

Unit 2 - Developing Listening Skills (Lecture Notes)

Topic - 1: Listening vs Hearing

Hearing

~ What is hearing? / What do you mean by hearing?

Hearing is an accidental and automatic brain response to sound that requires no effort. We are surrounded by sounds most of the time.

For example: lawn movers, ringing of cell phones and other sounds.

We learn to filter out sounds that mean little to us.

Definition of hearing has more to do with the psychological act of hearing sounds than it does with making sense and connecting with the person who's talking to you.

According to "Merriam-Webster" defines hearing as the 'process, function, or power of perceiving sounds, specifically; the special sense by which noises and tones are received as "stimuli."

- [Stimuli refers to the various signals, cues, or messages exchanged between communicators during an interaction. These stimuli can be verbal (words, phrases, tone of voice) or non-verbal (facial expressions, gestures, body language). They play a crucial role in conveying information, emotions, and intentions, allowing individuals to understand and respond appropriately to the communication context. Effective communication involves both sending and receiving stimuli accurately to ensure clear and meaningful interactions.]

According to Kevin Gilliland [clinical psychologist] says that / or he mentions that "**Hearing is like collecting data.**"

The natural ability or an inborn trait that allows us to recognize sound through ears by catching vibrations is called hearing. (**Imp. point**)

In simple terms, it is one of the five senses that makes us aware of the sound. It is an involuntary process, whereby a person receives sound vibrations continuously.

A normal human hearing capacity ranges from 20 to 2000 Hz, called as audio or sonic. Any frequency above or below the given range is known as ultrasonic or infrasonic respectively.

Listening

Listening is key to receiving messages effectively. It is a combination of hearing what another person says and psychological involvement with the person who is talking.

Listening is a skill of language. It requires a high level of energy and concentration. Listening is a language modality. It is one of four skills i.e. (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)

Listening requires / involves:

1. A sender
2. A Message
3. A receiver

Listening involves an active involvement of an individual. It is the psychological process of receiving, tending to constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and / or non-verbal messages.

Listening is key to all effective communication, without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood.

Listening is defined as the learned skill, in which we can receive sounds through ears, and transform them into meaningful messages.

Listening is a bit difficult, because it requires concentration and attention, and the human mind is easily distracted.

People use it as a technique to comprehend what is being said, through different verbal and non-verbal signs.

The act of hearing is rather simple and basic. Listening, on the other hand, is 3-D or three-dimensional.

	Hearing	Listening
1	A passive process	An active process
2	Involuntary	Voluntary
3	Accidental	Focused
4	Requires no effort	Requires effort
5	Easy and natural process	Learned process; a skill
6	Physiological process (physical)	Psychological process (physical + mental)

- **Five key differences between hearing and listening**

- ☐ Hearing is a passive process, while listening is an active process.
- ☐ Hearing does not require understanding, but listening does.
- ☐ Hearing can happen without any effort, but listening requires concentration and focus.
- ☐ Hearing is simply the physical process of perceiving sound, while listening involves understanding, and responding to what you have heard. For example: we may hear dogs barking, but listen to another person talk and respond accordingly.
- ☐ You can hear many things concurrently (cars, barking, TV in another room, people, chatting, etc), but can only listen to one thing at a time.

Topic - 2: Process of Listening

Becoming a good listener requires us to understand how listening happens. Essentially, the cognitive process, listening involves the following stages.

1. Receiving Stage (Hearing / Sensing)
2. Understanding Stage (Recognising and Interpreting)
3. Remembering Stage

4. Evaluating Stage
5. Responding Stage

1. Receiving Stage:

The first stage of the listening process is the receiving stage which involves hearing and attending.

Hearing: Is the psychological process of registering sound waves as they hit the eardrum.

- Excessive noise in the environment can create obstacles to receiving audible sound waves. Listening is an active process that constructs meaning from both verbal and non-verbal messages.

Attending: paired with hearing, attending is the other half of the receiving stage.

- It is the process of accurately, identifying and interpreting particular sounds we hear as words.
- The sounds have no meaning until we give them their meaning in context.
- Attending also involves being able to discern (to recognise or to find out) human speech, also known as speech segmentation.
- Identifying auditory stimuli as speech, but not being able to break. Those speech sounds down into sentences and words would be a failure of the listening process.

2. Understanding Stage:

- The understanding stage is the stage during which the listener determines the context and meaning of the words that were heard through a process called decoding.
- Decoding means when a listener is able to understand and interpret the message.
- Now the listener starts decoding the message. As he or she listens, he or she employs his or her own values, beliefs, needs, ideas, etc. to interpret the speaker's message since he or she also pays attention to non-verbal messages, the accuracy of his or her interpretation of the message also increases.

