



Education Tips

How to Use VOA Learning English
to Improve Listening Skills

This downloadable, printable guide is part of a series about using our website for group learning activities. The activities are excellent for classroom learning as well as English language practice groups.

While these activities were designed with classroom Internet capability in mind, most of the activities do not require it. For instance, the text from our written series can be printed and read aloud to students. Or, you can download the audio or video file to your device to play offline in class. To do this, just click on the words "Direct Link" to the right of the video or audio player.

Beginning Learners

Activity #1

Series options: [What's Trending Today](#), [News Words](#) and [As It Is](#)

Materials needed: four or five prepared questions, a laptop and a shared screen. If you don't have multimedia capability in your classroom, you can read the text from What's Trending Today or As It Is articles out loud.

Instructions: Before the activity, select a News Words video or choose a story from What's Trending Today or As It Is for the activity. Develop three to four level-appropriate questions to test student listening comprehension.

To begin the activity, put students into groups of three or four. Hand out the questions for the story or write them on the board or a shared screen.

Have students read the questions prior to hearing the audio or seeing the video and assign only one question to each group. Before playing the audio or video, tell students to listen for the answer to their assigned question.

Play the video or audio or read the story aloud.

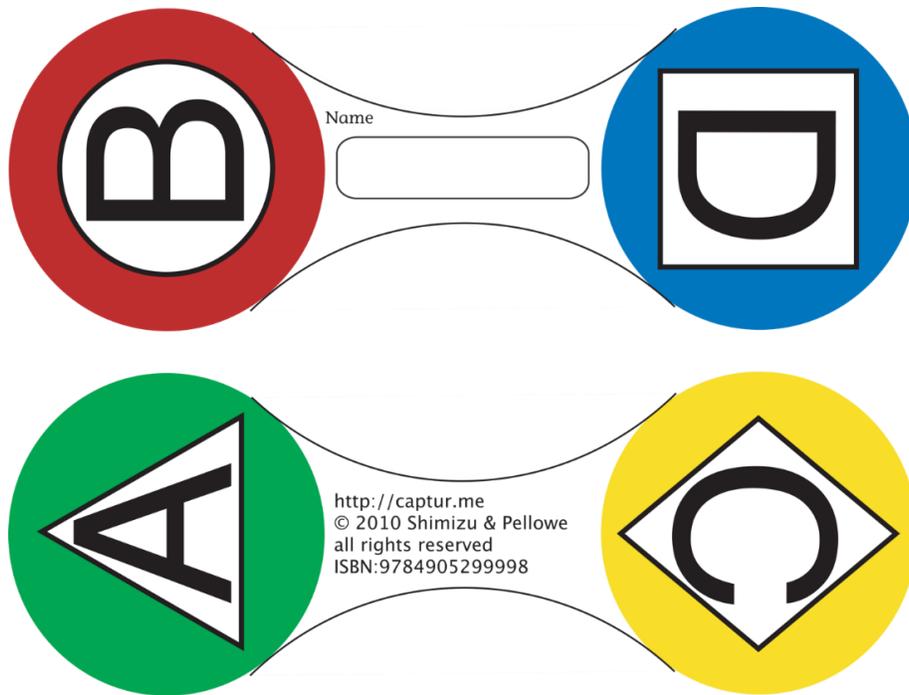
Then, ask each group to work together on an answer to one question. They should write complete sentence answers. Set a limit of no more than three sentences per question. Then, have each group share their responses to the questions with the class. Discuss anything students had difficulty understanding.

Activity #2:

Series: [Let's Learn English](#)

Materials needed: response paddles (see image below), a laptop and a shared screen. If you don't have multimedia capabilities in your classroom, choose a few of your strongest pronouncers to read the dialogue. Be sure to note whether the dialogue has two characters or more. A copy of the dialogue for Lesson 1, for example, can be found [here](#).

Instructions: For this activity, you'll need to download the response paddles (image below). These [interactive paddles](#) were developed by Japan-based English professors Bill Pellowe and Paul Shimizu. Click on the image in the main story for a downloadable version that you can print, copy, and give to students.



Have students cut them out and tape (or glue) them together. The assembled paddles should look like this:



Students at a university in Japan use interactive response paddles during an activity. Photo by Paul Shimizu.

Also before the activity, select the Let's Learn English episode you'd like to show. If you have never used the series for your class, it's best to start with Lesson 1. To begin the activity, place students into pairs. Play the main video at the top of the page. After the video, display the online quiz on the shared screen. For each question, play the video clip and then allow the pairs to discuss their answers:

Question 1 / 6

Play the video, then answer the question. Who is she?

- Melissa
- Mary
- Maurice
- Meghan

Submit Answer

Next Question



Each option can represent a letter. For example, in the image above, "Melissa" would be option "A" and "Mary" would be option "B," and so on. After the pairs have chosen their answers, ask students to raise their paddles to show which they chose.

Be sure to answer any listening comprehension questions that come up.

If you'd like to use the quiz as a game for points and small prizes, you can do the following: have each pair decide on a name for their team prior to the start of the activity; and (teachers) come up with a question (based on the episode) to break the tie. For the tie question, the person from a pair or group that calls out the correct answer first gets the point for their team. If there is any debate about who called out the correct answer first, you can give both winning teams the point and the prizes.

