

WORKSHEET

Differences between hearing and listening

Question: What is the difference between hearing and listening?

Answer: Hearing refers to the physical act of receiving sound, but listening involves our ability to attend to and interpret what we hear.

Question: What is hearing?

Answer: Hearing is a physical process whereby sound waves strike the eardrum and cause vibrations that are transmitted to the brain, which reconstructs the electrochemical impulses into a representation of the original sound, and gives them a meaning.

While there are all kinds of sounds around us, this does not mean that we *listen* to them all. We may just be aware of the noises around us as *ambient*, low-level, sound.

Question: What is *listening*? Why is it important?

Answer: Listening involves *making meaning* of the sounds we *hear*. We *hear* far more than we *listen* to each day. In order to *listen* effectively we must be alert to such things as tone of voice, the words used, and the presence of implicit meanings—which are sometimes described as being hidden *between the words*.

Listening is a major communication skill. In our working lives, we:

- write for about 9% of our time;
- read for about 16% of our time;
- talk for about 25% of our time; but
- listen for about 50% of our time!

Listening involves the mind as well as the ears.

Being a *good listener* means being alert to the possible meanings in any given sentence, to prevent us from missing the speaker's intentions and *jumping to conclusions*. Listening is an active process. It involves checking that what we think the other person has said is what they intended us to hear.

Your task: Your team has 10 minutes to do the following:

- Read and discuss these notes about *differences between hearing and listening*.
- Use these notes, and your knowledge, to develop a team presentation for delivery to the whole group. Make the presentation as creative as possible, and ensure that it includes all the important points about your topic.

Some suggestions to help your presentation demonstrate the key messages:

- Use your blank sheets of paper to draw images, without words.
- Write a poem, or a song.
- Create a mime to *act out* the points.
- Write a script for a conversation and act it out.
- Use your bodies to build *statues* representing the key points.
- Create *listening posters* to display during a discussion of *good listening skills*.

Be aware that each group has a different topic concerning listening and hearing.

This activity uses *peer learning*—that is, learning from each other—to extend and revise knowledge about listening and hearing. So you will be teaching others and also learning from them.

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Barriers to listening

Question: What are barriers to effective listening?

Answer: There are many barriers to effective listening—all of them cause us to miss some, or all, of the speaker's meaning. Some barriers are internal—we have control over these. Others are external—we may not have direct control over these.

Internal barriers

- Planning what we will say next and, therefore, not bothering to *listen*.
- Finishing off other people's sentences—as if we *know* their intention before they do.
- Belief systems that create and support prejudices.
- Emotions cause us to stop listening, to protect us from hearing ideas we don't like.
- Daydreaming—escaping into a comfortable private world, to block out the speaker.
- Faking attention—by pretending to listen.
- Blaming—judging others and moralising, feeling *superior* and *better than* them.
- Being easily distracted—by paying more attention to what is happening around us.
- Side-tracking remarks—distracting a speaker to introduce topics that interest you.
- Too much note taking—used as a substitute for listening.

Some questions to help identify if we are creating *listening barriers* in ourselves;

- Instead of listening, do you think about what you are going to say next?
- Are you easily distracted by the speaker's mannerisms—and focus on them?
- Do you notice other things and realise that you haven't heard the other person?
- Do you interrupt the speaker?
- Do you find yourself bored by the conversation and thinking about something else?

External barriers

- Distracting noise or movement.
- Uncomfortable furniture.
- Unsuitable topics.
- Conversations that do not suit the context.
- Dangerous situations.

Your task: Your team has 10 minutes to do the following:

- Read and discuss these notes about *barriers to listening*.
- Use these notes, and your knowledge, to develop a team presentation for delivery to the whole group.
- Make the presentation as creative as possible, and ensure that it includes all the important points about your topic.

Some suggestions to help your presentation demonstrate the key messages follow:

- Use your blank sheets of paper to draw images, without words.
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Emotions and listening

Question: How do emotions affect what we hear and listen to?

