

Basics

We often need to listen for a specific detail, such as a phone number, an email address or a time. When that's the case, using the right strategies can increase your chances of getting the information you need.

The academic context

When you are studying, a lot of the information is objective: percentages, dates, definitions, etc. If you get these details wrong, you can have a completely different picture of the whole, making it difficult to understand the content.

Key features

- Specific details and numbers are easier to predict based on the information you have. If you are listening to fill out a form, for instance, you can:
 - Work out what type of information is needed: is it a number, a word or a name?
 - Think about the format of the information: if it's a postcode in the UK, how many letters and numbers would it usually have?
 - Guess the actual information: if it's a form for first-year university students, how old would they usually be?
- Listen for words or phrases that lead to the information that you are looking for. If you need a telephone number in a message, for example, the speaker might say: *My number's ...* or *Call me on ...*
- Important or difficult words are often repeated or spelt out, so don't panic if you don't get them the first time.
- Know your weak points. Pay attention to your mistakes, and find out why you are making them. Do you have a problem with large numbers, for example, or with vowels? If you know the difficulties you have, you can work on them so you don't repeat them.
- In a conversation face-to-face or over the phone, you can check you have the right information by repeating it back. You could use a phrase like *Let me read that back to you.*
- Go over your answers after you have listened and check the spelling of common words and names.

Challenges / difficulties

When writing numbers and specific details, it's quite easy to make small mistakes that can make a big difference to the meaning. Typical problems include:

- Confusing the numbers 13 and 30, 14 and 40, 15 and 50, etc. Remember, in the numbers 13 to 19, the last syllable is stressed (*seventeen*), while in 30, 40, 50, etc. it's the first (*seventy*).
- Confusing the different ways of saying zero. Apart from *zero*, you might hear *nought* (usually in maths), the letter *O* (in phone numbers), *nil* (in football) and even *love* (in tennis)!
- Confusing double letters with *W* when listening to someone spelling a word. For instance, if you heard *hammer* spelt out *H-A-double M-E-R*, you could write *hawmer*.

Learning outcome

Understanding the details allows you to make correct connections between them and build your knowledge of a subject.


Theory to practice

1 Look at the listening task below and answer the questions.

Which part of the address is missing? →

What two symbols do all emails have? Do you know what they are called? →

How old do you think he is? →


WINDRUSH SECONDARY SCHOOL CHESS CLUB

First name: (1) _____ Surname: (2) _____

Address: (3) _____, Lime Avenue, Oxford Postcode: (4) _____

Email: (5) _____ Mobile number: (6) _____

Age: (7) _____ Preferred days: (8) _____ and Thursdays

Which of these do you think he will spell? →

How are postcodes usually formed in the UK? →

How many numbers would you expect in a mobile phone number? →

What information is missing here? →

2 Now read the transcript and complete the form.

Transcript

Mr Auklen Mr Auklen speaking.

Josh Hello Mr Auklen. This is Josh. I'd like to enrol for the school chess club.

Mr Auklen Excellent. Let me get a form ... OK, did you say Josh?

Josh Yes, Josh Whittaker.

Mr Auklen Of course. You were in my maths class last year. Can you spell your surname, please, just to be sure?

Josh Sure. W-H-I-double T-A-K-E-R.

Mr Auklen And what's your address, Josh?

Josh 52, Lime Avenue, Oxford. The postcode's OX5 4HA.

Mr Auklen ... 4 ... H ... A, OK. What's the best way to contact you?

Josh Either my email, which is jwhittaker3@gmail.com, or on my mobile, 07844 246 377.

Mr Auklen Right. And how old are you now?

Josh 13. No, sorry, my birthday was yesterday. 14 now!

Mr Auklen I hope you had a nice time. Final question: which days work best for you to come and play?

Josh I have some free time after school on Mondays and Thursdays.

Mr Auklen That works fine, Josh. See you Monday at the club, then.

3 How correct were your guesses from Exercise 1?

Ways to get more practice

Knowing the alphabet well is important for listening for details such as names. Practise by spelling words in your mind when you see them. You can also practise with a partner: take turns in spelling out words for each other.