

Listening Comprehension Questions

These questions will help you to stay focused and to test your listening skills.

How to do this:

Listen for the answer to the first question. Once you hear the answer, stop the audio and read so you know what to listen for.

The answers are not provided but instead, we show you where you can find the answers within the transcription :)

1. Why do people landscape their yard? (page 2)
2. Are flowers used in landscaping? (page 2)
3. Did we buy our house because it had a yard? (page 2)
4. Did Amy and Curtis live in a house or apartment previously? (page 2)
5. What is the first thing people do with their yard in the spring? (page 3)
6. Do trees keep their leaves in the winter? (page 3)
7. Name two vegetables we grew in the garden. (page 3)
8. What word did Amy forget? (page 4)
9. Is gardening hard or fun? (page 4)
10. Which vegetable is sweet and has an earthy flavor? (page 4)
11. Is Sebo a gardener or a farmer? (page 5)
12. Is his vegetable farm organic or does he use chemicals? (page 5)

Section 1 Transcription:

Amy: Hey everybody, this is Amy from Real English Conversations. And I'm here with Curtis.

Curtis: Hi, how's it going everybody?

Amy: And today we're going to be talking about a really, really common and popular activity that people love and look forward to all year round and it is gardening. And I suppose a little bit of landscaping.

Curtis: Right.

Amy: So, what is landscaping?

Curtis: Well, landscaping is making your yard look good by designing it in a certain way. So some people put rocks or they put a hedge or a tree here and there. And they kind of make a circle out of their lawn, making it look neat.

Amy: Like they'll put edging on certain sections of their lawn and put some small rocks inside. It's just a way--it's kind of like making an art or a special specific appearance out of your yard, so that when people see it, they go, "Wow, you have a really nice yard."

Curtis: And some people really, really go kind of crazy with it.

Amy: Yeah, they go nuts.

Curtis: Yeah, they put fountains up and all sorts of stuff.

Amy: Yeah, like they'll have their little flower beds around the fountain and, yeah, I mean, depending. You can go really extreme with landscaping. But for the average person--we will call ourselves average people here--so, we had a yard when we had our house. And one of the reasons why we actually decided that we wanted to buy this house was because it had a yard.

Curtis: Yes.

Amy: Previously, we lived in an apartment and we didn't have an outdoor space, right?

Curtis: Yeah. It was a way to get outdoors. So we were really excited about it, because in an apartment, you can't do that.

Amy: No, you just have to leave the house or, you know, maybe you're sitting outside but it's just concrete all around you. So it's a way of feeling like you're getting outside and enjoying the day and making your house look really pretty.

So let's start with, for example, spring comes. Things start to grow, okay? Because over the winter, of course, all the trees, they've dropped their leaves and everything dies because it's cold. At least in the northern parts, like Canada for sure. But the northern part of the United States. I mean, it gets cold enough that everything goes dormant over the winter and stops growing. So what is the first thing that people do?

Curtis: They mow their lawn and they rake their lawn. They start to get all their garden tools ready.

Amy: Yeah, like for example, preparing the garden, there is a tool that turns over the dirt.

Curtis: Oh, yeah.

Amy: A rototiller. And you'll see some guy out there with this big machine just mixing up the dirt, trying to make it ready so that when he's able to plant the seeds in his garden, he can just go right to work on it.

Section 2 Transcription:

Amy: We had a garden. What did we grow in our garden?

Curtis: We grew food in our garden, like carrots, onions, we grew peas, potatoes. We had like four rows of potatoes, I think.

Amy: Do you remember when we--the first year, do you remember the squash?

Curtis: Oh, wow. It basically took up the whole garden, didn't it?

Amy: And half the lawn. This crazy squash. I don't know. We must have very, very fertile soil in this garden, because this one single plant produced probably 70 pounds of squash. And the vines went everywhere. Like everywhere you can imagine.

Curtis: We said we had magical dirt.

Amy: Yeah. We had squash coming out of our ears. It was crazy. But something else that we decided to plant the first year that we had our yard was a raspberry patch, which we've mentioned in another conversation. The first year that we planted the raspberry patch, what did it look like?

Curtis: It was just a small section of raspberries.

Amy: But it was like a couple sticks. And then the next year there were a few more. And then the next year it turned into this mountain of leaves and raspberry--oh, geez, I forgot the word.

Curtis: Canes.

Amy: Canes. Yeah, raspberry canes. See, even native speakers forget words. And it was crazy the amount of raspberries that this raspberry bush produced. It was fantastic having this fresh fruit available. So why--like gardening is a lot of work. Why did we do it? Or why was --what did we enjoy getting out there and having dirty hands and a sore back and pulling weeds and all that stuff. Why did we do it?

