

UNIT II

LISTENING

Listening is a language modality. It is one of the four skills of a language i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. It involves an active involvement of an individual. Listening involves a sender, a message and a receiver. It is the psychological process of receiving, attending to constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or non verbal messages.

Listening comprises of some key components, they are:

1. discriminating between sounds
2. recognizing words and understanding their meaning
3. identifying grammatical groupings of words,
4. identifying expressions and sets of utterances that act to create meaning,
5. connecting linguistic cues to non-linguistic and paralinguistic cues,
6. using background knowledge to predict and to confirm meaning and
7. Recalling important words and ideas.

PROCESS OF LISTENING

The process of listening occurs in five stages. They are hearing, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding.

HEARING – It is referred to the response caused by sound waves stimulating the sensory receptors of the ear; it is physical response; hearing is perception of sound waves; you must hear to listen, but you need not listen to hear (perception necessary for listening depends on attention). Brain screens stimuli and permits only a select few to come into focus- these selective perception is known as attention, an important requirement for effective listening.

UNDERSTANDING- This step helps to understand symbols we have seen and heard, we must analyze the meaning of the stimuli we have perceived; symbolic stimuli are not only words but also sounds like applause... and sights like blue uniform...that have symbolic meanings as well; the meanings attached to these symbols are a function of our past associations and of the context in which the symbols occur. For successful interpersonal communication, the listener must understand the intended meaning and the context assumed by the sender.

REMEMBERING- Remembering is important listening process because it means that an individual has not only received and interpreted a message but has also added it to the mind's

storage bank. In Listening our attention is selective, so too is our memory- what is remembered may be quite different from what was originally seen or heard.

EVALUATING- Only active listeners participate at this stage in Listening. At this point the active listener weighs evidence, sorts fact from opinion, and determines the presence or absence of bias or prejudice in a message; the effective listener makes sure that he or she doesn't begin this activity too soon; beginning this stage of the process before a message is completed requires that we no longer hear and attend to the incoming message-as a result, the listening process ceases.

RESPONDING- This stage requires that the receiver complete the process through verbal and/or nonverbal feedback; because the speaker has no other way to determine if a message has been received, this stage becomes the only overt means by which the sender may determine the degree of success in transmitting the message.

Types of Listening

Based on objective and manner in which the Listener takes and responds to the process of Listening, different types of Listening are:

1. **Active listening** - Listening in a way that demonstrates interest and encourages continued speaking.
2. **Appreciative listening**- Looking for ways to accept and appreciate the other person through what they say. Seeking opportunity to praise, alternatively listening to something for pleasure, such as to music.
3. **Attentive listening** - Listening obviously and carefully, showing attention
4. **Biased listening** - Listening through the filter of personal bias i.e. the person hears only what they want to listen.
5. **Casual listening** - Listening without obviously showing attention. Actual attention may vary a lot.
6. **Comprehension listening** - Listening to understand. Seeking meaning (but little more).
7. **Critical listening** - Listening in order to evaluate, criticize or otherwise pass judgment on what someone else says.
8. **Deep listening** - Seeking to understand the person, their personality and their real and unspoken meanings and motivators.

9. **Discriminative listening** - Listening for something specific but nothing else (eg. a baby crying).
10. **Empathetic listening** - Seeking to understand what the other person is feeling. Demonstrating this empathy.
11. **Evaluative listening** - Listening in order to evaluate, criticize or otherwise pass judgment on what someone else says.
12. **Inactive listening** - Pretending to listen but actually spending more time thinking.
13. **Judgmental listening** - Listening in order to evaluate, criticize or otherwise pass judgment on what someone else says.
14. **Partial listening** - Listening most of the time but also spending some time daydreaming or thinking of a response.
15. **Reflective listening** - Listening and then reflecting back to the other person what they have said.
16. **Relationship listening** - Listening in order to support and develop a relationship with the other person.
17. **Sympathetic listening** - Listening with concern for the well-being of the other person.
18. **Therapeutic listening** - Seeking to understand what the other person is feeling. Demonstrating this empathy.
19. **Total listening** - Paying very close attention in active listening to what is said and the deeper meaning found through how it is said.

