

Cambridge Professional English

Business Listening Tasks

Patrick Hanks and Jim Corbett

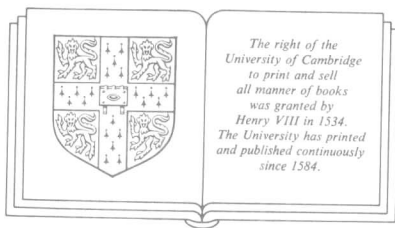
GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND
SELF-STUDY

Cambridge University Press

Business Listening Tasks

Guide for Teachers and Self-Study

Patrick Hanks and Jim Corbett



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P.W.H.

J.C.

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TO THE TEACHER

Who is the course for?

Business Listening Tasks is a course designed for intermediate and upper-intermediate level learners who wish to improve their listening and speaking skills within the specific framework of business English. Depending on how the course is used, some parts of it are also appropriate to lower-intermediate learners, and much of it is appropriate to learners at an advanced level.

Although in a few places the materials presuppose business experience, and are thus suited to the needs of the professional business person, most of the course is also suitable for students who have no previous work experience.

The course is suitable for use with learners who need to expand their general knowledge of English to include everyday business usage, and for learners who have previously studied English to a higher level but who have now forgotten much of what they learned because of non-usage.

The course is designed both for use in class and for self-study purposes.

What does the course consist of?

The course materials consist of two cassettes, a Learner's Book, and this Guide. In addition to the answers to questions, the Guide also contains teacher's notes and full tapescripts.

The course comprises ten units, each of which centres on a specific aspect of business life. Each unit contains sufficient teaching materials for approximately three hours' use. For ease of use, all units are divided into four parts of roughly equal length. Each unit contains preview work, vocabulary exercises in business and related terminology, and listening tasks. For classroom use there are extension activities for free oral production in each unit.

How were the materials arrived at?

In producing this course our aim was to provide activity-centred modular teaching materials for business people, based on authentic language. The listening materials are therefore actually based on extensive research into the real language of business in the British business community. Several major companies assisted us by tape recording many hours of their business

meetings and discussions, and from this corpus a selection was made to form the listening extracts, based on the criteria of relevance and interest.

The chosen extracts were then transcribed word for word, and were later re-recorded under studio conditions. Re-recording was necessary to produce tapes of a high technical quality, as well as to facilitate the one concession that we did make, namely editing. Conversations were shortened in order to make the units of manageable length, and in particular, lengthy digressions, confidential material, and company-specific references were omitted.

The course books were then based on the listening materials so arrived at, and finally the whole course was fully piloted before publication, and revisions made accordingly.

What are the main features of the course?

- 1 *The materials are based on authentic business discussions and situations.* The language is in no way idealized, and therefore contains natural features such as elisions, contractions, false starts, rephrasing, hesitation, mistakes, and incomplete utterances – all of which are integral to the normal spoken language. Practice is provided in recognizing and in coming to terms with these features.

The listening extracts are not in the form of discrete, short spans, but rather, in keeping with the criterion of authenticity, they are fully contextualized spans of language selected to accustom learners to understanding extended speech. Parts of the extracts may expose some learners to language which is beyond their own productive capacity, and practice is given in extracting the gist from utterances part of which the learner may not fully understand.

- 2 *The course is learner-centred.* Learners of English as a foreign language have many different levels of sophistication. Business learners, in particular, usually have a highly sophisticated range of knowledge, experience, and expertise; their need is to be able to use English to express themselves as such. The materials are intended to be used for teaching language rather than content, and the activities are intended to help learners to extend their command of English in business situations. We believe that learners learn more effectively if they are using material the content of which they can recognize as plausible and relevant to their own interests. That is a major reason for taking excerpts from real business discussions as a basis for language learning.

All learners are individuals who have their own aims in learning, and their own strategies with which to accomplish these aims. Because of this, the course offers a correspondingly wide range of exercise types, and caters for a range of different learning styles. Another reason for the diversity is that homogeneity of task is now known to be psychologically tiring, and can lead to demotivation and demoralization. For these reasons, therefore,

built into the course are the changes of pace and activity that are essential if learning is to take place effectively.

