

# Academic Listening Survival Strategies

*A Guide for Students of English Medium Universities*



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# Contents

Introduction: 1

3 Steps to improving your academic listening: 4

## Part 1

Academic Listening Questionnaire: 5

## Part 2

Strategies and Tips: 9

A. Perceptive strategies: 11

B. Cognitive strategies: 17

C. Meta-cognitive strategies: 23

D. Socio-affective strategies: 31

## Part 3

Lecture Tasks: 40

Conclusion: 49



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First published in 2018 in PDF format by Andrew Tristan Jarvis. First edition. ISBN: 978-988-78771-0-3

Cover image: [pixabay.com](https://pixabay.com)

With thanks to the Dean's Reserve Fund, Faculty of Humanities, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University for funding this project, and the English Language Centre, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, for supporting this project.

# Introduction

Welcome. This guide will help you to:

- discover your strengths and weaknesses in academic listening
- learn about academic listening strategies
- develop your listening skills at university

## The challenge of academic listening

Listening in English at university can be a challenge for many students. Students may find it hard to cope with the speed of lecturers, dealing with technical vocabulary, or being able to concentrate on the lecture for long periods of time. By reading this guide and completing the activities, you will be able to pinpoint which listening challenges affect you, and how to deal with them. Better academic listening can lead to more understanding in lectures and a more fulfilling learning experience at university.

## Academic listening at English-medium universities

Universities that teach in English often have staff and students from a range of countries. This means that your lecturers and peers may come from a different place to you and speak a different type of English to you. The use of different 'Englishes' at university can cause difficulties for students but being able to listen and interact with people using different flavours of English is a skill you need to develop for university and your career.

## Lectures

Lectures are still commonly used at most universities as a way to explain and discuss the main points and concepts related to a course topic. Different lecturers have different styles of lecturing. Also, different faculties may have different approaches to lecture formats. For example, some faculties may have practical lectures which include demonstrations. Other faculties may give more theory based lectures. Some subjects may require you to watch lectures before attending a class.

As more research suggests that being active leads to more effective learning, your lecturers may try to integrate various activities into lectures. These might include:

- discussion
- debates
- role play
- use of clickers (using smartphones to answer quiz questions)

- polls (e.g. show of hands to see which views students support)

### **Speaker blamers and listener blamers**

Different students respond to challenging lectures in different ways. When experiencing listening difficulties, some students may blame the lecturer. These students may say the reason for not understanding the lecturer is because of the lecturer's pronunciation or type of English they use. Other students could be seen as 'listener blamers'. These students blame themselves and their own listening level for not understanding a lecture.

Speaking and listening is always a negotiation of meaning, even for people speaking the same type of English. This means that there will always be some sort of confusion or misunderstanding which needs to be overcome. Instead of blaming others or ourselves, we should take a cool, logical look at the problems and try to deal with them. This guide will help you diagnose difficulties you may encounter in academic listening, and find solutions to deal with them.

### **Our research**

We wanted to find out which challenges students face in lecture listening so that we could advise students on dealing with these challenges. Firstly, we asked students to write a reflection on what they thought were the main problems they have in lecture listening. We then used these reflections to develop a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to students to find out which listening challenges were the most common. Finally, we held focus groups with students so that we could gain some deeper insights about the challenges students face in lectures. This research was conducted at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University with first-year students of various faculties and from different backgrounds.

### **New listening skills**

What we are finding is that some of the listening skills used by our students are not listening skills traditionally taught in school. For example, students are often taught to listen out for stress and intonation to aid the comprehension process. However, our students suggested that they needed to develop skills to listen to speakers who do not use much stress and intonation. Another challenge identified by our students is about focussing during lectures; students felt pressure to multi-task so that they could complete other assignments during the lectures, or were disturbed by social media. Avoiding distractions is talked about in this guide under the socio-affective strategies section of Part 2.

We hope you find this guide useful and engaging. Look on page 4 for our 'Three Steps to improving your listening at university'!

Before moving on, use this space to reflect on your abilities and challenges in academic listening.

### **Academic listening reflection**

1. What are your strengths in academic listening?

2. What challenges do you face in academic listening?

3. Which strategies do you use to help you listen in lectures and tutorials?

## Three Steps to improving your academic listening

### Step 1

Complete the  
Academic Listening  
Questionnaire

### Step 2

Look up the  
strategies and tips  
related to your areas  
of need in lecture  
listening

### Step 3

Do the lecture tasks  
relevant to your  
needs

# Part 1

## Academic Listening Questionnaire

### How to complete the questionnaire

The questionnaire has 25 listening challenges. These challenges were identified in our research as the most common challenges for students at an English medium university in Hong Kong. You should give a self-rating for each statement (listening challenge). Self-rating means that you think about your own level of listening and then tick one of the following responses next to each statement:

1 = Very challenging 非常難

2 = Challenging 難

3 = Quite challenging 有點難

4 = Not challenging 不難

5 = Not encountered this problem 沒有遇過此類問題

If you have not encountered one the problems, for example, 'Listening to lecturers who mix English with Cantonese', then you should tick '5 = Not encountered this problem'.

It is important to be as honest and realistic as possible when giving your answers. Try not to be too over-confident or too under-confident. Some students may be tempted to tick '1 = Very challenging' for each item but this would not help them to pinpoint which items are the most challenging.

