

# Listen, Hear!

by Geoff Plant

## TeenTrain

### Introduction

A major part of my work with MED-EL involves the presentation of lectures and workshops on training approaches and materials. These take me to places around the world, but, despite the different venues, I'm always struck by how many people ask me to talk about training for teenagers and young adults. It seems that this is an area of concern for many therapists and teachers, and, as more and more teenagers receive implants, the need for materials is continuing to grow.

Many of the adult training programs that I have developed for MED-EL - "Auditrain," "SpeechTrax," "Syntrain," etc., - can be adapted for use with older children and young adults, but they were not developed specifically for use with this group of students. Some therapists and teachers have little difficulty modifying these materials, but others feel inadequately prepared to do so, and, as a result, struggle to make these resources suitable for older students. It was this difficulty that prompted me to develop "TeenTrain," a training resource that was aimed at these students. Over the next few years, I hope to develop more materials for this age group, and hope that teachers and therapists will find them useful in their work.

### "TeenTrain"

"TeenTrain" is divided into eight parts:

- |                                      |                                    |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 Consonant and vowel discrimination | 5 Australian folk songs            |
| 2 Picture matrices                   | 6 Australian questions and answers |
| 3 Common sentences                   | 7 Looking at lists                 |
| 4 Thematic sentences                 | 8 Playing with words               |

The materials have been designed as "stand-alone" resources; that is, it's not necessary to work through the program in any fixed order, but rather to select those exercises that suit the needs and abilities of an individual student.

### 1 Consonant and vowel discrimination

These materials focus on specific vowel and/or consonant contrasts in a closed-set format. In the example below, a series of CVC words, containing one of four different vowels, contrast [p] and [b] in the initial position, and [t] and [k] in the final position. The student is asked to listen to the words presented in a random order, and to indicate which was the stimulus item. There are a total of fourteen different sets of words used in this section.

BEAT	BAT	BUT	BART
BEAK	BACK	BUCK	BARK
PETE	PAT	PUTT	PART
PEAK	PACK	PUCK	PARK

### 2 Picture matrices

This set of exercises presents a series of words in columns, with one word selected from each to form a short phrase or sentence. The matrix on the next page, for example, can generate phrases such as, "six new red books," "nine old blue cars," etc.

Other matrices in the program are more complex and involve seven columns with six contrasting words in each.

5	big		cars
6	small		bikes
8	old		buses
9	new		books

### 3 Common sentences

One of the most important resources in my work over the past 10 years has been Hartvig Dahl's "Word Frequencies of Spoken American English." This book presents a listing of the most frequently used words in spoken American English. I have a particular interest in the 500 most frequently occurring words, as I believe that they represent the "core" of spoken English. It might be possible to produce a coherent sentence without using words from this "core," but I doubt that anyone would ever do so! The first ten words in Dahl's list - "I," "and," "the," "to," "that," "you," "it," "of," "a," and "know" - account for around 25% of the total number of words used in everyday speech, and it's hard to imagine the result if we eliminated even them from our vocabularies.

This section of "TeenTrain" presents eight sets of sentences, which contain only words from the first 500 items of Dahl's list. Examples include:

"I can't see any problems with this right now."  
 "She seems to be very nice."  
 "That's a great idea!"  
 "Who wants to help?"

I've deliberately included sentences of varying length, and have used statements, questions, and exclamations to provide a variety of contexts. These sentences can be presented for simple identification, or as the starting point for exercises that look at a more conversational approach.

### 4 Thematic sentences

One of the realities of everyday communication is that it is "theme-based." We don't speak in isolated sentences, but rather in sentences or groups of sentences that are determined to some extent by what came before, and by the responses, comments, etc., of the person(s) to whom we are speaking. The sentences in this section are related to the following topics:

- |                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| i Health               | vi Pets                 |
| ii Time                | vii Transport           |
| iii Fruit & vegetables | viii Sports             |
| iv Restaurants         | ix Vacations & holidays |
| v Filling out a form   | x Weather               |

The student is given the topic of the sentence set, and is asked to repeat as much of each as possible. The sentences can also serve as a starting point for expansion exercises. For example, the original sentence, "I had a bad cold," can be expanded to:

"I had a bad cold last week."  
 "I had such a bad cold last week."  
 "I had such a bad cold last week that I went to the doctor."  
 "I had such a bad cold last week that I went to the doctor, and he told me not to go to school."

Pupils who are intimidated by long sentences find this a much easier task, as they are working from a known sentence each time.

## 5 Australian folk songs

This section uses a number of Australian folk songs as the basis for a series of speech perception and speech production exercises. I've loved Australian folk songs since I was a child, and often use them in my work with teenagers and adults. I provide the student with the words of the song, and then either read or sing it for them. I haven't got a great singing voice, but that's not really the point of the exercise. What I am trying to do is introduce the song and its lyrics in an easy, relaxed fashion.

