

Basics

Listening is a very big part of communication. In academic places like colleges and universities, listening helps us to understand. It is really important to listen carefully to decide what the main points are.

One way to do that is to listen for **keywords** – the words that give us the most information. Listening for keywords will help you understand what is being said, what the main points are and what you need to remember.

The academic context

In colleges and universities, you often need to listen for keywords. For example, in lectures, tutorials, seminars, debates and discussions.

Key features

- Be prepared before you listen. There are some suggestions about this below.
- Don't worry about words you don't understand.
- Use clues – listen for stress, pauses and repetition. These clues help you understand which words are important.
- Make notes and create your own set of abbreviations. For example:

v = very

info = information

educ = education

N, S, E, W = north, south, east, west

Q = question

e.g. = for example

p = people

+ = and

There are some ways you can prepare yourself to listen for keywords:

- Think about the topic. What sort of information do you think you will hear? What might some of the keywords be?
- Think about the purpose. Why are you listening? Will there be questions to answer after you listen? What will you need to remember, and why?

Challenges / difficulties

It is difficult to focus on keywords when you are listening. Try not to worry about words you don't know; don't try to work out the meaning of each one.

Concentrating for a long time can be a challenge. Try to get as much practice at listening to different types of speech (lectures, conversations, debates, etc.) as you can.

Learning outcome

Students will be able to show they can listen to a variety of different things and list the keywords correctly. The keywords in the list will be a good reminder of what the student listened to.

Theory to practice

Look at the transcript below. The keywords are underlined. After reading, answer the questions below.

Many things in your home can be fitted with sensors and microchips to make them 'smart' – that is, responsive. You can control your lighting and heating, security systems, entertainment systems and so on from a device like a smartphone or smartwatch, via a wireless internet connection. As a result, they can respond to changes in the environment, changes in the situation, and to your commands. Every year, technology companies spend a lot of money developing ways to make life more convenient.

- 1 Do you agree with the underlining?
- 2 Would you underline any other keywords?
- 3 Would you have time to write down all those keywords?
If not, think of abbreviations or shortcuts you could use (diagrams, etc.).

Ways to get more practice

- 1 Work with a partner. Take turns to find texts and read them to each other. Your partner notes the keywords. Then look at the text together to see if any keywords were missed.
- 2 Listen to spoken English on the radio or TV as much as you can, and note down the keywords you hear.