Lesson Plan Ideas: Skill Building Activities

Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2)
Passage Comprehension tasks assess test takers’ listening comprehension.

These tasks are included in B1, B2, C1 and C2 tests. (Passage Comprehension tasks in A1 and A2 tests have a different format.)

Test takers are required to listen to a spoken passage and then answer three questions about what they have heard.

The spoken passage features one person talking, and the questions that follow are asked by another person.

Each spoken passage is quite short, usually between 40 and 60 words at B1 and B2 levels, and between 60 and 80 words at C1 and C2 levels.

For each question, test takers must give a short, spoken response.

The questions test whether the listener has understood the gist and/or specific details of what they have heard.

There are 6-7 Passage Comprehension tasks on each test.

On screen, the task will look like this:

The spoken passage is played only once.

Each question is played only once.

Test takers should answer each question with one word, a few words or a very short sentence.

Test takers can begin recording their response once the Audio Status box says ‘Recording’.

Test takers can click ‘next’ once they have recorded their response.
Strategies for Success

- Listen carefully. The questions might relate to the overall meaning of the spoken passage or to a small detail of what has been said. Test takers must pay careful attention to everything they hear.

- Take notes selectively. Test takers can use the notepad to make notes. As the spoken passages are quite short, they should not worry too much about forgetting what they have heard, but it can help some test takers to make notes of key words. Also note, on the test, notes are not saved from screen to screen.

- Consider the speaker’s mood, attitude and/or feelings toward the subject they are talking about. Doing this can help to answer the questions. Test takers should listen out for descriptive words that convey what the speaker thinks.

- Pay attention to question words. Test takers need to understand the differences in meaning between question words (‘What...?’ ‘When...?’ ‘Where...?’) before they take the test. They should listen especially carefully to the start of each question in order to be certain what is being asked.

- Keep answers short. It is not necessary or helpful to give long answers to the questions – usually just a few words is enough.

- Speak at a normal volume. When answering the question, test takers should not speak too quietly, as this may mean that their voice is not recorded successfully. Speaking too loudly could lead to the recording being distorted, so it is important that test takers speak in a natural way.

- Speak clearly. It is not necessary to pronounce words using the same accent as the speaker in the recording. However, it is important to pronounce every word in your response correctly, in a way that can easily be understood.
**Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2): Activities for all learners**

The spoken passages and questions that feature within Passage Comprehension (Choose the Right Picture) tasks will vary in terms of vocabulary level and sentence complexity according to the level of the test. Test takers at lower levels are likely to be presented with spoken passages containing shorter, simpler sentences and more frequently used vocabulary, while higher-level test takers can expect to hear longer sentences and more high-level vocabulary. The kinds of topics will also vary according to the test level with higher level tests featuring more complex and abstract topics.

To prepare for this task, all learners should be helped to understand the requirements of the task and should practise listening to short talks. All learners should also be trying to build their vocabulary so that they are familiar with the words they hear on the recordings.

### Understanding the task

After introducing the format of Passage Comprehension (Choose the Right Picture) tasks to your learners and explaining the Strategies for Success on page 1, check that they have understood by using the following comprehension questions and/or gap-fill summary.

#### Comprehension Questions

1) How many questions are there for each task?
2) How should you answer the question?
3) How many Passage Comprehension (Choose the Right Picture) tasks are on each test?
4) What should test takers make notes of while listening?
5) When should test takers begin their answers?

**Answers:** 1) 3  2) by speaking a few words  3) 6  4) key words  5) when the Audio Status box says ‘Recording’

#### Gap-fill summary

While listening to Passage Comprehension tasks, pay attention to everything the speaker says, because the questions might relate to the gist or to specific (i) _________. Take (ii) _________ selectively: it is not necessary to write down everything the speaker says, as the recordings are quite short. The questions might relate to the speaker’s (iii) _________, so pay attention to words that indicate how they feel. When recording your answer, speak at a normal (iv) _________ and use accurate (v) _________.

