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*Working with podcasts for exam revision*

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## Working with podcasts for exam revision – Listen up!

by Liam Cleary

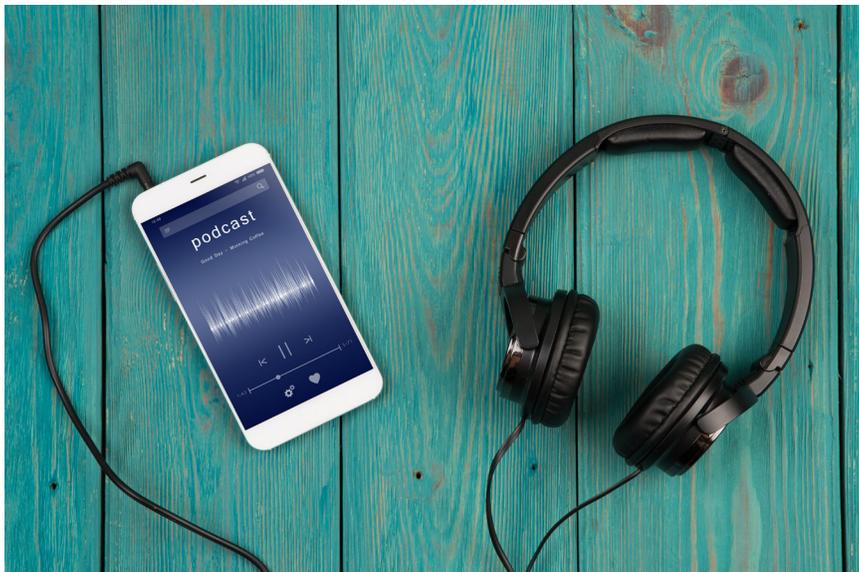


Podcasts haben in den letzten Jahren zunehmend an Popularität gewonnen. Dies legt unter anderem dar, dass sie viele Vorteile bieten: es gibt Podcasts zu verschiedensten Themen, sodass jeder etwas findet; NutzerInnen können Podcasts jederzeit anhören oder auch herunterladen; außerdem ist die Produktion von Podcasts günstig und wenig aufwendig. Auch zum Lernen von Sprachen sind Podcasts gut geeignet und können genutzt werden, um die Hörverstehenskompetenz der Lernenden zu fördern. Insbesondere für die Prüfungsvorbereitung kann die Arbeit mit Podcasts hilfreich sein. Diese Materialsammlung bietet Arbeitsblätter zu sieben Podcasts, die aktuelle und prüfungsrelevante Themen behandeln, wie z. B. racism, climate change und equal rights. Die Lernenden erhalten außerdem Tipps zum Umgang mit Lösungsvorschlägen sowie und vertiefen ihr Wissen zu den jeweiligen Themen in pre- und post-listening activities.

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## Competences and skills:

By working with the material, students improve their **listening comprehension skills** while revising for exams. The themes and podcasts have been specifically chosen for their exam relevance and the fact that they cover topics central to most higher-level exams. Students' **research** and **writing skills** are also trained and an exam is included at the end of the unit. A tip sheet helps students to prepare for dealing with listening comprehension tasks.

## Overview:

List of abbreviations:

**C** Comment

**D** Discussion/debate

**GF** Gap filling

**MC** Multiple choice

**PR** Presentation

**R** Research

**S** Summary

**T** Working with the text

**VI** Working with the video

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: Introduction – Issues of our age	M1	G, P, PR
2: London's first Black policeman	M2	D, LC, M, PR, R
3: Climate change	M3	LC, PR, R
4: Equal rights	M4	LC, P
5: Science fiction	M5	LC, VI
6: Women in the media	M6–M7	D, G, LC, PR, R

# Working with podcasts for exam revision – Listen up!

## Facts

In February 2004, journalist Ben Hammersley, writing in *The Guardian*, suggested the term “podcasting” for online radio and the boom he could see happening in that sector. The rise of iPods, cheap software and web blogs were all part of this development and since then, podcasting has become increasingly popular. Nearly every major media organisation has its own podcast section, and the genre has revolutionised what essentially is a modern and more comfortable way of listening to the radio.

One of the most striking characteristics of the rise of podcasts is the loyalty of podcast listeners. Once people have discovered a podcast that appeals to them, they subscribe to it and share or download the programme for later listening. Whereas radio in the 19th century was once a vital and dominant medium, a voice giving news and live reports to ordinary people, podcasts have breathed new life into the sector at a time when it was struggling to keep up with TV and Internet. One of the great advantages of podcasting that has become apparent over the past 20 years is the low cost of producing a programme. Additionally, listeners can now tailor their entertainment to match their needs very accurately. Instead of hoping that an upcoming radio programme will interest them, they can subscribe to a podcast they like and listen to it whenever it suits them.

This also applies to podcasting as a means of learning a language. Secondary school students wishing to improve their English and their listening skills can choose from thousands of podcasts. Many head straight to podcasts that are connected to their hobbies. Others use them as a source of learning for a particular subject. Podcasting also allows students access to quality programmes that would otherwise be hard to find. A variety of cultures, accents and styles of speaking, not to mention live events and archived programmes, are also available to the podcast listener. This is even more useful when students prepare for major exams. There are few ways of preparing better for an oral examination than for a student to spend the days beforehand listening to material on the major themes in question.

