

## Successful speakers... show they are listening

At Trinity College London, we have studied the scripts from hundreds of our speaking exams. We wanted to find out what makes some test takers more successful than others. One thing that test takers who perform better do is show the examiner that they are listening to what he or she is saying.

Here are two examples taken from the GESE exams.

### Activity 1

Read the conversations between a test taker <TT> and an examiner <E> aloud. In which discussion does the test taker show more signs that he/she is listening? .....

#### Corpus extract

##### A From a discussion about the martial art, T'ai Chi

<E> Have you heard of T'ai Chi?  
 <TT> Er  
 <E> It's a very old Chinese exercise.  
 <TT> Uhu...no, I don't know it.  
 <E> And it looks very similar to yoga but it works on an inside energy...  
 <TT> Ah  
 <E> ...in the body. So you are bending...  
 <TT> Mm  
 <E> ...in a very good position, your pelvis...  
 <TT> Mm  
 <E> ...and your neck...  
 <TT> Ah  
 <E> ...because it's very important to be grounded in life.  
 <TT> Uhu

##### B From a discussion about lending someone money

<E> He actually needs a hundred pounds. I mean, if he doesn't have it, if he can't pay the bill then he's going to be in trouble really.  
 <TT> Erm...then...let me think, please. You know, it's a hard situation because, er, if he is asking you for more money.  
 <E> Mm, well it's not more money. I mean this is the first time to be fair. It's the first time he's asked me but I know that if I give him the money, it won't be the last time.  
 <TT> Okay then. Er, try to give the money to him and then, erm, don't give more money.

### Activity 2

Why do you think is important to show that you are listening? Tick one or more of these reasons.

- a) You sound good, even if you don't understand everything .....
- b) The other speaker knows you are following what he/she is saying and the conversation flows more easily .....
- c) The other speaker needs breaks in what he/she is saying .....
- d) You, the listener, are helping to manage the conversation .....

### Activity 3

Now look at discussion B again. Where could the test taker have shown more signs of listening? Read it aloud with a partner and try to improve it.

### Trinity tip

It is important to show signs of listening at appropriate moments. If you just make noises all the time or at the wrong time, the other speaker will think that you do not understand the conversation or that you are not interested.

## Activity 4

Read these discussions aloud. In which one is the test taker showing signs of listening at appropriate moments? .....

### Corpus extract

#### A

<E> I don't really know...  
<TT> Mm  
<E> ...what to suggest to her. She wants to change...  
<TT> Ah, okay.  
<E> ...something in her life but I think that going abroad...  
<TT> Mm  
<E> wouldn't be the right thing for her to do at the moment. She's not a very adventurous person.

#### B

<E> My parents are celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary this year...  
<TT> Ah...  
<E> and we're not sure what to do for the occasion.  
<TT> Ah, okay...  
<E> My mum doesn't really like big parties...  
<TT> Mm  
<E> but my dad loves them!  
<TT> Oh. Okay so...is your family very big?

## Activity 5

Read this monologue. Where could a listener show interest? Mark those places with /. Then practise reading it aloud with a partner.

I think my life has changed for the better since I met my friend Matt. He's a very adventurous person and since I met him I've become more adventurous too. I never used to do anything that was even slightly risky but last year we went on holiday together and I did a bungee jump. I was really scared but I did it and it was amazing. And he's more outgoing than me and has lots of friends and some of them have become my friends too now so my social circle, let's say, has widened.