**Word options**

a) volume  b) attitude  c) notes  d) pronunciation  e) details

**Answers:** (i) e – details (ii) c – notes (iii) b – attitude (iv) a – volume (v) d – pronunciation
Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2): Activities for all learners

Exposing learners to a range of materials

Whether working with B1, B2, C1 or C2 learners, it is important to expose them to a wide range of spoken English as listening practice. They should not get too used to listening to the voices of their teachers, as this can make it difficult to adjust to the range of voices they will hear in the world outside the classroom and during tests. You can expose your learners to authentic listening experiences in many different ways, for example:

- Play short news stories at the start of class
- Invite a guest speaker into the class (This could be a colleague who usually teaches another class.)
- Play weather reports
- Play online videos, such as lectures or TV shows
- Have English language music on in the background of your classes

Encourage active listening by asking learners to make notes and write about what they have heard. You can vary this according to your learners’ needs by asking them to make notes and then discuss what they have listened to with a partner.
**Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2):**

Activities for B1/B2

B1-level learners should be able to understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, and leisure. They can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear. B2 learners can understand extended speech provided the topic is reasonably familiar. Passage Comprehension (B1–C2) tasks assess test takers’ listening ability, focusing on comprehension of a short narrative. You can help your learners prepare for the test by using the B1 example task below and other practice tasks on page 4.

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**Audio_B1_117_1**

**Transcript**

Female adult: One Saturday morning, Alice woke up excited because her parents were visiting. But then she remembered her flat was a mess so she had to clean it. While she was tidying up, the phone rang. Her father had to work and so her parents decided to cancel their visit. Alice was upset, but she could stop cleaning.

**Questions**

1. How did Alice feel when she woke up?
2. What was Alice doing when the phone rang?
3. What did Alice’s parents have to do?

**Play, Pause, Question, Repeat**

Using online videos, podcasts or audio recordings in class can engage your learners and help to develop their active listening and comprehension skills. Select a video/recording that will interest your group. It can help if it is related to a topic you are using in writing or reading classes so that they are more familiar with the subject matter and vocabulary. Play a short section from the video/recording. Then, pause it and ask learners a question about what they have heard. Once they have answered the question, play the next part of the video/recording before pausing and asking another question. Repeat this until the end of the video/recording. To get ready for Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2) tasks, learners should get used to responding to questions by speaking a few words or short sentence.

To give the whole group a chance to do this, it can help to ask them to tell the answer to each question to a partner rather than shouting it out in front of the whole group. You might also want to ask them to write down their answers first to incorporate some writing practice into the activity. It can also help to have learners take notes while listening.
Note taking

In preparation for Passage Comprehension (Levels B1-C2) tasks, learners need to develop their note-taking skills. Make sure they understand that they should not try to write down every word, as they would for Listen and then Write (Dictation) tasks. They should instead try to make note of key words. Some of them will have difficulty determining which words are key and which are not. It can help to talk through written examples using transcripts first and highlight key words for them. You can use examples on page 4 for this.

One important part of note-taking is developing the ability to use symbols to represent words that you hear. Ask your learners to match symbols to their meaning. Then ask your learners to practise using symbols while listening to a recording. You could use these symbols:

- because
- therefore/consequently
- + & and
- ? doubt/possibility
- > greater than
- < less than
- # number
- Δ change
- ↑ increase/improvement
- → leads to/casues
- ↓ decrease/deterioration
- ↔ linked/interrelated/connected
- ← does not lead to
- = equal/the same as
Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2):
Activities for B1/B2

Question bingo

This activity can get your learners used to receiving questions, as well as help them to develop the ability to handle the time pressure they will experience during a test. Give each learner a card showing all/a number of the question words or ask them to write the words down themselves on a blank piece of paper. This is their bingo grid. Produce a set of topic cards containing familiar topics such as ‘hobbies’ ‘family’ etc. One learner should come to the front, select a topic card, and read it to the other members of the group. They should then race each other to ask a question related to the topic using one of the question words on their bingo card. For example, ‘What do you like doing?’ or ‘How many brothers or sisters do you have?’

The learner who is at the front and holding the card should answer the question and the person who asked it can cross off the question word they used from their bingo card. Then, repeat: Another person comes to the front, selects a topic card, and they are asked a question. The winner is the learner who manages to ask questions using all their question words. This can work well as a whole class activity or in small groups of 4–6.
Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2): Activities for C1/C2

At C1 level, learners can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. C2-level English users have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, even when delivered at fast native speed. Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2) tasks assess test takers’ listening ability, focusing on comprehension of a short narrative passage. Use the example task below and others on page 4 to help your learners prepare.

Audio_C1_117_1

Transcript

Male adult: Much to John’s dismay, Ashley, a junior colleague, was promoted and put in charge of the team. John regarded Ashley as a rival, so the last thing he wanted to do was work under him! However, gradually, John’s perceptions changed. Ashley was receptive to John’s ideas about marketing. Even better, Ashley was willing to share his specialist manufacturing expertise to help John expand his knowledge. Ashley’s promotion actually served as the motivation John needed to focus on his career goals.