Curtis: Because we knew where the food was coming from. We knew that we were growing it, it was organic. There was no chemical enhancements to it. It was delicious and it was really nice outside, too. So getting out and breathing in the fresh air, it was a nice thing to do as well,.

Amy: I think it's really cool watching things grow. And the first time that you plant something and you're not an experienced gardener, you poke some holes in the soil or draw a line and drop the seeds in this area that you want this vegetable to grow. And some of the seeds sprout right away. And other seeds take a couple weeks, even a month before they come up. The conditions have to be just right for that seed. You have to give it water. And at first you can't really identify if it looks like it's a weed or if it's an actual plant.

Curtis: That's true.

Amy: But as you become a more experienced gardener and you remember what that little carrot looked like when it started to grow, the next year, you know immediately when your carrot seeds are starting to sprout, because you recognize them. And you see that little tiny seed that was just a small green little sprout turn into this vegetable that you can eat. And it's really rewarding being able to grow something and then cook a meal.

Curtis: Yeah. It was almost like this food had so much flavour to it. You know, when you grow something it tastes better, I think.

Amy: Um-hum. Especially carrots. Garden carrots are way better than store bought carrots.

Curtis: They're sweeter.

Amy: Yeah. They're sweeter and they have this earthy flavor to them. I don't know--I don't know what's different about it, but, you know, when you grow the vegetables yourself, or the fruit yourself, it's almost like you can taste the love inside of the food.

Section 3 Transcription:

Amy: Now you have a friend that's a gardener.

Curtis: Yes. My best friend is a--he's a farmer. So he just has this chunk of land that's huge. And he grows so much on it.

Amy: So he's a farmer. We'd consider him a farmer, because his garden is just bigger than like a garden you would have in your backyard, for example, a small area. His is like a large garden, very large.

Curtis: Very, very large. Yeah. And wow, he has double of everything that we had in our garden, plus more. He had greens, which are things that you can make salads out of. So like lettuce or kale or ...

Amy: Even dandelion leaves, which dandelions are considered to be a weed. But the leaves are actually edible. So he'd grow those specifically to be able to harvest the leaves for salads and stuff like that.

Curtis: I remember going to his house and he would take things off of flowers and leaves and he would just eat them.

Amy: Yeah, exactly.

Curtis: Right out of the garden.

Amy: Yeah. He knew exactly what he had to eat. Or what he could eat. And what's really cool about Sebo actually is his garden is an organic garden. So his farm he does organic farming. And this means they don't actually use any chemicals or pesticides and it's really, really healthy. And you can be confident that when you're eating organic food that, I don't know, it's just better for you, it has more nutrients and stuff like that. So, yeah, it's really cool knowing somebody who is so knowledgeable about the nutrition behind the plants and the gardening practices and how to get the most out of your crop when you're growing.

Curtis: He's really proud of his garden.

Amy: Yeah, oh, yeah. Like you have to go on a garden tour every time you show up. He's like, "oh, come check this out!" And he's talking about whatever is ready and he's eating it right out of the garden and, you know, probably dirt on it still. He doesn't care.

And this is the English Conversation Tip:

Curtis: Okay. For today's Real English tip, we're going to talk about a very common problem that we're hearing a lot. And I actually heard this from a Facebook message. Hi, Curtis. I'm really having a hard time speaking in English. And I can't find anyone to practice with, especially a native speaker. Can you help me? What is your solution to this problem?

Amy: Okay. So this is something, yes, that we hear very, very frequently because as you know, there are English learners from all around the world and English is not the native language obviously of the other people that are around them. And even worse, in some countries they are not tourist destinations. Or people are living in small towns where they hardly ever see a native speaker. So what has happened is somewhere in this process of learning English, you have seen over and over again this message about the best way to improve your speaking is to speak with a native speaker. And even better is to go to a country that speaks English and spend a few months there to really get immersed. And the truth is that these options are not options for a lot of people. And they're actually letting this become an obstacle between them reaching their goals of fluency, not only with listening, reading and writing, but speaking fluently. Because they're not accepting that there may be another option that they have to take. And it might not be something that they've really considered or heard about before.

So I think once you realize that you're not going to find a free native speaker to practice with, okay. That's number one. Accept it, move on. How am I going to get to fluency? Okay. What I did when I was in this situation, I was living in Canada and I was working on learning Spanish. And nobody speaks Spanish in Canada. Like some people maybe are there, but it's very rare to find a Spanish speaker to practice with.

Curtis: Very few.

Amy: And with my work schedule--actually, I had the opportunity to have a couple language exchange partners. However, my work schedule made it very difficult to find time to practice with them. So I had a very similar problem. And I can tell you that the only reason why I became a more confident speaker and able to handle myself in everyday situations in Spanish was because of the speaking practice I did by myself.