# The Academic Listening Questionnaire

When listening to lectures at university, how challenging have you found the following? 請用 1-5 的標準評價你聽大學講座時在以下方面遇到的困難。

	<b>Listening challenges</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
1	Understanding (some of) the lecturers' accents 理解講師的（部分）口音					
2	Understanding (some of) the lecturers' use of connected speech 理解講師對（部分）單個或連續單詞的發音					
3	Keeping up with and understanding lecturers who speak fast 跟上并理解語速快的講師					
4	Dealing with a lecturer's lack of intonation or stress 處理講師平淡或缺乏重音的語音語調					
5	Understanding unfamiliar or technical vocabulary 聽懂不熟悉或專業的詞彙					
6	Distinguishing main points from supporting ideas 區別主要觀點和分論點					
7	Understanding meanings that are not directly stated 理解沒有直接說明的意思					
8	Using my own knowledge to fill in any missing information from the lecturer 用已有知識填補沒有聽到的信息					
9	Summarising the information from a lecture 總結講座內容					
10	Understand when the lecturer moves to a new topic 明白講師開始講述新話題					

11	Doing topic-related tasks (e.g., reading, video) before the lecture to increase background knowledge 課前預習相關任務（如文章、視頻）來了解背景知識					
12	Rehearsing pronunciation of topic-related vocabulary before lectures 課前練習話題相關詞彙的發音					
13	Using the purpose, scope and main topic of the lecture to help understanding 藉助講座的目的、範疇和主題來理解講座內容					
14	Using the overall structure of a lecture (i.e., how it starts, continues, and ends) to help understanding 藉助講座的主要結構（如開題、發展、結束）來理解講座內容					
15	Observing the lecturer's body language to help understand what he/she is saying 觀察講師的肢體語言來理解講座內容					
16	Correcting my understanding of lectures immediately if my understanding is incorrect 發現理解錯誤時立即修正					
17	Paraphrasing the lecture content to take notes 做筆記					
18	Understanding a lecturer with a low level of English 理解英文水平不高的講師的講課					
19	Listening to lecturers who mix English with Cantonese 理解講師英文粵語混雜授課的內容					
20	Keeping listening even when you feel bored or tired 感覺枯燥或疲倦時繼續聽課					
21	Encouraging myself to listen to the lecture despite difficulty 遇到困難時鼓勵自己繼續聽課					
22	Asking (lecturers or classmates) for clarification					

	請（講師或同學）進一步解釋釐清我不明白的內容					
23	Listening to a lecturer who speaks a different type of English to me 發現講師的英文口音與自己不同時繼續聽講					
24	Focusing on the lecture despite distractions from social media (e.g. facebook) or incoming emails 集中精力聽課而不受社交媒體（如 facebook）或新郵件的影響					
25	Focusing on the lecture despite doing other work (e.g. for other subjects) 集中精力聽課而不分心做其他課程的功課					

## Part 2

### Strategies and Tips

Now that you have completed the questionnaire, it is time to see which listening challenges you should work on. The listening challenges have now been split into four strategy areas A / B / C / D. Strategy area 'A' refers to listening challenges 1-5 on the questionnaire, 'B' refers to listening challenges 6-10, strategy area 'C' relates to listening challenges 11-17 and 'D' to challenges 18-25. Use your questionnaire responses to complete the table below. Complete the table using the number of times you ticked 1,2,3 or 4 for each strategy area. Any strategies you answered '5' for in the questionnaire can be omitted from this table.

		very challenging	challenging	Quite challenging	Not challenging	
	<b>Listening challenges</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Strategy area</b>
<b>A</b>	1-5					Perceptive strategies
<b>B</b>	6-10					Cognitive strategies
<b>C</b>	11-17					Meta-cognitive strategies
<b>D</b>	18-25					Socio-affective strategies

Here is an example table completed by Anson, a first-year university student:

		very challenging	challenging	Quite challenging	Not challenging	
	<b>Listening challenges</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Strategy area</b>
<b>A</b>	1-5	3	2			Perceptive strategies
<b>B</b>	6-10		1	2	1	Cognitive strategies
<b>C</b>	11-17			3	3	Meta-cognitive strategies
<b>D</b>	18-25	4	1	2	1	Socio-affective strategies

\* this student had not encountered two of challenges on the questionnaire

You can see from Anson's results that strategy areas A and D hold particular challenge for him. Anson should now read about these strategy areas and complete the lecture tasks related to these areas.

Your results may show a range of listening challenges in all four strategy areas. This is totally fine and you can go check the individual strategies and tips.

## Strategy Area A – Perceptive Strategies

Perceptive listening is about encoding or mapping the sounds you hear. If you hear the word 'lec-ture', you can recognize this word and its meaning. English has 44 sounds and uses stress and intonation to convey meaning. English also has connected speech and uses strong forms and weak forms. As English is an international language, it is spoken with many different accents. The way a lecturer speaks, in terms of speed, clarity and volume are also factors affecting the listener. These linguistic features can cause problems for students at the level of perceiving the sounds and making them into recognizable words. A student may know the word, but cannot hear or 'perceive' it, so they may not be able to link the sounds to the word they know. Alternatively, students may not know the meaning of a word and therefore cannot connect the sounds to a meaningful word in their vocabulary. This is therefore also a problem with language proficiency and having a wide range of vocabulary.

