

## **Testing Comprehension: Reading and Listening**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Linguistic information can be conveyed in the form of speech and written text, but it is the content of the message that is ultimately essential for the higher-level processes in language comprehension, such as making inferences and associations between text information and knowledge about the world. Language is an integral part of our personal, social and business activities. Human life without language is unimaginable. It the most powerful, convenient and permanent means of communication. Language may be defined as mean of reading as well as receiving the messages therefore it can be defined as two way traffic. Hence, the sender as well as the receiver should know a language in order to exchange each other's views.*

**Keywords:** *Unimaginable, Receptive, Productive, Ignorance, Profitably, Individuality, Regression, Unfamiliarity, Prejudices, Harmony, Pessimist, Optimistic, Sophisticated, Appropriate, Envisioned.*

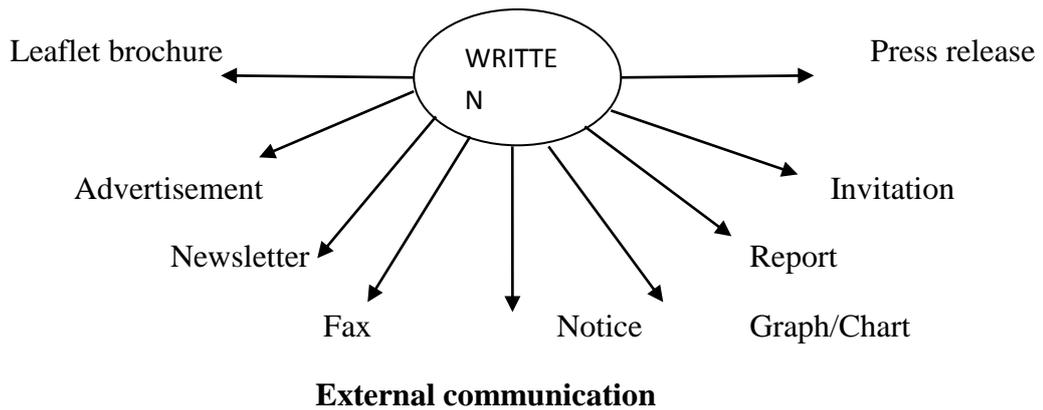
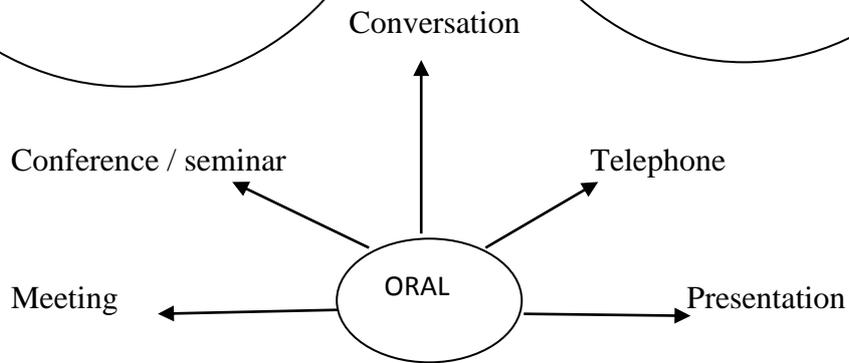
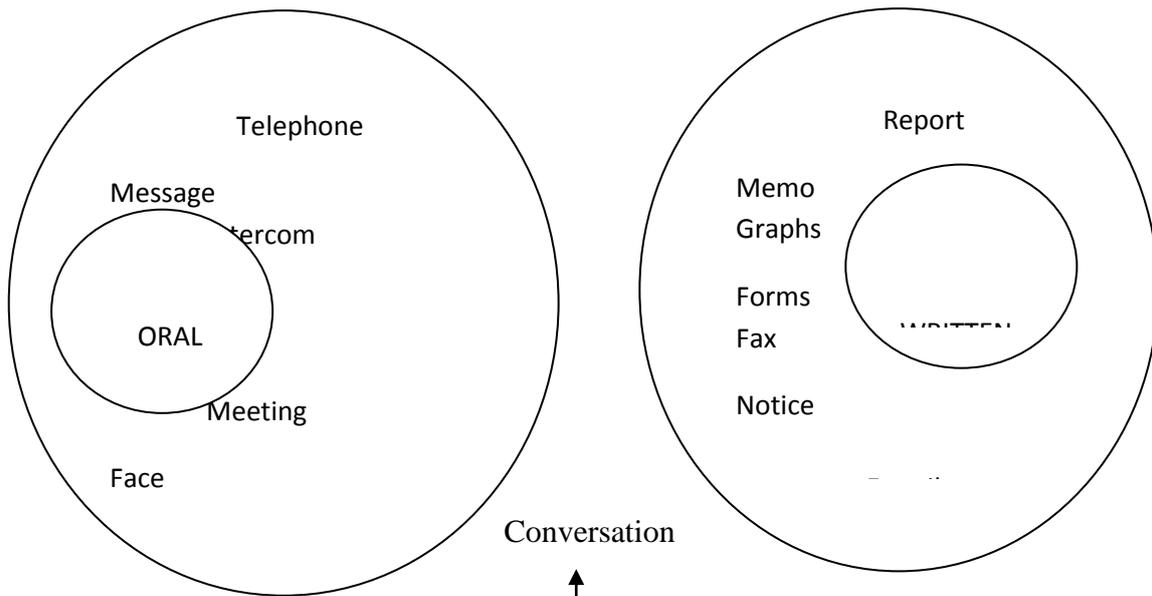
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### **Methods of Communication**

