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English

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English Qualifications

B2 First for Schools

Developing listening skills for
Cambridge English Qualifications:
A guide for teachers



Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Who this guide is for | 3 |
| How to use this guide | 4 |
| Key terminology | 6 |
| The challenges of listening in a second language..... | 11 |
| Top tips for developing learners' listening skills | 12 |
| Preparing learners for the B2 First for Schools Listening paper | 15 |
| Activity 1 – Part 1 | 18 |
| Activity 2 – Part 2 | 22 |
| Activity 3 – Part 3 | 28 |
| Activity 4 – Part 4 | 34 |
| Extra resources and further reading..... | 38 |

Who this guide is for

Just like official examiners, teachers also spend many hours evaluating learners' language skills. This guide is for you. With lots of practical tips and real examples, it will help you to develop your learners' listening skills in preparation for the Cambridge English B2 First for Schools qualification.

About B2 First for Schools

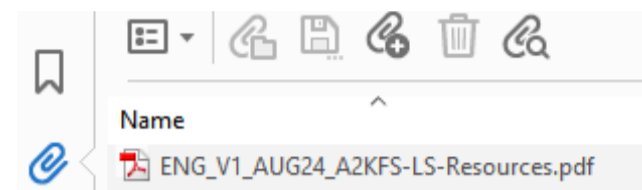
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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ One of the official Cambridge English Qualifications ✓ Tests reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, plus use of English ✓ Shows that learners have the language skills they need to communicate in an English-speaking environment, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expressing opinions and presenting arguments • writing clear, detailed English, and explaining the advantages and disadvantages of different points of view • following the news • writing letters, reports, stories and other types of text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Comes after B1 Preliminary for Schools and before C1 Advanced ✓ Like B2 First, tests learners at <u>CEFR Level B2</u> ✓ Unlike B2 First, is aimed at school-age learners, typically aged between 15 and 18, rather than adults ✓ Can be taken on paper or on a computer |
|---|---|

You can find out more about our B2 First for Schools qualification and other exams on our website. See cambridgeenglish.org/schools.

How to use this guide

To get the most from this guide:

- Try the practical ideas and reflect on how these techniques affect the processes of learning and teaching in your classroom.
- Open the attached **Resources pdf** and download the example exam tasks and resources in the guide.
- Discuss different approaches with learners in order to understand their preferences and needs, and to find out what approaches are most helpful to them.
- Reflect on your own listening skills, both in your first language and in any other languages that you speak. What do you find challenging? How do you overcome these challenges? Can you share any top tips with the learners in your own classroom?
- You can navigate the document by using the hyperlinks in the text and the buttons on each spread:



[Previous page](#)

[Next page](#)

[First page](#)

[Previous view](#)

There are also some other terms in this guide which are more widely used in the field of assessment. When these terms appear in this guide, you'll find an explanation nearby in a glossary box like this:

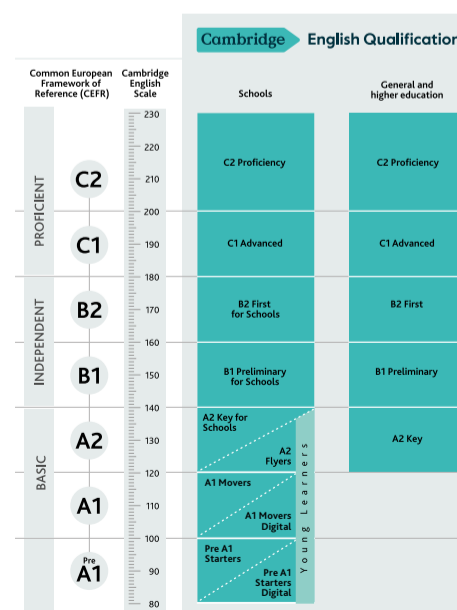


Key terminology

The **Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)** is an international standard for describing language ability. It uses a six-point scale, from **A1** for beginners up to **C2** for those who have mastered a language. This makes it easy for anyone involved in language teaching and testing, such as teachers or learners, to see the level of different qualifications.



CEFR scale





Key terminology

The study of listening is a specialist field and, like all specialist fields, there is some common terminology which might be unfamiliar or confusing. Learning to recognise these terms will help you to understand this guide, which will help you to develop your learners' listening skills.

What does effective listening involve?

When we achieve a very good level of listening in a particular language, we often forget how sophisticated this skill really is! The terms we use to describe the processes of listening are called sub-skills and they include:

| Sub-skill | Definition | Example from everyday life | Which parts of the exam test this sub-skill? |
|--------------------|---|---|--|
| Predicting | Thinking about what you are going to hear, based on what you know about the speaker, the topic and the context. | Your friend sends you a video from social media of an interview with an actor you both like. You immediately think about other interviews you've seen with this actor, what you already know about his latest film and what he might say about it in this interview. | Parts 1, 2, 3 and 4 |
| Listening for gist | Understanding just the general topic of what you hear. | You are sitting in a park and you overhear friends talking. One of them is talking about a recent family event. It's not important that you notice or remember all the details or words , but it sounded like it was a very happy event. | Parts 1, 3 and 4 |

| Sub-skill | Definition | Example from everyday life | Which parts of the exam test this sub-skill? |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Listening for key information | Identifying specific words or phrases in what you hear. | You are waiting at the train station, listening to the announcement with information about which platform to go to. You listen carefully because you don't want to go to the wrong platform and miss your train. | Part 2 |
| Listening for detailed understanding | Understanding the content of what you hear in depth, especially the opinions and attitudes of the speaker(s). | You want to take a friend to the cinema as a surprise for his birthday. You ask his sister which films she would recommend, since you like similar things and she will know if he's already seen them. You listen carefully to her explanation because you want to know what she thought of each film before you make a choice. | Parts 1, 3 and 4 |

Expert listeners can bring these four sub-skills together when they listen, so they can **recognise** what they hear and **understand** the meaning.

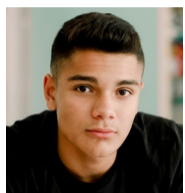
For example, imagine we are listening to someone describing a recent experience and we recognise the word *Unbelievable!* Our ability to match the sounds to the word is called **bottom-up processing**.

