

9.3 Inference in listening

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 10 marks**

KEY WORDS inference in listening 听力中的推断 • multiple-choice 选择题

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

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]

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

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

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

3 Exam-style questions

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.

3.2 Explain how you chose your answer to 3.1, and why option A is a trap. [2]

3.3 Write an indirect way of saying each of the following. [3]

(a) “I don’t want to help with this.”

(b) “Your idea will not work.”

(c) “I did not enjoy the meal.”

Solutions

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.”