Intermediate Learners

Activity #1

Series Options: [As It Is](#); [English in a Minute](#); [English at the Movies](#); [Words and Their Stories](#); and [Personal Technology](#)

Materials needed: five prepared questions, a laptop and a shared screen. If you do not have multimedia capabilities in your classroom, read the story text aloud or have student volunteers each read sections of the story.

Instructions: Before the activity, prepare five comprehension questions about the video or article. Note that some As It Is stories may be more appropriate for beginners, while others are better for intermediate learners.

Make sure the questions require some thought and an answer that is about a paragraph long. Additionally, before the activity, select the video or audio you'd like to use prior to class. To begin the activity, divide students into five groups. (Pairs will work well if the class is small.) Hand out copies of the questions or write them on the board or shared screen. Ask each group to be responsible for answering one question. (If the class is large, two groups can answer one question and compare their answers.)

Have students read the questions prior to hearing the audio or seeing the video and assign only one question to each group. Before playing the audio or video, tell students to listen for the answer to their assigned question.

Play the video or audio. If you do not have multimedia capability, read the story text aloud. Then, give students time to work in their groups to come up with thorough answers to their group's question. You can decide prior to the activity whether students will write out answers or just jot down notes about the answer and then speak the answers. If you choose the latter method, students can elect one or two members from their group to speak. However, all group members should participate in developing the answer.

Activity #2

Series options: [Health & Lifestyle](#) and [Science in the News](#)

Materials needed: response paddles; a laptop and a shared screen; if you don't have multimedia capabilities in your classroom, read the story aloud or have two or three of your students read it (in sections).

Instructions: Before the activity, select the story you'd like to use. Note that some health and science reports are more advanced than others; some may be better for intermediate activities, while others may be better for advanced activities. To begin the activity, place students into small groups. Play the audio or have one or two students take turns reading sections of the story text aloud. Afterward, show the online quiz on the shared screen. One by one, show the questions and allow the groups to discuss what the correct answers are.



From the Health & Lifestyle report 'Can Burnt Toast Give You Cancer?'

Ask students to raise their paddles to show which option they chose. Be sure to answer any comprehension questions that come up. You can even have other students answer their classmates' questions. For example, if a student

says, "Teacher, I don't understand why option A is not correct answer," you can ask a student volunteer to explain.

If you'd like to use the quiz as a game for points and small prizes, you can do the following: have each pair decide on a name for their team prior to beginning of the activity; in case there is a tie, come up with a question (based on the story) to break the tie. For the tie question, the group that calls out the correct answer first gets the point for their team. If there is any debate about who called out the correct answer first, you can give both teams the point and the prizes.

Advanced Learners

Activity #1

Series options: [People in America](#) and [American Stories](#)

Materials needed: five prepared questions; a laptop and a shared screen; if you do not have multimedia capabilities in your classroom, read the story text aloud or have student volunteers read sections of the story.

Instructions: People in America and American Stories episodes come with a comprehension quiz. (American Stories also comes with a scripted, downloadable lesson plan.) Before the activity, select the video you'd like to use. To begin, place students into pairs or small groups and play the video.



Iraqi-born and D.C.-based restaurant owner, artist, and activist Andy Shallal was featured in People in America. The video series takes a look into the diverse lives of Americans.

Then, play the quiz videos so that students can test their listening comprehension. Play the video for each question and then have groups select their answers using their response paddles. (These paddles are described in Activity #2 in the Beginning Learners section.)

After completing the quiz, you may wish to have students do additional activities related to the story. Below are a number of options for individuals or small groups.

First, give students the opportunity to listen a second or third time to the story in preparation for their responses. Then, have students do one or more of the following activities:

- Write a letter to a character in the story. Give the character advice or tell a story from your own experience that relates to their experience in the story. Or for an oral response, pretend to call the character on

the phone and tell them something they should do that is different from what they did in the story.

- Make a movie poster for the story. Include as many elements from the story as possible. Or, create the script for a movie 'trailer' for the story. Read it aloud to the class with an emotional vocal style. (Begin with a typical trailer phrase: "In a world...")
- Create a "word web" of terms from the story. Put the one key word or phrase in the middle. Connect other relevant words or phrases to it with lines
- Write and act out a dialogue that could occur between two or more characters from the story. (For People in America, you can write a dialogue between the featured person and someone important they mentioned in their interview.) The scene in the dialogue should be one that is NOT in the story, but is something students imagine occurring before the time of the story or after it.
- Retell an important part of the story in your own words. Pretend that the main character is a friend of yours and begin, "One day my friend..."

Activity #2

Series options: Science in the News and Health & Lifestyle

Materials needed: response paddles; a laptop and a shared screen; if you do not have multimedia capabilities in your classroom, read the story text aloud or have one or two student volunteers read sections of the story.

Instructions: Select one of the more advanced Health & Lifestyle or Science in the News stories. Place students into pairs or small groups. Play the audio or ask one or two volunteers to read the story aloud. Then, display the quiz questions and have students work with their partners or groups to select the correct answers with their response paddles.

After the quiz, other activities you may wish to have students do any of the following additional activities:

- Have students pretend to interview a scientist or health professional about the topic of the story.
- Write a letter or 'call' the main scientist mentioned in this lesson. Ask a question or give advice related to the topic of the story. Create a word web of the key terms you need to know to understand the story.
- Take the story a few years into the future. How will this impact the average person? What advances do you predict will take place as a result of this scientific research or breakthrough in health understanding? Tell a story or write a 'news' story on the same topic as it would be treated 10 years in the future.

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