

# 7 Creative and Engaging ESL Listening Activities for Adults

We know that listening practice is vital when learning any language.

But let's be honest, the CDs that come with ESL textbooks absolutely need supplements.

Hearing the same voices over and over can get boring, and the topics could be more current.

So how can we liven it up for our adult students?

We need to mix in some spirited *creativity* to our ESL listening activities!

Especially for adults, where it sometimes takes more to entertain while teaching them, original listening activities will go a long way. Just like children, adults learn better when they're interested and engaged.

## **The Importance of ESL Listening Activities for Adults**

Speaking and listening are both critical to the success of learning a language. In order for a student to have speaking success, he or she must first listen to the language being spoken. The listening practice is critical because it reinforces previously learned material, builds the student's confidence and improves the skill of natural pronunciation.

### **Reinforces Learning**

After going through vocabulary words and reading comprehension exercises, it is important to do a listening activity to reinforce what information the brain is trying to process. The more times your brain gets to encounter the material, the better!

### **Builds Confidence in Understanding**

Students are encouraged when they hear words that they understand. Read or play appropriate material that is suited for their skill level. Students should be able to understand many of the words and the general concept of the material that they are listening to, but there should still be words that are new to them in the audio.

### **Improves Natural Pronunciation**

Listening to native English speakers helps ESL students improve their enunciation, pronunciation and natural flow of words.

## **7 Creative ESL Listening Activities for Adults**

We've established that adults – like kids – benefit from interesting activities and engaging lessons. "Ok great, I believe it, but where can I find some? I'm not creative!" you might be thinking.

Not to worry! There are plenty of listening activities and games that can be used effectively with ESL students. And right now we're going to introduce to you seven creative ESL listening activities for adults.

With some of these, encourage your adult students to have a little fun, let down their guard and show their inner child.

## **1. Watch Clips from Movies and TV Shows**

Everyone loves a good movie and a little television, and both can be used for many different activities in the classroom. You can always write out some comprehension questions for your students to answer during a full-length film, but what else could we do?

A great way to incorporate this type of media into class is to pick short clips of movies that fit with the lesson you are teaching that day. Watching these clips at the start of class is not only great for reinforcing curriculum, but it also helps students get a feel for American culture and everyday conversational language. It's really entertaining too! If you're not sure which shows to start with, there are some '90s sitcoms that work really well for English learners.

Here's another listening activity using one of these clips: Show a list of names of the main characters that are in the clip you're going to watch. Have all of the students pick one character to pay a special amount of attention to. At the end of the movie or video clip, have students fill out a questionnaire or do a miniature report on their chosen character. Questions can include: What is his/her name? What is his/her job? What was he/she trying to say? Describe how he/she looked. What was his/her personality like?

## **2. Encourage Students to Watch the News at Home for Fun, In-class Activities**

Assigning students homework that involves watching the news in English is beneficial in more ways than one. Not only does it give students another medium of listening to English, but it also gives them something to talk about with other English speakers. This will help students engage in the culture, which is so vital to the English language learning process.

Here's an extension: Have students do current event presentations in the classroom to report on the information they learned from watching the news. This way, not only are students listening, but they are also retaining information and getting tons of speaking practice too.

A fun group project students can do after watching the news at home is to be news reporters in the classroom. Students can take highlights from the news, write them

down, practice and finally report the news in groups to the class. Add a cool news channel logo to project on the screen behind them for extra flare that students will love!

### **3. Use Music: Write Songs and Sing in Class**

People of all ages and cultural backgrounds appreciate music. Listening to music in the classroom helps with vocabulary memorization and word pronunciation. It also helps students to get a deeper grasp of word meanings and is a great way to explain rhyming words.

A cool way to incorporate music in the classroom is to have students split into groups and write simple songs using vocabulary words that they learned that week. Using a familiar tune and just writing new words for the song is a good idea for the less-creative folks. Have students perform the songs for the classroom and encourage everyone to sing along!

Here's a twist on your classic fill-in-the-blanks listening activity: Give students song lyric sheets with some of the lyrics missing. Listen to the song a couple of times, and instruct the students to fill in the blanks. To check for the correct answers, go around the room and have each person sing out a line. They have to sing it, or it doesn't count!

### **4. Act Out Scenarios in Role Play**

Come up with scenarios for students to act out in front of the classroom. For example, if the lesson for that day is on "Introductions," consider the following brief script:

**Student 1:** "Hello, my name is Jacob"

**Student 2:** "Nice to meet you, I am Mary."

**Student 1:** "Nice to meet you too."

After having two students volunteer to act out the scene in front of the class, ask the rest of the class comprehension questions. This activity works well with a wide range of lessons such as restaurant etiquette, job interviews and food/cooking.

### **5. Read Aloud in Class: Partner Gap-fill Activity**

Reading aloud is an oldie but goodie. Reading in front of the class can encourage students to feel confident about reading, speaking and listening to English. This is often practiced with popcorn reading, where students pop in and out, taking turns reading in a random order.

Another way to give students fantastic listening practice while reading aloud is a partner gap-fill activity. Have students sit in pairs, and then give each partner their own copy of the text sample, either A or B (A pair is comprised of one A and one B).

Although the text sample is the same, the A and B worksheets are not. Each worksheet has blanks in different places. Where A has a blank, B does not. Pairs take turns reading

aloud their full sentences, so that their partner can fill in their blanks. The students should continue doing this until they have no more blanks!

Note: This is also a great activity to practice spelling. Before starting, make sure students know how to ask questions like, “How do you spell ~?” and “Could you say that again?”

## **6. Embed Questions into TED Talks or YouTube Videos**

Podcasts like TED Talks are a great resource for advanced listening activities in the classroom, but how can we spice it up a notch?

If your students are ready for more content-filled material, use TED-Ed to create a listening activity/lesson around a TED Talk. TED-Ed allows you to embed questions (multiple choice, open-ended and discussion) into the TED Talk of your choice.

Browse through public TED-Ed lessons or follow these step-by-step instructions to make one of your own! These can be used in front of the class in a big group, or for individual practice in a computer lab.

For lower level and intermediate students, you can turn a YouTube video into an interactive quiz with blubbr. Advertised as a platform to “play and create video trivia with friends,” blubbr can just as easily be used as a fantastic ESL listening tool.

Just as with TED-Ed, you can browse already made blubbr quizzes, or make your own. When making your own, you have complete control to customize the English level, as you’re choosing the video and writing the questions.

## **7. Play with ESL Listening Apps**

In addition to podcasts and YouTube clips, phone apps are a revolutionary tool in the world of learning. There are so many new listening resources that are readily available at the touch of a finger. Here are two ESL apps that are great for listening activities – both inside and outside of the classroom.

Listening activities are necessary when learning a new language, and luckily they’re also a great way to introduce new topics, reinforce curriculum or check for understanding. Using any of these activities with adult students is a sure way to grab ahold of their interest and propel their English skills up and along on the road to English fluency!