

# **TEACHING LANGUAGE SKILLS**

## **PART 1- RECEPTIVE SKILLS**

# SKILLS IN INTEGRATION:

**A. Receptive skills** → reading and listening (meaning is extracted from the discourse)

**B. Productive skills** → speaking and writing (students actually have to produce language themselves)

-Receptive skills are somehow passive, but they demand considerable language activation!

-Productive skills are in some way more active!

-While teaching skills, they must be integrated! We must employ skills not in isolation, but in tandem.

-We should look at how input and output are connected in the classroom, how skills can be integrated and how skill and language work are connected.

## RECEPTIVE SKILLS:

**\*Basic methodology model for teaching receptive skills:**

\*There are two ways of teaching receptive skills:

1) Type 1- read and listen for general understanding

2) Type 2- read and listen for details /specific information/ for language points

\*\*\*From Type 1 to Type 2 (First get a feel for the general then attack the text in detail

a) Lead-in.

Lead-in → activate the schema (our pre-existing knowledge of the world), activate the schema with:

Pictures,

Headlines,  
Book jacket descriptions

\*\*\*Prediction is vitally important if we want students to engage fully with the text!

b) Type 1 Comprehension Task:

-Read and listen in a general way/understanding

c) Teacher Feedback:

-go through the answers (pairs and groups)

e) Type 2 Task:

in more detail...

f) Follow-up task

**\*The Language Issue (Problem) for Receptive Skills:**

Length and number of unknown words decides the text's comprehensibility.

\*\*\*For no language difficulty:

1) *Pre-teaching vocabulary*

2) *Extensive Reading and Listening*

\*Extensive- often for pleasure (provides language development and increased word recognition)

\*Intensive- more concentrated/ less relaxed

3) *Authenticity:*

Carelessly chosen authentic material can be extremely demotivating. However, it can be simplified!

**\*Comprehension Tasks for Receptive Skills:**

Not for testing → for helping to understand

Best tasks:

They raise students' expectations. To help students become better readers and listeners, use perform activities!

Appropriate challenge:

Tasks can be difficult, but they must be achievable! Getting the level right depends on the right match between text and task!

## A. READING:

### \*EXTENSIVE AND INTENSIVE READING:

To get maximum benefit from reading, students need to be involved in both **extensive** and **intensive** reading!!!

#### \*Extensive reading:

→ Teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they read and to do so for pleasure and general language development.

→ Extensive reading develops students' word recognition and improves them as readers overall!

→ Teachers need to offer students a programme including appropriate materials, guidance, task and facilities (such as permanent and portable libraries of books)

#### \*Intensive reading:

→ It is often teacher-chosen and directed.

→ It is designed to develop students' specific receptive skills such as:

- Reading for gist-general idea (skimming)
- Reading for specific information (scanning)
- Reading for detailed comprehension
- Reading for inference and attitude

#### \*\*\* Reasons of intensive reading sequences:

→ having students practice specific skills such as skimming/reading for general understanding or gist (Type 1 task) or scanning/reading to extract specific information (Type 1 task)

→ getting students to read texts for communicative purposes (mixing both Type 1 and Type 2 tasks) as part of other activities, as

sources of information, or in order to specify uses of language

### \*Intensive READING Sequences:

**1)Lead in:** introduce learners to the topic and focuses their attention

- **aim:** - to get the learners to start thinking about the topic of the reading text before you actually show them the text itself, and perhaps introduce or familiarize them with a few vocabulary items from the text.

-to engage learners' interest and get their minds focus on the topic

- **techniques:**

- ask learners questions about their personal experiences related to the topic

- ask learners' opinions and have a short discussion around the topic

- show a picture of something or someone in the text and ask learners to describe it/him

- ask learners to imagine a scene/person like one described in the text.

### **2)Read and Respond:**

Before the learners study the reading text in detail, it is important that they should read it through quickly to get a general idea of what it is about, rather than trying to understand every word straight away.

-**skimming:** read the text – or just the beginning and end – rapidly in order to get a general idea of the theme.

-**scanning:** look rapidly through a text searching for precise information (finding answers for one or two simple factual questions about the text quickly)

-reading more carefully:

### 3) Follow-up:

Reading texts as a good source of **new words and expressions** ( Extending learners' vocabulary by focusing on a particular group of words in the text ) ( the learners are encouraged to add more words and expressions to expand the set)

#### \*WHAT READING MEANS:

For defining reading; purpose and physical setting are linked in that we cannot identify a likely purpose for the activity without some knowledge of the setting.

