



# Listening

**The receiving, retaining and processing of information or ideas**

## Why it matters

We deliberately put listening as a critical component of communication first when it comes to the essential skills.

Listening sounds deceptively simple as a skill, and we might presume that this should be built in the home environment as a result. This is partly the case, but as teachers we know that listening is not as simple as it sounds – particularly over sustained periods, when taking on more complex information, or when it comes assessing bias.

Without the ability to listen (or receive communication through signing or similar) then we cannot easily receive information. The good news is that it is perfectly possible for all learners to develop their ability to receive and process information.

## How listening is built

This skill is all about being able to receive information effectively, whether it comes from a peer, parent, teacher, or someone else entirely.

Initially, the skill steps concentrate on being able to listen effectively to others. This includes remembering short instructions, understanding why others are communicating, and recording important information.

Learners then focus on how they demonstrate that they are listening effectively, thinking about body language, open questioning, and summarising and rephrasing.

Beyond that, the focus is on being aware of how they might be being influenced by a speaker through tone and language.

The final steps are about critical listening – comparing perspectives, identifying biases, evaluating ideas, and being objective.



## Skills Builder Framework for Listening

**The receiving, retaining, and processing of information or ideas**

Step 0	I listen to others without interrupting
Step 1	I listen to others and can remember short instructions
Step 2	I listen to others and can ask questions if I don't understand
Step 3	I listen to others and can tell someone else what it was about
Step 4	I listen to others and can tell why they are communicating with me
Step 5	I listen to others and record important information as I do
Step 6	I show I am listening by how I use eye contact and body language
Step 7	I show I am listening by using open questions to deepen my understanding
Step 8	I show I am listening by summarising or rephrasing what I have heard
Step 9	I am aware of how a speaker is influencing me through their tone
Step 10	I am aware of how a speaker is influencing me through their language
Step 11	I listen critically and compare different perspectives
Step 12	I listen critically and think about where differences in perspectives come from
Step 13	I listen critically and identify potential bias in different perspectives
Step 14	I listen critically and use questioning to evaluate different perspectives
Step 15	I listen critically and look beyond the way speakers speak or act to objectively evaluate different perspectives



## Listening Step 0

### Step 0: I listen to others without interrupting

To achieve step 0, individuals will have to be able to listen to others without interrupting.

This is the first step in building this skill and provides the foundation for more advanced steps in Listening.

### Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I know what it means to listen
- I know what interrupting is, and why to avoid it
- I know some ways to avoid interrupting

### Reflection questions

- What is listening? How do we do it?
- Why do we listen?
- What is interrupting and why do we do it?
- What is wrong with interrupting someone?
- What are some things that we can do to stop interrupting?

### What you need to know

#### What it means to listen

Listening is about being able to receive information through our ears, and then thinking about it so that we understand what is being said.

We cannot listen if we do not try to, if anything is in the way of our ears, or if we are thinking about something else.

It is important to listen because:

- We might learn information that helps to protect us, or to keep us safe
- We might understand how someone else is feeling about something
- We might learn how to do something better
- We might understand something new that we hadn't understood before

## What is means to interrupt and why we should avoid it

Interrupting is stopping what someone is saying. You might do this by speaking, or by looking away or doing something that shows that you have stopped listening.

We might interrupt for different reasons – including some positive reasons:

- We might have ideas that we are excited to share
- We might think of something that we want to say right away
- We might agree with the speaker and want to tell them straight away
- We might be running out of time to talk about something

Often though, we interrupt for less positive reasons:

- We might disagree with them and want to put across our point of view
- We might not be finding what they say interesting or relevant
- We might be bored with the conversation

Interrupting others causes several problems:

- It often makes the person you have interrupted feel like you don't care what they are saying, or that they are not interesting.
- It often makes the person you have interrupted feel that you think your opinion is more important than what they have to say
- It means that you have missed out on what is really being said
- If you let someone else talk for longer, you might be surprised about what you learn – and they might say something you did not expect

## How to avoid interrupting

We can all get better at not interrupting others. At the start, we may have to take a deliberate approach to thinking actively about how we are behaving and thinking.

Over time, as with all skill development, this will become more of an automatic habit, and not something that requires the same level of thought and attention.

Some strategies to try out are:

- Do try to be quiet, especially if you are normally talkative
- Do try to remember what is being said
- Do apologise if you accidentally interrupt and let the speaker talk again
- Do check if someone has finished before speaking if you're not sure
- Don't presume you know what is going to come next – try to think about whether anything you are hearing is a surprise to you
- Don't use any pause in the conversation to start talking
- Don't feel that you need to say something to show you agree – nodding and maintaining eye contact are much better ways than interrupting someone

If you have to interrupt – for example, because you have run out of time for a conversation, or because there is an emergency – then you can still do this politely and apologetically.

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- Get learners to ask a friend to tell them if they interrupt, or see them interrupting someone else
- Ask learners to get feedback at the end of a conversation to find out whether the other person felt that they had interrupted them at all

If the teacher wants to use an activity to practise this skill step on then you could use a graduated level of challenge:

- Start with one learner delivering a monologue to another – for example, about their weekend, holiday, or what they like doing at home. The other learner has to listen without interrupting for up to 3 minutes. They can then reverse roles.
- Then proceed onto having a conversation where they both have to share ideas and listen to each other. For example, having a conversation about what a great party would look like, or what they would like to do during their school holiday. You can have a third learner to act as an observer to highlight any times that one learner interrupts the other.

## Reinforcing it

This is a step that needs regular practice to become a habit. The teacher can:

- Encourage learners to reflect occasionally on whether they have been able to listen to one another without interrupting.
- Model good listening when other learners are speaking or recognise when learners have been showing good listening.
- Keep visual reminders around the learning space about this specific skill step.
- Maintain achieving this step as a target for all learners over a sustained period – for example, by having it as a target for the month.

## Assessing it

This step is best assessed through observation:

- During class, the teacher could keep a tally of when learners interrupt the flow of conversation or one another.
- The teacher could observe learners' interactions with their peers, to see how well they can listen to one another without interrupting.
- The teacher could set a target for the class to reduce the number of interruptions over time



## Listening Step 1

### Step 1: I listen to others and can remember short instructions

To achieve Step 1, individuals will have to demonstrate that they can listen to and recall a short series of 3-5 instructions.

This builds on the previous step of being able to listen without interrupting and starts to focus on the retention of information. It might apply to listening to a manager, instructor, or a peer.

## Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I know why recalling instructions matters
- I concentrate when listening to instructions
- I store and recall simple instructions

## Reflection questions

- When do you have to remember instructions?
- Why is it important that you do so accurately?
- When do you struggle to listen to instructions?
- What could you do to better listen to instructions?
- What can you do to help remember three simple instructions?