Answer: Hearing is an unemotional process. Noise is taken in without evaluation or judgment. However, listening is a process that adds meaning to the sounds we hear. Adding meaning occurs in conjunction with our stored recall of past events and experiences. Our emotions are inevitably linked to such stored memories; hence, they can have an impact on how we respond when we are listening *here and now*. What we are feeling right now can have a positive or negative impact on future conversations.

There are many things that can cause us to respond emotionally—either positively or negatively. Here is a partial list of such things:

- Someone saying *you are a good listener*.
- Receiving a compliment for our actions or manner.
- Using the expression: *'You always do this'*.
- Unpleasant odours, or appearance. Distracting behaviour or clothing.
- A pleasing appearance, or an unpleasant appearance.
- The person we are talking to declares: *'... that's the end of the subject'*.
- Being told to *shut-up*.
- Use of bad grammar, poor enunciation, unclear pronunciation or vulgar language.
- Pushy individuals who dominate the conversation.
- People who seem to have a negative attitude to everything.
- Having someone else tell you what you *must do*.
- A speaker who *rambles on* without allowing their listener to respond.
- When someone says: *'You don't listen'*.
- Being asked for our opinion and being listened to attentively.
- Some words have negative connotations—dole bludger, heroine, greenies, AIDS.
- Some words have strongly positive connotations—love, caring, considerate, etc.
- Annoying gestures can arouse strong emotions.
- Being tired or ill can make us angry or despondent, regardless of what is being said.

Your task: Your team has 10 minutes to do the following:

- Read and discuss these notes about *emotions and listening*.
- Use these notes, and your knowledge, to develop a team presentation for delivery to the whole group.
- Make the presentation as creative as possible, and ensure that it includes all the important points about your topic.

Some suggestions to help your presentation demonstrate the key messages:

- Use your blank sheets of paper to draw images, without words.
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Reducing barriers to listening

Question: How can we be better listeners? What will reduce the impact of distractions?

Answers:

- Keep control of your time so that you can give each speaker your full attention.
- Conduct meetings in appropriate settings that have few, or no, distractions.
- Divert your phone when you have a meeting in your office.
- Choose quiet places for meetings. If you are meeting during lunch, choose a restaurant that has good sound-proofing.
- If you have to meet in a noisy area, for example where large machinery is in operation, have a clipboard with you to make notes and write messages.
- Do whatever you can to ensure you can hear the message. Close the door, turn off the radio, move away from noisy machinery.
- Move closer to the speaker.
- Ask the speaker to talk a little more loudly.
- As you listen, seek for patterns in the speaker's line of thought.
- Seek out the key message they seem to be giving and use *active listening* to check that you have got it right—for example, ask: 'I understand you to be saying that Am I correct?'
- Focus your concentration and retention, screen-out external noises by looking at the speaker.
- Listen for the details of an argument or comment.
- Pay attention to *both* the words and the tone of voice.
- Remember that, sometimes, their *tone* will convey strong emotions that can *hook* your own feelings and then prevent you from listening to what they are saying.
- Practise your listening skills every chance you can.

Add your own suggestions as you discuss the following list:

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Listening objectively

Question: What are some useful techniques for listening objectively?

Answers:

