The Meaning of Life



EAE Learning objectives for this lesson

You will learn more about how to improve your listening comprehension and practice. You will learn and practice expressions for giving your opinion. By the end of the lesson you will know what techniques to use to continue to imp roe your listening comprehension.

Activity One: Discuss *with your partner or the group. (Prepare your answers at home).*



1. Do you see life as a privilege or a right?
2. What gives your life meaning?
3. Do you look for the hidden meaning in situations and experiences?
4. Do you sometimes find it hard to understand the meaning of what people say in English? In which circumstances is it harder for you to understand?
5. What expressions can you think of with the word 'mean' or 'meaning'?

Activity Two: Opinions: Read the expressions and the advice below.

To State an opinion

* The way I see it...
* In my opinion...
* If you want my honest opinion....
* According to Lisa...
* As far as I'm concerned...
* If you ask me...

To ask for an opinion

* What's your idea?
* What are your thoughts on all of this?
* How do you feel about that?
* Do you have anything to say about this?
* What do you think?
* Do you agree?
* Wouldn't you say?

To express agreement

* I agree with you 100 percent.
* I couldn't agree with you more.
* That's so true.
* You're absolutely right.
* Absolutely.
* That's exactly how I feel.
* Exactly.
* I'm afraid I agree with James.
* No doubt about it.
* (Weak) I suppose so. /I guess so.
* You have a point there.
* I was just going to say that.
* Clearly
* Obviously
* That seems obvious to me
* That's true of course...

To express disagreement.

* I would have to disagree with that.
* That doesn't seem right
* That doesn't ring true
* I don't think that can be true
* That's clearly not the case.
* That's not the case.
* That is not in fact correct.
* That is incorrect.
* I don't think so.
* (Strong) No way.
* I'm afraid I disagree.
* (strong) I totally disagree.
* (Strong) I'd say the exact opposite.
* Not necessarily.
* That's not always true.
* That's not always the case.
* No, I'm not so sure about that.
* That's completely untrue.

Using intonation and stress when arguing a point is a very good way of drawing attention to the points which you really want to emphasise. It also makes you more interesting to listen to and therefore more convincing.

Use rising pitch at the start of a sentence and falling pitch at the end, with a pause to mark the end of your statement. This shows you have finished making a point and allows people to stop and think about what you have said. It makes you a lot clearer and again, more convincing.

The use of introductory words acts as a way of attracting attention and saying 'listen to me', it sounds quite authoritative especially if you emphasise proof or experience:

Essentially, Ultimately, Basically, Obviously...

To learn these words and expressions try forcing yourself to use them. If you make a conscious effort to put the new expressions into practice then you will soon own them and be able to use them easily and have more varied ways of expressing your opinions. Try noting one from each category on a 'post it' note every day and using them in a work related discussion where you have to express your opinion.

Review them now and choose some to try out later today. Which expressions are the strongest, the weakest, the most idiomatic, the most enthusiastic?

Activity Three: Read the quotations and say which ones you agree with the most using the expressions and techniques from activity two.

1. "You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life." ***Albert Camus.***

2. "In our life there is a single color, as on an artist's palette, which provides the meaning of life and art. It is the color of love." ***Marc Chagal***



3. "To be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end of life." ***Robert Louis Stevenson***

4. "The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for." ***Fyodor Dostoyevsky***

5. "Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, it's not the end." ***John Lennon***

6. "The more I see, the less I know for sure." ***John Lennon***

7. "The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity." **Leo Tolstoy**

8. "Life is like a ten-speed bicycle. Most of us have gears we never use." **Charles Schulz**

Activity Four: How to listen for meaning instead of words.

1/ Pre- reading questions:

- In what situations do you find it the most difficult to understand English?
- In what ways do you try to improve your listening skills?

2/ Article: Read the **article** as a group and then with your partner resume it into several short sentences and pieces of advice.



When you are taking part in a conversation where the rôles of listening and speaking are shared it is relatively easy to ask someone to slow down or repeat something. *(Please could you repeat that, I'm sorry I didn't quite catch that, sorry could you say that more slowly I'm not sure I understood, Could you say that again I didn't catch everything…).* However, when you are trying to understand something in real time; on the TV, Radio or in a presentation, lecture or meeting and you can't interrupt, then you need to devise a strategy for listening actively for the important information so that you don't lose the thread of meaning.

Often people miss something in the dialogue or discourse because of a word they didn't understand. If they stop listening to try and re-process or pause to think about what has been said, then they can get lost.

When you are in this kind of situation you need to use a different listening strategy from the one you use in a two way conversation. You need to listen for 'gist' not for specific information. You need to try to ignore words which you don't understand or hear properly.

Remember that with English intonation we place more emphasis on the important words and even 'swallow' the less important words, because English is a stress-timed language. So if you don't hear a word it probably was not important.

When you are processing aural information to derive meaning you are de-coding sounds through a complex cognitive process involving different systems. You are making connections in a variety of ways. You are always using prior knowledge of the context and situation, as well as your knowledge of words and linguistic structure. So knowing what individual words mean is only part of how we understand meaning.

So you should always trust your general knowledge and your knowledge of the subject as well as the context to find out the meaning. Focus on key words and facts. Take notes to help support your memory and clarify. Listen for the intonation and stress.

Always keep in mind that it is not necessary to understand each word of what you are hearing in order to understand the general meaning.

As your knowledge of words, language structure, pronunciation and intonation and stress patterns improves, you will find it easier to understand in all different situations. You will be able to rely more on your knowledge of language and not have to rely as much on your knowledge of the subject or the context to make predictions about meaning and process information quickly. So all parts of language acquisition will help you to improve your listening comprehension.



As with any learning, practice makes perfect, so you need to put your listening strategies into practice as often as possible by listening to a variety of people talking on a variety of subjects regularly, and by finding ways to test and verify your level of comprehension.

Activity Five: Comprehension practice.

Listen to these extracts from Monty Pythons meaning of life and answer the questions:

1/ "What's it all about "
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQEkAbLJ5L8

- What is the conclusion of the extract?

2/ "Would rather be elsewhere"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucgU2DJlBiw

- What would Atkinson prefer?
- Where does everyone go in the end?
- What does he say about the army before he walks of at the end?

3/ "Every sperm is sacred"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8fheDIG_RA

- Where is every sperm needed?
- What happens if a sperm is wasted?
- What happens to someone is spills some in vain?

Activity Six - Further Comprehension practice - watch the video and answer the questions. Then we will see how many questions you were able to answer. We will only watch the video once but you can watch it again at home to see if you can improve your understanding.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ebt0X5ybm9Y
The Meaning of Life - The School of Life

1. Why do people say life has no meaning?
2. What do science say about life?
3. How does it make people sign?
4. Is it important to think about the meaning of life?
5. What can we do to make life meaningless?
6. What example of unhappiness in a relationship is given?
7. What examples are given for students feeling depressed?
8. What is given as an example of unhappiness in a job?
9. What kind of creatures are we by nature?
10. What can we do on a journey to a new country which is good?
11. What do we feel when we correct confusion?
12. What is one of the most meaningful thing we can do to other people?
13. What does service has to be in order to be meaningful?
14. What is the meaning of life according to this video?
15. What did you think of this video?

Activity Seven - **The Meaning of Life explained.**

Role Plays

With your partner act out a role play where one of the following famous people is explaining the meaning of life to a child who asks them for an explanation.

1. The Dalai Lama
2. The Pope
3. Wizz Khalifa
4. Bill Gates



