

Listening comprehension - Information and advice

Summary of this whole document: Listening in a new language is hard but practice helps. The most useful thing to do is focus on building vocabulary :)

Difficulties you might experience:

A Lack of vocabulary

B Not recognizing words you know

Possible reason 1: You're mispronouncing it / expecting it to sound different

E.g. Plus d'un milliard / Deux milliards

E.g. Six (pronounced 'seess' on its own, 'see' in front of a consonant, 'seez' in front of a vowel)

Possible reason 2: Difficulty separating words

(due to speed / not knowing where new words start)

Examples of separate words heard as one unit: trafic d'organes, en bas âge, en plein air, au fond, de près de

Hints for separating words correctly

Words often start with a combined particle	l'... d'... qu'...
French has 'liaison' which means that sometimes the normally silent consonant on the end of a word is pronounced when the next word starts with a vowel. The most frequently liaised letters are s (z sound), n, t	grands... sans... des...
Students often process small connecting words as part of the main word	et ('and') versus é-

C Getting used to a new accent (e.g. France v. Quebec)

D Dealing with poor audio conditions (too quiet, distracting background noise...)

For most immersion students, the main difficulty is B-2 (separating words / speed).

Listening tests - Additional difficulties

E Short term memory storage - you need to be able to keep what you've heard in your head long enough to write down the answer

Strategy: Write a keyword and fill in the answer after / Just listen the first time so you have a chance to hear everything.

Interesting tidbit: Your short term memory is more limited in a 2nd language but increases with increased fluency!

F You maybe understood the audio but your answer made no sense

Strategy: Write more detail or answer with a complete sentence / Reread your answer before you hand your test in / Read the questions ahead of time and circle keywords

G On a dictée, you may lose your place in the text.

Strategy: Ask the teacher to pause the audio more frequently and say where you should be

H You think you understood the audio, but you actually didn't so you continue along the path of an erroneous interpretation :(

Once again, based on the thousand+ listening tests I have marked over the years, the average immersion student has difficulty with listening because of reason B-2. The questions I put on a test target parts of the audio that use basic-intermediate vocabulary (i.e. you would understand it if you could read it).

Examples of answers on listening tests that are illogical, unclear, or don't answer the question

Why doesn't she own a tv?

- Obligatory

What are the problems with the New York subway system?

- Find the right metro
- The express line is good
- Not one platform equals a kilometer
- There's the express line that seems like a station
- The express line is too quiet
- You have to take a taxi 2000 km to the next station

Her comedy show is going to be aired on tv, but she isn't worried if it's terrible / if it sucks. Why isn't she worried?

- It not is marked on the the tv
- Someone else has was saying that it's bad
- Her presentation is shit so she doesn't worry
- It won't be on tv if it sucks
- Because she is a thing that sucks
- Modern structure
- She doesn't want to suck

The success of terrible tv shows depends on what type of people? / Why do people watch terrible tv shows?

- Revolt
- The success is held by people watching the tv
- People with the steps back
- For people who don't like tv
- Just to see a terrible detail
- So they know they still exist
- He relaxes
- Background noise
- To realize that there's reality

Comparing a skilled listener and a struggling listener

<u>Skilled</u>	<u>Struggling</u>
Strong vocabulary	Struggling with vocabulary
Good pronunciation	Pronunciation errors (like saying silent letters and not doing vowel sounds accurately)
Well-developed background knowledge	Lacking global knowledge (e.g. of history, science...)
Active listener <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asks questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does my interpretation make sense? - Stays focused 	Gets distracted by trying to figure out an unknown word and misses the rest of what's being said.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asks for / uses feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asks teacher for answers afterward / Listens again - Picks out unknown words / phrases and looks them up <p>Uses good test strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-reads questions / Knows what they're listening for - Listens for overall meaning and details - Writes quickly / Writes keywords and fills in details after - Rereads answers <p>Doesn't give up.</p> <p>Doesn't translate in their head.</p> <p>Is attentive but relaxed.</p> <p>Has an accurate idea of how much they understand</p>	<p>Doesn't try practice listening exercises.</p> <p>Doesn't use test strategies.</p> <p>Unmotivated or gives up.</p> <p>Translates in their head.</p> <p>Is unfocused or is over-focused on trying to understand a specific word instead of listening in general.</p> <p>Thinks they understand more than they do.</p>
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Levels of listening