## Why recalling instructions matters

We have to listen to instructions in many different parts of our lives, whether we are being taught something new, being given a job to do, or just completing tasks in our wider lives.

We must listen to instructions carefully to make sure that we do exactly what is being expected and so that we don't make mistakes or place ourselves into situations of danger.

Sometimes people struggle to listen to instructions because:

- They think they already know what to do – perhaps because they think that they have done the same thing, or something very similar in the past
- They are distracted by other things that they are thinking about
- They are distracted by things that are going on around them – for example, background noise, visual distractions or fiddling with things

## How to concentrate and focus

To help learners to concentrate we suggest a three-step approach:

- *Stop* anything that might be a distraction. That might include putting down stationery or tools, not writing or reading anything else, and ensuring that there are no distracting background noises.
- *Focus* on the speaker by looking at them and being ready to receive the instructions. Your brain should be actively trying to remember what is being said.
- *Repeat* the instructions in your head several times so that you have processed them and checked that you understand what they mean.

## How to store and recall simple instructions

It should be possible to store and recall three simple instructions within our *working memories*. They then need to be considered and processed to pass into our longer-term memory. To help things to stick in our long-term memories we can:

- Think about whether the instructions follow patterns that we already know – for example, there might be links between how we clean different objects, how we write different things down, or how we play different games
- Visualising ourselves completing the task by following the instructions
- Breaking the instructions into three separate packages and imagining them in order

If there are more than three instructions it can be hard to remember them. We might need to put them into smaller sub-sets of instructions. In most cases though, we would write down lengthier sets of instructions. We come on to doing this in *Step 5*.

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- The teacher can give learners a simple set of instructions – for example, to create a model or to rearrange objects in a particular way. As their teacher, model how you would take an instruction, repeat it in your head, and then try to visualise it.
- Working in pairs, one learner is given a simple set of instructions which they then have to share with a partner who then has to remember and enact those instructions to complete the task.

## Reinforcing it

This is a step that lends itself to regular practice in the classroom setting, and once mastered will support learning and a positive classroom dynamic. As a teacher you can:

- Remind learners of the three-step process (Stop, Focus, Repeat) to ensure that they are ready to take on instructions before you start
- When giving instructions, model to learners how they can process those instructions, making sure that they have taken them on board
- As learners become more confident in this skill step, provide less scaffolding when giving instructions – perhaps replacing verbal reminders to Stop, Focus, Repeat with visual reminders in the classroom
- Be confident over time in giving sets of instructions without substantial repetition and demonstrate your confidence that learners will be able to follow these instructions

## Assessing it

This step is best assessed through a practical exercise:

- By giving learners a simple set of instructions – for example, to fold a piece of paper, draw a particular picture on one side and write something on the inside – and then observe who has been able to recall and follow those instructions
- By asking learners to give each other simple sets of instructions and to observe how learners can cope with that structure



## Listening Step 2

### Step 2: I listen to others and can ask questions if I don't understand

To achieve Step 2, individuals will show that they can listen and then ask questions to clarify their understanding.

This step builds on the previous two steps of Listening, which focused on being able to listen without interrupting, and then being able to recall basic instructions.

## Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I know why it is important to understand what I have heard
- I think about whether I understand what I have heard
- I ask questions when I have not understood

## Reflection questions

- When is it important to check understanding?
- How do you check if you understand something?
- How can you check your understanding of something through questions?
- What are good or bad questions to ask?

## What you need to know

### How to check your understanding when listening

Even if you are a good listener, what you understand will only be as good as how clear the communication is that you are receiving.

Before you can expand your understanding further, it is often helpful to check that you have understood what you have heard. If you don't, sometimes misunderstandings can grow.

Some ways of checking your understanding are:

- Repeating back what you think you heard
- Rephrasing what you heard to check that you understand the meaning
- Drawing a link to something comparable to check your understanding – for example, ‘is that like the time that...’ or ‘is this similar to...?’

## Using questions to check your understanding

When you ask questions to check your understanding, you should first reflect on what you have already understood so that your questions are relevant

Some ways of thinking through whether you understand something, might be to think through the key questioning words:

- Who: who is involved, and how?
- What: what is happening?
- Where: where is this taking place?
- When: when is this happening; at what time and for how long?
- How: how is this going to happen; what are the steps that will be followed?

To make sure you are asking good questions, make sure that they are *relevant* to the situation. Questions that are not relevant will waste time and suggest to the speaker that you have not been listening.

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- The learners could be given some basic information about something – for example, an upcoming event. They should then formulate the questions they need to build up a full understanding of what is going on, e.g. when the event is, what will happen, who will be invited, and what is going to happen to get that event ready.
- They can then try it out with one another. For example, one learner can be given a set of information but can only share it when they have been asked a question that gives them the chance to share that information. This can be extended, where relevant, to sharing of subject knowledge like historical events or scientific ideas.
- Learners could be given a topic to investigate by developing the questions to which they would like to understand the answers, and then inviting in an expert to help address those questions.

## Reinforcing it

This step can be regularly practised in the classroom. Some things that the teacher could do include:

- Reminding learners of the key clarifying questions that they might ask – visual reminders of these around the learning environment might be helpful.
- Deliberately encouraging learners to ask questions to expand their understanding of a particular topic or in classroom learning more widely.
- If learners have opportunities to share their work, encourage other learners to find out more by asking clarifying questions to deepen their understanding of what is being shared. The teacher should praise learners who ask effective clarifying questions.

## Assessing it

This step can be assessed through observation and structured activity:

- The teacher can encourage learners to ask questions of one another after having presented an idea or a piece of work. Observe and record which learners can ask good questions.
- The teacher can set an activity where learners are only given partial information, which then requires that learners ask questions to complete their understanding.
- Over the longer-term, the teacher can observe learners and their ability to follow instructions and to check understanding when they are listening.



## Listening Step 3

### Step 3: I listen to others and can tell someone else what it was about

To achieve Step 3, individuals will need to be able to listen, and retain, recall, and share what they have heard.

In Steps 1 and 2 individuals focused on their ability to listen to others and remember simple instructions, and to use questioning to check their understanding. This step builds on this by dealing with the recalling and re-telling of longer pieces of information.

## Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I listen effectively and stay focused
- I retain and process information I have heard
- I recall and explain information to others

## Reflection questions

- How do you make sure you are listening?
- How do you help ensure that you stay focused?
- How do you make sure you remember a longer piece of speech, a series of instructions, or a story?
- When do you find this easier or more difficult?
- When are you good at recalling information that you have heard?
- What are the most important things to share?

## What you need to know

### Listen effectively and stay focused

In the previous steps, some approaches to ensuring focus were discussed, along with the importance of being in the right frame of mind.

