

LISTENING SKILLS

“The World is giving you answers each day. Learn to LISTEN.”

Definition

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is a skill of critical significance in all aspects of our lives--from maintaining our personal relationships, to getting our jobs done, to taking notes in class, to figuring out which bus to take to the airport.

Regardless of how we are engaged with listening, it is important to understand that listening involves more than just hearing the words that are directed at us.

Listening is not the same as ‘Hearing’

Hearing refers to the sounds that you hear, whereas listening requires more than that: it requires focus. Listening means paying attention not only to the story, but how it is told, the use of language and voice, and how the other person uses his or her body. In other words, it means being aware of both verbal and nonverbal messages. Your ability to listen effectively depends on the degree to which you perceive and understand these messages.

Significance

Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.

Listening skills are an important part of effective communication. Last week's feature focused on communication skills and their importance in the workplace. Hearing is the physical ability, while listening is a skill. Listening skills allow one to make sense of and understand what another person is saying.

“Are you listening to me?” This question is often asked because the speaker thinks the listener is nodding off or daydreaming. You may have heard the adage, “We have two ears but only one mouth”—an easy way to remember that listening can be twice as important as talking.

The ability to actively listen demonstrates sincerity, and that nothing is being assumed or taken for granted. Active listening is most often used to improve personal relationships, reduce misunderstanding and conflicts, strengthen cooperation, and foster understanding.

Stages of Listening

The listening process involves five stages: *receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding*. These stages will be discussed in more detail in later sections. Basically, an effective listener must hear and identify the speech sounds directed toward them, understand the message of those sounds, critically evaluate or assess that message, remember what has been said, and respond (either verbally or nonverbally) to information they have received.

1. Receiving

This is the first and most basic stage of the listening process: the act of actually absorbing the information being expressed to you, whether verbally or nonverbally. Not all communication is done through speech, and not all listening is done with ears.

Focus all of your energy on them, by following these three simple tips:

Avoid distractions. This is obvious. Don't have your cell phone out, or your iPod in, or the television on. Don't try to divide your attention between the speaker and something else.

Don't interrupt the speaker. You might want to make an assumption about what the speaker is saying, or what they're about to say – don't. It's rude, and you may find your assumption was wrong, which is beneficial to no one

Don't rehearse your response. Not *yet*. At this stage, your job is only to listen. If you start to plan a speech while the other person is speaking, you're going to miss certain points and not be able to respond to their larger message when it's your turn to talk.

2. Understanding

This is the point in the listening process where you're able to plan your response. Understanding takes place after you've received the information from the speaker, and begin to process its meaning.

You can do this by asking questions, or rephrasing parts of the speaker's message. This allows you to demonstrate your active engagement with their words, *and* help you better understand their key points.

3. Remembering

Remembering is about retaining that information, and the most effective way to do so in an important conversation is to move the key elements of a message from your short-term memory, and into your long-term memory.

There are numerous methods for doing this

Identify the fundamental points. By converting a collection of small details into a central theme, you're able to create something potentially complicated into an easy-to-grasp general concept. The details will remain in your short-term memory, but isolating the main ideas will help you understand them better, and remember them longer.

Make the message familiar. If the speaker touches some old memories and past experiences, it becomes easy to retain the attention of the listener. Use those to help you retain incoming information as a listener.

4. Evaluating

It's at this stage where you can begin to prepare for your response, but remember: you're still a listener, not a speaker. After the message has been absorbed, processed, and remembered, you can begin to sort the information into pieces.

What is fact, and what is opinion?

What parts of their message were interpreted, and which parts were unbiased?

What was the speaker's intent with their message?

After interpreting the speaker's message, through a combination of understanding, retention, and evaluation, you're ready to form a response.

5. Responding

If you've completed the receiving, understanding, remembering, and evaluating portions of the listening process, responding should be easier than ever. It's important to understand the transition between listening and speaking though, and be aware of the ways responding is still a part of the active listening process.

Don't complete the speaker's sentences. This is a presumptuous and rude way to segue into your own response. It impedes on the receiving process, and will make the original speaker want to listen to you less.