But the word *unbelievable* doesn't tell us much about the person's recent experience. Why were they so shocked? How did they feel? Angry? Amused? Disappointed? To understand what the speaker *means* when they use this word, we need to listen for more information, we need to know the **context** and **co-text**. This is called **top-down processing**.

| Process | Definition | Example from everyday life |
|--|--|---|
| Bottom-up processing = recognising what you hear | Recognising small units (sounds), building them up into bigger units (words) and then bigger ones (phrases). Sometimes called 'decoding'. | You ask someone for an address and they tell you it's number 60. You accurately identify the sounds and stress of the word <i>sixty</i> and don't mishear it as <i>sixteen</i> . |
| Top-down processing = understanding what it means | Using context (knowledge of the world) and co-text (what the speaker has said so far) to help you understand words that are not clear. | You're watching a fashion programme on TV. You think you hear someone talking about <i>string, summer, autumn</i> and <i>winter</i> . You doubt that you heard the first word correctly – you're not sure if <i>string</i> is a word in English, but you know that <i>spring</i> is a word. And you know that it makes sense when talking about other seasons. You also know that in the world of fashion, clothing is often categorised by season. You use this knowledge to make an educated guess: the person probably said <i>spring</i> , not <i>string</i> . |

Listening strategies learners can use to help them understand

Expert listeners can automatically understand and interpret what someone is saying, but this can be very difficult for the learner, especially when their language level is low or if the context is unfamiliar. This means communication can break down so the learner might need to use different listening **strategies** to help them understand. For example:



Diego hears the key words *past*, *library*, *next* and *5 minutes* when he asks someone for directions. He **uses his knowledge of the world** and guesses that the speaker is telling him to continue walking for about 5 minutes and keep going when he passes the local library.



Mahtab knows about sports but only catches the words *team*, *lose*, *10* and *players*. She **uses her knowledge of the topic** to help her understand that the speaker is describing a football team who lost their match because they only had 10 players instead of 11.



Yinxuan isn't sure if the speaker said *a lot of fun* or *a lot of sun*. He **waits until the speaker has said a little bit more so he can check his ideas**, and one of these options suddenly makes more sense.



Jana hears a new word when her friend is talking: *I don't really like ??? but my dad says I should eat it because it's good for me!* She can **guess the meaning from the co-text** because her friend has been talking about healthy food.

Listening strategies like these help when the learner has difficulty understanding by working with what they were able to understand. Over time, the learner will become a more effective listener.



Key terminology

Some words have a strong form and a weak form. The **strong** form is how a word sounds when it's alone, with no other words around it. For example, the word *as* has the same vowel sound as the words *cat* and *man*. But small grammatical words like *as* are often difficult to hear in connected speech because the speaker puts more stress on words which carry more meaning, like nouns, verbs and adjectives. So words like *as* become **weak**, which means the word is not stressed and the vowel sound changes. This change can make the word more difficult to hear.



The challenges of listening in a second language

Listening can be difficult, even in our first language. It can be difficult to understand if someone is speaking quickly, or if they are using words we don't know, on an unfamiliar topic. Physical and environmental factors also make a difference: if we have hearing problems, if we can't see the speaker's face, if several people are speaking at the same time, or if there is a lot of background noise – all these things make it harder to understand what you hear. Listening in a different language can be even more difficult.

Challenges for the learner

In addition to the general challenges of listening, there are other factors which can affect learners' listening in a second language. Here are some of the challenges your learners are likely to face:

1. **Language level.** Do your learners have a wide knowledge of vocabulary, grammar or idioms?
2. **Awareness of pronunciation.** Can they recognise the words and structures they know when they hear them? Can they understand words and phrases in fast and fluent, connected speech?
3. **Experience and exposure to the language.** Are learners familiar with the speaker's accent? Have they heard it before? How is it similar to or different from their own accent?
4. **Knowledge of the topic.** Are learners listening to somebody talking about a specialist subject?
5. **Learner motivation.** Are learners interested in developing their skills in the second language? How confident are they about listening? Are they aware of their own strengths and weaknesses?

Challenges for the teacher

Teachers also have several practical challenges to manage:

1. **Time and space in the syllabus.** How much time do you have to develop learners' listening skills? How long is the course, and will the learners be able to see their progress over time? What are the learners' expectations?

1. **Access to resources.** What materials do you have? Do you have audio recordings with accompanying exercises? Are these suitable for the learners' level, the exam they're preparing for, improving their particular weaknesses, etc.?
2. **Giving feedback.** How can you give feedback to individual learners in a large class? What's the best way to give feedback? How can you make sure you're developing learners' ability to listen, and not just checking correct/incorrect answers?
3. **Technology.** What audio equipment do you have? Is the sound quality good enough for a large classroom? Are learners studying on their own devices? Are they using headphones? Are they studying online from home, perhaps with background noise, distractions or technology problems, which you can't control?

These are not complete lists, of course. Many teachers will be very familiar with the challenges mentioned here and can probably add a few more from their own experience!

The rest of this guide is designed to help you and your learners overcome these challenges and improve their listening skills. There are several practical activities, illustrated with examples from the Cambridge English B2 First for Schools exam.

★ Top tips for developing learners' listening skills

The long-term goal of a learner is to become so comfortable with the different listening **sub-skills** in their second language that these become automatic, just like in their first language. This is a bigger challenge than just preparing for an exam, but the exam can provide structure and focus which will help both learners and their teachers. Developing listening skills is about helping learners to notice and practise all the small things which effective listeners do, and to use strategies to help them while their general listening abilities are improving.

General advice

- ✓ **Do ...** practise **bottom-up decoding skills** frequently. The best way to make these processes easier and more automatic is to practise little and often over a long time. You can do this by checking and drilling pronunciation every time you teach new words or grammar, or through techniques like dictation and focused listening.
- ✓ **Do ...** raise learners' awareness of how **top-down strategies** can help them understand more. You can practise these through techniques like using context to guess the meaning of unclear words.
- ✗ **Don't ...** focus *only* on meaning and language. It's also important to build learners' confidence in listening by praising their success and improving their self-awareness.

★ Top tips for developing learners' listening skills

- ✓ **Do ...** encourage learners to listen for pleasure. Listening doesn't always have to mean listening *practice*. It could mean learners sharing songs or podcasts that they enjoy, for example.
- ✓ **Do ...** take a healthy approach to exam practice. It's important to practise exam tasks formally sometimes, but don't make exam practice the only listening work you do. Treat listening lessons as an opportunity to help learners understand their own strengths and weaknesses and how to use strategies to improve their understanding.
- ✓ **Do ...** check learners' understanding thoroughly. In particular, ask them why wrong answers were wrong. Think about the pronunciation of the words they heard, discuss the distractors in the multiple-choice questions and work with the audioscript. See **Activity 1** for a practical idea about how to do this.