Questions

1. How did John feel when his team changed at the start of the year?
2. How did John initially perceive Ashley?
3. What area of business did John learn about from Ashley?
Passage Comprehension (Levels B1-C2): Activities for C1/C2

Reconstructing notes

To get ready for Passage Comprehension (Levels B1-C2) tasks, learners need to develop their note-taking skills as they should be listening out for and making note of key points while the recording is playing. First explain the importance of using symbols and abbreviations when note-taking. You could show them these common truncations, for example:

- ppl people
- natl national
- ed education
- imp important
- gov government
- dep department
- esp especially

You could also show them the commonly used symbols in the B1/B2 activities above.

Next, show your learners a set of notes and ask them to discuss what they think the notes mean with a partner. They should try to reconstruct the information represented by the notes using full sentences. These notes, for example, are based on the practice task above.

John : Ashley = junior = promoted
Grad. J’s view ∆
A’s ideas = good
A helped J
A’s ↑ → motivation 4 J

Next, ask them to take their own notes based on something they listen to using symbols and abbreviations. This can be done as a homework activity with learners watching a video at home, taking notes and bringing the notes to class. Alternatively, if your learners have smart phones, they could watch something using headphones and take notes in class. Once they have produced their notes, they should exchange them with a partner who has listened to something else and try to reconstruct for each other what the notes represent using full sentences.
**Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2): Activities for C1/C2**

### Active listening

Test takers will need to actively listen to every word during Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2) tasks. You can help them to prepare for doing this with a variety of tasks, such as the dictation activities used to prepare for Listen and then Write activities. Active listening can be encouraged by learners knowing they must use the information they hear productively in some way by, for example, giving a presentation on it or writing a summary. Set your group a variety of tasks that involve integrating skills in this way, listening-to-speaking or listening-to-writing. Encourage them to develop their note-taking skills while listening and challenge them to develop their comprehension ability by watching a variety of videos and listening to a range of audio recordings.

### True/False questions

Questions in Passage Comprehension (B1–C2) tasks focus on specific details of the recording. After your group have listened to a recording, it can help to present them with true/false comprehension questions to test whether they have understood what they have heard. These are some statements based on the example task above that you can use for true/false questions.

1. Ashley and John work for the same company.
2. Ashley was promoted ahead of John.
3. John was initially happy about Ashley’s promotion.
4. As Ashley began sharing ideas and advise, John felt increasingly unhappy.
5. John decided to change job and moved to work for a specialist manufacturing company.

*(Key – 1) True 2) True 3) False – He was dismayed 4) False – John’s feelings changed and he gained motivation. 5) False – John did not change company.)*

It can often help to ask higher-level learners to create their own true/false questions for each other. This can add a competitive element to classes and encourage more active listening when you play recordings. Award points to learners who are able to create the best questions.
Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2): Practice Tasks

B1

Audio_B1_117_2

Transcript

Male adult: John was on the bus to town. He had to buy a present for his wife for their wedding anniversary. At the department store, John found the perfect gift, but his wallet wasn’t in his pocket. ‘Oh, no! Where is it?’ he said. Just then, someone shouted, ‘Hey, is this yours?’ One of the bus passengers had found it.

Questions

1. Why did John need to buy a gift?
2. Where did John realise he had lost his wallet?
3. Who gave John his wallet back?

Audio_B1_117_3

Transcript

Male adult: Two weeks ago, Sarah applied for a job as a secretary. She had all the right qualifications, so they wanted to interview her. On the interview day, she felt calm. She walked into the interview room and behind the desk was one of her old classmates who asked all the questions. In the end, Sarah got the job.

Questions

1. What kind of job did Sarah apply for recently?
2. How did Sarah feel when she went for the interview?
3. Who asked Sarah the questions during the interview?
Passage Comprehension *(Levels B1–C2)*: Practice Tasks

**B1**

**Audio_B1_117_4**

*Transcript*

V1 Female adult: Judy was looking forward to her holiday. All her clothes were packed in her suitcase and her travel documents were in her hand. She was riding in a taxi to the airport when suddenly it broke down. So, she called her nephew and asked him to drive her to the airport. Judy knew she was lucky to arrive on time.

*Questions*

1. What problem did Judy have during the taxi ride?
2. Who had to take Judy to the airport?
3. How did Judy feel when she got to the airport?

**Audio_B1_117_5**

*Transcript*

Male adult: Last Saturday, Mary and her friends went to see a comedy film at the cinema. When they arrived, they saw a long queue to buy tickets. They waited in the queue for so long that they missed the first thirty minutes of the film. When the film finished, they thought it was amazing and decided to watch it again.