One simple model introduced in Step 1 to achieve this is to:

- *Stop* anything that might be a distraction. That might include putting down stationery or tools, not writing or reading anything else, and ensuring that there are no distracting background noises.
- *Focus* on the speaker by looking at them and being ready to receive the instructions. Your brain must be in a place of actively trying to remember what is being said. You cannot be thinking about other things.
- *Repeat* what you are hearing in your head several times so that you have been able to process it, and check that you understand what it means in your head.

## Retaining and processing information

Most people find it difficult to recall anything verbatim (that is, exactly in the same way that they were told it). Recalling what is being heard is not like trying to record in real-time what is being said.

Instead, people remember extended things they hear in one of several ways:

- They relate a new piece of knowledge to what they already know and fit it into an existing *conceptual framework*. For example, they might link something geographically, or place it in a historical context. Or they might link a concept in science to something that they have observed themselves.
- Alternatively, people turn the information into a *sequence or story* that they can follow – humans are good at using stories as a way of storing information.
- Finally, thinking about the *implications and feelings* about what is being heard can be a very effective way of processing information.

In any case, it often takes a little time to think and to process what has been heard before we can pass that information on to someone else. *Taking a bit of thinking time* is a good idea.

## Recalling and sharing information

It is very difficult to share information that you have not had time to think about first.

When you share information, you are very unlikely to share it exactly as you heard it. The key thing is to focus on keeping the same *key points* – not to get all the words right.

If you have been able to process what you have heard, you might already have turned this into a *story*, or be able to link what you are saying to other *concepts* or *experiences* that will be familiar to the listeners.

The most important information to share will depend on the situation, and it is worth focusing on this key information.

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- The learners should listen to an extended talk of 3-5 minutes, then take time to think about what they have heard and decide what the most important facts are. The teacher can model and scaffold this initially by listening with them and showing them how to think about what the most important pieces of information are.
- Once this has been modelled to learners, they can practice by listening to an extended talk or story for 3-5 minutes. The teacher should give them a chance to think about what they heard, and then try to tell the story back to one another.
- Another good activity, if the group makes it feasible, is to play a version of ‘Pass It On’ – they each pass a short story along to someone else, try to recall it, and then pass it on to the next person.

## **Reinforcing it**

This is a step that lends itself to regular practice in the classroom setting and, once mastered, will support learning and a positive classroom dynamic. The teacher can:

- Routinely remind learners before they are listening to an explanation that they will need to be able to tell someone else what is going to happen next. The teacher could even only tell half the learners, so that they then need to explain what is happening to the other half.
- Encourage learners to listen to a story or learn something new at home and come to class ready to recall and share what they learnt.

## **Assessing it**

This step lends itself well to being assessed through a simple exercise, although it can also be observed over time:

- The teacher could get learners to listen to a short explanation of something that they are studying, either on video or purely by listening. The learners could then work with a teaching assistant to recall what they can from what they have heard.
- The teacher could observe learners when they are being given some new information, and how well they can pass that information on to someone else.



## Listening Step 4

### Step 4: I listen to others and can tell why they are communicating with me

To achieve Step 4, individuals will need to understand the main reasons why others may want to communicate with them and to be able to identify each of these reasons.

In the steps so far, the focus has been on the tools of effective listening, but to make progress individuals need to be able to start identifying what the purpose is behind what they are hearing.

## Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I know the key reasons why people communicate
- I know why it is important to know why someone is communicating
- I can identify why someone is communicating with me

## Reflection questions

- Why do you communicate with people?
- Why do people communicate with one another?
- Why does it matter why someone is communicating with you?
- What could happen if you misunderstand the purpose of their communication?
- What are the ways of telling why someone is communicating with you?
- Are there any reasons that are more difficult to identify than others?

## What you need to know

### Why people communicate

Some of the main reasons why people communicate are:

- To share information
- To share an opinion or view
- To express their feelings
- To request something that they need
- To learn about others
- To build relationships
- To give instructions
- To encourage others

Sometimes communication might combine two or more of these purposes:

- To give instructions and encourage someone to follow them
- To share both information and their opinion on that information

## Why it matters why someone is communicating with you

Understanding the purpose behind someone's communication with us helps us to be as prepared as possible for processing what is going on and responding appropriately.

If we misunderstand the purpose of the communication, we might be unprepared to take any necessary actions after listening to the other individual. For example, if we think someone is presenting information, we might not be prepared to process instructions. Or if we think someone is trying to be encouraging, we might be unhappy when they express a different opinion to us.

Communication always works better, and is easier to listen and respond to, when we are clear on what the purpose of the communication is.

## The signs of why someone is communicating with you

There are some signs you can spot to help understand why someone is communicating with you:

Purpose	<i>How you can tell</i>
To share information	They might start with 'Did you know...' and talk in terms of facts and events
To share an opinion or view	They might use phrases like 'I think that...' or 'In my opinion...' and normally use more adjectives (describing words)
To express their feelings	They might use phrases like 'I feel...' and use emotional language or adjectives (describing words)
To request something that they need	A request will normally be posed as a question, although sometimes it is easier to say No than at other times
To learn about others and build relationships	They might be asking questions or sharing small pieces of personal information followed by related questions about you
To give instructions	They will talk directly and normally with a focus on actions and verbs (doing words)
To encourage others	They will talk in positive terms about what someone is doing and the effect it is having

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- Learners should listen to several short examples of the teacher speaking and match these to the correct purpose of speech.
- This could be extended by a matching exercise, with examples of each type of talk written down and learners having to match the phrase to the correct communication purpose.
- This could be built on further, with learners coming up with examples to illustrate each purpose of communication.

## **Reinforcing it**

This is a step that lends itself to regular practice in the classroom and supports effective learning. The teachers can ask learners to think about the communication they have just heard in the classroom and what the purpose of the communication was. For example, was the teacher encouraging, giving instructions, presenting facts, or sharing an opinion?

This sort of modelling can be undertaken regularly and supported by visual reminders of the different purposes of communication on display in the learning area.

## **Assessing it**

This step lends itself well to being assessed through a simple exercise such as a matching exercise where learners are asked to link what they have heard to what they think was the purpose of the communication, or by creating their own examples of communication with different purposes.



## Listening Step 5

### Step 5: I listen to others and record important information as I do so

To achieve Step 5, individuals will be able to listen effectively and then be able to identify and record key information.

This builds on previous steps that focused on how to listen effectively to simple instructions, how to recall longer speech, and how to understand the different purposes of communication.

## Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I can sustain concentration when listening over a longer period
- I identify key words and information from extended talks
- I record information in a way that makes it accessible again in the future

## Reflection questions

- How do you find listening for 20-30 minutes?
- What causes you to lose focus and concentration?
- Do you have any ways of helping to maintain concentration?
- Can you just write down everything you hear?
- If not, how do you know which information to write down?
- How do you take notes at the moment?
- What tricks can you use to save writing words when you're listening?