Ways to improve Listening skill

Hearing and Listening are two different activities. Hearing is passive whereas Listening is active. 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:

1. **Face the speaker.** Sit up straight or lean forward slightly to show your attentiveness through body language.
2. **Maintain eye contact,** to the degree that you all remain comfortable.
3. **Minimize external distractions.** Turn off the TV. Put down your book or magazine, and ask the speaker and other listeners to do the same.

4. **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?”
5. **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.
6. **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.
7. **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.
8. **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.
9. Even if the speaker is launching a complaint against you, wait until they finish defending yourself. The speaker will feel as though their point had been made. They won’t feel the need to repeat it, and you’ll know the whole argument before you respond. Research shows that, on average, we can hear four times faster than we can talk, so we have the ability to sort ideas as they come in...and be ready for more.
10. **Engage yourself.** Ask questions for clarification, but, once again, wait until the speaker has finished. That way, you won’t interrupt their train of thought. After you ask questions, paraphrase their point to make sure you didn’t misunderstand. Start with: “So you’re saying...”

Active Listening

Listening is a conscious activity which requires attention. Rather than waiting to speak, you need to listen attentively to fully understand the other person. Remember, there is no point in asking a question if you do not intend to listen carefully to the answer!

Listening fully - or actively means putting everything else out of your mind and acknowledging the other person so they have feedback that you are listening properly and valuing what they have to say. Understanding and valuing does not mean agreeing; active listening is particularly valuable in situations of conflict or disagreement where if the other party feels you understand their viewpoint, an atmosphere of cooperation can be created which increases the possibility of resolving the conflict.

Active listening skills:

1. Restating

2. Summarizing
3. Minimal encourages
4. Reflecting
5. Giving Feedback
6. Emotion Labeling
7. Probing
8. Validation
9. Effective Pause
10. Silence
11. 'I' MESSAGE-by using 'I' in our statements; we focus on the problem not on the person.
An I-message lets the person know what you feel and why-for example, "I know you have a lot to say, but I need to..."
12. Redirecting
13. Consequences

ADVANTAGES OF ACTIVE LISTENING

1. Reduce tension
2. Learn by listening
3. Can win friends
4. Solve problems for other persons.
5. Better work and cooperation from others.
6. Stimulates the speaker
7. Grasp things quicker and better.
8. Increased your confidence.
9. Enhance your thinking.

ART OF LISTENING

Most people think that to become a good communicator they have to focus on becoming great speakers, but listening is just as important as speaking in the communication process. Whether you're dealing with coworkers, managers, or clients, being a good speaker and a great listener are crucial workplace skills. Our ability to listen properly can give us insight into the rationale behind decisions and a better understanding of what the speaker is trying to accomplish.

Learn to tolerate silence

Most people are embarrassed by silence and when someone dries up we rush to fill the gap. Good listeners are not afraid of silence. Mozart said it was the most profound sound in music. Silence allows time for thoughts to be gathered and it can also be used to apply gentle pressure on others to elaborate, without giving your own position away or putting words into their mouth.

Look and listen hard

As we talk we reveal ourselves. Unless we closely observe people, we will miss well over half of the message they are conveying through emphasis in voice, body language and eye contact.

Know your power as a listener

The careful listener is not passive, but has real power. We mentioned the power of silence earlier. A poor listener can destroy the speaker's confidence in their ability to communicate. This is especially important when people are clearly upset, inexperienced or junior in status.

Reflect feelings

When someone shows emotion, indicate that you recognise this. Use paraphrasing to reflect the meaning that is coming across so that the speaker can confirm or alter your understanding.

Use your body language

Make sure that your body language - eye contact, expression, gestures and posture -demonstrates an interest in the speaker.

Know your own emotional biases

Recognize your own preferences and prejudices - try to allow for them in anything you hear. We can never be completely free of emotional filters and we are all subject to them. Be particularly on guard when dealing with people or situations we dislike or fundamentally do not agree with. Experiments show how people will interpret identical messages differently if they are told different original sources for the message.

