



Getting Better at Understanding Foreign Languages

KS2 MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Ages 9-14 ⌚ 3 min read

Why Is Listening Hard in Another Language?

When you hear someone speak a language you're learning, your brain has to do two jobs at once: figure out what the sounds mean AND translate them into words you understand. That's exhausting! Native speakers (people who grew up speaking that language) do this automatically, but you have to think about it. The good news is that like any skill, you can get better with practice.

Think of it like learning to ride a bike. At first you wobble and have to concentrate really hard on each movement. But after lots of practice, balancing and pedalling become automatic, so you can look around and enjoy the ride.

Listen to Real Voices Regularly

The best way to improve is to listen to **native speakers** in real situations. This could be **podcasts**, **songs**, **YouTube videos**, **films**, or **audiobooks** in your target language. Start with content made for learners—it's slower and clearer. As you improve, gradually move to real content made for native speakers. Even **10 minutes a day** is better than one long session once a week, because your brain needs regular exposure to remember patterns.

Use Your Eyes AND Ears Together

Watch videos with **subtitles** in the language you're learning (not your own language at first). This helps your brain connect sounds with written words. You can pause, rewind, and listen to tricky parts again. Many **streaming services** offer shows in different languages with subtitles. This is like having a teacher who never gets tired of repeating the same sentence!

Think of it like learning to read music. At first you need to see the notes AND hear the tune to understand how they go together. Eventually you can read notes and hear the tune in your head without playing it.

Speak Out Loud and Repeat

Your ears are connected to your mouth. When you hear a word and say it back, your brain remembers it better. Pause videos and repeat phrases after the speaker. This helps you get used to the **sounds and rhythm** of the language. It feels silly at first, but it really works!

Be Patient With Yourself

Understanding another language takes time—usually **hundreds of hours** of listening before it feels natural. Celebrate small wins, like understanding your first sentence or recognising a word you heard last week. Every bit of listening counts.