
TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Creating Listening Resources Using Cultural Experience Stories

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It can be difficult to find useful or authentic listening resources for a specific group of language learners. Commercial recordings are often too difficult for students to understand, unrelated to their needs and interests, or too expensive for programs to purchase. Freely available online materials are becoming easier to find, but they are seldom a good fit for a particular class because each group of learners is different, having unique needs. By recording their own listening resources, teachers can customize the content and manipulate the listening tasks to fit their students. To those who wish to record their own listening resources, I would suggest beginning with their own cross-cultural personal experience stories.

Several times in my teaching career, particularly in Paraguay, I have faced the need to choose between creating my own listening resources or having none. When first faced with the task of creating my own resources, I was overwhelmed and did not know where to begin. However, after pondering the matter for some time, I thought to record some of my personal cultural experience stories. These experiences were easy to recall and to share because I had lived them and often told them to others. They had been valuable learning experiences for me and became equally valuable (and entertaining) content for my students in lessons on travel, culture, communication, culture shock, and cross-cultural differences.

Everyone in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) probably has a myriad of similar cross-cultural experience stories to draw on. These experiences might come from an internship, a volunteer experience, a prior teaching position, or a previous job in the field. No matter where one teaches, culture is an integral part of the study of languages and interactions between people. By sharing cultural experiences with students, teachers show that they value culture and recognize that it plays a key role in learning to communicate with others. Sharing their own stories of culture shock, for example, makes it easier for students to recognize and begin telling their own.

Procedure

1. Recall a personal story from a past or recent cultural experience. List the key points in the story to help remember them as you speak, but do not write a complete script. This will help ensure that the recording sounds as authentic as possible.
2. Identify the discourse features that you want to showcase. For example, do you want to record a casual encounter on the street, an informal interview, or a guest lecturer speaking to students preparing to study abroad?
3. Install a program on your computer which allows you to record and edit audio files. For example, Audacity is a free, open source program easily downloaded to your computer from the Internet.
4. Record your story using your outline or key words. If you make a mistake or change your mind, just pause and then continue. There is no need to start over because *Audacity* makes it easy to edit the recording later. Try to keep your students in mind as you speak to make your recording as natural and authentic-like as possible.
5. (Optional) Record and insert additional segments such as an introduction, explanations of specialized terms, or clips of interviews with other speakers.
6. Edit your recording. Delete false starts and distracting outside noise, if you wish. For beginning level students, you may want to delete wordy passages or insert longer pauses between utterances. For intermediate and advanced students, you may elect to retain more of the authentic features of spontaneous speech.
7. Export your completed recording into an MP3 file for easy access in the classroom or to share with students via other means.

With the completed recording(s) you can create a variety of listening tasks, depending on the level of your students and your desired learning outcomes.

Pre-listening activities can include:

- Building suspense by telling students they will hear the voice of someone they know
- Discussing key concepts that relate to the content of the recording
- Activating current knowledge (schema) on the topic
- Asking for volunteers to tell personal anecdotes related to the topic
- Teaching a few new vocabulary items that students will hear

- Making predictions about the content based on the topic or the opening sentence from the recording
- Reading and discussing an article that relates to the content of the recording.

During listening tasks

Explain what students should do, think about, or write while they are listening to the recording so that they will be prepared for what follows. If you want them to listen for specific information as they might in a quiz or exam situation, encourage them to take notes or attend to details, or give them the quiz questions to answer as they listen. If you want them to ask for clarification, give them a signal to use when they want you to pause the recording or tell them to write their questions for “the speaker” as they listen.

Post-listening activities

These can be as varied and extensive as you wish. A few examples are described below to highlight various linguistic and cognitive objectives.

- Listen for specific details. Have students compare their answers with a neighbor. Encourage them to ask for clarification or decide whether they need to hear the recording again. Give them the answers, or a key, to check their responses.
- Listen and React. Have students share their reaction to what they heard orally with a partner or individually on paper. Are they surprised by their teacher’s story? Have they heard similar stories before? What advice would they give their teacher about the experience?
- Summarize or Retell. Have students work in pairs to summarize or retell the story using their own words orally or in writing. This task may lead students to ask for another replay of the recording.
- Give advice. Tell students about advice columns or blogs, and show them examples if possible. Then ask them to write a letter in response to your story. Ask them to answer questions such as Why did this happen? What would you do in that situation? What should I have done? Then circulate the letters so they read each other’s responses.
- Synthesize information. Have students answer a question that requires synthesis of information from various sources, for example: We read an article about culture shock. From the information in that article and what

you heard in my story, what stage of culture shock am I in? Why do you say so?

- Tell Your Own Story. Use your story as a springboard for students to tell, write, record and/or share their own.

Conclusion

While it can be difficult for teachers to find useful or relevant listening resources for a particular class or purpose, it is no longer difficult to create their own. Today, teachers have power to custom design audio recordings and manipulate listening tasks to fit their unique needs. This tip describes an easy way to begin creating authentic-like audio recordings utilizing the teacher's own cross cultural experience stories. Such stories are easy to collect and share because we all have them. They can teach about cultural differences, and students delight in hearing them. When drawing on personal cultural experiences, the possibilities for developing valuable listening tasks are endless. No doubt those who do will soon be dabbling in the creation of video-based materials as well.

About the Author

Mary Garceau is a senior majoring in TESOL at Brigham Young University–Hawaii and President of the Student TESOL Society. She completed two internships in Paraguay, teaching at the National University of Asuncion and writing English books. She currently works as an assistant English as an International Language (EIL) tutor leader in the BYU-Hawaii Online Learning Department.