Before listening: preparing for the task

- ✓ **Do ...** make sure learners understand what they have to do in the exam task and how to avoid silly mistakes. For example, teach them how to prepare for a specific question, to underline or highlight key words, to read multiple-choice options carefully and to be aware of distractors, which are designed to make them really listen and think. See **Activities 1** and **2** for an example of how to analyse exam questions carefully.
- ✗ **Don't ...** just press *play* with no time to prepare. It's important to spend some time on pre-listening tasks so that learners are ready to listen. See **Activities 1, 3** and **4**, below, for ideas on how to generate interest in the task and topic before listening.
- ✓ **Do ...** check the technology works before class. It's also helpful to have equipment which allows you to rewind just a few seconds so you can easily find and re-play the same very short section several times in a row.

While listening: how to conduct listening tasks

- ✓ **Do ...** stay quiet while learners listen. Make sure they aren't distracted by your voice, by other learners or by background noise (if possible). After you press *play*, just let them listen and concentrate on the task.
- ✓ **Do ...** wait a moment for learners to finish thinking and writing after you stop the recording. Don't press *stop* and then immediately begin speaking – this will quickly make learners forget what they just heard and focus on what you're saying instead.
- ✗ **Don't ...** forget to **check** learners' predictions! When practising this sub-skill, it's important that learners have the chance to compare their first ideas with what they hear the next time they listen. This will help reveal any problems learners have with understanding, and help to identify what they need to practise to improve.

★ Top tips for developing learners' listening skills

✗ **Don't ...** interrupt a listening to check learners' pre-listening predictions. After the whole recording is finished, you can ask learners to compare and explain their predictions before you confirm if they were right.

After listening: how to check understanding

✓ **Do ...** allow enough time for feedback, especially when deeper understanding is needed. It's especially important for learners to understand why wrong answers are wrong, and sometimes discussion about just one answer can take several minutes or require several opportunities to listen again.

✗ **Don't ...** simply accept the first answer that somebody offers in class. Often the strongest learner will answer, which can mean the class moves at the pace of the most able learner.

✓ **Do ...** take a range of answers from different learners before confirming which is correct. Ask several learners for their ideas, ask if they agree with each other, then play the recording again so they can listen and check their ideas. Finally, ask them if anyone wants to change their original answer before you confirm which is correct. See **Activities 3** and **4**, below, for an example of how to use this approach as a final feedback stage.

✗ **Don't ...** ask pupils to report how many answers they got right in the exercise. This doesn't tell you what specifically they are finding difficult and it can be very demotivating. It can also be embarrassing for a learner who found a task much harder than their peers.

✓ **Do ...** give learners the chance to compare their answers in pairs before you ask them what they wrote or chose. This can help learners who may not be very strong at listening, or if they are less confident. They won't feel so shy about sharing their ideas with the rest of the class.

✓ **Do ...** ask learners to justify their choices before you confirm which is correct. For example, ask what they heard that helped them to decide on the correct answer, or ask them to explain why one option is possible and another is impossible.

✓ **Do ...** experiment with tech tools like **Kahoot!** in order to get a whole-class view of the choices that learners made. This also avoids making learners who made an incorrect choice feel uncomfortable. An offline and tech-free alternative is for students to hold up a card or mini-whiteboard showing their answer while they close their eyes so they can't see the other learners' answers! Some learners find this adds an element of fun and mystery.

Preparing learners for the B2 First for Schools Listening paper

The texts and tasks in Cambridge English Qualifications are designed to reflect real-world communication and to test learners' true abilities in English, so preparing learners for the Listening paper for our qualification shouldn't be very different from developing and assessing their listening skills in general. But of course, the tasks, assessment focus and timings for an exam are very specific and learners should have plenty of practice before they take the real exam.

To prepare for the B2 First for Schools exam, learners will benefit from:

- plenty of practice, in class and at home, of listening to the kinds of texts they will hear in the exam, including lectures, radio broadcasts, speeches and talks
- chances to practise exam tasks under timed conditions, just like in the real exam
- making sure they can write clearly on the answer sheet so that examiners can read their answers easily.

They also need to understand:

- what they need to do in each task in the Listening paper
- the role of distractors in the exam and how these can lead to wrong answers
- their own strengths and weaknesses when listening
- how they can improve any areas of weakness
- what strategies they can use to overcome doubts or make intelligent guesses if they don't understand certain words or phrases that they hear.

★ Top tips

After doing practice tasks, get learners to record their results and their feelings in a personal learning diary. They should say what they did well and what they found more difficult. Then they can refer back to these notes later in their course in order to see their improvement and consider anything which they still find challenging.

How the exam is assessed

The B2 First for Schools Listening paper has four parts and lasts for about 40 minutes in total, including 5 minutes for candidates to transfer their answers to the answer sheet (if they're taking the paper-based test). Every audio recording in the exam is played twice.

| | Task format | What the learner has to do | Which listening skills are being tested |
|---------------|---|--|---|
| Part 1 | 8 questions, each with 3 multiple-choice options | Listen to eight short unrelated monologues or dialogues (about 30 seconds each) and choose the correct option for each one. | Listening for gist and detailed understanding |
| Part 2 | 10 sentences, each with one gap to fill | Listen to a monologue (about 3–4 minutes) and complete the gaps in 10 sentences about the monologue. | Listening for specific information |
| Part 3 | 5 questions. Select the correct option from a list of 8 | Listen to five, short, related monologues (about 30 seconds each) and choose the correct option for each one. | Listening for gist and detailed understanding |
| Part 4 | 7 questions, each with 3 multiple-choice options | Listen to an interview or exchange between two speakers (about 3–4 minutes) and identify attitudes, opinions, details or main ideas. | Listening for gist, specific information and detailed understanding |

Important note: The example exam tasks used in this guide are provided to give you and your learners an idea of the format of the exam and what is being tested in each part. The tasks have not been fully pretested and calibrated like our published exams. To assess your learners' readiness for a live exam use one of the official sample tests on [cambridgeenglish.org](https://www.cambridgeenglish.org), or one of our official [practice tests](#). Go to our [Mock Test Toolkit](#) for tips on using sample tests.

★ Top tips

Part 2 is the only part which requires learners to do more than choose an option from the multiple-choice list. In Part 2, they must write something in a gap. This gives them something extra to think about so it can be a little more difficult to do. When practising Part 2, make sure learners check each question carefully by highlighting key words. They should think about the grammar to help them have an idea about the type of word to listen for. For example, here the word *some* comes before the gap, so learners should realise that the missing word will be an uncountable noun or a plural countable noun and could start with either a vowel or a consonant:

Cherie bought some (5) soon after arriving at the park.





