

1.4 The listening strategies and skills you need

Managing the flow of information

The IELTS Listening Test sends an intense flow of spoken information to your brain for processing. It is essential to manage this torrent of words while you are doing the test and not let it wash over you. The strategies and skills in this section will help you to approach the Listening Test in the most effective way. Specifically, this section will help teach you how to:

- ▼ listen for the specific information you need to answer the questions
- ▼ focus on more than one question at a time while you are listening
- ▼ match what you read on the question paper with what you hear on the recording.

Listening for specific information

It is not necessary to comprehend every word in every section of the Listening Test. Of course, you will listen *to* every word in the recording, but you don't need to listen *for* every word.

What is the difference between 'listening *to*' something and 'listening *for*' something?

Listening to	You hear the words. You listen carefully to everything that is being said. This is passive listening .
Listening for	You are <i>waiting</i> to hear something. You are ready to catch a specific piece of information. This is active listening .

In the Listening Test you only need to listen for the *specific information that answers the question*. The strategy of listening for specific information is similar to 'scanning' when you are reading (see *Focusing on IELTS: Reading and Writing Skills*, page 32). As with scanning, you focus on catching one piece of information, not all of the information.

Predicting

The key to listening for specific information is predicting the type of information that you need to listen for. Through predicting you can activate your broad background knowledge about a topic. Then listening to an extended recording about this topic will become much easier. This is a useful strategy for all question types in the Listening Test.

For example, you read the following question on the question paper:

Why did Martin leave work early?

Before you hear the recording you can predict that there might be a reason given, using words like *because* or *so*, and perhaps information given about being ill, having an appointment or being tired.

It is important to make good use of the 30 seconds of silence the recording gives you for each set of questions. The recording will say something like: 'First you have some time to look at questions x to y.' As quickly as possible, read the questions and decide what kind of information you will listen for.

For example, with multiple-choice questions you could identify the differences in the different answers and then decide what to listen for.

Example

How many Canadian speakers will attend the conference?

- A 20
- B 30
- C 25

For this question you know you need to be ready to listen for just one piece of information: a *number*. When the recording starts, you expect to hear something like: 'There will be (*number*) Canadian speakers at the conference.'

Sometimes you need to listen for two pieces of information.

Example

What type of accommodation does he want to rent?

- A a two-bedroom house
- B a one-bedroom apartment
- C a three-bedroom apartment

You can see that the answers in this question differ in two ways. You have to listen for two pieces of information:

- 1 Does he want a house or an apartment?
- 2 How many bedrooms does he want?

Exercise 8 Listening for specific information

What would you listen for if you saw the following questions? In the middle column, predict the type of information needed. The first one has been done for you as an example.

continued ►



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	Information needed	Answer
1 When is Bill going to finish his assignment?	<i>A time/a day</i>	
2 Why did he enjoy his assignment?		
3 What proportion of university students are female?		
4 How many women Vice-Chancellors are there?		
5 What part of his assignment remains unfinished?		

Now listen to the recording and write your answers in the final column.

Identifying key words

One practical way to help you predict what information to listen for is to underline or highlight key parts of the question. When you read the questions, underline or highlight the words that ask for the information. These could include question words (usually *wh*-words, such as *what*) and nouns. Words that join pieces of information together, such as *and*, *of*, *the* and *so*, are not usually question words. Verbs such as forms of the verbs *to be* (for example, *is* and *was*) or *to do* (*do*, *did*, etc) are not usually key words.

Examples

Where is the computer?

What is the advantage of using solar power?

What are the two main causes of an ageing population?

When will the conference begin?

Exercise 9 Identifying key words

Take 30 seconds to look at the questions, underline or highlight the key words and get ready to listen to the recording.

Now listen to the recording and answer the questions.

Write NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS for each answer.

- 1 At what time did the robbery take place?
- 2 What is the name of the robbed bank?
- 3 How many customers were in the bank at the time of the robbery?
- 4 How many people were involved in robbing the bank?
- 5 What telephone number should people call to give information?



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