

Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab

www.esl-lab.com

Randall S. Davis (rdavis@esl-lab.com)

Sixty-seven percent of language students and teachers surveyed through an online poll stated that the types of learning materials they want to see more of on the Internet were those focusing on listening and speaking skills. Only five percent said grammar.

--- Davis, Online Research Survey

Description:

- *Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab* is an online, multimedia listening Website designed to help ESOL students improve their listening comprehension skills in English. It has also been used widely in the US by the hearing impaired with cochlear implants.
- The use of the online activities is completely free and requires no login. Students and teachers from over 150 countries have visited the site since 1998.
- Website supported through contextual advertising related to topics on the site.

Background:

- Lab first established in 1998 in Japan as an independent educational project and is currently being developed in Utah, USA.
- The original idea for the lab sprang from the realization that few listening materials existed online specifically designed for language learners.
- All of the materials, including the transcripts, questions, activities, and audio/video, are created and recorded by Randall and his support team.



Features:

- The **use of streaming audio and video technology** for developing multimedia content for language learners;
- **Over 300 original learning quizzes and activities** cover both functional language topics (e.g., making invitations, checking into a hotel, buying a used car, etc.) as well as interviews, news broadcasts, and simulated TV and radio programs;
- The Website can be used for **teacher-directed instruction** or for **self-access learning**. Listening quizzes are **arranged according to level** based on topic, lexicon and syntax, rate of speech, use of paralinguistic utterances, and background noise;
- Quizzes contain **a variety of learning tasks** to (a) accommodate different learning styles and (b) derive the greatest benefit from sound pedagogical practice and theory (i.e., from drill and practice and task-based activities to problem-solving Internet activities);
- Additional **pre-, listening, and post-listening activities** support and build on each listening quiz for a more well-rounded learning experience;
- **Low-bandwidth media files** in Flash, Windows Media™, and RealMedia™ formats make the material accessible to slow Internet connection rates around the world;
- **Play speed settings** in the Windows Media Player™ allow learners to slow down the audio playback for more precise listening;
- Use of **adult and children's voices** to cover a wide range of conversational styles while trying to preserve natural speech that hasn't been overly predigested (i.e., simplified) for the consumption of learners;
- **Self-study guide** helps visitors organize their study goals and objectives.

How to Use the Site:

► **Pre-Listening Exercises**

First, users select a quiz from the main page. Each listening activity provides details on the level of difficulty, topic, type of recording (conversation, news report, commercial message, etc.) of each quiz.

This is followed by a Pre-Listening Exercises to help the learner prepare to receive the message, that is, to simulate background knowledge about the topic so learners can begin to predict possible ideas that will come out of the conversation.

► **Listening Exercises**

The learner is presented with a number of multiple-choice questions, with three or four possible responses.

The questions are designed to check the learner's understanding of main ideas, inferences, prediction, cause and effect relationships, and comprehension of discreet-point items like numbers and dates.

► **Media Files**

The media files have been created in three formats: (1) Flash, (2) RealMedia™, and (3) Windows Media Player. The user can download this free software to listen to the audio and video. Users select the answer for each question and then click on the "Final Score" button to check their scores. The files have been prepared for low-bandwidth users around the world who often access the Internet on slower, and sometimes, unreliable Internet connections. The Windows Media Player has variable Play Speed Settings, which allow you slow down the audio for precise listening (see www.esl-lab.com/players.htm for more information.)

► **Post-Listening Exercises**

Listening tends to be a passive language skill, and thus, learners need opportunities to apply the language skills in spontaneous conversation after listening to the conversation. This section provides topics of discussion that encourages learners to share their ideas, experiences, and opinions by using the vocabulary, grammar, and theme with others. Furthermore, these exercises include online investigation tasks where students use the Internet to collect, compare, and report on information they find. Thus, rather than just memorizing information from the activity through simple drill-and-practice exercises, the student is now given opportunities to create totally new language based on what they have learned.

The screenshot shows a web page titled "A Student Credit Card" with navigation links for "I. Pre-Listening Exercises", "II. Listening Exercises", and "III. Post-Listening Exercises". A table lists quiz details: Level: medium, Topic: student credit cards, Type: conversation, Speakers: man - woman, Length: 02:00. Below the table is a section for "I. Pre-Listening Exercises" with a "HELPFUL TIP" and a small image of a hand holding a credit card. On the right, there are "IDIOMS!" and "Free Software" sections.