Listening challenges in Strategy Area A:

1. Understanding the lecturers' accents
2. Understanding the lecturers' use of connected speech
3. Keeping up with lecturers who speak fast
4. Dealing with a lecturer's lack of intonation or stress
5. Understanding unfamiliar or technical vocabulary

## 1. Understanding the lecturers' accents

One of the most interesting and rewarding aspects of attending university is engaging with lectures and students from different parts of the world. This also means that you will need to tune into a range of accents used to speak English. An accent is a way to explain how people from different backgrounds sound. You can probably remember listening to different accents while watching your favourite English language TV shows. Understanding different lecturers is similar to how you learnt the accents of the different actors on TV. It probably took a few episodes and you may have asked some friends who were also watching, checked the subtitles, and looked online for more background information. You can apply similar strategies to understanding different lecturers. Our research tends to show that students get used to the lecturers who have a different accent to them. This usually happens after a few lecturers. Remember, a skilled listener is someone who is able to understand a range of accents.

### Tips:

- ✓ Ask the lecturer where they're from so you can tune into his or her accent
- ✓ Treat the lecturer's slides like subtitles
- ✓ Follow the lecturer's body language
- ✓ Keep up to date with the course by reading before lectures
- ✓ Sit with a study buddy

### Search: Understanding accents

#### Online learning resources

- IELTS listening tips – Different accents  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFh\\_xt93M\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFh_xt93M_E)
- How to understand different English accents  
[https://www.bloomsbury-international.com/blog/2013/03/15/how-to-understand-different-english-accents/\(ok\)](https://www.bloomsbury-international.com/blog/2013/03/15/how-to-understand-different-english-accents/(ok))
- Phonological variation  
<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/sounds/regional-voices/phonological-variation/>

## 2. Understanding the lecturers' use of connected speech

Some lecturers may use connected speech which can make it difficult to pick out important words. Connected speech is the linking of words in a sentence. Sometimes the sounds of words change when words are linked together in a sentence. This makes it hard to perceive the words and understand the meaning of what a lecturer has said.

### Tips:

- ✓ Reading ahead will familiarize you with the language of the subject and provide you with an excellent vocabulary list that you can use for essays, presentations, and exams.
- ✓ Keep an eye on the lecture slides as you will be able to hear how the lecturer pronounces key words.
- ✓ Ask your lecturer to explain more during Q and A sessions and breaks.

Search: Understanding my lecturer

#### Online learning resources

- British Council – Connected Speech  
<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/connected-speech>
- Connected speech & linking American English pronunciation  
<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=understanding+connected+speech&view=detail&mid=62A1AEDC2EF04DB740A062A1AEDC2EF04DB740A0&FORM=VIRE>
- BBC Learning English – Pronunciation tips  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/multimedia/pron/connected/index.shtml>

### 3. Keeping up with lecturers who speak fast

Why do you think some people speak too fast? One of the reasons is that they have a lot of information to share with you in a short period of time. In a learning environment, lecturers know that they are exposing students to ideas for the first time and usually speak more slowly. The lecturers know that some students may feel they are speaking too fast because they have difficulty understanding new concepts and vocabulary. As you become more familiar with the topic, the language that confused you will become second nature. Try to reduce your distractions so you can focus on the lecturer and the slides. If you still find it difficult to listen, ask your lecturer for help.

#### Tips:

- ✓ Sit with a study buddy who you can compare notes with.
- ✓ Try increasing the playback speed on YouTube videos. Make it more fun by doing it with classmates.
- ✓ Try to control your anxiety levels when you lose track of the lecture. Take a deep breath and wait for a suitable point to re-focus on the lecture.

#### Search: Listening to fast talkers

##### Online learning resources

- Learn to understand fast speech in English: a 20-day challenge with JenniferESL – A 20-video series. Each video offers explanations, models, and practice.  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfQSN9FlyB6SEBVnec8LYuyLRvq3OCT-x>
- Fast talkers  
<http://vipenglishclassescampinas.com/blog/everyday-grammar-understanding-fast-talkers/>
- Understanding fast talkers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0YkZwkz5TY>

## 4. Dealing with a lecturer's lack of intonation or stress

When studying English at school, many students are taught to focus on the stress and intonation of the speaker to understand the important words. However, our research has shown that many students feel that some lecturers do not use stress and intonation enough. This can make listening for key words difficult and cause boredom for students.

### Tips:

- ✓ Stay focused throughout the lecture and look for other clues to key information such as in PowerPoint slides and body language.
- ✓ Encourage yourself to stay motivated and attentive during the lecture even if you feel bored.

### Search: English stress and intonation

#### Online learning resources

There are a lot of sources about recognizing and using intonation and stress online; however, there are none that we have found about how to deal with a speaker's lack of intonation or stress in a lecture context.

## 5. Understanding unfamiliar or technical vocabulary

Research has shown that understanding technical or discipline related vocabulary is one of the toughest challenges for students at English medium universities. You may feel confused at first with the amount of new vocabulary in your subject lectures, but you can help yourself with word lists. Many of the new words will appear in course materials such as readings and PowerPoint slides. Some of the same words, may be used in different subjects throughout your university life. Mastering the use of technical vocabulary will show your friends and professors that you have a professional understanding of the topic.

### Tips:

- ✓ Create a glossary of key words. Share them with classmates.
- ✓ Use a subject-related dictionary. E.g. dictionary of engineering, dictionary of linguistics.
- ✓ Learn the pronunciation of technical words.

### Search: Developing technical vocabulary

#### Online learning resources

- Techniques for improving vocabulary  
<http://fluentlanguage.co.uk/blog/techniques-for-learning-vocabulary>
- Improving your technical vocabulary  
<https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/globalpad/openhouse/academicenglishskills/vocabulary/tech/>
- Using context clues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85QcLiXBm6A>

## Strategy Area B – Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies are mental processes that you use to understand and make sense of what you have heard. Students have a number of cognitive strategies they use and adopt as they listen during lectures to foster understanding of lecture content. More effective listeners make use of a range of cognitive processes in order to better accomplish a task, including attending to specific information, relating what has been said to prior knowledge, understanding when a lecturer is moving to new topic, and summarizing what the lecturer has said.