## What you need to know

### Sustain and concentration over a longer time

Many people have cycles of concentration which last for 15-20 minutes so it is not unusual for someone to find it challenging to listen for up to 30 minutes.

Concentration requires effort and after a few minutes we become much more easily distracted than we were at the outset of the activity.

There are some things we can do to support sustained concentration over a longer period:

- We can actively try to avoid anything that might distract us – for example, by putting away stationery, tools, papers, or notes that we don't need.
- We can also avoid looking at other things or people who might distract us, e.g. by not looking out of the window.
- Finally, as our concentration weakens, we become more aware of any discomfort we might feel, e.g. a squeaky or uncomfortable chair. Making sure we're comfortable before listening for a sustained period can set us up for success.

## Identifying key pieces of information

It is near impossible for anyone to record exactly what is being said when someone is speaking when the average person says between 125 and 150 words per minute. On the other hand, the average person can only write up to 20 words per minute by hand, or around 40 words per minute when typing. Therefore, it is important to be selective in what is being written down.

Normally, when someone is writing as they listen, they are *note-taking*. This is about selecting the most important facts or pieces of information and ensuring that they are recorded. For example, in history you would want to record key dates, individuals, and places but might not need to record all of the narrative around them.

If the person you are listening to makes the same point more than once, or emphasises it, then it is likely to be an important piece of information that you should record

## Record information in an understandable way

Some important techniques to use when taking notes include:

- *Be clear on what the topic is:* If you start with an understanding of the objective and what is being covered when you listen, it is much easier to organise your notes.
- *Bullet points:* Instead of writing in long sentences, use bullet points to write down the key facts in shortened sentences. These are normally arranged under a particular theme, exactly as we've been modelling in this Handbook.
- *Drawing out links between ideas:* Particularly if you're writing notes by hand, you don't need to be constrained by writing all your notes in lines. Instead, you might draw links, or use flow diagrams to highlight how different concepts link together. Arrows are a good way of showing links and flows between things.
- *Find your shorthand:* Over time you might find abbreviations that work for you and stop you from having to write long words over and over again. For example, '=' instead of 'means that', or '→' instead of 'led to', or '～' instead of 'about'. You can also use *acronyms* or *abbreviations*.
- *Separate key facts or vocabulary:* You might want to use a different part of your page to record key facts or vocabulary so you have them all together.

At the end of your notes, it can sometimes be helpful to take time to think about everything that you heard. You can then use this time to create a summary of the main points.

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- Learners could listen to a modelled example of a talk. The teacher can listen with the class to a video or an audio track and show them on the board how to make notes, modelling some of the techniques that have been used above.
- The teacher can build up from this by getting learners to listen to a short video or audio clip and again ask them to make notes and then share what they came up with. If the teacher completes this at the same time, then it can act as a helpful exemplar.
- Finally, learners can build up to listening for a longer time, with the teacher supporting them to maintain concentration and make notes as they go.

## Reinforcing it

This is a step that lends itself to regular practice in the classroom setting, and once mastered will support learning. It also lends itself well to assessment. The teacher can:

- Find opportunities to deliver content in a block of time and encourage learners to make notes as they go. These notes can be reviewed or marked as the teacher would another piece of written work
- Regularly remind learners before they listen for a sustained period about how to maintain their concentration
- Create some shared guidelines as a class for what good note-taking looks like in your classroom, possibly including a shared shorthand notation

## Assessing it

This step lends itself well to being assessed through a simple exercise:

Give learners the challenge of listening to a sustained presentation on a relevant topic and set them the challenge of making notes as they listen.

Afterwards, the teacher can check whether they have secured the step by reviewing the quality and accuracy of the notes they have made. Alternatively, learners could be given a short test of the key facts, with access to their notes so that if they have recorded the information appropriately then it will be available to them.



## Listening Step 6

### Step 6: I show I am listening by how I use eye contact and body language

To achieve Step 6, individuals will be able to demonstrate that they are listening by using eye contact and other positive, encouraging body language with whoever is speaking.

In earlier steps, individuals focused on their experience of receiving information and how to take that information on effectively. The next steps, Steps 6 to 8, focus on how individuals can demonstrate effective listening to others.

## Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I actively listen for a sustained period
- I maintain an appropriate level of eye contact with a speaker
- I show that I am listening through my body language

## Reflection questions

- Why do you think eye contact is important to show you are listening?
- How do you feel when someone is not making eye contact when you are speaking?
- What does positive body language look like?
- What is the effect of positive body language?
- What do you do already to show you are interested?

## Using eye contact

Eye contact is a helpful part of showing that you are listening to someone, and to show that you are not being distracted by other things.

Eye contact is also important because seeing someone's face and their expressions give you extra information about how they feel about what they are saying. It also helps you to understand what they are emphasising, and therefore what they think is important.

However, maintaining eye contact does *not* mean that you should be staring into someone's face. This can be even more off-putting than limited eye contact. Instead, an approximate target of 60-70% eye contact is probably the best balance.

## Positive body language

We look at someone else's body language to build our understanding of how they are feeling, and also how interested they are in us and what we have to say. So, to be a good listener you should try to ensure that your body is giving the signal that you are interested in what you are hearing and that you want to hear more. Some of the ways that you can do this are:

- *Face the speaker:* You should turn your body so that you are naturally facing the speaker. This might mean moving your chair – if you are uncomfortable looking at them, it will show, and they might interpret that as your being uninterested or uncomfortable with what they are saying.
- *Not fidgeting:* Fidgeting with your hands, feet, or anything else is distracting both for the speaker and you. It indicates that you want to be somewhere else.
- *Being open with your arms:* Folding your arms can look defensive and suggest that you want to be somewhere else or that you are trying to protect yourself. Instead, try to use open gestures to show that you are open to what you are hearing.
- *Leaning forwards:* When you are engaged, you naturally lean forwards to show that you want to take part in the conversation and also to listen more effectively to what is being said.
- *Engaged face:* Seeing someone smiling helps the speaker to relax and feel that you are enjoying what they are saying. Obviously, depending on the message, smiling is not always appropriate, but you can still look engaged.

