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Exam Skills
Making listening exams easier

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Nuala: Hi, I'm Nuala O'Sullivan and you're listening to 'Exam Skills'. Listening exams are often quite a challenge – but don't worry, we have some great tips in this programme: *Making listening exams easier*. One of the best ways to prepare yourself for a listening exam is to listen to as much spoken English as possible, as often as you can.

Student

I think that one of the best things is watching TV because even if you don't understand it, you can understand it from the picture, but your listening skills are improved. But even better, I think, it's radio, listening to the radio, because you have to concentrate only on sounds, not on the picture.

Nuala: Take Anna's advice: listen to the radio and watch television. And with the internet and satellite TV, it doesn't matter where you are, there's a huge amount of English programming to choose from. Ahmed says watching TV has helped him a lot.

Student

I may say that listening is easier for me because now I can see a lot of movies, I have a lot of TV channels and I made the choice to watch all the movies in English, to watch all the TV shows in English, and I'm used to English now. So maybe I would say that listening is easier for me.

Nuala: But you don't have to have access to English language radio and television to be able to prepare well at home. Get hold of some listening tapes and

practice tests – listen to them often. There's no need to be in a quiet room. In fact, it's often better if you're not.
Language teacher Margaret John explains why.

Margaret John

When you start preparing for listening exams, a good thing to do at home is to listen to the tape in quite a noisy environment - because it forces you to focus on the key speakers, with background noise and distracters going on.

Nuala: If you listen in a noisy room you get used to blocking out distractions. You get used to concentrating on the main speakers, rather than everything else.

Margaret John

Some examinations deliberately put distracters, such as noisy environments like tube stations and bus stations and airports, behind the speakers. If you've been practising listening that way, you will be in a much better position in exam conditions to be able to handle this problem.

Nuala: So don't be taken by surprise - be prepared for listening tests where the speakers are recorded against noisy backgrounds.

Margaret John

So when you're listening at home, it's important to listen in an environment that is not completely noise-free. A busy sitting room or a kitchen is not a bad place to do a listening test.

Nuala: And when it comes to the exam itself, and you're in the exam room, don't make things difficult for yourself. Make sure the listening conditions are good for you. As examiner Mark Shea advises, it's important to act straight away.

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Mark Shea

Perhaps first and foremost, make sure you can hear properly. If you have a problem, tell the examiner right at the beginning - after the exam is too late. So if there's a window open, ask to close the window. If you're too far from the tape recorder, ask to sit closer.

Nuala: It's difficult to do a listening exam if you can't hear the tape!
Sometimes though, something happens and you do miss a bit. But don't worry!

Mark Shea

Then if you miss something during the exam, keep going with the next question. Don't get caught up in something which has already passed you by.

Nuala: That's what Noriko has learnt to do: to keep concentrating and be ready for the next bit.

Student

Well, when you didn't catch the answer and you have to leave a gap because you didn't understand it, then try not to care about it and try to forget the mistakes and go straight to other things.

Nuala: Now, here's a quick reminder of our hints for listening exams: prepare yourself by listening to as much English as possible. Practise doing listening tests and listening exercises at home. Get used to focussing on the main speakers and blocking out noisy backgrounds.
Once you're in the exam, give yourself the best possible listening conditions.
And finally, don't worry if you miss a bit – just concentrate on what comes next.
Good luck and good revising!

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