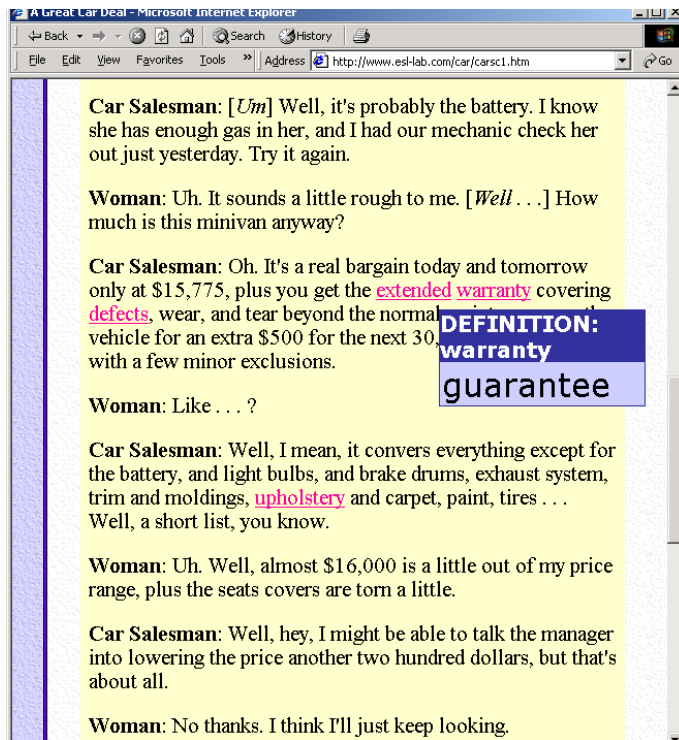
- How old is the minivan the woman is looking at?
 - A. three years old
 - B. five years old
 - C. seven years old
- What is the vehicle's mileage?
 - A. 55,000 miles
 - B. 65,000 miles
 - C. 75,000 miles
- What is the problem with the minivan's door?
 - A. It has several scratches in it.
 - B. It will not open properly.
 - C. It is missing the door handle.
- What is one thing the extended warranty would NOT cover on the vehicle according to the conversation?
 - A. a faulty oil pump
 - B. a malfunctioning gage
 - C. a worn out break drum
- If the manager lowered the price as the salesman suggests, what would the final price be?
 - A. \$15,475
 - B. \$15,575
 - C. \$15,675

Final Score Reset

Listening Transcripts and Vocabulary Building

Learners also have the option of reading the transcript of the conversation as they listen along with the recording.

1. Key vocabulary words throughout the conversation are highlighted in red, and when the computer mouse is passed over them, a pop-up window will open below the word, revealing its definition.



Car Salesman: [Um] Well, it's probably the battery. I know she has enough gas in her, and I had our mechanic check her out just yesterday. Try it again.

Woman: Uh. It sounds a little rough to me. [Well . . .] How much is this minivan anyway?

Car Salesman: Oh. It's a real bargain today and tomorrow only at \$15,775, plus you get the **extended warranty** covering **defects**, wear, and tear beyond the normal vehicle for an extra \$500 for the next 30, with a few minor exclusions.

Woman: Like . . . ?

Car Salesman: Well, I mean, it covers everything except for the battery, and light bulbs, and brake drums, exhaust system, trim and moldings, **upholstery** and carpet, paint, tires . . . Well, a short list, you know.

Woman: Uh. Well, almost \$16,000 is a little out of my price range, plus the seats covers are torn a little.

Car Salesman: Well, hey, I might be able to talk the manager into lowering the price another two hundred dollars, but that's about all.

Woman: No thanks. I think I'll just keep looking.

DEFINITION:
warranty
guarantee

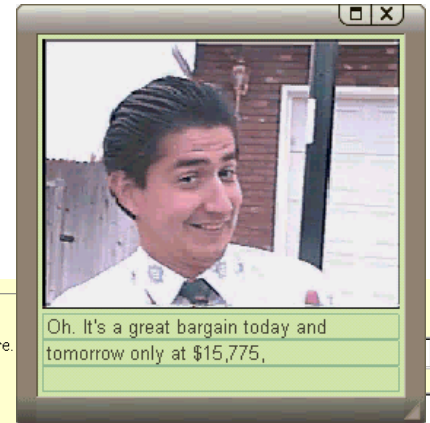
3. Visitors can then do a variety of interactive exercises to help recycle and review the key vocabulary in a variety of situations. These include multiple-choice, matching, and rearranging mixed-up sentences. The end results are that students learn to use and apply the vocabulary beyond the exercise in other situations.

Key Vocabulary [Top]

- **mileage** (*noun*): the distance traveled in miles equal to 1.6 kilometres
- This car gets great gas **mileage** in the city.
- **tap** (*verb*): to hit lightly and often repeatedly
- I **tapped** on the door, but no one answered.
- **extended** (*verbal adjective*): lengthy, extensive
- He has driven his car for an **extended** period of time without any problems.
- **warranty** (*noun*): guarantee
- There is a limited **warranty** on parts and labor in case the car breaks down.
- **defects** (*noun*): flaws, mistakes, faults
- The company decided to recall the car because **defects** were discovered in the engine's cooling system.
- **upholstery** (*noun*): a covering often used on furniture or car seats
- The **upholstery** on these seats needs to be replaced.

2. When users click on the key word, they will be taken to the bottom of the page which lists the word and its definition, along with a sample sentence with the word used in context.

(Randall taking the role of a used car salesman in his listening activity, A Great Car Deal)



Car Salesman: Oh. Hi there. isn't she?

Woman: Well . . .

Car Salesman: Do you want to take her a test ride?

Woman: Well . . . Um. How old is it?

Car Salesman: Well, it's only three years old?

Woman: And what's the (2) ?

Car Salesman: Uh, let me check. Oh yes. 75,000 miles.

Woman: 75,000 miles? That's quite a (3)

for a car that's only three years old

1. mileage
2. bit
3. broken
4. mechanic
5. extended
6. vehicle
7. exhaust
8. range
9. lowering
10. lowering

Final Note: You can read more about the background of this site at: www.esl-lab.com/faq.htm. Contact Randall with your comments and suggestions about the Website at rdavis@esl-lab.com.