

# FCE LISTENING

## Focus, Format and Procedure\*

Costas Gabrielatos

### INTRODUCTION

In order for learners to maximise their potential for success in any exam they need information about the **focus** (what is tested), the **format** (number and type of texts, number and type of tasks, and time available), as well as guidelines about the **procedure** (a blow-by-blow description of the steps they need to take in the exam). Here I will present information about each part of the Listening Paper of the Cambridge FCE.

### PART 1

#### Focus

<b>Learners will be asked to identify...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• information about the speaker and/or listener(s) (e.g. job, hobby)</li><li>• the relationship between speakers</li><li>• what the speaker(s) is/are talking about (e.g. job, problem, object, place, activity)</li><li>• who the speaker(s) is/are talking about</li><li>• where the speaker(s) is/are</li><li>• how the speaker feels about the listener or the topic</li><li>• what the speaker wants to achieve</li><li>• when something has happened or is going to happen</li><li>• the type or topic of a film, book, magazine, radio/TV programme</li></ul>
--	--

#### Format

<b>Texts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 8 <b>unrelated</b> short texts.</li><li>• Monologues, dramatic monologues (L can hear only one of the participants in a conversation) and dialogues.</li></ul>
<b>Task</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multiple choice (3 options).</li></ul>
<b>Timing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approximately <b>18 minutes</b>.</li><li>• <b>L will hear each text twice, before they hear the next one.</b></li><li>• Questions and options are also <b>read aloud</b> on the tape. This gives learners (L) around <b>20 seconds</b> to think about the questions (see also PROCEDURE).</li><li>• After the 2nd listening L will have some time to check their answers.</li></ul>

---

\* Published in *ELT News*, 117, November 1998.

## Procedure

<i>When?</i>	<i>What?</i>
<i>Before 1st listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L read the <b>questions</b> to get information about the situation.</li> <li>• The <b>questions</b> will also tell L what information they need to listen for.</li> <li>• L <b>read the questions only</b>. This will also give L about <b>20 extra seconds</b> to think about each question.</li> </ul>
<i>During 1st listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L note down their answers in their <b>own words</b>.</li> </ul>
<i>Before 2nd listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L look quickly at the <b>options</b> (A, B, C) and choose the one which is closest to their own answer.</li> </ul>
<i>During &amp; after 2nd listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L <b>check</b> their answers.</li> </ul>

## PART 2

### Focus

<b>Learners will be asked to identify...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• topic</li> <li>• factual information</li> <li>• feelings &amp; attitude</li> </ul>
--	---

### Format

<b>Texts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 long text.</li> <li>• Monologue or dialogue.</li> </ul>
<b>Task</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are <b>10 questions</b>.</li> <li>• L are asked to complete sentences, fill in parts of a form, or answer questions.</li> <li>• L should write <b>1-4 words only!</b></li> </ul>
<b>Timing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately <b>7 minutes</b>. L will hear the text twice.</li> <li>• L have about <b>45 seconds</b> to look at the questions.</li> <li>• After the 2nd listening they will have some time to check their answers.</li> </ul>

### Procedure

<b>When?</b>	<b>What?</b>
<i>Before 1st listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L read the <b>instructions</b> carefully; they will give them helpful information about the situation.</li> <li>• L read the <b>questions, unfinished sentences or prompts</b>; they will give them very helpful clues about:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* the <b>content</b> of the text.</li> <li>* the type of <b>information</b> they need (place, activity, feeling etc.)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• They should pay particular attention to prepositions (e.g. <i>for, to, by</i>) and linking words (e.g. <i>and, but</i>) before the gap. Sometimes more than one type of information may be possible; in such cases they should use the 1st listening to clarify the type of information they need.</li> </ul>
<i>During 1st listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L clarify the type of information they need (if necessary).</li> <li>• L take <b>notes</b>.</li> <li>• L can correct/improve their notes before, during or after the 2nd listening.</li> </ul>
<i>Before 2nd listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L quickly <b>check</b> what they have left blank and answers they were unsure of.</li> <li>• If they have time, they improve/correct their notes.</li> </ul>
<i>During &amp; after 2nd listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L <b>improve/correct</b> their notes.</li> </ul>

### PART 3

#### Focus

<b>Learners will be asked to identify...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• information about each speaker (e.g. job, hobby)</li> <li>• what each speaker is talking about (e.g. place, object, event, activity)</li> <li>• who each speaker is talking about</li> <li>• who the listener is</li> <li>• the relationship between speakers &amp; listeners</li> <li>• details about events, activities etc.</li> <li>• attitude, feelings, reactions</li> </ul>
--	---

### Format

<b>Texts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 short monologues <b>related to the same topic</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Speakers</b> and <b>details</b> are <b>different</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>Task</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple matching. L are given 6 statements.</li> <li>• L have to match each text/speaker to the statement that is true for the text/ speaker.</li> <li>• One statement does not have a match.</li> </ul>
<b>Timing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately <b>6 minutes</b>.</li> <li>• L will hear <b>all five texts together before they are repeated</b>.</li> <li>• L have <b>30 seconds</b> to look at the statements before listening.</li> <li>• After the 2nd listening they will have some time to correct their answers.</li> </ul>

### Procedure

**General Tip:**

Since all texts are on the same topic L should **listen for differences** not similarities. It is the differences will help them find the answer.

