

ESOL LISTENING STRATEGIES

When you first hear the speed and level of vocabulary of the academic English spoken at Massey, the first thing to remember is not to panic! Panic = less understanding.

Do not worry too much if you feel you are missing a lot of information when you first attend lectures and tutorials. It will take time to get used to this new listening environment. At first, you may have to rely a little on your classmates' notes, recommended readings, study guides, and additional assistance and advice from lecturers and tutors.

Short-term strategies

You will develop good academic listening skills if you regularly put yourself into academic listening environments (lectures, tutorials, study groups). In other words, good academic listening skills come from a lot of practice.

However, in the meantime, here are some short-term strategies to help you.

- **Prepare.** Ensure you are familiar with the material and the vocabulary before attending a lecture or a tutorial. Do this by actively reading and making notes.

Have a positive attitude when you enter the lecture room.

Pay attention. Do not get distracted.

Listen for the main points. Do not worry too much about detail.

Listen for signposts. For example, “The most important thing to remember is...”, “I cannot emphasise this enough...” “First of all,...” “And finally, ...” “To sum up,...”.

Lip read. Make sure you can hear and see the speaker's mouth and facial expressions, as well as their body language.

Listen to the message, not the language. Listen for meaningful chunks of language - even if you do not understand or cannot hear the prepositions and articles (the smaller, less meaningful words) in between.

Pay particular attention to visual cues: Over-Head Transparencies (OHTs), the board, PowerPoint presentations, videos, and slides.

Ask for help from lecturers or tutors. If you have a lot of questions, it is better to do this after the lecture or arrange a suitable meeting time.

Question. Ask yourself questions about the topic as you listen.

Predict. Try to predict what the lecturer will say.

- **Make space** in your notes to fill in later. For example, leave gaps for information you missed.

Form a study group. You can help each other to fill in the gaps in the notes you have missed from lectures.

Keep vocabulary lists. Write down vocabulary that you often hear in your lecturers and tutorials. Refer to a specialist dictionary for your field such as a dictionary of social policy, or a management dictionary.

- **Source language resources.** Make good use of English language learning books and tapes that can help you to improve your listening comprehension (including pronunciation).

Practice listening to the TV, radio, cinema, and sound files on the internet.

Practice! Make an effort to talk to English speakers. Expose yourself to spoken academic English as much as you can.

Use pronunciation references. An English-English dictionary with a CD-ROM can help you become familiar with the sounds of new words.

Listen for content references. Pay particular attention to where you can find information about the theorists, concepts, and processes noted in lecturers. If you miss important information, you can read up on it later.

Long-term strategies

Longer term listening strategies involve long-term practice and exposure to spoken English. This includes developing the following:

Prior knowledge of the topic, of the listening situation (e.g. knowledge the speaker, their relationship and status), and of the English language will all help to improve your listening.

Vocabulary: General and specialised vocabulary (words specific to your subject); linking words (e.g. inevitably, occasionally, while, in addition); sense and meaning splits (i.e. different ways of using a word); synonyms (different word, similar meaning); and word style (e.g. formal or informal).

- **Pronunciation.** If you cannot recognise a word when it is spoken in a lecture, understanding its meaning will not help you. For this reason, it is important to learn how New Zealand native speakers pronounce sounds. (see ESOL speaking strategies).

Cultural knowledge. The longer you live in New Zealand and interact with New Zealanders, the more you will come to understand our humour and the way we communicate with one another. Important questions you may like to ask yourself might include:

What do New Zealanders think is funny?

What do New Zealanders find offensive?

What are acceptable conversation-starters and topics of conversation?

What is the most appropriate way to ask for or give advice?

(Source: <http://owl.massey.ac.nz/esol-study/esol-listening-strategies.php> retrieved 8/2/2014)