

## Activities to Invigorate Repeated Input

by [Brianna Johnson](#) and [Sara Sulko](#)

Though teaching listening and speaking can bring some of the most rewarding, student-focused, and communicative lessons, teachers undoubtedly face challenges ranging from technology glitches to the ongoing search for the “perfect” listening passage to fit a lesson. One challenge in particular stands out: effectively utilizing repeated input (RI).

### The Benefits of Repeated Input

RI encompasses the repetition of listening passages more than once (and often several times spanning several lessons) to allow students the necessary input to improve comprehension and overall listening skills. Our students often plead for another repetition on a listening assessment, and this desire is not unfounded in theory. Research has indeed shown the benefits of RI with schema activation and background knowledge (Long, 1990). In addition, multiple listenings are quite authentic (Vandergrift, 2004) because native speakers often utilize clarification requests in normal speech for reasons such as low volume, unclear enunciation, or misplaced attention. Despite these facts, students—and, yes, even teachers—become bored with seemingly endless repetitions of the same passages in class. What, then, can we do to take the boredom out of RI?

The strategic elements that we believe contribute to successful inclusion of RI in the listening classroom are as follows:

1. The class listens to an excerpt multiple times.
2. The excerpt is a topic of interest for the class (Chou, 2015).
3. The activities based on the excerpt are varied and interesting.

If these three aspects take place, then RI should result in more comfort with listening, more confidence in listening skills, and better overall comprehension of listening material.

### Seven Repeated Input Activities

Between the two of us, we have come up with strategies and activities to help ourselves and our students maintain interest in RI with seven activities that resist boredom (many of them get students physically involved and out of their chairs) and help maximize the benefit of multiple listenings to the same material. These strategies can even go home with the students so that they feel more empowered to mirror classroom practices there.

#### 1. Wall Crawl

After listening to an excerpt or passage, place large strips of paper around the room. Students walk around the room decoding information to record on handouts you’ve provided them with. Information on the strips of paper can really address any aspect of your current lesson, from simple multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank answers regarding vocabulary or main ideas to more advanced information regarding whodunit mysteries, inferences, and speaker identification.

Encourage students to decipher information in groups and to collaborate and discuss ideas before listening again to the material for comprehension checks.

## **2. Cloze**

Create classic cloze activities using audio scripts to focus on new vocabulary or grammar for the students. It draws their attention to whatever is needed to fill in the blank. The blanks can also come at regular intervals, like every seven words, to encourage students to listen more closely to the passage.

## **3. Language Spotting**

Ask students to raise their hand, stand up, high-five a partner—whatever you decide for them to do when they hear target language. For example, students may stand up every time they hear a vocabulary word on their list or a verb tense being studied. This works well with beginner listeners, but it can be a fun activity for more advanced learners as well. This is also prime time to use incorrect answers, or “spots,” as excellent contrastive analysis material, such as when a student stands for the main verb “have” when the target function was to listen for present perfect.

## **4. Role-Play**

After students listen to an excerpt, they can role-play what they just heard or what they think they will hear next. This requires students to listen carefully to the passage and use language similar to the excerpt. This can also be exciting for students who love to talk in class but can also serve as “organized bravery” for the quieter students.

## **5. Identifying Language Function**

A classroom discussion about the purpose, speaker, and audience in a listening passage breaks up the repetitions with production and critical thinking. Students should support their ideas with reasons and examples, giving thorough oral responses. This activity models classroom discussions for students with more academic aspirations.

## **6. Question Writing**

Question formation and generation is challenging, so we often look for ways to practice this skill. In this activity, ask students to write questions about important details in the passage. These questions can be written for other students to quiz their understanding, or they can be questions that persist after listening. Directing students to write questions for others about what they think is important requires them to categorize and synthesize information. Furthermore, writing questions about what they are still curious about offers insight to the teachers as to what interests students and what they find hard to grasp. One strategy we use often when introducing a listening passage for the first time is playing a small section, stopping it prematurely, and asking the class what they are curious about so far.

## **7. Direct Quotes**

More advanced students may need sources for presentations or compositions. We can help students practice using audio as a source by taking direct quotes from a listening passage. This also requires taking very detailed notes with a focus on accuracy. If your institution has a computer lab available during class time, this is a great individual activity in which students have access to the listening using headphones. They can even work on their presentations or paper collaboratively with their other instructors, or you can provide your own materials to have students incorporate quotations into. Students can always compare each other's transcriptions for peer-to-peer interaction.

## Overcoming Repeated Input Challenges

Though the benefits of RI are clear, it may pose challenges in the classroom for students. First, students may develop listening fatigue. To avoid this pitfall, try not to drill one activity over and over again for one particular passage—switch it up often, and resist the urge to systematically (i.e., mundanely) go over the answers to each activity every time. By the end of multiple listenings, students may figure out answers to the first activity just from better understanding the listening in general. In addition, vary the length of the passage, perhaps listening again to short sections only or revisiting parts of it at different times within the lesson or among several lessons to lessen fatigue and heighten curiosity.

A second challenge to RI is that some students may struggle to understand its importance. Therefore, explain why listening to the same passage again is beneficial: RI helps them practice multiple skills that they can apply to many different listening situations and increase their comprehension. To bring this point home, we often have students pay attention to how much they understand on the final listening compared to the first—this usually helps them buy into the practice just through that awareness.

Remember: If we are bored, our students probably are as well.

## References

- Chou, M. (2015). The influence of topics on listening strategy use for English for academic purposes. *English Language Teaching*, 8(2), 44–54. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n2p44>
- Long, D. R. (1990). What you don't know can't help you: An exploratory study of background knowledge and second language listening comprehension. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 12(1), 65–80. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100008743>
- Vandergrift, L. (2004). Listening to learn or learning to listen? *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 3–25. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190504000017>

**Brianna Johnson** has taught K–12 English in Baltimore, Maryland, USA and Bordeaux, France. She has also worked with adults as an ESL lecturer at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, The University of Iowa, and Purdue University Northwest. She recently completed her eighth and final year of ESL/EFL teaching and has now embarked on a career as a bilingual speech-language pathologist at the University of Maryland College Park.

**Sara Sulko** received her BA in communication and Spanish. She earned her MA TESOL from the University of Southern Illinois Carbondale. She has taught ESL at Southern Illinois University Carbondale and the University of Missouri, where she continues to teach. Sara's areas of interest include classroom technology, intercultural communication, and teaching beginners basic communication skills.