

chapter 5



© Ariel Skelley/Blend Images/Getty Images RF

listening and critical thinking

When you have read and thought about this chapter, you will be able to

1. Discuss three reasons why listening is important in our lives.
2. Define and describe various types of listening as a process.
3. Analyze how noise, perceptions, and your own characteristics can influence the listening process.
4. Use critical thinking, nonverbal, and verbal strategies to become a better listener.
5. Adapt strategies for effective listening to specific situations, including the workplace, the classroom, and mediated environments.
6. Engage in ethical listening behaviors.

Listening is our most frequently used but least studied communication skill. In this chapter you will learn about the listening process, some factors that can inhibit effective listening, different types of listening, and strategies for becoming a more effective listener. Our hope is that you will learn that listening, like any other communication behavior, is a skill that must be developed through forethought and practice.

Our listening skills begin to develop when we are young children as our family members and friends read aloud or simply recount stories. Through stories, we learn to recognize and remember details, identify patterns and plots, and pick up on certain emotional cues. As we transition into adulthood, we must continue to refine these listening skills.

Since 2003, the StoryCorps project of NPR has collected over 50,000 stories about people's lives. By visiting storycorps.org, you can access thousands of stories that represent the widest array of human emotions. In his book *Listening is an Act of Love*, Dave Isay, a

founder of StoryCorps, commented, "If we take time to listen, we'll

find wisdom, wonder, and poetry in the lives and stories of the people all around us."¹ As you listen to stories on

the website, take note of how you recognize the emotions behind the story. What did the speakers

say or do to help you better understand their explicit and implicit meanings? If you were in a room with

the authors as they told their stories, how would you react? By continuing to practice your listening

to stories, you not only will find personal fulfillment but will also continue to develop and refine your

listening skills.

As you will learn, listening is one of the most

frequent communication behaviors you will practice. In this

chapter you will learn ways to identify your strengths and areas

for improvement as a listener in all types of contexts.

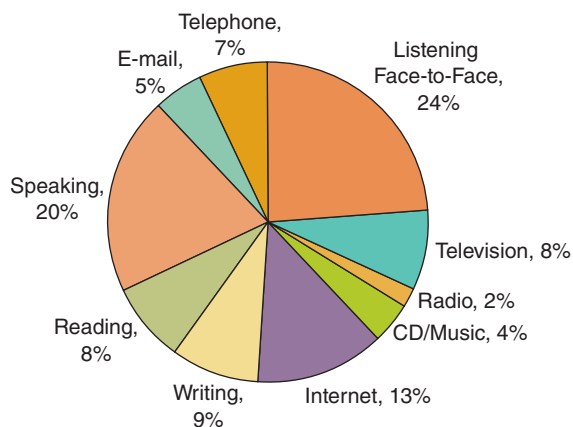


© Comstock Images/JupiterImages RF

The Importance of Listening in Our Lives

Listening is one of our most common communication activities. The International Listening Association studies surveying individuals on how much time they spend reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Across those studies, people spend an average of 44% of their time listening, followed by speaking (25%), reading (13%), and writing (11%).² Even when you consider digitally mediated communication, we still spend a great deal of time listening. Figure 1 shows results of a recent study observing that people spent 63% of their time listening to some degree, with the largest amount of time spent listening to others in face-to-face situations. The rest of their time dedicated to communication activities was spent speaking, reading, and writing. Given how important listening is to our work as communicators, learning to listen well is critical.

As you can imagine from the amount of time we spend listening to others, listening helps us accomplish important things. Listening helps us build and maintain relationships and can even help us determine whether the person we are talking to is being deceitful. How do we learn to be better listeners in our interpersonal relationships? A study reported by Andrew Ledbetter and Paul Schrodtt found that listening skills and behaviors are influenced by family communication patterns we experience early in life. As they noted, "When families create an environment where family members are encouraged to openly

**Figure 1**

Proportions of time spent by college students in communication activities.

Source: Janusik, L., Fullenkamp, L., & Partese, L. (2015). Listening facts. *International Listening Association*.

© Mike Kemp/Rubberball/Getty Images RF



social media listening

The active monitoring of and response to messages on social media platforms by businesses or other types of organizations.

hearing

The act of receiving sound.

listening

The active process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages. It involves the ability to retain information, as well as to react empathically and/or appreciatively to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.

active listening

Involved listening with a purpose.

empathic listening

Listening with a purpose and attempting to understand the other person's perspective.

critical listening

Listening that challenges the speaker's message by evaluating its accuracy, meaningfulness, and utility.

discuss a variety of topics, children may be more likely to learn how to process complex and ambiguous information without anxiety.”³

Listening is also recognized as an essential skill for business success.⁴ When reflecting on their business successes, executives like Bill Marriott note that their most important lesson was to create cultures in which managers listen to employees for ideas on how to do things more effectively and efficiently. As a result, better decisions are made.⁵ Cultures that emphasize listening can also reduce misunderstandings between co-workers and help managers be perceived as more caring toward their employees.⁶ In addition to promoting internal cultures of listening, the rapid growth of social media has forced organizations of all types to place a greater emphasis on social media listening.⁷ **Social media listening** occurs when an organization actively monitors and responds to messages on any type of social media platform. By actively listening to social media messages, organizations are able to track what consumers are saying about their products or services and then use that information to make improvements. Many organizations are even creating sophisticated social media listening/command centers through which they can actively engage and respond to customers on social media to build brand awareness and excitement. Both internally and externally, listening is one of the key elements of effective business strategy.

Defining Listening

John Dewey, a twentieth-century educational and social philosopher, observed in his book *The Public and Its Problems* that true democracy happens when we take time to listen to the people around us—our friends and family, our neighbors, and the people in our community.⁸ Dewey's observation seems intuitive; however, how often have you “faked” listening? Your friend may tell you about something that happened to him or her, but you only “half listened,” or you listened to a neighbor talk about a community event but quickly forgot about it. In fact, good listening is hard and takes sustained effort. Learning to be an effective listener starts with understanding what the listening process involves and then progresses to trying to improve how you enact that process.