Avoid Judging

Good listeners create warm, non-judgmental atmospheres and, of course they learn far more as a result. Speakers become defensive and clam up the more they feel under judgment or evaluation. 'Why don't you. ..?' type questions can create this defensiveness. Hear people out; then you may be able to act on the full story rather than on unreliable fragments.

The Main Trouble Spot

The biggest trouble spot for most listeners is their own anger. When we are attacked verbally we become defensive or angry and our listening power is correspondingly decreased. Similarly,

when the speaker is angry, we must keep our composure and try to defuse the emotion so that more effective communication can be established.

TRAITS OF A GOOD LISTENER

1. Listens Actively

Actively listening means your entire attention is focused on the speaker. You intently listen to make sure you catch all the necessary details. You are ready to respond to any questions or ask questions if they are needed. In short, you are present physically and mentally. Your mind does not wander anywhere.

2. Gets Rid of Distractions

Having undivided attention is one of the qualities of a good listener. You set aside other things you do, including your phone, to focus on the speaker. If needed, you also move to a quiet place where you will not be distracted by noise and passersby.

3. Pays Attention to Details

You need to focus on the details to analyze the message and the situation correctly. You do not take any information for granted, knowing they can help you understand the circumstances better. If possible and necessary, you scribble some notes so no detail will be forgotten.

4. Leans Forward to the Speaker

One sign that a person is interested in listening is how they lean toward the speaker. It gives you the impression that they want to hear clearer, avoid any distractions, and catch the important details. This is usually most evident when the listener is hooked on the story and wants to hear more.

5. Keeps Eyes Focused on the Speaker

Aside from leaning forward, a good listener watches the speaker intently. Their eyes are focused on the other person, ensuring they do not miss any details. They do not need to maintain eye contact with the speaker since the latter may avoid it for some reason. Still, the listener's eyes do not leave the speaker's face.

6. Asks Questions

Questions are important for clarification. Another trait of a good listener is being able to ask the right questions when necessary. Asking questions indicates that the person is seeking more details because they want to understand the scenario or idea better.

7. Avoids Interrupting the Speaker

A good listener also shows respect for the speaker. They wait for the person to finish talking before asking questions or commenting. If necessary to interrupt the speaker, they do it gently and courteously. These habits indicate that the listener does not want the speaker to lose their train of thought and is focused more on hearing them out.

8. Does Not Seek to Control the Conversation

Some people love dominating conversations. They want to do most of the talking. However, to be a good listener, you must condition your mind right from the start. You have to consciously decide to avoid the temptation of overtaking the speaker. You do not feel bad if you do not get enough time to talk.

9. Speaks Less

In connection to no. 8, a good listener spends energy more on listening and understanding the speaker's message than finding the right words to say. Do you want to be a good listener? If yes, then your goal is to talk less and give the other person the opportunity to pour out themselves. You have to remind yourself that it is not the time to be talking about yourself. The speaker is much more interested in your sincerity to hear them out.

10. Does Not Hurry the Speaker

One of the qualities of a good listener is patience. Even if you find the conversation boring or slow-paced, you do not rush the speaker to finish talking. It would discourage the person from talking further, thinking they are causing you inconvenience. That is why it is best to set schedules for heart-to-heart talks, just like professional appointments. This way, you can allot enough time for it without conflicts with other activities. You can also set the expectation of how much time you can talk.

11. Is Not Harsh

At the same time, you should avoid being rude to the speaker. Even if you do not agree with their ideas, opinions, or decisions, you choose to be courteous. You do not resort to sarcasm, name-calling, or other harsh behaviors that can offend the other person.

12. Knows when to be Silent

You are a good listener if you know when to be quiet. Instead of thinking you always need to come up with encouraging words, you become sensitive to the speaker's needs. You know that

sometimes, people do not really need advice from others. They only need someone who will willingly listen to their rants.

13. Listens with Assurance of Confidentiality

Some people find it hard to speak up for fear of embarrassment or conflict. That is why they choose to keep their burden a secret, even if they wish to empty their chests. These people wish they could share their concerns with someone who can be trusted. Thus, one of the qualities of a good listener is trustworthiness. They treat each heart-to-heart talk as a confidential matter.