Listening challenges in Strategy Area B:

6. Distinguishing main points from supporting ideas
7. Understanding meanings that are not directly stated
8. Using my own knowledge to fill in any missing information from the lecturer
9. Summarising the information from a lecture
10. Understand when the lecturer moves to a new topic

## 6. Distinguishing main points from supporting ideas

The main points of a lecture are usually part of the introduction. In most cases, the lecturer will follow the topic listed in the course outline and provide further details of readings. Try to at least skim the suggested readings prior to the lecture so you will have a better grasp of the main points and supporting ideas. During the class, the main points will be highlighted with title pages and a variety of fonts, colours, graphics, and sounds on the PowerPoint slides.

### Tips:

- ✓ Pre-read for classes so you know what to expect.
- ✓ Use a note-taking template that includes main points and supporting ideas.
- ✓ Listen to signposting phrases which point to main and supporting points.
- ✓ Compare notes with a classmate.
- ✓ Ask your lecturer for clarification.

Search: Main points from supporting ideas in speech

#### Online learning resources

- Listening for the main idea  
<https://magoosh.com/toefl/2014/toefl-listening-question-type-main-idea/>
- Noting the main idea  
<https://www.coursera.org/learn/note-taking/lecture/l2gcn/main-idea-lecture>

## 7. Understanding meanings that are not directly stated

Sometimes listening is not just about what is said but also about what is not said. This is often referred to as the listening skill of 'inferencing'. When friends share stories, we need to wait until the end to get the full picture. There may be similar situations in class when a lecturer introduces a new idea. The lecturer may warn you that the topic is complicated and will take some time to explain so sit back and relax while the information is **unpacked**. Diagrams, videos, and real-life examples may be used. If you feel confused, write down some points you would like to clarify during the Q and A. These may be clarified before the end of the topic but if not, raise your hand. Lecturers enjoy Q and A sessions because it gives them a chance to share their interests with an audience.

### Tips:

- ✓ Listen for guidance from your lecturer.
- ✓ Write down points that need to be clarified. Note the slide number if possible.
- ✓ Build subject knowledge.
- ✓ Use Q and A sessions and breaks to clarify points.

Online learning resources

Search: Understanding what is not said

- Strategies That Work to Listen for What's Not Being Said  
<http://www.yourthoughtpartner.com/blog/bid/57511/strategies-that-work-to-listen-for-what-s-not-being-said>

## 8. Using my own knowledge to fill in any missing information from the lecturer

Sometimes we seem to understand some new ideas more easily than others. This may have a lot to do with our prior knowledge and experience. When we have prior knowledge, we can relate this to the new ideas a lecturer is addressing. Over your university years, you will gain more understanding of your degree subject and this will in turn help you to understand lectures. Reviewing the readings and slides as well as talking to classmates may help you to visualize the missing information. You may also consider revisiting the suggested readings.

### Tips:

- ✓ Try to review your lecture notes within a day of the class.
- ✓ List confusing points during class and ask the lecturer during the Q and A.
- ✓ Clarify missing information with readings and classmates.
- ✓ Be active in class; talk to lectures and peers about the lecture content.

Online learning resources

Search: Using prior knowledge / active learning

- Being active in class  
<https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/learning/hlw/prior-knowledge>
- Remember What You Learn in Class: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEgRbMF1sH0>

## 9. Summarising the information from a lecture

One of the best ways to summarise information from a lecture is to organize your note taking like a secretary taking meeting minutes. Meeting minutes highlight the main points of a meeting and provide a good record of an event. Good organization starts by being well prepared. Whether you type or handwrite your notes, save them so you can read them later without confusion.

Use a system such as UPPER CASE, **bold**, *italics* or underlining to separate topics and **highlight** key words. Expand on your notes straight after the lecture while fresh in your mind.

### Tips:

- ✓ Good lecture summaries are useful for writing essays and revising.
- ✓ Distinguish between main points and supporting ideas.
- ✓ Make sure your handwriting or typing is clear.
- ✓ Save the notes along with course details in a safe place.

Search: Taking notes

#### Online learning resources

- Tips for college lecture notes  
<https://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/academic1/taking-notes-5-college-success-tips/>
- Most effective way to take notes  
<https://theconversation.com/whats-the-best-most-effective-way-to-take-notes-41961>
- Note-taking strategies  
<https://www.gocongr.com/en/examtime/blog/4-note-taking-strategies/>
- How to take great notes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAhRf3U50IM>

## 10. Understand when the lecturer moves to a new topic

Just like road signs show us what to expect when we drive, lecturers use signposts when they change topics. Most lecturers using PowerPoints will use different fonts, colours, and title pages. They will also give a verbal cue which will include summing up one topic, maybe even take a break or pause, and then introduce a new topic. Lecturers might also physically move from one side of the classroom to the other. Some of the verbal cues may also include a Q and A session.

Some verbal cues include:

- Before we move on are there any questions?
- In summing up...
- Let's move to the next topic...
- After the break we will explore...

### Tips:

- ✓ Look out for signs which show the lecturer is moving onto a new topic, e.g. the lecturer's body language, a new PowerPoint slide.
- ✓ Listen for signposting language which give verbal cues.
- ✓ Some lecturers may take a slight pause before moving on.

