

Listening

What is Listening?

Listening is receiving language through the ears. Listening involves identifying the sounds of speech and processing them into words and sentences. When we listen, we use our ears to receive individual sounds (letters, stress, rhythm and pauses) and we use our brain to convert these into messages that mean something to us. Listening in any language requires focus and attention. Listening is the first of the four language skills, which are: Listening Speaking Reading and Writing

Listening with understanding is an active process. It involves the following arrangement.

Input ----- Processing ----- Output

Models

There are two models to explain the nature of listening.

In the first model the listener is viewed as *tape recorders*. In day-to-day situations, people need to listen not so much to understand the spoken words as to retain them for recall when the time demands it. E.g, case of a receptionist or a steno typist.

In the second model, the listener is viewed as *construction worker*. This model regards the listener as an active participant, a processor in the act of listening. This is in reality

Input ----- Processing ----- Output model.

The Input could be processed in the following ways:

- a. **Bottom – up processing:** In this processing, the listener depends solely on the incoming input to understand the message.

Four steps are involved to analyze the input message :

Step 1. Organizing the sound signals to identify familiar items of vocabulary.

Step 2. Breaking up the stream of speech into constituent words, phrases, clauses, the whole sentences.

Step 3. Using sound and intonation cues to identify nature of input.

Step 4. Use the grammatical cues to organize what is heard into constituents so as to get at the intended meaning of the message.

b. Top – Down processing In this the listeners rely on their background knowledge for understanding the message.

Listening vs. Hearing

Hearing is the act of perceiving sound and receiving sound waves or vibrations through your ear. Listening is the act of hearing a sound and understanding what you hear. Hearing is one of the five senses and it just happens all the time whether you like it or not – unless you have a hearing problem. But if you listen, you are consciously choosing what you want to hear. You concentrate on what you hear in order to understand the message. For example, If I hear a baby crying out loud, I am using my sense of hearing, but when I hear a baby cry because he is hungry, it is a form of listening because I have attached a meaning to what I have heard. Hearing is a skill where you use your ears only. It one of the five senses. Listening uses different senses, like the sense of hearing, seeing, or sense of touch.

Types of listening

Here are six types of listening, starting with basic discrimination of sounds and ending in deep communication.

Casual Listening:

This is the type of listening when we listen to someone or some input without any particular purpose.

Focused Listening:

This is the type of listening when we listen for information or for transaction of some business agenda.

Discriminative listening

Discriminative listening is the most basic type of listening, whereby the difference between different sounds is identified. If you cannot hear differences, then you cannot make sense of the meaning that is expressed by such differences.

Comprehension listening

Comprehension listening is also known as content listening, informative listening and full listening. The next step beyond discriminating between different sound and sights is to make sense of them. To comprehend the meaning requires first having a good vocabulary at our fingertips and also all rules of grammar by which we can understand what others are saying. The same is true, of course, for the visual components of communication, and an understanding of body language helps us understand what the other person is really meaning.

Critical listening

Critical listening is listening in order to evaluate and judge, forming opinion about what is being said. Judgment includes assessing strengths and weaknesses, agreement and approval.

Appreciative listening

We use appreciative listening when we are listening to good music, poetry or maybe even the stirring words of a great leader.

Sympathetic listening

In sympathetic listening we care about the other person and show this concern in the way we pay close attention and express our sorrow for their ills and happiness at their joys.

Empathetic listening

When we listen empathetically, we go beyond sympathy to seek a truer understanding of how others are feeling. When we are being truly empathetic, we actually feel what they are feeling.

Dialogic listening

Thus dialogic listening means learning through conversation and an engaged interchange of ideas and information in which we actively seek to learn more about the person and how they think.

Relationship listening

Sometimes the most important factor in listening is in order to develop or sustain a relationship. Relationship listening is also important in areas such as negotiation and sales, where it is helpful if the other person likes you and trusts you.

