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## Using Listenwise for Listening Comprehension in the Language Classroom

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Contact information	Tel: (617) 282- 6101 For information: <a href="mailto:info@listenwise.com">info@listenwise.com</a> For Technical Support: <a href="https://support.listenwise.com/hc/en-us/requests/new">https://support.listenwise.com/hc/en-us/requests/new</a>
Type of product	Podcast-based website for listening according to grade-level standards of excellence. The standards provide language and literacy support.
Platform	<i>Listenwise</i> is supported by Chrome, Safari and Firefox. Cookies need to be allowed in the browser for Listenwise to function properly. Listenwise is accessible on tablets/iPads and smartphones via web browsers. It does not have a separate mobile application.
Minimum hardware requirements	In case of using Microsoft web browsers, Internet Explorer 9 or above is required. Listenwise can be accessed without headphones. However, individual or collective use should determine the need for headphones.
Supplementary software	No additional plugins are required.
Price	Apart from the free version, there is a premium version, which comes with student accounts: \$299 for a single subject, or \$399 for all subjects. However, a quote needs to be requested to buy it either per head, per teacher or according to the number of students in a school. The district package is the most economical, in which schools can get an LTI sign-on with <i>Schoology</i> , <i>Canvas</i> , and other LMS systems.

English Language Learners' listening comprehension skills need to be well-developed in order to understand oral messages (Öztürk & Tekin, 2019). Listening provides learners with meaningful input that translates over time into effective spoken output (Öztürk & Tekin, 2019; Waring, 2010). Traditional approach to listening skill development in class typically relies on an audio recordings, followed by a comprehension exercise designed by the teacher. This method of listening instruction follows the one-size-fits-all approach that overlooks learner differentiation. Fortunately, digital learning products make it possible to cater to differentiation as well as allow student autonomy to choose relevant digital options based on their learning preferences, (Lazokat, 2022), such as using transcripts, vocabulary and other forms of support.

Furthermore, using digital resources for listening is likely to make learning more interesting and flexible (Masykuri, 2022). Additionally, the use of digital media may increase student engagement with the content, which can facilitate comprehension (Kusuma et al., 2021; Masykuri, 2022).

This media review aims to introduce Listenwise, a website-based listening comprehension platform that offers audio podcasts and stories in English and Spanish from different subject areas. It delivers relevant and age-appropriate content in the form of interviews and conversations with two or more speakers, along with opportunities for listening practice to meet the needs for real-world communication. Above all, Listenwise caters to differentiated abilities in listening by offering a variety of audio selections based on audio lexical level, length of the audio, alignment with the Common Core Standards, and grade level.

## General Description

Listenwise is predominantly free with multimodal lessons for elementary to high school learners. The content has been specially curated in the English language from public radio and podcast excerpts, covering different subjects and various topics.

### Features

Listenwise categorizes content into English Language Arts, English as a Second Language, English Language Development, Science, and Social Studies. Content is also curated thematically into “collections” that structure different podcasts around a theme. Four such collections are illustrated in Figure 1. However, this is a premium feature that enables teachers and gives students the autonomy to select material based on interest.



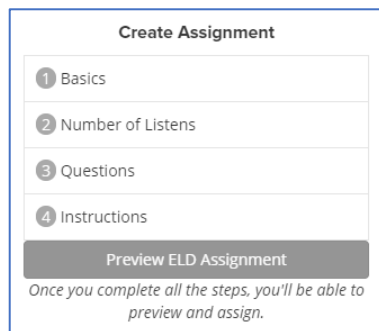
**Figure 1. Collections**

Content is searchable by browsing through subject-based categories, thematically compiled collections, chronologically organized content in current events, or standard-aligned lessons. Additionally, there is an option to search and filter content by topic.

Listenwise is compatible with learning management systems like *Google Classroom*, *Canvas*, *Clever*, and *Schoology*. Teachers can import their *Google Classroom* student list or create a class manually. If a *Google Classroom* list is imported, students get added automatically to the class. Alternatively, the class can be created manually, and students can enter the class by signing up with a code provided by the website.

