

Basics

In *C21 English for the 21st Century*, you get lots of practice at listening. Here, you will focus on listening when you already have some information. This is different from listening when you have no information, because you can predict what you will hear before you listen, so your ear is already 'tuned' to hear the important information.

The academic context

You sometimes have missing information when you are listening to talks, lectures and videos/broadcasts. For example, in a talk, you might make notes of what the speaker says, but you might miss some important information. Later, however, speakers often repeat the main points, and here you might have the opportunity to complete your notes. Another example is when a speaker hands out an outline or slides before their talk. Often you will need to add to these with your own notes.

Key features

- Try to predict the part of speech:

The first thing we did was to _____

The use of *to* tells us to listen for a verb.

The experiment needed a _____

The use of *a* tells us the missing word is a noun, although it could be a noun phrase or an adjective–noun phrase.

- Think about whether something is positive or negative:

The project failed because of _____

The word *failed* suggests the missing word is something bad, not good.

- Use the surrounding words to build up a context for the missing words:

He was an expert in algebra, calculus, geometry and _____

Here, we can guess that the missing word is a branch of mathematics, or at least a subject related to it.

- Consider the possibility that the missing words make up a phrase, an idiom or a simile:

Bosworth described himself as _____ before the start of the race.

Here, an adjective works, such as *fit*, but it could also be an idiomatic phrase, such as *in peak condition*, *fighting fit* or *as fit as a fiddle*.

- Check if it's possible that you are listening for a name or a number:

The booking was for Mr _____
The total cost for the three days was € _____

Here, it is clear you are listening for a name in the first gap and a number in the second.

- Listening comprehension questions often present the spoken information on the recording in a different form to the way it is presented on the page. This means that you will not hear exactly the same sentence and, in fact, the information could be presented in a different order. Here's an example:

You see:

The radio signal has to be _____ before it can be analyzed.

You hear:

Before we can analyze the radio signal, it must first be amplified.

Here, *amplified* is the answer, but although it needs to be added in the middle of the written sentence, it comes at the end of the spoken sentence.

Challenges / difficulties

It is often hard to hear all the information, especially if the speaker is talking quickly. In addition, it is more difficult to get the information you need if it is presented in a different sequence to what you are expecting.


How can I develop this skill?

When you are listening to talks or lectures, pay attention to how speakers form their sentences. There are always at least two ways to express the same thing (and often many more), so the more ways you are familiar with, the easier you will find it to hear the important information.

Learning outcome

If you can complete notes, you will have a fuller understanding of what the speaker says. As well as understanding more, you will also learn different ways to express the same thing (paraphrasing). This will help you in many areas of your studies.

Theory to practice

 **01 Listen to a short talk about a university in Canada. Complete the notes.**
You may need to listen a second time.

Waterloo University

- About a 90-minute drive from _____¹
- Big university well known for the _____² programmes it offers
- 36,000 students including _____³ and undergraduates
- Students are mostly _____⁴ but some are from other countries
- Students from around 120 countries; mainly Asia and _____⁵
- Well-known for _____⁶ and _____⁷
- About 1,100 _____⁸

Ways to get more practice

Listening to online talks and podcasts is a good way to get more practice, because you have the opportunity to listen again. One good exercise is to listen to a talk and make notes of the main arguments only. Then you can listen again and fill in any information you missed the first time.