The first step in learning about listening is to understand the distinction between hearing and listening. **Hearing** is simply the act of receiving sound. Although much of this chapter is devoted to listening rather than hearing, there are important things to learn about the physical act of hearing. First, your listening behaviors now will influence your hearing later in life.⁹ In fact, many audiologists warn that young adults and even children should

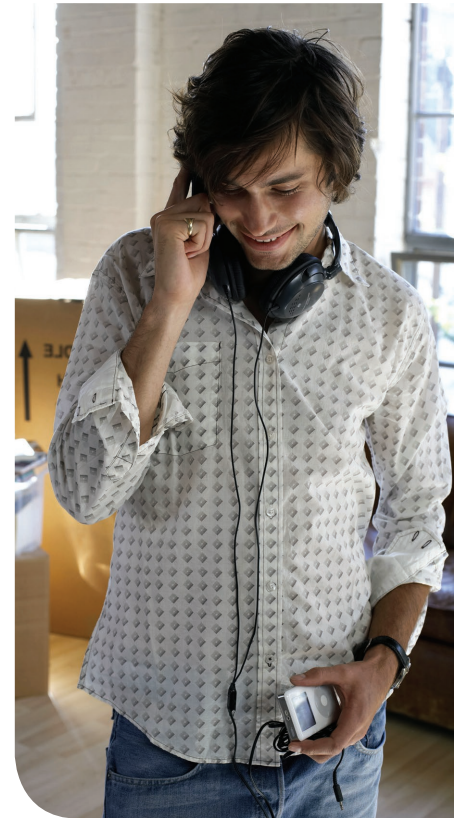
be careful when listening to music using headphones or earbuds. When using lower-quality earbuds that do not block external noise, people have a tendency to increase the volume to levels that can cause long-term damage to their hearing. Even without hearing loss stemming from loud noise, some people have other physical problems with their hearing. Tinnitus is a condition that results in a constant “ringing” in the ears. The American Tinnitus Association (www.ata.org) estimates that over 50 million Americans experience tinnitus to some degree—the condition can be caused by many factors, ranging from allergies to certain types of benign tumors. Thus, we should not assume that everyone can hear equally well, even those in your group of friends.

Hearing is not the same as listening. **Listening**, as defined by the International Listening Association, is “the active process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages. It involves the ability to retain information, as well as to react empathically and/or appreciatively to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.”¹⁰ **Active listening** is “involved listening with a purpose.”¹¹ Active listening includes (1) listening carefully by using all available senses, (2) paraphrasing what we hear both mentally and verbally, (3) checking our understanding to ensure accuracy, and (4) providing feedback. Feedback consists of verbal and nonverbal responses to the speaker and the speaker’s message.

Active listening can occur in different forms, including empathic listening and critical listening:

- **Empathic listening** is attempting to understand the perspective of the other person. You engage in empathic listening by using both mindfulness, which is being “fully engaged in the moment,”¹² and empathy, which is the ability to perceive another person’s worldview as if it were your own.
- In **critical listening** you challenge the speaker’s message by evaluating its accuracy, meaningfulness, and utility. Critical listening and critical thinking go hand in hand: you cannot listen critically if you do not think critically. Skills in critical listening are especially important because we are constantly bombarded with commercials, telemarketing calls, and other persuasive messages.

Not all listening is active listening. **Listening for enjoyment** occurs in situations that are relaxing, fun, or emotionally stimulating. Whether you are listening to your favorite band or just have YouTube videos playing in the background, we often use sound to create an escape from other activities or even to provide simple background noise while we perform other tasks. Besides aiding relaxation, listening to enjoyable music can even reduce pain for hospital patients.¹³



- Listening for enjoyment is an easy way to relax.

© Ken Wramton/Taxi/Getty Images

listening for enjoyment
Listening that occurs in situations involving relaxing, fun, or emotionally stimulating information.

communicating creatively

Music and Critical Thinking

As presented here, you may assume that listening for enjoyment and critical listening are two separate behaviors. While this is true in some situations, you can practice critical listening skills even while listening for enjoyment. Music has long been a vehicle for artists to express socially relevant messages. When you listen to music, carefully follow the lyrics to try to discern what messages the artist is attempting to reveal. For instance, how might the message behind Hozier’s “Take Me to Church” be contrasted with the message of Colton Dixon’s “I’ll Be the Light”? Thinking critically about your music is both enjoyable and useful as you develop your skills as a critical listener.

The Process of Listening

The process of listening is summarized in figure 2. As the illustration shows, we receive stimuli (such as music, words, or sounds) in the ear, where the smallest bones in the body translate the vibrations into sensations registered by the brain. The brain focuses on the sensations and gives them meaning. Your brain might, for example, recognize the first few bars of a favorite song, the voice of a favorite artist, or the sound of a police siren. On hearing these sounds, you immediately know what they mean. Your interpreted message is then stored in your memory for immediate use or future recall.¹⁴

As we discuss later, people create many obstacles to effective listening. Not all obstacles, however, are the fault of lazy, unethical, or ineffective listeners. Because listening is a process, natural barriers present themselves at various stages. In the following sections, these natural barriers are explained for each major step in the listening process: attention, working memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory.

ATTENTION

Anyone who has been a student has heard the command “Pay attention!” What exactly are teachers expecting when they say this? Paying attention means controlling your selective and automatic attention.¹⁵ **Selective attention** is the sustained focus we give to things that are important. Your favorite music, conversation with your friend, statements made by your date over dinner, and your professor at the front of the class are things that draw your selective attention. Selective attention is a form of selective perception (see the chapter on perception, self, and communication). In contrast, **automatic attention** is the instinctive focus we give to important things we experience in our surroundings. A siren, a loud noise, your name shouted from across the room, or a new person walking into the room can capture your automatic attention. In any listening situation we must manage our selective attention to keep it from being overwhelmed by our automatic attention. In essence, in saying “Pay attention,” your teacher is asking you to ignore your automatic attention and focus your selective attention. In practicing your attention skills, you should not assume that selective attention means paying attention to only one thing. Studies

selective attention

The sustained focus we give to stimuli we deem important.

