not sure, but is it a _____?"
- "It looks a little bit like a _____."

If you are confident that most of the students understand the activity and will be able to ask the question phrases with the vocabulary words, ask the students to break into pairs. Students in each pair decide who will draw first and then secretly choose a vocabulary word. After that, ask the students who will draw first to raise their hands. Make sure the students with their hands raised are prepared with paper and something to draw with. Your directions might sound something like this:

> *Now please find a friend. Two students will work together. One student will draw first. Who will draw first? . . . OK, the student who will draw first should have paper and a pencil. Please raise your hand if you will draw. Thank you! Do you know what you will draw? Don't say it! Shhh! It's a secret. Are you ready? I will count to ten. Ready, set, go!*

After ten seconds, students stop drawing, and you can walk around to help them use their questioning phrases with the vocabulary words. If you like, you can encourage them to show nearby students their pictures and have those students guess the vocabulary words in English. Discreetly help any students who may have done the activity incorrectly while the rest of the class guesses and shares their pictures. Continue to emphasize that this is a game for practicing English, so students should have fun while using their time wisely to practice their vocabulary words, and of course, remind them to guess and respond in English.

Have the students change who is drawing and then play the game again. One option is to have the partners take turns counting to ten; that is, one person draws while the other person counts and then guesses what the drawing is, and then they switch roles.

This game can be repeated up to about ten times, or more if students are still engaged. It should be played enough to use nearly all the vocabulary words, but not so many times that the students get bored. The explanation and demonstration may take about ten minutes, with the actual playing of the game taking another ten to 15 minutes or so. The game is appropriate for students of almost any age and is recommended for use with students whose English skills are at the beginning to intermediate level. You can play it again from time to time with different vocabulary lists.

Sara Hendricks has her master's degree in TESOL from University of Wisconsin–River Falls and enjoys living in Japan with her husband and two children while teaching English at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.

Answers to *THE LIGHTER SIDE*

YOU'RE NOT LISTENING!

1. Change *people* to *hours*.
2. Change *intent* to *silent*.
3. Change *hours* to *ears*.
4. Change *silent* to *people*.
5. Change *ears* to *intent*.

MY CLASSROOM INDONESIA

Alief Noor Farida is a junior lecturer at Indonesia's *Universitas Negeri Semarang* (Semarang State University [UNNES]). Now teaching her fourth semester and an alumna of the English Education program at UNNES, Ms. Farida is an especially motivated and dedicated educator. She teaches 18 hours per week, specializing in grammar and writing-skills courses. The Intensive Course she teaches, focusing on reading, writing, speaking, and grammar skills, serves as a foundation for incoming English Department students.

Ms. Farida welcomes her students to class.

Ms. Farida begins each class by welcoming students with small talk in English before reviewing previous material. Each class ends with a review, comprehension-check questions, encouragement to complete the homework, and a friendly reminder to students that the course serves as a building block for the rest of their academic journey within the department.

Of her classroom, she is most proud of the atmosphere she has established with her students, who, she said, are "energetic, active, and not afraid to try new things." She pointed out that "traditionally, Indonesian classrooms are very teacher-centered. Students usually feel a lot of pressure about making mistakes in class, both from the teacher and their peers." Ms. Farida combats this cultural norm by reducing her lecturing time, trying different seating arrangements, and moving around the classroom. "When I was studying English in junior high school," she recalled, "my teacher only read from the textbook, and the class was very boring. I do not want my students to feel this way about English. I especially like to assign role plays and let students become another character. This way they feel less pressure to be perfect."

The current students, who are enrolled in either the English Education or the English Literature program, received their English education beginning in the first grade of elementary school, when they were about six years old, and in general achieved intermediate proficiency by the time they completed high school, at about age 18. A topic of intense debate, the national curriculum of Indonesia underwent major changes in 2013, and English language study is no longer a compulsory subject in elementary schools. English is now optional at the primary-school level, with compulsory lessons beginning in junior high school.

"I understand the motive behind the change is to alleviate the pressure on students to learn a foreign language," Ms. Farida said. "However, without early exposure to English, how will students become interested? How will students build their language foundation?"

Ms. Farida believes that at the elementary-school age, students are more inquisitive and curious, and more capable of taking in new information. As a mother, she is keen to the changes she sees in her six-year-old son's learning experience. "My son hears the

"I especially like to assign **role plays** and let students become **another character.** This way they feel less pressure to be perfect."

Ms. Farida helps one of her students with an exercise.

English I use around the house and has already begun mixing English vocabulary with Bahasa Indonesia. He tells me '*Bunda*, *saya mau* star fruit' ('Momma, I want a star fruit'). He does this out of his own curiosity and natural thirst for learning. I hope he can continue to learn English like this without feeling too much pressure. My son is exposed to English because of my career as a teacher."

Also in the most recent national curriculum is a focus on student-centered learning. Ms. Farida hopes that this will shift the emphasis from reading and mechanical study to more active classes in which students are able to comprehend and *use* English to complete a task.

"The new curriculum's focus on student-centered learning is often quite different from what the majority of students have experienced in language classes," she said. "In my own lessons, I have incorporated more student presentations and teaching practices in order to give them hands-on experience. Up till now, these future English teachers have not had many role models for student-centered learning. Now, we must make up for this so our students are fully prepared to carry out the new curriculum."

At UNNES, English Department lecturers use classrooms equipped with the same basic facilities: desks, chairs, blackboards and whiteboards, and LCD overhead projectors. Ms. Farida's main resource in class is a textbook that provides students with a base knowledge of English so that they may continue in their respective programs. Both disciplines within the English Department—English Education and English Literature—instruct the majority of classes in English.

The English Department provides lecturers with a curriculum to follow, but they are also given the freedom to improvise and use their own materials. In Indonesia, students are able to choose their own majors, and therefore the students of the well-known program at UNNES are highly motivated and eager to learn. Finding engaging and authentic materials can sometimes pose a challenge to Ms. Farida, who said the greatest resource for such materials is the Internet, although she makes use of local materials as well—for example, by assigning her translation class to translate local brochures into English.

As a young lecturer, Ms. Farida hopes to continue improving her teaching technique as well as her personal knowledge of English. She actively seeks professional development and training opportunities and has participated in Shaping the Way We Teach webinars and MOOCs (massive open online courses) offered by the U.S. Department of State and the University of California–Berkeley. Her future goals include attending and presenting at local conferences and seminars as well as completing an exchange program overseas. Her advice to teenagers hoping to begin a career in English education is to first build a base knowledge of English grammar. She said, "It is one of the things students ask about most. For students to succeed, the teacher must be able to explain the grammar rules to them." She also pointed out that along with achieving a high proficiency in English, prospective teachers must also hone their teaching methods and skills.

