

Listening Tests: Pearson's MyLab in Teaching Communication and Spanish

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the use of technology in providing listening tests for the basic communication course. Because of experience with Pearson publishing's MySpanishLab, the authors developed a series of 16 listening tests through the Pearson MyCommunicationLab for the textbook Communicating: A social, career, and cultural focus (Berko, Wolvin, Wolvin, & Aitken, 2012). These tests use actors to provide realistic listening scenarios for students. Each scenario is followed by a test with objective and essay questions. This chapter discusses how to use technology for learning communication and assessment of listening skills.

BACKGROUND

Teaching listening has long been an important aspect of teaching the basic oral communication course (e.g., Johnson & Long, 2007; Ford, Wolvin, & Chung, 2000). With the advent of new technology, however, the opportunity for testing student listening skills has opened. Technology has shown a unique promise for testing and

teaching listening skills (Cheon & Grant, 2009). We sought to take advantage of that technology as a way to broaden our approach to teaching listening. Brownell and Wolvin (2008) suggested that using listening tests can be a successful instructional approach. They discussed some of the studies that suggest using listening tests improves performance (p. 121). Ford, Wolvin, and Chung (2000) found that in the basic communication course, students tend to have over-inflated opinions of their listening abilities when they begin the course. If a single unit on listening is taught, then there seems to be little effect. But if listening is taught throughout the term, students gain a more accurate self-perception about their listening skills (Ford et al., 2000). This finding underscored the importance of teaching listening throughout the course.

If we provided a listening test over textbook content (one test for each of the 16 textbook chapters), then the student may have learned the information not only by reading the text, but also by applying their listening skills to understanding the communication principles detailed in the chapters. Thus, we provided a brief listening test containing new—but relevant—content for each chapter.

The 16 tests are provided in written form in the textbook's Instructor's Manual and in audio form in the Pearson MyCommunicationLab for the textbook *Communicating: A social, career, and cultural focus* (Berko, Wolvin, Wolvin, & Aitken, 2012). Listening skills are important to anyone learning a language, so the use of listening tests and research about using technology to teach listening has been innovative in language instruction (see, for example, Song, 2012).

Pearson has developed language labs to accompany textbooks for language instruction. These labs include an extensive package that includes the following: An electronic version of the textbook.

The purpose of the listening tests was to provide the following:

1. A new listening format using actors to provide a realistic listening scenario.
2. Supplemental learning relevant to course content, which often provided additional information about communication technology.
3. A format for student practice that can be completed independently without requiring teacher involvement.
4. A way for student to self-check their listening comprehension.

The purpose of this paper is to provide teaching ideas for using these listening tests in the basic communication course.

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