Almost all of the songs I use contain some unusual or specifically Australian vocabulary items, and these can be used as the starting point for listening exercises. The most famous Australian song is almost certainly "Waltzing Matilda," which includes references to "a swagman," "a billabong," "a jumbuck," "a tucker bag" and a number of other unusual words.

In "TeenTrain," there are question and answer exercises for each song, and these provide the student with, among other things, the meanings of these words. Once the student understands the words, s/he can begin to understand the meaning of the song. For example, "Waltzing Matilda" tells of a tramp who steals a sheep, is "caught in the act" by the police, and evades jail by jumping into a waterhole and drowning. The lyrics also provide the opportunity to discuss rhyming words, and there are exercises looking at this aspect of spoken language in some detail.

I've included a few songs from Australia's days as a penal colony, and these bear a resemblance to many modern rap songs. I encourage students to "perform" these songs, but never insist that they use the original tune. Some students may find it easier to recite the lyrics, while others may want to use a rhythmic rap style.

## 6 Australian questions and answers

This section of the program presents a series of questions related to topics such as Australian animals, famous Australians, and Australian cities. The student is provided with a list of questions and has to discover the answer. This can be presented as a closed set activity, with the student provided with a list of the possible responses, or as an open-set exercise.

## 7 Looking at lists

The topics covered in this section of "TeenTrain," are:

- i The summer Olympic Games
- ii Animal names - male, female, young, and collective
- iii The football (soccer) World Cup
- iv The American football Super Bowl

In each case, the student is provided with a list, which s/he can use to find the answers to questions presented by the teacher/therapist. For example, s/he might be asked to find the Olympic host city in 1956 (Melbourne), or the year that the Olympics were held in Berlin (1936).

Other activities at this level include crosswords and word-searches. In both cases, the clues needed are provided by the teacher/therapist, and the student's task is to find the correct answer in the appropriate list. For example, the student may be asked to find the name of a female bear (sow), or that of a group of foxes (skulk). This is then entered in the crossword, or the word found in the word-search puzzle.

## 8 Playing with words

This final section of the program includes a series of exercises introducing some obscure, and, I hope, interesting aspects of language.

**i Homophones** These are words that sound the same, but have different meanings, such as "too/to/two," and "why/Y." The student is given a list of the possible words (e.g., TO, TOO, TWO), and then presented with a sentence containing one of them. (e.g., I have TWO sisters and one brother). Her/his task is to indicate which one of the words was used in the sentence.

**ii Pig Latin** The ability to "speak" Pig Latin requires a good knowledge of the way that words are formed. The speaker has to identify the consonant(s) at the beginning of a word, move them to the end of the word, and then add the diphthong "ay." If the speaker is able to follow these rules, "sheep" becomes "eepshay," and "dog" becomes "ogday." These exercises are designed to provide the student with practice in such transpositions, and can be seen as providing useful insights into word formations, and practice in producing unusual spoken patterns.

**iii Rhyming slang** Rhyming slang is believed to have originated as a secret language used by the "criminal classes" of eighteenth and nineteenth century London. The process is rather complex, and involves creating a two-word phrase, the elements of which are related. The second element rhymes with another word, and this pair is then used to substitute for it. Thus, "apples and pears," is used for "stairs" - "You go up the apples and pears and knock on the door." - or "rabbit and pork" for "talk." The real difficulty with rhyming slang, however, occurs when the second element is dropped, and all that is left is the first. For example, if someone says that they need to have a "rabbit" with you, they really mean they want to have a talk. I like rhyming slang because it involves a different way of looking at language, and I find that many older children are intrigued by this "secret" language form.

**iv Spoonerisms** Dr. William Spooner would have remained a relatively obscure Oxford academic if he had not had the unfortunate habit of transposing the initial sounds of words. His most famous utterances include; "You have hissed all of my mystery lectures and tasted the whole worm," and, my favorite, "We'll have the hags flung out when the boys come home from the war!" I've written a short poem that includes several of his most famous mistakes, and hope that it will encourage students to look a little more closely at another interesting aspect of language use or misuse.

### Conclusion

"TeenTrain" will become available in June 2006. If you are interested in obtaining a copy, please contact your local MED-EL representative for details. I hope that therapists/teachers will find it useful in their work with older children and young adults. In writing it, I was very conscious that "cultural literacy" is one area where many deaf students lag behind their hearing peers. I hope that this program will encourage students to look further at their own culture - its songs, poems, etc. I also hope that it will help them to look at the rules and conventions of languages, and ways that they can be "broken," either intentionally or unintentionally.

### Contact

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