Following up on her undergraduate and postgraduate work, Ms. Farida develops her own teaching skills by experience and

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reflection. During her UNNES studies, she taught privately from her second semester onward and therefore was able to immediately apply the theories she learned in the classroom. She learned from her challenges and successes. Ms. Farida thinks critically of her own lesson planning, reflecting on past classes and working to improve the next. She is also an active observer; as a student and still now as a lecturer she observes her more senior colleagues and takes note of techniques that work well and methods she hopes to try in her classroom.

In addition to online training, Ms. Farida is a fan of resources found on the Internet. "There are so many resources available on the Internet, and teachers from all over the world can access them for free," she said. She is especially a fan of www.eslflow.com and www.busyteacher.org. Now that she is a full-time teacher, she has even fewer chances to observe others in practice. Sometimes Ms. Farida finds videos of teaching on YouTube to imitate in class. Her senior colleagues are often too busy to observe her teaching and provide feedback, as the demand for English in Indonesia is quite high and UNNES has one of the best programs in the area.

Ms. Farida first became interested in the English language when she was in kindergarten. She borrowed a cassette tape of Mariah Carey songs from a cousin and fell in love with the language. Not only did she learn all the lyrics by heart, she had her mother translate them so she could understand the meaning. She did not return the cassette to her cousin for many months. And now she uses songs in her teaching. "Students are much more engaged during class when they see language in action, not just in a textbook," she explained. "Sometimes I still use songs in translation, idiom, phonetics, and even grammar lessons." She also uses songs to introduce a topic and get students "excited—even if the song itself is not the main focus of the lesson." As an example, she said she plays the Backstreet Boys' "As Long as You Love Me" to introduce adverb clauses.


Motorbikes parked on Semarang State University campus

Ms. Farida shows no signs of losing her passion for learning and teaching English. "I like English because it gives me a sense of accomplishment," she said. "Compared to Bahasa Indonesia, the grammar rules are much more complicated and complex. When I fully understand one and how to use it, I feel like I have solved a puzzle. When I teach, I try to pass this passion on to my students."

Most important, she said, "is my continued use of English with my son. I want him to be able to speak English well and have the same passion that I do. Indonesia is growing and developing rapidly, and I hope for him to be successful. I think English proficiency will be a key factor in that."

This article was written by **Erica Balazs**, an international education professional currently serving as a returning English Language Fellow hosted by Semarang State University in Central Java, Indonesia.

Photos by Erica Balazs

Listening and Logic

LEVEL: Low Intermediate and above

TIME REQUIRED: 45 minutes

GOALS: To practice listening for details; to practice or review vocabulary; to use teamwork and logic to solve puzzles

BACKGROUND: The word *logic* refers to a systematic, reasoned way of thinking, usually used to solve a problem or to understand a situation. Logic grid puzzles include a graphic organizer (in this case, a grid) that helps students keep track of information in the puzzle's clues, use the process of elimination, and make inferences that will lead them to the puzzle's solution.

The puzzles in this activity require members in a student pair (or small team, if you prefer) to communicate actively. Nobody in the pair or team has all the information needed to solve the puzzle. Students can share their clues orally, but they can't show each other the written information. Therefore, everyone must listen carefully to identify important details. Beyond developing listening and critical thinking skills, these puzzles are a fun and challenging way for students to practice speaking, review vocabulary, and apply social skills related to teamwork.

The activity instructions and first two puzzles use the theme of ordering food in American restaurants. Puzzles related to free-time activities, pets, and birthdays are also provided. Teachers and students can create their own logic puzzles by following the steps in the Extension section.

MATERIALS: Copies of the logic grids and clues, scissors, blackboard and chalk or whiteboard and markers, and pencils or pens

PREPARATION:

1. Review vocabulary in the logic grid puzzles to determine whether any words or phrases need to be presented or reviewed.

2. Photocopy and cut up the logic grids and clues so that you have one puzzle set for each pair of students. (A puzzle set includes a logic grid for the partners to share and one list of clues for each partner.) See the Variation section for a photocopy-free option in which students draw their own grids.

PROCEDURES:

1. Tell students they are going to work together to solve puzzles. Explain that to demonstrate the process, you and the class will work together to complete a puzzle about people's food orders in an American restaurant.

2. Present or review any target vocabulary items you have identified. Use descriptions, text, drawing, miming, elicitation, or other preferred techniques.

3. Explain to students that they will use these vocabulary items and a graphic organizer called a logic grid to figure out which person ordered each meal. Model how to complete a logic grid

by using provided clues about breakfast orders:

- Draw the following grid on the board. Write the list of clues below the grid.

	Scrambled eggs and sausage	Omelet with cheese and toast	Yogurt with fruit and honey
Paul			
Kevin			
Carol			

  - Paul does not like to eat sweet things for breakfast.
  - Carol does not like eggs.
  - Kevin always eats eggs and meat for breakfast.

- Tell students, "Three people, named Paul, Kevin, and Carol, have ordered breakfast. One person ordered scrambled eggs and sausage; another ordered an omelet with cheese and toast; and the other ordered yogurt with fruit and honey. Which person ordered each breakfast?"

- Explain that the breakfast orders are listed across the top of the grid, and the people's names are listed in the left-hand column. Tell the students they must use the clues to identify each person's breakfast order. Explain that each person ordered a different meal.

- Work through the clues with the class and show them how to mark a logic grid to keep track of the information. Ask a volunteer to read the first clue aloud. Ask the class to tell you which item Paul did *not* order since he doesn't like sweet things for breakfast (the answer is "yogurt with fruit and honey"). Put an X in the box that aligns with "Paul" and "yogurt with fruit and honey," and tell students that an X represents an incorrect combination of person and meal choice. Depending on your students' level, you can explain that this logic technique of removing incorrect information from a problem is called "the process of elimination."

Omelet with cheese and toast

- Repeat the process with the next clue. Since Carol doesn't like eggs, you can place an X in each of the first two columns in Carol's row:

	Scrambled eggs and sausage	Omelet with cheese and toast	Yogurt with fruit and honey
Paul			X
Kevin			
Carol	X	X	

- Ask the students if they know what Carol ordered, since two choices have been eliminated. When they reply, "Yes, yogurt with fruit and honey," place an O in the box that aligns with "Carol" and "yogurt with fruit and honey." Explain that an O represents a correct match. Also, put an X in the middle square in the last column to show that only Carol ordered yogurt with fruit and honey (and that therefore, Kevin didn't).

	Scrambled eggs and sausage	Omelet with cheese and toast	Yogurt with fruit and honey
Paul			X
Kevin			X
Carol	X	X	O

- Have a volunteer read the last clue aloud. Ask students if they know which item Kevin ordered (scrambled eggs and sausage). Place an O in the box that aligns with "Kevin" and "scrambled eggs and sausage." Then demonstrate that since you know which item Kevin ordered, you can put an X in the remaining empty box in his row. Marking that information solves the rest of the puzzle through the process of elimination: you know that only one person, Kevin, ordered scrambled eggs and sausage, so you can put an X in the box that aligns with "Paul" and "scrambled eggs and sausage." After that information is marked, the only possible combination that remains is that Paul ordered the omelet with cheese and toast:

	Scrambled eggs and sausage	Omelet with cheese and toast	Yogurt with fruit and honey
Paul	X	O	X
Kevin	O	X	X
Carol	X	X	O

- Conclude your demonstration by writing on the board each person's name and the breakfast he or she ordered:

  Paul – omelet with cheese and toast

  Kevin – scrambled eggs and sausage

  Carol – yogurt with fruit and honey

4. Put students into pairs. If you have a large class, you can put students into groups of 4 or 6 and then divide each group into two teams of 2 or 3. Tell the students they will now work with their partner (or partner team) to solve a more complicated logic grid about food orders.

