

Passive and active learning

Dr. Ahmed Hani Naif

Department of English and Literature

College of Arts and Human Sciences/ Al Mustaqbal Uni.

Passive learning is when you receive information without doing anything with it. Your brain is not working hard. Examples of passive learning. In the class, listening to the lecturer without interacting or participating in the class. Watching an English movie with subtitles in your own language (Arabic). Watching an English show and you look at your phone.

It is not completely useless, it can help you get used to the sounds and rhythm of English. Example /p/. It can make you feel more comfortable with the language but it is not enough to help you learn and remember new things efficiently.

Active learning

Active learning is when your brain is working hard, engaged with the material, thinking, and doing and using the language. It is like driving the car, not just sitting in it. You have to pay attention to the road, use the steering wheel and make decisions. The following parts will discuss active learning as this article is dedicated for active listening only. The other four skills will be tackled separately in the upcoming three articles.

1. Active listening

It requires more efforts than passive listening but the results are much better. There are a number of techniques by which you will not only listen to English but also to understand what you listen to. It is a step on your journey to fluency.

Technique 1

Focused listening, listen to an English video and try to write down the main ideas. Watch English movie with English subtitles (transcript) and pause to look up new words. Speak English with a language partner, classmate. Do a listening exercise or a vocabulary quiz. In these situations you are not just receiving information, but you are interacting with it as well.

Steps of Active Listening

1st listening:

Listen to the entire audio clip one time, do not stop. Just try to understand the general topic or the main idea. What is it about? Who is speaking to whom?

2nd listening:

Listen again, this time you can pause the audio. Try to understand more details. Write down words that you do not know and you think are important.

3rd listening:

Listen one more time. Now you know the main idea and some details, also see how much more you can understand. This focused practice trains your brain to pay attention and to find meanings, even when you do not understand every word.

Technique 2, listening with a purpose

That is when you give yourself a task to do while you listen. This gives a reason to listen carefully.

A. listen for specific information.

Ask yourself a question before you listen, for example, if you are listening to a weather report, your question could be, ‘what will the temperature be tomorrow? Then you listen carefully to find an answer to that question.

B. Listen and write down keywords.

Listen to a short audio clip and write down the five most important words you hear. This exercise helps you to identify the key vocabulary.

C. Listen and summarize.

After you listen to a story or short talk, write a one-sentence summary. For instance, ‘this audio was about a tourist went to Egypt for a holiday’. When you listen with a purpose, you are an active searcher for information.

The other three skill will be covered in detail in the upcoming articles.