

# Detailed Listening

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View from Museum of Tropical Qld



Water front along The Strand

Photos Hazel, 2002

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## Rationale

- Many students (and teachers) believe that it is necessary to understand only the general gist of a spoken text.
- But unstressed syllables & words are difficult to hear and carry much of the meaning in English.
- Contractions are also hard to hear and interpret.
- Some native speakers with literacy problems also have difficulties with auditory processing. So these issues are likely to be applicable to them as well as to EAL/D students.
- My students frequently respond initially to the exercises I'm going to show you here with "It's hard, teacher!" But by the end of the term they are starting to exclaim "My listening is a LOT better now!"

## General Gist

This is of course a very important starting point with all classes.

When the text is played the first time, I have a discussion with the class and ask some general comprehension questions to establish whether they do in fact grasp the general gist of the meaning.

## Unstressed syllables & words

Almost every English word with more than one syllable has at least one unstressed syllable.

Every sentence has stressed & unstressed words. These are hard to hear/interpret and misinterpreting them can completely change the meaning. Baby talk provides lots of clear examples of unstressed syllables:

'nana (*banana*); 'puta (*computer*)

Final consonants:

*band* or *bent*?

(In this case the problem is exacerbated by the similarity of the /æ/ and /ɛ/ sounds.)

Final syllables:

*fourteen* or *forty*?

## Contractions

Unstressed contractions are also difficult to hear and can reverse the whole meaning.

The **teacher's here**.

or

The **teacher isn't here**.

## Exercise design

I'm going to create a text with words missing, which the students need to fill in from listening to the spoken text. Some of these missing words will be content words, which are relatively easy to hear. Others will be unstressed function words, which carry a surprising proportion of the meaning.

My preparation is as follows:

- Copy a section of the text into new document.
- Double space (Ctrl 2) or 1.5 space (Ctrl 5) so that the text is not cramped and students have plenty of room to insert their answers.
- Remove every third word and replace with dashes to represent letters.  
2 underlines: \_\_\_  
2 spaces between letters: \_\_\_ \_\_\_
- To create a harder exercise remove every second word or two words out of every three. For the most confident/competent students remove the majority of the words, leaving only one here and there to help keep the place in the text. Put five or six spaces between missing words:  
\_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_     \_\_\_ \_\_\_
- Check the ends of lines - the computer interprets a space as the end of a word and will wrap accordingly.  
*the* = \_\_\_ \_\_\_ \_\_\_

- but it can become:

— —

—

## Using the exercise

### 1. Usual routine:

Listen to the whole passage.

Ask students general questions.

Discuss generalities of passage.

I often do this type of listening exercise after reading the passage as part of a longer text and doing substantial exercises on vocabulary, sentence structure and content. This thoroughly familiarises students with the vocabulary and subject matter before they start the listening exercise.

### 2. Hand out listening exercise:

a) For an inexperienced, very low level class I project the exercise onto the white board so that we can do it as joint class exercise.

b) With a more competent/confident class I use two or even three levels of the exercise to allow for widely varying individual differences in listening skills.

I allow each student to decide which level of difficulty s/he wants to attempt. The first time many students seriously over- or under- estimate their own competence, sometimes to the extent that I encourage them to swap versions during the exercise. By the time they attempt a second exercise of this type, they are generally more realistic in their choice of level.

### 3. Play each phrase as many times as the students need until they can hear each word.

Continue through the whole text in this way.

Replay the whole text once to allow students to check their work.

Hand out the full written text for the students to mark their own work.

Replay the whole spoken text again.

Then remove all written copies of the text and listen again from the beginning. Most of the class will hear virtually every word at this point.

### Examples from:

Davidson, Hazel & Court Dorothy: *The Great South Land Workbook, Second Edition*, 2015 Sugarbag on Damper Publishing, ISBN 978-0-9872737-7-2

Note: I have quoted here only part of each one-page exercise. I have provided the original text at each level.

*Easy level, Original text:*

### **In the Beginning**

The Aborigines came to Australia from Asia more than 40,000 years ago. We think they came in little rafts. Later visitors came from Indonesia every year to fish.

#### **Exercises – Easy, Page 16**

19. Listen 

### **\_ \_ the Beginning**

\_ \_ \_ Aborigines came \_ \_ Australia from

\_ \_ \_ \_ more than 40,000 \_ \_ \_ \_ ago.

We \_ \_ \_ \_ they came \_ \_ little rafts.