5. Tell the class that each partner (or partner team) will have a different set of clues. Students must not show their clues to their partners. Partners must solve the puzzle by taking turns talking about the clues, listening carefully for details, agreeing on the clues' meaning, and then using a logic grid to mark their progress. The two partners (or partner teams) will share the same logic grid.

6. Pass out the clues and the logic grids (see page 49), and tell students they may want to use a pencil to complete the grid in case they need to make changes. Remind students not to show each other their clues. Based on your students' English proficiency level, decide on the amount of time they will have to solve the puzzles; share that information with the class. Tell the partners (or partner teams) to begin solving the puzzle. When they are finished, the students should write a list showing each person's food order.

7. Monitor the students' progress and answer any questions that arise. When students think they have the solution, they should check their answers with you (solutions to the logic puzzles are on page 52) or compare answers with another pair or group. Partners that finish first can begin another puzzle, make their own logic grid puzzle (see the Extension), or complete another activity, such as silent reading.

8. When time is up, briefly review the solution with the whole class. If some partners (or partner teams) are still working, encourage the students who have finished to share their logic strategies with the group.

EXTENSION: MAKE YOUR OWN LOGIC GRID PUZZLES

Working in pairs or small groups, students can make their own puzzles using themes related to class content or other topics. To begin, pairs pick a theme, decide how many items to include in the puzzle (usually not more than six), and then develop two lists that contain equal numbers of names (people, animals, or other characters) and "mystery" targets. Examples include five people and five different movies they want to see this weekend, six animals and their six habitats, and four people and their four favorite sports.

Next, pairs draw a blank logic grid of the appropriate size, writing the names (first column) and target items (first row) as shown in this activity's grids. Then pairs create the solution to the puzzle by matching each name to a different target item. Finally, they work backwards to develop a list of clues, testing each clue by marking the grid as they write it to make sure their logic is sound. Working together to develop and test clues can spark dynamic student conversations and provide a bit of writing practice, too! When students finish creating a puzzle, they should give it to another pair or small group to try.

VARIATION

If you cannot photocopy the puzzles, students can create their own materials with your support. Before class, write each set of clues in large letters on a separate piece of poster paper. Follow Steps 1 through 3 above. When putting students in pairs, in Step 4, arrange the class so that all pairs or partner teams sit facing each other; that is, all students in one half of the pair face one classroom wall, and the other students face the opposite wall. Complete Step 5. During Step 6, post the clues on opposite walls so that each half of the student pairs (or partner teams) can see only one set of clues. (Note: If you have a large class, you may need to post more than one copy on each wall.) Draw the logic grid on the board so that all can see it. Have the pairs copy the grid on a piece of paper to share. Remind students not to turn around and look at the clues posted behind them. Proceed with the rest of the steps described above.

This activity was written by **Heather Benucci**, an EFL teacher, teacher trainer, and materials development specialist. She has led virtual professional development programs for EFL teachers in over 100 countries and has worked face-to-face with teachers and students in Russia, Korea, England, and the United States.

Logic Grid Puzzles 4 and 5 were written by *English Teaching Forum* staff.

Logic Grid Puzzle 1: What's for Lunch? (Intermediate)

Match each person to his or her lunch order. Everyone has ordered something different.

	Cheeseburger and French fries	Salad (lettuce and tomatoes) and vegetable soup	Steak and French fries	Cheese pizza	Baked fish with rice and spicy vegetables	Chicken sandwich with cheese and potato chips
John						
Katie						
Raul						
Maria						
Sheila						
Peter						

Clues — Set 1 You can read and talk about the clues, but don't show them to the person or people you are working with!	Clues — Set 2 You can read and talk about the clues, but don't show them to the person or people you are working with!
• Maria and Peter don't need a spoon or a fork to eat lunch. • John did not order French fries. • Sheila eats healthy vegetables at every meal. • John thinks cheesy foods have too many calories, so he doesn't order them.	• Raul is allergic to dairy products (foods made from milk). He can't eat them. • Katie is a vegetarian. She doesn't eat meat (beef, chicken, pork, or lamb) or fish. • Peter always orders French fries, but Sheila never eats fried or spicy foods. • John thinks salads are boring. He likes spicy foods.

Logic Grid Puzzle 2: Who Ate What? (Upper Intermediate)

Match each person to his or her breakfast order. Everyone has ordered something different.

	Tomato and cheese omelet, coffee	Fried eggs, orange juice	Oatmeal (porridge), coffee	Toast and strawberry jam, coffee	Spinach and mushroom omelet, tea	Hard-boiled eggs and fried potatoes, tea
Sarah						
Inna						
Mike						
Alice						
Kelly						
Richard						

Clues — Set 1 You can read and talk about the clues, but don't show them to the person or people you are working with!	Clues — Set 2 You can read and talk about the clues, but don't show them to the person or people you are working with!
• Mike wears glasses to read the newspaper while he eats breakfast alone. • Kelly is wearing a green sweater, Alice is wearing a black dress, and Inna is wearing a purple shirt. • Richard has a mustache, and Mike has a beard. • Kelly, Inna, and Alice are having breakfast together. • Richard and Sarah are sitting at the same table.	• The person wearing black and Richard both ordered omelets. • The person wearing glasses ordered an egg dish. • The person wearing green and the person having breakfast with the man who has a mustache never order eggs for breakfast. • The person with a beard doesn't like coffee or tea, but the person eating with Sarah always drinks coffee with breakfast. • The person eating with Inna and Alice loves toast with jam.

Logic Grid Puzzle 3: Having Fun! (Intermediate)

Can you figure out what each of these people likes to do in his or her free time? Remember, every person likes a different activity.

	Swimming in the ocean	Reading books at the library	Playing soccer (outside)	Playing basketball (outside)	Going shopping	Surfing the Internet at a café
Erin						
Jenny						
Olga						
Bob						
Julio						
Mark						

Clues — Set 1 **You can read and talk about the clues, but don't show them to the person or people you are working with!**	**Clues — Set 2** **You can read and talk about the clues, but don't show them to the person or people you are working with!**
• The two people whose names begin with the same letter prefer outdoor activities. • Erin likes to exercise in her free time. • Julio and Erin don't know how to swim. • Jenny and Erin don't like to play basketball.	• Bob and Olga can enjoy their favorite activities alone. • Mark doesn't need a ball to enjoy his favorite activity. • Mark's and Bob's favorite activities can make their eyes tired. • Mark likes to read blogs, watch videos, and read the news in his free time.

