

# Introduction

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In all of our everyday listening, the key to what we understand is not what we hear; it is our **purpose for listening**. For example, in the morning, we may be vaguely aware of a TV playing in the background while we focus on getting breakfast or our “to do” list for the day. When the weather or something else we want to know comes on the TV, we shift our attention to focus on the televised information. If a child needs our immediate attention, we shift our listening focus and adopt a parental listening style (Is the child okay physically and emotionally? How could I best help in this situation?).

Young children learn to listen for different reasons with different attention levels well before they enter the classroom. Within the classroom, they are taught to “be good listeners” by looking at the speaker, keeping their bodies still, not interrupting, etc. Such training covers more social behavior than listening comprehension or choosing the purpose for listening.

Most students learn to control their listening patterns without direct instruction as they are exposed to various listening situations. They learn to anticipate the teacher’s directions for what to do and to predict what questions the teacher will ask during various kinds of academic lessons. Other students need direct instruction in how to listen effectively.

*Spotlight on Listening Comprehension* was developed to teach students the importance of knowing what they are listening for and matching their listening comprehension strategies to their listening purposes. The six books in *Spotlight on Listening Comprehension* focus on these essential listening purposes and the corresponding comprehension strategies:

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|--------------------------|---|
| Listening for details    | Listening for making inferences             |
| Listening for main ideas | Listening for reasoning and problem solving |
| Listening for sequencing | Listening for story comprehension           |

These target areas parallel critical reading comprehension skills and will boost students’ performance in the classroom; on tests; and in everyday listening, reading, and speaking.

The content of the activities reflects a wide variety of curricular areas as well as daily life. The vocabulary and sentence structure are controlled at an elementary grade level to help your students focus on the listening comprehension element vs. novel terms or concepts.

Each book includes a Pretest/Posttest (page 6) to assess and monitor your students’ proficiency and progress. The worksheet activities require minimal writing and often feature a multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank format similar to tests. Use your own judgment and teaching purposes to present the activity sheets orally or as overheads for group presentation.

The activities in each book are sequenced by complexity. They begin by featuring the target skill in pictures to give visual information to facilitate comprehension. Then they address the target skill in reading activities so your students can easily reread or scan for key information. Finally the activities

depend on listening without visual cues. Students must then visualize what they hear, keeping their listening purpose of making inferences in mind as they hear the information presented orally.

Whenever possible, encourage your students to explain the rationale or clues for their answers. This strategy strengthens their oral expression skills and gives other students practice in critical listening. It also allows your students to provide alternative answers that may be appropriate, depending on the students' explanations.

*Spotlight on Listening Comprehension: Making Inferences* teaches your students to detect and think about clues in what they hear that suggest what happened and where, why, and when it happened and to predict what will happen next. It also teaches your students to make inferences from facial expression, body posture, actions, and speaking style. Here are some additional ways to enrich your students' skills in making inferences.

- Make your students aware of the difference between making inferences in reading and making inferences in listening. When we read, we depend on the author's words and illustrations or photos to infer causes, make predictions, etc; we can reread or scan material to check our hunches or search for specific clues. When we listen, we need to grasp information as we hear it; we can't often have the information repeated. We don't usually have visual aids, but we can infer a speaker's meaning from the spoken words, the way they are spoken, and nonverbal factors (e.g., posture, intonation, speed, volume, facial expression).
- Show a picture with part of it covered up. Have your students guess what is covered and explain their reasoning. Accept any logical inference your students can support. Then show the full picture. Talk about clues your students grasped and clues they might have missed.
- Demonstrate two ways of giving instructions to make something. First stand behind your students and ask them not to look at you. Then face your students and repeat the instructions. Ask for feedback from your students about what makes it easier to follow your instructions when they can watch you vs. when they can't (e.g., can't see hand gestures, don't know as easily how you feel about what you're saying).
- Present action photos from magazines or the Internet without their captions. Ask your students to infer what's going on, why, how the people feel, etc., giving the clues for each inference.
- When we make inferences, we rely heavily on previous experience and what we have learned from reading, studying, and hearing other people's experiences. Help your students make personal connections to what they hear by asking, "What does this remind you of in your own life?"

We hope you and your students enjoy *Spotlight on Listening Comprehension: Making Inferences*!

Carolyn and Paul