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English
Digital
Academy



FOR INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED LEVELS - B1-C2

How to improve your English with podcasts

Guide includes:

- 4 simple steps to make listening to podcasts as effective as possible
- 6 practice activities with step-by-step instructions

➤ STEP 1: Build good habits: dedicate some of your time

Try to make listening to podcasts part of your weekly **routine**: the **more** you do it, the **more effective** it will be and the **more progress** you'll make.

TIP! To set yourself up for success, you need to put good habits in place

Make time in your schedule. Stick a post-it note on your computer or put an alarm on your phone. Remind yourself to do it.

ACTION: write down when you think you can spend time listening to a podcast



- *Fridays on way to work*
- *Tuesdays on walk with dog*

➤ STEP 2: Set yourself a learning goal

Each time you set aside 10-30 minutes to study with a podcast, set yourself a **goal**.

Examples of goals could be:

- improve comprehension of native speakers
- increase your vocabulary on a specific topic
- learn a grammar rule
- listen for enjoyment
- listen and paraphrase
- practise pronunciation awareness

You'll find practice activities to help you in step 4

➤ STEP 3: Choose a podcast

Once you establish your goal for that day, choose your podcast accordingly.

For example, if I want to increase my vocabulary for business meetings, I may choose to listen to an episode of *Business English Podcast*. If I want to listen to something for enjoyment, I might choose *Today in Focus* or *Office Ladies*.

Tip! When choosing a topic, make it relevant to you

Choose something that interests you. If you like what you are listening too, you'll be more inclined to do it regularly. If it's boring, you'll never do it!



What about level?

If you listen to something that you find too difficult, and I mean, you don't understand anything – leave it alone and choose another one. There is nothing more demotivating than not understanding a word. So don't do it to yourself.

On the other hand – don't give up! If you're not ready to follow a certain podcast, try another one, or stick with the ESL podcasts (English as a Second Language) and choose the right level for you.

Bear in mind that you may not understand something because of cultural references, and not because of your English level. For example, I like to listen to *Tina Fey*, who is an American comedian. However, sometimes I don't get the joke because I don't know who or what she's talking about!



[Check out our list for inspiration](#)

➤ STEP 4: Choose a practice activity to develop your listening skills

1. Listen for enjoyment

Try just simply listening to podcasts for fun. Do this when you are out and about, on a walk with your dog or doing your shopping!

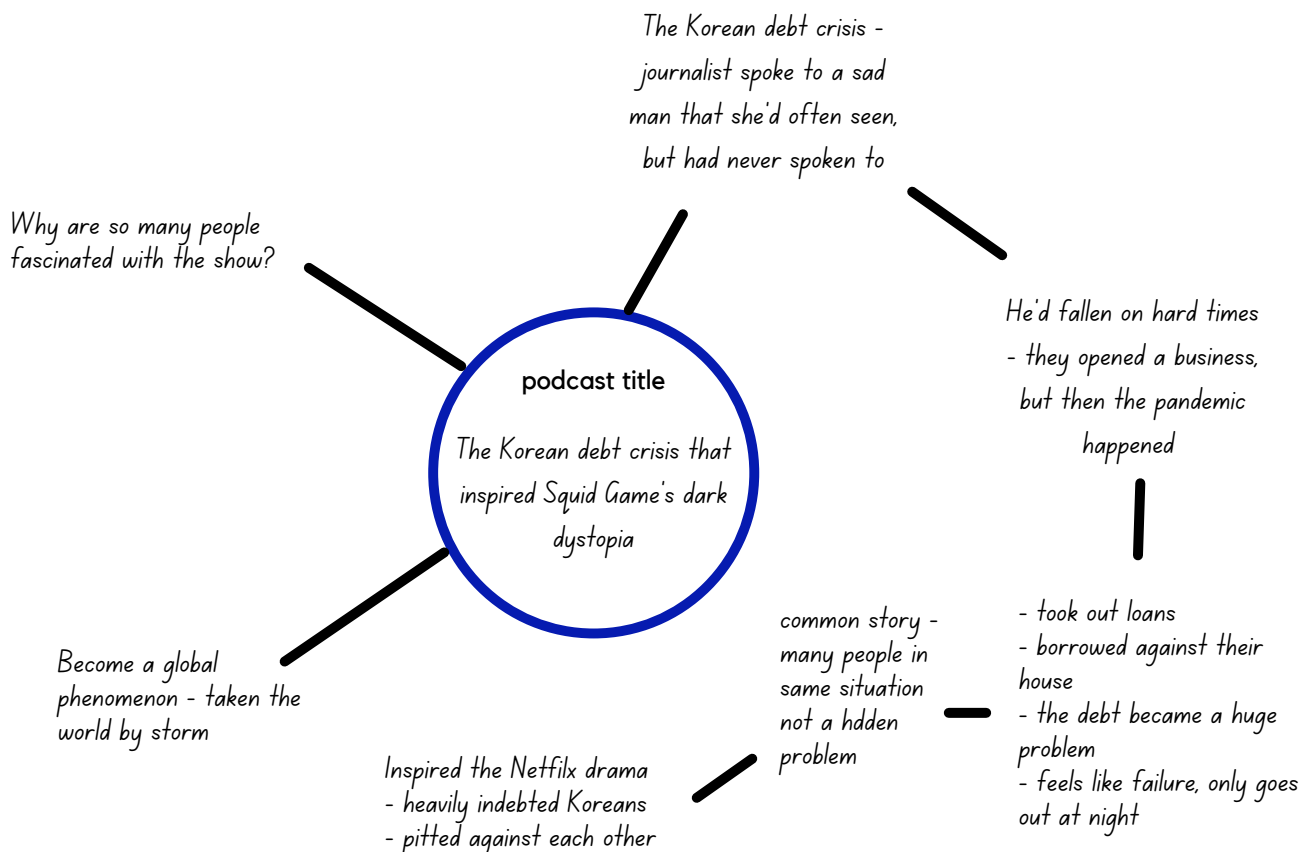
2. Listen for overall gist

Listening for gist is a key listening skill. It means that you focus on understanding the key points, key message or main idea. You don't have to worry about catching all the details.