Internet café

Logic Grid Puzzle 4: Pets (Low Intermediate)

A family has four pets: a dog, a cat, a bird, and a fish.
The colors of the pets are brown, white, black, and gray. Which color is each pet?

	brown	white	black	gray
dog				
cat				
bird				
fish				

Clues — Set 1 **You can read and talk about the clues, but don't show them to the person or people you are working with!**	**Clues — Set 2** **You can read and talk about the clues, but don't show them to the person or people you are working with!**
• The white pet has four legs. • The gray pet does not have feathers. • The dog is not black.	• The black pet cannot fly. • The gray pet does not bark. • The brown pet and the gray pet do not live in water.

Logic Grid Puzzle 5: Birthdays (Intermediate)

Four sisters—named Martha, Angela, Juanita, and Olive—were born in different months: March, April, July, and October. Which sister was born in which month?

	March	April	July	October
Martha				
Angela				
Juanita				
Olive				

Clues — Set 1 **You can read and talk about the clues, but don't show them to the person or people you are working with!**	**Clues — Set 2** **You can read and talk about the clues, but don't show them to the person or people you are working with!**
• Juanita's birthday comes before Olive's. • Olive was born in a month that has 31 days. • Martha's and Angela's birthdays are exactly six months apart. • Juanita's and Angela's birthdays are one month apart.	• Martha does not have the first birthday of the year. • Angela's birthday is not the last birthday of the year. • There is an "r" in the name of Martha's month. • Only one sister was born in a month that starts with the same letter that her name starts with.

SOLUTIONS

Logic Grid Puzzle 1: What's for Lunch?
John – baked fish with rice and spicy vegetables
Katie – cheese pizza
Raul – steak and French fries
Maria – chicken sandwich with cheese and potato chips
Sheila – salad and vegetable soup
Peter – cheeseburger and French fries

Logic Grid Puzzle 2: Who Ate What?
Sarah – oatmeal, coffee
Inna – hard-boiled eggs and fried potatoes, tea
Mike – fried eggs, orange juice
Alice – spinach and mushroom omelet, tea
Kelly – toast and strawberry jam, coffee
Richard – tomato and cheese omelet, coffee

Logic Grid Puzzle 3: Having Fun!
Erin – playing soccer
Jenny – swimming
Olga – going shopping
Bob – reading books
Julio – playing basketball
Mark – surfing the Internet

Logic Grid Puzzle 4: Pets
dog – white
cat – gray
bird – brown
fish – black

Logic Grid Puzzle 5: Birthdays
Martha – October
Angela – April
Juanita – March
Olive – July

You're Not Listening!

Below are five quotations on the art of listening. But if you're listening when you read them, you will notice that something sounds wrong. The word in bold in each sentence doesn't belong. Replace each word in bold with one from a different sentence to correct the quotes. Then you'll have five sayings on listening to think about and discuss.

1. We talked for four **people**. Well, I talked for four, and she listened for two.
   Change **people** to _____.

2. The word *listen* contains the same letters as the word **intent**.
   Change **intent** to _____.

3. We have two **hours** and one tongue so that we would listen more and talk less.
   Change **hours** to _____.

4. Most of the successful **silent** I've known are the ones who do more listening than talking.
   Change **silent** to _____.

5. Most people do not listen with the **ears** to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.
   Change **ears** to _____.

Sources of the quotations:

1. Jarod Kintz (American writer, born 1982)
2. Alfred Brendel (Austrian pianist and author, born 1931)
3. Diogenes (philosopher of ancient Greece)
4. Bernard M. Baruch (American financier and philanthropist, died 1965)
5. Stephen R. Covey (American educator and author, died 2012)

Answers on page 40

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Practical Tips for Increasing Listening Practice Time

Now I will do nothing but listen …
–Walt Whitman, Song of Myself

Learning a language—like learning to dance ballet, weave carpets, or play the saxophone—takes time and practice. In general, it's safe to say that the more practice you get, the better you will become. That's how I feel about understanding a foreign language, too. The more listening practice you get, the better you understand the language.

The problem is that students get little dedicated listening practice in their classes—and in some cases, they get almost none. The reasons are many. Teachers lack materials or equipment. They think their classrooms are too noisy or crowded. They value speaking, reading, grammar, or vocabulary over listening. Their curricula are driven by standardized tests without a listening component.

But the main reason is a perception of what listening practice *is* and *is not*. In a poll of 254 teachers from 40 countries, 84 percent felt that "any time the teacher is speaking to students in English it is a listening task" (McCaughey 2010). Now, it is true that students will get exposure to English through teacher talk. But it begs the question: If teachers assume students get listening *anyway*, why bother to design listening-specific activities?

This article will, I hope, help teachers of English reconsider how we think about listening tasks. It will provide guidance for increasing classroom listening practice through short, *dedicated* listening tasks. The emphasis is not on the science or theory of processing language—many other articles cover that—but on the practical business of setting up and "class-managing" listening activities in order to give students more practice.

Implementing new listening tasks is easy if we keep in mind five tips:

1. Students Do During
2. See It
3. Keep It Short
4. Play It Again
5. Change It Up

Before we advance to a detailed explanation of these tips, we need to examine a slippery notion, one that you may have objected to when you first read it a few paragraphs above: that "students get little dedicated listening practice in their classes—and in some cases, they get almost none." Unfortunately, as I will explain next, there is a lot of *not listening* happening.

NOT LISTENING

The last teacher-training workshop I attended on the subject of listening actually provided a

good illustration of *not listening*. After a lecture on pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening, the trainer offered a demonstration. He played the role of teacher while we participants were students. The notes I wrote on the structure of the lesson appear in Figure 1.

Pre-listening	1. Introduction: Teacher asks the class if they like animals. Students volunteer answers.
	2. Teacher presents several riddles about animals. Students guess answers.
	3. Teacher brings out a bag. Inside are stuffed animals that students can't see. Students ask questions until they determine what animals are inside.
While-listening	4. Students receive a handout with three True/False statements. They listen to a recorded dialogue about animals and tick True or False. They listen once.
Post-listening	5. Students check answers.
	6. Students create follow-up questions about animals. The teacher writes these on the board.

Figure 1. Listening demonstration lesson

At first glance, this looks like a classic listening lesson, well-organized and varied. Participating teachers enjoyed it, too. The topic of animals was appealing. We were not overburdened with grammar. And the guessing game, featuring the realia of toys in a bag, was a fun surprise. Neither participants nor trainer doubted that the primary focus of this lesson was listening. After all, the while-listening task took a central position.

I had a stopwatch, too, and timed each segment of the lesson. The result, shown in Figure 2, offers a different picture of what actually happened during the lesson.

One minute of listening was supported by 23 minutes of *not listening* activities.