14. Has No Prejudice Even Before Listening to the Message

A good listener sets aside their own biases when listening to someone explaining their side of a story. They listen to understand the situation better—not to find faults or grounds for arguments. They listen without judgment, or else they cannot put themselves in the speakers' shoes.

15. Does Not Jump to Conclusions Hastily

Aside from avoiding prejudice, a great listener will not conclude about the situation or message without hearing all the details first. They patiently wait for the speaker to finish talking and ask questions to make clarifications. Before everything is clear, they do not assume anything.

16. Offers Objective Advice or Solutions

With many people suffering from mental conditions around the globe now, the need for counselors is increasing. Of course, not all people can pursue a professional or spiritual counseling career. However, everyone can learn to be a good listener. People struggling mentally and emotionally must have a support system of loved ones who compassionately listen to them. That way, the case of individuals giving up on life will be reduced significantly.

Three Basic modes of Listening

Active or Reflective Listening

It is the single most useful and important listening skill. In active listening, the listener is genuinely interested in understanding what the other person is thinking, feeling, wanting or what the message means. The person is active in checking his understanding before he responds with his new message. Listener restates or paraphrases our understanding of the message and reflects it back to the sender for verification. This verification or feedback process is what distinguishes active listening and makes it effective. Essentials of

Active Listening:

1. Intensity

2. Empathy
3. Acceptance
4. Recognizing responsibility for the completeness

Passive or Attentive Listening

The listener is genuinely interested in hearing and understanding the other person's point of view. He will be attentive and will passively listen. The Listener assume that what he heard and understand is correct but stay passive and do not verify it.

Competitive or Combative Listening

It happens when the Listener is more interested in promoting his own point of view than in understanding or exploring someone else's view. He either listens for openings to take the floor or for flaws or weak points.

TED Talks for Extensive Listening

There have been some studies involving the use of TED Talks in extensive listening. Takaesu (2017), for example, reported using TED Talks to teach his college EAP (English for Academic Purpose) students whose proficiency levels were quite varied. About 78% of the higher proficiency students felt that the use of TED Talks for extensive listening improved their listening skills. Nearly an equal number of the lower proficiency students (74%) reported improvements in their listening skills. This showed that even though TED Talk video podcast is a novel media, it is effective in supporting extensive listening practice among language learners. According to Park and Cha (2013), there are several benefits of using TED Talk videos. First, TED Talk videos are interesting because they include a wide range of topics such as technology, entertainment, design, business, science, and global issues (Nurmukhamedov, 2017). Secondly, TED Talks have a distinctive "interactive transcript" feature embedded in each talk. The combination of reading while listening/viewing to video materials is a pleasantly rewarding experience. It can enhance students' motivation and comprehension of the listening materials as well.

Thirdly, TED videos are sharable. Learners can easily share the links using social media or download them as offline contents. Besides being sharable, TED Talks are also searchable "in multiple ways, including by speaker, subject, or theme" (Loya & Klemm, 2016). This aspect gives the listeners flexibility in finding topics of their interest. Lastly, TED Talks can be accessed at any time and any place as long as one is connected to the Internet. Any mobile

devices such as tablets, smart phones, laptops, or computers can access TED Talks without any limit. TED Talks can also motivate and inspire students to have the eagerness to learn on their own, thus promoting self-directed and independent learning in our students (Rubenstein, 2012).

Techniques to learn even more from TED talks

The basic way to use TED talks is to treat them like a simple listening exercise. You listen and, hopefully, you will learn something.

But this is a passive way of learning.

To be an effective, independent learner, you need to be an ACTIVE listener. This means that you need to engage with the listening materials - analyze it, repeat it, work with it and use it yourself.

1. Watch the video more than once

An active listener knows to listen more than once. Many TED videos are three to five minutes long. This is a perfect length for watching more than once.

The first time you watch a TED video, watch it for your own enjoyment. The second time you watch it, watch it to learn something about English.

The first time you watch it, focus on the main ideas. The second time you watch it, focus on the details.

The first time you watch it, practise note-taking by writing down the main ideas. The second time you watch it, write down useful phrases and expressions.