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- Learners can be put into pairs. They should take it in turns to talk for 3 minutes on a topic of their choosing, e.g. what they would like to change about school, their favourite television show, or a hobby.
  - For the first go, encourage learners to disregard actively the guidance on how to show that they are engaged by avoiding eye contact, fidgeting, using closed body language, and scowling. Ask the speakers how they felt.
  - Repeat the exercise, encouraging learners to put in effect all of the guidance on how to use eye contact and positive body language. Ask the speakers and listeners how they felt – hopefully, much better.
- Highlight to learners that, whilst eye contact and positive body language are really important when they are speaking and listening in pairs, it is also useful when they are listening as part of a larger group too.
  - When speaking to the class as their teacher, encourage them to demonstrate that they are listening, and highlight good practice

## Reinforcing it

This is a good step to reinforce regularly in the course of normal teaching:

- Before paired work, learners can be reminded how to do their best work together – starting by how they show that they are ready to listen and to learn from one another.
- During day-to-day learning, the teacher can remind learners how to be ready for learning, and how they can demonstrate that they are ready through these same techniques.
- The teacher could also include visual reminders of what it looks like when someone is listening, based on the tips and techniques shared above.

## Assessing it

This step is best assessed through observation in day-to-day learning, although a particular scenario or role-play could also be created. The teacher could also create a check-list, based on the reminders above, and assess whether individual learners are demonstrating the required behaviour. This could be extended to peer assessment too.



## Listening Step 7

**Step 7: I show I am listening by using open questions to deepen my understanding**

To achieve Step 7, individuals will be able to use appropriate open questions to demonstrate that they are listening and to open up the conversation to learn more.

In earlier steps, the focus has been on how to listen effectively, and then how to use body language and eye contact to show listening.

### Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I follow the thread of a discussion to make appropriate contributions
- I understand the difference between closed and open questions
- I identify how I can expand my understanding of what is said

### Reflection questions

- What is the difference between open and closed questions?
- Can you give any examples of the difference?
- How can you use open questions to support being a better listener?
- Can you come up with examples of open questions?

### What you need to know

#### The difference between open and closed questions

An important part of asking good questions is to know the right type of question to ask at the right time. There are two big types of questions:

- *Closed questions* are those which can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' response, e.g. 'Is that...' or 'Did...'. They are useful for confirming or denying facts. However, they are not good at expanding conversations further.
- *Open questions* are those that cannot be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' response. They tend to start with the bigger question words like 'who', 'what', 'why', 'when' and 'how'. Sometimes these questions can still be answered with short factual answers, but they have the potential to be much broader.

## Creating open questions to extend conversation

### *Key points:*

The value of open questions is that they can demonstrate to the speaker that you have listened to what they have said so far, as well as permitting the speaker to expand upon the topic they are sharing. This may open up new and interesting lines of enquiry.

It is possible to combine a closed question with an open question to extend the conversation further too, e.g. 'did you consider doing that, and how did you make your decision?' or 'do you like this, and why?'

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- Learners could look at a list of questions and decide whether they are open or closed questions.
- Learners can then listen to a talk from a peer or their teacher and then create closed questions to confirm or deny specific facts. They can then create open questions to broaden out the conversation.
- Learners can interview one another by using open questions to build up their understanding of something

## Reinforcing It

This step lends itself to easy reinforcement across learning. For example:

- Before introducing questions to the class, the teacher could ask whether they are open or closed questions
- The teacher could put visual reminders of the difference between open and closed questions on display in the classroom
- If learners present to each other at different times, the teacher could encourage other learners to ask closed or open questions depending on the purpose

## Assessing It

This step can be assessed through a simple assignment or observation:

- The teacher could set learners a challenge of creating three open questions and three closed questions in response to a stimulus
- The teacher could give learners a list of questions and challenge them to sort them into a list of open questions and closed questions



## Listening Step 8

**Step 8: I show I am listening by summarising or rephrasing what I have heard**

To achieve Step 8, individuals will show that they can demonstrate their understanding of more complex ideas by repeating or rephrasing what they have heard.

In the earlier Steps 6 and 7, individuals showed they were listening by using eye contact, body language, and open questions. This builds further by showing engagement with the content itself of what they are hearing.

### Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I understand what it means to summarise information
- I understand what it means to rephrase information
- I find appropriate points in conversation to summarise or rephrase

### Reflection questions

- What does it mean to summarise what you have heard?
- What is the value of rephrasing what you have heard?
- How would you choose between summarising or rephrasing?
- How can you effectively build this into the flow of conversation?

### What you need to know

#### Summarising or rephrasing what you have heard

*Summarising* is about capturing the key points of what has been said (the methods of doing this were discussed in Step 5, when taking notes).

Summarising works well when what you are listening to is not too complicated, i.e. it is about a process, a set of directions, or instructions. Here the focus is on making sure that you can repeat back the key points without significant change, and to ensure that you have not missed anything important.

*Rephrasing* is an extension of summarising. Similarly, you take the main points that a speaker has made, but instead of playing that back directly, you change the way that an idea has been expressed.

Rephrasing is most helpful when the speaker is talking about more complex concepts, e.g. explaining a broader principle, or an academic concept. In this case, rephrasing is a helpful test of whether you have understood and been able to process what has been heard. Putting something ‘into your own words’ requires that you have understood what has been heard already.

## Working summarising and rephrasing into conversation

Summarising and rephrasing can be extremely helpful tools to help structure the flow of information. If done well, it can ensure that:

- Anything that wasn't clear or that you misheard when listening can be addressed quickly
- It provides the speaker with greater confidence that you are understanding what they are sharing
- The process of summarising or rephrasing helps you to process and store the information, making it more likely that you will remember it in the future

Timing is critical for making summarising and rephrasing effective tools, though:

- If you interrupt to summarise or rephrase then it can break the flow of conversation or thought of the speaker
- If you leave too little time, the conversation becomes disjointed because there hasn't been time for the speaker to explain the idea or instructions fully
- If you leave too much time, you might miss the opportunity to correct a misconception on your part

Ideally, the speaker would make clear that they had finished a point or idea by asking if that all made sense, or whether you had any questions. However, even if they don't do that, they may well pause as they consider what is coming next. At that point, you can always chip in, starting with something like 'So, what you're saying is...' or 'To check my understanding, am I right that...' or 'So, is it the case that...'

You can tell if you've got your timing right, because:

- If you've timed it right, then your speaker should seem appreciative of what you've checked or encouraged to speak more
- If you summarised or rephrased too soon then they might seem flustered or snappy as they feel that they've interrupted
- If you leave it too long then they might start trailing off or appearing to lose confidence in what they're saying because they're questioning in their head whether you can keep up

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- For *summarising*, the teacher can start by modelling a conversation containing some key information or a set of instructions, perhaps between themselves and a teaching assistant, or one of the learners. At appropriate points, the teacher can model how to summarise what they have heard so far and how this can be built into the flow of a conversation.
  - The teacher might also want to model what it looks like to try to summarise what you have heard too soon, or to leave it too late and show how you might have got lost by that point.
- The learners can then work in pairs, giving a long set of instructions or information (of up to 5 minutes length). This lends itself best to repetition. Encourage the listener to summarise at least twice, and probably three times during that conversation.
- For *rephrasing*, it is worth starting by rephrasing a single idea first. Perhaps this is a subject-related concept, or for a more meta-approach the teacher could rephrase some of the key concepts in this step.
  - Learners can practice this individually by being given a concept or idea, and then telling one another or to writing it down in their own words, rephrasing what they heard.
- Then, in pairs, learners should explain a concept or idea to one another. The listener has to find an appropriate point to check their understanding by rephrasing what they have heard.

