

TEACHER GUIDE

Reading and Listening

Reading and Listening behave a bit differently from the Writing and Speaking domains when it comes to what a learner can do to improve or *Power Up* with these skills. Often referred to as the “Black Box” skills (not easily observed), these comprehension-based domains require more exposure to written and spoken material along with application of specific strategies to aid in expanding comprehension (increase ability). While text type (text length and genre) and language complexity do play a role in comprehension, it is often more about how well the reader or listener can “guess” meaning from what they are able to extract from the chunks of language that they encounter. Unlike the productive skills, where application of specific structures and verb conjugations are clear indicators of higher levels of writing and speaking ability, receptive skills require much more language processing and “critical thinking” to determine what the author intended in their message, with even small chunks of language. Creating with the language (writing and speaking) allows the writer or speaker full control over the language that they can use/produce and is easy to observe and measure. Comprehension, on the other hand, is much more internal to the reader/listener and there are limited ways to check understanding, making clear levels of ability more difficult to identify and assign without some formal means of evaluation or comprehension checking.

Therefore, our approach in addressing these challenge areas is to share the core skills that are required to accomplish these critical comprehension tasks and give several strategies that can be used to increase ability with these domains on a consistent manner across all levels. The most critical take away from this is that it is necessary to teach both reading and listening in direct ways, showing how to apply strategies (modeling) that will aid in achieving higher levels of comprehension. Another critical point to consider is the amount of exposure that learners need to have with realia-based written material and audio samples, which simulate what happens in the every-day world around any given learner. In the following tables, we have outlined critical definitions of what each skill really entails and have included several strategies that learners should use to help increase skill and ability with these domains. You can share this information with the test takers as you feel it will be helpful for them.

General Guidelines and Teaching Strategies

1. **Make it a point to include on-demand comprehension activities with both written and spoken passages/audio of realia-based reading and listening tasks on a (more) regular basis.**
2. **Model, Model, Model. Take time to model what good readers and good listeners do. This will allow you to teach strategies, rather than just rote memorization of vocabulary and structures.**
3. **Teach learners the power of metacognition and why it will help them retain learning better.**
 - a. Think aloud protocol (TAP) – learners talk about what they know and don't know as they engage in comprehension-based activities. In this sharing, they come to recognize natural strategies that are used to facilitate and assist in comprehension.
 - b. Word mapping – learners can generate word maps that will build connections with previously learned and new vocabulary and expand their depth and breadth of vocabulary.
 - c. Research other metacognition strategies and implement those with your students.
4. **Assess reading and listening on a regular basis:**
 - a. Comprehension check: Ask questions that address the critical details of the text addressing: who, what, where, when, why, and how type questions.
 - b. Have learners write summaries of what they have read or heard. Simple lists of details are fine for lower levels and this can be done in either English for lower level learners or in the target language for students at higher levels.

The following table outlines general skills or abilities with Reading and suggests actions that will help attain higher levels.

What is Reading?	Strategies for Improving Reading Skills
<p>Reading is a skill-based activity that requires the ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SKIM (quick observation of the text to look for known vocabulary, general topics and formatting/organization of the text) ■ SCAN (looking for some specific details inside of the text, answering who, what, when, where, why and how, and using contextual clues) ■ Read for Deeper Comprehension (understanding main ideas, points of view, author’s purpose and direct facts in the text. Generally, able to comprehend at least 70% of the text or above – “Lexile approach”) ■ Apply Critical Thinking (reading between the lines and making inferences, based on the author’s implied meaning) ■ Reading is NOT decoding or translation. Translation is a much more complex and complicated task. Do not translate word for word, but rather, use the skills listed above to initially interact with the texts and identify all that you already know. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reading is NOT a passive activity. Always read with a purpose or specific focus in mind. ■ In tests like the STAMP test, read the context and the questions FIRST and then skim and scan the text to locate the answer. ■ Build meaning on what you KNOW in the text and let that knowledge direct your understanding. ■ Guess the meaning or answer from what you KNOW. It is ok to guess when it comes to reading. We call this “educated guessing” because it is based on those things that you do know from the text and helps to give meaning to those things that you do not feel that you know for sure in the text. ■ Slow down and think about the context and consider the types of things that you might encounter in that context. For example, if you see a context that states, “An advertisement in a newspaper,” you should consider the types of advertisements that might be found in a newspaper. This focus will allow you to activate specific vocabulary/topics in your mind and be better prepared for the text.

The following table outlines general skills or abilities with Listening and suggests actions that will help attain higher levels.

What is Listening?	Strategies for Improving Listening Skills
<p>Listening is a skill-based activity that requires the ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hear input stimulus (audible sound/language). ■ Identify sounds in terms of words, phrases and sentences or in other words “Language”. ■ Comprehend the language spoken or presented. ■ Listening is usually the strongest skill for immersion students and the weakest skill for traditional language learning students due to exposure to extended listening passages or tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Listening requires focus and attention. ■ Listening requires much practice to be able to differentiate word boundaries and deal with different accents and pronunciation elements. ■ In tests like the STAMP test, read the context and the questions FIRST and then listen for the specific answer. You are able to listen to the audio sample two times in the test. ■ Practice eavesdropping (listening to spoken language live or via media.) Take notes on what you do know compared to what you do not know as you ‘eavesdrop’. Select specific vocabulary to study and use in your own language or teach someone else the things you learned. ■ The elements that make listening difficult, and that you MAY be able to control are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rate of Speech – asking someone to slow down when speaking may help you better focus on word boundaries and assist in understanding. ○ Background Noise – eliminating background noises or distractions will help. If you are in a loud environment move to a more quiet location or ask for music or other sounds to be minimized. ○ Repetition – asking someone to repeat something will allow you one more opportunity to listen for specific details. However, if you ask them to repeat something more than one time, the speaker may change what they are saying to make it “easier,” when in reality it has now complicated things because they are adding new information. Also, be specific in your request and let them know that you did not understand a specific word or section rather than having them repeat the entire statement. This lets them know where the problem was for you and they can then just deliver that word or section.

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