

INTENSIVE AND EXTENSIVE LISTENING: EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO LISTENING

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Abstract: Listening is one of the essential skills in language learning. This article explores the differences, similarities, and significance of intensive and extensive listening approaches. Intensive listening focuses on paying attention to details and understanding the structure of the language, while extensive listening involves using large amounts of audio material to enhance general comprehension and maintain interest. The article highlights the unique benefits of each approach and examines how they contribute to the learner's language development. Additionally, practical recommendations for effectively implementing intensive and extensive listening are provided.

Keywords: Listening skills, intensive listening, extensive listening, language learning, audio materials, comprehension, language development.

Many English learners use ineffective strategies in their independent listening practice. Avoid this problem with our guide to intensive and extensive listening. We will show you how and why it is important to practise both of these techniques

Me: Do you practise listening to English outside of class?

Student 1: I listen to English music.

Me: Okay. What type of music?

Student 1: Death metal!

Me: Death metal? But can you actually hear what they're singing?

Student 1: No.

Me: Do you practise listening to English outside of class?

Student 2: I watch English movies.

Me: But do you listen or just read the subtitles?

Student 2: Well... I read the subtitles.

Me: Are the subtitles in English or in your language?

Student 2: My language. It's clear from these conversations that many learners are not aware how to practise listening

And that's a shame, because we live in a connected world full of satellite TV, Spotify, YouTube and podcasts. There are so many great resources available! It's also a shame that most

learners don't know the two main ways to practise listening: intensive listening and extensive listening. Many learners focus on one, while ignoring the other. So let's look at both methods of listening in detail and learn how we can use them effectively. What is intensive listening? If you had a good English teacher at school, you should already know something about intensive listening. It simply means carefully analysing the language used in a listening clip. Usually, a short listening passage is used for this. For example, in my classes, we might spend an entire 45-minute lesson on a 5-minute audio clip. Let's say the topic is the British Royal Family. First, we discuss the topic and try to predict what will be in the clip. Will it be in favour or against the Royal Family? Next we listen once all the way through, picking out the main ideas. After we get the main ideas, we listen again to try to pick out the details. We may listen a third time, for vocabulary or pronunciation practice. In intensive listening practice, you can listen as many times as you like, as long as you are learning something each time. We'll follow up by trying to use the new vocabulary or by discussing the ideas mentioned in the audio clip. You can see that intensive listening is analytical and focused. It's hard work, but you will learn a lot. How can you practise intensive listening outside of class? The way I described intensive listening sounds like you need a teacher to guide you. Not true! You can certainly practise intensive listening on your own. Here is an example of how to do it. Pick a short listening clip of three to five minutes. Short podcasts or YouTube videos are great for this. Before listening, think of the topic and think about what kind of vocabulary you may hear. For example, in a podcast on the Royal Family, we might expect to hear words like duke and duchess. Listen once and write down the main ideas. A short podcast will only contain a few main ideas. Listen again and try to fill in the information that you missed the first time. Listen a third time with an emphasis on either pronunciation or vocabulary. If you wish to practise pronunciation, you could try shadowing (repeating the audio just after the speaker.) It is okay to use the transcript at this stage. In fact, it is recommended. If you wish to practise vocabulary, write down the new words and phrases that you hear. Perhaps you have just been studying phrasal verbs. In this case, listen carefully for these. Again, use of the transcript is recommended. Remember to listen for phrases and not just for isolated words. For example, you may hear, "I'm all ears." Of course, you know each individual word, but do you understand the meaning of the phrase?

What are the benefits of intensive listening?