Search: Lecture cues

Online learning resources

- Listening cues  
<http://www.eapfoundation.com/listening/lectures/cues/>
- How speakers use signposting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEEcwL5mq6w>

## Strategy area C – Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies are applied when the listener plans, monitors and evaluates the listening process (Goh, 2002, 2008). A person's meta-cognitive awareness is their self-knowledge about learning (Flavell, 1979). In terms of listening, this means a student's awareness of his or her own problems in listening and the ability to manage and act on these problems using specific and targeted strategies. For example, if a student does not know much about a topic, he or she might do some reading before the lecture which aids the listening and learning process.

Listening challenges in Strategy Area C:

11. Doing topic-related tasks (e.g., reading, video) before the lecture to increase background knowledge
12. Rehearsing pronunciation of topic-related vocabulary before lectures
13. Using the purpose, scope and main topic of the lecture to help understanding
14. Using the overall structure of a lecture (i.e., how it starts, continues, and ends) to help understanding
15. Observing the lecturer's body language to help understand what he/she is saying
16. Correcting my understanding of lectures immediately if my understanding is incorrect
17. Paraphrasing the lecture content to take notes

## 11. Doing topic-related tasks (e.g., reading, video) before the lecture to increase background knowledge

Your instructor should tell you what is coming up in the next lecture as well as suggested readings. Read the material, make some notes, and discuss with your classmates before the next class. This will aid your understanding of the lecture and make the learning process more rewarding. You can list any problem areas and if your instructor doesn't mention them in the next lecture, raise a question when he asks, "any questions?" Learning requires you to be pro-active, so prepare well and take a risk by asking questions. Instructors enjoy answering questions because students are showing an interest in their area of expertise.

### Tips:

- ✓ Course outlines and suggested readings will help you to understand topics.
- ✓ Professors often preview the next class as they sum up a lecture.
- ✓ Search online for additional background information related to the lecture.

### Search: Attending lectures

#### Online learning resources

- Preparation for lectures: [http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/lecture\\_preparation](http://libguides.staffs.ac.uk/lecture_preparation)
- Getting the most out of a lecture  
<https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/study/making-most-of-lectures>
- How to listen effectively in lectures: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwwGNu9afg0>

## 12. Rehearsing pronunciation of topic-related vocabulary before lectures

It is a good idea to keep a journal of new vocabulary, especially words that are unique to your major. While reading, write down the words and use an online dictionary with an audio function to check pronunciation. There may be some variation in pronunciation so your instructor may not always match a talking dictionary. Some words, such as names are not always listed in dictionaries, so you can try searching YouTube for a video that discusses the topic. For those words you cannot find, send an email to your instructor and ask if s/he could run through the pronunciation at the beginning of the lecture.

### Tips:

- ✓ Use an online audio dictionary.
- ✓ Search YouTube tags for specific vocabulary.
- ✓ Learning the pronunciation of new vocabulary will help your future career.
- ✓ Accept variation in pronunciation of technical vocabulary.
- ✓ Study words from the academic vocabulary word list.

Search: Lecture vocabulary

#### Online learning resources

- Pronunciation tips: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/>
- Academic vocabulary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eq9PQrFGObc>
- Academic vocabulary list: <https://elc.polyu.edu.hk/cill/eap/wordlists.aspx>

## 13. Using the purpose, scope and main topic of the lecture to help understanding

Lectures usually begin with an introduction that outlines the content of the class and how the time will be used. So, if you are late, you may miss the main idea and not understand why the lecturer is moving from one topic to another. Throughout the lecture, key words and phrases will be mentioned and stressed in PowerPoint slides. These will help build your understanding of the main idea. You can also use the course outline to get an overall view of what will be covered in lectures and how lectures link together. Having a bird's eye view of the course will give you an edge and increase your understanding in the lectures.

### Tips:

- ✓ Be on time to catch the introduction and main idea.
- ✓ Link notes and ideas as the lecture progresses.
- ✓ Stay for the whole class as instructors usually mention the topic of the next lecturer at the end.
- ✓ Observe how lectures link together.

Search: How to understand the key points of a lecture

#### Online learning resources

- Four Keys to Key Points of College Lectures  
<http://www.back2college.com/fourkeys.htm>
- How to take great notes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAhRf3U50IM&t=14s>
- How to write summaries: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGWO1dEhtQ>

## 14. Using the overall structure of a lecture (i.e., how it starts, continues, and ends) to help understanding

The overall structure of a lecture is similar to academic writing. It begins with a main idea that is developed and explained. It ends with a summary and conclusion. The lecturer may choose to focus on one key reading or combine several. This is usually revealed in the outline at the start of the lecture. Once the class starts, the lecturer will use verbal and visual cues of when he or she is moving onto the next stage of the lecture. Some lectures may have a set structure, e.g. problem-solution / comparison-contrast / historical development.

### Tips:

- ✓ Be on time for class so that you do not miss the lecture outline.
- ✓ Organise your notes according to the outline.
- ✓ Try to link-up ideas with your notes.
- ✓ Write down any confusing points and follow-up with classmates or the lecturer.
- ✓ Observe how lectures link together.

### Search: Key structures in a lecture

#### Online learning resources

- How teachers structure lectures  
<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/design/instructionalstrategies/lectures.html#structuring>
- Lecture format and cues  
<https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/globalpad/openhouse/academicenglishskills/vocabulary/lecture/>
- How lectures are organized: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWQSBpHL6IA>

## 15. Observing the lecturer's body language to help understand what he/she is saying

Like speech, people use different body language, especially across cultures. Body language can be affected by light, clothing, body shape, and a person's mood. So, it may take time to understand your lecturer's body language and gestures. The most obvious body language in a lecture is with arms. Gestures may suggest common actions such as emphasizing a point, agreeing or encouraging. The lecturer may show different facial expressions, such as smiling when a student gets a correct answer or disapproval if a student is late!

