



Children need planned opportunities to listen and respond to different speakers – including friends, the whole class and a range of adults, as well as to radio and TV broadcasts. For children new to English, it is particularly helpful to support listening by providing non-verbal cues including illustrations, models and actions.

Listening – key teaching points

Make listening necessary

- Avoid repeating what children say, and expect others to respond.
- Devise activities where, to complete the task, all children need to have contributed what they know.
- Do not repeat instructions.
- Sometimes speak quietly.
- Insist children respond to the last speaker (this may need to include wait time).
- Make sure children answer the question they are asked, e.g. how or why or what, and do not accept vague replies.
- Encourage children to speak audibly so all can hear, making teacher rephrasing unnecessary.

Encourage active, responsive listening

- Give a purpose for listening in advance.
- Present material clearly with prompts to support listening, e.g. using voice to signal changes in focus, emphasising key words.
- Demonstrate active listening, e.g. eye contact, asking questions, quick recapping.
- Help children identify features of language, gesture and non-verbal cues which help the listener.
- Ask children to reflect on how they listened.
- Practise strategies to structure listening, e.g. physical responses to mark key points, forming mental pictures, thinking of a question to ask.

Primary National Strategy

Speaking, Listening, Learning:
working with children in Key Stages 1 and 2

Listening – making it work in the classroom

Listening needs to be explicitly taught and reinforced throughout the curriculum.

When listening, children are:

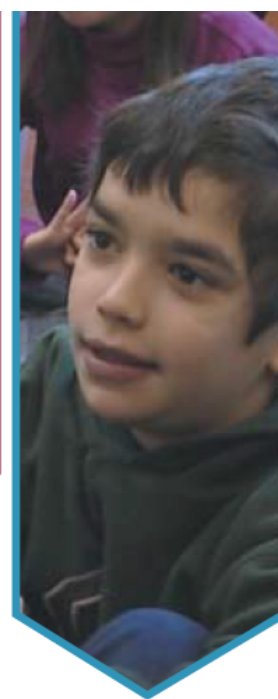
- hearing models of language in use;
- learning about how speakers use gesture, volume, tone;
- observing how, in groups, speakers interact, take turns and influence others.

In developing their skills in listening, children need to learn to:

- ask questions to clarify what they have heard;
- build on what others say;
- evaluate what has been said;
- respond non-verbally, e.g. by nodding or maintaining eye contact.

Children show they have listened and understood when they:

- identify the gist of an account;
- recall main ideas;
- re-present information;
- follow instructions correctly;
- make relevant comments and responses;
- respond to others, maintaining communication;
- ask questions to clarify understanding;
- notice significant uses of language;
- create new meanings based on what they have heard.



Listening – useful classroom techniques

Babble gabble

The teacher tells the children they are going to listen to a story and afterwards work in pairs and retell it. After the initial telling, one child begins to retell the story to a partner as fast as he/she can, but with as much attention to detail as possible. After a minute the teacher calls, 'Change!' and the listener now has to continue with the tale. This pattern continues for a number of turns. It is important to let the children know they do not have to retell the story in the same words as the teacher. However, they do have to listen carefully in order to remember the plot and the sequence of events.

Barrier games

Barrier games focus on giving and receiving instructions. They prompt children to focus on what they need to complete a task. The speaker has to give clear information and explicit instructions to the listener. The listener has to ask questions to clarify understanding and gain information, while keeping track of what has been said. For example, place children on either side of a screen, so that a speaker can describe an object that the listener has to draw. Alternatively a speaker can give directions from one map while the listener draws the route on a blank version of the same map.

Word tennis

This is a way of making a story with a partner, and emphasises listening for key words, main points and events, focusing on the need to make sense. Each person says one word or phrase in turn so that the story is continually passed backwards and forwards. For example: *once/ there/ was/ a/ queen/ who/ wanted/ to/ fly/ so/ she/ sent/ for/ ...* or: *once there was a girl/who liked writing plays/so she began ...*

Draw a story

Read a story while the children sit and listen. Pause at the end of sections, allow some think time and tell children to draw the relevant part of the story. At the end of the story, ask children what the story is about and get them to retell the story from their drawings.

Telephone conversations

To emphasise the need to use language rather than gesture or facial expression, children sit back to back with 'telephones' for conversation. The content of the conversation can vary, for example it might be passing on information, discussing a problem or describing an event. The children must listen carefully to what is said since they cannot see the person speaking.

Ways to listen

Different listening frames can help children focus on what they hear – before a broadcast, for example:

- give the topic and ask children to work out questions they would like answers to;
- guide the listening by giving children headings to help them listen systematically;
- suggest children count on their fingers each time they hear key words; different groups should listen for different words;
- ask children to make a picture in their heads as they listen.

All change!

Select a sentence and say it in a monotone. Now repeat the sentence using different intonation, e.g. as a question and then as an exclamation. What is the impact of the change? Show that a sentence can mean different things depending on which words are emphasised, e.g. *I didn't borrow my brother's best jacket yesterday.* How does the meaning change? This can be varied to explore the use of gesture, listener eye contact or encouragement.