Address the speaker's points. It will make it easier for the speaker to transition into a listener when they know exactly what part of their message you're addressing.

ESSENTIALS OF LISTENING SKILLS

A conversation requires concentrated listening. Many people assume they know how to listen. However, these people may be mistaking just hearing for effective listening. Listening does require hearing, but it also requires interpretation and understanding – in other words, two-way communication.

Listening effectively enables you to better understand and interpret what someone is saying. For example, you'll know what your manager needs from you only if you listen attentively. This can help you improve productivity and avoid mistakes.

If you listen effectively, you're able to show your coworkers that you're interested in and have respect for what they have to say. You encourage them to do the same and so develop mutual respect, which fosters strong and smooth work relationships.

The ability to listen effectively also means opening your mind to new experiences. You learn constantly and other people's thoughts, knowledge, or ideas will inspire your thinking and encourage you to be more innovative.

Different types of listeners

You can group different types of listeners into four main categories:

Non-listeners

A non-listener doesn't intend to listen to you, doesn't hear, and doesn't make an effort to pay attention. The non-listener would rather do all the talking. As a result, this person constantly interrupts the speaker and always attempts to have the last word. A non-listener may offer you blank stares and demonstrate nervous mannerisms while you're speaking, and may even fake attention during a conversation. However, it will become clear that this person isn't paying attention when they respond incorrectly or inappropriately. Non-listeners are generally not liked because their lack of effort shows a lack of respect for what others have to say.

Superficial listeners

A superficial listener hears what you're saying but doesn't grasp the point you're making. A superficial listener listens only for the basic meaning of the spoken words and takes no notice of body language, voice tone, and other subtle forms of communication. Most often, superficial listeners are busy thinking about what they want to say next. You might get the impression that they do understand what you're saying, which can lead to confusion and mistakes. People who listen superficially often search for an excuse to avoid conversation or difficult discussions.

Logical listeners

Logical listeners make an effort to hear what you're saying and to comprehend the meaning of the actual words. However, they don't understand your intent or the meaning behind your words. Because they don't receive messages from vocal intonation, body language, or facial expressions, they miss important components of what a speaker is trying to communicate. Logical listeners need to concentrate more on the nonverbal communication accompanying speech.

Active listeners

Listening actively requires concentration and emotional effort. Active listeners won't judge you as you speak, but will try their best to understand what you're saying and why you're saying it. In other words, they'll respect your point of view. They'll listen

for the intent and emotions behind the words so that they can better understand your line of thought.

In summary, listening effectively is very important in the workplace. It helps you improve productivity and build smoother relationships. Listening effectively also helps you collaborate more easily and become more innovative. There are four types of listeners, each with a different level of listening skill. A non-listener doesn't make an effort to hear what you say, and a superficial listener hears but doesn't grasp the points being made. A logical listener understands the meaning of the words but not the intent behind them. An active listener has the highest level of listening skill, and understands both the meaning of the words and the intent behind them.

BARRIERS TO LISTENING:

As pointed out earlier, listening is not easy and there are a number of obstacles that stand in the way of effective listening, both within and outside the workplace. These barriers may be categorized as follows.

1. Physiological Barriers:

Physiology means the state of human body and mind. Physiological barriers of communication occur due to the physical condition of sender or receiver which might even be physical disabilities. It includes sensory dysfunction and other physical dysfunctions.

2. Physical Barriers:

Physical barrier is the environmental and natural condition that act as a barrier in communication in sending message from sender to receiver. Organizational environment or interior workspace design problems, technological problems and noise are the parts of physical barriers.

These are referred to distraction in the environment such as the sound of an air conditioner, cigarette smoke, or an overheated room, which interfere with the listening process. They could also be in the form of information overload.

3. Attitudinal Barriers:

Attitudes are commonly formed by an individual's opinions or personal feelings on a subject or person and can be difficult to alter. When attitudinal barriers override the sense of professionalism in a workplace, it can become difficult for a group to engage in productive communication.