Assignments include cloze listening exercises as well as open-ended comprehension questions in increasing level of challenge. Additionally, questions for verbal discussion in class are provided for deeper inquiry and discussion. They are based on the theme of the audio. The creation and publishing of questions follow four simple steps, as shown in Figure 2. Teachers can assign the same assignment to the whole class or create level-based differentiation. They

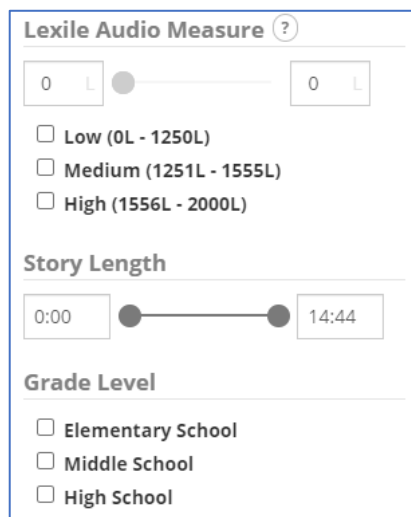
can preview, set the date and time for it to be available to students, and specify the completion date before publishing it.



**Figure 2. Steps to Creating an Assignment**

### Affordances for Teachers

Listenwise provides careful deliberation and selection of level-appropriate content in several ways. Content can be selected according to the Lexile audio measure, which indicates the audio complexity of the podcast, based on grammar, vocabulary and speech rate. Every podcast has a Lexile audio level measure setting (between 0L – 2000L), which can be used to assign and identify podcasts with low, medium, or high listening level (MetaMetrics, 2023). Moreover, teachers can select the story length and grade level.



**Figure 3. Lexile Audio Measure, Story Length and Grade Level**

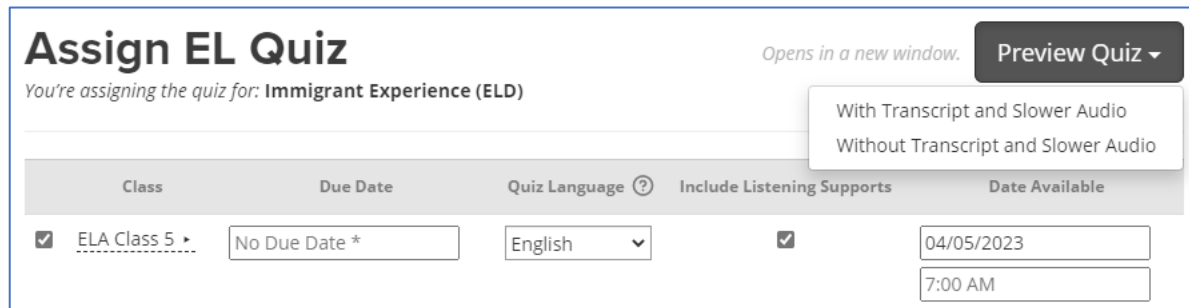
The product also provides a premium feature to measure students' individual audio Lexile levels. Teachers can narrow their search for lessons by specific grade and selected standards.

Teachers have access to a teacher's guide with a comprehensive lesson framework, as shown in Figure 4, which makes lesson planning time-efficient. The lesson comes with content objectives, language objectives and key concepts, which follow the presentation-practice-production (PPP) framework (Wang, 2022).

A short video in the pre-listening stage is paired with the audio recording in the practice stage and follows the top-down processing approach through lead-in activities (Scrivener, 2011;

Wang, 2022). Teachers can vary the support while assigning the audio recording and comprehension exercise, as shown in Figure 4.

They can allow transcripts to be downloadable for students who may need additional support. They can also choose whether to assign the audio to be played once or more than once and whether to provide access to supportive vocabulary and graphic organizers that help students organize ideas and use them in writing-based exercise that follows.