Part 1: Task familiarisation

It's helpful to check with learners what they know and can remember about the format of this part of the exam when you are preparing in class. You can either check before you start Activity 1, or at a point in the lesson that you feel works best for your learners. Here are some questions you can ask.

- How many questions are there? (*Eight*)
- How many multiple-choice options are there with each question? (*Three*)
- What should you do before you listen? (*Read the question and think about the topic. Highlight key words in the question and the multiple-choice options, and think about what you might hear.*)
- What should you do the first time you listen? (*Listen and choose the best option.*)
- What should you do the second time you listen? (*Listen and check.*)



Activity 1: Listening Part 1

Aims: To demonstrate the format of Part 1 and what learners need to do to identify the correct answer. To practise analysing the question before listening.

Also useful for: Parts 3 and 4.

Preparation and equipment: Open the **resources** for the guide and download the example Part 1 task and script. In this activity, the class practise how to approach the task with one question. Make copies of the task for learners. Read the audioscript and be prepared for when the correct or incorrect answers appear in the recording.

Steps: Prepare to listen

1. Select one question from a Part 1 task and use the context-setting sentence to generate interest in the recording. For example, if the question begins:

You hear a teacher talking about a machine for making coffee at the International Space Station.

You could ask learners:

- What are some typical things you do every morning?
- Which of these everyday routines or activities would have to be done differently in space?
- Would you like to travel into space? Would you be a professional astronaut or a rich space tourist?
- How do you think they make coffee on the International Space Station? What problems do you think there are?

Adaptation

You could generate interest in the topic by setting up a brief discussion activity in the style of a Speaking Part 2 task. For example, show learners two photos of people working or living in unusual environments (such as astronauts on the International Space Station in one photo and people working on a research station in Antarctica in the other photo) and ask them to discuss: 'How might normal daily activities be difficult in these situations?'

Activity 1: Listening Part 1

2. Tell learners they're going to practise an example Part 1 question and they have to listen to the recording and choose the best answer. Give them the full question, including the context-setting sentence. Ask them to highlight the key words in the question and multiple-choice options.

You hear a teacher talking about a machine for making coffee at the International Space Station.

What disadvantage of the machine does he mention?

- A** The coffee it makes doesn't taste particularly good.
- B** It can't make the type of coffee many people prefer.
- C** Astronauts have to take great care when they're using it.

Answers: *disadvantage, taste good, many people prefer, take great care*

3. Now write the following key words from the recording on the board. Ask learners to match these words to the multiple-choice options they think they relate to:

*putting astronauts and
instruments at risk*

taste can't be faulted

most people's favourite

4. Ask learners which of the multiple-choice options they think is the correct answer. (Don't confirm which is correct yet!)

Answers:

*putting astronauts and
instruments at risk*

(C)

taste can't be faulted

(A)

most people's favourite

(B)



Activity 1: Listening Part 1



Listening 1

- Learners listen to the **recording** and check their predictions with a partner. Ask them if they would still choose the same answer or if they want to change their minds.
- Get feedback by doing a class vote, but don't confirm the correct answer yet.



Top tip

There are various ways you could collect learners' suggestions anonymously during feedback stages like this: If you're teaching face-to-face, you could get learners to hold up a piece of paper or mini-whiteboard with 'A', 'B' or 'C' on it and to close their eyes while you count all the answers so they don't see what their classmates chose. Write each letter on the board and write a number next to them indicating how many students voted for each answer.

If you're teaching online, you could use a tool like **Kahoot!** for learners to vote on their answers. Alternatively, you could simply type the letters and number of votes into the chat box or type them into a document and then share your screen.



Activity 1: Listening Part 1



Listening 2

- Play the **recording** again and choose the best answer. This time, ask learners to make a note of any words **around** the key words which helped them decide.
- Learners compare ideas with a partner. Ask them to discuss: Which words helped you decide on the right answer? Which words made you think that one of the other options could have been the right answer?
- Conduct feedback with the whole class and discuss the co-text around each option to identify the correct answer:
 - What does the teacher say about *putting astronauts at risk*? (*In space, the high pressure of coffee machines would spurt coffee in any direction.*) Does this new machine have that feature? (*No, it can 'withstand the pressure.'*) So **C** is incorrect.
 - What does *the taste can't be faulted* mean? (*That there's no fault, or problem, with the taste.*) So does the coffee taste good? (*Yes.*) So **A** is incorrect.
 - What type of coffee do many people prefer? (*Cappuccino.*) What is required for this type of coffee? (*Milky foam.*) Can the new machine do this? (*No, this is **a step too far.***) So **B** is correct.
 - Which words around these words helped you? (Suggested answers: **However** shows a contrast with the sentence about **putting astronauts at risk**; **but after can't be faulted** shows that the speaker is about to mention another, different problem from the taste.)



Activity 1: Listening Part 1

Audioscript

Making coffee in an espresso machine requires water to be heated to a scalding ninety-four degrees centigrade and then passed through ground coffee under high pressure. While making coffee isn't usually a big deal, it is at the International Space Station. Under zero-gravity conditions, the coffee would spurt in any direction, putting astronauts and instruments at risk. However, a new machine uses a state-of-the-art capsule system to withstand the pressure required to make coffee in zero gravity. Once ready, the coffee's transferred into a small bag and astronauts drink it through a straw. The taste can't be faulted, but making milky foam for a cappuccino – most people's favourite – remains a step too far.

10. Remind learners that in the exam they might hear words which relate to all three multiple-choice options, and they should be careful not to choose the first one they hear. They can use **co-text** like this to help them understand which option is correct.



Exam strategy

Learners might find it useful to apply these steps to any question from Part 1:

1. Think about the topic of the question.
2. Find and underline key words in the question and the three options. Remember that you won't hear exactly the same words in the options and in the recording.
3. Predict the correct answer.
4. Listen and check. Sometimes, information relating to all three options will be mentioned, so listen very carefully before choosing one option. Think about these questions:
 - Which key words did you hear related to each option?
 - Which option do you think is correct?
 - If you're not sure about the answer the first time you listen, try to decide which answers are wrong before you listen the second time.
5. Listen again and check your choices.



Part 2: Task familiarisation

Remember to check what learners know and can remember about the format of this part of the exam when you are preparing in class. You can either check before you start Activity 2, or at a point in the lesson that you feel works best for your learners. Here are some questions you can ask.