What's the best way to do it?

As you listen, note down key words to capture the main ideas in the form of a mind-map or brainstorm. This helps you remember and commit the important ideas to your memory.

Here's an example of a mind-map



Tip! By writing things down, you will be able to recall the information visually and talk about these topics more easily.

3. Paraphrasing practice

Combine listening skills and practise paraphrasing. First, let's check that we understand exactly what paraphrasing means! It basically means **summing up key ideas in your own words**.

Why is this skill so useful?

Paraphrasing is something that we often need to do when speak; whether chatting with our friends or in a business meeting. Therefore, by practising this, you are strengthening your fluency skills.

What's the best way to do this?

Listen to short extracts at a time (around 3 mins). As you listen, identify the key points and key vocabulary. Stop the podcast and try to recap what you heard (using your own words).

Tip! When you paraphrase, try to say it out loud instead of in your head to improve your speaking confidence



You might like this post:

[Why Paraphrasing in English is an Awesome Skill to Learn! The Ultimate Guide for Upper Intermediate and Advanced English levels \(B2, C1, C2\)](#)

4. Vocabulary development

Combine listening skills and vocabulary building. Make sure the podcast you want to listen to has a transcript.

What's the best way to do it?

- Choose a short podcast or just listen to a section of it
- First, **listen for gist**
- Then listen again but this time **listen and read at the same time**. Use the transcripts to check your understanding and find new vocabulary
- **Highlight** the vocabulary you want to learn and use when you speak: e.g. any words that are new to you, words you want to remember and words you know, but you never use when speaking
- When you come across new vocabulary, **challenge** yourself to use the context to understand the meaning instead of reaching for the dictionary!

Tip! Write down what you think the new word may mean, before you look up the word or expression.

Why? Training yourself to do this, to try and work out the meanings of words in context, will help you understand new words in real conversations, in podcasts, when you watch TV and so on. In other words, this technique will help you avoid getting lost in conversations when you hear a word you don't know.

ACTIVATE

The next step is to activate what you have learned in order to commit this new vocabulary to memory.

What's the best way to do it?

Take the new word or expression and use it in your own sentence. If you make it meaningful to your life, it will be easier to learn

Do this consistently over the next few days and this will give you the repetition you need in order to memorise it.

It's better to do it this way than just trying to memorise the word on its own because you are actually activating the language. In other words, putting new vocabulary to use!

5. Listen to understand the finer details (Global listening skills)

When we speak any language, we have to strip away layers of meaning to get catch the finer details - we have to *read between the lines*, understand sarcasm, tone, emotion. We have to be able to identify meaning that is understood but is not said clearly.

There is so much more information when we speak than just the words we use.

Through the way we stress words, our intonation, our pauses, even our body language!

For example, if you stress each of the underlined words in this sentence, you will get an entirely different meaning

I never said she stole your money > someone else did

I never said she stole your money > I didn't ever say it

I never said she stole your money > maybe I implied it

I never said she stole your money > not her, but maybe someone else

I never said she stole your money > she may have borrowed it

What's the best way to do it?

Ask yourself these questions as you listen:

- > what emotions is the speaker conveying as they speak?
- > what is the speaker's opinion on the matter?
- > what do you hear in the voice?
- > what is the speaker really trying to say?
- > what is being communicated? (humour? surprise? fear? disbelief? power? sadness? anger?)

Second, can you pinpoint how the speaker used their voice in order to convey meaning? (Was it through intonation? Word stress? Emphasis? A pause?)

Tip! You may have to listen a few times to the same extract in order to identify how the speaker is communicating this layer of meaning.

This activity helps you to improve your listening skills by sharpening your ability to read between the lines, but it will also help you improve your own speaking, because once you analyse **what other speakers are doing to communicate layer**, you can do the same thing when you speak

6. Develop your pronunciation awareness

A great way to sound more fluent when you speak English is to use **expressive pronunciation**. This will help you sound more natural, and has the effect of making your voice more **interesting** and **emotionally expressive**.



[Read this article points 11-14](#) to explore this topic in more detail

Podcasts are a super resource to see **how** this done naturally by native English speakers.

What's the best way to do it?

You can use this activity as an add-on to activity 5 or as a stand alone activity.

- Choose a small section - 1-2 mins and listen for gist
- Then listen and read. As you are listening, identify pronunciation patterns:
 1. Can you hear the ways the speaker connects English? The words and sounds?
 2. Check the rhythm the speaker is using. (When are they pausing? Breathing?)
 3. Which words are they emphasising? How is that an essential part of making the meaning clear?
 4. What intonation is the speaker using? Is it making what they are saying more expressive? Clearer? More interesting?
- Once you've analysed the section, mimic what you hear. So listen and copy.
- The last step is to shadow the speaker (so say the phrase at the same as the speaker, trying to mimic the same expressive pronunciation they are using)



Learn how to do this here: [Learn the imitation technique to improve your pronunciation](#)

Thank you!

I hope you've enjoyed this guide and you feel motivated to start learning through podcasts!

Do let me know what your favourite podcast is!

I'd love to know how you get on if you use an activity from today's lesson.

Send me a quick email to tell me about it or connect with me on LinkedIn

Hope to hear from you soon,



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