- 3 *The course is activity-centred.* A learner-centred course implies the avoidance of learner under-involvement, and puts the learner at the heart of the learning process. The learner is in fact the ultimate source of learning, and can perhaps best acquire language when he or she is required to be active. This is why the course often calls on the learner to use skill and intelligence to carry out certain learning tasks. The learner is an active being who learns by doing, rather than by being an empty receptacle waiting to be filled with knowledge by a teacher.

The course is therefore activity-centred and the learner is called upon as much to learn to *use* English as to learn *about* English. Extension activities in free oral production are a feature of all ten units, and to maximize the amount of learner language use, many such activities are in the form of pair work. A few exercises focus attention on the mechanics of speech acts in English – identifying speakers' attitudes, for example. Where these occur, their purpose is to heighten the learners' awareness of the impact of their own linguistic behaviour on those around them and those with whom they interact in their working life.

- 4 *The course is flexible.* It may be taught as a sequential whole, or perhaps more usefully, it is suitable for selective modular use. As the tapes are based on authentic materials, there is no artificial grading of the language. This means that there is no objection to using, for example, Unit 9 before Unit 3. In this way units may be selected to match the learners' interests and needs, and other materials may be introduced in order to supplement those given here. In this sense our materials are as much a core book as a course book. Similarly the course materials here may be used to supplement other main course books.

As we have already said, there is no artificial grading of the language in the listening extracts. The level of difficulty is defined not by the language heard, but by the nature of the task which the learner is asked to perform. For this reason, the course can cater for several different language levels, as a range of tasks at different levels is provided. We would expect the teacher to select from the tasks given those that are at an appropriate level to the group.

A further aspect of flexibility hinges on the concept of redundancy. In ordinary speech, people repeat themselves and sometimes present the same idea in different words, in some cases several times. Redundancy is thus a feature of natural language; some people would argue that it is an important aid to communication and understanding. It is found in several places in these listening extracts. Few textbook writers, however, seem willing to accept redundancy as a feature of their own materials. We do. As well as being an empirical feature of the natural language in the listening extracts, redundancy will also be found to some extent in the activities.

This is intentional. There are several activities of different types associated with each extract. Some activities can be seen as reinforcing skills practised elsewhere in the course. Others break new ground.

Exactly which activities are undertaken depends on the judgement of the teacher, taking account of his or her first-hand knowledge of the needs and abilities of the learners concerned. There is no point in doing an activity 'just because it is in the book'. Teachers are encouraged to exploit the flexibility of these modular units, by using the activities selectively.

How may the materials best be used?

As previously mentioned, flexibility is an important feature of the course, and for this reason no set teaching method is imposed by either the materials or by the Teacher's Notes. The Notes include hints and suggestions as to the use of the material, and may be regarded either as instructions or as reference, whichever you prefer. They have been kept concise, in order to encourage you to read through them at least once.

We would expect the teacher to have listened carefully to any unit which he or she uses in class. Further, we would expect him or her to have looked through all the activities in a particular unit, and to have selected for use those which are judged to be of most value to the learners concerned. Such preparation is important if the learner-centred features of the course are to be used to their full advantage.

In terms of beginning a unit in class, there are sound pedagogical reasons, we believe, for starting with the preview activity or activities. Such questions are designed to help the learner to establish the right mental approach and to arouse expectations as to what he or she is about to hear.

The Vocabulary Points which preface the work in each extract explain difficult words and phrases that occur naturally in the listening extract. They should be looked through with all but advanced learners, as they enable the learner to find his or her way through the first listening without the unnecessary psychological stress of meeting several words or expressions which he or she could not be expected to know. Vocabulary items that are of importance and that should be learned are made the subject of reinforcement questions (in the Teacher's Notes) or, more commonly, are made the subject of vocabulary exercises. Many of the most important vocabulary items occur in more than one of the vocabulary exercises. It is worth noting at this point, too, that the multiple choice vocabulary questions often introduce subsidiary vocabulary items which may be exploited in class, and for this reason it is advisable for the teacher to include as lesson preparation a reading of the Key. Some of the other exercises may present difficulty to teachers with little or no business experience, and thus the Key may often be used to advantage in initial lesson preparations.

