Listening — free worksheet

Listen to the recording and answer the questions.

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1. Behind the Scenes at the Airport

Listening (audio transcript) · airports

Listen to the interview with an airport operations manager. For each question, choose the correct option (A, B or C) based only on what you hear. You will hear the recording twice.

Audio transcript

Interviewer: Thanks for joining us. You've worked at the airport for over fifteen years now. What's changed the most since you started? Manager: Honestly, it's the security process. When I began, passengers could keep their shoes on and carry liquids without a second thought. Now everything's scanned twice, and we've added biometric gates at passport control, which has actually cut waiting times by almost half compared to five years ago. Interviewer: That's a big improvement. What about the busiest times of day? Manager: Early mornings, between five and seven, are surprisingly calm because most long-haul flights leave later. The real crunch is around six in the evening, when business travellers and holidaymakers overlap. That's when the check-in queues stretch furthest. Interviewer: Do delays still cause major headaches? Manager: Weather is our biggest enemy, more than technical faults. A single foggy morning can push back dozens of departures, and the knock-on effect lasts the whole day because aircraft and crews are scheduled so tightly. Interviewer: Any advice for nervous first-time flyers? Manager: Arrive with plenty of time, obviously, but also don't be afraid to ask staff questions. We'd rather guide someone to the right gate than have them wander around stressed. And keep your boarding pass and ID together — that's the single biggest cause of last-minute panic at the gate. Interviewer: Finally, what's something passengers rarely notice but should appreciate? Manager: The baggage handling system. It looks simple from the outside, but there's a vast underground network of conveyor belts sorting thousands of bags an hour, matching each one to the correct flight before it even reaches the aircraft hold. People only think about it when something goes wrong, but ninety-nine percent of the time it runs flawlessly. Interviewer: Fascinating. Thank you for your time. Manager: My pleasure.

1. According to the manager, what has biometric passport control mainly achieved?

A) It has reduced waiting times significantly B) It has made shoe and liquid checks unnecessary C) It has reduced staffing requirements at passport gates

2. Why does the manager say the airport is unusually quiet in the early morning?

A) Technical checks delay the first departures of the day B) Business travellers haven't arrived at the airport yet C) Flights to far-off destinations usually take off later in the day

3. What does the manager identify as the biggest cause of delays?

A) Technical faults with aircraft B) Poor scheduling of crews C) Weather conditions

4. What final piece of advice does the manager give to prevent panic at the gate?

A) Make sure your travel documents stay together B) Ask staff to escort you directly to your gate C) Arrive at least two hours before departure

5. Why does the manager encourage nervous passengers to ask staff questions?

A) It helps staff identify which passengers are flying for the first time B) It reduces the length of check-in queues during peak hours C) It stops passengers from roaming the terminal in confusion

6. What does the manager say most passengers overlook despite it working well?

A) The system that sorts and matches luggage to flights B) The biometric gates at passport control C) The equipment used to forecast weather conditions

7. How long has the manager worked at the airport?

A) Nearly ten years B) More than fifteen years C) Almost five years

2. The Island That Talks in Whistles

Listening (audio transcript) · Silbo Gomero – the whistled language of La Gomera, Canary Islands

Listen to the interview about a unique whistled language. Then choose the correct answer (A, B or C) for each question, based only on what you hear.