Now, I can tell you when I first started speaking by myself, my techniques were not very good, because I didn't know what I was doing. And like you, I didn't find anything online, so I had to get creative about how to practice. And through this process I actually discovered some really cool techniques that helped my pronunciation, my ability to speak faster. My fluency technique is probably my favourite one, because it makes you feel so good after you do the exercise. You know, you start and you're terrible at speaking. And then at the end of it you're like "Woo! I'm fluent! Look at me go!" And it's a great confidence booster.

And I did those things and it really helped me to reach my goals. I took control of my speaking practice. Practised it as much as I needed to to reach my goals. And I was able to do that without practising very often with a native speaker.

So for you, you could, you know, hire someone maybe for a private lesson once a month. And the rest of the time be doing speaking practice on your own.

Now, you're probably saying, "Well, where do I get these techniques that you did, Amy? Which ones worked for you? How can I do those same techniques?" Good question. Last year I actually spent several months putting together a speaking course that is specifically designed to help intermediate to advanced students really reach a high advanced level and be able to explain things with the detail that they want, be able to give your opinion, tell stories, really be able to respond automatically the way you want to and sound really natural doing it. Because as you know, our conversation lessons are the base of what we do. So you're going to have--we incorporate that into the speaking activities to make sure that you're not speaking like a text book.

And, you know, if you're this person that really, really needs to improve their speaking and you don't know what to do, you can't travel to another country, you don't have a native speaker that's willing to practice with you as much as you want to practice and hiring someone to practice through private lessons for the hundreds of hours you're going to need to practice speaking is not--it's not an option. If this is you, you need to come to our website and check out our speaking course, because for less than the cost of five private lessons, you're getting access to hundreds of hours of speaking practice activities that are actually making you think in English and develop the same skills that you're going to need for communication.

Curtis: Yeah. You'll see it all there under the Courses button at RealEnglishConversations.com.

Amy: And you'll be able to opt in to try one of those conversation speaking lessons. There'll be something there. So just go to the website, check it out. And let's get your speaking under control and help you reach your goals faster.

Speaking Practice

Now that you practiced answering the questions while listening to the conversation, you can practice giving the answers by speaking out loud. (The questions are at the beginning of this document)

While you trying to answer the questions (by speaking), you may need to look up words you don't know yet or you have forgotten. This is very important to help you learn the vocabulary you are missing while you are speaking or you do not know very well.

If you have to look up a word, be sure to write it down. There is an area for you to write down words you need to know or have learned. Later, we are going to give you activities to practice using this new vocabulary to help you remember it faster.

Practice Activities

Try to answer the questions by speaking from the listening comprehension section? Try to use a full sentence when you answer, not just one word like 'yes' or 'no'.

For example

Question #1: Where are Amy and Curtis from?

Answer: Canada

Your spoken answer in a full sentence: Curtis and Amy are from Canada.

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Let's Talk about this Conversation

Give as much detail as you can when trying to answer the following questions. Try to speak for 3 to 5 minutes for each answer. Don't forget to write down new words you realize you need to know in order to explain these parts of the conversation.

Practice your answer to these questions several times until you feel confident using the vocabulary and you can explain it more fluently.

1. Explain some of the ways people landscape their yard?
2. How do people prepare their gardens to grow things?
3. Explain Amy and Curtis's garden and the things they grew.
4. Explain why people like growing their own food?
5. What is the difference between a gardener and a farmer?
6. Describe Sebo's farm and why organic food is better.

The Big Summary

Now that you have practiced explaining each part of the conversation, try to do a summary that explains the whole conversation.

Try to speak as if you are telling a friend about a cool conversation you heard. Try to sound interesting while you talk about it.

The first time you might feel like you are explaining the story in a boring way... you need to practice explaining it several times to get better at telling stories and explaining things better.

Each time you practice explaining it, you will feel more confident using the new vocabulary and you will be speaking with more fluency.

Vocabulary Practice

This is an exercise to help you practice using the new vocabulary you have learned. A great way to make sure you understand the words well enough to use them.

1. Use the first 5 words from your list of words you found from this conversation (or the activities).
2. While speaking, start telling a short story where the first sentence of the story uses the first word on your list.
3. After you use the first word, you need to think of a way to use the second word in the story...
4. The story does not have to be real and it does not have to make a lot of sense. The objective is to practice using the new words you have learned in context

Example words:

- carnival
- pack into (phrasal verb)
- lap
- get down (phrasal verb)
- vibrant

Example story:

I was really excited to go to carnival this year. My friends and I decided to pack everyone into Bob's truck. There was no extra space in the car so we had to put our stuff on our laps. When we arrived to the city, we could not wait to get down to the party area. We knew it would be vibrant and full of festivities.