One attitudinal barrier is pre occupation. It means the state or condition of being preoccupied or engrossed with something. This results in the difficulty to focus one's attention completely on what speaker is saying. Another common attitudinal barrier is egocentrism, or the belief that you are more knowledgeable than the speaker and that you have nothing new to learn from his ideas. People with this kind of close minded attitude may very poor listeners.

4. Wrong Assumptions:

The success of communication depends on the both the sender and receiver. It is wrong to assume that communication is the sole responsibility of the sender or the speaker and those listeners have no role to play. Such an assumption can create a barrier to listening. For example, a brilliant speech or presentation, however well delivered, is wasted if the receiver is not listening at the other end. Listeners have as much responsibility as speakers to make the communication successful, by paying attention seeking clarifications and giving feedback.

Another wrong assumption is to think that listening is a passive activity, in which a listener merely hears the thoughts of the speaker. On the contrary, real listening or active listening is hard work- it requires speaking sometimes to ask questions, agree or disagree with the speaker, give feedback etc.

5. Cultural Barriers:

Wherever we live, you're going to be influenced by the attitudes, customs and practices of the people around us. Those basic elements are the definition of culture. When a person of one culture encounters the beliefs and resulting actions of another culture, a clash can occur. This is known as cultural barrier.

Accents can be barriers to listening, since they interfere with the ability to understand the meaning of words that are pronounced differently. Another type of cultural barrier

is doddering cultural values. The importance attached to listening and speaking differs in western and oriental cultures. Generally,

6. Gender Barriers:

Communication research has shown that gender can be barrier to listening. Studies have revealed that men and women listen very differently and for different purposes. Women are more likely to listen for the emotion behind a speaker's words, when men listen more for the facts and the content. Example:- a salesperson giving a demonstration of a new type of office equipment may be asked by two colleagues if the equipment will work without problem and respond by saying "sure". A male user may take this at face value, whereas the female user may detect some hesitation in his voice. This is because the male users listen for the content of the message, whereas the female users listen for the tone of the message.

7. Lack of Training:

Listening is not an inborn skill. People are not born good listeners. They have to develop the art of listening through practice and training. Lack of training in listening skills is an important barrier to listening, in the Indian context.

8. Bad Listening Hobbits:

Most people are very average listeners who have developed poor listening habits that are hard to said and that act as barriers to listening. For example, some people have the habits of "faking" attention, or trying to look like a listeners, in order to impress the speaker and to assure him that they are paying attention. Others may tend to listen to each and every fact and, as a result, mis out on the main point.

9. Bringing in Emotions:

Emotions erect barriers to effective communication. A listener's senses are not likely to be functioning at their optimum level when he or she is angry. Likewise, it is not possible to understand or appreciate what the speaker is saying if the listener is excessively sad.

10. Fear

Fear is a great barrier to listening. People who are afraid during a conversation are not likely to listen. They become defensive and tend to argue.

Tips to overcome fear:

Be aware that fear can only worsen the situation. Listen to what the other person is about to say without fear.

Keeping calm will give you mental strength to face any situation.

Taking a deep breath helps in overcoming fear.

EFFECTIVENESS OF LISTENING

In today's high-tech, high-speed, high-stress world, communication is more important than ever, yet we seem to devote less and less time to really listening to one another. Genuine listening has become a rare gift—the gift of time. It helps build relationships, solve problems, ensure understanding, resolve conflicts, and improve accuracy. At work, effective listening means fewer errors and less wasted time. At home, it helps develop resourceful, self-reliant kids who can solve their own problems. Listening builds friendships and careers.

Here are eight tips to bring effectiveness to your listening.

Step 1: Face the speaker and maintain eye contact.

Eye contact occurs when two people look at each other's eyes at the same time. In human beings, eye contact is a form of nonverbal communication and is thought to have a large influence on social behavior. This term came from the West in mid 1960s. This term defines the act as a meaningful and important sign of confidence, respect, and social communication. Eye Contact provides some of the strongest emotions during a social conversation. It provides details on emotions and intentions. Prolonged eye contact can tell someone you are interested in what they have to say.

