

1 Understanding

An ability to understand the dialogues which students hear and read in the world around them must be a starting point for any dialogue work. The activities in this first chapter all use a written, spoken or written and spoken dialogue as a source of input for the students to engage with.

A traditional approach to developing listening skills in the classroom is to set students a range of tasks to complete whilst listening to the recording of a dialogue. Understanding dialogues: a basic procedure (1.1) and Board grab (1.2) illustrate some of these techniques.

Many learners, however, are also keen to have access to the written form of the dialogue at some point, because it allows processing of the text in a different way. Reading versus listening (1.3) aims to raise students' awareness about the advantages and disadvantages of being able to see the tapescript which often accompanies spoken coursebook dialogues.

Dialogue interpretation worksheets (1.4), Jigsaw (1.5), and Designing exam questions (1.6) turn things on their head, and use the written form of the dialogue as the point of entry for the learners. The students first read the dialogue, then they listen to it. This requires a different kind of processing.

In What are they talking about? (1.7), Snippets (1.8) and Fairy tale tableaux (1.9) the learners are exposed to only the written format of quite short dialogues and encouraged to interpret the wider context in which the dialogue occurs.

Lame jokes (1.10) and Working with interviews (1.11) check students' understanding of dialogues by asking them to match questions with answers, and finally in Dialogue as a way into a graded reader (1.12) and The bit I like (1.13), understanding a dialogue is the springboard for more extensive reading work.

1.1 Understanding dialogues: a basic procedure

| | |
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| Outline | Students listen to a dialogue and work through a series of tasks aimed at helping them understand the dialogue |
| Focus | Checking understanding of a spoken dialogue |
| Level | Elementary plus |
| Time | 20 minutes plus |

*Understanding***Materials
and
preparation**

Choose a spoken dialogue appropriate to the level and interests of your group. Design a series of tasks to go with it. The example below is the transcript of a telephone dialogue between someone enquiring about train times and prices, and a voice-activated information service.

Procedure

- 1 Tell the class what the topic of the dialogue is (in this case asking for information over the phone). Ask the students for their views. Is this common in their country/countries? What kinds of information can be accessed in this way? Do they prefer getting information like this or do they prefer talking with somebody face to face? Which is easier? How do they feel about doing it in English? Why? These questions can be discussed in small groups or with the whole class together.
- 2 Set a task to focus on overall understanding of the conversation. This can often be captured by asking four wh-questions: who is talking to whom, about what, where and why? (In the example below a customer is talking to a voice-activated service over the phone, in order to gain information about train times and prices.)
- 3 Play the recording and ask the class to compare and discuss their answers in pairs.
- 4 Conduct feedback with everybody together.
- 5 Now set a task to focus on more detailed understanding. For instance the learners could be given the following statements and asked to decide, while listening, whether they are true or false.

The passenger wants to travel to Liverpool.

The journey takes more than two hours.

The passenger is travelling alone.

The passenger wants to come back by train on the same day.

The passenger wants to know how much the ticket will be.

- 6 Play the recording again. The learners compare and discuss their answers and feedback is conducted as before.
- 7 Set up a situation where students have to engage with a similar topic to the one they have listened to. For instance the learners could take part in a roleplay situation, where one person asks for information about trains, and the other provides it.

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Nick Billbrough

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Dialogue Activities***Box 1**

