

Amelia Springer

ELS Listening Skills Activity Sequence

Intermediate Level

Focus: Inference & Context Clues

Time: 70–90 minutes

Materials:

- An audio clip (1–2 minutes) for Activities 1 and 2 — a natural conversation works well, e.g., a delayed flight, job interview, or everyday interaction
- 2–3 shorter audio excerpts (30–45 seconds each) for Activity 4, featuring implied meaning such as sarcasm, hesitation, or polite disagreement
- A device and speaker to play audio for the class

Learning Objectives

By the end of this sequence, students will be able to:

- Use context clues to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases
- Make logical inferences about a speaker's tone, attitude, and intent
- Predict content using prior knowledge and context
- Distinguish between what is stated and what is implied
- Justify inferences using evidence from what they heard

Activity 1: Listen & Predict (10–15 minutes)

This opening activity activates students' background knowledge and gets them making inferences before the audio even plays. Display 3–4 images or keywords related to the audio topic, but don't reveal what it's about. Ask students to predict who is speaking, where they are, and what the conversation might be about. Students write 2–3 predictions on a worksheet, then share briefly with a partner and the class.

Teacher tip: Encourage guessing freely at this stage — there are no wrong predictions. The goal is to prime students to listen actively, either confirming or revising what they expected.

Activity 2: First Listen — Gist & Gut Check (10 minutes)

Play the audio clip once straight through without pausing. Students then answer 4–5 inference questions on a handout:

- What is the relationship between the speakers?
- How does each speaker feel? What clues told you this?

- What is the purpose of the conversation?
- Was your prediction correct? What was different?

Follow up with a class discussion, prompting students to explain their reasoning. Introduce and model inference language at this point: *"I think this because I heard....," "The speaker sounded... which made me think....," "Based on the tone, I inferred..."*

### Activity 3: Second Listen (15–20 minutes)

This activity zeroes in on vocabulary inference. Prepare a partial transcript of the audio with 5–7 words or phrases blanked out. Distribute it before playing the audio a second time. As students listen, they try to fill in the blanks and write a guess for each word based on what they hear around it.

For each target word, students complete a simple four-column table:

- Word/Phrase — what they heard (or the blank)
- Clue I Heard — surrounding words, tone, or situation that helped
- My Guess — their inferred meaning
- Actual Meaning — confirmed after discussion

Pairs then compare their tables and discuss any differences before sharing with the class. Replay specific sections if students are struggling, and remind them to listen for surrounding words, the speaker's tone, and the overall situation — not just the target word in isolation.

### Activity 4: What's Implied? — Deep Inference Discussion (15–20 minutes)

Play 2–3 short excerpts (30–45 seconds each) from a new or extended audio clip that features implied meaning — things like sarcasm, polite disagreement, hesitation, or understatement. For each excerpt, pose deeper inference questions:

- What did the speaker say versus what did they actually mean?
- What feeling might the speaker be hiding or softening?
- How would you describe the speaker's attitude?
- What do you think will happen next, and why?

Students discuss in small groups of 3–4, reaching a consensus answer before a spokesperson shares with the class. Facilitate by highlighting that different interpretations can all be valid — as long as they're grounded in evidence from the audio. Regularly prompt: *"What specifically did you hear that supports that inference?"*

### Activity 5: Inference in Action — Role Play & Debrief (20 minutes)

Part A: Role Play (10 minutes) Students work in pairs using scenario cards that describe a situation with deliberately incomplete information — for example, *"You receive a voicemail from your doctor asking you to call back urgently."* Pairs discuss what they can infer from the

scenario, then role play a follow-up conversation letting those inferences shape what they say. They should be prepared to explain which clues drove their choices.

Part B: Reflection & Consolidation (10 minutes) Bring the class together for a structured debrief:

- What inference strategies did you use today?
- What was the most helpful type of context clue — tone, word choice, situation, or prior knowledge?
- When was it hardest to infer meaning, and why?
- How can you use these skills outside of class?

Close with an exit ticket: each student writes one sentence — *"Today I learned that I can use \_\_\_\_\_ to infer \_\_\_\_\_ when I listen."* Collect these to gauge understanding and inform your next lesson.

### Differentiation

For students who need more support, provide a word bank for Activity 3, allow extra re-listens, use audio with clearer and more obvious context clues, and pair them with a stronger partner during Activities 4 and 5.

For students ready for more challenge, use audio with ambiguous or unreliable narrators, ask them to write their own inference questions for classmates, or assign a short podcast for homework with a written reflection log.

In mixed-level classes, consider jigsaw grouping in Activity 4, assign different excerpt difficulty levels to different groups, and allow student choice in the role play scenario cards in Activity 5.

### Assessment Guidance

Throughout the sequence, look for the following:

- Predicting: Are students making reasonable pre-listening predictions, and do they revise them after listening?
- Inferring word meaning: Can students use surrounding context to guess unfamiliar vocabulary, and are they identifying different types of clues?
- Deep inference: Can students distinguish what is stated from what is implied, and do they back up their inferences with specific evidence from the audio?
- Reflection: Can students name the strategies they used, and do their exit tickets show genuine metacognitive awareness?