### Tips:

- ✓ Reading body language can be hard as it can vary across cultures and personalities. Try to learn the different gestures each lecturer uses.
- ✓ Ask a classmate if you are unsure what the lecturer's body language is saying.
- ✓ Test your skills by trying an online body language reading skills test.

#### Online learning resources

- Test your body language reading skills  
<http://www.all-about-body-language.com/body-language-decoder.html>
- Body language tips: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolkinseygoman/2013/08/21/12-body-language-tips-for-career-success/#2019da0a187e>

Search: Reading body language

## 16. Correcting my understanding of lectures immediately if my understanding is incorrect

In university, you will probably listen more than you write. In many cases, lecturers will introduce new ideas and vocabulary and it is easy to get lost in the lecture. However, you can be prepared for lectures by reading the suggested course material before class. During classes, try to link the oral presentation to the PowerPoint slides and your own knowledge of the topic. While taking notes, highlight the questions you would like to ask. You can then check with classmates or ask the professor to clarify any points you are unsure about.

### Tips:

- ✓ Go to the lectures prepared and compare your understanding of the content to what your lecturer is saying.
- ✓ Ask questions to the lecturer or peers.
- ✓ Sit with a study buddy at the front of the class so you can hear clearly and concentrate.

#### Online learning resources

- Lecture notes self-check  
<http://manoa.hawaii.edu/undergrad/learning/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/LECTURE-NOTES-SELF.pdf>
- How to Talk to a Professor — Explained by a Professor  
<https://www.noodle.com/articles/how-to-talk-to-a-professor-explained-by-a-professor>

Search: Checking lecture notes

## 17. Paraphrasing the lecture content to take notes

Paraphrasing is an important part of note-taking because it gives you the chance to write down what you have learnt in your own words. Paraphrasing is a little bit like being a reporter taking notes from eyewitnesses. As we tend to write at about a third the speed someone talks, we need to paraphrase the main points. Be creative by using words, symbols, diagrams, pictures, and **colours**. One way is to put explanatory notes next to the PowerPoint bullet points. After the lecture, you can compare your notes with classmates and the recommended readings.

### Tips:

- ✓ Work on your vocabulary so that you become more able to paraphrase.
- ✓ Your notes help you to manage your knowledge and learning.
- ✓ Form a study group and share feedback on course content.

#### Online learning resources

- Note-taking  
<https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/study/notes>
- Paraphrasing: <https://elc.polyu.edu.hk/cill/refchoice.aspx>

Search: Paraphrasing lectures

## Strategy area D – Socio-affective Strategies

Socio-affective strategies refer to listeners' management of social relationships and negative emotions during listening (Chamot, 1993; Rahimirad & Moini, 2015). Five categories of socio-affective strategies for listening have been proposed, including questioning for clarification, cooperation, lowering anxiety, self-encouragement, and taking emotional temperature (Vandergrift, 2003). For example, if a student does not understand lecture content, they may ask a classmate or the lecturer for clarification. Sometimes, students get distracted by their smart phones in lectures or become discouraged if they cannot understand the lecture content. Therefore, they may adopt strategies for dealing with these challenges.

Listening challenges in Strategy Area D:

18. Understanding a lecturer with a low level of English
19. Listening to lecturers who mix English with Cantonese
20. Keeping listening even when you feel bored or tired
21. Encouraging myself to listen to the lecture despite difficulty
22. Asking (lecturers or classmates) for clarification
23. Listening to a lecturer who speaks a different type of English to me
24. Focusing on the lecture despite distractions from social media (e.g. Facebook) or incoming emails
25. Focusing on the lecture despite doing other work (e.g. for other subjects)

## 18. Understanding a lecturer with a low level of English

University life exposes us to a much wider world. Students and professors from around the world work together to share and learn. While you study to become an expert in your chosen field, you will also learn how to communicate your knowledge in an international environment. That means that some lecturers may use different language structures to what you are used to, but like all learning, you will get used to this. Moreover, your familiarization with different Englishes will help if you work in an international company. If you have trouble understanding your lecturer, try to match the key points to the PowerPoints and readings.

### Tips:

- ✓ Give your professor a chance and remain positive about learning as a whole.
- ✓ Sit in the front row.
- ✓ Read the handouts or ask for handouts.
- ✓ Pre-read.

Search: I cannot understand my teacher; teachers with foreign accents

#### Online learning resources

- Hard to understand <http://www.universitysurvival.com/student-topics/dealing-with-a-professor-who-is-hard-to-understand/>

## 19. Listening to lecturers who mix English with Cantonese

The ability to mix languages is called code-switching and it is a talent we should admire. Some lecturers may code-switch during lectures to help students understand the meaning of terms and concepts in their mother tongue. It also adds to the overall experience and local flavour. Students should see this as an opportunity to learn key Cantonese terminology for a number of reasons:

- It helps for doing group work with Cantonese-speaking students.
- Knowledge of Cantonese terms will be useful for attachments in Hong Kong and Southern China; especially for field work.
- If you feel your lecturer is using too much Cantonese, speak to him/her and explain that you do not understand Cantonese.

