

# The "Tuning In" Listening Activity

Jeff Leinaweaver

[gungadin \[at\] avisnet.or.jp](mailto:gungadin@avisnet.or.jp)

Shinshu University, Asahi-Mura Komi, Japan

- Learner English Level: All
- Learner Maturity Level: All
- Preparation Time: 10-20 minutes
- Activity Time: 10 - 40 minutes

## Introduction

Many times listening activities are just that - activities which focus on right or wrong, understood or not. The building and cultivation of listening skills may be lost in the quest to accomplish the task itself. The following activity is aimed at constructing solid bottom-up skills while developing student self-reliance and confidence. This listening activity is not an activity for accuracy, but an element for true practice and listening experimentation.

During the listening task students will be asked to listen for one specific element only. This can range from names, animals, colors, verbs, nouns and lexical sets. This runs on a sliding scale and should be adjusted as skills develop. One word can be extended to small expressions, questions and answers or words beginning with a specific letter, such as *ÒpÓ*.

## Preparation

First, find a listening sample which best suits your class size and level. Next, decide what language item will be focused upon and draw a word web of ideas, themes and other topics that can be free associated. For example a listening about a flight attendant would create a word web that included - airport, airplane, travel, flying, uniform, intelligent etc. This is important as it helps to focus the students mind, activating their schematic knowledge. For the teacher, preparing the word web helps elicitation and controls the direction of the task.

## Procedure

Tell the students they are going to do a practice activity where there isn't an emphasis on right and wrong. They are simply practicing their L2 listening skills like they would practice a golf swing or musical instrument - through repetition, self-awareness and form.

First introduce the listening topic and write it on the board to begin the word web. Have students free associate while you elicit answers and fill in the web. Discuss the topic if wanted or needed.

Have students get out a piece of paper and prepare to write down the specific language item targeted. Play the listening two times (more or less depending on level, length of listening and item difficulty).

After listening have students compare what they heard with the word web. With new items they are added and discussed as needed. This is also the time for students to discuss problems they had, what worked and what didn't. Then listen once more to provide closure and wrap up all elements discussed.

## Additional Comments

The ultimate goal of this activity is to hone and sharpen listening skills to pinpoint accuracy without the fear of getting it wrong. The student must be given the opportunity to see their progress and lessen the fear of listening activities. It is an activity to be practiced over many classes as a brief exercise or lengthy workout. It's up to you and your class dynamics.

Activating students' background knowledge via the word webs is crucial as it helps students with learning about the prediction of language in many circumstances.

As students become used to this listening activity, gradually decrease the teacher-centered web exercise to a group, pair and individual activity. Eventually challenge students to authentic listening activities where they must predict language in their own minds. Hopefully this will become an automatic process for your students, so when they leave the classroom and enter an L2 environment they will be able to deftly enter a listening situation with confidence and self-reliance.

---

The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. IV, No. 6, June 1998

<http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/>

---