- In understanding or comprehension occurs when the listener's determination of the context and meanings of the words matches the speaker's message.

3. Evaluating Stage:

- This stage of the listening process is the one during which the listener assesses the information they received, both qualitatively and quantitatively.
- Evaluating allows the listener to form an opinion of what they heard and, if necessary, to begin developing a response.
- The evaluating stage occurs most effectively once the listener fully understands what the speaker is trying to say.
- Having a clear understanding of a speaker's message allows a listener to evaluate that message without getting bogged down in ambiguities or spending unnecessary time and energy addressing points that may be tangential or otherwise nonessential.
- After he or she understands what the message actually means, he or she critically evaluates it. He or she assesses its strengths and weaknesses, its accuracy, reliability, and feasibility.

4. Remembering Stage:

- This stage involves retaining the information you have heard. Memory and cognitive processes play a role in storing the message for future reference.
- It occurs as the listeners categorise and retain the information he or she gathered from the speaker for future access.
- If the listener has been attending, understanding, and evaluating, chances are the result will be stored memory-allowing the listener to record information about people, objects, and events for later recall. This happens both during and after the speaker's delivery.

5. The Responding Stage:

- The responding stage is the stage of the listening process in which the listener provides verbal and/or nonverbal reactions based on short- or long-term memory.

- At this stage, the listener is ready to respond and react. He or she shows his or her rejection or acceptance, or understanding or confusion, or even difference through his or her non-verbal cues.
- Nonverbal responses such as nodding or eye contact allow the listener to communicate his or her level of interest without interrupting the speaker, thereby preserving the speaker/listener roles.
- When a listener responds verbally to what they hear and remember. For example, with a question or a comment-the speaker/listener roles are reversed, at least momentarily.

Methods of Listening

1. Top-Down Listening
2. Bottom-Up Listening

Top-Down Listening

In the top-down method listeners go from meaning to language. Involves activating prior knowledge about a particular topic or theme, and using this prior knowledge to help us make sense of the new story or information we are hearing.

Listeners rely on their background knowledge for understanding the message.

So input is not the only source of meaning. Listeners through their knowledge of the world make guesses of the intended meaning of the message and approach, the input to confirm them and fill out the specific details.

Background knowledge consists of context, the situation and topic, and co-text (what came before and after).

Much of our knowledge of the world consists of knowledge about specific situations, the people one might expect to encounter in such situations, what their goals and purposes are, and how they typically accomplish them. Likewise, we have knowledge of thousands of topics and concepts, their associated meanings, and links to other topics and concepts.

In applying this prior knowledge about things, concepts, people, and events to a particular utterance, comprehension can often proceed from the top down.

The actual discourse heard is used to confirm expectations and to fill out details.

Consider the meaning of the expression “*Good luck!*” and how its meaning would differ if said as a response to each of the following statements:

I'm going to the casino.

I'm going to the dentist.

I'm going to a job interview.

The meaning of “*good luck*” differs according to the situation we mentally refer to it to and according to the background knowledge we bring to each situation when it is used. If the listener is unable to make use of the top-down method, an utterance or discourse may be incomprehensible.

Bottom-Up Method

Bottom-up learning happens when students focus on words, structures, and linguistic forms, instead of starting with meaning (language to meaning process).

They are text based. The listeners relies on the language in the message (sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning)

The listeners depend solely on the incoming input for the meaning of the message.

The input is received and analysed at different levels of organisation.

The sound signals are organised into words, words into phrases, phrases into clauses and the clause into a whole sentence.

In this processing, listeners use their lexical and grammatical competence in the language for getting the intended meaning of the message.

Topic - 3: Effective Listening

Effective listening, also known as active listening, describes when we concentrate on listening to what someone else has to say. Effective listening

requires conscious effort, and when we do listen effectively, we are listening to understand and not just hear what someone has to say.

The purpose of effective listening is to listen to understand, not just hear what was said. Effective listening is a skill. This means it requires practice to become better and more efficient at doing it.

Effective listening is actively absorbing the information given to you by a speaker, showing that you are listening and interested, and providing feedback to the speaker so that he or she knows the message was received.

Effective listeners show speakers that they have been heard and understood.

Effective listening requires both deliberate efforts and a keen mind. Effective listeners appreciate the flow of new ideas and information.

It goes beyond merely hearing the words being spoken, it involves fully engaging with the speaker and seeking to understand their perspective, emotions and intentions.

