
How can we make engaging listening activities with technology?

Webinar handout

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Differentiating listening activities and fostering learner autonomy

Here are some of my favourite listening activities that leverage simple, accessible digital tools to help learners take an active role in their listening. Each activity is followed by a webpage to find out more.

1. Letting learners control the speed of the recording

One of the listening difficulties most often reported by learners is the speed of the text, which is perceived as too fast. However, research shows that the speed of a text may have a lower impact on listening performance than our learners think. To give them the opportunity to appreciate whether lowering the speed of a video/audio helps comprehension, and work at their own pace, allow your learners to set their own speed via the settings on YouTube.

<https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/7509567>

2. Using subtitles

Whether or not to use subtitles is a question that divides teachers, with many thinking that by activating subtitles, students will just practise reading and not listening. While these doubts are founded, some research suggests that watching videos with subtitles can not only improve listening comprehension, but also vocabulary acquisition, bottom-up decoding and self-confidence. Subtitles can be used flexibly to suit the needs of different students, and can be activated and deactivated at different stages of the lesson. For example, you can ask students to watch without subtitles first, then activate them during their second and third listen when they

see they are having problems understanding, making a note of at least 3 instances in which they had problems. <https://www.modernenglishteacher.com/to-caption-or-not-to-caption-using-videos-with-subtitles-for-language-learning>

3. Bookmarking difficulties

An important aspect of learning to listen is developing a sense of control over one's listening, which in turn helps learners feel more confident and less anxious. To contribute to this, it is important that students learn to pinpoint their difficulties, tackle them and use this knowledge to plan what strategies to use in the future.

One simple way to do this is to use a bookmarking tool, such as Bookmarker for YouTube. Have your learners watch a video first for general comprehension, then with a focus on more detailed comprehension. As they listen again, the focus of the activity should be to pinpoint a set number of moments in which they struggled to understand and bookmark them. They could answer questions such as "what word/words did you not understand here?" and "why did you not understand?" Then, they could share and discuss their difficulties with their partner and/or with the whole class. <https://chromewebstore.google.com/detail/bookmarker-for-youtube/fheccdekkhopfajafneanikccpomani?hl=en>

4. Students creating their own task

Give learners a more active and aware role in listening by letting them design listening tasks for their classmates. You could divide the class into groups and give each group a short video. Students could watch the video and bookmark a certain number of difficulties they had. They use the transcript to create a gap fill focusing on their difficulties. Groups swap tasks, then work together on comparing their difficulties and discuss how they overcame them. Another option is to have them use AI to generate a multiple-choice quiz on their video and check it for accuracy (which would require detailed comprehension of the video). <https://hyperquiz.io/>

5. Listening outside of the classroom

The benefits of *Extensive Listening*, i.e. listening to large amounts of comprehensible materials for pleasure, are widely recognised. Aside from the benefits in terms of listening comprehension, with Extensive Listening, learners are also motivated and involved, since they normally choose what to listen to based on their interests. There are many sources learners could choose independently, such as videos on social media or YouTube channels they subscribe to, or you could recommend some examples of graded podcasts:

<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/general-english/audio-series/podcasts>; and <https://premierskillenglish.britishcouncil.org/podcasts>; and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/podcasts>

A recording of Chiara's webinar can be watched here: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/multimodal-classrooms-mini-event>