Online learning resources

Search: My bilingual university experience

- Bilingualism as a life experience  
<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/15/10/bilingualism-life-experience>

## 20. Keeping listening even when you feel bored or tired

Our research showed that this was a major challenge for students regardless of language proficiency! Sometimes it is easy to lose our focus at university. Late nights and lectures in big halls may tempt you to take a nap in the back row of a three-hour lecture. With a little bit of self-discipline, you should be able to make the most out of some of the more boring lectures. You may even find that by sitting at the front of class, you will become more interested. Pre-reading before class should also stimulate your curiosity and motivate your desire to learn more.

### Tips:

- ✓ Sit in the front of class so that you can make eye contact with the lecturer. It will make it easier if you need to ask questions.
- ✓ Think about the lecture topic. Ask yourself if you agree.
- ✓ Do simple stretches and exercises while seated. Take advantage of breaks to have a quick walk.
- ✓ Prepare by sleeping well.
- ✓ Do not treat lectures as a one-way transmission from the lecturer. Be active!

Online learning resources

Search: How to stay focused during boring lectures

- How to pay attention in lectures: <https://theuniversityblog.co.uk/2012/04/12/attention-in-lectures/>
- How to pay attention in class <http://www.wtfprofessor.com/how-to-pay-attention-in-class/>
- How to Pay Attention During Even the Most Boring College Lecture <http://study.com/articles/Make>YourTimeinLectureCountTipsforStayingEngaged.html>

## 21. Encouraging myself to listen to the lecture despite difficulty

You can familiarize yourself with difficult vocabulary by **highlighting** new words and ideas in the suggested readings before class. Another important issue is to choose to be at the lecture both physical and mentally. Good listening is about being in the right location and with the minimum of distractions. It is therefore good to sit close to the lecturer and pack your electronic devices away. By focusing in class, you will be better prepared for assignments and exams. Challenge yourself while taking notes by asking questions and giving examples. Use diagrams and **different colours**.

### Tips:

- ✓ Choose a comfortable seat at the front of class.
- ✓ Choose to be mentally focused.
- ✓ Use simple stretches to overcome tiredness.
- ✓ Stay positive even if you face difficulties.

Search: How to listen to difficult lectures

#### Online learning resources

- Becoming a visual learner  
<http://sachachua.com/blog/2012/02/what-to-do-when-you-have-a-hard-time-listening-to-lectures-adapting-as-a-visual-learner/>
- Tips for difficult lectures: <https://www.ramapo.edu/crw/files/2013/03/20-24.pdf>
- Listening skills: <http://www.educationcorner.com/listening-skills.html>
- 5 ways to listen better: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSohjYQI2A>

## 22. Asking (lecturers or classmates) for clarification

As you progress through university, you will discover that the format of lectures will vary. In some cases, it may take some time to explain complex ideas. The main idea is like a big building but the lecturer needs to lay the foundations first. If you are unsure of some ideas, write your questions. If you find they remain unanswered, ask the professor at the end. You can also ask your study buddy. Some students may be worried about asking questions which are too easy but do not worry; part of a lecturer's role is to help students and most lecturer's will be happy to answer even the simplest of questions.

### Tips:

- ✓ Familiarize yourself with the lecture topic by following the course readings.
- ✓ Keep a list of questions and tick them if they are answered.
- ✓ Most lecturers welcome questions but it is a good idea to wait for a Q and A period.
- ✓ Asking questions is part of being an active learner.

### Search: Asking questions in lectures

#### Online learning resources

- Asking questions  
<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/students/success-guide/ug/effective-study/in-class-and-in-lectures/asking-questions/>
- Asking for clarification: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28KTEQ7velc>

## 23. Listening to a lecturer who speaks a different type of English to me

Communicating with people from different backgrounds in university will help you after you graduate; especially if you join an international company. You will learn how people from different backgrounds pronounce key words and understand sentence structure. Being able to listen to different accents will help you communicate more effectively. Along with lecturers, some international students may use English in a way you have not heard before. You can increase your ability to understand someone who has a different English to you by being familiar with the subject you are discussing. In university, this means reading course material before class and perhaps watching a YouTube video.

### Tips:

- ✓ Listening to different Englishes improves your communication skills.
- ✓ Join a study group with international students.
- ✓ With permission, record lectures for future reference.

Search: What to do when you cannot understand your professor

Online learning resources

- International English:  
<https://blogs.nottingham.edu.my/learningenglish/2013/08/27/what-is-proper-english/>

## 24. Focusing on the lecture despite distractions from social media (e.g. Facebook) or incoming emails

Mastering distractions is a life skill that will help you in university and your future career. You can choose not to bring electronic devices to class or use them only when necessary. For example, you can turn off the Internet connection. Sitting at the front of class with a study buddy will give you more opportunities to engage with the professor. You will learn more and make better use of your time.

### Tips:

- ✓ Make learning in class your priority.
- ✓ Handwrite notes in class and type them up later.
- ✓ Treat lectures like a future workplace and only use electronic devices for specific tasks.
- ✓ Use a printed dictionary if you get distracted while using an app.

### Search: Distractions in lectures

#### Online learning resources

- Stay focused  
<http://www.collegexpress.com/interests/public-colleges-and-universities/blog/tips-and-tricks-staying-focused-lecture/>
- 97% of college students are distracted by phones during class  
<https://www.eab.com/daily-briefing/2016/02/02/study-one-fifth-of-college-students-are-distracted-by-phones-during-class>
- Your phone is trying to control your life: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/phone-trying-control-life/>

## 25. Focusing on the lecture despite doing other work (e.g. for other subjects)

It is better to organize your studies so that you can focus in lectures. If you try to multitask during a lecture, you may miss key information. You may get even further behind because you need more time to catch up. Worse still, your classmates may find it a distraction and your lecturer may feel offended. You can avoid deadline pressure by planning ahead. You should make a schedule for key assessment dates. Remember to always keep some spare time to coordinate with classmates for group work.

