



Today's Listening Post Solutions: A Sitech Think Sheet

This article looks at the different technologies available to create listening centres. It also gives you a few ideas on how you may be able to add to your usual listening post activities as a result of integrating technology.

Do It Yourself with an MP3 Player / iPod Touch / Tablet and iTunes

If you have access to an MP3 player, a headphone splitter and mini headphones you can essentially construct a listening station. You can download stories onto the MP3 player from a computer and one child from each reading group can be shown how to use the MP3 player. They can take it in turns to peer teach another member of their guided reading group so that everybody is able to set up and use the MP3 player.

If you do not have books in digital format then you can record readers and big books using GarageBand (Mac) or Audacity (PC) and save them as an MP3 file. Then you can share it into iTunes and transfer it to your MP3 player.

There are other advantages to using iTunes to manage your

audio files. Firstly it means you can add variety. iTunes makes it possible for you to add Podcasts or Apps to your Listening Centre activities.

Secondly differentiation is simple. You can easily create a playlist in iTunes, with different playlists for different levels, groups or even individuals.

Thirdly to make it easier for your students to navigate. You can import pictures to illustrate the audio file into iTunes from Amazon for example.

The really great thing about the MP3 player-style listening station is the mobility. Children can even sit outside under a tree and listen.

If you don't have access to any mobile devices you could still use the headphone splitter, mini headphones and even iTunes on an old desktop. You can then at least go to town decorating the area around your listening station!

Listening Activities for your MP3 Players / tablets

- The basic one: students listen to various stories and complete tasks. There are many free story podcasts available

from the iTunes store. Some good ones include Storynory [<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/storynory-stories-for-kids/id94571049>] and The Story Home [<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/the-story-home-childrens-audio/id270352658>].

- Students listen to story apps. You can find apps here <http://www.apple.com/nz/education/apps/>, at Google Play and there are recommendations here <http://www.iear.org/>
- Students can watch How-to videos from www.howcast.com and follow the instructions to complete a task such as how to make sushi.
- Students listen to songs or poems and sequence cards containing the lyrics to the song or words to the poem.
- Students listen to a recording of instructions or clues to solve a problem or complete a treasure hunt.
- Students watch short videos from You Tube and again complete a set of response activities.
- Students can also record their own versions of all of the above to create material for

other students.

The next step: better quality headphones and an Infrared Wireless Headset Kit

Quality

With headphones you do get what you pay for so get the best that you can afford, or if it is part of your student's stationary list urge parents to do the same. There is nothing more frustrating than a buzz, crackle or hiss. If you are thinking of using a device with a USB port for your listening station then you may want to invest in something like these wireless infrared headsets available from Sitech Systems NZ.



You simply plug in a “dongle” and it wirelessly transmits the audio via infrared to each headset. The kit includes good quality headsets with a volume control on each headset so a student can set it at a level comfortable to them.

Mobility

It also means that the group of students can move away from the computer (and each other!) to sit in bean bags or lie on the floor to undertake their listening/reading task, so long as the headsets are within line of sight of the “dongle”. The kit requires no software installation and will transmit the audio of whatever is playing on the computer, be it audio books or YouTube videos.

Where the priority is Differentiated Listening Activities

If you have access to a number of MP3 players, tablets or netbooks then differentiated listening is possible by downloading different files onto the MP3 player or by setting up different folders or playlists in iTunes on the tablets and netbooks.

However this is perhaps not so easy to manage with juniors and can be time consuming. So where differentiation is important or where teachers want to give students some time away from screens, there are other options available.

Easi-Ears is one such set up. The teacher installs some software on their laptop which enables them to drag audio files onto one or more of six wireless headset units which sync via a base unit. The base unit is also an MP3 recorder so you and your students can use it to record audio too and sync this to the headsets as well, so maybe different instructions for each student to accompany the same audio book.

The headsets are all different colours so that each student can identify their headset. They can then control their own audio, repeating, pausing and moving to the next track to meet their own needs using the controls on the side of the headset. A remote control unit enables a teacher to intervene as required, cut in and broadcast announcements and instructions.

And best of all for the littlies, the headset will start to play as soon as you put it on and pause for up to 20 minutes if

they are removed so they are very straightforward to control. You can also get students to carousel the headsets so they can complete the red task on Monday, then the yellow task on Tuesday etc.



Ideas for differentiated or independent listening activities

All of the activities listed above are applicable but with the Easi-ears these can be completed at the students' own pace.

- Each student listens to a very different piece of music to inspire story writing, model making or painting pictures and then you can compare or try and match the output with the stimulus.
- Each student records their own information for a nature trail or a short journey. The students can swap the headsets and listen to the different versions and compare.
- Total empowerment - each student can decide what story they want to listen to, or what skill they want to learn...

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