Step 2: Be attentive, but relaxed.

Now that you've made eye contact, relax. You don't have to stare fixedly at the other person. You can look away now and then and carry on like a normal person. The important thing is to be attentive. Mentally screen out distractions, like background activity and noise. In addition, try not to focus on the speaker's accent or speech mannerisms to the point where they become distractions. Finally, don't be distracted by your own thoughts, feelings, or biases.

Step 3: Keep an open mind.

Listen without judging the other person or mentally criticizing the things she tells you. Listen without jumping to conclusions. Remember that the speaker is using language to represent the thoughts and feelings inside his or her brain. Don't be a sentence-grabber.

Step 4: Listen to the words and try to picture what the speaker is saying.

Allow your mind to create a mental model of the information being communicated. Your brain will do the necessary work if you stay focused, with senses fully alert. When listening for long stretches, concentrate on, and remember, key words and phrases. Finally, concentrate on what is being said, even if it bores you. If your thoughts start to wander, immediately force yourself to refocus.

Step 5: Wait for the speaker to pause to ask clarifying questions.

When you don't understand something, of course you should ask the speaker to explain it to you. But rather than interrupt, wait until the speaker pauses. Then say something like, "Back up a second. I didn't understand what you just said about..."

Step 6: Try to feel what the speaker is feeling.

If you feel sad when the person with whom you are talking expresses sadness, joyful when she expresses joy, fearful when she describes her fears—and convey those feelings through your facial expressions and words—then your effectiveness as a listener is assured. Empathy is the heart and soul of good listening.

To experience empathy, you have to put yourself in the other person's place and allow yourself to feel what it is like to *be her* at that moment. This is not an easy thing to do. It takes energy and concentration. But it is a generous and helpful thing to do, and it facilitates communication like nothing else does.

Step 7: Give the speaker regular feedback.

Show that you understand where the speaker is coming from by reflecting the speaker's feelings. Or just nod and show your understanding through appropriate facial expressions and an occasional well-timed "hmmm" or "uh huh."

The idea is to give the speaker some proof that you are listening, and that you are following her train of thought—not off indulging in your own fantasies while she talks to the ether.

In task situations, regardless of whether at work or home, always restate instructions and messages to be sure you understand correctly.

Step 8: Pay attention to what *isn't* said—to nonverbal cues.

If you exclude email, the majority of direct communication is probably nonverbal. We glean a great deal of information about each other without saying a word. Even over the telephone, you can learn almost as much about a person from the tone and cadence of her voice than from anything she says. When I talk to my best friend, it doesn't matter what we chat about, if I hear a lilt and laughter in her voice, I feel reassured that she's doing well.

Face to face with a person, you can detect enthusiasm, boredom, or irritation very quickly in the expression around the eyes, the set of the mouth, the slope of the shoulders. These are clues you can't ignore. When listening, remember that words convey only a fraction of the message.

Listening comprehension

Listening is the one skill that you use the most in everyday life. Comprehension means the ability to understand completely and be familiar with a situation, facts, etc. Listening comprehension is the basis for your speaking, writing and reading skills. To train your listening skills, it is important to listen actively, which means to actively pay attention to what you are listening to. Make it a habit to listen to audio books, podcasts, news, songs, etc. and to watch videos and films in the foreign language. The following are the methods to achieve effective listening of comprehension.

1. Set the purpose:

Students need to understand the purpose for listening to get the most from the experience. Having an explicit purpose in mind will help them know where to focus, enabling them to achieve success.

EXERCISE 2

Choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Annie and her brothers (is, are) at school.
2. Either my mother or my father (is, are) coming to the meeting.
3. The dog or the cats (is, are) outside.
4. Either my shoes or your coat (is, are) always on the floor.
5. George and Tamara (doesn't, don't) want to see that movie.
6. Benito (doesn't, don't) know the answer.
7. One of my sisters (is, are) going on a trip to France.
8. The man with all the birds (live, lives) on my street.
9. The movie, including all the previews, (take, takes) about two hours to watch.
10. The players, as well as the captain, (want, wants) to win.