Effective listening is a crucial communication skill that is beneficial in various aspects of life including personal relationships, professional settings, and problem- solving scenarios.

Effective listening fosters better communication and understanding between individuals, enhances trust in relationships and encourages open and honest dialogue.

Effective listening is a dynamic activity that seeks out the meaning intended in the messages sent by the speaker.

Topic - 4: Barriers to Effective Listening

Listening is a very interactive, creative and interpretative process. A barrier to listening is anything that is hindering you from recognising, understanding, and accurately interpreting the message that you are receiving.

We'll discuss various barriers that impede us from being good listeners.

1. Forged Attention (False Attention)

- This is one of the most common barriers to effective listening.
- We usually find audiences staring at the speaker but their minds are preoccupied with something else.
- They have a very attentive listening posture with their hands below their chins and eyes wide open, but they are not listening at that point of time, only faking it.

2. Premature Evaluation of the Subject Matter and Speaker

- It means making judgments about a topic or the person talking before you really understand everything. It's like deciding what you think before you have all the facts.
- And thereby it creates a chain of negative thoughts that start mushrooming.
- The next preconceived notion is that the speaker is dull and boring, and finally they turn to the many other thoughts and concerns stored in their minds for such an occasion.
- Such listeners tend to mentally criticise the speaker for not speaking distinctly, for talking too softly, or for not looking at the audience. They often do the same with the speaker's appearance. If speakers are not dressed as they should be, they probably tend not to listen.
- On the other hand, good listeners try to get something good even out of a dull discussion or talk.

3. Hard Listening

- Poor listeners try very hard to listen to and absorb every word the speaker utters. Such type of listening is called hard listening.
- By employing this, listeners lose sight of the main idea by concentrating too hard on details. In such cases, the listeners pay more heed (pay attention) to the individual words and expressions rather than concentrating on the actual essence of the message.
- Thus, most of us who listen for facts may recall some isolated facts, but may miss the primary thrust or idea the speaker was trying to convey.
- Remember that in order to overcome this problem, we must listen to the speaker's primary points.

4. Poor Interpersonal Relations

- Poor interpersonal relations in communication skills can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and strained relationships.
- Human beings base their reactions on the type of relationship they have with the other person.
- They interpret the message according to their past or present relation with the speaker.
- A lack of confidence, or a sense of superiority or inferiority prevents them from having proper involvement in listening tasks. These prejudices affect the sense, interpretation, and evaluations of the message.

5. Over Excitement

- Whenever we listen to someone/something that we are ardently in love with or averse to, listening becomes biased.
- Listening requires focused, objective attention on the message being conveyed. Avoid letting your personal biases, likings, and disliking mar your objective listening.
- Whenever we hear something with which we happen to disagree, we get swayed by a chain of thoughts related to that. We spend too much time on thinking about the counter arguments and we tend to lose track of the speaker's ideas.
- In such cases, our listening efficiency drops to nearly zero because of over-excitement.

6. Different language Variety and Accent

- Listening to a different accent and language style may lead to lack of comprehension and it eventually turns the audience away from the message of the speech.
- When the speaker uses a different accent which the audience is unable to understand, it becomes a great barrier to listening.
- For instance, the Indian audience can follow the British accent easily, whereas when they listen to a speaker from California who has an American accent, they find it difficult to follow him/her
- Another thing that can hinder the ability to listen actively is the presence of a language barrier. When two or more people are communicating,

they don't speak the same native language or have distinctly different accents.

7. Distractions

- Distraction is one of the major barriers to effective listening. We have so many devices pinging, ringing, and dinging that our attention can easily be pulled in a dozen directions at once.
- Some listeners have very poor concentration while listening. They actually get distracted even with the slightest sounds of opening and closing of doors, people whispering to each other, or vehicles outside.

8. Evading the Difficult Types

- [Evading means **'to avoid something or from someone'**]
- We have a tendency to listen to whatever is easy and familiar, and avoid whatever seems to be difficult and unfamiliar.
- Avoiding challenging situations or tasks can limit personal growth and learning opportunities.
- Poor listeners become easy victims of this in classrooms, meetings, interviews, or group discussions which leads them to poor performance.

9. Non - attentive State of Mind

- The non-attentive state of mind barrier to effective listening can include distractions, daydreaming, preoccupation with personal thoughts, and lack of interest.
- The closed mind becomes a major barrier to listening.
- Various other distractions, such as hunger or drowsiness, and some other discomforts of a similar sort, can stop him/her from being attentive while listening.