Reading itself will mean different things in different contexts.

We need to widen our understanding of context to consider not just the physical setting of the activity but who is speaking to whom and what set of circumstances.

So;

**Reading= physical setting + purpose + who is reading + set of circumstances**

Reading for;

- 1) identifying
- 2) decoding and understanding
- 3) recitation
- 4) interpreting

Reading as interpreting → reacting to a written text as a piece of communication, attempting to understand

#### \*WHAT BEING READER MEANS:

**-experienced readers** → make judgements about any reading activity about the degree of care and attention which the material warrants

**-effective reading** → flexible and appropriate response to the material

This is always guided by the reader's purpose; it means that readers are aware that they have options, including the option to give up. Our day-to-day reading is **selective**. We filter written messages. Our response to a reading activity depends on:

-our time

- attention
- energy
- purpose

#### \*READING PURPOSES:

Personal purposes of reading:

##### a) Reading for survival (Instrumental Reading):

Reading in response to our environment

-as a matter of life and death (stop sign for a driver)

-as a matter of immediate needs/wishes (WC-ladies and gentleman- exit)

For young children: perceiving their day-to-day needs and interests, from such sources as TV, advertising, and street signs (environmental print)

For adults: reading instructions on a baby food, safety regulations on toys

##### b) Reading for learning:

Extending our general knowledge of the world-means of finding out information

-reading at school (with display function)

-extensive reading for learning

##### c) Reading for pleasure:

For your own sake! You don't have to do it!

If readers do not read for pleasure in their mother-tongue they are likely to do so in a second or foreign language. An important by-product of reading for pleasure in any language is fluency.

#### \*TEXT AND DISCOURSE

Reading → as a text

Reading → as a discourse

(Two different perspectives)

Reading as a text: output of a writer which can be studied/ recorded

Reading as a discourse: reader's process of constructing meaning from it

## \*READING AND TEXT:

**Text:** any chunk of written language carrying a whole meaning

-describable with terms such as warning/ novel/ letter

-the data the reader works with to construct meaning

### \*The writing system:

The English writing system is frequently charged with being **chaotic** on the grounds that correspondences between sound and written symbol are much less consistent.

The lack of a predictable sound-symbol correspondence in English has an immediate implication for learner readers.

### \*Features of connected text:

When we encounter texts, whether written or spoken, we recognize them as pieces of communication rather than mere strings of words and sentences. This is because of the way parts of a text relate to each other to create a meaningful whole. It is possible to look at texts in three different ways;

1) formal feature (cohesion) → grammatical system of linking sentences, paragraphs

2) propositional meaning (coherence) → how ideas are expressed and related to each other

3) communicative function → function of a text

**Cohesion** → the formal links between sentences and clauses (personal pronouns-referring expressions)

**Coherence** → the meaning connection within the text

-depends on a reader's ability to draw on relevant knowledge of the world

## \*READING AND DISCOURSE:

Discourse → the meaning the reader constructs from the text

There are a number of discourses which can be recovered by a reader from any text.

These discourses are social rather than personal and individual in that they relate to social practices and beliefs.

They change according to social groups (culture specific).

## \*READING COMMUNITIES:

Speech communities → social groups which share both a language or language variety and conventions regarding its use- sub-groups

Literacy Club/Discourse Community → the group of people for whom reading and writing is a taken-for-granted daily event

-sports page readers, readers of romantic fiction, readers of feminist poetry, etc...

## READING AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Discourse → can be related to three levels of context in the interpretation of a text

- 1) Immediate
- 2) the institutional
- 3) the wider social context

### \* The immediate context of situation:

The physical and social environment in which the reading of a text takes place

### \*The institutional context:

Notices, signs and documents show the power of institutions such as the advertising media or the government

Our knowledge of a society's key institutions helps us to anticipate when and where we might be likely to come across particular printed messages.

### \* The wider social context:

Behind a particular text in its immediate and institutional contexts lies a complex set of values, beliefs, knowledge and expected behaviors which are part of the shared culture of its author or authors and intended reader.