EXERCISE 3

Fill in the blanks with the verb that agrees with the subject in each of the sentences.

- a. Every one -----(tries , try) his or her best to achieve the best in life.
- b. Few students from our school -----(competes, compete) every month.
- c. Either of these houses----- (is,are) suitable as a guest house.
- d. Several of my paintings -----(are is) displayed in the gallery.
- e. Some are usually -----(bring, brings) blankets for the orphans in the home.
2. Several of the roses----- (has, have)bloomed.
3. Anything the teacher says ----- (turn,turns) out to be a good idea.
4. A few of the dogs ----- (has, have) got lost.
5. T here ----- (is, are) plenty of time for you to complete your work.
6. Many gymnasts' -----(is, ara) training for the international meet.
7. ----- the laws allow people to spit on the roads?
8. ----- you read the newspaper every day?
9. -----the factory give out large quantities of smoke?
- 10.----- the milk man delivered the milk packets?
- 11.----- the girl been introduced to her neighbor?
- 12.Economics ----- a subject that puzzles me.
- 13.Gymnastics -----something that should be taught in school.

14. Diabetes ----- a disease that can be handled easily by everyone.

15. Dramatics----- now become an important part of the school curriculum.

MODIFIERS

Definition: Modifier is a word or phrase that is used with another word or phrase to limit or add to its meaning:

Purpose of Modifiers

A modifier adds detail or limits or changes the meaning of another word or phrase.

The following are the examples

1. Happy
2. Pretty
3. Silly
4. Crazy
5. Hopeful
6. Fast
7. Slow
8. Very
9. Much
10. Many

Types of Modifiers

Once you have identified a modifier, you need to identify the person, place or thing that it is modifying. Modifiers usually have to accompany the thing they are modifying or go as close to it as possible.

1. Adjective Modifiers

Adjectives typically go before the words they are modifying, or after with helping verbs. For example:

- The *pretty* girl
- The girl *was pretty*.

In the first example, *pretty* is an adjective modifying the noun *girl*. In the second example, *was* is a helping verb and *pretty* is again an adjective modifying *girl*.

2. Adverbial Modifiers

Adverbs can go before or after the thing they are modifying, depending on what exactly is it they are modifying. For example:

- The *very* pretty girl
- He ran *quickly*

In the first example, the adverb *very* is modifying the adjective *pretty* which is modifying the noun girl. In the second example, the adverb *quickly* is modifying the verb *ran*.

When you have a single adjective or adverb, misplaced modifiers rarely occur since they would immediately sound incorrect. However, when a modifying phrase is used, misplaced modifiers become more common.

EXERCISE 1

Pick out the modifier and show which word it modifies.

1. He tied red and orange ribbons round the present.
2. For years, we kept a pet dog that gave us much joy.
3. A strong wind swept through the countryside.
4. Dark clouds were gathering in the west.
5. If we are quick, there will be tickets available.
6. The film was short but exciting.
7. He was nervous and shaking on stage.
8. This is the best movie we have watched.
9. The exam is hard to pass.

EXERCISE 2

Pick out the modifier and show which word it modifies.

1. Sue sat silently throughout the meal.
2. I rarely interrupt when other people are speaking.
3. She suddenly left the party.
4. He receives his copy of the magazine monthly.
5. My father often reads the newspaper in bed.
6. We finally decided to stay where we were.
7. Jack and Jill regularly visit their parents.

8. There is someone standing outside the door.
9. He is quite serious about resigning.
10. The girls are kept separately from the boys.

Articles

Article is a word which points out at a person, thing or place spoken of. Thus article refers to the noun.

There are two Articles - a / an and the

A or an is called the Indefinite Article, as it leaves indefinite the person or thing spoken of as:

A doctor, A school, A man, A woman - here a points out any doctor, any school or any man or woman.

