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## Teaching Listening Skills with Digital Resources to ELLs

Ekaterina Arshavskaya

Utah State University, [ekaterina.a@usu.edu](mailto:ekaterina.a@usu.edu)

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## Teaching Listening Skills with Digital Resources to ELLs

By: Ekaterina Arshavskaya, PhD, Associate Professor of EAP at USU

**Description:** These are open-source instructional materials designed for intermediate/high-intermediate and advanced learners of English. The materials feature multiple online resources and help students improve listening comprehension by practicing note-taking skills and listening strategies in a variety of contexts (e.g., podcasts, movies, lecture excerpts).

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# Unit 1: Personal goals and values

## Handout 1A

**Introduction:** These online materials will help you better understand listening passages from various sources and develop note-taking skills in English. While there doesn't exist one right way to take notes, the Cornell note-taking method has been found to be particularly effective for college-level students. In this course, we will use Cornell notes and based on this experience, you can decide if this system of note-taking works the best for you.

One of the ways to help you improve your listening skills in English is through listening to the same passage multiple times with different purposes, such as **identifying the main idea**, **listening for details** and **signal words** (e.g., *first, second, for example, to summarize, etc.*). Try watching the videos in this compilation and/or your other classes at least three or four times. First, you need to get a general understanding of the passage. If you think you can summarize the passage in 1-2 sentences, try to listen for the more detailed information in your subsequent re-listening to the passage. Signal words can be particularly helpful for you at this point.

**Directions:** Watch the video on how to take Cornell notes and take notes as you listen. Make sure you watch the video a few times.

- [Tutorial on how to take Cornell notes by Jennifer DesRochers](#)



## Handout 1B

**Introduction:** In this unit, we will talk about personal values and goals. We will also watch the TED Talk *3 Things I Learned while My Plane Crashed* by Ric Elias and practice a new listening strategy – **predicting the content**. This strategy can help you activate knowledge related to a particular topic and as a result, you can understand the passage better. Here are some warm-up questions to prepare for watching the video:

- Who is Ric Elias, in your opinion?
- What things might he have learned while his plane crashed?
- Why did he decide to share his personal story with the audience?

**Directions:** Now, let's watch the video and check your predictions. Make sure to take Cornell notes as you watch.

- [TED Talk 3 Things I Learned while My Plane Crashed by Ric Elias](#)

**Extension Activities:** In order to help students retain new listening strategies and practice new vocabulary, students also create a personal website. *E-portfolios* facilitated by *Canvas* (a cloud-based learning management system) can be used as a personal website. For this unit, students start working on websites by creating a personal introduction page with a focus on personal values and goals. Also, they find a favorite [TED Talk](#) and start a new page with its information (including the link), summary, and a personal reaction (why they chose this video and how it helps them personally or professionally). They add a mini-dictionary with 5 new/important words from the favorite TED Talk (including definitions, sample sentences, and images). They allow the teacher and classmates to access their websites.



**Notes for Teachers:** Students can share their favorite TED Talks in class by presenting them to each other. They can use their personal websites for reference. As they listen to each other, students should take notes and then report back what they understood.



## Unit 2: Parenting styles and families around the world

### Handout 2A

**Directions:** Before we listen, let's check if you know the following words: *to donate, to master, a memoir, mesmerizing, nurturing, indulgence, rebellious, studious*

Now, let's listen to the passage and decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).

- a) *Battle Hymn of a Tiger Mother* is a memoir and a book for parents. T/F
- b) Amy Chua is a mother, a professor, a writer, and an entrepreneur living in China. T/F
- c) Amy Chua promotes "tough love" strategies in her book. T/F

Listen again and find answers for the following questions:

1. What is the Chinese way of parenting?
2. What is the western way of parenting, according to the passage?
3. What are the two daughters' names and accomplishments?
4. What is "the virtuous circle", according to the podcast?
5. In your own opinion, which parenting style is better? Why?

