

Listening - what's so special about it?

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#### Using cassettes in the classroom

- peter** Hi Jeremy, Georgina  
**Georgina** Where are you from Peter?  
**peter** From Scotland, but I'm teaching in Greece at the moment.  
**jeremy\_harmer** Where does listening fit in with your Greek students Peter? Do you use a lot of tapes or do you rely more on your own voice/words to give the students the kind of input they need?  
**peter** We use the tapes that go with the coursebooks - though I suppose they listen to me too. Though we were encouraged on my training course to keep the TTT to a minimum.  
**jeremy\_harmer** Isn't that interesting?! TTT was always considered 'bad' somehow, because it is always et against STT yet when teachers talk to students in an appropriate way they provide them with the very best kind of comprehensible input!  
**peter** So Jeremy, would you say that we should be encouraged to talk - as another model?  
**jeremy\_harmer** There is a feeling amongst some methodologists that tapes are a very 'bad idea' - that's something that the Dogme people (Scott Thornbury et al) have enunciated very forcefully. How do you all feel about that?  
**Katia** I like to have the tapes, English is not my first language.  
**Georgina** Katia - do you feel they help you in class - and if so, how?  
**peter** What way do they see them as bad?  
**jeremy\_harmer** I think the argument goes something like this: tapes are pre-recorded, and not always very natural whereas face-to-face conversation ( or 'live' listening) is bound to be more 'here and now', more interactive yet I'm with Katia, I think. Tapes have a lot to offer too!  
**peter** but can this always be replicated in the classroom - a false environment - especially if the students don't have the language to input at that level?  
**Katia** The tapes give a good model for the students. I make mistakes so they have good source and I feel better that way.  
**jeremy\_harmer** Katia, I think you've mad a very important point. Good tapes do provide a good model because even if the voice of the teacher is totally wonderful (!) still it's only one voice!  
**jeremy\_harmer** Peter, that's really interesting isn't it. 25 students listening to a tape all together if really unnatural yet so, in a way, is some of the discourse between teacher and students! I suppose a lot depends on how we use tapes!

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Using cassettes creatively in the classroom!

- Georgina** Jeremy, could you give us some of your creative ways of using tapes?
Katia yes please!
jeremy_harmer I asked for that!
jeremy_harmer I think a lot depends on how you set the scene. With listening exercises we need to get the students engaged with the tasks so that they listen with real interest and not just to complete comprehension tasks (though, BTW that can be pretty engaging in itself). So I think prediction is really important e.g. playing a bit of the tape and having them speculate on what's coming next, or looking at pictures to set the scene, or considering some questions they have to listen to the answer for or telling them what topic they are going to listen about and having them discuss it first, or at least try and predict words they might hear, etc. That's for starters. But I bet you've got some better ideas????
Georgina and I guess the other thing to remember is that you don't have to use them as suggested in the books. One thing I'd do to make listenings more realistic is to have two cassettes and play music or another tape so that sts had some background noise to deal with - like in real life.
jeremy_harmer That's really interesting! And I think that of course materials writers try and make listening tasks
maria Hello - I'm from Argentina.
Georgina Hi Maria - do you use tapes a lot? Any suggestions?
jeremy_harmer as engaging as possible (and as lifelike as possible). They (sorry, er, we) do our very best

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to make things really interesting. But it's the teacher in the class who can really make things come alive (as always).

peter Yes - I sometimes make students listen to different parts in the same room then we do group work based on the activities they were set.

jeremy_harmer Peter that sounds great - or, if the teacher can't use more than one tape recorder, some students can read some stuff while others listen, and then they have to put things together. Well, the winning song of the famous Labour victory here in 1997 was 'things can only get better'. I hope that's true in A, Maria. And now, back to listening!!

Katia I saw an activity where one student had to write on the board what the students say, but they all speak at the same time. It was madness, but a very interesting result.