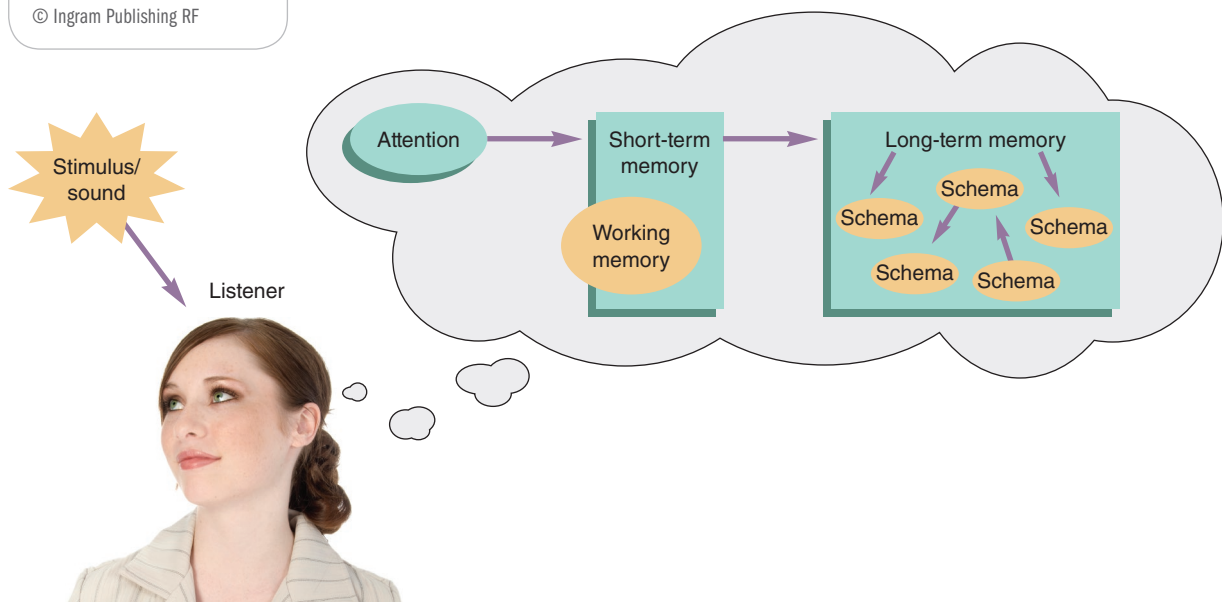
automatic attention

The instinctive focus we give to stimuli signaling a change in our surroundings, stimuli that we deem important, or stimuli that we perceive to signal danger.

Figure 2

The listening process.

© Ingram Publishing RF



exploring how people use social media and the Internet suggest that we actually learn to quickly scan our surroundings and assess the importance of several items of interest as they relate to one another.¹⁶ Think about the timeline in a Twitter feed. Obviously, you would not open Twitter and focus on only one tweet; rather, you would quickly scan hours' worth of tweets from those you follow to see what is trending. In other words, you quickly give selective attention to each tweet and then determine what trends are present.

Our ability to quickly scan social media is a valuable and transferable skill. Being able to scan, read, and react to situations, both virtual and face-to-face, is useful in a variety of personal and professional situations. Be warned, however, that over-relying on this use of selective attention can cause problems. A recent study found that when students text or use social media during class, their performance on quizzes and tests can drop by as much as one-and-a-half letter grades.¹⁷ Allowing your selective attention to scan too much of your environment can overwhelm your ability to make meaning of specific, and perhaps important, stimuli.

WORKING MEMORY

Once we have paid selective attention to relevant sounds and stimuli, our brain must initially process and make sense of those stimuli. **Working memory** is the part of our consciousness that interprets and assigns meaning to things we hear. Our working memory looks for shortcuts when processing information. When you hear people speak, your working memory quickly recognizes patterns of sounds that represent words, phrases, and ideas. Using your prior knowledge, which is stored in long-term memory, your working memory assigns meaning to what you are hearing and allows you to respond. Thus, when you hear a family member say, "A storm is coming," your working memory allows you to assign meaning to that sentence and plan your travel or other actions in anticipation of what that sentence means. The patterns we recognize and respond to with working memory resources are critical for effective and efficient communication with others.

Working memory uses patterns of words or other symbols stored in long-term memory to apply these shortcuts for assigning meaning. Not surprisingly, research has found that when children have difficulty with language development, they have less efficient working memory.¹⁸ That is, when children do not learn language skills and develop strong vocabularies, their working memory must work harder to decipher new information. Of course, the opposite is also true. Helping children develop strong language skills early in life will likely help them become better listeners later.

working memory

The part of our consciousness that interprets and assigns meaning to stimuli we pay attention to.

SHORT-TERM MEMORY

Once interpreted in working memory, information is sent to either short-term or long-term memory. **Short-term memory** is a temporary storage place for information. All of us use short-term memory to retain thoughts needed for immediate use. You might think of short-term memory as being similar to a Post-it note. You will use the information on the note for a quick reference but will soon discard it or decide to write it down in a more secure location.

We constantly use short-term memory, but it is the least efficient of our memory resources. Classic studies in the field of psychology have documented that short-term memory is limited in both the quantity of information stored and the length of time information is retained.¹⁹ In terms of quantity, short-term memory is limited to five to nine "bits" of information. A bit of information is any organized unit of information, including sounds, letters, words, sentences, or something less concrete, such as ideas, depending on the ability of working memory to recognize patterns. For instance, experts in a particular area can recognize patterns easily, and therefore can organize

short-term memory

A temporary storage place for information.



- Being startled can break your concentration and cause you to forget what is in short-term memory.

© PhotoTalk/Getty Images RF

long-term memory

Our permanent storage place for information, including but not limited to past experiences; language; values; knowledge; images of people; memories of sights, sounds, and smells; and even fantasies.

schemas

Organizational “filing systems” for thoughts held in long-term memory.

large amounts of information into a single bit. Nonexperts have more difficulty in recognizing patterns and must therefore use more bits to organize the same amount of information. You experienced this as you learned language. When you began reading, you processed each letter individually. As you became better at reading, you naturally started to process words, then phrases, and then entire paragraphs or even pages of text as a bit of information within your short-term memory.

If your short-term memory becomes overloaded (for average people, more than nine bits of information), you begin to forget. Short-term memory is also limited to about 20 seconds in duration unless some strategy, such as rehearsal, is used. If you quickly scan and rehearse a definition from your textbook in preparation for a quiz, you will likely remember it. However, if something breaks your concentration and you stop rehearsing the definition, the words will likely be lost. Unfortunately, many listeners rely too much on short-term memory during the listening process. Researchers in the field of communication have found that individuals recall only 50% of a message immediately after listening to it and only 25% after a short delay.²⁰ Relying on our short-term memory is not a substitute for trying to encode information into long-term memory.

LONG-TERM MEMORY

Information processed in working memory can also be stored in long-term memory for later recall. Similarly, information temporarily stored in short-term memory can be deemed important and subsequently stored in long-term memory. If short-term memory is the Post-it note in the listening process, long-term memory is the supercomputer. **Long-term memory** is our permanent storage place for information, including but not limited to past experiences; language; values; knowledge; images of people; memories of sights, sounds, and smells; and even fantasies. Unlike short-term memory, long-term memory has no known limitations in the quantity or duration of stored information.

Explanations of how long-term memory works are only speculative; however, researchers hypothesize that our thoughts are organized according to **schemas**, which are organizational “filing systems” for thoughts held in long-term memory. We might think of schemas as an interconnected web of information. Our ability to remember information in long-term memory is dependent on finding connections to the correct schema containing the particular memory, thought, idea, or image we are trying to recall.

In theory, people with normally functioning brains never lose information stored in long-term memory. How is it, then, that we often forget things we listen to? When we try to access information in long-term memory, we access schemas holding needed information through the use of stimulus cues, which can be words, images, or even smells and tastes. If the cue we receive does not give us enough information to access the corresponding schema, we may be unable to recall the information. Consider, for example, a situation in which you see a person who looks familiar. In this case you recognize the person (a visual cue); however, that stimulus does not provide you with enough information to recall who the person is. If you hear the person’s voice or if he or she mentions a previous encounter with you, you may then have enough information to activate the correct schema and recall specific details about that person.