Need / Importance of Listening

Listening is needed and important in every aspect of life. Careful listening is essential :

To make more productive: Good listening skills make workers more productive.

Just for pleasure: music, birds singing etc.

To take part in conversation: exchange news with family and friends, make arrangements.

For information: the news or weather forecast on the television or radio, or announcements at a station or airport.

To understand: when someone is explaining what is happening, what we have to do, what someone feels in better way and find and what is expected from him.

To build rapport: To show support and with students, co-workers, bosses, and clients; and to work better in a team-based environment

To answer questions and to find underlying meanings in what others say.

To avoid Misunderstandings – Regardless of the clarity of written or spoken messages, the effective listener can prevent misunderstandings.

Personal Growth – A person learns and grows by listening and understanding other viewpoints, differing ideas, and exploring conflicting viewpoints. Learning the skill of active and effective listening not only adds a tool to the personal development portfolio, but equips you to continue growing with tools for exploring new ideas.

Common Listening Mistakes

There are some common mistakes, which are made by an individual while Listening. Some of them are:

1. Interrupting the speaker.
- 2 Completing the speakers sentences in advance.
- 3.Habit of topping another person's story with your own is demeaning and relegates the speaker's story to something less important.
4. Dominating Conversations – A person who dominates conversations probably commits all of the above mistakes and is not listening at all.

Barriers to Listening

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

Physiological Barriers: - some people may have genuine hearing problems or deficiencies that prevent them from listening properly. It can be treated. Some people may have problem in processing information or retaining information in the memory.

Physical Barriers: - These referred to distraction in the environment such as the sound of fans, coolers, air conditioners, overheated room. If the phone rings and your mobile beeps at the same time to let uknow that you have the message. It is very hard to listen carefully to what is being said.

Attitudinal Barriers: - Pre occupation with personal or work related problems can make it difficult to focus one's attention completely on what speaker is saying, even what is being said is of very importance. Another common attitudinal barrier is egocentrism, or the belief that the person have more knowledgeable than the speaker, or that there is nothing new to learn from the speaker's ideas. People with this kind of close-minded attitude are very poor listeners.

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 that listeners have no role to play. Such an assumption can be big 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. The process should be made successful by paying attention seeking clarifications and giving feedback.

Cultural Barriers: - Accents can be barriers to listening, since they interfere with the ability to understand the meaning of words that are pronounced differently. The problem of different accents arises not only between cultures, but also within a culture. For example, in a country like India where there is enormous cultural diversity, accents may differ even between regions states.

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.

Lack of Training: - Listening is not an inborn skill. People are not born good listeners. It is developed through practice and training. Lack of training in listing skills is an important barrier.

Bad Listening Habits: - Most people are very average listeners who have developed poor listening habits 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, miss out the main point.

Ways to improve Listening skill

- Listening is a psychological process. It can therefore be improved by regular practice. Listening is a very helpful skill. Active listening is really an extension of the Golden Rule. Here are some of the tips, which can help the person to improve his Listening skill:
 - Face the speaker. Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show your attentiveness through body language.
 - Maintain eye contact, to the degree that you all remain comfortable.
 - Minimize external distractions. Turn off the TV. Put down your book or magazine, and ask the speaker and other listeners to do the same.
 - Respond appropriately to show that you understand. Murmur (“uh-huh” and “um-hmm”) and nod. Raise your eyebrows. Say words such as “Really,” “Interesting,” as well as more direct prompts: “What did you do then?” and “What did she say?”
 - Focus solely on what the speaker is saying. Try not to think about what you are going to say next. The conversation will follow a logical flow after the speaker makes her point.
 - Minimize internal distractions. If your own thoughts keep horning in, simply let them go and continuously re-focus your attention on the speaker, much as you would during meditation.
 - Keep an open mind. Wait until the speaker is finished before deciding that you disagree. Try not to make assumptions about what the speaker is thinking.
 - Avoid letting the speaker know how you handled a similar situation. Unless they specifically ask for advice, assume they just need to talk it out.
 - Engage yourself. Ask questions for clarification, but, once again, wait until the speaker has finished.
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Suggestive Activities/ games to Improve Listening Skill Of Students

Relay the message

This classic game, otherwise known as “running dictation,” is a great active icebreaker, as well as a natural way to introduce a topic.

