



Sometimes we can't understand native speakers because we don't know enough about their culture.

## Better Listening & Culture

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Understanding oral English is hard. There are many different accents and countless words that are written differently but sound the same. Today, however, we will talk about aspects that affect listening but are not connected to pronunciation.

### **Gestures**

Fortunately, most gestures are international. Others, however, belong to more restricted cultures and can sometimes cause confusion. The answer? Ask your teacher for a lesson on common gestures in English speaking countries and practise them in class by role playing different situations.

### **Cultural background**

Sometimes it's not the words you don't understand but the cultural references. If you travel to Chicago and people mention buildings by name instead of address you won't know where to find them on maps—so it's always a good idea to

read guides or watch documentaries on places you are about to visit. If you're going to the Edinburg Jazz Festival check the programme beforehand to recognise theatre and band names. In fact, anything you learn about local customs could be useful once you arrive at destination.

### **Acting on partial data**

Unfortunately speakers will sometimes say things we have no idea about. We might be at a business meeting where colleagues start discussing yesterday's baseball game. We neither know the rules nor the players. If it's a conversation in a small group we can always ask for clarification but there's a limit to that.

What to do? We can choose to switch off; or we can try to construct the message from incomplete data. Most speakers will pronounce important expressions differently so if you pay attention to words that are said louder, more slowly or mentioned after a pause you should be able to comprehend part of what people are saying.

*Countless: a lot.  
Gesture: body language.  
Switch off: disconnect.  
Beforehand: before.  
Colleague: workmate.  
Grab: get, catch.*

Would you like to read more about listening? Click on the link to learn about changes in the language and your ability to understand oral English: <http://www.englishfb.com/better-listening-comprehension-change/>