Long-term memory plays a key role in the listening process. As we receive sounds, our working memory looks for patterns based on schemas contained in our long-term memory. Thus, our ability to use language, to recognize concepts, and to interpret meaning is based on the schemas we accumulate over a lifetime. If we encounter new information that does not relate to a preexisting schema, our working memory instructs our long-term memory to create a new schema to hold the information. The arrows in figure 2 depict this working relationship between schemas and working memory.

Barriers to Listening

Although you might agree that listening is important, you may not be properly prepared for effective listening. A survey conducted by a corporate training and development firm noted that 80% of the corporate executives taking part in the survey rated listening as the most important skill in the workforce. Unfortunately, nearly 30% of the same executives said that listening was the most lacking communication skill among their employees.²¹ In the section explaining the connection between listening and thinking, we discussed several natural impediments to listening. In this section we explain barriers we create for ourselves in the listening process. Table 1 identifies noise, perceptions of others, and yourself as potential listening barriers.

Table 1 Barriers to Listening

Type of Barrier	Explanation and Example
NOISE	
Physical distractions	All the stimuli in the environment that keep you from focusing on the message. Example: loud music playing at a party
Mental distractions	The wandering of the mind when it is supposed to be focusing on something. Example: thinking about a lunch date while listening to a teacher
Multitasking	Trying to do two or more tasks simultaneously. Example: posting on Twitter while carrying on a conversation with family
Factual distractions	Focusing so intently on details that you miss the main point. Example: listening to all the details of a conversation but forgetting the main idea
Semantic distractions	Overresponding to an emotion-laden word or concept. Example: not listening to a teacher when she mentions “Marxist theory”
PERCEPTION OF OTHERS	
Status	Devoting attention based on the social standing, rank, or perceived value of another. Example: not listening to a freshman in a group activity
Stereotypes	Treating individuals as if they were the same as others in a given category. Example: assuming all older people have similar opinions
Sights and sounds	Letting appearances or voice qualities affect your listening. Example: not listening to a person with a screechy voice
YOURSELF	
Egocentrism	Excessive self-focus, or seeing yourself as the central concern in every conversation. Example: redirecting conversations to your own problems
Defensiveness	Acting threatened and feeling as though you must defend what you have said or done. Example: assuming others’ comments are veiled criticisms of you
Experiential superiority	Looking down on others as if their experience with life were not as good as yours. Example: not listening to those with less experience
Personal bias	Letting your own predispositions, or strongly held beliefs, interfere with your ability to interpret information correctly. Example: assuming that people are generally truthful (or deceitful)
Pseudolistening	Pretending to listen but letting your mind or attention wander to something else. Example: daydreaming while your professor is lecturing

The barriers listed in table 1 are common, but as our cultural listening habits change, these barriers evolve and new ones are added. A conference sponsored by the International Commission on Biological Effects of Noise noted that the proliferation of noise created by humans—everything from cars and airplanes to iPods and video games—is starting to cause fatal accidents for adults and poorer achievement in children just because of the sheer number of audible distractions.²² Likewise, Lenore Skenazy, writing in *Advertising Age*, complained that smartphones and other personal communication devices might be diminishing ongoing practice with face-to-face communication skills, such as listening.²³ Other studies show that listening to loud, fast music significantly diminishes our ability to comprehend things we read or hear.²⁴ In sum, these barriers point to one conclusion: our listening practices are more complicated because more and more things draw our attention.

Modern technology, including smartphones, laptops, the Internet, and tablet computers, can pose challenges for good listening. If you are in a large class, you have probably even seen people carry on telephone conversations! When we multitask by trying to listen to someone while texting, tweeting, or just playing on the Internet, we are likely diminishing our ability to function well as a listener. Recall that short-term memory is limited. When we multitask, we place greater strain on our short-term and working memory, which can impede all other aspects of our ability to process information. For instance, assume you are listening to a training podcast for your job and you decide to answer a text from your partner. Each time you stop listening to the podcast to read/answer a text, you lose mental momentum on your listening and have to restart. In fact, our own research on this topic shows that in classroom situations, students record 62% less information in their notes when they multitask by texting or posting on social media during the lesson.²⁵

Obviously, there are many challenges to effective listening, not the least of which is faking being a good listener, which we might do for various reasons. Some scholars argue that “pretend listening” is “a perfectly useful, and sometimes indispensable, feature of the pragmatics of ordinary communication.”²⁶ In some situations we may need to be polite and act like we are listening, even though we really don’t want to. We might portray the act of listening to avoid hurting another’s feelings, we may pretend to listen in an effort to get others to model our behavior, or we may act like we are listening because we know others expect us to do so in a given situation. These scholars argue that there are definite risks in poor listening; however, they also point out that expecting or assuming that everyone can be a perfect listener in every circumstance is unrealistic. Although they do not conclude that we should become better at fake listening, they do suggest that we recognize the realities facing people with whom we communicate, because they may not listen with 100% effort all the time.



• Men and women tend to enact different behaviors when listening.
© Westend61/Getty Images RF

steps to overcome these barriers to good listening. In this section we highlight how you can become a better listener by recognizing differences, listening and thinking critically, using verbal and nonverbal communication effectively, and checking your understanding.

Ways to Become a Better Listener

So far in this chapter, we have emphasized the importance of listening while pointing out both natural and self-taught barriers to effective listening. Faced with this knowledge, you might wonder how any of us can hope to become effective listeners. After all, the potential barriers are many. Fortunately, each of us can take several

RECOGNIZE DIFFERENCES IN LISTENING

The first step in becoming a better listener is to recognize that we all have different tendencies that can influence how we listen to others. Although these tendencies can be influenced by many different factors, such as our family life and our early language development, even our gender orientation can influence our listening habits. Have you ever had a conversation with a person of the opposite sex and thought afterward that he or she just did not listen well? If so, you are not alone. Debra Tannen, a linguistics professor and acclaimed author of the book *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, suggests that men and women have very distinct communication styles, which influence everything from how they use vocal inflections to how they listen. For example, Tannen suggests that men tend to be more instrumental or task-oriented when communicating, whereas women tend to be more relationally oriented.²⁷ Furthermore, a woman listening to her female friend talk about her relationship problems will likely keep eye contact with the speaker, listen for emotions to which she can relate, and nod to confirm she understands what her friend is saying. On the other hand, a male listening to his male friend talk about his relationship problems will likely make less eye contact while listening for key facts to identify a problem he can help solve. While men and women tend to be comfortable with these communication styles among their own genders, communication frustration can sometimes occur when men and women talk to each other. See table 2 for some of the more commonly observed differences relevant to listening. Recognizing that you might enter into a conversation with particular habits or tendencies can help you become more self-aware of your own strengths and weaknesses as a listener.