Nevertheless, using podcasts in class still has some way to go for its tremendous educational potential to be fully realised. It is hoped that this unit will help teachers in preparing in-school lessons and winning over students to this method of self-education outside the classroom. A further positive aspect of podcasting is the fact that it can be seamlessly integrated into online lessons and remote learning.

## Notes on the material

As the title suggests, the unit covers themes which are centred on exam revision. These include climate change, equal rights, the Black experience and science fiction.

In **topic 1**, a photo collage is provided to introduce students to some of the issues of our age which are covered in this set of materials. It provides an opportunity to explore the issues of our time in class discussion and prepare students for the material they will be listening to and working on.

**Topic 2** deals with the issue of Black people and the racism they suffer at work. Although the recording deals with a policeman's experience in London in the 1960s, the worksheet allows students the opportunity of discussing what progress has been made from then to our modern world of Black Lives Matter protests across the globe.

**Topic 3** consists of an interview with Mary Robinson, a woman who progressed from being President of Ireland to a campaigner dedicated to reversing climate change. In an interview, she outlines what she sees as the five phases of injustice concerning climate change and the efforts needed to deal with the problems the planet faces. Of all the themes currently important for exam students, climate change is probably one of the most central and likely to be included in any paper, so this worksheet is particularly useful.

**Topic 4** features another famous campaigner, Peter Tatchell. Born in Australia but now living in London, he has earned a reputation for fearlessly fighting against injustice all over the world. In the interview provided, Tatchell outlines what convinced him to become a campaigner for human rights.

**Topic 5** turns to the science fiction author Ray Bradbury whose work (including *Fahrenheit 451*) is described and analysed by several speakers. This material allows

students to research the genre science fiction and prepare for other aspects of literary analysis which may be useful in both written and oral exams.

**Topic 6** centres on the work of two well-known journalists who worked at very different times, the 1920s and the period from 2010–2018: Djuna Barnes and Lyra McKee, one American, the other Northern Irish. Both had to endure a lot as independent, lesbian writers in an unwelcoming environment. The worksheets designed here allow for comparison and contrast of their achievements and fates.

The unit is rounded off with an **exam** containing a listening comprehension task on the very current theme of epidemics and a comment writing question on digital devices and their influence on young people.

Prior to working with the materials provided, the teacher can hand out a useful **tips sheet** to the students that helps them to prepare for dealing with listening comprehension tasks.

### Further sources for podcasts suitable for studies and classroom use:

- <https://www.npr.org/podcasts-and-shows/>  
This website is highly recommended as the transcripts to the shows are often available. This is useful if the teacher wishes to go through a recording either before or after listening to it.
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/podcasts>  
This website provides high quality productions covering a wide range of topics.
- <https://www.rte.ie/radio/podcasts/series/32758-today-with-claire-byrne/>  
This is one of many programmes available at RTE.ie covering mainly Irish issues.
- <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/podcasts>  
Here you can find a superb Canadian selection of material.
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/orom/features/6-minute-english>  
Strictly speaking, this programme is not an actual podcast but nevertheless beloved by many learners of English.
- <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/776/i-work-better-on-deadline>  
This website provides stories about life in the USA with transcripts and downloads.  
[last accesses: 12/12/2022]



## Dealing with listening comprehension tasks – Useful tips

Listening comprehension tasks often cause students a certain amount of concern, but this does not have to be the case. Here are some guidelines and tips for dealing with such tasks.

1. It is important that all students are able to listen carefully to the recording, so **silence in the classroom** is essential. Do not rustle papers, drop pens or make other noises that can be distracting both to yourself and your classmates.
2. The most important aspect of a listening comprehension test is the task sheet. Before the audio is played, use the time to **read the tasks** as many times as you can. Focus on the information you are looking for when the audio starts.
3. When reading the tasks, watch out for **numbers, dates, names** and any other distinctive pieces of information that are asked for.
4. If you are not sure which answer is required to any particular task after the first listening, mark the likely answer in pencil and decide on it the **second time** round.
5. Remember that in multiple choice or true/false tasks, you should mark one of the options even if you do not know the answer. **Leave no task unanswered!**
6. You can prepare yourself for difficult **accents** by listening to podcasts from countries where accents may be hard to understand. These include India and Scotland to name two countries that come to mind. Of course, everything depends on the speaker you are listening to. Nicola Sturgeon for instance is a very clear speaker. The important thing is that you have an idea how people from various English-speaking countries usually speak so that if you get a difficult accent or dialect, you can quickly tune into it.
7. In general, prepare well by listening to podcasts on **subjects** you like. You will find the time flies if you like the theme under discussion.

## Topic 1: Introduction – Issues of our age

### Worksheet – Photo collage: issues of our age

**M1**

1. Divide into groups and study the photos in this collage before working on the tasks.
2. In your group, choose one photo and describe it in detail. Use the following questions to guide you:
  - a) Where is this photo located as far as you can tell?
  - b) Who can you see in the picture?
  - c) What are the people in the photo doing?
  - d) How are they dressed?
  - e) Does the person/do the people look happy, annoyed, determined?
  - f) What is the purpose of their action on this day?
  - g) What are the outstanding qualities or characteristics of the photo?
  - h) Can you identify the main theme in one bullet point or sentence?
3. Pick a second photo. Study it and compare or contrast it to the first photo you worked with. How is it similar to the other photo? How is it different?
4. As a group, help one person to prepare a presentation of the collage under the topics *Issues of our age* and *The role of protest in our modern world*.



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