

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 understanding what they hear as information is 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.

The skill of listening comprehension for a narrative requires far more than reconstructing information from auditory memory. It involves determining where and when an event took place, the people involved, the actions people and characters took, the sequence of events, the problem the characters faced, and the resolution they put in place. It is a holistic understanding of what was heard.

The same skills for comprehending an oral story or narrative also apply to understanding other classroom information and lessons. Use these strategies and activities to develop and enrich students' comprehension for oral stories and information.

- Ask your student to tell you about what has happened so far today. What was the sequence of events? Did any problems arise? If so, how has the student approached or solved the problems? What does the student think will happen for the rest of the day?
- Begin a file of daily comic strips that illustrate a simple conflict and resolution. Have your students use a simple story map, such as the one on page 26 of this book, to note the basic elements of the story, especially the conflict and resolution.
- Share biographical stories of historical figures with your students, especially those who have struggled against adversity to achieve their goals. Have students identify basic story elements in these individuals' experiences and explain that story comprehension can apply to real-life events as well as to fictional narratives.
- Ask a student to recall the best (and then worst) day of his or her life. Prompt the student to include basic story elements (characters, setting, sequencing, conflict/resolution) in the retelling, or have the student begin by placing those elements on a story map and using the concrete representation as a prompt for telling the story.

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

Carolyn and Paul