- Focus on what you need to know.
- Avoid being overly affected by the speaker's personality or mannerisms.
- Accept the challenge to delay judging what you're hearing.
- Avoid *selective listening*—listening to parts of a message rather than the whole message.
- Try to be aware when you begin to *close your mind* to subjects that you find difficult to face, or uninteresting, and re-focus your attention.
- If a speaker is long-winded, or uses poorly constructed language, use a *mind game* to stay alert to their key message. For example, while you are listening form their words into simpler sentences to help you summarise and remember their key points.
- If your attention wanders, and you lose track of a conversation or a speaker's line of argument, find a convenient moment when the speaker pauses and ask them questions, such as: 'So what do you see as the key point?' or 'Please remind me why this is important.' or 'I'm sorry I lost track of your argument for a moment, could you give me your main points again—in brief, so that I am sure I understand.'
- In a difficult or boring conversation pay attention to your internal state of mind.
- If it is important to you, mentally rehearse a comment that states your position clearly and then use it at the right moment to re-focus the conversation: for example, 'I regret that I have been unable to follow your argument, and would like to:
 - change the subject of the conversation;
 - ask a question to help me understand what you are saying;
 - ask you to give me a concrete example of where this happens;
 - have you explain the theory behind your proposition; and
 - tell me when this would be useful, etc'.
- Listen carefully for the emotions underlying what is being said, without judging them.
- Listen *between the words* because speakers—this includes everyone—don't always put everything that's important into words.
- Listen to changes in tone and volume of the speaker's voice.
- Check that you understand the speaker's meaning—it may not be clear in what is said.

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The benefits of listening effectively

- If you want the attention of others, first give them your attention. You're more likely to be listened to when it's your turn.
- You can separate facts from feelings and beware of both as influencing the conversation.
- You can listen for the wisdom in everyone's ideas.
- You can evaluate and analyse what you've heard and make comparisons.
- Effective listening helps to:
 - divert and defuse anger;
 - reveal the biases in our own and other's thinking;
 - reveal other people's needs and expectations;
 - prevent accidents. We can learn from other's mistakes and prevent waste.
- You can learn something new, be entertained and satisfy your curiosity.
- You gain respect, are viewed as a team player, and are valued and trusted.
- We can ask intelligent and relevant questions and give appropriate responses.
- You can practise your own self-discipline and confidence.
- You can create a win for yourself and the person to whom you listened.
- You can increase your powers of concentration and control distractions.
- You will be more prepared if the speaker makes sudden shifts in the conversation.
- Listening will help you to maintain a flexible attitude—keep an open mind.
- You'll be using the gift of hearing. When we have been given two ears and one mouth, use them in that proportion; that is, listen twice as much as you talk.
- You can enjoy all of nature's wonderful sounds around you.
- You can listen to what is not said. You may hear the feelings behind the message.
- You can avoid being defensive when the speaker mentions an idea or even a word that arouses a defensive reaction in you.
- You can practise not pre-judging the other person. Listening encourages speakers to unfold and expand, improving our understanding.

Remember that a speakers' ideas may be right for them, even when they are wrong for you.

Your task: Your team has 10 minutes to do the following:

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Techniques for remembering and recall

Question: What techniques can help you remember what you've heard, and said?

Answers:

- Build rapport, by pacing the speaker. To do this appropriately match the speaker's gestures, expressions and voice patterns to create a more relaxed atmosphere to help your own understanding and, therefore, your recall of what is said.
- Take notes, especially when you need to write more about what is being discussed.
- Concentrate, share responsibility for successful communication. Be specific, for example: you do need to remember what is being said. Ask for help to achieve this.
- Maintain eye contact—look into the speaker's general eye area for up to 70% of the listening time. Too much eye contact can make a speaker feel uncomfortable. Too little eye contact may indicate a lack of interest. Be receptive to body signals from the speaker that may indicate how they are feeling.
- Use listening noises such as 'ah ha' 'mmm' 'I see'.
- Vary the tone and inflection in your voice. Use suitably affirming facial expressions and postures, for example: showing a smile to let speakers know you're with them.
- Wake up your face! Show that you understand the others' feelings and express this without censure—this is called showing *empathy*. It is not necessary to agree.
- Paraphrase, restate—in your own words—your understanding of what is being said. For example, 'My understanding of this is...?'. When you are *wrong*, the speaker can adjust their message accordingly.
- Summarise your points to clarify what has been said and to indicate that you are paying attention, and to help you memorise the key points.
- Give feedback and ask questions to ensure you fully understand the message.
- If possible, read or learn something about the topic before the conversation—especially when it concerns your work or other important issues.

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