

Listening Portfolio: A Combination of Extensive and Intensive Listening

リスニングポートフォリオ：広範で集中的なリスニングの組み合わせ

Lai Bao Hoa, ライ バオ・ホア

Center for English as a Lingua Franca, Tamagawa University, Japan
hoa@lab.tamagawa.ac.jp

ABSTRACT

Listening skills have been proved to be important among the four language skills; however, research and teaching listening has not been paid sufficient attention to (Brown, 2014). Recent studies have shown that Japanese learners' weakness is still listening because of their lack of ability to decode sounds as linguistic forms. (Yonezaki, 2014). Yonezaki (2014) added that the lack of teachers' instructions on how students can actually listen for listening purposes, not for non-listening purposes is another reason. A listening portfolio, which enables students to listen extensively to various and freely chosen topics, and requires them to practice decoding the sounds they recognized, then reconstruct all that they decoded in writing through dictation, is recommended in this paper. When in-class time is limited, a course project asking students to work out of the class should be considered as an assessment method and a teaching technique. The listening portfolio, combining extensive and intensive listening, not only addresses Japanese learners' weaknesses when listening to English, but also gives them chances to listen actively, effectively, and enjoyably.

KEYWORDS: Extensive listening, Intensive listening, Dictation, Listening portfolio

1. INTRODUCTION

Bozan (2015), Yildirim and Yildirim (2016), stated that listening can be considered a primary source (50%) in language learning and daily communication. However, in language instruction, teaching listening skills seems to be neglected as the least understood, the least researched language skill, or the most disregarded skill (Brown, 2014). Japanese learners also find listening skills challenging even though many of them can read well. Being instructed on mostly reading and writing in class makes Japanese learners find it hard to converse in the targeted language. Therefore, more studies relating to teaching and learning listening skills should be undertaken by the research community.

2. INTENSIVE AND EXTENSIVE LISTENING, DICTATION AND LISTENING PORTFOLIO

2.1. The Importance of Learning Listening Skills Among Japanese Students and Teaching Listening Skills to Japanese Students

English education in Japanese universities is complicated (Ikegashira, Matsumoto, & Morita, 2009; Løfsgaard, 2015) as a majority of students do not think it is important for them to learn English, but they still have to learn the “necessary evil” language for the university entrance exam (Løfsgaard, 2015, p.28). The university entrance exams have faced a large deal of criticism as they merely measure students’ memorization on reading and writing. The major focus on reading skills in the tests results in a teacher-centered classroom where very little attention is paid to communicative skills (Løfsgaard, 2015).

Historically, English education in Japan was focused on grammar-translation methods that were prevalent in the early 19th century. English teaching in the schools was merely conducted for the purpose of entrance examinations (*juken eigo*) with the emphasis on translating Japanese sentences into English and vice versa (Løfsgaard, 2015, p.13). Approaches did not change until the late 19th century when Palmer introduced the “Audio-Lingual method” to English teaching in Japan (Løfsgaard, 2015). With this method, students heard the target language and then repeated it. The 20th century witnessed the boom of English language teaching in Japan with a more communicative focus, enabling students to get familiar with group-work, discussion and opinion-sharing. Even though the approach proved to be communicatively effective in theory; in reality, it is still infeasible as few teachers had a strong command of English to apply this teaching method (Løfsgaard, 2015).

Traditional teaching methods like Grammar-Translation, the Audio-Lingual method, and even Communicative Language Teaching give students few chances to listen actively as it is believed that enhancing exposure is the way to improve listening skills, not through teaching (Richards & Renandya, 2002). In recent years, even with Communicative Language Teaching, the duration of students’ exposure to the target language via listening in class is still limited. As a result, students are not yet confident in their listening skills. Besides, according to the data of a recent TOEFL test, the performance of Japanese learners’ listening is still low (Yonezaki, 2014). Therefore, what should teachers do to let students practice listening skills outside classrooms effectively? The answer could be homework. But what kind of homework is effective? How should it be assigned and conducted?

To address these teaching concerns, the author proposes a combination of extensive listening and intensive listening.