The game plan:

- Put students in pairs or groups of three, assigning one (or two) as runner and one as writer. Sit the writers at tables at one end of the room.
- Stick pre-printed messages at the other side of the room, one for each group or pair. These messages can be the same or different, easy or difficult, long or short, depending on the level and goals of the class.
- When you shout the word “go,” the runner runs to the message, reading and remembering what they can. This can be as much as a few sentences or as little as one word. The aim is to be able to relay it accurately to the writer.
- The runner goes back to the writer to relay the part of the message that they memorized. The writer (you guessed it!) writes it down.
- Repeat until the message is complete. Teams score points for speed but more importantly for accuracy of spelling and punctuation.

Back-to-back interview

What better way to improve listening skills than to listen to each other? This is a great activity for practicing listening without relying on lip reading or actions. It also incorporates speaking practice, thus killing two birds with one stone. You can use this activity to introduce famous people you want to talk about during your lesson.

The game plan:

- Pairs of students sit back-to-back, one as the interviewer with a list of questions.
- The interviewee is given a famous person to role play, with a list of answers. (This can also be done as an exercise to learn more about each other personally. For example, at the beginning of a course when students don’t know each other well).
- The interviewer asks the questions, writing down the answers as they go along.
- The fastest interviewer to work out who they’re talking to wins!

Follow the directions

This activity provides excellent practice, which will prepare students to ask for directions in a foreign country. It allows students to gain audio rather than visual practice with receiving directions, giving them the ability to understand step by step instructions.

The game plan:

- Provide students with a street map, either a real one or something tailored to the activity and their level. You can even go crazy and create a big one for the classroom floor!
- Split the students into teams, and have one person go at a time.
- Read instructions for the student to follow, such as “go straight two blocks.” To win a point, the student must successfully navigate the map until they find the right store, the lost friend or the buried treasure.

Telephone

In this game, students are responsible for listening carefully to their peers as well as successfully relaying a message. It encourages students to determine similar sounding words from one other, and can be used as a starter activity to introduce any topic.

The game plan:

- Create two teams of students and set up both teams in lines. The end of each team line should be at the whiteboard.
- Whisper a word or sentence to the student farthest away from the whiteboard, and then have them whisper the message they heard to the next student. Each student whispers to the next until the end of the line.
- The last student writes the message on the board. The winner is the team with the most accurate spelling, pronunciation and content, although bonus points for originality may be awarded!

Minimal pairs card hold-up

Improve your students’ knowledge of proper pronunciation with this quick-fire game, which is good for reinforcing phonics lessons.

The game plan:

- Give a set of pre-prepared word cards to each team (there can be as many teams as you want, depending on how many card sets you have).
- Students spread the word cards out on a table.
- Call a word out. For example: “feet!” The students have to search their decks and hold up that word’s card as fast as possible.

Song gap-fill

Songs are a great way to engage reluctant listeners, as they can be tailored perfectly to fit the preferences of the students. Why not use the latest pop song? Lyric repetition is welcomed here!

The game plan:

- Give each student/pair the song lyrics with some words missing. To make it easier you can put the missing words in a box at the top of the page.
- Play the song, pausing if necessary. The aim is for the students to fill in the missing words.
- Once at the end, go through the answers to see which student/pair got the most correct.

Order-the-lyrics

This activity is a variation on the above, giving students practice in noticing the subtle differences between lyrics in music.

The game plan:

- Pairs get a set of the song lyrics cut up into lines.
- As they listen to the chosen song, they have to put the lyrics in the right order on the table. Repeat the song if necessary. You can always have a sing-along after the activity is completed!