## \*READING, GENRE, SCHEMA:

### \*GENRE:

-literacy forms (novel, epic poem, short story)

-culturally recognizable types of language activity -both spoken and written- (menu, shopping list, tutorial, medical examination, joke, essay, thesis)

-Some genres are for **cultural/ subcultural groups**, others are **cross-cultural** (jokes).

-Communicative events which are socially recognizable

-Communicative function of the genres as social events is recognizable to a particular community of listeners or readers

-there is **not** one-to-one correspondence between genre and discourse!

#### \*SCHEMAS:

- Reader's schema: "cognitive constructs which allow for the organization of information in long term memory"

- relates incoming information to already known information!

- **Schemas**: allows us to predict the continuation of both spoken and written discourse

→ Readers: must bring together linguistic knowledge & familiarity with the discourses within a text. WHY? : to draw upon a relevant schema!

#### \*THE READING PROCESS

- reader's progression through a text => **dynamic** ; not static.

- **reading** => not only product , but process as well.

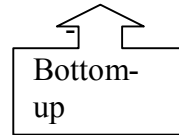
- **text** does not contain meaning, rather *it has a potential for meaning!*

#### \*READING AS A UNITARY AND SELECTIVE PROCESS:

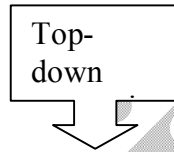
- no hierarchy of skills ; instead, ability and willingness to reflect on what is being read

- **unitary**: reading strategies, rather than distinct skills.

- **effective readers**: select the most appropriate strategies!



: from textual clues to meaning



: from schematic knowledge to text

#### **Top-down and Bottom-up:**

\*Top-down → looking at a forest (getting general view of the passage-the overall picture)

\*Bottom-up → studying the individual tree  
It is probably most useful to see acts of reading and listening as interactions between top-down and bottom-up processing.

\*Interactive model → An interactive reading model combines the valid insights of bottom-up and top-down models by recognizing the interaction between bottom-up and top-down processes simultaneously throughout the reading process.

#### \*SUBMISSIVE AND RESISTANT READERS:

→ Readers disagree or agree with the writer.

##### Submissive readers:

- interpretation is likely to be the one intended by the writer

##### Assertive (Resistant) readers:

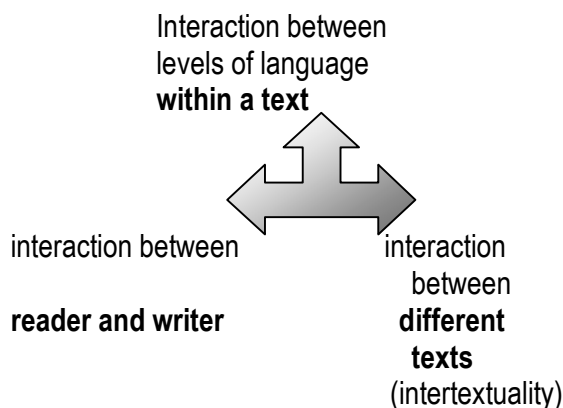
- can derive quite remote interpretations due to distinct purposes.

- "critical reader"

#### \*INTERTEXTUALITY:

The production and reception of a given text depends on the writer's and reader's knowledge of other texts!

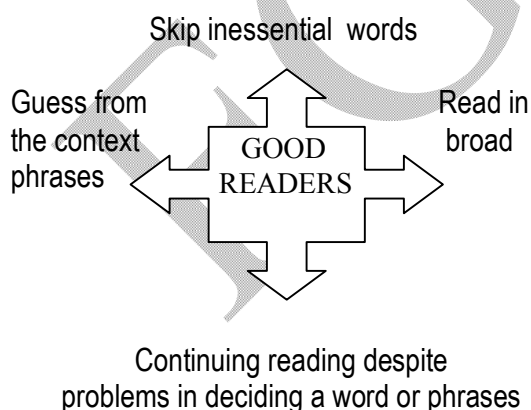
→ Reading process is interactive in several ways!



**\*READING STRATEGIES:**

-not teaching specific skills, but of developing reading strategies!

→ Good readers tend to select suitable strategies!



**\*Roles of Teacher in a Reading Lesson:**

There are further roles we need to adopt when asking students to read intensively:

**1. Organiser:**

- tell students exactly what their reading purpose is.

- give students clear instructions about how to achieve the purpose and explain how long they have to do this.