Audio transcript

Host: Welcome back to the show. Today we're heading to a small volcanic island in the Atlantic to explore something you won't find almost anywhere else in the world — a language made entirely of whistles. I'm joined by linguist Elena Vidal, who has spent the last decade studying it. Elena, welcome. Elena: Thanks for having me. So yes, Silbo Gomero is a whistled form of Spanish, spoken — or rather whistled — on La Gomera, one of the smaller Canary Islands. Host: And how on earth did it start? Elena: Nobody knows exactly, but the theory most linguists accept is that it was brought by the island's earliest inhabitants, possibly from North Africa, long before the Spanish arrived in the fifteenth century. The island's landscape is incredibly steep, cut by deep ravines, so shouting simply didn't carry far enough. A whistle, though, can travel up to three kilometres under the right conditions — far further than the human voice. Host: Three kilometres, that's remarkable. And it's not just random sounds, it's actual language? Elena: Exactly, that's the key point. Silbo isn't a code like Morse; every whistled sound corresponds to a vowel or consonant in spoken Spanish. Skilled whistlers can hold entire conversations — asking about the weather, warning of danger, even gossiping about the neighbours — using only pitch and rhythm. Host: I read that it nearly disappeared at one point. Elena: It did. By the 1980s, with better roads and telephones, almost nobody under fifty could whistle it fluently. But in 1999 the local government made it a compulsory subject in primary schools, and UNESCO later recognised it as an item of intangible cultural heritage. Now most children on the island learn it alongside ordinary Spanish. Host: So it's had a genuine revival. Elena: A real one. Tourists even come specifically to watch demonstrations at the local museum, and some young islanders now use it just for fun, whistling messages to friends across the valley the way we might send a text message. Host: Elena, thank you so much for sharing that. Elena: My pleasure.

1. Who does Elena say most probably started the whistling tradition?

A) North African traders who came to the island after Spanish rule began B) Settlers who arrived from Spain once Spanish rule had begun C) The original islanders, who were living there before Spanish rule began

2. Why did people on the island begin whistling instead of shouting, according to Elena?

A) Shouting echoed confusingly off the valley walls, making messages hard to follow B) The human voice could not carry far enough over the terrain C) Whistling was the only way to warn each other quickly of approaching danger

3. According to Elena, roughly how far can a skilled whistler's signal travel under good conditions?

A) Only a few hundred metres, not much further than a loud shout B) Several kilometres, well beyond what a voice could ever carry C) All the way across the island, reaching the coast on the other side

4. What does Elena say Silbo Gomero actually is?

A) A separate language that developed independently of Spanish B) A whistled rendering of the sounds of ordinary Spanish speech C) A coded signal system similar to Morse code

5. What example does Elena give of an everyday whistled conversation?

A) Giving directions to visiting tourists B) Reporting news from the mainland C) Chatting about neighbours

6. What had happened to Silbo Gomero by the 1980s, according to Elena?

A) It had become more widely used thanks to new roads and telephones B) It had nearly died out, as fewer islanders bothered to learn it C) It had been formally banned by the regional education authorities

7. What specific step did the local government take in 1999, according to Elena?

A) It opened a museum where visitors can watch whistling demonstrations B) It introduced whistling lessons as a required subject in primary schools C) It funded research into the language's North African origins

3. The Quietest Room on Earth

Listening (audio transcript) · Anechoic chambers – the science of the world's quietest rooms

Listen to the monologue about anechoic chambers. Then choose the correct answer (A, B or C) for each question, based only on what you hear.

Audio transcript

Have you ever wondered what true silence sounds like? Today I want to tell you about a special room called an anechoic chamber, which is often described as the quietest place on Earth. An anechoic chamber is a room built to stop all sound. The walls, floor and ceiling are covered with thick foam wedges that absorb echoes, so no sound bounces back. There are also thick walls that block outside noise like traffic or aeroplanes. The most famous chamber, at a company in Minnesota, in the United States, holds the record for the quietest place ever measured. It is so quiet that scientists measure the background noise in negative decibels, which means the sound level is

actually below what the human ear can normally hear. You might think spending time in a room like this would be relaxing. In fact, it's the opposite. Without any outside noise, people start to hear things they normally never notice: their own heartbeat, their blood moving through their veins, even their joints. Most visitors can only stay comfortable for a few minutes. The record for staying inside the Minnesota chamber alone in the dark is around forty-five minutes; after that, people usually start to feel dizzy or anxious, and some even report hearing strange sounds that aren't really there. Why were these rooms built in the first place? They weren't designed to test human reactions to silence — that was just an interesting side effect. Anechoic chambers are mainly used by engineers to test products like microphones, speakers and even space equipment, because any tiny echo could affect the results. Car companies also use them to check how quiet a new engine is. So next time you complain about noisy neighbours or traffic outside your window, remember: total silence isn't always as peaceful as it sounds. Our brains, it seems, need at least a little bit of sound to feel comfortable.