2.2. Processes of Foreign Language Listening

To find out the best way to teach or learn listening skills, there is a need to first understand the processes of foreign language listening. Oller (1971) recognized there was a schema in the listening comprehension process with several sequences. Yonekaki (2014) agreed and he proposed a scheme for the processes of listening:

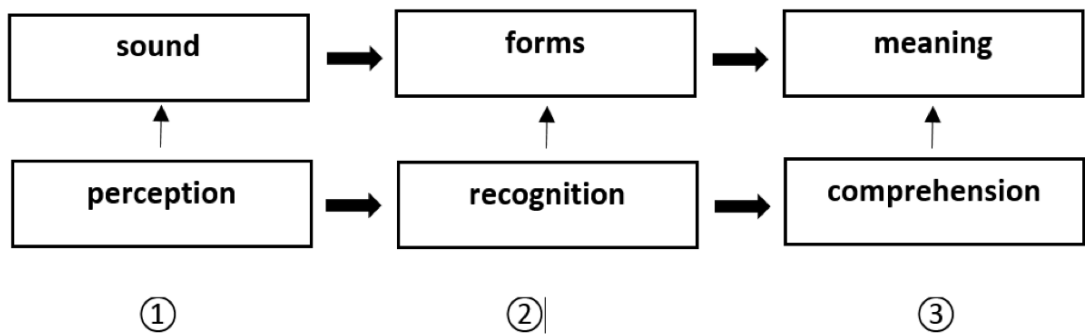


Figure 1. Three processes of listening (Yoneyaki, 2014, p. 22)

- (1) The listener perceives sounds,
- (2) The listener decodes the sounds he or she has perceived, recognizing them as certain linguistic forms, and
- (3) The listener decodes the forms he or she has recognized, this time comprehending the meaning of the forms.

Yonezaki (2014) stated that among the three listening processes, listeners normally found no difficulty in the first process. However, what restrained them was the second process. In other words, learners were trapped in the second stage, which made them unable to translate the perceived sounds into forms. As Ito (1990) suggested, this could be due to Japanese students being more used to understanding the sentences by reading words and letters than listening to the sounds. Hence, English teachers need to find a way to help their Japanese learners be able to recognize sounds as “corresponding linguistic forms” (Yonezaki, 2014, p. 23).

2.3. Intensive Listening and Dictation

Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) noted that with intensive listening, learners might be required to comprehend every small unit of the discourse such as specific information, grammar, vocabulary, and sounds. While a number of researchers and teachers agreed that the global meaning or the meaning-based input was essential for students’ listening comprehension skill (Bozan, 2015; Renandya & Farrell, 2010; Renandya, 2011; Vo, 2013), “extensive exposure to meaning-based input does not lead to the development of syntactic and lexical accuracy in an L2” (Lee, 2010, p. 94). As a result, students should also be given chances to practice form-focused listening. Dictation is an intensive method that enables students to construct linguistic forms and boost up their listening accuracy and effectiveness.

In terms of dictation, Davis and Rinvoluceri (2010) defined dictation as a combination of the decoding of language sounds and recording them by writing. Also, Morris (1983) stated that dictation was an “active re-interpretation by the learner” (p. 126). To support this, Oller (1971) suggested a model of dictation in which learners first differentiated phonetic units, then worked out the wording and phrasing sequences that made sense.

Finally, learners analytically translated this into a representation of graphemes.

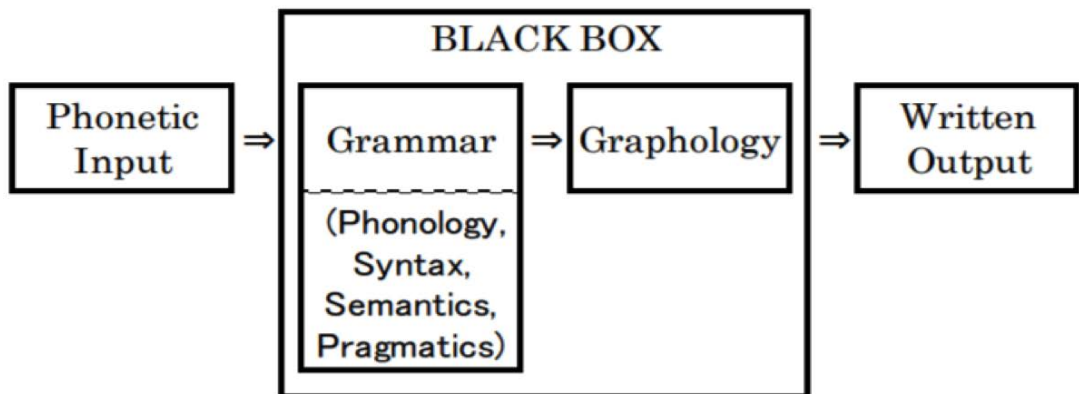


Figure 2. Model of dictation (Oller, 1971, p. 258)