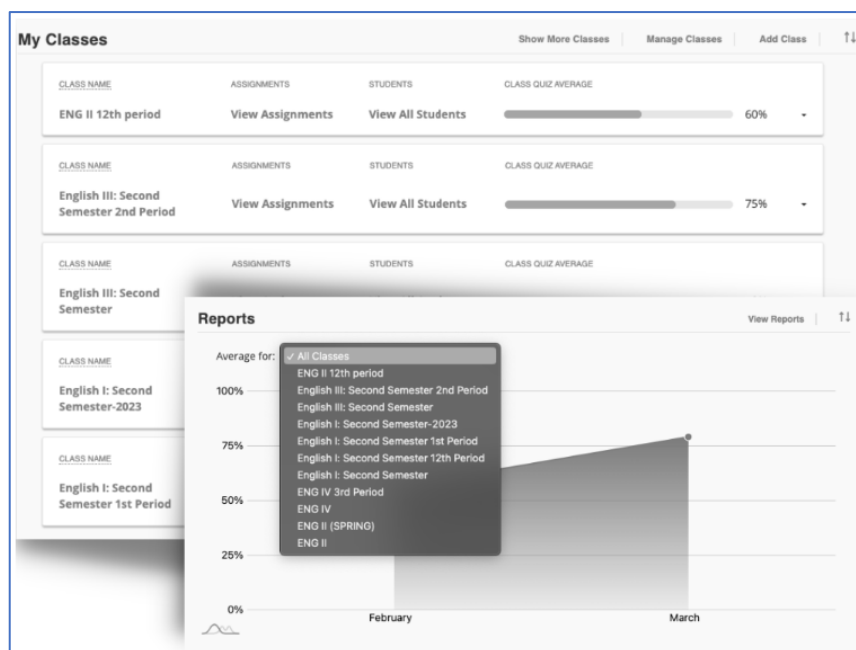


**Figure 4. Varying the Level of Challenge in Quiz**

The comprehension questions accompanying the audio may range from cloze test to open-ended questions. Teachers have the flexibility to adjust the number of questions, reword them or even remove the given questions and add their own. Listening exercises could be assigned individually or in groups for students in class to negotiate answers through engaging social interaction. Additionally, there are post-listening questions for discussion.

The product also provides scoring for assessments aligned with the audio recording. Unlike cloze tests and multiple-choice quizzes, open-ended written responses provide room for a variety of responses and cannot be auto-assessed. They need to be scored manually by teachers.


Furthermore, teachers can view aggregate data and monitor student progress, as shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5. Class-wise Progress Monitoring**

Teachers can also see students' detailed reports based on their achievement in different listening sub-skills.

Most of these affordances come with the premium version, as detailed in Figure 6, although teachers can access them for a 30-day trial period to assess them.



The image is a screenshot of a premium lesson notification banner. At the top, it says "This Lesson is PREMIUM." in bold black text. Below this is a large icon of a pair of headphones with a speech bubble inside. Underneath the icon, it says "Get More Great Content and Features with PREMIUM" in bold black text. Below that, it says "You can access this lesson right now by starting a 30 day free trial of Listenwise Premium." in smaller black text. Below this, it says "All ELA, Social Studies, and Science podcasts are included in a Premium trial - plus the great features below! (click feature for more information)" in smaller black text. Below this are five feature icons with text labels: "Interactive Transcripts" (with a document icon), "Listening Comprehension Quizzes" (with a checkmark icon), "Online Student Assignments" (with a laptop icon), "Standards-aligned Lessons" (with a document icon), and "ELL Supports" (with a pencil icon). At the bottom center, there is a grey button that says "Start your 30 Day PREMIUM Trial - Free!"

**Figure 6. Features of a Premium Lesson**

### **Scaffolding for Students**

Listenwise gives students the freedom to learn at their own pace, whether in class or beyond class time and space. Moreover, they can listen to the audio in English or Spanish. Another noteworthy support is the interactive transcript highlighting the text as it is played in the audio. Students can also highlight portions of the text to have it read aloud or click on words to get a definition, picture dictionary, or Spanish translation. It also allows students to choose the pace of the audio and the number of times they can listen to it for different purposes, such as listening for an overview versus listening for details.

The lessons provide a paired video as a before-listening activity that helps to activate students' prior knowledge and build connections with the topic. The video plays picture-in-picture with subtitles in English or Spanish based on students' language selection.

The lesson consists of a listening guide, vocabulary assistance, video analysis, discussion guide and tiered vocabulary in order of difficulty, as shown in Figure 7. It requires students' information literacy sub-skills, such as critical thinking and operational knowledge to locate and use needed information in specific domains and contexts (Koltay, 2011).

STORY ASSIGNMENT RESOURCES TEACHER'S GUIDE SCAFFOLDING QUIZ

### Simplified Listening Comprehension Questions

- What did Dickens find in the U.S. factory?
- How would you compare the conditions of the Lowell Mills to the working population in England?
- Why was Dickens opposed to unions if he cared about the conditions of workers?
- How did traveling to the United States affect Dickens' attitude and his writing?

### Tiered Vocabulary

Tier 2 Tier 3

**degraded** (adj) - reduced far below ordinary standards of civilized life and conduct

**underscore** (v) - to emphasize or show the importance of something

**paved the way** (v) - to prepare a smooth and easy path (for something)

**exemplify** (v) - to be an instance of or serve as an example of

**underlying** (adj) - used to identify the idea, cause, problem that forms the basis of something

Close Listening with Language Practice

**Figure 7. Scaffolding**

Students can also take the listening challenge, as shown in Figure 8, and receive instant feedback through auto-generated scores.

Listen to the Story:

Lois Lowry Says 'The Giver' Was Inspired By Her Father's Memory Loss

0:00 3:52

✓ ✓ 3 4 5

3. What is the main idea of the interview?

Lois Lowry has written about 40 books, one of which is titled "The Giver."

"The Giver" is a novel that has been made into a movie, an opera, and a musical.