**2. Observer:**

- give them space to do the reading.  
- restrain yourself from interrupting the reading

**3. Feedback Organiser :**

-lead feedback session to check that they have completed the task successfully.  
- having them compare their answers in pairs.  
- be supportive in order to counter negative feelings and sustain students' motivation.

**4. Prompter:**

- prompt students to notice language features within the text.  
-direct students to certain features of text construction

**B.LISTENING:**

**\*EXTENSIVE AND INTENSIVE LISTENING:**

**\*Extensive Listening:**

- teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they listen to and to do so for pleasure and general language improvement.

- usually takes place outside the classroom  
- motivational power increases when students make their own choices)

- materials can be obtained from a number of sources: *simple readers with an audio version, coursebook CDs/tapes, podcasts, broadcasts, etc.*

- Students should not worry if they do not understand everything

- teacher should explain the benefits of listening effectively and come to an agreement about

how much and what kind of listening students should do.

### **\*Intensive Listening:**

#### **a) Audio Materials**

##### - Advantages:

- Students hear a variety of different voices apart from the teacher's
- opportunity to "meet" a range of different characters (especially where real people are talking)
- wide variety of situations and voices
- provide a significant source of language input

##### - Disadvantages:

- big classrooms with poor acoustics are problematic
- every one has to listen at the same speed (speed dictated not by listeners)
- not an entirely natural occupation (group of people → around a tape recorder)

#### **b) Live listening**

- a popular way of genuine communication is live listening (T. or visitors to the class talk to the students)

##### - Advantages:

- allow students to practice in face-to-face interactions
- allow students to practice listening 'repair' strategies such as *formulaic expressions*, *repeating up to the point*, *rephrasing*, etc

→ not only the sounds of someone's voice but also all sorts prosodic and paralinguistic clues.

- **Live listening** can be like these:

##### a. Reading aloud:

- extremely enjoyable if the teacher reads with expression and conviction.
- teachers' playing two parts of a dialogue or inviting a colleague into classroom.

(Students see how a speaker would act in different conversational settings)

##### b. Story-telling:

- predictions on what is coming next.
- describing people in the story.
- retelling stories → powerful way of increasing language competence

##### c. Interviews :

- Students' own questions → real listening for answers to their own questions

##### d. Conversations:

- teacher ↔ colleague conversations: Students watch the interaction as well as listen to it

### **\*Roles of the teacher in a Listening Lesson:**

#### **a. Organizer:**

- giving listening purpose
- giving clear instructions about how to achieve the goals
- building their confidence (achievable tasks and comprehensible texts)

#### **b. Machine Operator:**

- being efficient users of the audio players (test them before the lesson)



**c. Feedback Organizer:**

- leading a feedback session to check Students' answers (comparing in pairs first may be better → sharing responsibility!)
- being supportive when giving feedback

**d. Prompter:**

- prompting students listen to the text again in order to notice a variety of language and spoken features
- sometimes script dictations to provoke their awareness of some language features

**\*LISTENING lesson sequence:**

**1) Warm up:**

- giving them some idea of what the text is going to be about
- may also be as pre-teach difficult new vocabulary (not all of them!)
- aim: get the learners interested in the topic and familiarize them with some vocabulary

**2) Listen and respond:**

- **Listen and complete** : a picture, map, diagram, table, or chart.
- **Listen and correct** : factual mistakes → correct
- **Listen and do**: a series of instructions and actions
- **Listen and draw**: description of a person, place or object
- **Listen and guess**: description → guessing what/who/where.
- **Listen and match** : matching with pictures, people, objects or places.
- **Listen and reorder** : put some pictures or sentences in the correct order.

**3) Follow-up:** an activity from another skill area (speaking or writing)

**\*TYPES OF LISTENING:**

**a) Listening for gist:** listening when we want to know the general idea of what is being said, as well as who is speaking to whom and why, and how successful they are in communicating their point.

**b) Listening for specific information:**

listening when we don't need to understand everything, but only a very specific part. For example, while listening to a list of delayed trains we are only interested in hearing news about one particular train-the one we want to catch – we listen selectively for this specific information. We ignore everything else.

**c) Listening in detail:** listening when, for example, we need to find errors or determine differences between one passage and another. We cannot afford to ignore anything because, unlike listening to a list of delayed trains, we don't know exactly what information will help us to achieve our task.