- How many sentences are there? (*Ten*)
- How many gaps are there? (*Ten*)
- Do the answers appear in the recording in the same order as in the task? (*Yes.*)
- What do you have to do? (*Complete the sentences with the word or short phrase you hear in the recording.*)
- Can you change the words you hear to fill in the gaps? (*No. This task doesn't test learners' ability to paraphrase – they should simply write the actual words they hear.*)



Optional warm-up activity

Play 'Back to the Board' to practise synonyms. One learner sits with their back to the board, facing the other learners. You write a word on the board. The rest of the class can see it and must suggest similar words or phrases so the learner with their back to the board can guess what word or phrase you've written. They cannot use the same words that appear on the board.



Activity 2: Listening Part 2

Aims: To explore the format of Part 2 and how the language in the task relates to the language in the audioscript. To practise listening for key information.

Also useful for: Grammar revision.

Preparation and equipment: Open the [resources](#) for the guide, download and make copies of the example exam task and audioscript.

Steps: Prepare to listen

1. Revise the format of Listening Part 2. Ask learners:
 - How many sentences are there? (*Ten*)
 - How many gaps are there in each sentence? (*Only one.*)
 - How many words can go in a gap? (*A maximum of three. Usually only one or two words are required.*)
 - Should you change the key words when you write them in the gaps? (*No, the task doesn't test the learners' ability to paraphrase. The learner should write the words they hear and not change them in any way.*)
 - What about the script? Will the words around a gap be the same or different? (*Different. You'll need to listen for synonyms.*)
 - Will the information in the recording come in the same order as the sentences? (*Yes.*)
 - Do all answers have to be spelled correctly on the answer sheet? (*It's OK to make some small spelling mistakes in the Listening paper, but it must be clear what the learner was trying to write.*)
 - What should you do if the speaker spells a word? (*Listen and write it very carefully – words which are spelled in the recording must be spelled correctly on your answer sheet.*)

★ Top tip

Candidates sometimes write too much, either by including unnecessary detail, or by trying to rephrase what they hear on the recording. Irrelevant detail can spoil what would otherwise have been a correct answer. Candidates should be reminded that no changes are required to the key information; no answer will need more than three words; in many cases they will need only one or two words.

Activity 2: Listening Part 2

2. Tell learners they're going to compare the words in a Part 2 task with the words used in the recording. Explain that first they are going to work with the first part of the audioscript. Give learners the gapped audioscript. This corresponds to the first five questions.

Audioscript (first half, gapped)

Hi! My name's Cherie Sullivan. I'm going to tell you about a trip I went on to the Smoky Mountains National Park with the other guys in my class.

First of all, let me tell you a bit about the park itself. Like I said, it's a national park and the idea of creating one there was first suggested way back in 1926. By 1. _____, enough money had been raised to buy the land and that's when work started on the park, which was officially opened in 1940 by President Roosevelt. In 1983, the park was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The park covers an area of around two-thousand square kilometres, which makes it the biggest in the Eastern USA. The park is ninety-five percent forested and thirty-six percent of that is what's called 2. _____ forest, where the trees predate European settlement of the area. There are also plantations of coniferous forest.

So what is there to see in the park? We started off at the 3. _____ near the main gate. They've got, like, exhibitions about the history of the park, including stuff about the Cherokee people who lived there centuries ago, but more interesting is the information about the wildlife. There are around fifteen-hundred black bears and two-hundred different species of birds. Strange as it seemed some of the rarest creatures in the park are actually 4. _____. We didn't see any of those unfortunately.

Then there's also a place selling maps and books and things, where I was able to get hold of some 5. _____, having stupidly forgotten to put mine in my bag. They actually have all sorts of souvenirs, but I'd say nothing out of the ordinary really.

3. Learners read the gapped script carefully and try to think of words and phrases to fill the gaps that seem logical and are grammatically correct in the context.
4. Learners compare their ideas with a partner.

Adaptation

If your learners need more support, you can break down the task so each learner has responsibility for only one question. This makes the challenge a bit more achievable and learners can support each other. Instead of steps 3 and 4 above, follow these steps:

1. Put learners in groups of five.
2. In each group, each learner has a different question from the gapped script.
3. Learners read their section of the script and predict what kind of word is missing and what that word could be.
4. Learners share their ideas with the rest of the group.
5. Now continue to **Listening 1**.

Activity 2: Listening Part 2

Listening 1

5. Play the first half of the **recording** so learners can check their ideas. They should read as they listen and write the missing words in the gapped script.
6. After listening, learners compare answers with a partner (or with their group, if you are following the steps in the Adaptation box above). They should check each other's spelling and grammar.
7. Get feedback from the class and agree on what words complete the gaps. If possible, project the script on the board (or share it on your screen, if teaching online) and write the missing words in the gaps as learners confirm their answers. Answers are given at the end of this activity and in the **resources**.
8. Now give them the first half of the actual exam task. They must fill the gaps here, taking care not to copy exactly but to check the grammar is still correct.

Smoky Mountains National Park

Cherie explains that the job of creating the park began in the year **(1)**

The term **(2)** forest is given to those parts of the park where the original trees survive.

The trip began at a building called the **(3)** just inside the park.

Cherie was surprised to hear that some species of **(4)** living in the park are quite rare.

Cherie bought some **(5)** soon after arriving at the park.

9. Get learners to compare their answers in pairs and discuss:
 - How are the words in the script similar to or different from the words in the task?
 - What did they need to pay attention to as they completed the task? (Suggested answers: *plural endings, verb tenses, articles.*)

★ Top tip

For some questions, more than one answer is possible – but the differences will be very small and won't change the meaning. For example, more than one spelling may be accepted as correct. Learners should always check their spelling when transferring their final answers to their answer sheet.

● Adaptation

For learners who need more support in filling the gaps, you can give them hints. For example, provide the first letter of the missing word, or tell learners which type of word they are looking for (such as a plural noun, a phrase with two words, etc.).

★ Top tip

Students need to develop the habit of reading not only the text in front of the gap, but also the text which follows the gap, which may affect their answer.

Activity 2: Listening Part 2

Listening 2

Now it's time for learners to practise the task with the remaining five questions, just as they would in the exam – but this time, they won't read or practise with the audioscript as they did with the first five questions. However, for reference, the second part of the audioscript is available in the **resources**.

10. Give learners the second half of the task with the remaining five questions. Allow them a minute to read the task and to prepare to listen.

Cherie's group chose to go on a **(6)** tour through the park.