## Reinforcing it

This is a skill step that lends itself well to being reinforced in class:

- During regular lessons, the teacher could pause at moments to ask the learners to summarise what they have learnt or heard so far, or to rephrase it to demonstrate their understanding.
- The teacher can also continue to model this technique when teaching concepts or ideas that learners find challenging by demonstrating how they rephrase these to help build understanding. This is something that teachers do naturally anyway.

## Assessing it

This step can be assessed through observation or a deliberate activity:

- The teacher could check that learners can summarise and rephrase by giving them all something to listen to for 2-3 minutes and then asking them to summarise or rephrase it, either verbally or in writing.
- The teacher will then want to check that learners can build this naturally into the flow of conversation. This could be done through peer assessment of learners as they work in pairs, or through observation of conversations.



## Listening Step 9

### Step 9: I am aware of how a speaker is influencing me through their tone

To achieve Step 9, individuals will have to understand what is meant by ‘tone’, how it varies, and the impact of different tones when communicating.

In earlier steps, the focus was on listening effectively and demonstrating listening. This step, and Step 10, focuses on increasing listeners’ understanding of how they could be influenced by the speaker.

## Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I understand what tone means and can identify the key elements
- I explain how a speaker’s tone can change
- I understand how different tones can influence my understanding of what I hear

## Reflection questions

- How do our voices change when we are speaking?
- What do you understand by ‘tone’ in the context of listening?
- How can tone vary? Can you give examples?
- How do you think each of the elements of tone affect the listener?
- Why is it important as a listener to pay attention to tone, not just the words?

## What you need to know

### What tone is and how it matters

For now, imagine that someone is saying the same thing, e.g. “Could you get that piece of work to me tomorrow?”

Without changing the words, the way they sound and the meaning they convey can change a lot depending on the way in which someone says them. It is amazing how much meaning comes from the way that something is said, rather than just *what* is being said. This simple sentence could sound:

- *Positive*: you are doing them a favour by getting the piece of work done for tomorrow.
- *Exasperated*: the piece of work should have been done today or sooner.
- *Relaxed*: getting the piece of work done for tomorrow would be great, but it could plausibly be at a later date.
- *Like a direct instruction*: it is actually a command, not a question.

We refer to the way that something is said as the *tone* of speaking. Five main elements go into creating tone:

- *Pitch*: How high or low someone is speaking
- *Tempo*: How quickly someone is speaking
- *Volume*: How loudly or quietly someone is speaking
- *Intonation*: How the sentence rises and falls
- *Stress*: Where the emphasis is placed on different words

## The elements of tone and what they can mean

We can see how changes in tone have different effects on listeners:

<i>Element</i>	<i>The Variation</i>	<i>The Effect on the listener</i>
<i>Pitch: How high or low someone is speaking</i>	Someone speaks with a high pitch	The speaker can seem stressed or anxious, which might be interpreted as lacking confidence or not being honest.
	Someone speaks with a low pitch	The speaker can seem calm and more confident. However, they might seem less energetic or engaged.
<i>Tempo: How quickly someone is speaking</i>	Someone speaks quickly	The speaker can seem energetic and engaged. However, they might also seem stressed or anxious.
	Someone speaks slowly	The speaker can seem more authoritative and calm. However, if they speak too slowly they might seem unengaged.
<i>Volume: How loudly or quietly someone is speaking</i>	Someone speaks quietly	The speaker can appear calm and in control if they speak quietly. However, if they speak too quietly they might seem to be lacking in confidence.
	Someone speaks loudly	The speaker can seem authoritative if they speak loudly as it suggests that they are in control. However, if they are too loud it can seem aggressive or angry.
<i>Intonation: This is about how the sentence rises and falls</i>	Someone uses falling intonation – where the voice falls at the end of a phrase	The speaker sounds confident in what they are saying – perhaps they are giving an instruction.
	Someone uses rising intonation – where the voice rises at the end of a phrase	The speaker sounds like they are asking a question.
	Someone uses falling and rising intonation	The speaker sounds like they are not sure about what they are saying – they are open to discussion. It can also be a way of softening a direct question.
<i>Stress: Putting emphasis on different words in the sentence shifts meaning, mood and intention</i>	Heavy stress on a word draws attention to its importance	Stress identifies which element of the sentence is of most importance to the speaker, and what their intention is behind it (e.g. <i>Could you give me that?</i> implies irritation at a delay in being given something, whereas <i>Could you give me that?</i> Is about whether the person addressed is capable or willing to do so and so on...)

## Deciphering tone

Of course, these different elements of tone can all be used in a variety of different ways. The combination that is used can suggest:

*Different emotions:* As listeners, we might be able to interpret something of how the speaker is feeling depending on their tone.

- Anger could be suggested by a loud voice and falling intonation
- Anxiety could be suggested by speaking quickly and with a high pitch
- Confidence could be suggested by moderate volume and steady speaking pace
- Excitement could be suggested by a louder voice and quick speaking
- Doubt could be suggested by stressing an uncertain element of a statement

*The purpose of the communication:* As listeners, we can also infer the purpose of the communication from the tone (this was touched on in Step 4). For example:

- Instructions tend to have a falling intonation
- Questions tend to have rising intonation
- An invitation for discussion will often have falling and then rising intonation

There are a lot of different combinations of the five elements of tone (pitch, tempo, volume, and intonation, stress). As such, although we have given some examples, this is a skill step that is worth exploring in greater depth through listening carefully and then identifying the elements of tone and what you learnt as a result of paying attention to them.

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- Firstly, learners must have a clear understanding of what is meant by tone and the elements that make it; they should be able to give definitions and examples and talk about how they vary.
- Secondly, learners can then focus on what changes in these different elements might suggest to a listener. The teacher might be able to model how this works by repeating a similar statement in different ways and demonstrating what variations in each of the tonal elements sound like.
- Once learners have a strong understanding of the different elements, the teacher can play them a series of audio clips (try to avoid visual clues) and ask them to reflect on what they learnt from listening to the tone of the speaker.

