

***Sound Bites for Better Teaching***  
***Listening: the misunderstood skill***  
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Listening  
Skills

Research has shown that of the four language skills, the listening skill is the one that is used most frequently in the time adults spend in communication: listening 45%, speaking 30%, reading 16%, and writing 9% (Adler et al. 2001). A quick examination of the listening strategies that teachers use reveals that those strategies are in fact:

- a) listening/speaking: teacher asks question and students answer (with a complete sentence!),
- b) listening/writing: teacher asks question, students write the answer (in a complete sentence!),
- c) listening/reading: teacher asks question, students find the answer in the text and read it aloud.

It is essential that the strategies that are used to develop the listening skills are designed to develop and to measure it accurately without the recourse of the other three language skills all the while being aware of the role that memory plays. Because the goal is to evaluate how well the students understand what is being said, asking them to prove it by speaking in the foreign language is in fact judging their listening comprehension by way of their speaking ability. Depending on their stage of learning, that is perhaps asking too much of them.

***Self Evaluation*** (no right or wrong answers)

- *When making oral true/false statements about a text under study or a picture being shown, do you require that the students explain orally or in writing why the answer is false?*
- *When asking your students oral questions, do you insist that all answers be in complete sentences?*
- *When conducting an oral multiple choice activity, do you expect the students to state the complete answer or are you satisfied with just the letter a, b, or c?*
- *Are you aware of the important part Total Physical Response (TPR) can play in developing and in evaluating the students' ability to comprehend the spoken language?*
- *Do you believe that the judicious use of English can be useful in determining the students' ability to comprehend what was said?*
- *Would you allow your students to answer your French/Spanish/German questions in English? Why?*
- *Have you tried doing the language/learning lab listening activities that you give to your students? Can you do them within the allotted time? How does memory enter into the picture?*

***TIP***

In order to practice isolating the listening skill from the other three language skills, challenge yourself to devote one full week to creating and to exposing your students to activities designed to develop and to evaluate your students' listening comprehension abilities, i.e., your students will do the activities without speaking, reading, or writing. I suggest the following: true/false, yes/no, multiple choice, identification, matching, TPR, drawing, acting, or whatever else your imagination produces. Include visual and verbal clues.