<p><u>Easiest:</u></p> <p>Teachers</p> <p>People talking to you directly</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They want you to understand so they might modify their speech to help you (slower, louder, repetition, simpler sentence structure). - You are probably familiar with the context - You probably know the person (and are used to their accent / dialect) - They choose vocabulary that you know - You can participate to signal when you don't understand / to ask questions - Lots of visual cues like easy-to-see body language
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<p><u>Intermediate:</u></p> <p>Participating in a group conversation (with native speakers)</p> <p>TV shows / Movies / Podcasts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easier genres: soaps operas, live sitcoms, blockbuster movies (marketed to a large and varied audience) - Harder genres: police procedurals, comedies - Hardest genre: 'realism' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More slang / more varied vocabulary - Harder to hear (person not directly facing you, other noise...) - Jargon specific to a certain context (e.g. police vocab) - Actors might not be speaking clearly
<p><u>Intermediate or advanced:</u></p> <p>Intimidating person talking to you directly</p> <p>The news (level varies a lot)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You are consumed with emotions like panic! fear! embarrassment! etc. that don't let you focus on processing speech - <i>The news</i>: requires a lot of vocabulary, a lot of contextual knowledge, cultural references (and maybe regional dialects during interviews)
<p><u>Advanced:</u></p> <p>Super-slangy hyper-realistic TV / movies (basically the movie 'La Haine')</p> <p>Eavesdropping on conversations (e.g. on the bus)</p> <p>Young kids</p> <p>Really old people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>La Haine</i>: tons of slang spoken super quickly in 'realistic' conversation (unfinished thoughts, people talking at the same time ...) - <i>Eavesdropping</i>: lots of distracting noise, no visual clues, lack of background knowledge about people / situation - <i>Young kids</i>: Most of what they say is nonsense, the rest is mumbled or sung - <i>Old people</i>: literally unclear (e.g. might not have teeth or good tongue control), different generational vocab, might ramble or not say context - <i>Kids and old people</i>: not likely to check for understanding or to have you participate in the conversation

Ways to practice listening without having to do anything written:

Find a tv show and watch it without multi-tasking.

Sub-strategy: put on French subtitles

Example: When I first started teaching Spanish, I showed a movie in class that I couldn't understand (though I could understand it without a problem when *reading* the screenplay). After watching 100+ hours of Spanish-language telenovelas, I could understand it!

Ways to practice listening that include a related activity:

1 Dictée / Transcription activities

- Find audio/video that has available subtitles or a transcript (e.g. Cyprien on Youtube or enseigner.tv5monde.com). Choose a short section (30 seconds to 1 minute), play it and write down what you hear word by word. You'll need to pause and repeat a lot. Then correct what you've written using the subtitles / transcript.
- This is a great activity since it's easy to do without a teacher and it helps with pronunciation, spelling, grammar, vocabulary and attention to detail!

2 Cloze activities (Fill in the blanks dictée)

- Listen to a text get read out loud and fill in the words that have been removed. Best style: blanks that contain 1-3 words so you have to work on knowing where to separate sounds.
- Drawback: more time-consuming to create.

3 Note-taking

- Listen to audio/video and take notes. Good for listening for main ideas and working on processing speed and short term memory.

4 Answering reading comprehension questions.

- Good for practicing main ideas and test structure, but hard to create on your own.

5 Watching a show and jotting down vocab notes.

- Good for listening actively and developing vocabulary and grammar.

6 Following along with an audio book

- Good for pronunciation and learning where word boundaries are.

7 Listening to the same episode / podcast etc. twice.

- Try repeating cool vocab you hear at loud to practice noticing stuff / improving your speaking.

