

# Strategies to Improve College English Learners' Listening Abilities

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## Abstract

The present paper is a detailed analysis of several strategies to improve college English learners' listening abilities. The strategies are analyzed from the perspectives of students and teachers as well. By adopting these strategies, students are sure to make remarkable progress in their listening abilities.

## Keywords

strategies, college English learners, listening abilities.

## 1. Introduction

A great number of college students consider listening as the most difficult part in their learning of English language. Not only do they have trouble understanding details, they also tend to show their inability to comprehend key information. However, listening is a most important ability when interacting with speakers of English, as "the time spent on listening is twice more than that spent on speaking, and four to five times more than that spent on reading and writing[1]. In other words, listening lays the foundation for speaking and further communication. Therefore, it is of great significance for college English teachers to cultivate and improve students' listening abilities. One thing I would like to emphasize here is that the strategies explored in the paper are not aimed at helping students cope with exams. Instead, they aim to improve students' actual listening abilities.

## 2. Body

### 2.1. Strategies to Improve College English Learners' Listening Abilities from the Perspective of Students

Students' listening abilities cannot be improved without the improvement of students' comprehensive language abilities. So to improve students' listening abilities, teachers should help them improve their other language abilities such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar etc. Also, students must combine listening with reading, speaking and writing while doing their listening tasks, because if students just listen to English materials again and again for improvement, they tend to get distracted and unchecked and thus make little progress.

Yang Zhihao and Cheng Zuyan's survey reveals that dictation teaching mode can effectively promote students' listening abilities [2]. So to a larger extent, students who want to improve their listening abilities can try detailed listening by combining listening with reading, speaking and writing. First, students should listen to an English material several times to get a general idea. Then they should listen to the material sentence by sentence. While they listen, they are supposed to write down what they have heard and try to interpret each sentence. Next, they ought to refer to the script and clarify the meaning of each sentence by consulting dictionaries. After a thorough understanding of the material, students may read the material again and again and try their best to imitate the original voice. Finally, after much listening, writing and reading

and speaking, students can go back to the listening of the material. What is most important is that they have to repeat the cycle on a regular basis.

I am not against listening for general ideas. But the truth is that if students want to truly improve their listening abilities, they have to listen to the details of every sentence, because to some degree language is detail-oriented, and the learning of a second language should be accordingly detailed. Take the word “apple”, a detailed piece of information, for example. If a language learner does not know the meaning of the word, then there will be a breakdown in communication; if a learner cannot use appropriate words or cannot make grammatically acceptable sentences, then the language created by him or her has defects, which defies the objective of language learning. In a word, constant detailed listening is of vital importance to the improvement of students’ actual listening abilities.

Listening combined with visual appreciation can better stimulate students’ interest. And the relatively interactive communication within a scene facilitates students’ listening comprehension. For example, if students merely listen to a short dialogue about “celebrating the Spring Festival”, they have to imagine the scene in their mind’s picture. But if the conversation is set in a visual background, students will find it easy to understand all the situations and thus greatly facilitate their understanding. Therefore, I highly suggest that students watch all types of video clips, films, soap operas etc. After they have finished the visual material with sound, they can pick up some classic lines and try to repeat them often in their spare time. To be accurate, they may taste the lines on a regular basis, and gradually bear them in mind. In this way, their detailed listening comprehension abilities are established and developed.

I show my uttermost objection to the listening strategies or listening skills to cope with English tests. For example, if three out of the four choices given are short in length, then the right answer is the lengthy one. Another example: Students are told to listen to the information that is directly relevant to the required questions and ignore other information. Such listening skills do help students guess out the right answers, but they do not work at all concerning improving students’ actual listening abilities. The result is that students may give decent answers to some of the questions without understanding most of the information of the material. I admit that some of the listening strategies or listening skills are important as they help students better understand a certain material. For example, students are encouraged to pay special attention to the key information while listening and to listen to the supporting details to enhance the understanding of the key points. Therefore, we should discard the notorious “listening strategies” that do not aim at improving students’ language abilities, and retain the listening strategies that aim to help students understand a material better.

Apart from the combined method for listening and the proper use of listening skills, we should not underestimate the social aspects of students as language learners who try to improve their listening abilities. My advice is that students had better find their study partners or study in groups, because “post-listening activities” are equally important. Students in pairs or groups may listen to the same material. After their listening practice, they may conduct many meaningful activities to improve their listening abilities. For example, one student in a group may just read a sentence and the other students try to correct his or her pronunciation or try to translate the sentence into Chinese or just to repeat the sentence. Through those post-listening activities, students may begin to understand every detail in the material and they will have less trouble comprehending it when they listen again.

## **2.2. Strategies to Improve College English Learners’ Listening Abilities from the Perspective of Teachers**

As expected, teachers play important roles in promoting students’ listening abilities. First of all, college English teachers have to offer an English-only environment for their students. That is,

they should teach or communicate in English in class so that students can keep listening to the English language throughout the class. Teachers had better continue to keep in touch with students academically after class. For example, they may look for suitable listening or video materials from the Internet and share them with students. They may also use a voice bar in a WeChat or QQ group to leave some messages. Teachers may say whatever they like using the voice bar as long as what they say is in English and is ideologically and morally right. The modern way of communication and the teachers' voices are sure to lure most students to click the bar and listen. If some students do not understand the teachers' words, they may just listen again and again or ask their peers for help.

The teachers' contributions to the improvement of students' listening abilities can also be indirectly shown in their supervision and management of their students. The above listening strategies or skills are of course very important, but what is more important for students is to apply those strategies to practice and to keep practicing on a regular basis. The improvement of students' listening skills depends much on students' autonomous learning through self-discipline. Teachers may inspire students into further efforts by supervising them. For example, teachers can assign students some listening tasks as their homework assignments. The listening tasks should not involve objective questions, as such tasks easily lend themselves to abuse. Teachers had better assign some detailed tasks based on listening such as dictation or recording students' own voices.

It is not uncommon for students to ask teachers such questions as to how to improve their listening abilities, which shows that some students are at a loss as to how to improve their listening abilities. Despite the importance of the listening strategies mentioned in the first part of the body, students will still be at a loss if teachers do not share with students the tips on how to listen well. Teachers should attach importance to the metacognitive strategies in students' English listening practice [3]. Therefore, in the first class, teachers are supposed to tell their students how to enhance their listening abilities from a metacognitive perspective. Teachers may tell students theoretically how to listen before they actually start their listening journey. Then after some listening practice, students may come back to verify the "theories". Gradually, students begin to deeply believe in these "theories" put forward by their teachers and will hold on to them, which will boost their listening abilities.

### 3. Conclusion

To enhance college English learners' listening abilities, the paper offers coping strategies from two perspectives. From the perspective of students, first of all, students' listening abilities should be combined with other abilities such as speaking, reading, writing etc. Moreover, instead of mere listening, listening set in the visual context such as video clips helps students to develop interest in listening and enhance their understanding. Third, "listening strategies" that do not aim at improving students' language abilities should be discarded, and listening strategies that aim to help students understand better the materials should be retained. From the perspective of teachers, first all of, they should create various opportunities both in and after class for students so that they can listen to English quiet often. Next, teachers should enhance their administrative abilities to supervise students' autonomous listening. Finally, teachers are supposed to tell their students how to enhance their listening abilities from a metacognitive perspective. By adopting these strategies, students are sure to make remarkable progress in their listening abilities.

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