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Introduction

Instruction in listening is as crucial as instruction in reading and writing. Listening permeates every facet of school curriculum, and the academic environment itself demands that children possess competent listening skills in order to learn. Active listening is necessary for following directions, understanding concepts, maintaining discipline and planning classroom activities. Effective listening skills correlate closely with such essential reading behaviours as auditory memory and reading with expression. In addition, research has proven that acquiring better listening skills (auditory comprehension) yields substantial benefits in the area of reading comprehension. Consequently, we all want our students to become better listeners, to understand and remember information they hear and to take adequate notes when necessary. However, accomplishing this feat often seems difficult, even elusive. *Developing Listening Skills* offers a logical, sequential, step-by-step process to help students in years 5 to 8 recognise what information is important, take effective notes and demonstrate their understanding through written responses.

Listening for Information

Every day we hear all sorts of information without seeing it written anywhere – loudspeaker announcements, radio ads and weather forecasts are a few examples. We need to attend to these messages and sometimes act on them. At school, listening takes on additional importance because a great deal of learning involves taking appropriate notes for later study and review. Knowing what's been said gives the student greater confidence to ask questions without the fear of looking foolish ('He just answered that about two minutes ago.'). In addition, the ability to take notes while listening is critical for success at high school and university, so the development of these skills needs to begin early in a child's educational career. Writing information down reinforces what a student hears and helps him or her remember it. Taking notes promotes active listening, and educational studies have shown that the cognitive processes associated with hearing, comprehending and writing provide the best reinforcement of material. The student guide pages given in this book will help your students establish note-taking skills using a variety of methods (informal outlines, semantic mapping, graphic organisers), each suited to a specific purpose. After using the guide pages about four times, the children should have an idea of the specific data they're looking for when listening for information.

Listening Level

A person's listening level is the level at which he or she can comprehend material that is read to him or her. Since research has established that a child's listening level is approximately two years beyond his or her reading level, the passages presented in *Developing Listening Skills* are written at reading levels that span years 6 to 9.

Building Listening Ability

To ensure that students possess the requisite skills to succeed with the passages, this book contains preliminary listening-building activities. These activities should take place prior to beginning the actual listening passages and essay responses. Also, research has shown that short, intensive-listening periods work best, as kids tune out when they must listen intently for too long.

Promote Student Success

Before beginning any genre, discuss the important characteristics of that genre. For example, before doing the first folktale, discuss with the students what a moral is and how a fable teaches a moral through implication rather than a direct statement. You may want to use a folktale from another source to demonstrate this point. Prior to the literature passages, talk to your students about the elements of literature: characters, setting, theme, main conflict or crisis, resolution and the resolution's effect on characters. You can use a literary work the students are currently reading to illustrate these elements. Before beginning any of the nonfiction passages (magazine articles, newspaper articles and famous person essays), ask your students questions such as, 'What types of information are found in nonfiction? Why do people read nonfiction? How are fiction and nonfiction alike?' Engaging in these simple but necessary preparatory activities will greatly improve your students' ability to master the passages.

How to Use This Book

The first four passages of each genre are for instructional practice; the final eight passages of each genre are for assessment practice. If necessary, you can modify this ratio to meet your students' needs.

Begin with the listening-building activities at the start of the book. When you feel the students have mastered the requisite skills, proceed to the passages. Since they build in difficulty, present the passages for each genre in the order given. Follow the administration directions closely, for they move from supported instructional practice to actual test-like practice.

You may wish to tape-record the majority of passages so that you can play them for your class. In this way, you will only have to read the passages once, and yet you will be able to use them time and again over the years. However, you should not do this for the first and third passages in each genre, as these will need to be actively modelled by you. For those that you do record, be sure to speak loudly, clearly, and slowly into the tape recorder to avoid voice distortion.

Although the genres are presented in the order deemed logical by the author, it is not essential that you do one particular genre prior to another.

Note: After you complete the first few passages of one genre, you may want to do the first few of another genre, and so on, until you have covered the first few passages in each genre. Then use a rotation to complete the remaining passages of each genre. This staggering will encourage the students to think critically in order to decide the type of notes to take for a particular passage.

Passage 1

Carefully model the first passage in a genre as a whole-group lesson.

1. Choose the genre you'd like to begin with.
2. Copy and hand out to students the outline guide page for that genre. Read aloud the questions on the guide page and discuss them. Expand on the questions given by offering examples of different ways the answers may be phrased. For example, in response to the question 'When?' the answer may be as vague as 'about 250 years ago' or as precise as '23 June, 1958', depending on the passage. Advise the students to be ready to record either type of answer. Also be sure to explain that not all questions on the guide page will always be answered by the article.
3. Read the first passage through slowly, asking the students to just listen carefully the first time through. Tell them that you will read it again, and that's when they'll fill in the guide page.
4. Reread the passage. Do a 'think aloud' to show students your own thought processes when tackling this task by stopping and saying, 'I think this is important. Is it one of my questions? Yes! OK, I'll jot it down.' Have them complete their guide page. At no time are they allowed to see the passage.
5. On an overhead projector, display the essay questions. Ask the students to refer to their guide page notes to tell you the answers to each essay question. Whenever they hesitate, do a 'think aloud' as you complete the page in front of the class. Model suitable essay responses, making certain to mention the necessity for capitals and full stops where appropriate.

How to Use This Book *(cont.)*

Passage 2

Give the students a bit more independence on the second passage.

