

example something like writing an email to a college professor. This would be a much more appropriate task for a student than writing a letter to a pen pal. This is reflected in the fact that the First English Cert is now dropping their Letter Writing task.

What is vital for teaching writing is that teachers need to have students thinking about what they will write first. That is, starting the lesson off with some brainstorming. Students need to take their writing through stages. This would include writing a plan, drafting and editing. Writing can be a group activity, students can work together in error checking – and so writing need not be a solitary task.

Listening

Listening is a skill that comes naturally (in the L1) and as such can be picked up sooner than the previous two skills. Listening just like reading is also a receptive skills but with one significant difference, that is, listening happens in real time and (in the case of media, ie, tv, cinema, etc) the listener has no opportunity to ask the speaker to repeat. Again the different forms listening takes are important to consider. Listening to a lecturer teach is much more difficult than listening to a friend speak. Talking to a speaker face-to-face at least offers the students a chance to request the speaker to repeat themselves. Another problem faced by students in developing their speaking skills are accents, something that is diminishing thanks to globalisation.

What is vital for teaching listening, just like in reading, is that some pre listening activates take place. This could include pre teaching new vocab, context setting activities and so on. It is also important to allow multiple playing of the audio file with possible questions of varying difficulty on each playing. The first time it is played the task could be simply to identify what type of thing the students are listening to eg, a radio broadcast, a job interview, etc.

Speaking

Of all the four skills speaking is the one in which students recognize its importance. To speak enables the student of English to seek help, make requests, display intention, emotion, and so on. It is the skill which best enables a student to communicate and work (and live) in a community. Of the four skills speaking takes the least number of forms (for the typical student). Granted speaking to a police officer vs speaking to a friend requires a different register. By-and-large most speaking done by most students during the day is rather similar in form, function and style. Speaking is the most natural skill to learn in the L1 (although not always so in the L2). After all it is the first skill learnt by all people in all places at all times. Speaking skills in the L2 can be hampered by poor education. By that I mean schools that give little time to speaking in order to deliver classes of grammar drills instead. Unfortunately, this is a teaching style still present in some countries (China for example).