You might contend that the other tasks supported the central listening segment. Maybe. But those tasks did not target listening practice. Or you might argue that there were elements of listening in Steps 1 and 2 of the pre-listening portion of the lesson because students would need to understand the teacher to form responses. And maybe there were some listening elements. But what if students did not understand? There was no provision for that. The teacher took verbal answers from volunteers and moved on. The teacher could not gauge exactly who understood or identify or help those who did not.

If the participants of this demonstration lesson had been students and not teachers, perhaps the trainer might have played the audio two or three times. That's an improvement, but even so, pre-listening and post-listening time dominated the lesson.

The question is: How much preparation does a 65-second audio warrant? If our goal is to increase listening practice, the answer should be "Very little." Usually, even within portions of class devoted to listening, actual listening gets short shrift.

Figure 3 is a quiz of sorts that you and fellow language teachers can take individually and then discuss. In the quiz, you will see descriptions of activities. Decide whether each activity offers true listening practice or whether it requires students to spend

Pre-listening	16 minutes	1. Introduction	4 minutes
		2. Riddles	3 minutes
		3. Guess the toy	9 minutes
While-listening	1 minute, 5 seconds	4. Listen to recording: True/False	1 minute, 5 seconds
Post-listening	7 minutes	5. Check answers	1 minute
		6. Follow-up questions	6 minutes

Figure 2. Timed segments of the listening demonstration lesson

most of their time on some other skill such as vocabulary, grammar, or writing. Discuss answers with colleagues and think about how you give students listening practice in your classes. My answers to the quiz appear in the Appendix, though you are free to disagree.

PREPARING FOR THE LISTENING TASK

I have heard experienced trainers say that "No listening exercise is too difficult if there is enough pre-listening." What they mean is that, with enough scaffolding and language support prior to listening, learners can understand difficult or long audio texts. It's a sensible dictum—but sneakily *anti*-listening. It tells us that students succeed at listening tasks if they have lots of *not listening*.

Is vocabulary preparation critical for understanding an audio text? Sometimes. But vocabulary preparation is not listening. What about a game that uses core ideas from the listening text? Not listening, either. What if, in the middle of an audio, you encounter the natural surfacing of the past perfect progressive tense—something you had just introduced to your class the week before? Isn't that the perfect opportunity to review? Maybe. But then you are no longer focused on listening skills. The common goals of pre-listening—"activating prior knowledge, making predictions, and reviewing key vocabulary" (Richards 2005, 87)—are valuable in supporting listening activities, but they are not listening practice themselves.

And yet, in a poll of 118 teachers from more than 25 countries, 31 percent considered that in a listening task, the largest chunk of time should be devoted to pre-listening (McCaughey 2010). Another 9 percent chose post-listening. A significant 40 percent, then, did *not* consider while-listening the most important part of a listening task!

As some have pointed out (Cauldwell 2014; Field 2002), teachers often see listening as

Does each activity provide a lot of listening practice?	Yes	Sort of	No/Not really
1. Four students, one in each corner of the room, are reading a list of their ten favorite foods and drinks. The remaining students move to each corner, in any order they want, to listen and write down each reader's list.			
2. The teacher describes a scene: a park with trees, people, and benches. Students draw the scene as the teacher describes it.			
3. Students in pairs do a vocabulary matching activity on a handout. The vocabulary comes from the audio text they just listened to.			
4. Students listen to a song several times. They have a copy of the lyrics with some of the words missing—a gap-fill or cloze activity.			
5. Students in pairs read a dialogue from the textbook out loud, each student taking on one role.			
6. The teacher tells the class about something that happened on the way to school that morning.			
7. After students listen to an audio, the teacher asks the whole class comprehension questions. Students volunteer answers.			

Figure 3. A "quiz" for discussion on what constitutes real listening practice

serving other language-learning goals. That idea prompted Nunan to refer to listening as the "Cinderella skill … all too often … overlooked by its elder sister—speaking" (2002, 238).

We need to think in terms of listening for the sake of listening practice. We must not label a segment of the English class *listening* just because the teacher talks in English. We should realize that when we use a listening text as a springboard for activities we are more comfortable with, like discussions, vocabulary practice, writing, or grammar, students are not getting the actual listening practice they may need.

LISTENING-SPECIFIC GOALS

A dedicated listening task focuses on listening goals. A goal might be understanding the text—in part or as a whole. It might be focusing on global gist or on discrete elements like single phrases. We do not need to follow up with writing or speaking in order to justify the listening task. Listening for the sake of practice is a reasonable goal.

When I observe a listening activity in a classroom, it usually follows this pattern: students listen to a complete audio text and afterwards answer comprehension questions posed by the teacher. (In the past, I did listening tasks this way, too.) This model is probably based on how we use written texts for reading comprehension: read the article and answer the questions. But listening texts, unlike the written word, do not remain unmoving in front of our eyes; listening texts move past our ears in real time. The student doesn't have the opportunity to go back, review a sentence, or look up a word in the dictionary. Answering comprehension questions *after* an audio is mostly a test of memory. The focus is on outcome, on "product rather than process," and ignores the specific difficulties students may have experienced during the actual listening phase (Field 1998, 111).

Listening-specific goals can address difficulties of understanding as they are happening. They can deal with utterances, specifically tackling differences in oral and written language like hesitations, false starts, pauses, background noise, variable speed, and variable accent (Rost 2002, 171). Our dedicated listening tasks might also draw attention to reduced forms and connected speech that occur naturally when speakers drop consonants (Wednesday = *Wenzday*), leave off endings (going = *goin*), or blend sounds together (that will = *that'll*). Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006, 2) have identified nine of these processes: "word stress, sentence stress and timing, reduction, citation and weak forms of words, elision, intrusion, assimilation, juncture, and contraction." There's no reason that most students—or even most teachers—need to know these terms or how to differentiate between the processes. But students will benefit from repeated exposure to examples. They will see that words are often not pronounced the way they are spelled and that their pronunciation changes at times, even when spoken by a single person. The language teacher—like any teacher—shouldn't shelter students from reality.

For instance, in my classes I have used an audio recording of my father telling a story. In the first sentence, he uses the word *probably*. Except he doesn't actually say *probably*. He says *prolly*. Sometimes students have to listen a few times to hear this, and they express surprise that a word can lose two separate "b" sounds and one full syllable, yet still be comprehensible. And if one speaker pronounces a word one way once, it doesn't mean the same speaker will pronounce it the same way the next time. Most English students are familiar with *gonna*, a reduced blend of "going to." (*Gonna* appears often in writing.) My wife, a non-native speaker of English, pointed out to me that when I say "I'm going to," it comes out as "I'm unna" [ajm *ʊnə*], with the "g" disappearing entirely. And yet teachers should not get the idea that they are promoting slang or dialects in pointing out features of connected speech, for "it is commonly used in all registers and styles. Even the most formal pronunciation of a

language will typically contain some aspects of these phenomena" (Brown and Kondo-Brown 2006, 5).

