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PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

In this unit you will:

- learn about 'prior knowledge'
- discover what it is like to listen both with and without prior knowledge
- investigate whether what you have read about a topic affects your note-taking

DISCUSSION

Thinking about prior knowledge

1. What do you think 'prior knowledge' means?
2. What sort of prior knowledge might be relevant when you listen to a lecture?
3. How could prior knowledge be dangerous?

TASK 1

1.1 Cover the words in 1.2 before you do this task.

Listen to the tape and take notes of the speaker's main points. What was the lecturer talking about? Would you be able to write a summary from your notes?

1.2 Look at the following made-up 'words' and phrases which you heard on the tape. Notice that the words are 'fun words' — they are not real English words!

Spend a few minutes learning their 'meaning'.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word or phrase</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dinginess</td>
<td>boldness; aggressiveness in the marketplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gabbability</td>
<td>flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the legical forms of control</td>
<td>the traditional restrictions on employees'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>freedom to make decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noobling permits</td>
<td>newly-developed financial markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a shinger</td>
<td>a coward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his stogglement on developments</td>
<td>his influence on what happened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trantable for</td>
<td>responsible for</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3 Listen to the tape again and add to your notes from 1.1.

1.4 Review your notes, then compare your second set of notes with the notes you took in 1.1. Was it easier to take notes when you knew more of the vocabulary?

- **Soundbite**
  
  *If you do not know the concepts or the vocabulary, listening will be more difficult.*

**TASK 2**

2.1 You're now going to try out this idea of prior knowledge with real words and a real lecture. The two extracts you will hear come from an education lecture. The topic is *Learning and remembering*.

Read the following phrases. Discuss their meaning and what they suggest the lecturer will talk about.

- the concept of attention
- like a torch
- part of short-term memory
- think about the metaphor
- focusing on things and ignoring other things
- hearing and not hearing
- you're processing what you're focusing on
- what is ignored is not processed
- this is where the second theory comes in
- theories ... about how memory is used in general
- fundamental distinction between ... long-term and ... short-term memory
- you're mentally repeating the number in ... short-term memory
Listening

short-term memory is the active part of long-term memory within short-term memory, you have attention three concentric circles attention ... is the part of short-term memory that is in focus

2.2 The extract deals with two theories of attention. What does this suggest to you about a suitable note-taking style?

2.3 Review your notes, then compare them with other students’ notes.

2.4 Identify the main ideas from your notes and write a five or six sentence summary of what you heard.

2.5 Look at these phrases which you will hear in the next part of the lecture. Discuss their meaning and the ideas that they suggest to you.

psychological experiment

2.6 Review your notes, then identify the main ideas from your complete set of notes and write a summary of what the lecturer said.

Now listen to the extract and take notes. Do not look at the phrases in 2.1 while you are listening.

Did the pre-listening discussion of vocabulary and ideas help you to understand and take good notes?

Listen to the next section of the tape and continue your notes.

Did the pre-listening discussion of vocabulary and ideas help you to understand, complete your notes satisfactorily and write an accurate summary?
TASK 3

3.1 Read either Text 1 (on page 66) or Text 2 (on page 67). Make sure you understand the vocabulary.

3.2 Discuss what you have understood with others who have read the same text.

3.3 Listen to the tape and note down what you think are the important ideas and information.

3.4 Review your notes, then compare them with those of someone who read a different text from you and discuss the following questions:

- Have you recorded the same main ideas?
- Do you think your notes and your understanding of the extract were affected by the reading you did before you listened? If so, how?

[Soundbite]

- Your understanding of a lecture may be affected by what you expect to hear.

THE REFLECTIVE LEARNER

In this unit you have evaluated the effect of prior knowledge, both of vocabulary and of content, on your understanding. You have also been able to see whether information you have read before a lecture changes what you write in your notes.

When you listen to a lecture, you will find it easier to understand what you hear if you have done some reading beforehand.

Questions for your diary
1. What will you do to make sure that you have maximum prior knowledge before attending a lecture?
2. What opportunities can you find at the moment to practise reading and then listening to a lecture?
3. Apart from reading, how else can you prepare to listen to a lecture?
TASK 3.1 — TEXT 1

Aristotle and Newton

A major early figure in the history of science was Aristotle, a Greek philosopher who lived in the 4th century B.C. About two thousand years later, Isaac Newton (1642-1727) conceived his influential scientific ideas in England. Both Aristotle and Newton developed theories to explain the nature of motion and matter.

Aristotle believed that the natural state of bodies was one of rest. According to his theory, a material object would remain at rest unless an external force acted to move it. He thought that everything in the universe had its natural place and this meant remaining in one place. Newton, on the other hand, believed that the natural state was one of motion and that any material object would move unless something acted on it to stop it. He thought that a state of rest was not the natural one — rather, it was to be perceived as an exception to the general rule about material objects always being in a state of motion.

Aristotle’s idea seemed to be based on common sense but Newton showed that we cannot claim that science is only what T.H. Huxley, writing in the latter half of the 19th century, called ‘trained and organised common sense’. If that is all it is, then Aristotle’s common-sense idea would have been right, and Newton would have been wrong. But our present scientific understanding leads us to believe that Newton’s first law of motion describes the world more accurately. Far from any comfortable notion of being able to explain any laws of nature through the application of common sense, Newton apparently claimed he felt like a small child playing with pebbles on the shores of a vast sea of knowledge.
Task 3.1 — Text 2

Thomas Kuhn

Thomas Kuhn was a 20th century philosopher of science who was very influential in changing the way people think about science. Most people are probably familiar with the term 'paradigm shift', but they may not know that it was Kuhn who invented the term. Kuhn defined a scientific paradigm as a 'constellation of achievements — concepts, values, techniques etc. — shared by a scientific community and used by that community to define legitimate problems and solutions' (Kuhn 1962). At any one time, science was seen as operating within commonly agreed norms of practice and social acceptability. For example, there was a dramatic change in the concepts and ideas of physics in the early part of the 20th century. The mechanistic views of Descartes and Newton were challenged by revelations about the sub-atomic world. The old concepts and methods of science were inadequate to explain these new phenomena. This required a change in thinking, described by Kuhn as a 'paradigm shift', which did not mean a complete dismissal of everything that had come before but, rather, a progression.

Kuhn suggested that scientists operate within current paradigms, which may be influenced by social, religious or moral factors. While science, in his view, was not arbitrary in its development, scientists do not stand entirely outside the society to which they belong. Thus, the paradigm shift which led to the emergence of quantum physics may be viewed in the light of a broad climate of cultural uncertainty in the first decades of the 20th century.

Kuhn's theory created an enormous amount of controversy and debate. In fact, as well as being the most frequently cited academic book of recent decades, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions may well go down in history as the most misunderstood one of the 20th century.