

The listening comprehension part of the exam consists of two parts. The first is audio combined with print texts, and the second is only audio texts. The questions for all listening comprehension sections will be printed in your test booklet. Before each audio selection is played, you will be given time to read information about the source of the audio selection, which will help put what you are about to hear in context. Each audio source will be played twice.

There will be room in your text booklet for you to take notes on what you hear. You will have time to read the questions before listening to the selections, so you can focus on the information you need to extract from what you hear. The selections may be an interview taken from broadcast media, news reports, a lecture, or it may simulate an everyday conversation. The topics will be taken from any topic related to the Spanish-speaking world and the six overarching themes. The questions will ask you to identify and summarize main points, understand some detailed information, and draw conclusions about what you hear based on what you know about Spanish culture and customs. Other questions may ask for an interpretation of a specific phrase or an interpretation of a specific idiomatic phrase, the meaning of which can be inferred from the context in which you hear it.

The following exercises are designed to help you focus on learning to listen for first the main idea, and then for details that relate to time, place, and activity. If some parts are difficult to understand, the exercises will help you learn how to work around unfamiliar phrases. On the exam, it won't be unusual to hear some words you do not recognize. In such cases you should not focus on what you do not know, but rather focus on what you do know. Practicing with difficult passages will help you learn to listen carefully, and good concentration will help every time. The secret is not to get frustrated when you do not understand an individual word. Focus on listening to phrases and extracting ideas. Remember that you will hear each audio file twice.

STRATEGIES FOR LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Try some of the following strategies to see if you can improve your listening comprehension.

- **READ THE INTRODUCTION TO EACH SAMPLE.** You will always be given a context for the listening selection. Use this to bring in any prior knowledge you may have on the subject and make predictions.
- **READ THE QUESTIONS FIRST.** You will have time to read the questions before listening to the selection. Use this time to gather as much information about the selection as possible.

- **CONCENTRATE.** The hardest part is concentrating while the audio is playing. The strategies below will help you to learn how to focus while you listen.
- **EVALUATE THE INFORMATION BEING PRESENTED.** Is the speaker trying to persuade the listener? Is the speaker stating facts or opinions? What evidence, if any, does the speaker present?
- **LISTEN FOR REPEATED WORDS.** The repetition of a word often indicates important information or ideas.
- **PAY ATTENTION TO STRUCTURE.** You can expect to hear certain kinds of information in certain parts of a selection. For example, usually at the beginning of a selection, you will hear things related to the setting for a scene and the introduction of ideas, people, and things. Next, you will hear changes to or affirmation of the original information. In a conclusion, expect to hear something summarizing the event, or a return to the original premise.
- **FOLLOW THE THREAD.** Every conversation or narrative has a thread, or a direction in which it is going. Ideas often take off from some detail, so pay attention to details, especially ones that may indicate a shift in topic.
- **LISTEN FOR COGNATES.** Picture what the cognate means instead of translating it.
- **FOCUS ON WHAT YOU DO KNOW AND NOT ON WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW.** Often students get hung up on single words they do not understand. Focus on what it is you do understand and use contextual clues to help you figure out those words or ideas that may be confusing to you. Remember, this test is designed to evaluate your ability to understand ideas, not individual words.
- **KNOW NUMBERS WELL.** Numbers beyond single digits often slow you down if you try to translate the quantity associated with the number you hear.
- **ANTICIPATE.** Once you know the topic, imagine where the narrative or dialogue will go. If you know what the topic is, you will understand more.
- **MAKE MENTAL NOTES.** File information in your mind or on paper by grouping it in categories, especially the details. You remember things longer, if you associate things in a group.
- **VISUALIZE.** Nothing makes the selection more understandable than visualizing what you hear.
- **IMAGINE.** If the topic deals with unfamiliar subject matter, try to imagine what it would be like to be in that situation or to experience the setting or event that is discussed.
- **TAKE NOTES.** If it is helpful, take notes. If nothing else, writing something down helps you concentrate while you listen. Avoid writing complete sentences, as it will take up too much time. Try to write individual words or short phrases that will help you remember ideas.

Remember that you will be able to listen to each selection twice. During the first listen, focus on main ideas, and during the playback, listen for facts and details.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Choose a few strategies at a time to practice and see which ones make a difference in your listening comprehension.

- **CONCENTRATE WHILE YOU LISTEN.** To keep your mind from wandering while you listen, try jotting down notes, drawing pictures or doodles, noting key words about what you hear, or making an outline of what is said.
- **VISUALIZE.** If you can picture what the words say, you are more likely to remember them.
- **ORGANIZE AND CATEGORIZE.** Group information into categories. For example, if you hear the sound of a bell or a public address system announcement, file that sound under the “school” so that other details relating to the topic will all be grouped together. By doing this, you will be likely to remember more details.
- **TAKE NOTES.** If you can write and listen at the same time, take notes. If you have difficulty doing both things at the same time, write down key words instead of taking more extensive notes. Practice both ways, so you know which works best for you.
- **MAKE EDUCATED GUESSES.** When you hear a word or expression you do not know, rely on the context to interpret its meaning.
- **LISTEN FOR IDEAS.** Instead of translating what you hear into English, try to assimilate the information in Spanish. Translation slows down the thought process, and you will miss other things that are said.
- **RECOGNIZE COGNATES.** Make sure that cognates do not sidetrack your thoughts into English. Instead of translating the cognate, visualize what it means.
- **PAY ATTENTION TO PARTS OF SPEECH.** Pay particular attention to the ends of words because they often convey very important information. For example, *enfermarse* is a verb, *enfermera* is a nurse, and *enfermedad* is a sickness. *La enfermera enfermiza de la enfermería se enfermó con una enfermedad* would be incomprehensible unless you paid attention to which words were nouns, subjects or objects of the verb, adjectives, or which one was the verb itself.
- **FOCUS ON IDEAS.** When you focus on ideas, you are less likely to translate what you hear.
- **LISTEN TO LOTS OF SPANISH.** Nothing improves comprehension more than a lot of practice, so listen to as much Spanish as you can. Online sources are very good because the visual images will help you understand words.