

Who is this for?

This Advice Sheet is for anyone who wants to improve their English by listening to songs.

The aim of this leaflet

The aim of this leaflet is to help you develop your listening ability through listening to songs. It introduces you to materials that are available in the Language Commons and on the Internet and suggests learning tips.

Useful materials in the Language Commons

Music CDs

The Language Commons has a selection of English music CDs in the *Orientation Area*. Ask for the CD you want to borrow at the Language Commons Reception, and hand in your student ID card. You can then play the CD in the Seminar Room (if you want to listen with a partner or group of friends) or at the computer in the Language Commons. The list of CD titles we currently stock is here:

http://cle.ust.hk/online_resources/english/emusic

If you would like to *recommend* that we add particular music CDs to our collection,

please pass your suggestions to the Language Commons Reception, or e-mail them to lccommons@ust.hk. We welcome suggestions!

Pronunciation Activity Sheets

We have several activity sheets which can help you practise listening to pronunciation features with particular Music CDs.

Useful materials on the Internet

Sites with music and lyrics

Lidwina's Disney Song Collection - http://www.geocities.ws/lidwina_s

A clearly arranged site with lyrics to 120+ Disney songs and music files (not original music/singing).

Sites with lyrics only

The International Lyrics Server - <http://www.lyrics.com>

A very good place to start looking if you have the song you like, but not the lyrics.

Lyrics World - <http://www.lyricsworld.com>

A useful site if you can remember some key words but not the title of the song.

The Madonna Lyrics Archive

<http://www.madonnalyrics.org>

The lyrics to all her songs: 'Material girl', 'Don't cry for me, Argentina', 'American Pie' etc.

Radio stations

Lots of possibilities, although you won't be able to read the lyrics at the same time (unless you can search the web very quickly!). One suggestion from a learner: 'Uncle Ray's' program on *RTHK Radio 3* around midnight, with an archive of the previous two years' broadcasts available at <http://programme.rthk.org.hk/channel/radio/programme.php?name=/alltheway&p=547&m=archive&page=1&item=50>.

Learning tips

Before listening ...

- **Decide what aspect of your listening you want to improve.** If your focus is *Vocabulary*, it's useful to decide whether you want to focus on conversational phrases, or vocabulary related to a particular topic (e.g. Love and Relationships) etc. See **Learning Vocabulary by Reading or Listening**

(V7). If you want to improve your ability to hear features of English *Pronunciation*, then it's useful to find out if your main difficulty is hearing contractions, or linking, or weak forms etc. See the Pronunciation Advice sheets, particularly **Deciding what Areas of Pronunciation to Focus on (P2)**, **Selecting Materials to Work on (P3)** and **Glossary (P6)**.

- **Set yourself a goal.** It's best not to aim too high, unless you have lots of time free to dedicate to your listening. Think of one or two aspects of your listening that you'd like to improve and set a goal related to that (e.g. 'In phrases like *You're all that I'll ever want*, I want to be able to hear the contractions like *You're* and *I'll* or 'I want to be able to hear words which are linked together e.g. *You're all that I'll ever want*'). Or you could aim to improve your ability to hear the words of one particular singer.
- **Choose a song or singer that you enjoy!**
- **Try to find songs that match your goal and level.** Do the songs contain the Vocabulary or Pronunciation features you want to practise? Do you want songs that tell a story, with a wide range of

vocabulary, or do you want songs with a lot of repetition?

- **Find songs that have got printed lyrics (words).** Even native speakers often mishear the words of songs. (If you don't believe that, check out <http://www.kissthisguy.com> – it's surprisingly common.) So having lyrics available is really vital when listening in a second language.
- If you know the song is going to be difficult for you to hear clearly, **read the lyrics first.**
- **Find out about the singer or the topic of the song** if possible – it's useful to have some background knowledge before you start listening. Encyclopedias are good sources. A particularly good one is *Wikipedia*, which has up-to-date information and links to other websites for singers that it doesn't list: <http://www.wikipedia.org>. You will also find useful information on famous singers and cultural topics in the *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* on the *Dictionaries* shelf.

While listening ...

Here are some things you can do while listening:

- **Jot down vocabulary** that you don't know, if you are focusing on that. Try *NTC's Dictionary of American Slang & Colloquial Expressions* (on the *Dictionaries* shelf) if you hear phrases that are not listed in your dictionary.
- **Replay the CD** if there are parts you can't catch.
- **Stop the CD randomly and predict which words will come next.** This tests your knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, as well as your listening ability.
- If you have your own song lyrics, **highlight the words/sounds you are having difficulty** with. You can also 'white out' some key words in the lyrics beforehand, and then try to **fill in the gaps** while you listen.
- **Jot down the main point** of the song if you are trying to develop your ability to interpret or draw conclusions/infer meaning from what you hear. You can later check this with the song lyrics or with a friend who may be listening to the song with you or already know it.

- **Listen to the song with a friend.** You can later discuss what the song is about and help each other if you have difficulties in understanding any of it.
- Try to **transcribe the song word for word.** This is a useful technique for advanced learners, or for intermediate learners if the song is fairly simple. You can then compare your transcription with the actual lyrics.

After listening...

Here are some things you can do after listening:

- **Think about how you will learn + remember vocabulary** that you have jotted down. Writing it down (and checking its meaning in a dictionary) is the easy part. *Remembering* the vocabulary is the important part. See **Remembering Vocabulary (V4)**.
- **Listen to the songs again but without reading the lyrics** this time. Can you still understand them?
- **Check your summary, gap-filling or transcription with the lyrics.**

- **Discuss the song and any problems you had in listening with a friend.**
- **Write your own lyrics** or **record your own song!**
- **Find more songs** to listen to that have the **same topic** (if you're focusing on Vocabulary) or **Pronunciation features** (if you're focusing on Pronunciation)

Evaluating your progress

It can very useful to evaluate your learning progress: this not only gives you a sense of success, but also enables you to identify areas that you need to work on in the future. Here are some ways of evaluating the progress you have made in your listening to songs:

- **Think about your progress** – how do you feel about your performance?
- Try listening to another song. Are you able to hear Pronunciation features (e.g. contractions) more clearly now?
- **Compare** your listening comprehension/vocabulary knowledge/knowledge of pronunciation features **at the beginning of a period**

of learning and at the end, e.g. several months later – have you improved? (You could listen to the same song as before, or to another song by the same singer, for comparison.)

- **Listen to the songs again without reading the lyrics.** Can you still understand them?
- **Check your summary, gap-filling or transcription with the lyrics.**
- If learning vocabulary, **test your vocabulary knowledge** after several months. Can you still remember all the words you wrote down? See **Evaluating your Vocabulary Learning (V5)** for more advice.

And now...

If you would like any help or advice, or just a chat about your progress, please get in touch - **we are here to support your independent learning!** To contact us:

- Make an appointment to see an adviser. For details of advisers and their availability, please go to <https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/language-adviser-timetable/>.

- E-mail your questions to **iLANG** (lcilang@ust.hk).
- Ask at the reception counter of the Language Commons — if the receptionist cannot help you directly, s/he will pass your query on to one of the advisers.

What else can you do?

- Browse the many physical (<https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/language-commons/#resources>) and online materials (<https://ilang.cle.ust.hk/resources-listening/>) for Listening.
- Join a Listening activity or short course (<http://ilang.cle.ust.hk/listening/>).

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