Should you watch it more than twice? Yes, why not? As long as you are learning something, watch it as many times as you wish.

2. Absorb new vocabulary

Active learners know to write down new words that they hear. But this is only the first step in active listening.

New vocabulary does not always mean new words. For example, you know the word GO and the word FROM. But have you heard them used like this before...?

“I went from desk-dwelling computer nerd to the kind of guy who bikes to work.”

Do you use this phrase yourself? Could you use it in a sentence? These are the kinds of questions to ask yourself if you want to be an active learner.

After all, in a classroom, you have the teacher to ask you questions. But, as an independent learner, you have to ask those questions yourself.

By the way, the quote is from a TED talk by Matt Cutts, entitled Try something new for 30 days.

An active listener knows to apply this technique to grammar, too. How does the speaker use modal verbs? Why did he use the past continuous tense in that sentence?

The important thing is to keep asking questions. These questions will help you to analyze what you hear.

Interacting with the language like this is a powerful way to learn.

3. Use the transcript feature

Some speakers use more advanced language than others. Some speak more quickly. Should you use the transcript feature to help you understand?

Yes, absolutely. For example, you could listen once without the transcript and a second time with the transcript. It's not "cheating"!

Using the transcript can help you to focus on the speaker's language.

It can be hard to write down new words, such as "desk-dwelling" the first time you hear them (to dwell means to live or spend a lot of time somewhere). The transcript can help you do this.

Remember, an active learner makes full use of any tools that are available.

4. Practice reading aloud

Read the transcript aloud with the speaker to practice your pronunciation and vocal skills.

See if you can hear which words the speaker emphasizes and repeats. Can you read comfortably at the same speed?

Shadowing is a technique where you repeat the audio just after hearing it, like an echo. Read our complete guide to shadowing and learn how you can apply it to audio such as TED talks.

5. Rewrite the talk

Would you like to practice writing as well as listening? I suggest rewriting a TED talk after listening to it. Don't worry about writing exactly what you heard. Instead write your own version in a summary.

Afterwards, check the transcript to see that you understood all the main points. Generally, each paragraph in the transcript covers one main point.

PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation" refers to the way in which we make the sound of words.

To pronounce words, we push air from our lungs up through our throat and vocal chords, through our mouth, past our tongue and out between our teeth and lips. (Sometimes air also travels through our nose.)

To change the sound that we are making, we mainly use the muscles of our mouth, tongue and lips to control the shape of our mouth and the flow of air. If we can control the shape of our mouth and the flow of air correctly, then our pronunciation is clearer and other people understand us more easily.

Speakers of different languages tend to develop different muscles of the mouth for pronunciation. When we speak a foreign language, our muscles may not be well developed for that language, and we will find pronunciation more difficult. By practicing the foreign language pronunciation, our muscles develop and pronunciation improves.

As well as creating correct vowel and consonant sounds using the muscles of our mouth, tongue and lips, there are other important aspects of pronunciation, including:

Word stress - emphasis on certain syllables in a word

Sentence stress - emphasis on certain words in a sentence

Linking - joining certain words together

Intonation - the rise and fall of our voice as we speak

SPEAKING

Speaking is the communication medium of learning orally. To talk, we make sounds utilizing numerous pieces of our body, including the lungs, vocal tract, vocal lines, tongue, teeth and lips.

Speaking is the second of the four learning skills. Speaking is normally the second expertise that we learn. Speaking or talking means to communicate, or expressing one's thoughts and feelings in a spoken language.

In primary schools elocution and recitation are main sources to master the phonetics, the sounds, the rhythm, and to an extent the intonation, modulation and variation in the way to be effective in conveying ideas and information.

SPEAKING STYLE

Speaking style is another key feature that defines the possible uses of the speech corpus. For instance a corpus containing spontaneous or non-prompted speech will not be useful for a dictation task.

Unfortunately many speech corpora contain only one speaking style and are therefore restricted in their re-use for different applications. This is a pity considering the fact that the recruitment

and recording of speakers is the most expensive part of a corpus production. Therefore we strongly recommend specifying at least two different speaking styles for a corpus production. The following list gives an overview of the main speaking styles with rising complexity.