<b>When?</b>	<b>What?</b>
<i>Before 1st listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L read the <b>instructions</b> to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* get information about the situation.</li> <li>* understand what exactly they have to match.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Alternative 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L <b>read</b> the <b>6 statements</b> and find the <b>key words</b> in each statement. They may find it helpful to <b>paraphrase</b> the statements (in their minds) in a way that is more clear/helpful to them, and/or think of related words they may hear in the text.</li> <li>• The key words will show them what they need to concentrate on during listening.</li> </ul> <p><b>Alternative 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L <b>don't read</b> the 6 statements to avoid getting confused by the distractor.</li> </ul>
<i>During 1st listening</i>	<p><b>Alternative 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L listen for the <b>meaning</b> of the key words, <b>not the key words themselves</b>. It is risky to rely on the key words themselves, because they may be 'planted' in the text to confuse them.</li> </ul> <p><b>Alternative 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L note down the <b>key elements</b> of what each speaker says:  <i>Speaker 1:</i> .....  <i>Speaker 2:</i> .....  <i>Speaker 3:</i> .....  <i>Speaker 4:</i> .....  <i>Speaker 5:</i> .....</li> </ul>
<i>Before 2nd listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L <b>check</b> if the elements in their notes match the key words in the 6 statements.</li> <li>• L <b>match</b> speakers to statements.</li> </ul>
<i>During &amp; after 2nd listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L check their answers.</li> </ul>

## PART 4

### Focus

<b>Learners will be asked to identify...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what information each speaker gives (e.g. about places, events, decisions)</li> <li>• what views or feelings each speaker expresses</li> <li>• the attitude of each speaker towards events, or other people.</li> </ul>
--	--

### Format

<b>Texts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A <b>conversation</b> between <b>2-3 speakers</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>Task</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 Questions.</li> <li>• True/false or multiple choice (3 options).</li> <li>• Multiple choice tasks can be both <b>questions</b> and <b>unfinished sentences</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>Timing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately <b>10 minutes</b>.</li> <li>• L will hear the text twice.</li> <li>• L have <b>1 minute</b> to look at the statements before listening.</li> <li>• After the 2nd listening L will have some time to correct their answers.</li> </ul>

### Procedure

<b>When?</b>	<b>What?</b>
<i>Before 1st listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L read carefully the <b>instructions</b> to get information about the situation.</li> <li>• L read the <b>questions, unfinished sentences, or true/false statements</b> to get information about the situation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Multiple Choice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L read the questions or unfinished sentences <b>only</b> - not the options!</li> </ul> <p><b>True/False</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L think of vocabulary related to the key words in the statements, because the information in the texts is given using alternative vocabulary. E.g., for the T/F statement '<i>Sharon has contacted the authorities</i>' they should have in mind the different ways in which we can contact someone (<i>call, write, visit</i> etc.) and listen for those words.</li> <li>• Sometimes it helps if L turn the statements into related questions (in their mind - not in writing). For example '<i>Bill explained the situation to Carol and Joan</i>' can be turned into the more helpful questions: '<i>Who gave the explanations?</i>' or '<i>Who wanted more information?</i>'</li> </ul>
<i>During 1st listening</i>	<p><b>Multiple Choice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L <b>note</b> down their answers in their own words.</li> </ul> <p><b>True/False</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L note down relevant information</li> </ul>

<b>When?</b>	<b>What?</b>
<i>Before 2nd listening</i>	<p><b>Multiple Choice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L look quickly at the options (A, B, C) and choose the one which is closest to their own answer.</li> </ul> <p><b>True/False</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L check the statements against their notes to see whether they are true or false.</li> </ul>
<i>During &amp; after 2nd listening</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L <b>check</b> their answers.</li> </ul>

### IMPORTANT REMINDERS

- Learners should concentrate **only** on the information they need. **They shouldn't try to understand everything**; it will only make things more complicated. They may get confused and give the wrong answer, or waste valuable time.
- It is important that learners try to **answer all questions** during the **1st listening**, so that they can use the 2nd listening to check their answers. If they use up both times to give initial answers, then they will have to rely on their memory in order to check. But memory for details tends to be quite unreliable under the psychological strain of the exam !
- In Parts 1 & 4 (**multiple choice**) They **shouldn't pay attention to the options** (A, B, C) before & during the 1st listening, because 2 out of 3 are designed to confuse them! Words from the distractors are 'planted' in the text; if learners have read the distractors they may be led to choose the wrong option. They have much more chances of giving the correct answer if they listen having only the question in mind, and then approach the distractors 'armed' with specific ideas. They always have the 2nd listening to check.
- When taking **notes** (on rough paper), they **shouldn't write full sentences**; they should write **key words** only. They **don't need to write whole words**, either; they should write only parts of words (e.g. *univ.* for *university*). Also, they **don't need to write neatly**; if they can understand their notes they are OK. Remember: **speed is very important!** Regarding notes in Part 2, they will have time to write them down neatly at the end of the Part, as well as at the end of the test.
- When the question is about feelings or attitude learners should pay particular attention to the speaker's **tone of voice**.
- At the end of the test learners will have **5 minutes** to transfer their answers to the answer sheet.

***Don't expect learners to be able to apply these procedures effectively only because you have presented them.***

***Learners will need step-by-step guidance and a lot of practice before they can use the procedures quickly and successfully under exam conditions.***

### Sources

- FORMAT: adapted from Bower, S. & Gabrielatos, C. (1998). *First Certificate First! Examination Practice 1: Listening and Speaking*. Athens: AVM Publications.
- PROCEDURE: adapted from Gabrielatos, C. (1995). Two birds with one stone 2: Exam preparation and listening skills development using testing materials. *Current Issues*, 6, 15-19, and Gabrielatos, C. (1997). Teaching reading & listening for exam preparation, parts 1-3. *ELT News*, 99-102.