1. What lines the inside of the chamber to stop echoes forming?

A) Thick walls that keep outside noise from getting in B) Dense foam shapes that soak up sound C) A layer of padding that stops sound from escaping the room

2. Where is the chamber that currently holds the record for the quietest place ever measured?

A) A car manufacturer's test site in Europe B) A business based in the US state of Minnesota C) A research lab belonging to a space agency

3. How does the speaker describe the sound level inside the quietest chamber?

A) Measured on a special scale invented only for that room B) An extremely low but still ordinary positive reading C) Low enough to fall below what human ears can pick up

4. What do visitors begin to notice once every outside sound has been blocked out?

A) Noises from traffic passing outside the building B) Sounds coming from inside their own body, like their heartbeat C) The echo of their own voice bouncing off the walls

5. What is the record for staying alone in the dark inside the world's quietest chamber, according to the speaker?

A) About 30 minutes B) About 45 minutes C) About 60 minutes

6. Why were anechoic chambers originally built, according to the speaker?

A) To check sound-sensitive equipment for unwanted noise B) To give visitors a calm, relaxing experience C) To study how people react to complete silence

7. What does the speaker say car companies use these chambers for?

A) To measure the noise level of new engines B) To check space equipment for unwanted noise C) To test the sound quality of speakers

4. Lights That Lead Astray: Birds and the Glow of Cities

Listening (audio transcript) · Light pollution's disruption of nocturnal bird migration

Listen to the monologue about how artificial light affects migratory birds. Then answer the seven questions, choosing the option (A, B or C) that best reflects what you heard.

Audio transcript

Every autumn and spring, billions of birds cross continents under cover of darkness, navigating by starlight, the moon, and the Earth's magnetic field. What's only recently become clear, though, is just how catastrophically we've been interfering with that ancient system simply by lighting up our cities. Migratory birds appear to interpret the artificial glow rising from urban centres as a kind of false dawn, and rather than continuing on their route, they veer towards it, drawn in as if by some irresistible magnetic pull. Once they're caught in that glow, many end up circling illuminated skyscrapers for hours, disoriented and burning through fat reserves they desperately need for the journey ahead. Some simply collide with glass façades; researchers estimate that in North America alone, upwards of six hundred million birds die this way every single year — a staggering figure, and one that dwarfs many other threats we tend to worry about far more. What's particularly striking is that not all light is equally dangerous. Studies show that white and blue-toned light, the kind emitted by many modern LED fixtures, scatters more in the atmosphere and confuses avian navigation systems far more severely than warmer, amber-toned light does. That's precisely why a growing number of cities — Chicago and New York among them — have adopted so-called 'lights-out' initiatives, voluntarily dimming or switching off non-essential building lights during peak migration weeks. Early results are genuinely encouraging: one building in Chicago recorded an eighty percent drop in bird strikes after simply switching off its upper-floor lights during a single migration season. Now, I wouldn't want to suggest we ought to abandon urban lighting altogether — that would be neither realistic nor necessary. What I would argue, however, is that with a bit of thoughtful redesign — motion sensors, warmer colour temperatures, timed shutoffs — we could dramatically reduce the death toll without plunging our cities back into darkness. It isn't a question of choosing between illuminated cities and living skies. We can, if we choose to, have both.

1. According to the speaker, why do migratory birds veer towards city lights?

A) The light overwhelms their sensitivity to the Earth's magnetic field B) They mistake the brightening sky for the onset of daylight C) They are drawn towards warmth radiating from heated buildings

2. What point does the speaker make when citing the number of bird deaths from collisions?

A) It has been contested by other researchers in the field B) It applies mainly to small songbirds rather than larger species C) It exceeds many threats that receive far more public attention

3. Which quality of light does the speaker identify as most disruptive to bird navigation?

A) Cooler, blue-white light B) The overall brightness of the light, regardless of colour C) Warmer, amber-toned light

4. What does the Chicago example illustrate?

A) The measure was adopted mainly to cut the building's energy bills B) The initiative eliminated bird collisions at the building altogether C) A relatively small adjustment produced a sharp decline in bird strikes