1) Funny, Humorous Motivational Speaker.

This speaker's style engages a convention audience with humor and laughter. It is a great way to open or close a conference. Stressed out people will appreciate laughing because it instantly compels people to take themselves lightly. When stress surrounds us we tend to take it personally and lose all perspective. Laughter creates distance from stress and balances our perspective. As they say, people who play together stay together, create rapport with conference delegates by ensuring you have some levity built into the agenda. As a former standup comedian, I am considered a Humorous Motivational Speaker and one of my other favorite female motivational speakers is Linda Edgecombe or Amanda Gore.

2) Content Rich Speaker. This style of presentation is usually designed to deliver the maximum amount of information relevant to the audience. Your convention would benefit from this style of professional speaker if there is a timely message you need to get across. The Content Rich Keynote Speaker usually has a PowerPoint Presentation. Given the potential density of information it helps the audience visualize the information and helps the speaker stay organized. The types of content you may highlight could evolve around industry change, specific skills, politics, marketing skills and more. Some examples of content rich keynote speakers are technology or social media professional speakers like Susan Sweeney or Jim Carroll.

3) Story -Teller- Some inspirational keynote speakers get their calling from delivering their story. You can find professional speakers who have climbed mountains, survived cancer or were born with a disability they turn into an advantage on the platform. Their story becomes an inspiration for others. The best inspirational keynote speakers will turn their story into learning for the audience. If the audience can relate to the speaker and their message resonates to a diverse group, this message will inspire.

Content

If the speaker is content-rich, he may speak in facts significant to the audience. He will stick to objective information. So, if it were your goal to get information out to a large group of people in a timely way, this would be your guy.

Some speakers are downright hilarious. These funny or humorous speakers entertain the crowd using jokes and other antics to generate excitement and interest. This style works well for an icebreaker or to take a group that hardly knows one another and bring them together through laughter. Everyone loves a jokester!

Maybe you want to inspire your group. Use a storyteller. This speaker tells a story about something relevant to the crowd. It's not necessarily factual information. Maybe he will talk about an experience he had that can translate into a lesson for the audience.

SEQUENCING

Simple Sequences

Suppose you have a number of points you would like to discuss. You can't discuss them all at the same time, so you have to decide which goes first, which goes second, and which goes last. If you organize them into a single list (i.e. no sub-lists, no hierarchy), then you have created a simple sequence. There are several simple sequences available to you, including:

- Chronological sequence
- Step-by-step sequence
- Spatial sequence
- Paired sequence
- Topical sequence
- Perspective-based sequence
- Sort-by-property sequence

Each of these simple sequences is discussed below.

1. Chronological Sequence

In a chronological sequence, items are ordered according to the date or time they occurred.

Examples of presentations where a chronological sequence may apply:

Background

Hypothesis

Experimental methods

Data

Analysis and discussion

Conclusions

Advantages: A chronological sequence is easy to apply. Because most stories (parables, novels, movies) follow this pattern, it is a familiar pattern for audiences, and is thus quite easy to follow.

Disadvantages: Chronological sequence encourages “and-then” syndrome (“... and then... and then... and then... and then...”). It can feel like a long, tiring sequence, and may make it more difficult to highlight key takeaways.

2. Step-by-step Sequence

In a step-by-step sequence, items are organized according to their order within a process. Examples of presentations where a step-by-step sequence may apply:

How to upgrade financial management software

How to stuff and cook a turkey

How to change a flat tire

Advantages: Easy to apply, and easy to follow. Particularly for any type of “how to” present is catered.

Disadvantages: None provided that the nature of the presentation is a good match for this sequence type.