- [Tiger Mothers: Raising Children the Chinese Way](#)



**Extension Activities:** Students search the [npr.org](http://npr.org) website for an interesting podcast. They can be allowed to work with the podcasts' scripts to help with understanding the passage. The students summarize and write a personal reaction to the podcast they chose and post these on their websites. They add a mini-dictionary with 5 new/important words. They also share them in the class with each other. They can use their personal websites for reference. As they listen to each other, students should take notes and then report back what they understood.



## Unit 3: Science

### Handout 3A

**Directions:** Before we watch the video, let's check if you know the following words: *to cradle, floods, sediment, to predict, to prevent, muddy, flat, dunes, to sweep, particles, to deposit, banks*

Watch the video and take Cornell notes while watching the video.

Answer the following questions using the notes you just took:

- a) What nickname did the Yellow river earn and why?
  - b) What clogs the river?
  - c) What was problematic about the previous models used to explain floods caused by the Yellow river?
  - d) What was the scientists' main finding, according to the video?
  - e) Where else can the new model be used and why?
- [Tackling China's Devastating Yellow River Floods](#)





## Handout 3B

**Introduction:** Another listening strategy we will learn is **inferring meanings**. Oftentimes, speakers do not state their opinions or other information directly. Rather, you have to use your background knowledge and logic to understand the full meaning.

**Directions:** Before we watch the video, let's check if you know the following words: *complex, to capture, patterns, gregarious, tolerant, courtship, extended, solitary*

Take Cornell notes while watching the video.

Answer the following questions using the notes you just took:

- a) What other terms can be used to refer to pumas?
  - b) How was the study (described in the video) arranged?
  - c) What social behaviors of pumas surprised the scientists?
  - d) How successful was the study?
- [The Secret Social Life of a Solitary Puma](#)



## Handout 3C

**Directions:** Before we watch the video, let's check if you know the following words: *temples, heritage, to preserve, to document, initial, assessment, footage, humidity, vulnerable, drones, texture, distortion, utilize, archive, disaster, efforts, glory*

Take Cornell notes while watching the video.

Answer the following questions using the notes you just took:

- Where are the temples located?
  - How old are the temples?
  - What happened in August 2016?
  - What makes the restoration efforts challenging?
  - What is 3-D digital preservation, according to the video?
- 
- [Lasers and Drones Help Preserve Ancient Temples](#)

**Extension Activities:** Students search the [scientificamerican.com](http://scientificamerican.com) website for an interesting video. They can be allowed to work with the scripts (if available) to help with understanding the passage. The students summarize and write a personal reaction to the video they chose and post these on their websites. They create a personal mini-dictionary related to the video on the websites. They also share them in the class with each other. They can use their personal websites for reference. As they listen to each other, students should take notes and then report back what they understood.



## Unit 4: Beauty, health, and happiness

### Handout 4A

**Directions:** Before we watch the video, let's check if you know the following words: *tangible, to perceive, contemporary, ancestors, pervasive, nutritious, to evaluate, to evolve, artworks, to navigate, to neglect, shabby, monotony, aesthetically pleasing, impact, recovery, wards, factors, harmonious, inherent*

Take Cornell notes while watching the video.

Summarize the video in 1-2 sentences.

Identify three interesting details from the video to discuss with the class.

- [Why Beautiful Things Make us Happy – Beauty Explained](#)



## Handout 4B

**Directions:** Before we watch the video, let's check if you know the following words: *an antidote, to crave, impulses, hardship, gratitude, virtue, random, fate, reciprocity, to modify, to motivate, consequences, traps, to solidify, in a nutshell, caveats, to appreciate, insulting, mind-blowing*

Take Cornell notes while watching the video.

Summarize the video in 1-2 sentences.

Identify three interesting details from the video to discuss with the class.

- [An Antidote to Dissatisfaction](#)



## Handout 4C

**Directions:** Before we watch the video, let's check if you know the following words: *foundation, to affect, generally, harmless, environment, to discredit, to persist, threats, sensitive, unsettling, to cause, associations, current, robust evidence, unproven dangers, to compromise*

Take Cornell notes while watching the video.

