

Introduction

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 discussions.

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 listening activities. Repeat the information for your students if necessary. When students have no visual cues, they must visualize what they hear, maintaining their listening purpose of reasoning about what they hear as information is presented orally.

Wherever 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.

Thinking independently, reasoning logically, solving problems, and determining causes and events are all important life skills for your students. Most of the thinking and reasoning challenges that students tackle every day come to them through auditory means. Conversations, radio advertisements, and directions from parents and teachers are all things your students need to process as listening tasks, and the activities in this book provide them with practice in a wide variety of areas. The book begins by building basic thinking and reasoning skills such as associations, categorization, and exclusion. Then your students will work with comparing and contrasting, questioning, identifying speaker's purpose, and other core reasoning tasks. Finally, your students will use reasoning to identify problems, offer solutions, and evaluate the effectiveness of those solutions. Here are some additional activities to build your students' reasoning and problem-solving skills:

- Make association and category collages using pictures from magazines, newspapers, and the Internet. Provide your students with either a category or a concept and have them collect pictures and words that belong to that category (mammals) or are associated with the concept (going on vacation).
- Have your students practice their questioning skills by conducting a class interview. Invite a local government official, news celebrity, or interesting person to visit your classroom. Present details about this person's life, career, and accomplishments to your students before the visit. Help your students formulate questions to ask the guest when he or she arrives. Encourage your guest to ask follow-up questions of your students and see how much everyone can learn about one another during the interview.
- Record several TV and radio commercials and play them for your students. Have them identify the product being sold, the reasons the ad gives for buying the product, and the essential information you need to know in order to make a purchase. Then talk about why someone might buy this product or service instead of a similar item.
- Talk with your students about the two basic kinds of problems to solve: those that require instant action (an injury) and those that can be delayed until you devise a problem-solving plan (a school project). Discuss the different problem-solving approaches each kind requires.

We hope you and your students enjoy *Spotlight on Listening Comprehension: Reasoning and Problem Solving!*

Carolyn and Paul