5. What is the speaker's overall position on urban lighting?

A) It should remain unchanged, with efforts directed elsewhere B) It should be modified rather than removed C) It should be scaled back significantly, whatever the cost to residents

6. What does the speaker say happens to birds that circle illuminated buildings for extended periods?

A) They eventually settle on nearby buildings to rest before resuming their route B) They conserve energy by flying at a reduced pace while circling C) They exhaust the energy supplies they need to finish their migratory flight

7. How does the speaker characterise the 'lights-out' initiatives adopted by cities like Chicago and New York?

A) A mandatory policy enforced by national regulators B) A permanent ban on decorative and building lighting C) A voluntary, temporary measure tied to migration periods

5. Training the Nose: Inside the World of Professional Perfumers

Listening (audio transcript) · How professional perfumers ("noses") are trained to smell

Listen to the interview. For each question, choose the correct answer (A, B or C).

Audio transcript

Interviewer: Good morning, and welcome back to the show. Today we're talking to Elena Voss, a perfumer who's spent the last fifteen years training what the industry calls a "nose". Elena, thanks for joining us. Elena: Thanks for having me. Interviewer: So how does someone actually become a professional nose? Elena: Well, people assume you're either born with an exceptional sense of smell or you're not, but that's really not the whole story. Everyone starts with roughly the same biological equipment. What makes a trained nose different is years of deliberate practice — smelling the same raw materials over and over until you can name them instantly, even mixed with forty or fifty other scents. Interviewer: How long does that training usually take? Elena: Formally, most perfumers spend around seven years in a training programme before they're trusted to create a fragrance that actually goes on sale. During that time, you memorise somewhere between two thousand and three thousand individual ingredients. I still remember being handed a tiny sample on my first day and being told simply to smell it until I could describe it without looking at the label. Interviewer: That sounds exhausting. Elena: It is, in a way most people don't expect. Your nose gets physically tired after a few hours. We use thin paper strips to test each scent properly, but once the nose starts to tire, most trainees take a short break by smelling coffee beans, which apparently resets the sense of smell. A few people I know prefer smelling the back of their own hand instead, though coffee beans are definitely the more common choice. Whether any of this works scientifically is still debated, but it's become something of a ritual in the studio. Interviewer: Has technology changed the job at all? Elena: It's changed the business side of things more than the creative side. Computers can now predict how two ingredients might combine, which saves time, but they can't replace the emotional judgement a human nose brings — deciding whether a scent actually makes someone feel something. That part, thankfully, machines still can't do. Interviewer: Final question — what's the biggest misconception people have about your job? Elena: That it looks exciting and glamorous from the outside. In reality, most of my working day is spent in a lab surrounded by unmarked bottles, testing combinations that fail nine times out of ten, until, every so often, one of

them doesn't.

1. According to Elena, what mainly separates a trained nose from an ordinary person's sense of smell?

A) A natural talent that lets some people skip years of training B) An inborn gift that most people simply don't have C) Repeated practice identifying scents over several years

2. How long does formal training usually take before a perfumer can create a fragrance that goes on sale?

A) Around three years B) Around ten years C) Around seven years

3. What does Elena say trainee perfumers most often do to rest a tired sense of smell?

A) Smell the back of their own hand B) Have a quick sniff of coffee beans C) Use thin paper strips to test scents

4. According to Elena, which part of the job has technology changed the most?

A) The number of ingredients perfumers must memorise B) The creative decision-making process C) The practical and financial aspects of her role

5. What does Elena say technology still cannot replace?

A) Working out how two scents might blend together B) Judging whether a scent truly moves someone emotionally C) Keeping track of thousands of different ingredients

6. What does Elena say is the biggest misconception about her job?

A) That computers now make most of the creative decisions B) That it relies mainly on natural talent rather than years of training C) That her profession looks fascinating and impressive to outsiders

7. What happened on Elena's first day of training, according to the story she tells?

A) She had to name as many ingredients as possible from a list B) She had to smell a single sample until she could describe it C) She had to mix several different scents together from memory

Answer Key

1. Behind the Scenes at the Airport

1. A) It has reduced waiting times significantly
2. C) Flights to far-off destinations usually take off later in the day
3. C) Weather conditions
4. A) Make sure your travel documents stay together
5. C) It stops passengers from roaming the terminal in confusion
6. A) The system that sorts and matches luggage to flights
7. B) More than fifteen years

1. The manager says the biometric gates have 'cut waiting times by almost half,' so faster processing is the achievement; staffing levels are never discussed in connection with the gates.