The main methods of oral and written communication, both internal and external are showing in the following diagram:

#### **Internal communication**



Each sender and receiver of the messages needs to acquire a specific level of mastery in the four basic skills:

1. Listening comprehension

2. Speech
3. Reading comprehension
4. Writing

These are classified into two categories:

### **‘Receptive’ and ‘Productive’**

Listening and reading are called ‘receptive skills’ as we receive information through listening and reading. Speaking and writing are called ‘productive skills’ as we produce our thoughts and feelings while speaking and listening.

### **Reading comprehension**

Reading, like Listening is a receptive skill. Reading does not mean simply to read the word symbols without grasping their meaning. In reading, the eyes come in contact with certain words which are used to represent certain ideas. Mind perceives the meaning of those words which ultimately concern a message. This process is known as reading comprehension – understanding through reading.

### **Reading comprehension: Impediments**

1. Poorly equipped mind
  2. Prejudices and bias
  3. Regression
  4. Vocalisation
- The reader’s ignorance of the symbols employed or his unfamiliarity with the subject can affect his comprehending of the matter read. We can read more speedily and profitably the things already known to us.
  - Our prejudices, beliefs, bias individuality might not be in harmony with the writer’s new point. In such a condition the comprehension will be imperfect.
  - Some readers suffer from a habit of working back too much so as to hamper their progress. This visual wandering and regression makes them slow readers.
  - Sometimes reading is made slow due to reader’s habit of reading aloud. He has to vocalise or sub vocalise.

### **Measures Adopted for Good Reading comprehension**

The following measures should be undertaken:

1. Reading much and of interest
  2. Underlining
  3. Looking for the key sentences
  4. Guessing
- Reading material should be of reader’s choice.

- Underlining main terms is useful as it saves time when revision is done.
- For meaningful reading, another important measure is to follow the scientific procedure. The reader should try to look for the key sentences, which enable him to understand the entire written material.
- Guessing the meaning of words with reference to the remaining matter enables to maintain the continuity.

### **Preparing for reading**

- Find something to read. Examples include a children's book, a newspaper article, and a short story.
- Find a place to read where you can concentrate. This may be someplace secret where no one will bother you or simply your home at a time when it is quiet.
- Schedule a routine time to read. Do this at least for the times you have nothing else to do, such as when you're on the bus. That way, a good book only entertains you but can also help you learn to read faster. Read a book that will capture your interest, not a book that you'll probably be bored with or dislike.
- Implementing the basics

### **Methods of reading speedily**

1. Skimming method
2. Scanning method

#### **Skimming method**

The word 'skim' literally means to take scum or cream or floating layer from the surface of liquid. Skimming is a specific technique of reading which means reading a text superficially or to look over with curiosity and gather salient facts contained unlit. Webster calls skim reading a combination of reading and skimming where the reader reads the important sections and skim the less important ones.

#### **Scanning method**

The word 'scan' means to look at all parts initially or quickly. The scanning method of reading a text means reading quickly to look for specific bits of information. This method is used when the reader reads a passage quickly to get a general idea of the theme. This short of reading is extensive and not intensive.

### **Advancing your reading skills**

- Read as much as you are able. When you start getting bored or need a break, take one. Reading should be fun and enjoyable, don't force it. After your break, return to where you were, and continue.