- A: Welcome to Virgin Trains. If you're new to this voice-activated service just say 'Help'. Here are your options. You can plan a journey, buy tickets or enquire about an existing booking. Which would you like to do?
- B: Plan a journey.
- A: Would you like to get fare information or just check the timetable?
- B: Check the timetable.
- A: OK. What train journey would you like to hear timetable information for? An example is London to Manchester.
- B: Birmingham New Street to Liverpool.
- A: Thanks. And what date would you like to travel?
- B: Tomorrow.
- A: And what time? For example 12 midday or arriving by 4 in the afternoon. If you like you can say 'first train' or 'last train'. So what time?
- B: Arriving by 2 in the afternoon.
- A: So you want Birmingham New Street to Liverpool on Sunday 16th April, arriving by 2 in the afternoon. Did I get that right?
- B: Yes.
- A: OK I'll check the timetable. PAUSE. Thanks for holding. I'm still checking the timetable. PAUSE. Here you go. There's a train leaving Birmingham New Street at 11:30 in the morning and gets into Liverpool Lime Street at 1:08 in the afternoon. I can check other times if you say 'earlier trains' or 'later trains'. If the journey's OK say 'continue'. Otherwise you can change any of the journey details by saying 'change details'.
- B: Continue.
- A: Alright. Do you want a return journey?
- B: No.
- A: Great. Now that you've planned your journey you can buy tickets, check fares or get further assistance.
- B: Check fares.
- A: How many adults will be travelling?
- B: One.
- A: Any children?
- B: No.
- A: Do you have any railcards?
- B: No.
- A: Thank you. Please hold while I connect you to an agent.

Understanding

Variations

- a Set up the roleplay activity before doing any of the listening exercises. This is a good way of engaging interest from the start, and raising awareness about the gap between the learners' use of English and that used by more proficient speakers.
- b Play the tape without any of the preparatory work. After listening, students discuss with a partner everything that they understood and can remember from the dialogue.
- c Give out the dialogue as a jumbled series of lines. Students work in pairs to put the lines of the dialogue in order. They then listen to check whether their order is the same as in the recording.
- d After they have listened to the recording for the first time, tell the class that they are going to be asked some more questions about the dialogue. Ask them to listen to it again and try to retain as much information as they can. Now give out the set of detailed understanding questions and ask the learners to discuss the answers in pairs.
- e Give out the transcript after students have completed all the listening tasks. Ask them to listen again whilst reading it. This is a useful opportunity to focus on language which may otherwise go unnoticed. For instance, with the dialogue in Box 1, the learners could be asked to read and identify all the features which indicate that this is a voice-activated service, as opposed to a conversation between real people.
- f Prepare a copy of the transcript with gaps in it. The missing language items should include areas which it would be useful for the class to focus on. After the other listening task/tasks, give out the gapped version of the transcript and ask the students to decide on a suitable word or phrase to go in each space. They then listen again to check.

1.2 Board grab

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| Outline | Students run to the board in a race to grab language items that they hear from a dialogue. This activity is suitable for classes of up to 15 students. For larger classes see the variation below |
| Focus | Developing aural recognition skills, reviewing dialogues and reinforcing previously encountered lexical chunks |
| Level | Any |
| Time | 5 minutes plus |
| Materials and preparation | On large pieces of paper, write out a selection of language items from a dialogue which the students have listened to in a previous lesson. These could include formulaic expressions (chunks), discourse |

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markers, individual words or examples of specific grammar structures. Include some items which are not mentioned in the dialogue. (See the example in Box 2 from *Language in Use: Upper Intermediate*, Recording 4.1 – the last three chunks were not included in the recording.) Stick them up randomly all over the board. Find the relevant part of the recording of the dialogue. Each student will also need access to the complete transcript of the recording.

Procedure

- 1 Invite the class up to the front and organise the students so that they are standing in a semi circle around the board. Make sure no one is hovering too close to it.
- 2 Draw the students' attention to the words or phrases on the board. Tell them that some of the items were in the dialogue that they heard in the previous lesson. Ask them to discuss with a partner which ones they think are included.
- 3 Split the class into two teams by dividing them down the middle. Tell them that if they hear one of the language items, they have to run up to the board, grab the appropriate piece of paper and take it back to their team. The team with the most pieces of paper at the end wins.
- 4 Play the recording or read out the dialogue and let the race begin.
- 5 When the recording has finished, count up how many pieces of paper each team has.
- 6 Give out copies of the complete tapescript (or direct the students to the back of the book) so that they can see how the chunks work in context.