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### Other ways of listening

**maria** Thank you Jeremy. What other ways can we listen - sorry I am slow, I am reading what you say already.

**jeremy\_harmer** Katia, I saw something like that in a non-EFL setting, where three groups of kids all had to shout their sentences at the same time and the listeners had to see if they could understand anything. It was really good fun, and, surprisingly, it was possible to pick words out of the mess Not a great listening training activity, but a fun listening 'filler'!

**Georgina** So what do students get out of activities like these?

**Katia** I think fun only?

**jeremy\_harmer** Georgina, a bit of confidence (gosh, we can understand some words, despite everything) and a great injection of anarchy!

**peter** They get good practice of coping in pubs! A great student pastime.

**jeremy\_harmer** Pubs? Why only a student pastime?! Maria, you're not slow at all. I do like the idea of bringing visitors to the class and getting students to plan interview questions for them and then they have to follow up their questions based on the interviewee's answer. If you can't get someone into the class, the teacher can role-play a character, for example, and the students have to find out everything about him/her through their questions. But yes, if you can get a friend - any competent speaker that the students don't know - then they should be mildly curious at the very least.

**maria** Like a friend or other English speakers?

**Georgina** Time is moving on. In the development pack there was an article about using soaps - do any of you use video at all? That can be used if you don't have access to native speakers as well.

**peter** I like to use videos if possible - more realistic

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Using videos in the classroom

jeremy_harmer Yes, video is great, though of course the TV studies that have been done show that people listen more effectively with less visual input than with more (excuse my syntax not too elegant!) But video (all those basic video techniques) do allow for exactly the kind of prediction and 'schemata awakening' that we were talking about earlier.

Georgina That's interesting, do you think they concentrate harder on the actual language? I thought my students got more from video as they learn more than just listening.

Katia I think we should be given more help in using videos in class. I'm not sure we get the benefit from them.

peter Training courses now do cover these areas more.

jeremy_harmer Yes, Katia, I'm sure there are lots that can be got from video. For one thing, if the video is any good, it is full of interesting visual material/clues about language use, and it shows what kind of language is appropriate in what kind of situations but I suppose the TV point is that some students get more from this kind of visual element than others.

peter I think students do get more from video and being from the UK I like to use a variety of material I get sent from home. That way we can offer more than just language, but cultural - and not all British either.

jeremy_harmer Katia, do you do all the silent viewing/only seeing a little bit of the screen/listening without seeing etc kind of activities? I really agree with your idea, and one article in the development pack shows how even very 'British' soap operas can be taken into fairly low level classes, and with the right kind of teacher support can really hook students into language use.

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- Katia** I don't think I have confidence, we normally watch the video and do some activities. We sometimes role-play.
- jeremy_harmer** I don't think you need to worry Katia! Just have fun. I love fast-forwarding a 3-minute sequence for example and asking the students to say what they think they saw. Or just letting them listen to guess what the scene is. Or play the sequence with no sound etc students should get hooked by that. Well, if the magic works!
- peter** Yes Jeremy - there's so much to get from even a small video clip. I know a teacher who only sometimes uses 30 seconds of video as the theme for a class, but the students feel they have had a 'different' lesson because they saw a video clip.
- jeremy_harmer** Yes, that's right Peter. I think a general rule of video is that less is more although, of course, more advanced classes can get a lot out of longer sequences provided the teacher spices up the experience with good tasks which provoke engagement with what they are seeing.
- Katia** I will try. Thank you - there are some nice ideas here for teachers like me.
- jeremy_harmer** Katia, did you say where you 'talking' from today?
- Georgina** And songs can be done with video rather than a tape. I loved using videos of songs - especially videos that tell a story - there's so much to get visually and from listening.
- jeremy_harmer** Glad you mentioned that, Georgina. Modern pop videos can be really really useful again, if you watch them without the sound it's really good
- jeremy_harmer** fun trying to work out what the song is, though of course if the students are MTV kids they will probably know already.
- peter** Yes songs on video - great.
- jeremy_harmer** (And although this is not so much about listening, it's great to work on a song and then get students to try and plan their own video!)
- Katia** and do you do with songs on video like you can with songs on tapes?
- Georgina** Yes Katia, you can video doesn't have to be something to be wary about if you use it more, you can start to experiment with how to use it. try some of these suggestions - and let us know how it goes!
- jeremy_harmer** That's a good question, Katia. Sometimes you can play the video without the picture for them to just listen to the music and words or they can listen and watch (because sometimes - not always - the pictures really help them understand what the song is all about!)
- peter** Yes katia - and more.
- Katia** thank you very much. Do you all have so many good ideas always?
- jeremy_harmer** No, only on Mondays!!!!
- peter** Or when it's time for home! I have to go too - it's time for class. I feel inspired.
- Georgina** That's great Peter! Happy teaching, see you next time perhaps. and if you have any other ideas that may help teachers like Katia, you can leave them on the Message Board.
- jeremy_harmer** Peter, thanks for that. What a great thing to say. Thanks very much for your participation. Bye!
- peter** Thank you. Good luck katia
- jeremy_harmer** I was thinking about something that Field says in one of the articles in this development pack that the best kind of listening tasks aren't always based on words etc, but on filling in charts, choosing pictures, putting pictures in order etc. How do you feel about that Georgina and Katia?
- Katia** My students like that, because it is not all need to produce language
- jeremy_harmer** Yes, that's right. And in fact it's sometimes important to separate reception from production for their sake, though not always!
- Georgina** Clover, Jessi, do you have any views on listening - how do you incorporate it into your class?