## Reinforcing it

This is a step that can be routinely practised in a classroom setting:

- To reinforce the ideas of tone and the elements that make it up, visual reminders in the classroom can be helpful
- When listening to any audio of another speaker, the teacher can pause learners and get them to reflect on what they have interpreted from the tone of the speaker
- When the teacher is talking in class, they can pause learners and highlight the different elements of tone in how they spoke and ask the class to interpret what that might mean

## Assessing it

This step is best assessed through an assessed activity:

- Testing whether learners remember what the five elements of tone are, how they vary and what the effects of that variation can be on the interpretation of the listener
- Playing a series of short audio clips to learners and asking them to interpret how the elements of tone vary in the clips, and what they can infer from that



## Listening Step 10

**Step 10: I am aware of how a speaker is influencing me through their language**

To achieve Step 10, individuals will focus on how differences in the language that the speaker uses influence the meaning of what they are saying. They will identify some common elements and how to interpret them.

In the previous step, individuals explored how a speaker can influence through their tone and how to infer additional meaning from that tone. This step builds on this by focusing on the language that the speaker uses.

### Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I understand how language can influence emotions
- I identify language features that create different emotional responses
- I identify how language tools can influence the listener

### Reflective questions

- How can changes in language affect how you feel about something?
- Can you give some examples?
- Why is it important to be aware of how language can influence our emotions?
- What are some of the other ways that a listener can be influenced by what a speaker says?
- What have you experienced as the impact on you?

### What you need to know

#### Language for emotional responses

As listeners, we are influenced by the tone with which someone speaks to us, but we are also emotionally influenced by the language that a speaker uses.

It is important to be aware of how a speaker's language can influence our emotions so that we can consider whether we want our emotions influenced in that way. If we are not aware then we can be easily manipulated by a speaker.

If we are focused on listening to something, then we can often start to mirror the emotions that we are hearing. For example:

- If a speaker starts talking about being excited, then we start to feel excited too
- If a speaker talks about being anxious, nervous, or uncertain then we start to take on that emotion too

There are a wide range of emotions that one might feel at any time, based on what you are hearing:

- Joy
- Fear
- Surprise
- Disappointment
- Trust
- Anger
- Anticipation
- Disgust
- Boredom

What is important is to avoid being overwhelmed by the emotional reaction that you might have to what is being said. While it is helpful to be able to identify the emotional response that a speaker wants you to have, it is also important that this is balanced by being able to think objectively about the *content* of what is being said, to be able to engage critically with what the speaker is saying, and to remain detached so you can make your own mind up as to whether you agree with them or not.

## Language tools that can influence a listener

There are other language tools that a speaker can use to influence a listener.

While it is important to listen carefully, it is also important to be able to identify what is influencing you as a listener so that you can be in control of your reaction. In Step 4, we explored some of the purposes that a speaker might have when they are communicating with you as their listener. Each of these has associated language tools that a speaker might use:

<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Language tools they might use</i>
To share information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facts</li> <li>• Statistics</li> </ul>
To share an opinion or view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assertions of truth – “It is well known that...”</li> <li>• Selective statistics and facts</li> </ul>
To express their feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotive language</li> <li>• Hyperbole and exaggeration</li> </ul>
To request something that they need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotive language</li> <li>• Compliments</li> </ul>
To learn about others and build relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humour</li> <li>• Self-deprecation</li> <li>• Queries</li> </ul>
To give instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct instruction</li> </ul>
To encourage others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flattery</li> <li>• Compliments</li> <li>• Self-deprecation – for example, that they could never have done that.</li> </ul>

It is particularly important when a speaker is requesting something, encouraging, or sharing an opinion to be mindful that they are likely to be selective in the language that they use. They might be trying to influence and change your mind about something, or encouraging you to take some action which might not be correct or in your own best interests.

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- Firstly, the teacher should ensure that learners understand why a speaker might want to influence them through their use of language.
- Secondly, learners should understand that language can influence by encouraging a particular emotional response, or through selective provision of information to back up a particular idea.
- They can then look at this by modelling what it looks like to try to influence someone. These modelled examples can come from a teacher in the first instance, but then learners could also create their own.

## Reinforcing it

This step can be reinforced in the classroom:

- The teacher can encourage learners to identify emotive language in what they hear or read, and to reflect on how that is being used to influence their emotions.
- Learners can also be encouraged to take a critical view of some of the other language tools they might come across (e.g. hyperbole or exaggeration, selective use of facts and statistics or compliments) and to appreciate how that might influence them as a listener.

## Assessing it

This step can be assessed through observation or a carefully designed activity:

- Learners could listen to a couple of speeches or pitches (video is fine for this step) and try to identify where the speaker is looking to influence an emotional response from the listeners.
- They can also look to identify where language tools are being used to influence.



## Listening Step 11

### Step 11: I listen critically and compare different perspectives

To achieve Step 11, individuals will show that they can listen to two or more different perspectives on an issue and compare them.

In the previous steps, the focus was on how to demonstrate active listening, and then to be aware of how a speaker might try to influence us as listeners. This step thinks about how to listen critically to different perspectives and compare them.

## Building blocks

The Building blocks of this step are:

- I explain and can define what perspective means
- I understand the value of different people's perspectives
- I use core points made in a discussion to identify different perspectives

## Reflection questions

- What does it mean to have different perspectives?
- What is the value of looking at multiple perspectives?
- How can we identify the core points being made?
- How can we compare perspectives?

## What you need to know

### Different perspectives

A *perspective* is a view of something. That something might be as small as a specific problem, or as substantial as the global economy.

We have a diversity of opinions on a topic because we have such diversity of information, insights, lived experience, values, cultural norms, and underpinning assumptions about the world. What drives these different perspectives is explored in a lot more depth in *Step 12*.

A perspective might seem obvious or intuitive to the individual who holds it but look utterly incomprehensible to someone else.

### The value of different perspectives

Each of us only has an incomplete understanding of anything. Even experts in their field or academics spend a lot of time talking to one another to share different perspectives, and to debate and try to reconcile different ideas about how the world works.

By being open to different perspectives, we are open to:

- Expanding our knowledge and understanding of the world
- Recognising and benefiting from the skills and experiences of others
- Appreciating different values and cultural norms
- Challenging our unconscious biases and assumptions

There is plenty of evidence that groups that work to incorporate diverse perspectives into their thinking make better decisions and get further as a result. This is because the human brain does not tend to worry about the limitations of what it knows – it presumes it knows enough and then keeps going.

It takes an active effort to try to open up to different perspectives, and to wrestle intellectually with the differences that emerge as a result.

## Identifying the key points

Comparing perspectives is not an easy thing to do, particularly when listening. A simple mental model to do this is to take each individual in turn, and when listening try to capture some of this crucial information:

- What do they think the answer is, or should happen?
- What reasons do they give for this perspective?
- Do they recognise any of the arguments against their perspective?

This process of capturing information is helpful as a starting point, and to aid us in processing what we are hearing.