1. Choose the second passage in the same genre.
2. Copy and hand out to the students the outline guide page for the genre. Review the questions on the guide page.
3. Read the passage slowly, allowing the students to write the answers to the questions on their guide pages.
4. Reread the passage and have them complete their guide page. At no time are they allowed to see the passage.
5. Hand them the essay questions. Tell them to refer to their notes from their guide page to generate their written responses.
6. Collect and score the essays.
7. On an overhead projector, display the essay questions. Read aloud an exemplary, average and minimum essay response for each question (*without* revealing who the authors are!). Talk about what made them exemplary, average and minimally acceptable. Discuss what would be unacceptable responses as well.

Passage 3

Carefully model the third passage of a genre as a whole-group lesson.

1. Copy and hand out to the students the graphic organiser guide page for the genre. Discuss with the class the purpose of the words, lines and boxes on the graphic organiser. Give examples of different ways the information may be stated. For example, in response to the question 'Where?' the answer may be as vague as 'in the Indian Ocean', or as specific as 'Melbourne', depending on the passage. Advise the students to be ready to record either type of answer. Also be sure to explain that the graphic organiser may not be completely filled up by the information given in an article.
2. Read the first passage through slowly, asking the students to just listen *carefully* the first time through. Tell them that you will read it again, and that's when they'll fill in the guide page.
3. Reread the passage. Do a 'think aloud' to show students your own thought processes when tackling this task by stopping and saying, 'I think this is important – is there a place to record it on my graphic organiser? Yes! OK, I'll write . . .' Have them complete their graphic organiser guide page along with you. At no time are they allowed to see the passage.
4. Next, display the essay questions on an overhead projector. Ask the students to refer to their graphic organisers to tell you the answers to each essay question. Whenever they hesitate, do a 'think aloud' as you complete the page in front of the class. Model suitable essay responses, making certain to mention the necessity for capitals and full stops where appropriate.

How to Use this Book *(cont.)*

Passage 4

1. For the fourth passage in each genre, copy and hand out to the students the graphic organiser page. Remind them of the purpose of the words, lines and boxes on the graphic organiser.
2. Read the passage slowly, allowing the students to write the answers to the questions on their guide pages. Then reread the passage and have them complete their guide page. At no time are they allowed to see the passage.
3. Hand them the essay questions. Tell them to refer to their notes from their graphic organiser page to generate their written responses.
4. Collect and mark the essays.
5. On an overhead projector, display the essay questions. Read aloud an exemplary, average and minimum essay response for each question (*without* revealing who the authors are). Talk about what made them exemplary, average and minimally acceptable. Discuss what would be unacceptable responses as well.

Passages 5–12

Once you have covered the first four passages of each genre, move to the test-taking portion (the last eight passages of each genre, done without giving the students the appropriate guide pages). Encourage the students to follow the format of their favourite guide page while taking notes.

1. Slowly, but with expression, read aloud each passage to the students. Tell them just to listen *carefully* the first time through. Tell them you will read it again.
2. They should take notes on important details the second time. Remind them to think of what was included on the student guide pages. Read the passage aloud to the students a second time, slowly but with expression.
3. When you are done, pass out the essay questions. The students may use only the notes they have taken to answer the questions; *they may not see the passage at any time*. Also, they must not know the questions prior to listening to the passage twice. The notes are not considered part of the mark and are just for their own use.
4. Collect and mark the essays.
5. On an overhead projector, display the essay questions. Read aloud an exemplary, average and minimum essay response for each question (*without* revealing who the authors are). Talk about what made them exemplary, average and minimally acceptable. Discuss what would be unacceptable responses as well.

Scoring Student Responses

To make scoring the essays as quick and easy as possible, adhere to the answer key's specific point value for each statement a student makes. If the statement is invalid or irrelevant, do not add or subtract anything. Total the points to arrive at an overall score, then refer to the rubrics given on the answer key pages for each genre to arrive at the minimum passing, average and exemplary scores.

Differentiating between Fact & Opinion

Prior to doing the famous people, newspaper or magazine article sections, make sure students can differentiate between fact and opinion. Begin by telling them this story and asking them at the end, sentence by sentence, if each statement is a fact or opinion.

Wendy looked out the window and said, 'It's raining.' (F) Katie rushed over to the window and said, 'That's terrific!' (O) 'No it's not,' said Ken. (O) 'I hate rain.' (F) Mrs Carter told them to take their seats. (F) Then she said, 'They're forecasting six centimetres by tomorrow morning.' (This one's both: it's a fact that that's the forecast, but the actual amount of rain is the educated opinion of the weather forecaster.)

Through guided discussion, help students 'discover' how certain parts of the story were facts and others were opinions. As a class, brainstorm a list of 'signal' words that indicate that something is an opinion. Be sure the following words are included in your signal word list: believes, thinks, best, worst, should, ought.

Next, write the following on the board or overhead:

Fact – something that can be proven true; an actual event or date; well-documented statistics (numbers or percentages)

Opinion – what someone thinks or believes; a personal judgment (best, worst, great, terrible)

Leaving the above definitions visible, have the students number a blank sheet of paper from 1 to 10, and then read the following statements aloud to the children. Ask them to write **F** for fact or **O** for opinion after each statement:

1. The First World War lasted four years. (*Fact*)
2. Our Prime Minister should be removed from office. (*Opinion*)
3. We usually go to school on Friday. (*Fact*)
4. Children should go to school seven days a week. (*Opinion*)
5. A short haircut is easier to take care of than a long one. (*Opinion*)
6. Her baby was born on 1 May at 9.20 a.m. (*Fact*)
7. Mt Everest is the tallest mountain in the world. (*Fact*)
8. YMCA stands for Young Men's Christian Association. (*Fact*)
9. My baby is the most beautiful baby in the world. (*Opinion*)
10. Bach was the best composer who ever lived. (*Opinion*)

