

Learning, Teaching
and Student Engagement

English Skills

Speaking and Listening

This module covers concepts such as

- Understanding the connection between effective listening and effective speaking
- Trying some new strategies to improve your spoken English
- Committing to regular practice

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The Learning Centre
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Speaking and Listening Skills

Effective spoken communication requires:

- Language skills (speaking, listening)
- Social skills
- Awareness of the cultural context

In order to develop your spoken language, you need to begin by developing your listening skills. The structured listening activities below will help you to focus on particular aspects of spoken language.

1. Resources for structured listening

Lecture recordings

The ideal listening resource for English within your subjects is your lectures. If an audio recording or **podcast** is not available in Learn JCU, ask your lecturer for permission to record your lectures.

First, these recordings can be used to check that you have understood the **content** of the lecture. This may require you to learn new vocabulary. A second listening will help you to become familiar with the **structure and style** of the lectures. Subsequent listening can help you to become familiar with the **accent and pronunciation** features of each of your lecturers.

TED Talks and ABC Radio National

There are many excellent free online resources to help you to improve your listening. TED Talks are high quality presentations recorded in **video format** on a huge range of topics. They are an excellent resource for learning to deliver **successful presentations** to a general audience.

<https://www.ted.com/talks>

Another excellent online resource is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's Radio National. Radio National explores a wide range of issues and current affairs daily. Most programs are podcast and many are transcribed. This is an excellent resource for listening practice. First, listen to the **audio file** of a program without reading the transcript. Then, listen to a short segment of the interview and write down what you hear. Check the **written transcript** to see whether you

misunderstood any words and to fill in any gaps in your listening.

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/transcripts/>

Did you know that PDFs can talk?

Next time you open a document in PDF format, try listening to it while you read. If you can't work out how to do this, google search: 'How to listen to a pdf'!

Can your dictionary talk?

Most online or electronic dictionaries supply audio files as well as text. Use this facility to check that you have the **pronunciation** right.

2. Structured speaking activities

Public Speaking clubs and courses

At JCU, you can join the Townsville University Toastmasters club. This is a great place to practice giving short talks and meet other students. The club also offers 'Speechcraft' courses in public speaking.

<http://townsvilleuni.toastmastersclubs.org/>

3. Unstructured speaking and listening practice

The old saying, "practice makes perfect", is a reminder of the importance of regular practice. Without it, you are unlikely to improve. So take every opportunity you can to engage in conversation daily. Don't be embarrassed about mistakes or misunderstandings. Instead, try introducing yourself to your fellow students, forming a study group, joining a club or attending a social event. JCU offers a wide range of events on campus and your city also hosts numerous events. Ask a local for some suggestions. The more opportunities for practice the better.

<http://www.jcu.edu.au/student/studentlife/index.htm>

<http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/community/events/Pages/EventsCalendar.aspx>

"Practice builds confidence and competence!"

English Speaking Skills

1. Fluency

Communicating clearly is most important. Do **not** focus on communicating quickly; this will occur naturally, with practice. Moderate volume is important for communication; avoid excessive or insufficient volume.

2. Mistakes

Don't be afraid of mistakes – native speakers do not speak perfectly either! A different accent and a few minor mistakes are acceptable. Self-correct when you can and allow your language to improve steadily - it will if you practise.

3. Misunderstandings

Don't see a bit of confusion as a disaster. Take a breath and try clearer pronunciation, or a different word, or create a context for the listener.

If people laugh, they will want to laugh with you not at you. Try to see the humour rather than focus on the humiliation.

4. Conversation Practice

Take every opportunity you can to participate in conversations with a variety of people. Find people with similar interests – this is definitely not a waste of your time at university.

5. 'Muscle Building' and Self Esteem

Give yourself time to learn to work your facial muscles in new ways in order to speak clearly. Stay positive; your skills will develop continuously as long as you engage in the English speaking community as much as possible. Have

realistic expectations of yourself; language learning is a lifelong process, even for native speakers.

6. Conversation Topics and Taboos

Listen to English speakers in different contexts and you will soon learn to adjust to this strange new language called Australian English. Take note of the common topics of conversation you hear around you: the weather, the weekend, etc. If you ask an inappropriate question, you will probably notice a surprised reaction. Try a safer question or simply talk about yourself!

7. Communications Styles and Cultural Context

As you mix with locals here, you will begin to understand the cultural context. For example, after the first meeting with someone, formalities are often dispensed with. At university, academic staff value student questions and feedback, so be direct but always use polite language. At JCU, your learning is paramount, so ask for help when you need it!

Other useful websites for learning English

<http://australianetwork.com/learningenglish/>