Table 2 Listening Differences Between Men and Women

	Women	Men
Purpose for Listening	Listen to understand the other person's emotions and to find common interests	Listen in order to take action and solve problems
Listening Preferences	Like complex information that requires careful evaluation	Like short, concise, unambiguous, and error-free communication
Listening Awareness	Are highly perceptive to how well the other person understands	Often fail to recognize when others do not understand
Nonverbal Listening Behaviors	Tend to be attentive and to have sustained eye contact with the other person	Tend to be less attentive and to use glances to monitor reactions; use eye contact to indicate liking
Interruptive Behaviors	Interrupt less often, with interruptions usually signaling agreement and support	Interrupt more often, with interruptions often used to switch topics

Sources: Tannen, D. (2001). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York: Harper-Collins. Watson, K., Lazarus, C. J., & Todd, T. (1999). First-year medical students' listener preferences: A longitudinal study. *International Journal of Listening*, 13, 1–11. Weisfeld, C. C., & Stack, M. A. (2002). When I look into your eyes. *Psychology, Evolution and Gender*, 4, 125–147.

sizing things up

Barriers to Listening

The following are several statements describing how you might react to specific listening situations. Read each statement carefully and indicate how strongly you agree or disagree by using the following scale:

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly agree

When listening to others I often . . .

1. Assume that their viewpoint will be similar to those of other people like them.
2. Respect others' opinions, even when they have less experience than I have.
3. Think about other things while the person is talking.
4. Get distracted by their physical appearance.
5. Pay close attention but have trouble remembering their main ideas.
6. Feel threatened or that the person is attacking me or my beliefs.
7. Get put off by terms or phrases used by others.
8. Pay less attention to people who are not important.
9. Pay less attention if what they are saying does not pertain to me.

There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. A guide for scoring your responses appears at the end of the chapter.

critical thinking

Analyzing the speaker, the situation, and the speaker's ideas to make critical judgments about the message being presented.

source credibility

The extent to which the speaker is perceived as competent to make the claims he or she is making.

LISTEN AND THINK CRITICALLY

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, critical listening and critical thinking go hand in hand: you cannot listen critically without also thinking critically. We have already noted that critical listening is a form of active listening in which you carefully analyze the accuracy, meaningfulness, and utility of a speaker's message. Similarly, **critical thinking** involves analyzing the speaker, the situation, and the speaker's ideas to make critical judgments about the message being presented. Although we discuss critical thinking in terms of its relationship to critical listening, you also use critical thinking when reading, watching television, or analyzing the ingredients of a tasty meal.

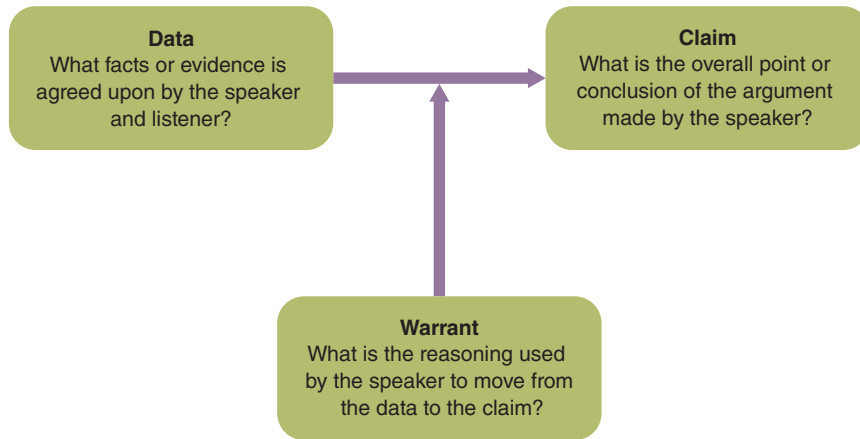
One way to think critically is to analyze the communication situation. Are there characteristics of the situation that tip you off that the information will be important? If your supervisor organized a staff meeting, would you pay more attention if she came in with a somber look on her face after a long meeting with the department manager? The communication context will provide cues about the situation and suggest key things to remain aware of while listening.

A second skill in critical listening is to analyze the credibility of the speaker. **Source credibility** is the extent to which you perceive the speaker as competent and trustworthy. If you wanted to know what procedures were required to study in Europe for a semester,

who would give you the best information? Would you be more likely to trust your roommate, who heard about foreign exchange programs during freshman orientation; your adviser, who had an exchange student a few years back; or the director of international programs on your campus? If your car ran poorly, would you trust your neighbor's advice or that of an auto mechanic? The choice seems obvious in these situations. When assessing the credibility of a speaker, you should determine the credibility of the person in relation to his or her qualifications, experience, and potential biases or ulterior motives for taking a certain position.

One way of analyzing the credibility of speakers is to determine whether they are reporting something they have seen or experienced personally or something they have heard from someone else. Also important is whether they are providing factual accounts or opinions. The following questions can guide your preliminary analysis of source credibility.

1. *Is the person presenting observations or inferences?* Observations are descriptions of things that can be seen, heard, tasted, smelled, or felt. Inferences are conclusions drawn from observations. You might observe that a number of people who are homeless live in your community. Based on that observation, you might infer that your community does not have enough affordable housing.

**Figure 3**

Stephen Toulmin's concepts of data, claim, and warrant.

Source: Toulmin, S. E. (1958). *The uses of argument*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

2. *If presenting observations, are they first-person or second-person?* A **first-person observation** is based on something that was personally sensed; a **second-person observation** is a report of what another person observed. First-person observations are typically more accurate because they are direct accounts rather than inferences drawn from others' accounts.

Although a careful analysis of these questions will help you develop initial perceptions about a person's credibility, your analysis should not end there. The speaker's sincerity, trustworthiness, passion, and use of evidence and reasoning are among many factors that you might take into account to refine your assessment of the person's credibility.

After you have analyzed the situation and formed initial impressions about the person's credibility, a final step in critical thinking is to analyze the arguments the person is making. One of the simplest ways of analyzing an argument is to use Stephen Toulmin's concepts of data, claim, and warrant.²⁸ As shown in figure 3, Toulmin provides a way of diagramming how the components of an argument fit together. Starting on the right, a claim is the overall point or conclusion of the argument. Every argument begins with data, which consist of factual or agreed-upon evidence. Based on the evidence, a speaker uses a warrant to develop a logical connection, or bridge, between the agreed-upon data and the claim. If any of these elements are missing, the argument has no foundation.

