

# Exercise walk-through

Inference in listening ■ 9.3

eXercise

## 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

## Method — 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.

## Method — 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.

## Method — 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**.

## Method — 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.

## Practice 2.1 ■ 1 mark

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

## Solution 2.1

Method: Common indirect moves

### Worked steps

They are refusing politely / do not want to go **B1**.

## Practice 2.2 ■ 1 mark

“How was the film?” — “Well, the cinema was comfortable.”

## Solution 2.2

### Worked steps

They did not like the film — praising the cinema instead of the film implies there was nothing good to say about it **B1**.

## Practice 2.3 ■ 1 mark

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

## Solution 2.3

### Worked steps

They have doubts about Marco — “certainly keen” praises his enthusiasm and pointedly not his ability **B1**.

## Practice 2.4 ■ 2 marks

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

## Solution 2.4

### Worked steps

The speaker thinks the system is fast **B1** but that the week of learning is a real cost, so the improvement is not as straightforward as it sounds **B1**.

## Exam-style 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.

## Solution 3.1

Method: The exam question shape

- A It is good value.
- B The staff are rude.
- C The service is too slow. 
- D She will go back often.

### Worked steps

C.

## Exam-style 3.2 ■ 2 marks

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

## Solution 3.2

### Worked steps

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 **B1**. A is a trap because the words “very reasonably priced” appear literally, and a listener matching words rather than meaning will choose it **B1**.

## Exam-style 3.3 ■ 3 marks

Write an indirect way of saying each of the following.

- (a) "I don't want to help with this."
- (b) "Your idea will not work."
- (c) "I did not enjoy the meal."

## Solution 3.3

### Worked steps

Any plausible indirect version **B1** *each*, 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.”