Is it any wonder that students express difficulty in understanding English speech outside their classroom environments?

Pointing out the aberrations of spoken language—or better yet, letting students discover them through our guidance—is a shortcut toward understanding authentic speech:

> When second-language learners learn some new element of a language, at first they have to pay conscious attention and think about it; that takes time, and their use of it is slow. But as the new element becomes more familiar, they process it faster, with less thought, until eventually the processing of that element becomes completely automatic. (Buck 2001, 7)

Many activities we do in the course of a listening lesson are actually *not listening*.

We want to put our students on the road to that automatic processing. Is it frustrating for students that language doesn't conveniently bend to the rules written in their textbooks? It might be. But according to Brown (2006), students enjoy learning about reduced forms because it's new information. In my own experience, I've found that students treat the discovery of, say, an elision or glide that suddenly makes two words comprehensible as a kind of secret key to unlocking mysteries of the language and putting them ahead in the learning game. And the bottom line is that students feel good about understanding authentic English.

FIVE TIPS FOR INCREASED LISTENING PRACTICE

At this point, we should have two key ideas foremost in our minds:

- First, many activities we do in the course of a listening lesson are actually *not listening*.
- Second, we can increase listening practice by including simple activities with *listening-specific goals*.

The five tips below will make the design and setup of listening practice in the classroom easy and effective.

1. STUDENTS DO DURING

A good listening task is one with "active responses occurring during, or between parts of, the listening passage, rather than at the end" (Ur 1984, 4). In fact, a great model for a listening task is the children's game Simon Says. In Simon Says, one person (in a classroom setting, usually the teacher) gives commands:

> Simon says, "Put your hands on your head."
>
> Simon says, "Lower your hands to your sides."
>
> Simon says, "Lift your left leg."

Students follow these commands bodily. They do this while listening, or to be more precise, in those spaces between spoken commands. The actions are an immediate response to the spoken word. I call this kind of task a "do-during" task because students need to *do something during* the listening portion of the activity. (Full instructions for how to play Simon Says can be found in a video at www.howcast.com/videos/258347-How-to-Play-the-Simon-Says-Game.) Many audio texts—especially those where the teacher's voice is the audio source—can easily be paused or segmented, so that students respond immediately. Take, for example, a picture dictation.

Picture dictation

Each student, working with a blank piece of paper, has a pencil or colored pen or marker. The teacher dictates instructions one by one, and students draw accordingly:

> Teacher: We are going to draw a monster. We just learned the word *lopsided*, right? Draw a big lopsided circle near the top of your paper. … Okay, give your monster two big eyes. … Give your monster two large ears. … Now put an earring in his left ear. … Good. Let's give our monster very curly hair. …

We can sense the natural pauses here as the teacher walks around the room, observing the progress of every student. Again, students are responding immediately, during the listening activity.

Sound-clip dictation

This *Students Do During* principle also applies to writing or dictation that is based on listening. In the following case, I've taken a single sentence, one of the most famous lines in American film, spoken by the actor Marlon Brando in 1972's *The Godfather*:

> I'm gonna make him an offer he can't refuse.

The teacher can voice the sentence, of course, but such authentic sound bites are easy to find online (on YouTube.com, for instance, or search for "movie sound clips"). And with a recording, you can play it again and again as a loop, giving students lots of exposure to the language. Students write while they listen.

Single-sentence gap fill

Using another single-sentence text, you could pinpoint attention on reduced speech. Write the following gap fill on the board:

> (1) _____ be great if (2) _____ get it done early this year.

Next, play a recording of the sentence or read it as many times as necessary. Repeating the audio many times is not a problem—it's just three seconds long—and students may need the repetition to figure out what's missing, especially since the missing words do not sound the way they look in writing.

The missing words are (1) *It'd* and (2) *we could*. (Who says only one word can be missing in a blank?) In this authentic audio, (1) *It'd* is pronounced [ɪdəd] to rhyme with *lidded*, and (2) *we could* is pronounced [wikəd].

Many students, even advanced students, are not aware of the contraction *it'd*. But after this short listening task, they will be, and catching it in a natural conversation will start to become automatic.

2. SEE IT

In the above activities, the key is that *Students Do During*: whether they are moving their bodies, drawing, writing, or gap-filling, students react immediately to the listening text. The great advantage to this arrangement is that no matter what the students are doing, the teacher can *See It* every step of the way. The teacher sees exactly who understands and who doesn't, which groups are fast and which are slow, who is struggling and who needs an extra challenge, and what everyone understands and perhaps what no one understands. The teacher can actually discern student comprehension and measure progress in real time.

Let's return to Simon Says to test whether the *See It* principle applies. The teacher says, "Simon says, 'Stand on one leg.'" The teacher can *see* who in the class understands because those students are standing on one leg. The game features built-in discernible comprehension. True, some students look at others and imitate what they are doing, but the teacher sees that, too. (Fix that problem, by the way, by having students wear blindfolds or close their eyes.)

Follow the map

For another example, let's take a map activity. Students receive a handout of a simple city

map and have it in front of them. Each student gets a paper clip or some other small object to represent his or her car. The teacher gives oral instructions:

> You are in the parking lot on Monkey Street. … Turn left on Javelina Street. … Go two blocks to Giraffe Park. …

The teacher walks around the room while giving the instructions and can see whether students' cars are at the right place at every stage, thus being able to help those who need it. And if all students seem to be following instructions with ease, the teacher can add a little more challenge, speeding up the language or offering more complex directions:

> Now make a U-turn, go two blocks, and turn right. Do you see the Little Cat Café? Don't stop there; keep going until you get to Old King Mighty Food—it's a huge grocery store right before the river.

Seeing answers

You can improve any question-and-answer task by applying the *See It* idea—for instance, when you ask questions about an audio text or about a reading text, or even when you ask for students' opinions. Resist the temptation to ask students to raise their hands to answer. This tends to give an artificial picture of student participation. The same students tend to answer, and we have no idea how to gauge whether those who don't raise their hands understand.

Instead, distribute to each student two small squares of paper, one green and one red. Ask Yes/No questions or give True/False statements. For each Yes/No question, every student responds by raising one of the colored papers: green for "Yes" and red for "No." Adding a third paper, a white square to mean "I'm not sure," is even better. It allows students to take part while admitting they do not have an answer yet. The teacher can spare these students stress by not calling on them or asking them follow-up questions. A large number of "I'm not sure" squares are a signal that students need to listen to the text again.

The *See It* tactic works with all sorts of questions, not just Yes/No questions. Try asking personal opinion questions to the entire class, with each student signaling an answer through movement.

Teacher: Stand up if you like ice cream.
Sit down.
Stand up if your favorite color is blue.
Sit down.
Stand up if you drank tea this morning.
Sit down.

Try Yes/No questions the next day. Tell students to stand up for a "Yes" answer.