**d) Inferential listening:** listening when we wish to know how the speaker feels. It may involve inferring.

**\*DELIVERY TYPES OF LISTENING:**

- reciprocal listening → allows the use of repair strategies-speakers can react to looks of confusion by backtracking and starting again, listeners can ask for clarification, ask the speaker to slow down, etc.

- nonreciprocal listening → the listener has no opportunity to contribute to a dialogue ( watching tv, listening to the radio). The listener has no influence over factors such as the speed at which speaker talks, the vocabulary and grammar used, and no recourse to asking for repetition of a word. For all of the above reasons, nonreciprocal listening is usually regarded as more difficult than reciprocal listening.

**\*BOTTOM-UP VERSUS TOP-DOWN APPROACHES TO LISTENING:**

There are two models to describe the listening process. These are the bottom-up model and the top-down model.

→ **The bottom-up model** emphasizes the decoding of the smallest units- to lead us towards meaning. This approach is based on discrete units of language in text.

→ **The top-down model** emphasizes the use of background knowledge to predict content- refers to world knowledge, knowledge of the speaker or context.

The top-down model is based in the listener, much of the comprehension relies on what happens in the mind before the listening has ever begun whereas the bottom-up approach depends more on the sounds heard.

\*\*\*We use both processes simultaneously when we listen, something that is known as the **interactive model**.

#### **\*WHAT MAKES A GOOD LISTENING TEXT?**

→ In the context of language classes, we can divide these and various other factors into two groups: **Content** and **deliver**.

##### **1) CONTENT:**

###### **Interest factor:**

If the text is interesting and if the students have a personal stake in it, they will listen attentively.

###### **Entertainment factor:**

Funny, enjoyable or gripping texts contain their own built-in interest factor.

###### **Cultural accessibility:**

The texts need to be accessible to the listener. Certain concepts don't exist in some cultures, so the situations and contexts of some recordings may be incomprehensible. For example; Halloween is unheard of in most of Africa. Teachers need to make sure that students have the content knowledge to make the text accessible.

###### **Speech acts:**

What makes a good listening passage is the type of speech act it represents. Speech has a number of different functions, such as suggesting, narrating, criticizing, etc.

-Fixed/ static speech acts: airport announcements, formal introductions, how to operate washing machine, etc.

-Dynamic speech acts: narratives, extended discussions, etc.

##### **Discourse structures:**

Certain discourse structures are easier than others. Discourse structures refer to the organization of a piece of text.

The problem-solution pattern is far easier to grasp because it has fewer stages and fewer transition.

##### **Density:**

Density refers to the amount of information in the text. Redundancy gives listeners a chance to process the content of the previous utterance. The less redundancy present, the more demanding listening is.

##### **Language Level:**

A listening text containing many new lexical items and high-level grammatical structures will be difficult. Besides grammar and vocabulary, a further aspect of level is complexity: long sentences full of noun phrases, packed with meaning, are for students to progress. Degrees of formality also need to be considered. Very informal texts, perhaps containing slang and/or unclear articulation, may cause difficulties, as may very formal texts.

##### **2) DELIVERY:**

Listening input in classroom comes in two models.

\*In the form of Live talk:

-student-to-student, teacher-to-student, guest speaker-to-student

-one benefit- the listener may influence the delivery through facial expression, gesture, interruption and verbal interaction

\*In the form of recordings:

- vary in their mode of delivery- cassette, CD or DVD

-none of these allows the listener to influence the delivery

##### **Length:**

Most students can only cope with a limited amount of input.

##### **Quality of recordings:**

Professionally produced material is recorded in a studio and the sound quality is generally high.

Teacher-made listening materials contain distortion and lack clarity.

**Speed and number of speakers:**

- Rapid speed (heard in BBC news headlines, etc.) is more difficult for students than the speech rates of an adult talking to a child.
- The number of speakers is another issue. The more speakers there are, the more potential there is for confusion, especially when there is no visual backup for the students.

**Accent:**

- standard British English (such as BBC English)
- international English (a variety that can be understood by everyone)
- \*students should be exposed gradually to a variety of accents as they become more proficient.

**\*AUTHENTIC VERSUS PEDAGOGIC:**

Authentic dialogue:

- authentic sentences, much repetition, misunderstanding and negotiation of meaning, false starts, backchannel devices (uh huh- which shows you are listening), non-standard forms (What I do more is ..... ) and a far longer conversation

Scripted (pedagogic) dialogue:

- exemplify a grammar point, serves its purpose, provides a clear model of rules, easily understood and economical in terms of time and space.