2. He explains that the calm morning period happens because flights covering the longest distances are timetabled for later in the day; technical checks are never mentioned as a cause of delay to morning flights.

3. He says 'weather is our biggest enemy, more than technical faults,' ranking it above technical problems; tight crew scheduling is mentioned only as something that makes delays spread further, not as a cause in itself.

4. His last tip is to keep the boarding pass and ID together, and he adds that this is the single biggest cause of last-minute panic at the gate, framing the advice as the way to avoid that panic; arriving early and asking staff questions are separate, more general tips given earlier in the conversation.

5. He explains that staff would rather direct someone straight to their gate than let them end up lost and anxious in the terminal, so asking questions avoids that outcome; identifying first-time flyers and shortening queues are never mentioned as reasons.

6. He describes a network sorting and matching bags to flights that people 'only think about... when something goes wrong,' identifying it as generally overlooked; the passport gates are discussed earlier in a different context, and weather forecasting equipment is never mentioned in the recording.

7. The interviewer states the manager has worked there 'for over fifteen years now'; five years is mentioned later only as the period used to compare how much waiting times have improved, not his length of service.

2. The Island That Talks in Whistles

1. C) The original islanders, who were living there before Spanish rule began
2. B) The human voice could not carry far enough over the terrain
3. B) Several kilometres, well beyond what a voice could ever carry
4. B) A whistled rendering of the sounds of ordinary Spanish speech
5. C) Chatting about neighbours
6. B) It had nearly died out, as fewer islanders bothered to learn it
7. B) It introduced whistling lessons as a required subject in primary schools

1. Elena credits the tradition to the population already present on the island before Spanish rule began, not to settlers or traders who arrived afterwards.

2. Elena explains that the steep, ravine-cut landscape meant the voice did not carry far enough, so a method with greater range was needed; the other options describe problems or uses she never gives as the original reason.

3. Elena states that a whistle can cover a distance of several kilometres, far beyond the reach of the human voice; this rules out the idea that it barely beats a shout or that it can cross the whole island.

4. Elena says every whistled sound corresponds to a vowel or consonant of spoken Spanish, meaning Silbo reproduces ordinary Spanish through whistling rather than being a code or an unrelated language.

5. Elena lists topics such as asking about the weather and gossiping about the neighbours as typical subjects of whistled conversations; giving directions to tourists and reporting mainland news are never mentioned.

6. Elena recalls that by the 1980s, with better roads and telephones reducing the need for it, almost nobody under fifty could still whistle it fluently, meaning the tradition had nearly died out; the other options describe things not mentioned—no ban occurred, and the new technology actually reduced use rather than increasing it.

7. Elena says the local government's 1999 action was to require the teaching of whistling in primary schools; the museum demonstrations are described as something tourists watch today, not a 1999 government measure, and no research funding is mentioned at all.

3. The Quietest Room on Earth

1. B) Dense foam shapes that soak up sound
2. B) A business based in the US state of Minnesota
3. C) Low enough to fall below what human ears can pick up
4. B) Sounds coming from inside their own body, like their heartbeat
5. B) About 45 minutes
6. A) To check sound-sensitive equipment for unwanted noise
7. A) To measure the noise level of new engines

1. The speaker says the walls, floor and ceiling are covered with foam wedges that absorb sound, which stops echoes forming; the thick walls are described separately as a way of keeping outside noise out, not as the anti-echo lining, and the recording never suggests any material designed to stop sound escaping outward.