A or An

The choice between *a* and *an* is determined by *sound* before a word beginning with a vowel sound *an* issued: For e.g. *an egg, an orange an honest man, an hour*. *A* and *An* are used with the singular number only.

The is called the Definite Article, as it normally points out some particular person or thing as : He saw the doctor - where the points out some particular doctor.

The indefinite article is used before singular countable nouns e.g. A book, An orange, A girl The definite article is used before singular countable nouns, plural countable and uncountable nouns, for eg. The book, the books, the milk

A or An

The choice between a and an is determined by sound before a word beginning with a vowel sound an is used : For eg., an egg, an orange an honest man, an hour. A and An are used with the singular number only.

USE OF THE INDEFINITE ARTICLE

1. In its original numerical sense of one:
For e.g. Twelve inches make a foot. Not a word was said
2. In a vague sense of a certain
For e.g. One evening a beggar came to my door
3. In the sense of any, to single out an individual as the representative of a class:
for eg., A pupil should obey his teacher A cow is a useful animal
4. To make a common noun of a proper noun:

For e.g. A Daniel come to judgment! (A Daniel - a very wise man)

USE OF 'THE' DEFINITE ARTICLE

1. When we talk about a particular person or thing, or one already referred to earlier,
2. When a singular noun is meant to represent a whole class for eg. The cow is a useful animal,
The rose is the sweetest of all flowers
3. before some proper names:
For e.g., oceans and seas: the Pacific, the black sea rivers: the Ganga, the Nile
4. Before the names of certain books:
For e.g., The Vedas, the Puranas, the Ramayana
5. before names of things unique of their kind; as for e.g. the sun, the sky, the earth
6. Before a Proper noun when it is qualified by an adjective or a defining adjectival clause:
For e.g. the great Caesar, The immortal Shakespeare
7. with Superlatives
For e.g. the darkest cloud has a silver lining, this is the best book of elementary chemistry.
8. with ordinals:
For e.g., He was the first man to arrive, the ninth chapter of the book is very interesting.
9. Before an adjective when the noun is understood, for e.g. The poor is always with us.
10. Before a noun to give the force of a Superlative for e.g., The Verb is the word in a sentence.
11. As an Adverb with Comparatives: for e.g. The more the merrier.
12. Uncountable nouns take the when used in a particular sense (especially when qualified by an adjective or adjectival phrase or clause.
for e.g. Would you pass me the sugar! The Wisdom of Solomon is great.

OMISSION OF 'THE' ARTICLE

1. Before names of substances, proper and abstract nouns (uncountable nouns) used in a general sense:
For e.g. Sugar is bad for your teeth.

Gold is a precious metal Delhi is the capital of India Wisdom is the gift of heaven

2. Before plural countable nouns used in a general sense: for eg., Children like chocolates
Computers are used in many offices
3. before languages
For e.g. We are studying English.
They speak Punjabi at home
4. Before predicative nouns denoting a unique position i.e., a position that is normally held at one time by one person only:
For e.g. He was elected Chairman of the Board
Mr. Mathura became Principal of the School in 1995.

Exercise 1

Choose the right article to fill the blanks.

1. _____ Swedish is a difficult language to learn.
 - a) NO ARTICLE
 - b) The
 - c) A
2. _____ general's army attacked the city at night.
 - a) NO ARTICLE
 - b) The
 - c) A
3. I like to play _____ basketball.
 - a) NO ARTICLE
 - b) the
 - c) a
4. My parents gave me _____ basketball for my birthday.
 - a) NO ARTICLE
 - b) the
 - c) a

5. She is _____ prettiest girl in the school.
a) NO ARTICLE
b) the
c) a
6. I have _____ idea! Let's go bowling.
a) NO ARTICLE
b) the
c) an
7. I have borrowed _____ money from her before.
a) NO ARTICLE
b) the
c) a
8. My first apartment was on _____ Orange Street.
a) NO ARTICLE
b) the
c) an
9. _____ dress she is wearing is blue.
a) NO ARTICLE
b) The
c) A
10. He is _____ real gentleman.
a) NO ARTICLE
b) the
c) a