We see examples of Toulmin's argument layout in nearly every persuasive speech. When Apple introduced the iWatch, company executives began with the data that consumers like small, wearable devices that add functionality to their lives. Given the success of various wearable health-related devices, these data seemed reasonable. The warrant that an iWatch would fill a need for consumers was easy to establish through examples of how the device would help consumers interact with their smartphones to access and use all types of information ranging from text messages to calendar entries and music. Using the questions posed in figure 3, you can analyze nearly any argument to think more critically about what another person is saying.

first-person observation

An observation based on something you personally have sensed.

second-person observation

A report of what another person observed.

USE NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVELY

Although you demonstrate active listening through verbal skills, the majority of your active listening ability is shown through nonverbal communication. The following nonverbal skills are essential to your ability to demonstrate active listening. As you listen to another person, have a friend observe you to determine if you are practicing these skills.

building behaviors

Using TED to Practice Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is one of the most important listening skills you can develop while in college. Being a good critical listener is critical to all aspects of your adult life. You can practice suggestions for critical thinking discussed in this chapter by watching a TED video on a topic of interest to you (www.TED.com, or use the free mobile TED app). While watching the video, analyze the speaker's credibility and attempt to dissect the arguments presented by the speaker using Toulmin's layout of argument.

1. *Demonstrate bodily responsiveness.* Use movement and gestures to show your awareness of the speaker's message. Shaking your head in disbelief, checking the measurements of an object by indicating the size with your hands, and moving toward a person who is disclosing negative information are appropriate bodily responses.
2. *Lean forward.* By leaning toward the speaker, you demonstrate interest in the speaker. A forward lean suggests responsiveness as well as interest. In addition, leaning places you in a physical state of readiness to listen to the speaker.
3. *Use direct body orientation.* Do not angle yourself away from the speaker; instead, sit or stand so that you are directly facing him or her. A parallel body position allows the greatest possibility for observing and listening to the speaker's verbal and nonverbal messages. When you stand or sit at an angle to the speaker, you may be creating the impression that you are attempting to get away or that you are moving away from the speaker. An angled position also blocks your vision and allows you to be distracted by other stimuli in the environment.
4. *Maintain relaxed but alert posture.* Your posture should not be tense or "proper," but neither should it be so relaxed that you appear to be resting. Slouching suggests unresponsiveness; a tense body position suggests nervousness or discomfort; and a relaxed position accompanied by crossed arms and legs, a backward lean in a chair, and a confident facial expression suggests arrogance. Your posture should suggest to others that you are interested and that you are comfortable talking with them.
5. *Establish an open body position.* Sit or stand with your body open to the other person. Crossing your arms or legs may be more comfortable, but that posture frequently suggests that you are closed off psychologically as well as physically. In order to maximize your nonverbal message to the other person that you are "open" to him or her, you should sit or stand without crossing your arms or legs.
6. *Use positive, responsive facial expressions and head movement.* Your face and head will be the speaker's primary focus. The speaker will be observing you, and your facial expressions and head movement will be the key. You can demonstrate your

engaging diversity

Using Touch as Feedback

We use a variety of nonverbal behaviors to provide feedback and demonstrate that we are listening carefully. Touch is often used to signal that we are listening and to provide feedback. For example, we may use a hug or a simple hand on the shoulder to console someone.

Are there differences in how people use touch while listening? Researchers have observed that men tend to use hand touches on women more than women use hand touches on men. This was particularly true in the Czech Republic, where there are more traditional gender roles than in the United States and Italy, where gender roles are less rigid. This observed finding suggests that the way we use some nonverbal behaviors while listening is tied not only to our culture but also to our gender.

Source: Dibiase, R., & Gunnoe, J. (2004). Gender and culture differences in touching behavior. *Journal of Social Psychology, 144*, 49–62.

interest by nodding your head to show interest or agreement. You can use positive and responsive facial expressions, such as smiling and raising your eyebrows.

7. *Establish direct eye contact.* The speaker will be watching your eyes for interest. One of the first signs of a lack of interest is the tendency to be distracted by other stimuli in the environment. For example, an instructor who continually glances out the door of her office, a roommate who sneaks peeks at the television program that is on, or a business executive who regularly looks at his watch is, while appearing to listen, indicating lack of interest. Try to focus on and direct your gaze at the speaker. When you begin to look around the room, you may find any number of other stimuli to distract your attention from the speaker and the message.
8. *Sit or stand close to the speaker.* Establishing close proximity to the speaker has two benefits. First, you put yourself in a position that allows you to hear the other person and that minimizes distracting noises, sights, and other stimuli. Second, you demonstrate your concern or your positive feelings for the speaker. You probably do not stand or sit close to people you do not like or respect or with whom you do not have common experiences. Close physical proximity enables active listening.
9. *Be vocally responsive.* Change your pitch, rate, inflection, and volume as you respond to the speaker. Making appropriate changes and choices shows that you are actually listening, in contrast to responding in a standard, patterned manner that suggests you are only appearing to listen. The stereotypic picture of a husband and wife at the breakfast table, with the husband, hidden behind a newspaper, responding “yes, yes, yes” in a monotone while the wife tells him that their son has shaved his head, she is running off with the mail carrier, and the house is on fire provides a familiar example of the appearance of listening while one is actually oblivious to the speaker’s message.
10. *Provide supportive utterances.* Sometimes you can demonstrate more concern through nonverbal sounds, such as “mmm,” “mmm-hmm,” and “uh-huh” than you can by stating “Yes, I understand.” You can easily provide supportive utterances while others are talking or when they pause. You are suggesting to them that you are listening but do not want to interrupt with a verbalization of your own at this particular time. Such sounds encourage the speaker to continue without interruption.

USE VERBAL COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVELY

The notion of the verbal components of listening may seem strange to you. You may reason that, if you are engaged in listening, you cannot also be speaking. Recall though that communication is a process that includes feedback. While listening, you must use both verbal and nonverbal feedback to negotiate meaning with another person. To measure your current competence in this area, consider the skills you regularly practice:

1. *Invite additional comments.* Suggest that the speaker add more details or give additional information. Phrases such as “Go on,” “What else?” “How did you feel about that?” and “Did anything else happen?” encourage the speaker to continue to share ideas and information.
2. *Ask questions.* One method of inviting the speaker to continue is to ask direct questions, requesting more in-depth details, definitions, or clarification.
3. *Identify areas of agreement or common experience.* Briefly relate similar past experiences, or briefly explain a similar

- Close proximity, and even touching, can show that you are listening with empathy.

© Eric Audras/ ONOKY/Getty Images RF



point of view that you hold. Sharing ideas, attitudes, values, and beliefs is the basis of communication. In addition, such comments demonstrate your understanding.

