

Using pictures to teach listening skills

Introduction

Pictures are a resource from which listening skills can be taught. They provide students with authentic situations that are commonly found throughout the world, and more importantly, illustrate how vocabulary, grammar, speaking, and listening are found in students' immediate environment. Some instructors (Werff, 2003) have even been able to bring about even the most reticent students in the class by using pictures to decrease their affective filters. In this lesson, we will learn of one way pictures are used as effective tools in teaching listening skills to ESL and EFL students.

Choosing the Picture

The first step in choosing a picture is to determine a theme for the class. Themed classes will often bring about intrigue and curiosity simultaneously reducing any negative emotions students may feel and that will hinder the language acquisition process. Moreover, they will feel as though the class has meaning, a feeling students need in order to continue learning English.

The next step in choosing a picture is to find one with appropriate content. The term "appropriate" in this context refers to materials that are suitable to the classroom once the age, culture, content in the picture, and students' negative sentiments towards subjects are identified and considered. Instructors poll students before class to see what interests them. Then, instructors create a short schedule from which pictures will be used to teach listening skills. Pictures should not be used too often in class as students may grow bored of the lesson format which will in turn cause them to lose focus and begin day-dreaming.

Finally, pictures should be large enough and clear enough so that students do not have to strain their eyes trying to decipher what is in the picture. A decently sized picture for the English language classroom will be roughly the size of a sheet of paper, in other words, 8 inches by 11 inches. Pictures smaller than 8 inches by 11 inches may be too small for students to see details. Pictures much larger than 8 inches by 11 inches would just be wasteful and inefficient. Also, they would be difficult to distribute among the students.

The picture should be clear and when possible, pictures with color should be used. The color can emphasize certain aspects in the pictures and it can also provide more details therefore creating more information from which listening questions can be derived. The following summarizes the guidelines that should be used when choosing a picture.

- Determine a theme for the class that day (e.g. sports, natural disasters, shopping, etc.)
- Chose a picture with content that is appropriate for students (e.g. considering their age, preferences, likes and dislikes, etc.)
- Use a picture with color and with dimensions roughly equivalent to a piece of paper.
- Check to make sure that pictures are clear and not blurry
- Prepare enough copies of the pictures for the class

Preparing a Note-Taking Sheet

Instructors will want to prepare a separate sheet of paper so that students may write down words that represent objects or actions in the picture. This will help them recognize the words when they hear them; learning vocabulary is easier when students first read the word then hear it (Drislane, 1999). On the paper, instructors create 3 sections. One section is for brainstorming where students just write down what they see in the picture. The second section consists of 5 separate rows. Each row is labeled. The labels are: Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives, Adverbs, and Prepositions. The third section is for the final answer, which is done immediately after the listening section of this lesson. The following illustrates how a page is created.