

## 9.3 Inference in listening

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Total: 11 marks

### Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **inference in listening** 听力中的推断 — working out what a speaker means when they do not say it.

**You must be able to:**

- infer a speaker's meaning from tone, hesitation and what they avoid saying
- recognise polite refusal and indirect criticism
- choose the option that the speaker implies rather than the words they used

### 1 Worked examples

#### ■ People rarely say the hard thing directly

*"The food was... interesting. Very filling."*

The pause and the choice of *interesting* imply the speaker did not enjoy it. Nothing negative was said.

#### ■ Common indirect moves

- **Polite refusal:** *I'd love to, but I've got quite a lot on that week.* → No.
- **Indirect criticism:** *It's certainly different from the last one.* → Worse.
- **Reluctance:** *I could do, I suppose, if nobody else can.* → Would rather not.
- **Doubt about someone:** *He's very confident.* → Possibly overconfident.
- **Softened disagreement:** *That's one way of looking at it.* → I disagree.

#### ■ The exam question shape

Multiple-choice listening questions often set a **literal** option against an **implied** one:

*What does the speaker think of the new bus route?* **A** It is convenient. **B** It is too expensive. **C** It does not go where she needs. **D** She has not used it.

*"Oh, the new route's very convenient — if you happen to live near the station."*

The literal word *convenient* points to A. The implication of *if you happen to live near the station* — and she does not — points to C.

### ■ The rule

Ask what the speaker WANTS the listener to understand, not which words appeared. And when a sentence ends with a qualification (*if...*, *though...*, *for some people...*), that qualification usually carries the real meaning.

## 2 Practice

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For each extract, write what the speaker really means.

**2.1** “Would you like to come to the concert on Friday?” — “Friday... I’ve got quite a lot to finish this week.” [1]

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**2.2** “How was the film?” — “Well, the cinema was comfortable.” [1]

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**2.3** “Do you think we should ask Marco to lead it?” — “He’s certainly keen.” [1]

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**2.4** “The new system is much faster — once you’ve spent a week learning it.” [2]

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## 3 Exam-style questions

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**3.1** What does the speaker think of the restaurant?

“It’s very reasonably priced, and the staff couldn’t be friendlier. We waited fifty minutes for a sandwich.”

- **A** It is good value.
  - **B** The staff are rude.
  - **C** The service is too slow.
  - **D** She will go back often.
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**3.2** Explain how you chose your answer to 3.1, and why option A is a trap. [2]

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**3.3** Write an indirect way of saying each of the following.

[3]

(a) “I don’t want to help with this.”

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(b) “Your idea will not work.”

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(c) “I did not enjoy the meal.”

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## Solutions

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**2.1** They are refusing politely / do not want to go.

**2.2** They did not like the film — praising the cinema instead of the film implies there was nothing good to say about it.

**2.3** They have doubts about Marco — “certainly keen” praises his enthusiasm and pointedly not his ability.

**2.4** The speaker thinks the system is fast but that the week of learning is a real cost, so the improvement is not as straightforward as it sounds.

**3.1** C.

**3.2** The first two clauses are genuine praise, but the final sentence — a fifty-minute wait for a sandwich — is placed last and undercuts them, which is where the speaker’s real point sits. A is a trap because the words “very reasonably priced” appear literally, and a listener matching words rather than meaning will choose it.

**3.3** Any plausible indirect version, e.g. (a) “I could, I suppose, if nobody else is free.” (b) “That’s certainly one approach — how would it handle the busy period?” (c) “The portions were generous.”