3. Spatial Sequence

The most common type of spatial sequences in presentations are those which organize items by geography. Examples of presentations which might use a geographic sequence are:

Roadside attractions along the Oregon coast

Ukrainian settlements throughout Canada from 1891 to 1914

Local, regional, and national impact of hosting the Olympics

But spatial sequences do not always correspond to geography. Spatial sequences can also sequence the connected parts of a whole. Example presentations include:

Functions of different parts of a plant (roots, stem, branches, leaves, fruit)

How to design an ergonomic office/workspace (computer, desktop, seating, storage)

Human nervous system (brain, spinal cord, nerves)

Advantages: Emphasizes the spatial relationships between your items. This can lead to a stronger understanding of the whole. Audiences can easily visualize how items “fit” together, particularly if you provide a map, diagram, or scale model.

Disadvantages: A spatial sequence is sometimes used even though the spatial dimension is meaningless to the content. Avoid this trap.

4. Paired Sequences

Paired sequences are short — only two items — but are quite common due to our propensity to compare and contrast.

There are a number of paired (or binary) sequences:

Advantages vs. Disadvantages (Costs vs Benefits; Pros vs. Cons)

Cause vs. Effect

Advantages: Natural pairings are easy to understand, and audiences expect that one will follow the other. Using a paired sequence generates anticipation and suspense.

Disadvantages: The binary nature of the paired sequence may not be flexible enough to handle complex real-world topics. The sequence suggests simplicity which may not be real. (It suggests a black-and-white situation, even though there may be fifty shades of grey.) For example, how do you handle a factor that is neither a cost nor a benefit? How do you handle a factor that is both a cost and a benefit?

“There are many ways to organize your presentation. The choices you make seriously impact your success.”

5. Topical Sequences

When all else fails, you can usually apply a topical sequence. Examples of presentations where a topical sequence may apply:

Presenting a project plan (budget, schedule, staffing, testing)

Unveiling new corporate strategy and discussing the impact on different stakeholders (marketing, sales, manufacturing, suppliers, customers)

School dress code presentation (code details, common violations, enforcement, uniform costs)

Advantages: Can be applied in almost any presentation, even when chronological, spatial, or other sequences are not relevant. Because of this, it is the most common sequence pattern.

Disadvantages: Unlike previous patterns covered, topical patterns are not intuitive. By their nature, topical sequences are more abstract. Audiences can easily get lost, and may have difficulty seeing how the sequence items relate. It’s also easy for a presenter to “miss” an important topic. For these reasons, a topical sequence is generally weaker than other options.

6. Perspective-based Sequences

A perspective-based sequence is a little like a topical sequence turned inside out. Instead of looking at different aspects of the main issue, a perspective-based sequence involves investigating some entity through a series of different lenses.

For example, consider a proposal to adopt a corporate initiative on telecommuting. One way to sequence your presentation would be to consider the impact of the policy from several perspectives:

From the perspective of telecommuting employees

From the perspective of office-based employees

From the perspective of managers

From the perspective of IT

From the perspective of Accounting

Advantages: Good for persuasive presentations when you encounter resistance, if you can correctly address the perspectives of each of your key stakeholders. Audience analysis is key!

Disadvantages: Can be repetitive (boring) if there is a great deal of topical overlap as you consider each of the perspectives.

7. Sort-by-property Sequences

Sort-by-property sequences are special topical sequences which allow a presenter to choose one property (or dimension) of their material and organize along that property (or dimension). You can choose any quality, as long as you can evaluate each item in your list e.g. importance, brightness, size, speed, popularity, shape, concreteness.

Once you choose the property, you then sequence your items in an appropriate order, often ascending or descending. For example:

Smallest to largest

Most understood to least understood

Most concrete to most abstract (specific to general)

Least impactful to most impactful

The optimal sort order may depend on the audience and the goals of the presentation. For example:

Most important to least important

Executive presentations often follow a sequence which begins with the most important item (what is being proposed?), and then follows with less important details (analysis, data, methods).

Least important to most important

Conference keynote addresses often follow a sequence which begins with small examples and points, progressively building to larger and larger points, and ending with a climax.

Advantages: Easy for an audience to follow and predict. Once you set the pattern with the first two elements, audience members will recognize it and use it to assess subsequent items.

Disadvantages: Avoid choosing a meaningless dimension on which to organize:

If discussing hockey players, it would be meaningless to sequence by favorite music style.

If discussing Academy Award winning actresses, it would be meaningless to sequence by hair color or breast size.