



Listening in English

Being actively engaged and taking control of your own learning is important for developing your skills and processing new ideas.

Let's look at 6 practical tips for improving your listening skills in class and in conversations.

1. Be prepared

The most effective thing you can do with any interaction is prepare well, and try to predict what information might come up.

- Read the unit guide carefully.
- Think about how this lecture connects with last week's lecture or how this tutorial will approach the week's reading.
- Write up questions for yourself on anything that is unclear, as well as predictions for lecture content or key phrases.

It doesn't matter if your predictions aren't correct – the act of predicting is in itself an active learning strategy, and you will always learn something from getting it wrong.

Remember: not understanding everything straight away is good. If you're not being challenged, you're not learning.

2. Take effective notes

Avoid writing down everything the lecturer says: otherwise you can fall behind trying to write down unnecessary or repetitive information.

Use non-verbal cues – tone of voice, emphasis, body language – and your own prior notes to identify the key words and ideas.

3. Pause, rewind, repeat

In recorded lectures you have more control over your learning environment, so make the most of it.

- Pause, rewind and repeat difficult sections.
- Slow the recordings down to review unfamiliar phrases, and speed them up to challenge yourself.
- Pause regularly to try to predict what comes next (either as a topic, or grammatically).
- Keep up to date with your lectures.

It doesn't matter if your predictions are wrong – the act of predicting is an active learning strategy, and is a good way of keeping yourself focused and on task.

Listening to lectures at the right time in the semester will help prepare for other classes, give you more practice in prediction, and train you to understand the way different lecturers express themselves – it can be overwhelming to catch up with so much information late in the semester.

4. Note non-verbal cues

Listening skills involve more than simply understanding the words. Whether you are participating in a structured conversation or speaking socially in an informal setting, pay attention to tone, body language and facial expressions.

Attend lectures in person where possible: you can observe your lecturer emphasising key points with gestures or how they move and use space as they speak, and you'll also have better opportunities to meet and talk with other students.

5. Ask questions

Remember that you can also be the one asking the questions! This will give you some control of the direction of the conversation, and again an opportunity to predict possible responses.

Don't be afraid to ask for clarifications. Everyone wants to be understood, so ask someone to repeat or rephrase what they have said, or check your understanding of their message in your own words.

6. Listen to diverse voices

Finally, incorporate diverse English language voices into your everyday life and interests. For example, listen to podcasts on topics that interest you. Try to find ones you don't have a background in in your first language to guard against the temptation to translate back and forth between languages.

Make time to listen to the radio. [SBS Radio](#) is an Australian multicultural radio station which also has resources for English language learners. You can use active listening strategies, but you can also just have the radio on in the background and get a general feel for tones of voice, accents, speed and pronunciation.

It's important to give yourself breaks – studying in your second, third, fourth language can be tiring, so put in the work, but try not to exhaust yourself.