Cherie found the **(7)** that she chose as a place to visit very impressive.

Cherie didn't enjoy the **(8)** that the group's guide gave them to try.

Cherie thought the **(9)** they saw at the agricultural museum was attractive.

Cherie was disappointed not to see any ancient **(10)** in the cave they visited.



Exam strategy

Before listening, learners should:

1. Think about the topic of the recording.
2. Read each incomplete sentence, including the words before and after each gap. Pay attention to the grammar on each side of the gap.
3. For each gap, think about:
 - the type of information it could be (date, job etc.)
 - the type of word it could be (noun, verb etc.).
4. Anticipate what could go in each gap.
5. If the answer is a noun, they should listen and check if it is singular or plural.



Activity 2: Listening Part 2

11. Learners compare ideas with a partner. For stronger learners, get them to predict specific words or phrases and write these in pencil under each gap.
12. Play the second half of the **recording**. Learners check their answers while listening and try to complete the gaps.
13. Get learners to compare their answers with a partner, then conduct whole-class feedback. If possible, project the second half of the task on the board as you collect learners' answers. If they disagree on how to fill a certain gap, write up all possible answers and they can then listen one last time to check and choose the right one.



Exam strategy

After listening, learners should read their completed sentences to make sure they are grammatically correct and that they match what the speaker said. They should write an answer for every question, even if they're not sure.



Activity 2: Listening Part 2

14. Play the **recording** a final time to listen and check answers.

Answer key

| Question | Answer | Acceptable misspelling(s) |
|----------|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | 1934 nineteen thirty-four | |
| 2 | old growth | |
| 3 | (the) Study Centre (the) Study Center | |
| 4 | frog(s) | |
| 5 | (some) sunglasses | |
| 6 | cycling (a) pushbike (a) bike (a) bicycle (a) cycle | cycleling cyclling |
| 7 | (the) waterfall(s) | waterfal(s) |
| 8 | (the) (forest) fruit(s) | (forrest) |
| 9 | (the) farm(-)house | |
| 10 | (wall) paintings (on the wall) | |

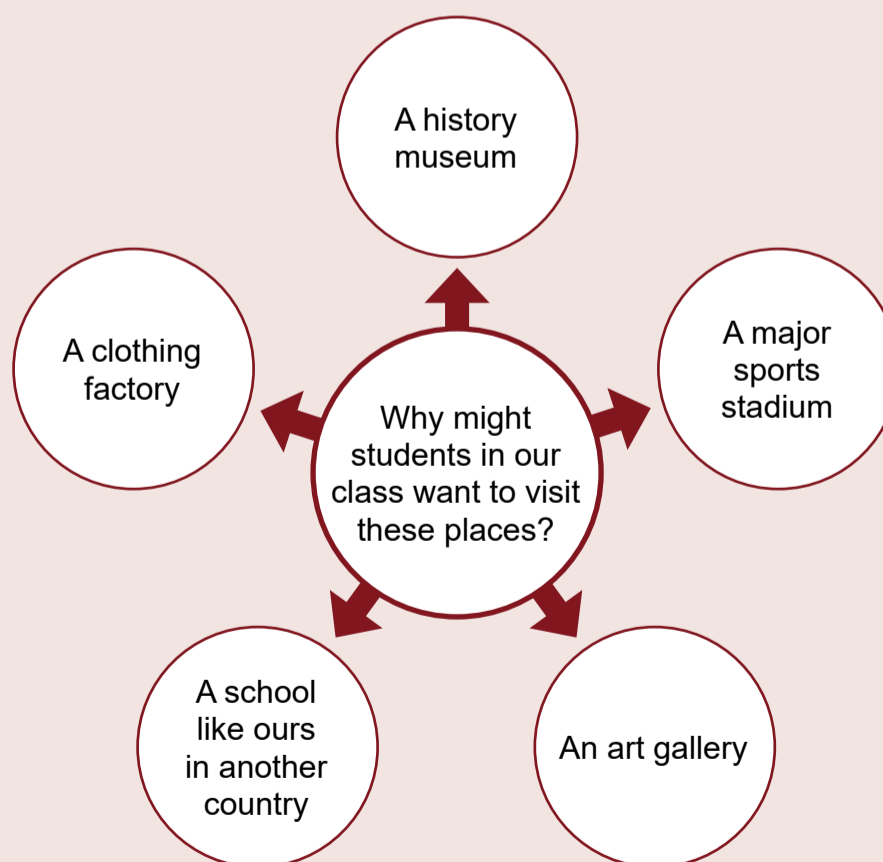


Optional follow-up

Give learners a collaborative task in the style of Speaking Part 3 to extend and personalise the ideas from the listening. For example, tell learners:

'I'd like you to imagine that our class is going to take a trip together. Here are some ideas for the trip:'

1. Give learners the handout from the **resources**. Put learners in pairs or groups of three and give them the handout with ideas for the trip. Tell them to discuss which place students in their class might want to go to, and why. After the activity, they will need to suggest two options for the class to vote on.
2. After a few minutes, stop the discussion and give the pairs another minute to decide: Which two trips will you suggest to the rest of the class?
3. Finish the activity by conducting a class vote to find the most popular trip option.





Part 3: Task familiarisation

Make time in class to check what learners know and can remember about the format of this part of the exam. You can either check understanding about the exam before you start Activity 3, or at a point in the lesson that you feel works best for your learners. Here are some helpful questions you can ask.

- How many recordings will they hear? (*Five*)
- Are they about the same topic or a different topic? (*The same topic.*)
- Does each recording have one person speaking or multiple people? (*Only one person per recording.*)
- How many options are there? (*Eight*)
- So how many extra options are there which you don't need? (*Three*)
- Can you use one letter more than once? (*No. Use the letters only once.*)
- What should you do the first time you listen? (*Listen and choose the best option.*)
- What should you do the second time you listen? (*Listen and check.*)



Activity 3: Listening Part 3

Aims: To understand the format of the Part 3 multiple-matching task, to practise listening for gist and detailed understanding.

Also useful for: Parts 1 and 4; reading skills.

Preparation and equipment: Open the [resources](#) for the guide and download the example Part 3 exam task and audioscript. Make copies for your learners. Read the audioscript and be prepared for when the correct or incorrect answers appear in the recording.