Instructions for the use of the listening tasks normally specify that a re-

hearing of the extract is necessary before the carrying out of the task. This instruction, however, should not be regarded as an absolute. Some groups may be able to perform the task without hearing the extract again, whilst other groups may need to hear it several times before being able to perform the task. The teacher needs to be sensitive as to the number of replays required by a particular group, and should neither stretch their patience with too many replays, nor stretch them into the realms of the impossible by asking them to perform tasks which they cannot do before listening to the extract again.

The extension activities often take the form of free oral practices, and for reasons already mentioned, oral practices are often given as simultaneous pair work. Such practices assign to the teacher the roles of facilitator and monitor. They reduce teacher input, and provide the learners with an opportunity to practise their generative, creative use of language.

Feedback from the teacher at the end of these activities can be a useful way of warding off the internalization of mistakes by the learners, as well as helping them to fill in the gaps in their knowledge. In addition, feedback helps the learner to get an idea of where he or she is at, and in this respect it is perhaps also worth mentioning that purely positive feedback should not be overlooked. A classroom atmosphere of no risk should prevent mistakes from assuming undue importance. The classroom, after all, is the ideal place in which to make language errors.

Finally, some listening tasks omitted in class may be set as self-access homework, always assuming that the learner has access to the cassettes. Review plays an important part in language learning, and from this point of view the very minimum that learners should be asked to review in their own time should be those vocabulary items already covered in class.

The tapescript is intended mainly for reference purposes, and not for general classroom use. It may have some classroom application in providing help in a situation in which a learner has extreme difficulty, but in general the tapescript should not be used until after all work on an extract has been completed. In this respect, the tapescript is itself a useful area of self-access review.

TO THE SELF-STUDY LEARNER

Before you begin

Business Listening Tasks is designed both for use in class and for self-study purposes. If you are using the course on your own for self-study, then the notes that follow will help you to use the course to its best advantage. If you have not yet read the introduction 'To the learner', which is in the Learner's Book, then please do so now, before reading these notes any further. This is because the introduction will help you to understand what the course is about, and how it is organized.

Beginning the course

After reading the introduction 'To the learner' and so getting a basic idea of what the course is about and how it is organized, you will know it is not necessary to begin with Unit 1 and to work your way through to Unit 10.

To increase your understanding of the course, and to help you to decide where to begin, you should now carry out an overview of the Learner's Book. Look through the contents list of the book, and then at the short introductions at the beginning of each unit. When you have done this, you should choose the unit which seems most interesting to you, and begin your work on the course there.

Using a unit

Before you begin a unit, you might like to look through it quickly, to see how the four extracts are arranged. Do not look too closely at the questions at this stage.

When you have looked through the unit in this way, begin by listening to the presenter's introduction to the unit, on tape. When you have done this, look carefully at the preview activity or activities at the beginning of the unit. Although you may not have anyone to do these with, they are still useful, as they help you to think about what you might hear in the unit, and to be in the right mental condition before you listen.

The next step is to look through the Vocabulary Points at the start of the extract. These explain difficult words and phrases that occur naturally in the listening extract. You might wish to test yourself on these before moving on and listening to the extract.

Listen to the extract for the first time straight through without stopping, even if you do not understand it all. Remember that the tasks that come afterwards will ask you to listen to the extract again, and that they are designed to help you understand what the extract is about. When you have completed the work on an extract, you should be able to listen to it right through without any real problem.

The first exercise in each extract is usually a vocabulary exercise, and it is here that you should start, after you have listened to the extract. If the exercise is one that offers you several possible answers for each question ('multiple choice questions'), you may be able to answer it at this stage. Note that some of the multiple choice questions do not only give an explanation of the target word or phrase. They may also contain explanations or definitions of other words or terms, so try to think if there are any special words or terms that you know for the other three choices, after you have chosen your answer to the question.