- Reread the material. It is okay to reread something if you do not understand it fully the first time.
- Use context clues to find out a word's meaning. Context clues are when a person figures out the meaning of a word by seeing how the word was used in a sentence. For example, you were reading the following sentence and wanted to know what 'pessimist' means: My mother is always happy and optimistic, the total opposite of my brother, the pessimist. So from the sentence, you can gather that 'pessimist' means the opposite of happy, so pessimist means being moody and angry. Good, experienced readers always use context clues! If you find a word that you're totally stumped on, use the dictionary! If you want to save time and the hassle of turning pages, go to the online dictionary.
- Memorize a text. Read that portion out in front of a mirror, out loud. Memorizing can improve your confidence with reading.
- Reread. If you don't understand what you are reading, read over the sentence again. Try reading the words out loud to yourself. If you still don't understand something, ask a good reader nearby to explain the sentence to you, or simply pick up a book that is easier to read and more appropriate to your reading level. Feel free to use your finger as a pointer. It will keep your eyes focused on the line you are reading, improving your understanding.
- Keep reading. Try to read as much as you can on your free time. Reading will help you in lots of ways; your vocabulary will become larger and more sophisticated and you will notice your grades change for the better in school. Have fun reading

### **Listening comprehension**

Language learning requires mastering four basic skills, namely: listening comprehension, speaking, reading comprehension and writing.

All communication is a two way traffic which requires at least two partners – the speaker and the listener. The speaker or the sender of the message through speech symbols. The listener receives these symbols. His mind interprets those symbols and converts those speech symbols into a meaningful message. But if the listener is not actively involved in oral communication then he fails to comprehend the oral message. This entire process can be represented graphically in the following manner-

**Sender of the message      -Message      Receiver of these message**

Thus listening comprehension may be defined as an ability to understand the message communicated orally.

#### **Guidelines to be an effective listener**

1. Prepare to listen
2. Avoid pre judgement

3. Be open minded
4. Establish eye contact
5. Watch for signals
6. Extract main points
7. Give feedback
8. Make notes

### **Types of listening**

An individual can respond to oral communication in either of the two ways:

1. Passive listening
2. Active listening

### **Passive listening**

Sometimes we hear somebody speech without comprehending it. In such case the mind receives no message and thus no communication takes place. Most of the time such a situation arises due to the inattentiveness of the listener. This type of listening is often known as passive listening.

### **Active listening**

When the listener listens to ones speech attentively and comprehends its meaning, it is known as active listening. In this kind of listening, the listener is actively involved in the process of communication.

### **Stages in the development of listening skills**

1. Casual listening: The basic experience of listening, understanding and recognizing.
2. Attentive listening: This is the second stage in the development of listening skills, where the learner recollects and comprehends the meaning of the message without the help of any visual presentation.
3. Focussed listening: This is the third stage, where the learner uses the language code. He forms certain images in the mind and names them using language code.
4. Analytical listening: This stage is very essential creative thinking and creative writing. At this stage the learner develops the ability to analyse, evaluate and apply his ability in an envisioned situation.

### **Strategies for Developing Listening Skills**

Language learning depends on listening. Listening provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication.

Effective language instructors show students how they can adjust their listening behaviour to deal with a variety of situations, types of input, and listening purposes. They help students develop a set of listening strategies and match appropriate strategies to each listening situation.

## Listening Strategies

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. Listening strategies can be classified by how the listener processes the input.

**Top-down strategies** are listener based; the listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text, and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. Top-down strategies include

- listening for the main idea
- predicting
- drawing inferences
- summarizing

**Bottom-up strategies** are text based; the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. Bottom-up strategies include

- listening for specific details
- recognizing cognates
- recognizing word-order patterns

Strategic listeners also use met cognitive strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening.

- They plan by deciding which listening strategies will serve best in a particular situation.
- They monitor their comprehension and the effectiveness of the selected strategies.
- They evaluate by determining whether they have achieved their listening comprehension goals and whether the combination of listening strategies selected was an effective one.

## Listening for Meaning

To extract meaning from a listening text, students need to follow four basic steps:

- Figure out the purpose for listening. Activate background knowledge of the topic in order to predict or anticipate content and identify appropriate listening strategies.
- Attend to the parts of the listening input that are relevant to the identified purpose and ignore the rest. This selectivity enables students to focus on specific items in the input and reduces the amount of information they have to hold in short-term memory in order to recognize it.
- Select top-down and bottom-up strategies that are appropriate to the listening task and use them flexibly and interactively. Students' comprehension improves and their confidence increases when they use top-down and bottom-up strategies simultaneously to construct meaning.

- Check comprehension while listening and when the listening task is over. Monitoring comprehension helps students detect inconsistencies and comprehension failures, directing them to use alternate strategies.

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