Notes

This activity works well as a warm-up and provokes some very focused scan listening.

I learnt the idea of students grabbing language items from the board from Vicky Wood at International House, Santiago.

Variation for larger classes

Instead of putting the language items up on the board, organise the class into groups of three or four. Give each group a set of the chunks which have been cut up. They then arrange these randomly on the desk in front of them. Each student now tries to grab as many chunks as possible as they listen to the recording.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)*Understanding***Box 2**

you're about to go
 a little bit frightened
 looking forward to it
 in the first place
 it's a good cause
 make sure that
 supposed to
 the second thing is
 by heart
 it was fantastic
 I was kind of forced to
 you feel in control
 the million dollar question
 a bit of a shock
 took my breath away
 at the last minute

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1.3 Reading versus listening

| | |
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| Outline | Students compare and contrast the experience of reading the tapescript versus listening to the recording without it |
| Focus | Encouraging debate and raising awareness about the advantages and disadvantages of being able to see the tapescript |
| Level | Pre-intermediate plus |
| Time | 30 minutes plus |
| Materials and preparation | You will need copies of the tapescript for the listening material you are working with (normally found in the back of the coursebook). |

Procedure

- 1 Do the pre-listening activities suggested in your coursebook with everybody together.
- 2 Now direct the students' attention to the tasks which go with the listening material, and ask them to try to complete them whilst listening. Give one half of the class the tapescript which accompanies the material.

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They can read and listen at the same time. The other half need to complete the tasks through listening alone.

- 3 Now pair students off so that you have one student who listened with the tapescript working with another who couldn't see it.
- 4 Encourage them to compare and discuss answers and to discuss whose task they felt was the easiest/most useful and why.
- 5 Write the following sentence heads on the board and ask the students to complete some of them, so that their opinions are expressed.

It's useful to spend class time reading the tapescript because...

It's more useful to spend class time listening without seeing the tapescript because...

I prefer being able to see the tapescript because...

I prefer just listening without seeing the tapescript because...

- 6 Invite the students to mingle around and compare and discuss what they wrote.
- 7 Open things up and have a general debate about the pros and cons of listening with the tapescript versus without it. Broaden the discussion to include the issue of watching English programmes with the dialogue displayed as subtitles at the bottom of the screen.

Possible points:

Looking at the tapescript/subtitles makes it easier to notice the language items that are being used. You can reread bits that you've missed and focus on spelling, contractions, articles etc. more easily. When listening and reading at the same time, you can start to associate the way a word is written with its pronunciation.

However, this isn't really what happens in the world outside the classroom. When people speak to us we don't have the luxury of subtitles! If we always read what is being said we may not be training ourselves to pick up language from hearing it alone.

1.4 Dialogue interpretation worksheets

Outline Students use a worksheet to help them to interpret the contents of a dialogue

Focus Intensive reading skills. Encouraging discussion about ways of interpreting a dialogue and preparing the ground for listening to/watching the recording

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| | |
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| Level | Intermediate plus |
| Time | 30 minutes plus |
| Materials and preparation | Choose a dialogue from a film, soap opera or comedy sketch which your students will find interesting. You need both the written version and the recording of it. Prepare a worksheet (see the example below in Box 3) which will challenge the students to interpret what is going on. See Dialogue Bank F on p. 237 for an example dialogue for an intermediate group from the comedy series <i>Little Britain</i> (Dialogue Bank A on p. 222 could also be used for this activity). Each student will need a copy of the worksheet and the dialogue. |

Box 3**Worksheet**

- 1 Read this dialogue to get a general idea of what the people are talking about. Turn to the person next to you and discuss what you remember and how you feel about it.
- 2 What do you think is the relationship between the characters (Roy, Margaret and Mr Mann)? What helped you to work this out?
- 3 Below are some adjectives to describe character and feelings. Can you match any of them to any of the characters? Use a dictionary if you need to. You do not necessarily need to use all of the words. What things that the characters say helped you to decide?

strange patient rude difficult
fussy annoying annoyed polite

- 4 Mr Mann's answers in lines 13, 15, 17 and 19 are quite strange. What would be a more 'normal' answer for each question?
- 5 How do you think the lines 14, 23, 25, 39 are said? Try saying them with your partner.
- 6 Do you think you would behave differently if you were Roy?
- 7 This dialogue was written to make people laugh. At which points in the dialogue do you think the audience will laugh when they hear it?