Teacher: Are you 38 years old?
Is today Tuesday?
Am I wearing glasses?
Do you like eating snakes?
Do you like rainy weather?
Are the windows open?
Is Shanghai the capital of China?

The next day, mix things up: tell students to stand up for a "No" answer.

You can even practice grammar forms in listening. Here is an example where students are required to understand and differentiate between events associated with certain times—in this case, present perfect vs. simple past structures. A warning, though: avoid the trap of naming or explaining the grammar. Once that happens, you are no longer doing a listening activity.

> Who has had coffee before?
>
> Who bought a coffee somewhere yesterday?
>
> Who had coffee this morning?

Who hasn't had any coffee this week?

Who has tried iced coffee?

Who has never had iced coffee?

Who had iced coffee this morning?

Who didn't have iced coffee this morning?

We can also introduce variability into student responses. Write guidelines on the board:

Yes	No	Sometimes
Stand up	Remain seated	Wave your arms

And we can easily go beyond Yes/No questions. Here is a guideline for responding to questions of "How often … ?":

How often do you brush your teeth in the morning?

How often do you go swimming on weekends?

How often do you see monkeys on your way to school?

Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Jump up	Hold a book in the air	Put one hand in the air	Put your hands over your eyes

These simple tasks, led by the teacher and with virtually no preparation, can considerably increase student listening time. Students give responses during listening, and teachers can discern who understands throughout.

3. KEEP IT SHORT

For most of the above activities, the teacher is the source of the audio. Thus, the teacher can provide pauses for students to do something during the activities. But often, you will want to use recordings, too. The Internet offers a practically unlimited source of audio files, many of which are free.

It's best to work with very short audios. By "short" I mean from a few seconds in length up to a minute. What are the advantages of using short audios? Short audios mean short activities. Short activities require little preparation. You don't need to make handouts. You can write a gap fill on the board. You can dictate. Short activities are easy to squeeze into the class schedule. And there's even a benefit to classroom discipline. Short audios get students to quiet down and focus. They shush each other so as not to miss the beginning. They are like 50-meter sprinters, bracing themselves and cocking their heads to hear the starting gun. They know that there is little chance that a ten-second audio will bore them.

All these benefits make short audios low-risk, too. If an activity based on a 20-second audio goes wrong, there's little harm done. But if a long-audio activity (say, one that is based on a ten-minute speech) goes wrong, the teacher has wasted a lot of time—the teacher's own and the students'. For Scrivener (2005, 176), "[t]wo minutes of recorded material is enough to provide a lot of listening work," while Rost (2002, 145) reminds us of the "well-known limitations to short-term memory that occur after 60 to 90 seconds of listening." Lewis and Hill (1985) put the concentration of lower-level students at about 20 seconds. For the average teacher, this is great news: preparing short audio takes very little time.

Some secondary-school students may be preparing for university classes where they will listen to long lectures in English. Your short activities will help them, too. Just increase the level of difficulty by finding audios that are faster or that contain more complex vocabulary. These activities will build confidence, give students practice with authentic spoken language, and increase students' awareness of reduced forms.

4. PLAY IT AGAIN

In the summer of 2003, I was studying Russian in the United States. My teacher played a Russian song in class one day. She had prepared a gap fill with about 12 words missing. It was exciting because as a teacher myself I had used songs hundreds of times, but this was, amazingly, my first time experiencing a gap-fill song as a learner.

I wrote down missing words as the song played. But I couldn't write them all; there just wasn't time. When the song ended, we checked answers. The teacher called on me once. That was for a word I just didn't happen to catch—one of the two words I'd missed. Somehow that didn't feel fair. The teacher—who was actually wonderful—had decided to play the song only once, perhaps because it was four minutes long and playing it again might have seemed like a waste of class time. Playing the audio just once, though, was a mistake. It meant that none of us had a chance to succeed at the task as it was designed, to understand and fill in all the missing words. It is too bad we didn't repeat the song, perhaps playing it in segments and repeating certain lines multiple times.

Most trainers and course books recommend playing an audio two or three times. Sometimes that's enough. But a better rule of thumb is to play the audio (or speak it) as many times as the students need in order to succeed at the task. That is another benefit of *keeping it short*: you can play or speak the audio again and again, and students can succeed at the task, without a huge investment of class time.

Students should have specific tasks, something to do during the audio, and that enables the teacher to monitor progress and comprehension. Everybody wins.

Longer audios can—as we've mentioned—always be segmented, turned into short audios. These segments can be played over and over. All the while, students should have specific tasks, something to do during the audio, and that enables the teacher to monitor progress and comprehension. Everybody wins.

5. CHANGE IT UP

Increasing the variety of our audio sources will make bringing more listening to the class easy. Below are some of the choices you will make when selecting an audio.

Recorded audios or teacher's voice?

The teacher's voice is a great audio source. Give your students a do-during task, and then provide them with content: read a newspaper headline, recite a short poem, or sing a song. Audio recordings work well, too, and thousands are available for free on the Internet. Sources for freely downloadable audible content include American English (americanenglish.state.gov), English Teachers Everywhere (www.etseverywhere.com), BBC Learning English (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish), and sources mentioned in the sections below.

Non-authentic or authentic texts?

Non-authentic texts are designed for learners of English, not for native speakers. Voice of America's Special English recordings (learningenglish.voanews.com) are read at two-thirds normal speed and are, thus, not authentic. When a teacher reads a dictation to the class, this is also non-authentic. It is not a natural form of communication; it is an exercise to learn English. However, non-authentic recordings are useful: their clarity and limited vocabulary allow students to understand large chunks of English.

Outside the classroom, authentic texts are much more common. These are real, natural communications, intended for purposes beyond English learning. A radio advertisement to sell soap is authentic because the goal is to sell a product, not to teach

English. A conversation in English in a café is also authentic.

Teachers should not avoid using authentic texts just because they have low-level students or because they think authentic texts are too difficult. The teacher's task is to design the listening activity so that students will succeed, whatever the text. Keeping that text short will almost always help.

Scripted or unscripted texts?

We can make a further distinction among authentic texts. Some are scripted (or written), while others happen spontaneously. The dialogue in a TV show or film is usually scripted. So are the lyrics to songs. These scripted texts are still authentic, though, since they are created for entertainment and not for language learning.

Unscripted language develops spontaneously, like the conversations you have every day with friends and family. Interview responses are usually unscripted. The interviewee may have a general plan but is not reading the answers. It is in unscripted language where we find the most examples of reduced speech, and so it is important that we provide our students the opportunity to experience and decipher these potential points of frustration. A good source for free unscripted audios is the English Language Listening Lab Online (elllo.org).

Native speakers or non-native speakers?

