Listening: B1
An interview about listening skills

Listen to the English teacher talk about listening to practise and improve your listening skills.

Before listening

Do the preparation task first. Then listen to the audio and do the exercises.

Preparation task
Match the vocabulary (1–8) with the definitions (a–h).

Vocabulary	Definitions
1. ...... high stakes	a. to admit
2. ...... to break something down	b. an action to achieve a result
3. ...... a strategy	c. to behave as if something is true
4. ...... to pretend	d. a situation where the result is very important
5. ...... sweat	e. the water that comes from your skin when you're very hot
6. ...... to confess	f. to give the main points
7. ...... to summarise	g. forms and documents
8. ...... paperwork	h. to make something into smaller parts

Tasks

Task 1
Are the sentences true or false?

		Answer	
1.	The interviewer finds speaking the most difficult.	True	False
2.	Gabriella thinks, in some situations, people can find speaking easier than listening.	True	False
3.	According to the interviewer, asking for someone to say the same thing again is one way to solve the problem.	True	False
4.	Gabriella recommends pretending to understand if a conversation is too difficult.	True	False
5.	Gabriella's strategy for managing important conversations sounds strange to the interviewer at first.	True	False
6.	Gabriella's idea involves asking a lot of questions.	True	False

Task 2
Match the expressions (1–6) with the meanings (a–f).

Expressions

1. ...... I came out in a cold sweat.
2. ...... I'm still lost.
3. ...... I can take it.
4. ...... My brain shuts down.
5. ...... I get you!
6. ...... I wanted to get out of it.

Meanings

a. I can't think.
b. I won't be upset.
c. I wanted to escape.
d. I was really nervous or afraid.
e. I still don't understand.
f. I understand what you're saying!

Discussion
What do you do to help with listening?

Presenter: So, today's expert teacher is Gabriella, a university English teacher from Leeds. Gabriella, hi and thanks for joining us today.

Gabriella: Thanks for having me!

Presenter: So, I have to confess today's topic is something I am really bad at: listening. Most people say speaking is the most stressful part of learning a new language but, for me, with my B1 German, speaking isn't so bad. At least I'm in control of it. But listening … woah … people speak so fast and it's like my brain just shuts down. Am I just really strange and bad at listening? Tell me, honestly, I can take it.

Gabriella: No, you're not strange. In fact, it's really common. You know, in exams most people do pretty well in speaking compared with listening. Of course, exams are a different situation from real life because in an exam you can't ask for something to be repeated or explained. You usually have just one or maybe two opportunities to listen to the dialogue and then it's gone.

Presenter: Right, but in real life I feel stupid always saying, 'Sorry, can you repeat that, please?', especially if I still don't understand even when they repeat it. And people out there listening, I hope you don't do this – quite often the person just repeats what they said equally as fast and I'm still lost!

Gabriella: They do, don't they? In real life, you've got two strategies. One is to pretend to understand and get out of the conversation as fast as you can.

Presenter: Yep, sounds familiar!

Gabriella: But, obviously that's not going to help if it's a conversation with high stakes. It might have important consequences. I mean, if you're just chatting with a stranger at the bus stop, it doesn't matter. But imagine you're at a government office or a bank, trying to find out what paperwork you need to get your ID or open a bank account. What can you do then?

Presenter: I hope you've got the answer, Gabriella, because I'm coming out in a cold sweat just thinking about either of those situations!

Gabriella: The other strategy is to summarise what they said.

Presenter: But how can you do that if you didn't understand what they said?

Gabriella: Ah, well, you only start the summary, so you might say, in German in your case, 'OK, so the first thing I have to do is …?' and make it a question. Or, for example, 'And which office is that again?' Break it down into smaller questions and the other person will naturally start answering them. That way you're controlling the conversation a bit more.

Presenter: I get you …

Answers

Preparation task

1. d
2. h
3. b
4. c
5. e
6. a
7. f
8. g

Task 1

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. False
5. True
6. True

Task 2

1. d
2. e
3. b
4. a
5. f
6. c