Fun data from a dictée (fill in the blanks style)

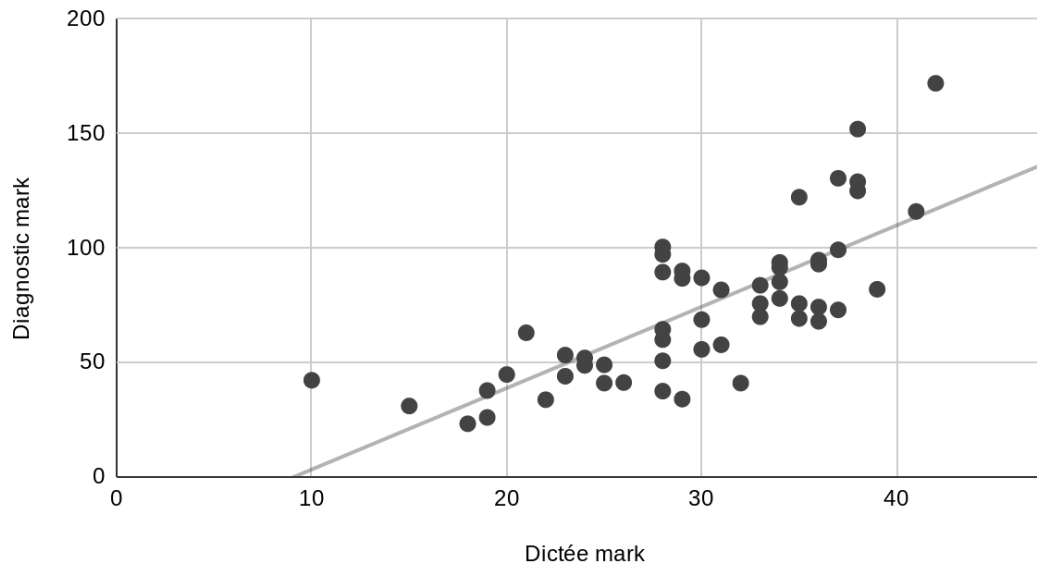
How it was marked:

- Each blank was worth 3 points
 - 3 = correct, 2 = right words but minor spelling mistake, 1 = one of the words or correct sound but written wrong
- Total possible: 48
- Class range: 10 to 42
- Average mark: 29.5
- Average mark for early immersion students: 31; Average for late immersion: 27
 - Is this difference statistically significant? I don't know! I never took statistics :(

Observations

- Almost everyone tried to fill in all the blanks
- Most students said the level was okay (but the speed was difficult)
- Other than 'et génèrent', when students had a blank they weren't sure of they tended to either:
 - 1 write the part they knew and leave the rest blank (if the blank had more than one word)
 - 2 write a word that exists (but with the wrong sound and that makes little sense in the context)
 - 3 write a word that doesn't exist, doesn't quite have the right sound, and maybe doesn't even look French!
- In general, students who heard the sound correctly had the right answer. Wrong answers usually included having the wrong sound.

Diagnostic versus Dictée



Success on the dictée correlates to success on the September / May diagnostic test (testing vocabulary and grammar).

My conclusion: the biggest barriers to success are:

- Lack of vocabulary (données = data, réseaux = networks, au fond = at the bottom, eux = them 'emphatic form')
- Lack of collocation awareness (knowing which words are likely to be used together / in a specific context)
 - De près de (of approximately), réseaux + sociaux, qu'un + noun, vingt mille + noun, au fond + de
- Lack of practice separating words in authentic speech (more used to pre-studied dictées or dictées where the teacher makes word boundaries obvious)

Answer examples from the Fral 12 dictée (Câbles sous la mer)

<i>Level (based on number of correct answers)</i>	<i>Correct answer</i>	<i>Small spelling mistakes</i>	<i>Incorrect answer - different word</i>	<i>Correct sound but word doesn't exist</i>	<i>Incorrect sound or doesn't make sense</i>
Interm.	Se font	Se fond			Se front Ce vent Ce front Se fondre
Easy	Sans rien	Sans riens			
Interm. <i>The word 'sociaux' was easier than 'réseaux'</i>	Réseaux sociaux	Résaux...	Resources Ressources		Résus... Resseaux... ... sorciaux Resarelle Reusose Ressous
Interm. <i>Most people heard the 'qu' sound and the 'l'</i>	Qu'un rôle	Qu'une rôle	Que un film Qu'un filme		Qu'un l'autre Qu'a un Qu'a haut Chole Carol Qu'au un Qu'houle Qu'un houle Qu'à eau Q'un peux Caouille

