

Basics

When we listen, we listen in a context. This means that when we listen, we use our knowledge of the world and knowledge of the subject to predict the content of the text. This is a very important part of the way we understand what we hear, and we do it in our native languages as well as in a new language.

The academic context

Academic listening can be complex, but it is almost always in a context which enables you to predict what the listening will be about, based upon previous lectures and your own reading and research.

Key features

When you are preparing to listen to a lecture, for example, or about to attend a seminar or workshop, here are some ideas to help you understand more easily by predicting the content:

- Look at the title of the lecture or seminar. Do a very quick brainstorm and write down some keywords and ideas that come to mind. Some of these words and ideas will come up and you will be ready to understand them.
- Think about the topic and ask yourself some questions such as:
 - 1 What do I know about this?
 - 2 What do I need to know?
 - 3 How does this connect with other topics I am studying?
 - 4 What challenges are there in this topic?
 - 5 What key points will I hear?

These questions will help you predict what you will hear about in the lecture or seminar and prepare you to listen successfully.

- Academic lectures are given in a logical sequence, and so there will always be some connection between today's lecture and lectures in the past. Look back at your notes from previous lectures and try to remember the key points. These points will often connect to the upcoming lecture and help you to predict the content.
- Seminars and workshops are often designed to develop the ideas from a lecture in more depth. Looking back at your notes from the lecture can help you to predict what will be said in the seminar.

Challenges / difficulties

Sometimes you won't have very much time to think about what you are going to listen to. In these cases, you can simply think quickly about the topic and make a mental note of five or six keywords or ideas.

How can I develop this skill?

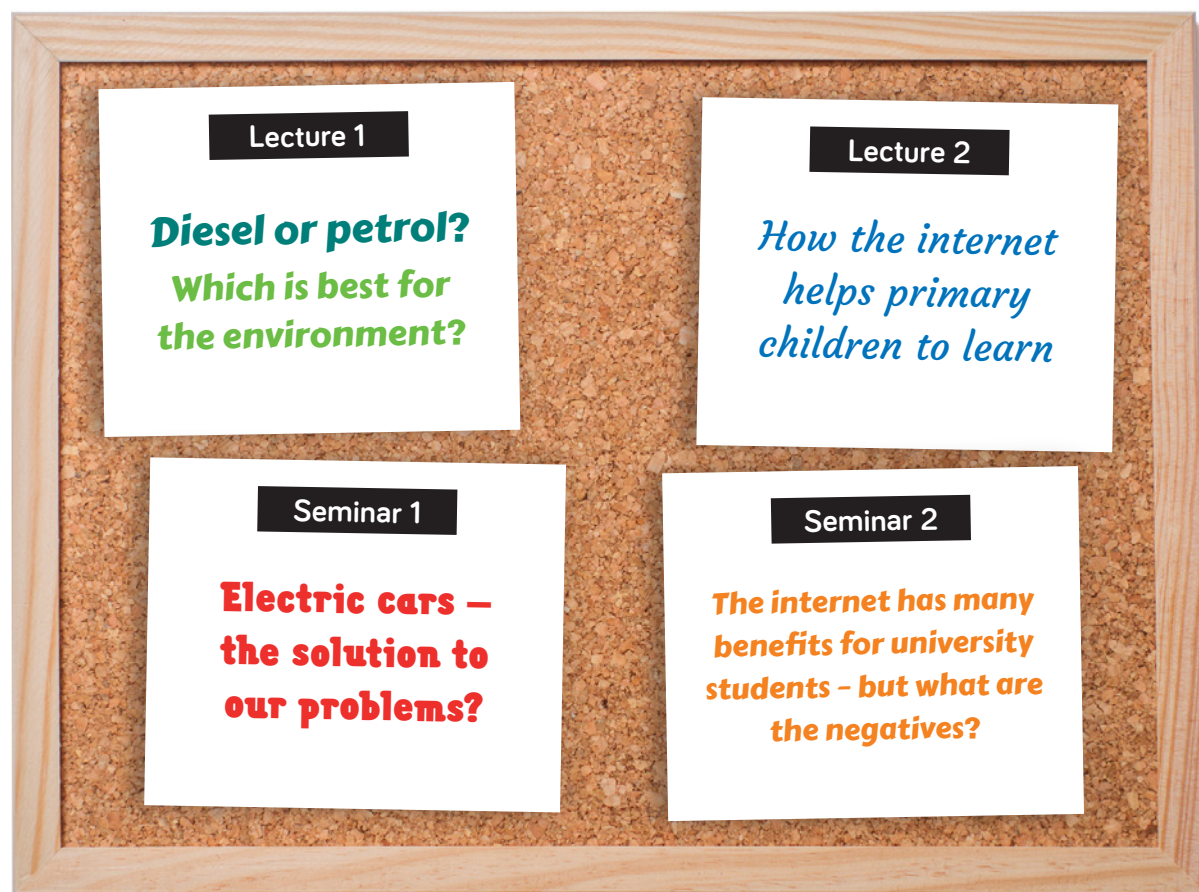
The best way to improve the accuracy of your predictions is by practising and learning from your attempts. Make a list of bullet points summarizing what you think the speaker will say, and take it to the lecture. Tick off the points the speaker mentions. At the end, reflect on why you think they didn't mention the others. Were your ideas wrong, or just not relevant? Repeating this process a number of times will help you fine-tune this skill.

Learning outcome

By predicting effectively the content of the lectures and seminars you attend, you will understand a lot more of what is said and be in a better position to use that content to develop your studies.

Theory to practice

Look at the titles of two lectures and two seminars. Try to predict what the speaker might say in each one, using the techniques from the previous page.



Ways to get more practice

A good way to get more practice and also to make your predictions more accurate is to discuss your ideas with one or more other students. If possible, do that now. See if you have the same ideas and if not, why not.