Listen to CNN or BBC news and you will hear reporters from Scotland, Abu Dhabi, South Africa, and Argentina, among other places. Your students, if they travel, are more likely to encounter other second-language English speakers than native English speakers (Graddol 2006). Non-native English speech can be as authentic as native English speech. Students need to hear a variety of English accents and dialects. They do not need repeat-after-the-audio drills, though; reproducing dozens of accents is not the goal. Instead, listening practice that leads toward understanding the broad array of 21st-century Englishes is the goal. If anything, we as teachers should probably increase listening practice from non-native-speaking sources. Even more than a decade ago, in 2004, 74 percent of 750 million international travelers were non-native English speakers traveling to non-English-speaking countries (Graddol 2006). What does that tell us about sticking only to native English models of speech?

Give students variety. Expose them to a wide range of English. Let them understand that English does not have one single correct form.

Furthermore, native English itself is full of dialects. Give students variety. Expose them to a wide range of English. Let them understand that English does not have one single correct form. This exposure may have the added benefit of letting students realize that their own variety of English is perfectly legitimate and has a rightful place in the world of communication.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

I hope I have convinced you that adding listening activities to the class hour need not be difficult. But I realize that for many, there are obstacles. The curriculum, for instance, is packed. Teachers may have little time to add anything. In this case, think *small*; think *short*. Reminder: an audio text can be a few seconds long. Dictate a single sentence now and then.

For other teachers, the problem is technical. They have no audios, no CD player or cassette player—or they have one, but the class is just too huge and noisy for students to hear the audio. There are possible solutions here. Use your voice as the audio source. Bring in a guest. Is there a video player at school? Use that for audio only. Ask your school to purchase an MP3 player, or borrow one from somebody. Take the students to the computer lab. Or use your phone; today many cell phones can play audio files. Of course, they

won't be audible to the whole class, so change the arrangement: bring the students to the audio source. Create a listening station in the corner of the class where a few students at a time rotate in to listen. Whatever solution you find, keeping the audios short and making sure students have a task to complete when they listen are the keys to productive listening practice.

CONCLUSION

Many students of English eventually travel abroad, where they are shocked to discover how unprepared they are for understanding real speech—whether native or non-native English. A teacher who attended one of my training workshops had had that experience: "After studying English for many years," she said, "I was able to understand only my teachers, nobody else."

Comments like that one are evidence that students are not getting the listening practice they deserve. So often, we are sidetracked from listening goals and drift back towards the familiar safety of teaching vocabulary and grammar. We need more listening for the sake of listening. We need to give students practice. We need to give them while-listening practice. And it can be easy to do. Keep audios short. Let listeners respond right away. Make sure their responses are visible; make sure that you can discern how much they understand and can measure the progress they make. Take advantage of the huge variety of listening texts available on the Internet.

Keep in mind how important it is to have your students "do nothing but listen." You can, of course, keep teaching vocabulary, writing, reading, and speaking. But don't let those activities steal from the listening portion of class.

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APPENDIX

Answer Key to "Quiz" on What Constitutes Real Listening Practice

Note: These answers are the opinion of the author and are not definitive.

1. **Yes.** It's a type of dictation. Students are writing down words that they hear. Writing is involved, but the primary emphasis is on listening. It sounds like fun, too! Besides, students will need to practice listening while there's lots of noise around. That happens in real life. This task might not be the greatest listening task ever invented, but it's worth doing now and then. We like variety.

2. **Yes.** This is a picture dictation. Students must listen and understand, and they immediately draw. It's a useful comprehension task.

3. **No.** Students are working on vocabulary. They are not actively engaged in any listening.

4. **Sort of.** Students listen closely and write the missing words simultaneously. I say "sort of" here because when there is a lot of text, students are likely to rely primarily on their reading skills. Sort-of listening activities are okay sometimes—as long as we have a lot of variety and are also doing true listening activities.

5. **No.** This is reading and enunciation practice. Does one student truly listen (and do something) while the other reads? I say no.

6. **Sort of.** Students may get some listening practice here. Or they may understand almost nothing. It really depends on how the teacher speaks. And does the teacher provide some "do-during" tasks? Natural, spontaneous talk is helpful now and then, but it should not entirely replace well-designed do-during activities.

7. **No.** Answering comprehension questions does not really constitute listening. Yes, students have to comprehend the teacher's questions, but the audio text is no longer playing. This is more of a memory test. Students can remain quiet and hope the teacher does not call on them. Very little listening is going on at this stage.

READER'S GUIDE

This guide is designed to enrich your reading of the articles in this issue. You may choose to read them on your own, taking notes or jotting down answers to the discussion questions below. Or you may use the guide to explore the articles with colleagues.

For example, many teachers discuss *Forum* at regularly scheduled meetings with department colleagues and members of teachers' groups, or in teacher-training courses and workshops. Often, teachers choose an article for their group to read before the meeting or class, then discuss that article when they meet. Teachers have found it helpful to take notes on articles or write a response to an article and bring that response to share in a discussion group. Another idea is for teachers to try a selected activity or technique described in one of the articles, then report back to the group on their experiences and discuss positives, negatives, and possible adaptations for their teaching context.

Practical Tips for Increasing Listening Practice Time (Pages 2–13)

Pre-Reading

1. What makes a good listening activity? When you answer, consider your experience as either a teacher or a learner.
2. If the goal is for students to use English successfully outside the classroom, what kinds of listening activities would be most beneficial?
3. Look at the title of the article. Do you have any practical tips to share? What particular techniques do you use or have you seen that can improve textbook listening activities?

Post-Reading

1. Take the listening activity quiz on page 4. Discuss your answers with a partner or a group of colleagues.
2. On page 5, the author suggests that listening activities may be about "product rather than process." What does this phrase mean to you? What does the author recommend for a more process-oriented approach?
3. Have you ever used authentic listening texts in your classroom? What was your students' reaction? Find an authentic listening text and share with a partner how you would teach it.
4. The author, on page 2, suggests five tips for teaching listening. Which ones would work best in your classroom? Can you brainstorm a new activity based on any of these tips?

Observation Tools for Professional Development (Pages 14–24)

Pre-Reading

1. What experiences have you had with classroom observation? Have you ever observed another teacher or been observed by a colleague or supervisor? If so, what do you remember about the experience?
2. In what ways and circumstances do you think classroom observations can be helpful? Do you know of any specific techniques that observers can use to give teachers effective feedback?

During-Reading

Complete the activities and questions suggested by the author. Share your answers in a group of colleagues, if possible.

Post-Reading

Is there any specific change you want to make in your teaching? How could you use the techniques presented in this article to help make that change?

Increasing Awareness and Talk Time through Free Messaging Apps (Pages 25–32)

Pre-Reading

1. Do you use any free messaging apps on your mobile phone? If your students have mobile phones, do they use free messaging apps?
2. Have you ever used phone messaging to improve your students' English? If so, what were the results?

Post-Reading

1. Reread the second paragraph under the heading "Goals of the *KakaoTalk* project" (page 26). Have you had experiences with your students similar to the ones described? If so, how do you think the activities in this article can help your students?
2. The author suggests three activities. If you were to use free messaging apps to supplement your students' learning, which activity would you use first—and why?
3. Can you think of any other ways to engage your students through free messaging apps?