2.3.1. Advantages of Dictation

Japanese learners' difficulty in listening is in recognizing sounds as corresponding linguistics forms. Dictation can help learners discover and segment the chains of sounds, and rebuild them actively, making them become words, phrases or even sentences, by writing them down. All these suggest that dictation can help Japanese learners overcome their weaknesses in listening as it enables students to make the auditory forms and visual forms subjective and then put them together by translating "sounds into forms and then forms into written forms" (Yonezaki, 2014, p. 23).

Furthermore, when translating sounds into forms, learners need to make up some of the missing information and deal with situations where reduced sounds, unstressed words or syllables, sound changes, assimilation, liaison, and elision occur. Also, Fujinaga (2002) showed that students often make mistakes in listening due to their lack of ability to listen and recognize unstressed, weakened syllables and sound changes. In other words, by filling information gaps and reconstructing the original forms, dictation practice can develop students' skill of prediction, which is crucial in listening.

2.3.2. Different Types of Dictation

There are different types of dictation. In the past, in class or in the exam room, teachers might read a passage out loud with pauses; and the students had to write down what they heard (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992). Recently, more applications of dictation have been proposed to serve more teaching and learning needs, such as fill-in-the-blanks style dictation, or gapped dictation (Kidd, 1992; Yonezaki, 2014) with one, or more than one word for each blank and no limit to the number of blanks. The other type is the dictation that requires learners to write whole sentences. Last, dictation for the whole text or 'dicto-composition' can also be provided (Kidd, 1992).

2.4. Extensive Listening

Bozan (2015) defined extensive listening as "listening for pleasure" (p. 8). Also, Renandya

and Farrell (2010) showed that extensive listening could be any listening activity providing learners with a great deal of meaningful and fascinating input. Moreover, excellent access to the Internet makes it easy for learners to seek comprehensible listening resources and materials, which suit their level of proficiency, interests, and learning styles. To suit all the effectiveness, appropriateness, enjoyment criteria, Vo (2013) suggested teachers use extensive listening in teaching and assessing listening.

2.4.1. Advantages of Extensive Listening

Extensive listening benefits language learners to a great deal. First, with extensive listening, all the messages that learners receive are meaningful in nature (Bozan, 2015). Along with this, extensive listening can be immeasurably motivating as learners can choose different resources such as TV shows, movies, radio programs, podcasts, or audiobooks (Vo, 2013). The visual aids from the chosen materials can aid learners to a great extent with their prediction skills and sustain their interest. Besides, as students choose the listening resources themselves, they may feel more confident, more involved and responsible for their own education (Holden, 2008; Onoda, 2012). Finally, extensive listening can develop learners' ability to handle various rates of speech, word recognition, and vocabulary, which makes students become fluent listeners and boosts them to a higher level of language comprehension (Renandya, 2011).

2.4.2. The Need for Extensive Listening

Thorn (2009) stated that even though teachers and researchers attempted to boost listening teaching, most of the listening was conducted for non-listening aims; for example, as language input to teach grammar or vocabulary, to introduce the discussion topic, to test students' language proficiency, or to introduce or familiarize students with different accents. Also, as Brown (2011) highlighted, when a teacher plays audio, then asks students comprehension questions, or to complete listening tasks, they are testing, not teaching (Brown, 2011). Thorn (2009) concluded that most of the listening texts in textbooks did not appeal to the students due to their lack of language characteristics (e.g., linking or elision), their utility of one standard accent, and their inappropriateness to different individuals' interests. As a result, these prepared and non-authentic listening texts did not equip learners adequately for the real listening obstacles they might face.