Summarize the video in 1-2 sentences.

Identify three interesting details from the video to discuss with the class.

- [Could your Phone Hurt you? Electromagnetic Pollution](#)

**Extension Activities:** Students search the [kurzgesagt.org](http://kurzgesagt.org) for an interesting video. The students summarize and write a personal reaction to the video they chose. They create a personal mini-dictionary related to the video on their websites. They also share them in the class with each other. They can use their personal websites for reference. As they listen to each other, students should take notes and then report back what they understood.



## Unit 5: Culture and arts

### Handout 5A

**Directions:** Choose an interview with an artist or a regular person on the MET website and take Cornell notes while watching the video.

Summarize the video in 1-2 sentences.

Identify three interesting details from the video to discuss with the class.

Compare your views with those of the artist or the person you chose. Explain why they are different and/or similar (e.g., age, expertise, culture, etc.).

- [The MET Artist Project](#)
- [The MET Connections Project](#)



## Handout 5B

**Directions:** Before you watch, answer these warm-up questions:

1. Have you ever felt awkward due to some cross-cultural misunderstandings?  
What happened? Why?
2. What are the best ways to deal with these situations?

As you watch, answer the following questions:

1. What is the context? Where does the situation take place?
2. What kinds of cultures are represented?
3. What cross-cultural misunderstandings happened and why?
4. Do you think these things happen in real life? Why (not)?

- [Student Culture Project](#)

**Extension Activities:** Students write a script and role play a possible cross-cultural misunderstanding situation.



## Unit 6: Learning through films

**Directions:** Students watch short video segments and write transcripts (as they watch/listen). These segments discuss common daily life experiences, such as parent–child interactions, classroom situations, and job interviews. The students can choose a 1-minute excerpt from the segments below and transcribe them. They will need the teacher’s and/or a native English peer’s assistance to get these checked. They can also use additional symbols to represent intonation, stress, and other elements that they identify. After this exercise, they can role play the scripts.

- [The Pursuit of Happyness – Father and Son](#)
- [The Pursuit of Happyness – Job Interview](#)
- [Mona Lisa Smile – What is art?](#)

**Extension Activities:** Students choose a movie segment on their own and transcribe it.

*\*Adapted from Orientation for International Teaching Assistants: Integrating Drama for Communication by Dean Papajohn (2006) in Professional Development of International Teaching Assistants, ed. by Kaufman, Dorit, Brownworth, Barbara, & Burton, Jill.*





## Unit 7: Learning through music

**Directions:** Students are offered some background information about the musical *Hamilton: An American Musical* and then are asked the following questions:

1. What makes the musical unique?
2. Why did the directors choose to hire culturally diverse actors?
3. Do you think this phenomenon is possible in your country? Why (not)?

Students can then be provided with more historical information about the time and settings in which the musical is set. They can practice comprehending the songs' lyrics. After this, they can be provided with transcripts (lyrics) and they can practice the English language rhythm, intonation, and stress while listening to the songs.

- [Alexander Hamilton's Rap Song](#)
- [Non-Stop Song](#)
- [All Songs' Lyrics](#)

**Extension Activities:** Students choose a song from *Hamilton: An American Musical* and write their own lyrics to it. They can also perform it in class to each other.

\*Adapted from Martinez, O. V. (2017). *From Broadway to the classroom: Using rap, prose, and poetry for pronunciation*. PSLLT Conference, Salt Lake City, UT.



## Unit 8: Learning from lectures

**Directions:** Students listen to a series of talks and lectures on psychology and take Cornell notes. They focus on discourse markers (**signal words**) that the lecturer uses to help them better understand the lecture.

- [Professor Paul Bloom on the Psychology of Prejudice](#)
- [Professor Paul Bloom on Happiness](#)

**Extension Activities:** Students attend a lecture on campus, take notes and bring the notes to the class. They also report what listening strategies they used, what was challenging and/or easy about the experience, and set goals for themselves in terms of listening comprehension.

