

USING PODCAST FOR ENHANCING LISTENING SKILLS

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Abstract: This article shows how to use podcast for improving listening skills and Podcasts are now available covering almost any topic you can think of. I subscribe to about 30 different series, covering topics like science, films, history, teaching, language, and storytelling. There's something out there for everyone.

The majority of podcasts are free, and you can find them in a variety of ways. I find most of the podcasts I listen to from the BBC podcasts page, via the Apple Podcasts app (automatically installed on Apple devices) or through the iTunes podcasts tab, but simply searching on Google will also help you. For example, try 'film review podcast' and you'll be inundated with examples.

Key words: using podcasts, music, movie, imitation, shadowing.

The Benefits of Using Podcasts for ESL Learners

Using podcasts as part of language learning offers several unique advantages:

- **Variety of Content:** Podcasts cover a vast array of topics, enabling learners to choose subjects that interest them. This enhances motivation and engagement.
- **Exposure to Different Accents and Dialects:** English is a global language spoken with various accents and dialects. Podcasts provide exposure to these variations, helping learners develop a more comprehensive understanding of spoken English.
- **Improved Pronunciation:** Regularly listening to native speakers aids in understanding natural pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation. This exposure helps learners refine their speaking skills.
- **Enhanced Listening Comprehension:** Podcast episodes range in complexity, allowing students to gradually increase their listening comprehension abilities by selecting content that matches their skill level.

Choosing the Right Podcasts for Learning

Selecting the appropriate podcasts is crucial for an effective learning experience. Here are some guidelines to consider:

- **Interest Alignment:** Choose podcasts that align with personal interests, such as technology, culture, or storytelling, to maintain motivation and engagement.
- **Language Level:** Start with podcasts designed for ESL learners or those featuring slower speech and clear articulation. Gradually progress to more complex content as skills improve.
- **Host's Accent:** Initially, select podcasts with hosts who speak with a clear and easily understandable accent. Over time, diversify the range of accents to build a broader auditory comprehension.

- **Availability of Transcripts:** Some podcasts offer transcripts, which can be immensely helpful for understanding and following along, especially for beginners.

Once you've found a podcast you like, what can you do with it?

As a student, try these activities:

- Read the short summary of the podcast. Predict three things you think the presenters will talk about. Listen and check.
- Choose ten words, phrases or collocations you think the presenters will use. Play bingo. How many did you hear? If you listen to the same podcasts regularly, you will start to notice the same phrases appearing again and again.
- Play two minutes of the podcast. Stop and predict what you will hear next. Continue listening. Were you correct? Repeat this at a few different points in the podcast.
- Listen to the whole podcast without stopping. Write a short summary of what you heard, or record an audio summary of it. Listen again and see if you can add any extra information. Repetition will improve your confidence.
- Choose a piece of grammar you'd like to improve, like the present perfect. Focus on listening for it. How many times did you hear it? What contexts is it used in?
- Listen and repeat what a speaker is saying. Mumble it under your breath. Repeating this a few times can really help your pronunciation.

As a teacher, you could use podcasts in the classroom or for homework.

- Use a clip from a podcast to introduce a new topic. For example, if you're talking about the environment, try something from BBC's Costing the Earth series. For a topic on identity, search for programmes from the BBC Identity series from spring 2016.
- Play a clip from a coursebook listening, then one from a podcast designed for native speakers. Students should think about the differences between the two, for example the speed of speech, turn-taking, and how easy it is to distinguish different speakers. They can then assess how easy it is to understand, and you can offer ways they can work on the areas they had the most trouble with.
- Use excerpts from podcasts to focus on features of connected speech. You can clip them using free software such as Audacity or [mp3cut](http://mp3cut.com) online. This works well as a mini dictation activity.
- Ask students to choose a podcast to listen to for homework. You could give them some guidance or allow them to choose anything they like. For the first ten minutes of the following lesson, students talk about the podcasts they listened to, why they chose it, how easy or difficult it was to understand, and whether they learnt anything from it (language or topic-related). Doing this regularly works as part of an extensive listening scheme.

A few tips:

- As a student, don't be depressed if you find a podcast difficult to understand at first. Some presenters speak very quickly, and there may be concepts you have not heard before. You have two choices: keep listening and be patient – it may take time, but you will start to understand more; alternatively, choose a different podcasts – there are plenty out there!
- Listen to the same podcast a few times. You'll notice a lot more language the second and third time you hear it.
- As a teacher, think carefully about the level and speed of the language in the podcasts you select. They can also often contain a lot of cultural information that may be very challenging for

students if they are unfamiliar with podcasts or have not had much exposure to authentic materials. Introduce them slowly and consider your aims carefully.

Top Recommended Podcasts for ESL Learners

While there are countless podcasts to choose from, here are some recommendations that cater specifically to ESL learners:

- **ESL Pod:** This podcast features dialogues and discussions on everyday situations, making it ideal for beginner and intermediate learners.
- **BBC Learning English:** Offers a variety of podcasts focusing on language skills, grammar, and useful expressions. The episodes are short, making them easily digestible.
- **Luke's English Podcast:** Hosted by Luke Thompson, this podcast covers a wide range of topics with a focus on natural and conversational English.
- **All Ears English:** A friendly and engaging podcast that helps learners improve their listening and speaking skills through real-life conversations and cultural insights.
- **The English We Speak:** Produced by the BBC, this series focuses on colloquial phrases and expressions used in daily English conversation.

Conclusion: Incorporating podcasts into ESL learning routines can significantly enhance listening skills and overall language proficiency. With a wide range of content, flexibility, and the opportunity to hear authentic language in use, podcasts offer an engaging and effective tool for learners. By choosing the right podcasts, setting specific goals, and actively engaging with the content, learners can make substantial progress in their English listening abilities. Embrace the world of podcasts and unlock your potential to understand and communicate more fluently in English. By incorporating these strategies into your routine, you can effectively enhance your listening skills while enjoying diverse content from the podcasting world.

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