The benefits of intensive listening are clear. You can improve many skills including:

Listening for main ideas

Listening for details

Guessing meaning from context

Pronunciation. Vocabulary reinforcement. What materials are suitable for intensive listening? Look for short audio or video clips of up to five minutes. If you wish to use a longer audio clip, split it into 5-minute parts and study it over several sessions. Make sure the audio is clear and the language level is suitable. It can be a little above your comprehension level, since you will listen several times. The topic of the clip is not so important, but it will be more fun if it is a topic that you are interested in. If you like football, listen to a podcast on football. If you are into fashion, find a YouTube video on fashion. Finally, choose a clip that comes with a transcript, if possible. Watch out for the YouTube videos that are 'auto-translated'. They are translated by computer and often contain lots of mistakes. Can you use a song? Sure! Just make sure that the audio is clear. Try to choose a song with a story, like this one. Avoid pop songs where the lyrics are just, "Baby, baby, I love you. But you don't love me. Oh, baby..." What is extensive listening?

Intensive listening is great, but it does have one main disadvantage: you will only be listening to a small amount of content. We can fix this with extensive listening! As the name suggests, extensive listening is pretty much the exact opposite of intensive listening. While intensive listening focuses on short audio clips, extensive listening focuses on longer audio clips - the longer the better! Intensive listening means that you will be working hard and analysing what you hear. However, extensive listening means you can relax and simply enjoy watching a movie or listening to an audiobook. At school, you practised intensive listening. However, extensive listening is something that you need to practice on your own, outside of a formal class. (This is why I asked my students if they practised listening in their own time.) Most importantly, for extensive listening, you should 'vary your diet' and listen to audio on as many different topics as possible.

What are the benefits of extensive listening? Most learners understand that it is a great benefit if they have the chance to travel to an English-speaking country. This is because you will be 'immersed' (surrounded) in the language. You will spend all day using English and will improve quickly. With extensive listening, the goal is similar. Without an expensive plane ticket, you can immerse yourself in English through long periods of relaxed listening. Yes, you will only be practising listening and not speaking, but that is also what you would mostly be doing if you went overseas to attend a short course, for example. Extensive listening trains your ears to the sound of English. The aim is to get where the language sounds natural and comfortable to you. With extensive listening, you will be exposed to a wide range of vocabulary, ideas and different styles of speaking.

What is the best method to practise extensive listening?

First, you need to find some long form listening materials. I recommend a minimum of 20 minutes and a maximum of three hours. Unlike with intensive listening, you will only listen once. However, you should feel free to "rewind" every now and again if you feel you missed something. You do not need to take notes. However, it is always nice to have a notebook handy to write down a few things. You can note down some new words or interesting expressions and Google them later. You can use English subtitles to help you along if you really need to, but it is better to listen or watch without subtitles. This is because you want to be immersed in the sound of the language, just like on an overseas trip! While it is good to choose topics that you are interested in, try listening to as wide a range of topics as possible. Most of all, when practising extensive listening, remember that you do not need to achieve 100% comprehension of what you are listening to. As long as you can follow along, you're doing it correctly. What materials are suitable for extensive listening? Watching the news is a great form of extensive listening, because they change topics every few minutes and you will hear a lot of new vocabulary.

Have you heard of 'binge-watching'? It means watching multiple episodes of a TV show at one time. Binge-watching may be bad for your physical health, but it is great for extensive listening practice. TED talks and YouTube channels are also great sources for extensive listening. Choose longer videos and watch two or three at one time. Finally, there are podcasts. Podcasts are excellent because you can use them for both intensive and extensive practice. Personally, I like to listen to podcasts in my car when I drive to and from work. This gives me over an hour of listening time in a day (more if I get stuck in a traffic jam!). The English Learning for Curious Minds podcast is a great choice because it is a little bit slower than the speech on the news, it covers a wide range of topics and the vocabulary is suitable for upper-intermediate learners.

Which is best: Intensive Listening or Extensive Listening?

Some learners prefer intensive listening because they feel that it is "serious learning", but they miss out on the immersive effects of extensive listening.

Some learners prefer extensive listening because they feel intensive listening is too hard and it can only be done with the help of a teacher. This is incorrect, as we have seen. Neither method is the best. Instead, you should do both to get the best results. Remember, as an independent learner, you are responsible for your own learning. Make sure you use both of these techniques and use them in a smart way! That is the best way to make progress and achieve your English-learning goals.

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