### Tips:

- ✓ Plan ahead.
- ✓ Create a reward system by working during the week and resting on weekends.
- ✓ Get the most out of a lecture by being there mentally as well as physically.
- ✓ Some studies show it is a waste of time to multitask in lectures. Discuss this with classmates and see if they think multi-tasking works. Then decide for yourself whether mono-tasking or multi-tasking in lectures is best for you.

### Search: Multitasking during lectures

#### Online learning resources

- You will never learn  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/science/2013/05/multitasking\\_while\\_studying\\_divided\\_attention\\_and\\_technological\\_gadgets.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/05/multitasking_while_studying_divided_attention_and_technological_gadgets.html)
- Students Think They Can Multitask. Here's Proof They Cannot.  
<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/multitasking-confronting-students-with-the-facts/>
- Monotasking  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/paolo\\_cardini\\_forget\\_multitasking\\_try\\_monotasking](https://www.ted.com/talks/paolo_cardini_forget_multitasking_try_monotasking)

## Part 3 Lecture Tasks

This section contains lecture tasks you can try out with your own subjects. After you have identified areas of need from Parts 1 and 2, you can select the lecture task most relevant to you.

**Task 1: Preparing for lectures: Content**

**Task 2: Preparing for lectures: Vocabulary**

**Task 3: Listening in lectures: Main and supporting points**

**Task 4: Listening in lectures: Your opinions**

**Task 5: Listening in lectures: Your questions**

**Task 6: Listening in lectures: English differences**

**Task 7: After lectures: Your reflection**

**Task 8: After lectures: Writing a summary**

## Task 1: Preparing for lectures: Content

1. Look at the topic of your next lecture. Has your lecturer provided any information about this topic? Tick the information provided.

PPT or lecture notes

Course readings

Links to resources

Other information: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Now you should do some preparation! Select the most relevant resource for the next lecture and go through this resource, taking notes. Make notes of any key points you find in the space below (left column) (you may need extra space).

Lecture preparation notes	Lecture notes

3. During the lecture, compare your notes to what the lecturer says. Make lecture notes in the right column above. Are there any similarities or differences in the points?

## Task 2: Preparing for lectures: Vocabulary

Write down ten technical/subject related terms that you think will come up in the next lecture. Try to practise the pronunciation of these words before the lecture. Tick the items off when you hear them in the lecture.

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

Did your understanding of any of these terms change during the lecture? If so, how?

### Task 3: Listening in lectures: Main and supporting points

During the lecture, note down the main points and supporting details. Continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

Main points	Supporting details

What did you find easy or challenging about this task?

## Task 4: Listening in lectures: Your opinions

During the lecture, note down the key points or arguments your lecturer presents. Then note down your opinion on these points, e.g. Does the lecturer have a strong point? Is the data up-to-date and reliable? Do you have any ideas you can add to the lecturer's argument?

<b>Lecturer's points</b>	<b>Your responses</b>

Evaluating what your lecturer says is an important skill at university.

## Task 5: Listening in lectures: Your questions

During the lecture, note down the key points or arguments your lecturer presents. Then note down your questions related to these points, or what extra things you want to find out. Finally, identify how you will find the answers, e.g. ask the lecturer, ask a classmate, or do your own research.

<b>Lecturer's points</b>	<b>Your questions / Points you want to know</b>	<b>How you will find the answers</b>

## Task 6: Listening in lectures: English differences

Your lecturer may speak with a different flavour of English to you. To become an advanced listener at university, you will need to become familiar with different Englishes. If your lecturer uses a different kind of English to you, complete the notes below to raise your awareness about how their English differs from yours.

1. Does the lecturer use different grammar structures to you? If so, which structures are different?

2. What do you notice about the lecturer's pronunciation and accent? Which words are difficult for you to listen to? How about the speed, stress and intonation?

3. How does the lecturer use body language? Does this help clarify the message?

## Task 7: After lectures: Your reflection

1. How would you rate your understanding of the lecture or tutorial? Tick one of the boxes

I understood everything	I understood most points	I understood about half the content	I picked up a few key points	I did not understand much
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Tick the areas of challenge in the lecture.

- I could not perceive the lecturer's English?
- The lecturer spoke too fast
- The vocabulary was too tough
- The lecture content was too new / challenging
- I could not pick up the main points
- I did not have enough subject knowledge to fill in the missing details
- I could not grasp the structure of the lecture
- I could not motivate myself to keep listening
- Others:

3. What could you do to develop for the next lecture?



# Conclusion

## The skilled listener at English medium universities

Skilled listeners have a developing **linguistic repertoire** and are able to use **technical language** related to their field of study. Successful academic listeners also have **sociolinguistic awareness**. This means that they are able to listen to different Englishes and have an open mind about the use of English by different speakers. At university, it is important to build **subject knowledge**. Effective listeners are able to access this store of knowledge when listening in lectures, making the comprehension process smoother. Finally, skilled listeners at university are able to **stay focussed and motivated** when facing difficulties. **Monitoring the listening process** and **employing strategies to cope with listening challenges** are essential listening skills.

We hope you have found this guide useful! Academic listening holds many challenges but by addressing each challenge and developing your listening skills, you can enjoy the rewards of study at English medium universities.