4. *Vary verbal responses.* Use a variety of responses, such as “Yes,” “I see,” “Go on,” and “Right,” instead of relying on one standard, unaltered response, such as “Yes,” “Yes,” “Yes.”
5. *Provide clear verbal responses.* Use specific and concrete words and phrases in your feedback to the speaker. Misunderstandings can occur if you do not provide easily understood responses.
6. *Use descriptive, nonevaluative responses.* Better to say “Your statistics are from an organization that is biased against gun control” (descriptive) than to say “Your speech was a bunch of lies” (evaluative). Trivializing or joking about serious disclosures suggests a negative evaluation of the speaker. Similarly, derogatory remarks are seen as offensive. Acting superior to the speaker by stating that you believe you have a more advanced understanding suggests an evaluative tone.
7. *Provide affirmative and affirming statements.* Comments such as “Yes,” “I see,” “I understand,” and “I know” provide affirmation. Offering praise and specific positive statements demonstrates concern.
8. *Avoid complete silence.* The lack of any response suggests that you are not listening to the speaker. The “silent treatment” induced by sleepiness or lack of interest may result in defensiveness or anger on the part of the speaker. Appropriate verbal feedback demonstrates your active listening.
9. *Allow the other person the opportunity of a complete hearing.* When you discuss common feelings or experiences, avoid dominating the conversation. Allow the other person to go into depth and detail; give him or her the option of changing the topic under discussion; and let him or her talk without being interrupted.

- Use questions to check your understanding of what someone is saying.

© Andersen Ross/Getty Images RF



CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

When we listen to others, we are actually engaging in a specialized form of the perception process (see the chapter on perception, self, and communication). Because listening is a specialized form of perceiving, you should engage in perception checking to ensure that your perceptions match what the speaker intends. In the context of listening, rather than calling this perception checking, we might refer to it as checking your understanding. You can check your understanding by practicing these skills:

1. *Ask questions for clarification.* Before testing your understanding of the speaker's message, make sure you have a clear idea of what he is saying. Begin by asking questions to gain more information. For specific factual information you may use closed questions (such as “yes/no” questions), and for more general information you may ask open-ended questions (questions pertaining to what, when, where, how, and why). Once you have gained sufficient information, you can ask the speaker to check your understanding against what he intended.
2. *Paraphrase the speaker's message.* Using “I statements,” attempt to paraphrase what you think the speaker was

saying, so that she can determine whether your understanding matches what she intended.

3. *Paraphrase the speaker's intent.* Using “I statements,” attempt to paraphrase what you interpret as the intent or motivation of the speaker. After hearing your assumptions about his intent, the speaker may talk with you more to refine your understanding.
4. *Identify areas of confusion.* If there are specific aspects of the message that you are still confused about, mention those to the speaker while you are expressing your initial understanding of the message.
5. *Invite clarification and correction.* Asking the speaker to correct your interpretation of the message will invite additional explanation. The ensuing dialogue will help you and the speaker share meaning more effectively.
6. *Go back to the beginning.* As necessary, return to the first step in this process to check your new understanding of the speaker's message, intent, and so on. Good listening is a process without clear beginning and ending points, so you should check your understanding at each stage in the process.

Effective Listening in Different Situations

Most listening skills will serve you well in every communication situation. Listening critically, mastering nonverbal cues, and checking your understanding always aid your understanding. In this section, you will learn about listening skills that are important in some of the most common and important listening situations that you regularly confront.

LISTENING IN THE WORKPLACE

As our nation has shifted from an industrial-based economy to an information-based economy, effective listening has become recognized as an essential skill for workers. Statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that by 2020 just under 80% of the workforce in the United States will be employed in service-oriented industries, such as education, healthcare, retail sales, and state and local government.²⁹ These jobs all have one thing in common—they require employee–customer interaction in which listening skills translate into revenue.

Organizations are increasingly interested in developing effective communication skills for both new and experienced managers. In fact, performance feedback for most managers highlights listening as one of the most important areas for improvement. Although many of the listening skills discussed in this chapter are relevant for the workplace, the *Harvard Business Review* synthesized the following recommendations for becoming a better workplace listener:

- *Plan for nuggets.* As you take notes during a meeting, use a column on the right or left to jot down key takeaways or insights about what you learned.
- *Consider the source.* Recognize that the person you are listening to has a unique perspective or viewpoint. How is that perspective influencing what he or she is telling you and, by implication, how you should react?
- *Slow down.* Being empathic when listening to co-workers, customers, or clients takes time. Minimize distraction and take time to truly hear what they say.
- *Keep yourself honest.* Ask others to provide feedback on how well you listen when interacting with others in your workplace. Use that feedback to improve.³⁰

Empathic listening and effectively using verbal and nonverbal feedback are among the most critical listening skills for the workplace.

LISTENING IN THE CLASSROOM

Take a moment to think about how often, as a student, you find yourself listening to a lecture. If you were to estimate how much of your time is spent listening to lectures, how much would it be? If you said “a lot,” you would not be alone. Researchers have estimated that college students spend at least 10 hours per week attending lectures.³¹ If you take a typical 15-credit-load in a semester, that 10 hours per week translates into about 80% of your time in class being spent listening to lectures.³² The prominence of listening in students’ lives led Vinson and Johnson to coin the term **lecture listening**—the ability to listen to, mentally process, and recall lecture information.³³

What constitutes effective lecture listening? Although a variety of answers have been offered, educational researcher Michael Gilbert provides the following general suggestions:

1. *Find areas of interest in what you are listening to.* Constantly look for how you can use the information.
2. *Remain open.* Avoid the temptation to focus only on the lecturer’s delivery; withhold evaluative judgments until the lecturer has finished; recognize your emotional triggers and avoid letting them distract you.
3. *Work at listening.* Capitalize on your mind’s ability to think faster than the lecturer can talk. Mentally summarize and review what has been said, mentally organize information, and find connections to what you already know or are currently learning.
4. *Avoid letting distractions distract.* Monitor your attention and recognize when it is waning. If you are becoming distracted, refocus your attention on the lecturer.
5. *Listen for and note main ideas.* Focus on the central themes of what is being presented, and make notes about those themes. Effective notes outlining the main ideas of a lecture can, in some cases, be more useful than pages of notes containing unorganized details.³⁴

In addition to Gilbert’s suggestions, communication researcher Dan O’Hair and colleagues recommend that you practice flexibility in listening.³⁵ By practicing your listening skills while watching information-packed documentaries or while attending public presentations on campus, you not only will become a more effective lecture listener but also will learn valuable information.

A final lecture listening strategy, one that is essential, is to take effective notes. Research has found that effective note taking during lectures can increase scores on exams by more than 20%—a difference between receiving a C and receiving an A.³⁶ Unfortunately, students typically do not record enough notes during a lecture. Research generally shows that less than 40% of the information in a lecture makes it into students’ notes. In short, most students are unable to capitalize on the benefits of note taking simply because their notes are incomplete.