"The Giver" is a novel that is assigned reading in many classrooms.

Lois Lowry wrote "The Giver" which is about a society where people have no memories or emotions.

Previous Next Submit Quiz

Take the Listening Challenge →

**Figure 8. Listening Self-Assessment**

## **Product Evaluation**

The evaluation of Listenwise uses the language task engagement facilitators framework proposed by Egbert and Roe (n.d.):

- Authentic (ELLs' perception of the task being relevant to their world outside the classroom)
- Interesting (holds value and curiosity)
- Social interaction (provides opportunities for conversation and collaboration)
- Match between challenge and skill level (includes choice of challenge)
- Autonomy (imparts choice and decision making)
- Scaffolding (provides feedback)

### **Affordances for Teachers**

The selection of the Lexile audio level shown in Figure 4, helps teachers select and assign podcasts at the right level of complexity for their students. This match between students' skills and the challenge posed is likely to support student engagement in the task (Rodriguez-Ardura & Meseguer-Artola, 2017). Additionally, the premium feature to measure students' individual audio Lexile levels, as shown in Figure 5, can be used as a diagnostic, formative, or summative assessment.

Since integrating speaking and listening skills supports verbal communicative competence (Maulana et al., 2020) it is good practice to provide questions for discussion around the topic. This can help students evaluate, synthesize and produce information, using information literacy skills (Reddy & Sharma, 2020).

Varying the level of challenge in assignments and quizzes by being able to edit questions and altering the level of support while assigning the audio recording gives teachers control over the content. Auto-scored assessment makes for time-efficient grading. Furthermore, cumulative and individual detailed student reports help teachers get a holistic idea of class assessment and progress over time.

### **Scaffolding for Students**

Learning support can scaffold student engagement in activities by providing student autonomy; employing relevant and interesting learning activities; providing feedback, scaffolds and structure to learning in tasks (Núñez & León, 2019; Tian & Zhou, 2020).

Research suggests that not only does listening and speaking improve as a result of using podcasts, but it also has bearing on students' motivation and positive attitude towards language learning (Yoestara, & Putri, 2018). Allowing students to listen for different purposes, such as for an overview or listening for details develops students' skills to infer the gist, scan the details, and deduce vocabulary. However, these forms of support have to be assigned by the teacher as a toolbar in the settings and students need to have relevant digital literacy skills to maneuver them.

In terms of social interaction, students can listen to the audio, discuss the comprehension questions and answer them in small groups. Moreover, they can discuss the topic given at the end of the listening comprehension exercise as an extension activity.

Overall, Listenwise aligns with the philosophy of the language task engagement facilitators framework mentioned, by providing authentic and interesting content and student autonomy to choose content by subject, topic, or thematic collection. Furthermore, it supports students in selecting comprehension exercises for practice, based on their audio lexical level, length of the audio podcast and grade level. This makes the task challenge compatible with students' individual skill levels. These affordances make Listenwise compatible with blended and flipped classrooms. In addition, the auto-scored quizzes provide feedback to students.

However, taking advantage of the scaffolds embedded with language task engagement facilitators depends on students' digital literacy, which considers the application of digital skills through which users make identifiable meanings using digital technologies (Leaning, 2019). Students should be able to access and navigate the product. They should also be able to access the embedded media for meaningful knowledge construction by listening, reading, organizing information, downloading documents, and uploading responses. Furthermore, they should be able to use information literacy skills to select well-crafted search strategies to find and critically process information to solve a problem (Reddy & Sharma, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

Listenwise provides an immersive and meaningful learning experience through a multimodal approach. It aids students in developing their listening skills through a student-centered approach and listening activities supported by task engagement facilitators. Additionally, it provides teachers with guides, lessons, assignments, and assessments, with the flexibility to modify them for different levels. Since technology enables students to determine their own pathway through controlled personalized learning (Kusuma et al., 2021), they need to have the digital literacy skills to access, navigate, select options for support, and share documents and media within the same or different digital platforms. Moreover, they need to have the information literacy skills to scan, locate, evaluate, interpret, and use information. Overall, Listenwise is a product worth considering to practice listening skills in a language classroom.

## **About the Reviewer**

**Maliha Shah** is currently doing her PhD in the Language, Literacy and Technology Program at the Washington State University, Pullman. Prior to this, she had received a Master's degree in TESOL and an MPhil in Applied Linguistics. Her research interests include student engagement, learner variability, equity, and interactive use of technology for language learning. She likes to explore media for communicative language learning in the four macro language skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. She is particularly mindful of the room for differentiated instruction afforded by an application while evaluating media for teaching and learning.

## **To Cite this Review**

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