10. Different Levels of Perception

- The speaker at times presumes that all his/her listeners have the same level of understanding that he/she enjoys, which might lead to information redundancy, or at times complex information, which may not be easily comprehended by the listeners.
- It is likely that the listener with a lower level of understanding could then face a problem in decoding the message aptly, and the intelligent listener may find it redundant and not pay proper attention to what the speaker says.
- For example; Cultural differences (Different cultures can lead to misunderstandings), technical language (Using technical terms confuses people), generational gap (Varying ages can mean different interpretations)

Topic 5: Types of Listening

1. Content Listening

- Content listening, also known as comprehensive listening, informative listening or full listening, is where the listener's primary concern is to understand and retain the speaker's message.
- The primary focus is on understanding the message sent by the speaker and to gather and understand the information.
- We listen to reports, briefings, instructions, speeches, and conversations to obtain the desired information.

2. Empathetic Listening

- This is also known as **therapeutic/relationship** listening for the obvious reason that it is used in times of crisis.
- This is mostly done by us when we allow a troubled friend to express his/her feelings. It does not mean that empathetic listening is not employed by professionals.

- In fact, all good leaders and managers always try to empathize with their subordinates when they approach them with some problem.
- Counsellors, doctors, and artists also use this type of listening in their profession.
- In this type of listening, the listener is required to empathize with the speaker and help him/her get things off his/her chest.
- Since you try to understand the speaker's situation as an empathetic listener, it helps in strengthening the relationship between you and the speaker.

3. Appreciative Listening

- You do not employ content listening or empathetic listening when you listen to music or watch a movie.
- Appreciative listening involves listening for the sake of enjoyment and not necessarily to understand or analyze and can be people or content oriented.
- In these situations, you use appreciative listening since you appreciate the lyrics, direction, melody, style, or dialogue delivery.
- People spend much time engaging in appreciative listening.
- Consider the following examples:
 - Listening to enjoyable music.
 - Watching a movie or a comedian, causing laughter.
 - Listening to someone speak because they have a soothing voice.
 - Relaxing by listening to the sounds of nature.
 - Re-watching a movie or tv show only to enjoy.
- Thus, it is listening for pleasure or enjoyment.

4. Analytical Listening

- The purpose of this listening is two-fold.
- On one hand, you try to absorb the message and on the other, you attempt to analyse the ideas or facts and make critical judgement.
- In fact, this type of listening helps you evaluate the strength of argument, accuracy of evidence or facts, validity of inferences and reveals gaps in thinking.

- This type of listening also enables you to understand the speaker's perspective better, discern underlying assumptions, identify logical fallacies, and develop a more well-rounded and informed response to the information being presented.
- **For example;** Imagine you're listening to a friend explain their plan for a school project. Analytical listening would involve understanding their ideas while also thinking about whether their plan makes sense, if there are any missing details, and how well their ideas fit together. You're not just hearing the words; you're evaluating the feasibility and logic behind what they're saying.

5. Intensive Listening vs Extensive Listening

- Intensive listening is listening to a small amount of material a number of times.
- For example, when you listen to a recorded lesson again and again, you may be able to acquire the correct pronunciation or intonation, or understand the hidden meaning of the text.
- When you listen, you concentrate and keep your mind focused on the text. This is the perfect technique to improve your listening comprehension.
- This helps you develop an intuitive feel of the grammar, structure, and words of the language which you listen to in this type of repeated listening.
- By regularly listening to news in English, audio articles, audio books, movie scenes, speeches, etc., you can easily develop your intensive listening skills.

However, you will take a lot of time to learn the language by using this technique.

- So, you also require extensive listening in order to learn a language. It gives you the opportunity to hear different voices and different styles.
- Intensive listening means that you will be working hard and analysing what you hear. However, extensive listening means you

can relax and simply enjoy watching a movie or listening to an audiobook.

- Thus, it helps you get used to the natural flow of the language. This also helps in developing effortless listening, since listeners listen to the ideas and opinions on a wide range of topics.
- However, when listeners employ only extensive listening, they passively pick up the erroneous (means incorrect) expressions with the correct ones and make the same errors when they themselves speak and write.
- That is why, we are required to employ both intensive and extensive listening in our day-to-day interactions with others.

	Intensive Listening	Extensive Listening
Class goal	listen for accuracy	listen fluently
Listening purpose	answer questions/study words/pronunciation	get information/enjoy meaning
Focus	teacher chooses/often	you choose/easy
Material	difficult	a lot
Amount	not much	comfortable
Speed	uncomfortable	stop if you don't like it
Method	must finish use dictionary	no dictionary