Optional warm-up activity

For exam tasks like this, which require learners to recognise synonyms, it is really important to practise *saying the same thing in a different way*. You could begin the lesson by writing some vocabulary about the topic on the board, then putting learners in pairs and getting them to take turns choosing one word and describing it to their partner, who must guess which word they're referring to. For example, for the topic of 'hobbies':

Write on the board:

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <i>hobby</i> | <i>game</i> | <i>cycling</i> |
| <i>tennis</i> | <i>music</i> | <i>guitar</i> |
| <i>painting</i> | <i>cooking</i> | <i>karaoke</i> |
| <i>etc.</i> | | |

Example of pair dialogue:

Learner A: It's something you play ...

Learner B: *Guitar?*

Learner A: No, it's a general thing. You play it, it has rules, sometimes it's a competition. Like chess or football.

Learner B: Oh, you mean a *game*?

Learner A: Yes!

Activity 3: Listening Part 3

Steps: Prepare to listen

1. Begin by generating interest in the topic of the recording. Put learners into small groups to discuss for a few minutes:
 - What skills and hobbies do you have? Anything unusual?
 - What skills would you like to learn? Why? (For example: mountain biking, baking, playing guitar, etc.)

Listening 1

2. Play the **recording** for the first time. Learners listen to all five speakers and identify what new skills they have taken up. They don't need to understand every word – they should just make a brief note of the main idea for each speaker.

3. Conduct whole-class feedback, checking the correct answers:

- **Speaker 1:** *typing*
- **Speaker 2:** *football (goal-keeping)*
- **Speaker 3:** *writing poetry*
- **Speaker 4:** *sewing*
- **Speaker 5:** *playing drums (drumming)*

4. Learners discuss in pairs: Would you like to try these new skills? Why/why not?

Listening 2

5. Now give them the full task to try and complete **before** listening, in case they can remember any of the information from the first time they listened. Let them compare with a partner before playing the recording.

Top tip

At this stage, the aim is to encourage learners to listen for the main ideas. This is about developing their listening skills and not testing them yet – so, unlike in the exam, learners don't need the specific task or questions at this stage.

Exam strategy

Before listening, learners should always read the task and underline key information. This includes **who is speaking** (in the example below, they'll hear five teenagers) and any **key words in options A–H**. They should think about what each option means and listen first for the general idea that each speaker expresses. Between the first and second listening, learners can try and match which option applies to which speaker, then listen to check their ideas when they listen again.



Activity 3: Listening Part 3

6. Questions 1–5

You will hear five short extracts in which teenagers are talking about learning new skills. For questions **1–5**, choose from the list (**A–H**) what each speaker says. Use the letters only once. There are three extra letters which you do not need to use.

A People have been impressed by my ability.

B It's been more fun than I was expecting.

Speaker 1

| | |
|----------------------|----------|
| <input type="text"/> | 1 |
|----------------------|----------|

C I haven't always received enough help from others.

Speaker 2

| | |
|----------------------|----------|
| <input type="text"/> | 2 |
|----------------------|----------|

D It hasn't had a big effect on my life.

Speaker 3

| | |
|----------------------|----------|
| <input type="text"/> | 3 |
|----------------------|----------|

E I've gained a real feeling of achievement from doing it.

Speaker 4

| | |
|----------------------|----------|
| <input type="text"/> | 4 |
|----------------------|----------|

F It hasn't been as difficult as people said it would be.

Speaker 5

| | |
|----------------------|----------|
| <input type="text"/> | 5 |
|----------------------|----------|

G I've been frustrated by my lack of progress.

H Other people have found my enthusiasm surprising.



Adaptation

For learners who need more support, you could remove or cross out the three extra incorrect options (in this example these are **B**, **E** and **F**) and let them try the task with only the remaining five correct range of options.

Activity 3: Listening Part 3

7. Play the **recording** a second time. Learners listen and complete the task.
8. Learners compare their answer with partner, justifying any points where they disagree. If possible, they should refer to specific things they heard in the recording.

Listening 3

9. Give learners the audioscript to look at and check their answers. They should highlight key phrases in the recording and connect these to corresponding phrases in the task. For example, they could draw connecting lines (in pencil) between the task and the script, if it's printed on a single page; or they could use different colours and highlight key phrases for **Speaker 1**, key phrases for **Speaker 2**, etc.
10. The marked-up audioscript is supplied in the **resources**.
11. Conduct whole-class feedback by playing the **recording** a final time and pausing after each question is answered. Ask learners to confirm whether they agree with each other's answers before you confirm which is correct.

Answer key

| Speaker | Answer | Key phrases from the script |
|---------|--------|--|
| 1 | G | I was so annoyed with myself I was still really slow |
| 2 | C | You can end up taking the blame my team's not been giving me the support I need |
| 3 | D | It's no big deal It hasn't changed anything |
| 4 | H | my friends think it's a weird thing to do |
| 5 | A | when I do something clever they all start clapping in admiration |

Exam strategy

It's important that learners listen for words which have the same meaning as the words in the options, because they won't hear those exact words in the recording. Learners can develop their knowledge of synonyms through simple games which revise vocabulary, such as the optional warm-up activity above.

Exam strategy

Speakers might talk about something connected with other sentences, but there is only one correct option for each speaker. This means learners should wait until each speaker finishes before they choose their final answers.



Activity 3: Listening Part 3

After listening

1. Briefly discuss as a whole class the interests of the teenagers they have just listened to. Be playful – for example, ‘Speaker 1 talks about typing! Is this more fun than playing drums, like Speaker 5? What do you think?’
2. Put learners into new small groups (different from the groups in step 1) to discuss:
 - Would you like to take up any of the hobbies mentioned in the recording? Why/why not?
 - What skills and hobbies do you have which you could teach each other?
 - What study skills do you want to improve before your exam?



Adaptation

This adaptation is designed to teach learners how to do Part 3. Alternatively, it can be used to provide learners with extra support. You can break it down and take a ‘team’ approach, working through the task together speaker by speaker. These teacher instructions are also supplied in the **resources**.

1. Give learners all the options (A–H) but tell them you’re going to focus only on Speaker 1.
2. Get learners in pairs to highlight the key words and look at the audioscript **for Speaker 1 only**.
3. In their pairs, learners discuss which option seems best.
4. Compare ideas with the whole class, then let them listen to check. You may need to play the recording several times, pausing for discussion between each listening.
5. When learners have agreed on the correct answer, write this down and cross that option off the list.
6. Repeat steps 1–5 for Speaker 2.
7. Finally, repeat steps 1–5 for Speakers 3–5 **or**, if learners are now feeling more confident, divide responsibility for the remaining speakers among the learners:
 - a. Some pairs focus on Speaker 3, some focus on Speaker 4 and some focus on Speaker 5. Give learners a few minutes to work through steps 1–5, focusing only on their speaker.
 - b. Learners present and discuss their ideas with the rest of the class.
 - c. Play the recording again so learners can check their answers.
 - d. For feedback, play each speaker again. Pause after each one and check the correct answer. If learners disagree, they can refer back to the audioscript to check their ideas.





