

Prediction activities

In real life listening and reading, we usually have some idea of what we are going to hear or read before we begin. The fact that we can predict what the text or the speaker will say helps us to understand and to focus on the information – in effect, we are actively ‘reaching out’ towards the text and matching what we hear or read with what we expect.

In the language classroom, too, we can help learners to listen and read more effectively if we start with an activity which gets them to make predictions and guesses about the content of the text or conversation. This is also a good way to increase motivation and get learners to engage more actively with the listening or reading text.

Give key words

You can use this technique with any kind of story or anecdote, and it also works well with descriptive texts or with factual interviews.

Your learners are going to read the story below. Before they see the story, write a few key words on the board (not in any particular order, and not enough to give it away):

spider Japan gun frightened
hotel receptionist policeman

In groups, learners imagine a story that could include all the words. Ask each group to tell their story. Then open books and learners read the actual story.

Because they’ve tried to predict the story themselves, they will already know some of the language, they will be more motivated to read and their reading will be more active and focused.

I was in the south of Japan at the time. One morning, I woke up in my hotel room, opened my eyes and looked around my room. The first thing I saw was a huge spider on the wall. It was about ten centimetres across. I hate spiders! I ran out of the room to the reception desk and shouted for help. “Kuma!” I remembered from my Japanese lessons that ‘kuma’ means ‘spider’.

“Kuma?” the receptionist said.

“Kuma!” I shouted again. “In my room!”

“Kuma?”

“KUMA!!!”

The receptionist looked really frightened. She picked up the phone and said something quickly in Japanese. About a minute later – and I’m not joking – a policeman with a gun ran into the hotel and went into my room. For a minute there was silence but then we heard a laugh, so we went in. When the receptionist saw the spider on the wall, she started laughing too.

In Japanese, spider is ‘kumo’. ‘Kuma’ means ‘bear’.

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Predict from pictures

A standard class technique is to look at a picture to 'set the scene' for a reading or listening activity. This idea can be taken further when playing recorded conversations, by getting learners to imagine part of the conversation they will hear. This works well with any photo that shows some context (e.g. people at a party).

The photo below illustrates the conversation on the right, used first as listening and then to focus on 'checking' questions.



- MAITE** Hello, I'm Maria Teresa.
- KRISHNAN** Hi, nice to meet you. I'm Krishnan.
- MAITE** *Sorry, can you say that again?*
- KRISHNAN** Krishnan.
- MAITE** *Krishnan?*
- KRISHNAN** Yes, that's right. And *what's your name again?* Maria ...?
- MAITE** Maria Teresa, but you can call me Maite. It's short for Maria Teresa.
- KRISHNAN** Maite, OK. So, what do you do?
- MAITE** I'm a Spanish teacher here in the summer ... but in Spain, I'm a historical linguist.
- KRISHNAN** *Sorry, what's that again?*
- MAITE** A historical linguist.
- KRISHNAN** Oh, right. *Is that* about the history of language?
- MAITE** Yes, that's right. And what do you do?

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Before the first listening (and without seeing the script), ask students to look at the photo in pairs or groups and imagine what the woman might be asking. You could then ask pairs to improvise their conversation. Then play the recording to find out what the people actually say.

Because they have tried to guess the conversation first, learners already have some idea of what to expect. This not only makes the listening phase more interesting, but also easier and more focused.