Easy	Sous la mer	Sou la mer	Sous la mère		
Easy	Des kilomètres	Des kilomètre			
Interm. <i>Many people missed the word 'des'</i>	Au fond des	Au font des	En fond des		En found
Difficult <i>Most people thought it was 1 word</i>	Et génèrent	Et génères Et génère	Engineers Ingénieurs	Éjénère Égénère Et génaires	Éjeuner Engener Ingeneur Et gererre Et genier
Interm. <i>The d' was often missed and many students wrote 'guerre' instead of the plural despite having the word 'des' in front of the blank</i>	Guerres d'influence	Guerres influence Guerres l'influence Guer des influences			... d'enfurence Guère enfouiance Guerre den fr Gare d'influence
Impossible <i>Most people heard '20' but didn't separate 'mille' from 'lieues'</i> <i>Jules Verne allusion</i>	20 mille lieues		20 mètres 20 millions 20 milieux 20 minutes 40 mètres Bien milieu	Vin millieu Vint milieu	20 millièrre 20 millie Va millieurs Vinght milleux
Easy	Eux		Eu		
Easy <i>Many students didn't write the second 'de'</i>	De près de	De pret de	De presque De prête	Depres	De prete
Easy	1990		1970 1980 2090 1985		

<p>Impossible Almost everyone heard 'grands'</p> <p>A lot of people thought the beginning of the next word 'privés' was part of the word in the blank</p>	Grands acteurs	Grands actors	<p>Grandeurs Grands entreprises Grandes attentes Grands êtres</p>		<p>Grands entres Grands interpris Grands attends Grands éteint Gros inter</p>
<p>Difficult The word 'numériques' was easier than 'données'</p>	Données numériques		<p>Domaines numériques Dollars numériques Dollar Amérique</p>	Donnaie numérique	<p>D'neuveau amerique Don Amérique Dos Amérique D'é numériques D'éclaires numérique Duneau numérique Doler numérique Numberique Doulais numérique Énuméric Dédonnumérique Douvres numériques</p>
Easy	0,4			0.5	

Dictée - Les câbles sous-marins, un enjeu planétaire

<https://enseigner.tv5monde.com/fiches-pedagogiques-fle/les-cables-sous-marins-un-enjeu-planetaire>

Émilie Aubry

Partout dans le monde, vous le savez, on assiste à une explosion du trafic Internet mobile avec le sentiment que toutes nos connexions **se font** de façon virtuelle, sans fils, sans tuyaux, **sans rien**. Et bien non, évidemment, détrompez-vous: pour que vous puissiez accéder à vos **réseaux sociaux** préférés en quelques secondes, il faut bien sûr des infrastructures. Des infrastructures dans le ciel avec les satellites - encore que vous allez voir que, dans cette affaire, ils ne jouent **qu'un rôle** infime - des infrastructures sur terre et surtout des infrastructures **sous la mer**, et c'est ce que nous allons voir aujourd'hui, dans cette émission : **des kilomètres** de câbles enfouis **au fond des** océans qui permettent des communications ultra-rapides entre les continents nous rendent aussi potentiellement très vulnérables **et génèrent**, vous allez voir, des **guerres d'influence**, des bagarres commerciales et géopolitiques **vingt mille lieues** sous les mers.

Le câble Ulysse entre Calais et Douvres fait une trentaine de kilomètres de longueur. Les transpacifiques dépassent, **eux**, 30 000 kilomètres. Alors, qui contrôle ce marché annuel **de près de** deux milliards de dollars ? Eh bien, depuis les années **90**, ce sont quelques **grands acteurs** privés : le français Alcatel Submarine Networks, l'américain TE SubCom et le japonais NEC. Les 428 câbles sous-marins actuels transportent 99 % de nos **données numériques**, moins de **0,4** % passent par les satellites.