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**Soap Operas**

- jessi** I am probably traditional - I use a lot of cassettes with the course books we use. I read in the development pack about soap opera and it sounded interesting.
- CLOVER** it's perhaps a little too late to joining the discussion now but if you have scheduled any other forum I would like to know
- Georgina** Clover - we hold them each month and I let members know by email, usually two weeks before
- jeremy\_harmer** Jessi, I liked that soap opera article too. I haven't actually tried it out yet, but



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- Georgina** and you can always use the message board in between these times.
- jeremy\_harmer** I'm looking forward to doing just that
- jessi** What are you thinking of doing?
- Georgina** Any idea which soap opera you will use?!
- jeremy\_harmer** And, Jessi, I think tapes are a really good idea, of course, provided, as we were saying about 45 minutes ago, that they present a reasonable version of the language (which they usually do in most modern coursebooks) Which soap opera? Well there's the problem a quick anecdote. I went to see a ~Mexican film the other day called Y Tu Mama Tambien (it's fantastic) and because I have lived in Mexico and speak good Spanish I had not trouble with the voiceover stuff and the more formal conversations or monologues But when the teenage kids started talking to each other in modern Mexican teenage slang I was kind of outgunned! The point of that long digression is to wonder how much soap opera slang is a 'good' thing. Maybe one would want to choose a soap opera that wasn't too colloquial???
- Katia** I have to go. Thank you again for good ideas. I will come back next month.
- CLOVER** I'm sorry but I can't stay any longer but I will try to be on time next time!
- Georgina** Bye - visit the site and the transcript will be up by Friday. Thanks for participating.
- jeremy\_harmer** Katia, it was a pleasure having you. See you soon. Bye
- jeremy\_harmer** Clover great to 'meet' you even for a few minutes!
- CLOVER** yes, same here!
- jessi** Maybe they are too colloquial - but some of my students - intermediate and above want that kind of thing. And they also learn language like that in chat rooms they visit - it's an education for me!
- jeremy\_harmer** That made me laugh, Jessi!
- jessi** I think I must go - a shame I came so late. Very interesting. I know Jeremy - some expressions they ask me to translate!
- jeremy\_harmer** I think a lot depends which way the students are looking and what they are learning English for but there's not doubt that emails and MTV etc have opened up the kind of language we want to expose them to. Anyway, bye Jessi. Hope you make it earlier next time!!
- jessi** Yes, and I remember the painful time I had studying 'correct' English - and all the discussions that go on about what is right or wrong

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