

How to Make Books on Tape Your Best Friends

by **Linda G. Tessler, Ph.D.**, Psychologist, Bryn Mawr, PA

I often tell my personal story of living with dyslexia. When I do, my goal is always the same. I want people with dyslexia to understand there is nothing special about me that enabled me to achieve my goals. After years of school, I eventually earned a doctorate in psychological studies and now have a private practice specializing in helping people with learning differences. **If I could do it, so can the next person with dyslexia** who has the determination to succeed.

I also tell my story in order to share my discovery of and experience with books on tape. They are the most valuable aid there is for learners like myself. But only when the student knows how to adapt listening to tapes to his/her personal learning style. **The key to success is making a match between your special learning style and books on tape.** Unfortunately, I did not know this when I first discovered taped books.

In truth, **my first experience with a recorded book was a dismal failure.** At age 33, I happened to hear about dyslexia and took myself to be tested. Then, armed with the new knowledge that I am severely dyslexic, I began searching for something to help me learn. My search led to books on tape. I love art and ordered a taped art book. Without any guidance, I put the tape in the player, started listening and just couldn't grasp it.

I now understand that every person has a perceptual dominance in the way they learn. That is, every person's learning process relies primarily on visual perception, auditory perception **or kinesthetics, which is activity.**

I, like most dyslexics, exhibit a dominant kinesthetic learning style. Therefore, just listening to a tape is at times ineffective. I must incorporate an activity with listening. In other words, **I have to find something to do while listening.**

The "doing" is what dyslexics must personalize. For me, it means following the words in a difficult book. With an easy book, I might just browse through the book as the tape plays while circling the names of characters, dates and places. What I do, however, will not necessarily work for the next person. **Every person must go through a period of trial and error to discover an "ActivityListening" combination that works.**

In addition, a person who has difficulty paying attention to tapes may actually find it helpful to do an unrelated activity while listening. I often listen to books on tape while driving a car, cooking, straightening up or taking a walk. My students agree, and have **a whole list of favorite activities that are good backdrops to listening**, such as jogging, drawing, knitting or doing hand work, or, for young children, building with legos.

I have also learned that listening to taped texts is a skill. **As with any skill, it takes practice.** The fact is, the more books you listen to, the better listener you become. In addition, each time you listen, you must be prepared for a warm-up period of getting adjusted to listening. Generally, you're a better listener after 10 minutes than during the first few minutes.

Also, it is crucial that first-time readers begin with easy, short books to turn them onto the process.

While the "how to" of books on tape is very personal, there are certain steps that are helpful to many learners. First, browse through your book before listening. As you browse, **use clues such as titles, sub-titles, illustrations and photographs** to get an idea of what you're about to hear.

As you listen, it's a good idea to use visual aids. That is, **use markers to highlight, star or circle important information**. Then, do something with the information. For example, you may find it helpful to draw a concept chart. Whatever you do will make it easier to build on the next layer of information. Also, let repetition be part of your listening habit. Not everything must be repeated. But re-wind to important or difficult sections and listen again if it helps.

Finally, be organized. Those of us with learning disabilities need a place – a basket or backpack – to keep our paraphernalia, including the tape recorder, the current and next tape on our agenda, earphones, pencil, highlighter, notebook, post-it pads, and especially spare batteries. More than one tape recorder is ideal in case one breaks. The point is, once we start to concentrate, it's important that nothing interrupts our concentration.

In my professional practice I've made converts out of many students who were convinced books on tape could not work for them. I have helped them get comfortable with the tape recorder and discover their optimum "Activity-Listening" mode. They now agree that, **while learning is never easy, books on tape will be your best friends** if you take the time to make the friendship work.

Article Summary

1. Be An Active Listener

Before you begin to listen to the book look to see what you're reading. **Use the clues — titles, subtitles, pictures.**

Add Visual Learning

Have a Magic Marker in hand to highlight, star or circle important information/names, dates, places, key information.

Add Kinesthetic Learning

Write a summary or draw a concept chart of what you are reading.

Add Auditory Learning

Use the re-wind key. Listen to important sections again.

2. Avoid the Organizational Pitfalls

We need a lot of things to read. Use a basket or backpack or having a reading corner in your room.

Keep there the tape recorder, the next tape you need to listen to, earphones, pencil, highlighter, notebook and a spare battery.

Have more than one tape recorder if one breaks.

The tape recorders are not heavy duty. Try not to drop them. Zip up the case so that when you walk around it doesn't drop out.

3. Things To Be Aware Of

The more books you listen to the better listener you'll be.

Each time you listen to a tape there is a warm up phenomenon. In other words you are going to be a better listener after 20 minutes than you are after 5 minutes.

Get a new listener turned on by making sure they listen to something fun. Give them a short fun book.

©Copyright Tessler, Summer, 1998