If the exercise is not multiple choice, listen to the extract again, and stop the tape when you hear the words or phrases that you are listening for, and write them down. When you have done the vocabulary exercise, you may wish to look in the Key and check your answers before moving on to the next exercise.

Instructions for the use of the listening tasks normally specify that a re-hearing of the extract is necessary before you carry out the task. You may find that you can perform the task without hearing the extract again. On the other hand, you may wish to listen to the extract, or certain parts of it, several times before you perform the task. The best person to decide how many times you need to listen is you.

Remember that you do not have to do all the exercises in an extract. The tasks are not all at the same level of difficulty, so try to choose those that you find are at the right level of difficulty for you. Remember too that people do not learn in exactly the same way as each other, and so there are different types of exercise in each unit, to cater for differences in learning styles. Choose those exercises that you find most interesting, and which you think will be of most help to you.

The Key will help you to check your answers, and it is probably best to check the answer to each exercise when you finish it, rather than wait until you have completed all the work on the extract.

The Tapescript is intended mainly for reference purposes. It may help you to refer to it at those times when you are having a lot of difficulty, but in general you should not use it until after all the work on an extract has been completed. In this way, the Tapescript is useful when you wish to review the extract or the unit. Review is a very important part of learning, and is talked about in the next section.

Planning your time

As we said in the introduction 'To the learner', there is enough material in each unit for approximately three hours' study. This does not mean, however, that you should sit down for three hours at a time and work your way through a unit. Remember that it is better to do a little studying often than to do a lot occasionally. It is much easier to remember things if you work steadily and regularly. Thus you will probably learn more if you use one extract a day, that is study for approximately forty-five minutes a day, than you will if you go through a whole unit at once and then do nothing else for a week.

It is very important before you even begin the course to plan your time, and to set yourself realistic goals. If your goals are too ambitious and you cannot keep to your planned schedule, then this will demoralize you and will have a bad effect on your learning. As we have said, it is better to work steadily and regularly than it is to try to do a lot of work now and then. Decide how much work you wish to do at any one time, and when you wish to do it, and then stick to your plan. A good plan might be to do some work each day. This does not mean that you have to begin a new extract each day – review is very important to help you to remember things, so there should be some days when you plan to spend just a few minutes on the course, looking through parts of it that you have already used, and reviewing what you have learned.

Memory plays a very important part in language learning, and for this reason it is essential that you review the work that you have done. Always finish a period of study on the extracts by taking a little time to think over what you have learned from them. Here it helps you if, as you worked your way through a unit, you have underlined any words or expressions that you found either especially difficult or especially useful. Marking in the margin also makes it easier for you to return later to areas of the course that you want to look at again.

One review is seldom enough. In addition to finishing your periods of study with a review, you should begin the next period of study by reviewing the work with which you finished last time. In this way you will review things at least twice. As mentioned above, it is a good idea to plan a few days when you spend just a few minutes looking through those parts of the course that you have already used, and reviewing what you learned. This means that you will be reviewing things three or four times, which is very important in helping you to remember the language.

Finally remember that if you use the strategies suggested to work systematically through the course, you can make your study a personal, varied, and stimulating experience. Even good materials can lead to a rigid, impersonal, boring routine if they are used in the wrong ways.

TEACHER'S NOTES

1 MAKING CONTACT

EXTRACT A: BY PHONE

A1

- A Work through the situations one by one, asking the group to suggest what is being said in each situation. Seek several alternatives, in each case, and if necessary talk over formality levels, appropriateness, etc.
- B This activity should be done with the group members standing, in an area in which they can circulate freely. Ask the members to move around the group, introducing themselves, and to use small talk. They should also introduce to each other two of the people to whom they have spoken.

Circulate amongst the group yourself, monitoring performance, as some remedial feedback to the group may be necessary at the end of the activity. Do not let the activity drag on. Once the introductions are complete, give any feedback which you think necessary.