Part 4: Task familiarisation

Remember to check what learners know and can remember about the format of this part of the exam when you are preparing in class. You can either check before you start Activity 4, or at a point in the lesson that you feel works best for your learners. Here are some helpful questions you can ask:

- How many questions are there? (*Seven*)
- How many multiple-choice options are there with each question? (*Three*)
- What should you do before you listen? (*Read the question and think about the topic. Highlight key words in the question and the multiple-choice options, and think about what you might hear.*)
- What should you do the first time you listen? (*Listen and choose the best option.*)
- What should you do the second time you listen? (*Listen and check.*)



Activity 4: Listening Part 4

Aims: To practise listening carefully for detailed understanding without being distracted by multiple-choice options.

Also useful for: Parts 1 and 2; revising grammar.

Preparation and equipment: Open the [resources](#) and download the example Part 4 exam task and script, including the version of the exam task with the multiple-choice options removed. Make copies of this and the complete task for learners. Read the audioscript and be prepared for when the correct or incorrect answers appear in the recording.

Steps: Prepare to listen

1. Begin by generating interest in the topic of the task – in this example, working at a museum. Ask learners to discuss in pairs:
 - Do you enjoy visiting museums? Why/why not?
 - What's the most interesting (or boring) museum you've ever visited? Why?
 - Would you like to work at a museum? Why/why not?



Optional extension

Invite learners to brainstorm ideas around these questions:

- What would make museums more interesting?
- How could museums attract a wider range of visitors?

If you have time, learners could work in groups to prepare a poster or presentation for a museum director who is looking for ideas about how to encourage more young people to come to the museum. They should decide what kind of museum to focus on, the reasons young people might not want to visit it, and suggest some ideas to improve the experience.



Activity 4: Listening Part 4

2. Show learners the question stems, but not the multiple-choice answers. They should look only at the questions and, with a partner, predict possible answers.

Questions 1–7

You will hear part of an interview with a boy called Lucas Edwards, who recently spent a week finding out what it's like to work in a museum.

- 1 Why did Lucas choose a museum for his work experience placement?
- 2 What surprised Lucas about the museum?
- 3 What does Lucas say about the paintings in the museum?
- 4 Lucas enjoyed helping the museum staff to ...
- 5 How did Lucas feel about being in the museum when it was closed to visitors?
- 6 Why does Lucas mention the museum trails for children?
- 7 Lucas thinks that during his week at the museum he improved ...



Exam strategy

This step reflects what learners should do in the real exam to prepare to listen. They have 1 minute to read the task before the recording plays. They should:

1. Read the main part of each question carefully, underlining key words.
2. (If they have time) Go back and read the options for each question.
3. Try to predict what they might hear.
4. Listen for the same idea to be expressed but not in the same words, e.g. Question 2 *What surprised Lucas about the museum?* In the audio learners will hear: *And was the museum as you expected it to be?*

When they listen, learners will hear options A, B and C referred to in some way, but only one of them is the correct answer to the question. The best way to prepare themselves for this is to think about the questions carefully before they listen.



Activity 4: Listening Part 4



Listening 1

3. Play the **recording**. Learners listen and try to answer each question in their own words. They don't need to write full sentences – just taking brief notes is fine.
4. Learners compare their notes with a partner and tidy them up into complete phrases or sentences. For example, if they wrote a brief note about tours for Question 4 'Lucas enjoyed helping the museum staff to ...' they might extend this to 'give guided tours' in order to complete the sentence grammatically.
5. Once learners have written answers to all seven questions, give them the full task with multiple-choice options supplied in the attachment. They should read them carefully and choose the best option for each question, discussing and explaining their choices with a partner.



Top tip

For weaker classes, you might want to play the recording twice at this earlier stage.



Top tip

In preparing for multiple-choice questions, it can be useful for students to answer questions in their own words before they look at the options. They can then decide which option seems to correspond most closely to their own answer.



Activity 4: Listening Part 4



Listening 2

6. Play the **recording** again so learners can check their answers.
7. Learners compare their answers with a partner and with the notes they took in Step 3 to see if any of their ideas were quite similar to the correct multiple-choice answer.



Listening 3

8. Conduct whole-class feedback by playing the **recording** a final time and pausing after each question is answered. Ask learners to confirm whether they agree with each other's answers before you confirm which is correct. Praise any learners who got the correct meaning even before seeing the multiple-choice options.

 **Activity 4: Listening Part 4**

Answer key and audioscript

| Question | Answer |
|----------|--------|
| 1 | A |
| 2 | A |
| 3 | C |
| 4 | B |

| Question | Answer |
|----------|--------|
| 5 | A |
| 6 | B |
| 7 | C |

 **Top tip**

Fast finishers could study the audioscript with the questions, making a list of synonyms and different ways of expressing the same ideas. These would provide good practice for vocabulary development and for Part 3 of the Listening paper.

 **Optional follow-up**

Give learners an essay task in the style of Writing Part 1. They could write this for homework or do it collaboratively in class. For example:

In your English class, you have been talking about work experience. Now your teacher has asked you to write an essay for homework.

Write your essay using **all** the notes and giving reasons for your point of view. Write your answer in **140–190** words.

Teenagers in many countries do work experience placements as part of their formal education. Is this a useful way to spend several weeks of the final year of school?

Notes

Write about:

1. working and studying at the same time
2. learning real-life skills
3. (your own idea)

Extra resources

You might find the following resources helpful for the development of listening skills, both in class and as independent self-study.

Lesson plans and resources for teachers

- A variety of [free resources for preparing learners for Cambridge English Qualifications](#)

Webinar recordings about developing listening skills

- [Preparing students online for Cambridge English Listening exam papers](#) (A2 Key, B1 Preliminary and B2 First for Schools exams)
- [Developing Listening skills](#)

Learn more about research into second language learning

Field, J (2008) *Listening in the Language Classroom*, Cambridge University Press

Cambridge University Press has published over [20 free and easy-to-read research papers about second language learning and teaching](#). The following may be of particular interest:

- [Giving feedback to language learners](#)
- [Specific Learning Difficulties in ELT](#)
- [Motivational aspects of using near peers as role models](#)
- [Personalization of language learning through mobile technologies](#)
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