**\*STRATEGIES GOOD LISTENERS USE:**

Strategies can be divided into three groups:

- 1) Cognitive strategies: we use in order to complete an immediate task. For example; a student may find out about the topic before listening, in order to predict the content.
- 2) Metacognitive strategies: related to learning in general and often have long-term benefits. For example; students may choose to tune in to a BBC recording once a week to improve their listening.

- 3) Socio-affective strategies: concerned with the learner's interaction with other speakers and their attitude towards learning. For example; they may choose to rehearse a telephone conversation in L2 with another student in order to develop confidence.

**\*THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD LISTENERS:**

- they are motivated,
- they fill gaps in a narrative,
- they are engaged and see themselves as participants in an interaction,
- they take an ownership of what they hear rather than just answering questions,
- have the ability to focus on valuable information,
- realize that ambiguity is sometimes unavoidable,
- prepared to make a calculated guess,
- become experts at self-monitoring, aware of whether or not they are achieving the task,
- aware of irony and other tones of voice,
- overall, they are STRATEGIC! They are organized and have a plan to achieve the task.

**\*DIFFERENT SOURCES OF LISTENING:**

- Teacher talk*
- Student Talk*
- Guest Speakers*
- Textbook Recordings*
- Television, video, DVD and radio*
- Songs*
- The Internet*

**\*LISTENING IN THE LESSON- THE SEQUENCES:**

**1)Pre-listening:**

- help our students to prepare for what they are going to hear, and this gives them a greater chance of success in any given task.
- \*The first stage of pre-listening:
  - usually involves activating schemata in order to help students to predict the content of the listening passage.
- \*The second stage:

- is setting up a reason to listen.
- Maybe there is an information gap that needs to be filled or
- an opinion gap or pre-set questions, or
- perhaps the students have asked questions based on things they would hope to hear.

## 2)While-listening:

- The students hear the input once, probably listening for gist, although of course there may be occasions when they need to listen for specific information or listen in detail.
- They check their answers in pairs or groups. This is to give them confidence and to open up any areas of doubt.
- They then listen a second time, either in order to check or to answer more detailed questions.
- It is important that the students should be required to do different tasks every time they listen

## 3)Post-listening:

The whole class checks answers, discusses difficulties such as unknown vocabulary, and responds to the content of the passage, usually orally, sometimes in writing. A final stage may involve the 'mining' of the recording for useful language, a particular grammatical structure, vocabulary or discourse markers, for example.

### \*ACTIVATING SCHEMATA/ PREDICTING:

→Six practical ways to activate the schemata and to get students to predict what they will hear. The activities involve:

- 1) brainstorming;
- 2) visuals;
- 3) realia;
- 4) texts and words;
- 5) situations;
- 6) opinions, ideas and facts.

### \*ESTABLISHING REASONS FOR LISTENING:

→Once our students' schemata have been activated, we need to give them a purpose for

listening. Here we look at a few general principles:

- 1)Make the purpose realistic (the task must reflect the type of listening text).
- 2)Make the goal achievable.
- 3)Get the students involved. If they have invested time, effort and thought in the material, they are more likely to listen successfully.

-Setting questions is the most common way of establishing a reason for the students to listen. There are, many different types of questions we can set.

- One particularly useful type is known as a signposting question.
- Signposting questions make listeners aware of the key points of the text and guide the students through it.

### \*WHILE-LISTENING ACTIVITIES:

- The content should demand a response.
- It should make them think and react.
- The activities that teachers ask should contribute to, or help shape, this response.

\*\*\*Distinction between responses that involve production and those that involve recognition only:

### \*Productive responses:

- include note-taking,
- writing answers to questions,
- correcting errors,
- completing tables, charts, diagrams and sentences

### \*Recognition responses:

- include answering multiple-choice and true/false questions,
- ticking words and phrases that are heard,
- matching and choosing pictures

### \*POST LISTENING:

-Besides checking the answers, we go into detail, looking at both top-down features such as the exact setting of the passage or information about the speakers, and bottom-up

features such as individual words or phrases. We also look at what the students found problematic, a process sometimes called troubleshooting.

EGENIA