## Comparing perspectives

To compare perspectives successfully, though, we need to build up our mental models of the options and how to reconcile what we are hearing.

- As we build up our view of the different perspectives, we are looking to:
- Identify the range of available options
- Capture the arguments for and against each of those options
- Assess which of the perspectives we have heard is most *credible* – that is, most likely to be true
- Evaluate which of the options has the most compelling case, balancing the arguments for and against

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

The teacher should introduce the idea that there exists a diverse range of perspectives on any question, and that diversity is valuable because each of us only holds a small part of the answer.

- Learners can discuss the value of diverse perspectives. The teacher could illustrate this idea with examples such as highlighting how a decision in the context of school or college, like lengthening the learning day, would be seen quite differently by different members of the community. Learners could discuss what some of these different perspectives might be.
- The teacher can then model how to reconcile these different views. In this simple example, there are two initial options (to extend the learning day, or not to extend the learning day). Additional options might also be introduced, such as reducing the length of holidays.

- The teacher can illustrate how to draw out these three options, add arguments for and against each option in a grid as they are heard, and then use this to help make a choice.
- Ultimately, the teacher should remind learners that lots of decisions are not clear-cut but are about trade-offs between options, and linked with values as much as to outcomes.

## Reinforcing it

This step lends itself well to reinforcement in the classroom. For instance, debate can be a way of deepening learners' engagement with a topic, and those listening have to decipher what they are hearing and decide what they think at the end, having reflected on a variety of options and views.

This step is also useful when learners are listening to different perspectives in other areas of learning. This sort of comparison is often an essential part of learning at a more advanced level.

## Assessing it

This step is best assessed through a structured activity where learners have to listen to a range of perspectives on a problem or question. They should demonstrate that they can capture critical information, and then organise it in a simple model to compare the options and reach a justified view of their own, based on what they hear.



## Listening Step 12

**Step 12: I listen critically and think about where differences in perspectives come from**

To achieve Step 12, individuals will have to show that they can think about where differences in perspectives might come from.

In the previous step, the focus was on recognising and comparing different standpoints. This step builds on this by encouraging individuals to think more deeply about where diverse views come from, the better to build empathy and understanding.

### Building blocks

The building blocks of this step are:

- I am aware of the factors which can influence a person's perspective
- I link information that I have heard to a person's perspective
- I build knowledge of people and events to better understand different perspectives

### Reflection questions

- What causes us to have different perspectives?
- Why is it helpful to understand where perspectives come from?
- What are the challenges in being able to do this?
- How can we start to understand those perspectives?

### What you need to know

#### Where different perspectives come from

We all have different perspectives on life. It's easy to forget that our view of the world is uniquely ours. Several layers forge that view:

- Firstly, our *knowledge, experiences, and skills*. These can vary according to the education and life experience we have had.
- Secondly, we would also recognise that we have different *interests* – things that we are affected by day-to-day. For instance, a business owner and a worker might have different interests, as the business owner might want to maximise their profits, while a worker wants to get a good salary and work safely.
- Thirdly, we have different *beliefs and values* – which might be religious or not – about how we should act and behave in the world. These are the things that we view as making up good behaviour.
- Finally, we also have an underpinning set of assumptions about the world, which may be entirely unconscious. For example, the relationship between humans and the earth, the nature of time, or what happens beyond death.

With all of these different layers, what we see as the world is simply our view of it and so it is no wonder that we have different perspectives.

## The value of understanding where perspectives come from

When we share our views on something, we are only sharing the very surface of this thinking. We are most likely to talk about how our perspective is informed by what we know, what we understand, and our experiences. This is often the most comfortable level to talk at – these things are harder to dispute, and they are also impersonal, so people feel most comfortable sharing them.

Sometimes individuals might talk about how their interests differ from others. This is less comfortable because it highlights individual self-interest and we often want to project that we are taking a perspective for objective reasons, rather than for our advantage.

It is even less likely that the conversation will come to beliefs and values unless these are commonly shared. That is because individuals sometimes find it hard to identify the drivers of their own ‘gut reaction’ to something. At other times, if their beliefs and values differ from others, they might feel uncomfortable setting themselves apart as different.

When it comes to underpinning assumptions, these are very rarely shared because they are often unconscious to the individual themselves.

For all of these reasons, it is essential to remember that sometimes the perspective and the rationale that we hear for something is only the very tip of the iceberg. There is likely to be a lot more than underpins a particular opinion that we might not see but is still helpful to understand.

## Analysing different perspectives

We often struggle to understand fully where our view on something comes from. We simply don’t have the brainpower to be able to unpack consciously everything that underpins our view of the world.

It is at least as challenging to analyse this for someone else when we only ever have imperfect information about them. Therefore, we need to move carefully and modestly when we try to understand what is unspoken in someone’s perspective.

In *Steps 13 and 14*, we look at how to identify bias when listening, and how to use questioning to better understand different perspectives. For now, a good approach is to think about several layers when we hear individuals giving different perspectives:

- What other reasons might they have to hold this perspective?
- What skills, experience, or knowledge might they have?
- What is their stake in this – how will they personally win or lose depending on this decision?
- How might their beliefs or values be part of their perspective?

Asking these questions will help to widen our understanding of the issue and avoid just taking the views we hear at face value.

## Teaching it

To teach this step:

- The teacher should start by asking learners why they think people have different views of things. This can be extended to a structured conversation about the layers from the explicit reasons people give for their opinions to the more implicit.
- Learners could think about a topical issue that they have a strong view on and analyse for themselves where they believe this view came from. Encourage them to peel back the layers of their views one at a time to try to uncover the interests that drive their perspective, and then the underpinning beliefs or values. These could be shared as a group, if appropriate.

- The teacher can lead a discussion of why it is helpful to be able to understand what underpins the different views that individuals present, but also the limitations of being able to gauge these accurately.
- Learners could be challenged to look at a topical issue – for instance, by seeing different politicians' perspectives on a current issue. They could be asked to think about what might be underpinning that particular view.
- After they have shared their analysis, the teacher should remind learners that they will never know for sure why those perspectives come about, and they should avoid assuming too much. However, there is still value in trying to deepen their thinking beyond the view as it is presented.

## **Reinforcing it**

This step can be reinforced effectively by encouraging learners to take a more critical approach to how they take in information and assess different perspectives. When they read differing accounts or opinion pieces, they can be challenged to analyse what they see as causing those differences.

## **Assessing it**

This step is best assessed through a structured analysis task, either based around something that is topical in current affairs or related to their wider subject learning. Learners can be asked either to discuss or write about a comparison of perspectives, and their analysis of where those different perspectives come from. The teacher is looking for evidence of the learner identifying and exploring some of the layers above.