

## Listening to Movies

Movies are interesting, but they can be less valuable than some other options for improving your listening skills. TV comedy or drama shows, talk shows, and news shows have the same characters or announcers, and if you watch them over time, it becomes easier to follow them. This isn't true of movies because they generally introduce characters and tell a story that is new. Once the movie is over, you will probably never see the characters again. If you want to use movies anyway, here are some suggestions for more effective ways of using movies on your own to improve your listening.

1) Select a movie that is about something familiar, such as

- A movie that is set in your home country: this should be easier than a movie set in some place you're less familiar with.
- A movie that you have seen before, perhaps in your home country with subtitles or a translated soundtrack, so that you know the story and characters.
- A movie with close captioning: in this case, watch the movie first with the closed captioning on, so that you become familiar with it. Then watch it again with the closed captioning off. Or turn on the captions when you feel you're getting lost.
- A movie that is based on a book: this way, you can read the book first to learn about the characters and story and then watch the movie.
- A movie that is one of several in a series: in this way you at least get to know some of the characters and may even have a continuing story (e.g. Harry Potter).
- A movie that has a lot of visual elements to support the dialogue.

Note, you can listen to an unfamiliar topic for pure entertainment or if you are doing so to build cultural understanding, but be aware that it may be more difficult to use for language learning if you don't understand the references.

2) For language learning purposes, some movies may not be as useful:

- Movies with slang, fast speakers, ethnic dialects, and so on are more difficult than ones with speakers who speak a relatively standard version of North American English and speak it clearly.

- Older movies (especially from the 1930s-60s) often have patterns of speech that are no longer common, especially in this area.
  - Some kinds of "action" movies have a lot of action and little language.
  - Movies about historical events, especially from the distant past, if done well may have patterns of speech that are uncommon today, and the situations will not be relevant.
- 3) Select a movie where the *language* is not too difficult and which you think may contain useful expressions: [www.eslnotes.com](http://www.eslnotes.com) has vocabulary assistance for some popular older movies, many of which are available on DVD from Green Library.
  - 4) Find a part of the movie that is especially easy for you to understand. Try to do a dictation of 2-3 minutes of it. If the movie has accurate captioning or you can find a script, use the captions or script to check your answers.
  - 5) Listen to a part of the movie that has an interesting conversation you can understand. After one of the characters says a line, pause and try to say it right back (this is like a dictation, only without writing). The goal is not to memorize the line, but to build processing accuracy and capacity.

Remember, any time you listen to a movie in English and enjoy and understand it, you're getting some benefit. However, it's important to realize that you need to be *actively* involved in listening if you want to get the most from it. That means listening deeply to selected parts to improve processing, mining the material for useful words and phrases, and using specific strategies for interpreting meaning.

If you don't have access to video playback equipment, you can go downstairs in Green Library and get DVDs which you can watch there in the Media Center. You can also find free (legal) online movies at Crackle (a Sony company) [www.crackle.com](http://www.crackle.com).