

Pre-listening

Why pre-listening is necessary

When listeners listen, they use two types of processing: top-down and bottom-up. Top-down processing is like looking at the forest from above to fulfill the listening purposes. Bottom-up processing is like studying each tree for the listening purposes. Native speakers of any language utilize these two types freely and they successfully get the general ideas and necessary detailed information through top-down and bottom-up processing. However, second language learners cannot use the two types of processing at their will due to limited amount of knowledge about the target language and limited cognitive resources. That is why language teachers should help the learners focus on one type of processing at a time and prepare them for the main listening activity by, for example, presenting the necessary vocabulary items beforehand to lessen their cognitive load.

What can be done for successful pre-listening

Vocabulary learning in pre-listening

Unlike reading activities, listening in itself is a very difficult task for L2 learners. When learners encounter unknown words during the listening, they get easily demotivated and disoriented. If teachers preteach problematic words through reading or listening before the main listening activity, this will remove some of the barriers to successful listening and the learners will get “comprehensible input” as the teacher planned.

Extensive listening before the main listening activity

When the main listening activity can be detail-oriented and therefore, rather concentrated, pre-listening activities can be extensive and therefore, rather relaxed. This kind of activity can build up background knowledge about the main topic of the while-listening activity and help them automatically recognize the topic words.

Authentic materials

Since the purpose of pre-listening activities is not for extracting detailed information, authentic materials whose levels are appropriate for the learners are recommended in terms of language. The speed should be normal, but the speakers' pronunciation should be clear and articulated, and the recording quality should not bother the learners.

Schemata activation

If the pre-listening activities are predictive and interesting for the learners, they bring their schemata to the listening passages during the while-listening activities. Teachers can guide their flow of thinking by asking them questions, by:

- encouraging them to predict what will happen next
- connecting the pre- and while-listening activities to activate and build the learners' schemata.

Reference

Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English language teaching*. England: Pearson Education Limited.