\_ \_ \_ \_ visitors came \_ \_ \_ \_ Indonesia

every \_ \_ \_ \_ to fish.

*Medium level, Original text:*

### **Ancient Times**

The first people in Australia were the Aborigines. We think they came from Asia on rafts. They came at least 40,000 years ago. The world was colder then. There was more land and less sea. Thousands of years later fishermen visited the north of Australia from Indonesia. They came every year for about 200 years.

## Exercises – *Medium*, Page 10

### 14a Listen

#### Ancient \_\_\_\_\_

The first \_\_\_\_\_ in Australia \_\_\_\_\_ the Aborigines. \_\_\_\_\_ think they \_\_\_\_\_ from Asia \_\_\_\_\_ rafts. They \_\_\_\_\_ at least 40,000 \_\_\_\_\_ ago. The \_\_\_\_\_ was colder \_\_\_\_\_ . There was \_\_\_\_\_ land and \_\_\_\_\_ sea. Thousands \_\_\_\_\_ years later \_\_\_\_\_ visited the \_\_\_\_\_ of Australia \_\_\_\_\_ Indonesia. They \_\_\_\_\_ every year \_\_\_\_\_ about 200 years. \_\_\_\_\_ met the \_\_\_\_\_ .

## Exercises – *Medium*, Page 11

### 14b Listen

#### Times

\_\_\_\_\_ first \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ were \_\_\_\_\_ Aborigines. \_\_\_\_\_ think \_\_\_\_\_ came \_\_\_\_\_ Asia \_\_\_\_\_ rafts. \_\_\_\_\_ came \_\_\_\_\_ least 40,000 \_\_\_\_\_ ago. \_\_\_\_\_ world \_\_\_\_\_ colder \_\_\_\_\_ . There \_\_\_\_\_ more \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ sea. \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ later \_\_\_\_\_ visited \_\_\_\_\_ north \_\_\_\_\_ Australia \_\_\_\_\_ Indonesia. \_\_\_\_\_ came \_\_\_\_\_ year \_\_\_\_\_ about 200 \_\_\_\_\_ .

*Hard* level, Original Text:

#### The earliest days

The first people in Australia were the Aborigines. Scientists believe they came from Asia at least 40,000 years ago. They came across the sea in small boats or rafts when the sea level was lower and Australia

was closer to Asia. We think they came at several different times. Each group probably pushed the previous group further south until there were people living in the whole of Australia.

### Exercises – *Hard*, Page 11

#### 14a Listen

#### The Earliest \_\_\_\_\_

The first \_\_\_\_\_ in Australia \_\_\_\_\_ the Aborigines.  
\_\_\_\_\_ believe they \_\_\_\_\_ from Asia \_\_\_\_\_ least 40,000  
years \_\_\_\_\_. They came \_\_\_\_\_ the sea \_\_\_\_\_ small boats \_\_\_\_\_ rafts  
when \_\_\_\_\_ sea level \_\_\_\_\_ lower and \_\_\_\_\_ was closer  
\_\_\_\_\_ Asia. We \_\_\_\_\_ they came \_\_\_\_\_ several different \_\_\_\_\_.  
Each group \_\_\_\_\_ pushed the \_\_\_\_\_ group  
further \_\_\_\_\_ until there \_\_\_\_\_ people living \_\_\_\_\_ the whole \_\_\_\_\_  
Australia.

### Exercises – *Hard*, Page 12

#### 14b Listen

#### The \_\_\_\_\_ Days

\_\_\_\_\_ first \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ were \_\_\_\_\_  
Aborigines. \_\_\_\_\_ believe \_\_\_\_\_ came \_\_\_\_\_  
Asia \_\_\_\_\_ least 40,000 \_\_\_\_\_ ago. \_\_\_\_\_ came \_\_\_\_\_ the  
\_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ boats \_\_\_\_\_ rafts \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ level \_\_\_\_\_  
lower \_\_\_\_\_ Australia \_\_\_\_\_ closer \_\_\_\_\_ Asia. \_\_\_\_\_ think \_\_\_\_\_ came  
\_\_\_\_\_ several \_\_\_\_\_ times. \_\_\_\_\_ group  
\_\_\_\_\_ pushed \_\_\_\_\_ previous \_\_\_\_\_ further  
\_\_\_\_\_ until \_\_\_\_\_ were \_\_\_\_\_ living \_\_\_\_\_ the  
\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