2. The speaker states that the current record is held by a business located in Minnesota, in the USA; the car manufacturer and space equipment are mentioned later only as examples of what such chambers are used to test, not as the owner of the record-breaking room.

3. The speaker says the background noise is measured in negative decibels, meaning the level actually falls below what the human ear can normally hear, rather than being an unusually low ordinary reading or a scale made just for this chamber.

4. The speaker says people start to hear their own heartbeat and blood moving once outside noise disappears; traffic noise is actually kept out by the thick walls, and an anechoic chamber is built specifically so that no echo of any kind occurs.

5. The speaker gives the record as 'around forty-five minutes', not thirty or sixty.

6. The speaker explains these rooms were mainly built so engineers could test sound-sensitive equipment such as microphones and speakers without echo affecting the results; the idea that the room might be relaxing is mentioned only as a common guess that turns out to be wrong, and studying people's reactions to silence is described as just an interesting side effect, not the original reason for building them.

7. The speaker specifically says car companies use the chambers to check how quiet a new engine is; testing speakers and checking space equipment are mentioned earlier as general uses by engineers, not as something done by car companies.

4. Lights That Lead Astray: Birds and the Glow of Cities

1. B) They mistake the brightening sky for the onset of daylight
2. C) It exceeds many threats that receive far more public attention
3. A) Cooler, blue-white light
4. C) A relatively small adjustment produced a sharp decline in bird strikes
5. B) It should be modified rather than removed
6. C) They exhaust the energy supplies they need to finish their migratory flight
7. C) A voluntary, temporary measure tied to migration periods

1. The speaker says birds interpret the glow as a kind of false dawn — in other words, they take the brightening sky for the start of day. The magnetic field and warmth are mentioned elsewhere in the talk but not as the cause of this behaviour.

2. The speaker calls the figure 'staggering' and says it 'dwarfs many other threats we tend to worry about far more' — the point is about scale relative to public concern, not about dispute or species.

3. The speaker explains that white and blue-toned light scatters more in the atmosphere and confuses navigation far more severely than warmer light — the point concerns the kind of light, not its intensity.

4. The speaker says switching off upper-floor lights brought an eighty percent drop — a large effect from a simple change, not a complete elimination of strikes or a cost-saving motive.

5. The speaker explicitly rejects abandoning urban lighting as unrealistic, but argues for thoughtful redesign — a middle position between no change and drastic reduction.

6. The speaker states that circling birds become disoriented and use up the fuel they need for the rest of their flight — a restatement of the point about depleted energy, not a sign of conserved effort or of resting before continuing.

7. The speaker says cities 'voluntarily' dim or switch off lights 'during peak migration weeks' — a chosen, time-limited measure, not a permanent ban or an externally imposed law.

5. Training the Nose: Inside the World of Professional Perfumers

1. C) Repeated practice identifying scents over several years
2. C) Around seven years
3. B) Have a quick sniff of coffee beans
4. C) The practical and financial aspects of her role
5. B) Judging whether a scent truly moves someone emotionally

6. C) That her profession looks fascinating and impressive to outsiders

7. B) She had to smell a single sample until she could describe it

1. Elena says everyone begins with the same basic sense of smell, and it is years of repeated practice identifying scents that produces a trained nose, not an inborn gift or a way of avoiding training.

2. Elena states that most perfumers spend around seven years in training before being trusted to create a fragrance for sale, ruling out the shorter and longer periods.

3. Elena says paper strips are used for testing scents and a few people prefer smelling their own hand, but coffee beans are the method most trainees actually use to rest a tired nose.

4. Elena directly says technology has changed the business side of her work more than the creative side, matching the practical and financial aspects rather than creative decisions or memorising ingredients.

5. She says computers can predict how ingredients combine, but only a human can judge whether a scent genuinely moves someone, a skill the other options don't describe as being replaced.

6. Elena directly says the biggest misconception is that her job looks exciting and glamorous from the outside, not that it depends on natural talent or that computers now make the creative choices — both ideas she addresses separately earlier in the interview.

7. Elena recalls being handed a single sample on her first day and told to smell it repeatedly until she could describe it, rather than mixing scents or naming a long list of ingredients.

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