2.4.3. The Practicality and the Effectiveness of Extensive Listening

To a number of teachers, especially teachers with traditional teaching methods and mindsets, the validity of extensive listening can be questioned. For a long time, teaching has focused on assessment. When giving students a segment to listen to and ask them to dictate, some teachers may want to check students' dictation work and have them correct any mistakes. By doing this, the teachers may feel relieved as the listening tasks seem complete. However, in practice, class time is limited, class numbers are often large, and there are four skills and countless linguistic elements that the teachers have to consider introducing each class. As a result, it may not be possible for teachers to run dictation tasks, check the accuracy of every listening source that students choose. In certain situations, like exams, accuracy is important; nevertheless, in other cases, the focus on accuracy

may hinder other student qualities, such as creativeness, learning interests, and learner autonomy. It is not uncommon for teachers to assign students certain tasks and check them regularly for evaluation purposes. However, students may develop even further through learner autonomy, in which students make decisions about their own learning and become more responsible for what they have decided. In this way, students may become mature learners, learning for their own sake. Last but not least, when helping students engage in learner autonomy from the early stages, teachers may guide them to step into life-long learning, which benefits students in the long run.

2.5. Listening Portfolio

History and the current English education context in Japan show very limited attention to the teaching of listening, and Japanese students are still struggling with listening. There should be a teaching approach to help students overcome their weaknesses in recognizing sounds, and exposing them to a wide range of Englishes frequently. Besides, exposure to English should be appropriate to students' levels, needs, learning styles, and interests. For all of these reasons, a combination of intensive and extensive listening is an appropriate solution. If class time is not enough for extensive listening, teachers can assign it as homework.

This kind of listening homework has been used by a number of teachers with different names and a variety of adaptations.

First, Ducker (2013) proposed an **extensive listening portfolio** for listening homework. The portfolio task involved listening, reading the script, and checking vocabulary and grammar. The steps in the portfolio gave students chances to focus on forms while practicing listening. Nevertheless, Ducker (2013) showed that students might lose their motivation easily and this becomes the challenge for teachers. Ellis (2005) and Dörnyei (2001) agreed it was difficult to ask students to complete the homework if it was not related to classroom activities. Therefore, if listening portfolio is used as homework, there is a need to frequently check on students' work in class. By this way, the validity of portfolios can be granted.

Second, the **listening journal** by Schmidt (2016) for intensive and extensive purposes showed that students liked it because of its effectiveness and attraction. At the end of the program, Schmidt's students agreed that the listening project was "a source of improvement for their real-world listening skills" (p. 7) as the idea came from teaching and learning realities and students' weaknesses. The project could fill the gaps which previously made teaching and listening procedure challenging. Schmidt (2016) concluded that without getting exposed to a wide range of listening input, and without a focus on sounds, words and phrases comprising the input, students could not improve their listening skills in an effective way. Lastly, to prove that his idea on listening journal was necessary, Schmidt (2016) added if listening instruction in the ELT world focused on testing the skill, not on guiding the students how to listen, this could be problematic.

Finally, Chen (2016) suggested one another type of listening assignment which was the Taiwanese college students' project on their individual **listening diary**. In the diary, Chen (2016) asked the participants to report their listening activities outside the classroom, material selection, the problems encountered and students' perception of the

diary's effectiveness. The research data also showed that keeping a listening diary means students started to have study plans, which enabled them to be more responsible for their own learning.

Herein, I propose a **“weekly listening portfolio”** as an appropriate type of homework to raise students' listening skills.