*Questions*

1. What kind of film did Mary and her friends go and see?
2. Why did Mary and her friends miss the beginning of the film?
3. How did Mary and her friends feel about the film?
Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2): Practice Tasks

B2

Audio_B2_117_1

Transcript
V1 Female adult: It had been an enjoyable party but just as Sarah was saying farewell, she noticed her diamond engagement ring was missing from her finger. Upset, she hunted in the armchair where she had been sitting but it was gone. An hour later, Sarah took off her raincoat, took her handkerchief from the pocket – and found it was folded around her ring.

Questions
1. When did Sarah realise she had lost her ring?
2. Where did Sarah search for her ring?
3. Where did Sarah discover her ring?

Audio_B2_117_2

Transcript
V1 Male adult: Steve was delighted he could finally get off the overcrowded underground carriage with all his baggage. As he was going up the escalator, Steve realised he didn’t have his rucksack, so he went back down to the platform. Due to a technical fault, the underground train was held up and luckily Steve’s rucksack was exactly where he’d left it.

Questions
1. Why was Steve happy about leaving the train carriage?
2. What did Steve forget to take with him?
3. Why was the underground train still in the station?
Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2): Practice Tasks

B2

Audio_B2_117_3

Transcript

V1 Male adult: David was desperate to get a designer sports cap like his classmates but was reluctant to spend £25 on one he saw in a store. The following day, he saw an identical one at half the price, on a market stall. He suspected it was a fake but bought it anyway. His classmates were completely taken in by it.

Questions

1. What was David keen to buy?
2. Who did David purchase the item from?
3. How did David’s friends react to the item he bought?

Audio_B2_117_4

Transcript

V1 Female adult: Lucy was planning to open her own boutique selling handmade items, but needed to find investors. She approached her relations, but they didn’t think it was commercially viable. Lucy ended up going to the bank, which loaned her the money. Lucy’s business became incredibly successful, and after only a year, she made enough profit to buy herself a sports car.

Questions

1. What was Lucy’s business idea?
2. Who financed Lucy’s business?
3. What did Lucy do with the money she made?
Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2): Practice Tasks

C1

Audio_C1_117_2

Transcript
Female adult: Claire’s friends were astonished when she announced she was going climbing. Although Claire was physically fit, she was petrified of heights! Actually, Claire had only accepted her colleague’s invitation out of politeness. They would be indoors on a climbing wall rather than outside on a mountain, but she was still extremely apprehensive. Fortunately, the instructor was very supportive, and Claire was soon enjoying herself too much to feel afraid! She was able to conquer her fear through this positive experience.

Questions
1. Why did Claire agree to do the activity?
2. What was the venue for the activity?
3. What did the activity help Claire to do?

Audio_C1_117_3

Transcript
Female adult: Paul signed up for a sign language taster session advertised at his college. He was intrigued, despite not personally knowing any sign language users. Paul had assumed it was mainly about communicating through hand gestures. He was surprised that reading facial expressions was so vital. He enjoyed the session so much that he enrolled on the full-time course. As well as improving his professional opportunities, Paul believes his sense of compassion has also been deepened by studying sign language.

Questions
1. Why did Paul take the sample class in sign language?
2. What did Paul expect to be the most important aspect of sign language?
3. What personal quality has Paul developed as a result of the course?
Passage Comprehension (Levels B1–C2): Practice Tasks

C1

Audio_C1_117_4

Transcript

V1 Female adult: With overflowing drawers, Jenny’s clothing collection was out of control. She’d even converted her bookcase into a clothes rack to accommodate more items! She no longer felt a thrill when she bought clothes. It was simply a habit to relieve her boredom. One day, on a whim, Jenny sold everything she didn’t wear anymore. She made a small profit, which she used to decorate her bedroom. Nowadays, she’s content to swap clothes with friends instead of buying new ones.

Questions

1. What had Jenny altered in her bedroom to make space for clothes?
2. What did Jenny use to experience when she shopped for clothes?
3. What did Jenny do with the money she made?

Audio_C1_117_5

Transcript

V1 Male adult: Mary wasn’t the type to follow in her father’s footsteps and become a surveyor. Opting to do a zoology degree was prompted by formative visits to her sister-in-law’s cattle ranch as a teenager. After graduating, she sought and gained a position in a veterinary clinic. The financial rewards were substantial, but the lack of diversity soon became an issue. So Mary swapped domestic animals for wild ones, took up a post in Arctic wildlife conservation, and has never looked back.

Questions

1. Who influenced Mary’s choice of university course?
2. What was the drawback with Mary’s first job after graduation?
3. What field does Mary work in now?
Be yourself in English.