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Procedure

- 1 Give out copies of the dialogue and the worksheet to the students.
- 2 Encourage the students to discuss the answers to the questions in pairs. Depending on the group, it may be more appropriate to allow them time to go through the worksheet on their own first, before discussing answers.

Dialogue Activities

- 3 Bring the class together to discuss some of their interpretations with everyone.
- 4 Now play the recording of the dialogue and ask the class to compare it with how they saw the written version. Is there anything that they now interpret differently?

1.5 Jigsaw

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|----------------------------------|---|
| Outline | After reading the scripts for different scenes, students swap information about what they have read. They then watch the complete section to compare it with how they had imagined it |
| Focus | Encouraging learners to access and activate information contained in a script |
| Level | Pre-intermediate plus |
| Time | 30 minutes plus |
| Materials and preparation | Choose two adjacent scenes including dialogue from a film or soap opera, or divide one scene into two fairly equal parts. You will need copies of the script of both scenes and the DVD that goes with it. See Dialogue Bank A on pp. 222–225 for an example from the film <i>Mulholland Drive</i> by David Lynch. (Dialogue Bank F on pp. 237–238 could also be used for this activity.) |

Procedure

- 1 Give one side of the class the script of the first scene and the other side the script of the second one. Ask the students to read it and work out the basic details of where the people are, what they are doing, what happens and what they are talking about. It may help to write these categories on the board.
- 2 In pairs or small groups, ask the students to discuss what information they have worked out about the scene.
- 3 Now pair off students so that they are working with somebody who has read the other scene. Ask them to share as much information as they can about what they have read. What do they think the characters in the scene are like? How old are they? What do they look like? What kind of people are they?
- 4 Listen to the recording or show the complete scene on the DVD.
- 5 Discuss whether the characters and the scene were similar to how they had imagined them.

1.6 Designing exam questions

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|----------------------------------|--|
| Outline | From looking at the tapescript, students design multiple choice questions and then answer each other's questions |
| Focus | Raising awareness about the format and style of multiple choice listening questions |
| Level | Intermediate plus |
| Time | 30 minutes plus |
| Materials and preparation | Rewrite a set of listening comprehension multiple choice questions so that the option parts are left blank (see the example below from a First Certificate Listening, Part 4, set of questions). |

Procedure

- 1 Divide the class into two equal groups. Give one group one half of the set of questions, and the other group the second half. They also need the part of the tapescript which has the answers to their set of questions.
- 2 The task for each pair of students within the groups is to find the correct answer from the transcript, write it in, and to also come up with and write in two other incorrect answers in the relevant spaces.
- 3 Pairs now swap sheets with students from the other half of the class.
- 4 Play the tape and ask the students to answer the questions they have just received as they listen.
- 5 Now rearrange the class so that pairs who have answered each other's questions are working together. Tell them to check their answers and to give each other feedback on how difficult the questions were and why. Give out the original options that were provided in the coursebook or exam paper, and ask students to compare them with the questions they designed themselves.

Below are the first three questions relating to exercise 2 on page 164 of *First Certificate Star* by Luke Prodromou. The three multiple choice answers have been completed by students and are uncorrected.

- 1) What percentage of the population play the lottery every week?
 - a) 42%
 - b) 90%
 - c) 58%
- 2) If you want to win why should you choose a number like 32 33 35 36 37 39?
 - a) Those numbers are logical.