- 1. What is a weekly listening portfolio?** A listening portfolio is a student's individual course project. I propose that each week, students should be required to choose a piece of listening to listen to and write the transcription (dictation). The sources can vary from youtube.com, ted.com, newsinlevels.com, fluentu.com, to esllab.com with any topic that appeals to students. Based on students' levels, teachers can make decisions on the duration of the listening texts (e.g., a two-minute talk or a movie trailer). The students have one week to do the assignment, and they can listen to the listening materials as many times as they wish. Two samples of the listening portfolio and how students make and combine it are in Appendix B.
- 2. Difficulties:** In the beginning, students may get frustrated because of the fast rate and the large number of unknown lexicon. However, as the listening topic is what students are interested in, and the levels of difficulty are also decided by students, they may happily look for new lexicons in their dictionaries and continue with the dictation.
- 3. Addressing problems:** Some researchers and teachers may worry about students cheating, or losing motivation on this kind of assignment (Dörnyei, 2001; Ellis, 2005). Teachers can check progress by having students hand in their portfolio at the beginning of the lesson. Besides, to ensure that students actually do their homework, teachers can check individual works randomly. Some students may choose a listening source with transcription. To avoid this problem, the teachers make students aware that they will be randomly checked if they can write any piece of the transcription again in-class when asked by the teachers. If students fail to do their homework as they claim, they will be asked to listen to another video, and get prepared to perform well in class the next week.
- 4. Follow-up activity:** As suggested by Chen (2016) in the **listening diary**, there should be a follow-up activity to explore students' opinions, problems, and preferences. When checking students' work in-class, teachers may spend several minutes listening to the listening texts and asking students some related questions. Some meaningful questions not only check whether students actually listened, but also provoke thoughts.
- 5. Vocabulary notes:** In the proposal of **extensive listening portfolio**, Ducker (2013) agreed that checking vocabulary was essential. After having finished the dictation task, students are encouraged to look up for the new words in the dictionary that they encounter in the listening, and then write the meanings down. Thanks to vocabulary checking, students may acquire new words while listening. Hence, learning new vocabulary will be more contextualised and meaningful.
- 6. Reflection:** If the students' level is upper-intermediate or higher, teachers may ask students to write a reflection regarding how students have done so far with the portfolio, what they have found interesting, what they have learned, what difficulties they have had, and what they are going to do in the future to practice listening.

7. Listening portfolio completion and assessment: Teachers will need to check students' work every week to make students keep up with the progress. At the end of the course, students are asked to compile all the weekly listening assignments, and the reflection (if required), and make a listening portfolio.

Teachers should create a marking scheme for the listening portfolio. The criteria and the marks given to each criterion in the scheme may vary. A suggested marking scheme for listening portfolio (accomplishment, lateness in submission, portfolio display, appropriateness of level, range of chosen topics and video sources, and work on new vocabulary) is included in Appendix A.

3. CONCLUSION

Based on a literature review concerning Japanese college students' weaknesses in English listening skills and the limitations of listening instruction in Japan, the author proposes that teachers use a **weekly listening portfolio** homework task. The assignment can be checked every week and at the end of the semester by the teacher; therefore, it can become an effective on-going and summative assessment. By letting students freely choose the listening materials that fit their levels, interests, and needs, the listening portfolio makes students become familiar with a variety of Englishes with different accents and uses, which is important in this era of globalisation. Furthermore, dictation enables listeners to focus on forms, and recognise the sounds better; and this is beneficial to Japanese students as they have been struggling with form-focused listening. In short, the idea about a combination of extensive and intensive listening can fit ideally with the **weekly listening portfolio**, which promises an appropriate approach to teach and assess students' listening abilities.

4. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposal of using weekly listening portfolio in this paper has not proven its validity using students' feedback, reflections by the author, and classroom observations. Hence, the author plans to publish empirical research about its use and effectiveness in a forthcoming paper. This paper proposes a **weekly listening portfolio** as an idea for teachers to consider for teaching and assessing listening. The literature reviews are valuable and beneficial to teachers to some extent as they can better understand the originality, the purposes, the adaptations, the problems and the practicality of the method.

For further research, teachers can measure the effectiveness of the listening portfolio, make their own adaptations to fit the teaching and learning contexts, and solicit wider perceptions about this method.

