

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 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 finding the main idea 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: Main Idea teaches your students to listen for the “big picture” of what they hear or *what it's all about*. The sequence of activities begins with the main idea vs. details of pictures and progresses to the topic or label of groups of pictures or words. Your students will then identify the topic and main idea of brief articles, fables, messages, and school passages.

Here are some additional activities to help your students master listening with the purpose of detecting the main idea.

- Use a collection of items in a category to teach the label or topic of a group of things, such as buttons, shells, ribbons, or writing/drawing utensils. More complex groupings might include pictures of living things, including plants, land animals (include people), and sea creatures. For advanced students, use cards with words from curricular texts, such as *humidity, dew, rain, fog, condense, precipitation, conserve, supply, water, and evaporate* for the topic *water cycle*.
- Play songs or read poems that are probably unfamiliar to your students. Ask them to give each song or poem a good title. Point out that questions like *What would be a good title for this song/poem/story?* are often ways to find out if students understand the main idea.
- After your students have heard an announcement in the classroom, ask them to identify the main idea of the announcement.
- Introduce classroom lessons by announcing the “main idea of the lesson” or conclude a lesson by asking your students to state the main idea of the lesson.
- If a student rambles or digresses in commenting on something, refocus the student by asking, “What is the main idea of what you want to say?”

We hope you and your students enjoy *Spotlight on Listening Comprehension: Main Idea*!

Carolyn and Paul