If the group members already know each other, give them false identities. The following names could be copied onto slips of paper and given to individuals:

Men

| | |
|-------------|------------------|
| Jim White | Tom Hay |
| Tim Wright | John Jay |
| Harry Gibbs | Peter Cartwright |
| Barry Tibbs | Steven Andrews |

Women

| | |
|---------------|---------------|
| Jane Bradford | Marcy Grant |
| Jean Ford | Nancy France |
| Joan Bates | Heather Rowe |
| Jill Waites | Florence Snow |

A2

Do the exercise before playing the Introduction. Give the group a minute or so to work individually, and then go quickly through the answers orally.

A3

- A Direct the group's attention to the book before you play the Introduction. Then check that they have extracted the right job titles, before moving on to B.

- B** Let the group work through the exercise individually, before going through the answers orally.

A4

Play the first phone call after asking the group to look at the form in their books. They should fill in this form while they listen to the call. Allow them to compare answers in pairs, before quickly going through the answers with the whole group.

A5

Ask the group to look at the list of functions. Then explain that you will play the phone call again, and that you want them to tell you to stop the tape as soon as they hear the words that are used to carry out these functions. Elicit the words from the group each time, and ask them to note them down quickly under the relevant function. Replay short sections again if necessary.

A6

With lower-intermediate groups, you may wish to play the phone call again before attempting the activity. Otherwise simply conduct the activity as a simultaneous pair exercise. Monitor, and give any necessary feedback. If the group had difficulties, you should ask them to read through the tapescript of the phone call.

A7

Play the second phone call, after asking the group to look at the form in their books. Ask them to fill in this form while they listen to the phone call. Allow them to compare answers in pairs, before quickly going through answers with the whole group.

A8

Ask the group if they wish to hear the phone call again before answering the questions, as they may already be able to identify the speaker in each case from memory. After getting them to specify the speaker, ask them to explain the point of each of the sentences.

Encourage the group to provide several alternatives for each item, and talk these over if necessary.

A9

(As for A6.)

EXTRACT B: AT RECEPTION

B1

The exercise centres around the skill of prediction, and should be done individually. Let the learners check their own answers as they listen to the extract.

B2

Play Extract B. Stop the tape at the end, after Joan Atkinson says, 'Thank you'. Explain that names and addresses can present a problem when doing business internationally, and that naming the letters of the alphabet *in English* is an important skill.

Write up the following groups of letters:

A J K
 B C D E G P T V
 Q U W
 M N
 I Y
 F H L O R S X Z

Pronounce each of these letters yourself, before pointing at random to individual letters and asking the group to call out the answers.

Play Exercise B2, then ask the group to compare their answers in pairs. Play the exercise again if necessary, before quickly writing up the answers for the group to check their answers.

B3

Ask the group to look through the exercise. Then explain that you will play the extract again, and that you want them to tell you to stop the tape every time that they hear the words that mean the same as the sentences in the exercise. Elicit the answers from the group each time, and ask them to note down the answers quickly.

B4

Divide the group into pairs. Give one person in each pair a copy of one of the following names and addresses. Without showing it to their partner, they should then read it and spell it for their partner to write down. Circulate and help as necessary. Then give a copy of another name and address from the list to the pairs, the individuals this time reversing roles.

If the alphabet still presents problems, then it is perhaps best to return to the

remaining names and addresses later in the course, rather than going through them all at once.

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EXTRACT C: MAKING INTRODUCTIONS

C1

Ask the group to look at the statements, then to mark them T or F as they listen to the extract. Finally, check the answers orally and quickly.

C2

Take this exercise in three stages.

First, play the extract through and then get the learners to specify the number and the names of all the people at the meeting. If they do not get all five straight away, play the extract again and stop the tape every time a new speaker is heard, until all five are identified.

Secondly, ask the group to look at the twelve sentences listed. Ask them to write down the name of the speaker while listening to the extract again. Check their answers and correct any mistakes by playing through the relevant part of the extract, several times if necessary.

Thirdly, you may wish to get them to identify the propositional attitude for each remark. Ask them to choose a propositional attitude from the list given, in discussion with the group as a whole. Then ask them to confirm or alter