REFERENCES

- Bozan, E. (2015). *The effects of extensive listening for pleasure on the proficiency level of foreign language learners in an input-based setting* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Kansas: USA.
- Brown, S. R. (2011). *Listening myths: Applying second language research to classroom teaching*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson.
- Chen, C. (2016). Listening diary in the digital age: Students' material selection, listening problems, and perceived usefulness. *The JALT CALL Journal*, 12(2), 83-101.
- Davis, P., & Rinvoluceri, M. (2010). *Dictation: New methods, new possibilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ducker, N. (2013). Self-directed Internet-based extensive listening portfolios. In N. Sonda, & A. Krause (Eds.), *JALT2012 Conference Proceedings* (pp. 516-526). Tokyo: JALT.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2005). Principles of instructed language learning. *System*, 33(2), 209-224. doi: 10.1016/j.system.2004.12.006.
- Fujinaga, M. (2002). Why is English listening comprehension difficult for Japanese college students? : An analysis of errors in students' dictation. *The Wakayama Economic Review*, 306, 1-22. doi: 10.19002/AN00071425.306.1.
- Gilakjani, A., & Ahmadi, A. (2011). A study of factors affecting EFL learners' English listening comprehension and the strategies for improvement. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(5), 977-988. doi: 10.4304/jltr.2.5.977-988.
- Holden, W. (2008). Extensive listening: a new approach to an old problem. *Journal of the faculty of Humanities, Toyama University*, 49, 299-312.
- Ikegashira, A., Matsumoto, Y., & Morita, Y. (2009) English education in Japan – from kindergarten to university. In R. Reinelt (Ed.), *Into the Next Decade with (2nd) FL Teaching* (pp. 16-40). Matsuyama, Japan: Rudolf Reinelt Research Laboratory, University of Matsuyama.

- Ito, H. (1990). Comprehension gap between listening and reading among Japanese learners of English as a foreign language, *ARELE*, 1, 13-27.
- Kidd, R. (1992). Teaching ESL grammar through dictation. *TESL Canada Journal*, 10(1), 49-61. doi: 10.18806/tesl.v10i1.611.
- Lee, S. (2010). Developing intensive listening skills: a case study of the long-term dictation tasks using rapid speech. *The English Teacher*, XXXIX, 94-120.
- Løfsgaard, K. A. (2015). *The history of English education in Japan - Motivations, attitudes and methods* (Master's thesis). University of Oslo, Norway.
- Morris, S. (1983). Dictation - a technique in need of reappraisal. *ELT Journal*, 37(2), 121-126. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/37.2.121>
- Oller, John. (1971). Dictation as a device for testing foreign language proficiency, *ELT Journal*, 25(3), 254-259. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/XXV.3.254>
- Onoda, S. (2012). The effect of QuickListens and extensive listening on EFL listening skill development. *Proceedings of the First Extensive Reading World Congress* (pp.176-179). Kyoto, Japan: The Extensive Reading Foundation.
- Renandya, W. A. (2011). Extensive listening in the second language classroom. In Widodo, H. P., & Cirocki, A. (Eds.), *Innovation and Creativity in ELT Methodology* (pp. 28-41). New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Renandya, W. A., & Farrell, T. S. (2010). Teacher, the tape is too fast! Extensive listening in ELT. *ELT Journal*, 65(1), 52-59. doi:10.1093/elt/ccq015.
- Richards, J. C., Platt, J., & Platt, H. (1992). *Dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. London: Longman.
- Richards, J.C., & Renandya, W.A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmidt, A. (2016). Listening journals for extensive and intensive listening practice. *English Teaching Forum*, 54(2), 2-11.
- Sugawara, Y. (1999). Dictation and listening comprehension: Does dictation promote listening comprehension? *Language Laboratory*, 36, 33-50.
- Thorn, S. (2009). Mining listening texts. *Modern English Teacher*, 18(2), 5-13.
- Vo, Y. (2013). Developing extensive listening for EFL learners using Internet resources.

Yıldırım, S., & Yıldırım, Ö. (2016). The importance of listening in language learning and listening comprehension problems experienced by language learners: A literature review. *Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 16(4), 2094-2110.

Yonezaki, H. (2014). Effectiveness of dictation in improving English listening ability of Japanese high school students. *Research Reports of Nagaoka College of Technology*, 50, 21-30.

APPENDIX A

LISTENING PORTFOLIO MARKING SCHEME

Name:

Class:

Date of submission:

	Criteria	Weight	
1	Accomplishment (11 weeks)	1	/1
2	Timing (On time submission)	2	/2
3	Display	2	/2
4	Interesting & diverse contents & topics	3	/3
5	Appropriateness of level chosen	1	/1
6	Work on new vocabulary	1	/1
	TOTAL	10	/10

Teacher's comments:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Mark:

Teacher's signature:

Date of grading:

APPENDIX B

An example of a students' weekly Listening Portfolio