Now that you understand why note taking is so important, how can you become a more effective note taker? In your notes your goal should be to record both the outline of the lecture—called organizational points—and the details supporting those points. The most effective way to ensure that you record all of these points is to listen for **lecture cues**—verbal or nonverbal signals that stress points or indicate transitions between ideas during a lecture. Table 3 summarizes various types of lecture cues commonly used by teachers. While taking notes, you should listen and watch for these types of cues.

Research has examined the importance of cues for students.³⁷ A group of students were taught about organizational cues and were asked to listen for those cues and take notes during a videotaped lecture. Students in another group were not informed about organizational cues but viewed and took notes during the same lecture. The students who

lecture listening

The ability to listen to, mentally process, and recall lecture information.

lecture cues

Verbal or nonverbal signals that stress points or indicate transitions between ideas during a lecture.

Table 3 Common Lecture Cues Teachers Use

Type of Cue	Example	Main Uses
Written outlines	Outline of lecture on transparency or PowerPoint slide	Indicate main and subordinate ideas
Words/phrases	Term written on the chalkboard	Stress important terms and accompanying definitions
Verbal importance cues	"Now, <i>and this will be on the exam next week</i> , we will explore . . ."	Stress important concepts deemed essential for recall/understanding
Semantic cues	"Here is an <i>example</i> [<i>definition, explanation, conclusion, implication, or illustration</i>] of uncertainty reduction theory in action . . ."	Signal common types of details that make up the lecture content
Organizational cues	"The <i>third thing</i> I want to discuss today is . . ."	Orally provide indications of main and subordinate points in a lecture
Nonverbal cues	Holding up two fingers when saying "I will discuss two concepts today . . ."	Can serve any of the functions of nonverbal behaviors discussed in the chapter on nonverbal communication

were taught about organizational cues recorded four times the number of organizational points and twice the number of details in their notes. These students were able to capitalize on their note-taking effectiveness; they received the equivalent of an A on a quiz about the lecture. Their counterparts, who were unaware of and did not listen for organizational cues, received the equivalent of a C. This research looked at the effects of teaching students about organizational cues only. Imagine what could have happened if these students had been taught about all types of lecture cues! Fortunately, you are now equipped with this information.

LISTENING TO MEDIA

Think about how much time you spend watching television; listening to the radio; reading magazines, newspapers, or books; reading and writing e-mail; chatting online; or just surfing the web. Many of us might avoid that thought because it might frighten us. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported statistics showing that, on a typical day, children who are at least two years old spend over two hours per day watching television.³⁸ If other forms of media consumption, such as playing video games or using the Internet, were factored into these statistics, the number would be much higher. These statistics show that our saturation with mediated messages begins at an early age. Also, the CDC warns that such ubiquitous use of the media might be linked to important health issues, such as childhood obesity.

Given the quantity of mediated communication to which we are exposed each day, we must become critical consumers of such information. Think how much money you would spend if you "bought in" to every commercial you saw, or think of how much time it would take for you to read every e-mail message you get (including "junk" e-mail). Simply put, good listening behaviors are essential because mediated communication is so prevalent.

One way to be an effective listener in a mediated culture is to have information literacy. **Information literacy** is defined by the American Library Association in the following way: "To be information literate an individual must recognize when information is

information literacy

The ability to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the information needed.



- Many of us spend over two hours per day listening to the media.

© Onoky/Getty Images RF

needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the information needed.”³⁹ According to this definition, information-literate individuals are able to think critically, know when and how to find more information, and know how to evaluate information.

Mediated communication is not limited to advertising and television. In 2014, it was estimated that just over 42% of the world population uses the Internet regularly.⁴⁰ To put this in some perspective, the corresponding 2011 value was 35%.⁴¹ How do people use the Internet? A recent poll of nearly 200,000 global Internet users showed that 1.72 hours per day are spent on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and others.⁴² These find-

ings suggest that much of what we listen to and consume comes from online sources. In fact, most college-age students get most of their news from online sources rather than more traditional print, broadcast, and cable outlets. Moreover, much of our communication with others flows through digital channels, such as e-mail, text messages, and social media posts.

Digital communication tools on the Internet or mobile devices require different approaches to being an effective listener/consumer of communication. The principal problem with digital communication—whether you are using e-mail or text messaging—is that nonverbal communication is difficult. Recall that nonverbal communication provides significant clues about another person’s emotions and feelings. Without the ability to see and hear the other person, how can you tell what that person is really thinking? When communicating using digital tools, you may perceive messages in ways not intended. For instance, you may interpret a short message to be angry or abrupt when, in fact, the person was texting while doing something else. When using other tools, such as Twitter or Facebook, remember that our tweets and posts are often full of subtexts and hidden meanings. Take care to check your understanding of messages and intentions when consuming personal messages from others.

LISTENING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

Many of the suggestions provided in this chapter are common for both native English speakers and English language learners (ELLs). However, if you are a non-native speaker, some understanding of how to further develop your listening skills can speed your progress as an effective listener. Research suggests that second-language listening development requires two skills: vocabulary comprehension and metacognitive awareness.⁴³ Vocabulary comprehension is more than just memorizing lists of terms. Rather, vocabulary is strengthened by recognizing the sounds of words and associating those sounds with their meaning. Being immersed in a new culture will assist you in developing such connections, particularly if you seek out and engage in sustained conversations with others. You can also use television and other media to broaden your listening experiences and assist you in vocabulary development.

In addition to developing your vocabulary, you should also try to develop your metacognitive skills. Metacognition is your ability to use “mental strategies” to assist in quickly determining the meaning of words. Learning to decipher words by drawing inferences on their meaning from the context and other words around them is one such strategy. Another example of metacognition is drawing parallels between English vocabulary and your native vocabulary. Through such strategies you will make quicker inferences about what new terms mean and will be able to listen more efficiently.

Of course, if you have difficulty listening because the other person is speaking rapidly or using words you have not heard, you should feel comfortable telling the person. Adaptation to language differences is the responsibility of everyone involved in a communication situation, and you should not take on the entire challenge of trying to make the interaction succeed.

Ways to Be an Ethical Listener

Although effective listening requires you to adapt your verbal, nonverbal, and perception-checking skills to specific situations, such as the workplace, the classroom, and mediated environments, you must also take care to enact ethical listening behaviors. To be an ethical listener, you should practice the following behaviors:

1. *Recognize the sources of your own conversational habits.* Your family, school, and other life experiences have allowed you to develop certain habits, which in some situations could be strengths and in others could represent areas for improvement. Recognizing those habits will allow you to more fully adapt to those with whom you are communicating.
2. *Monitor your communication to recognize when you are engaging in poor listening behaviors.* Perhaps the most important step in becoming an ethical listener is recognizing that you must work hard to be a good listener—a step that begins with an awareness of what you are doing in the situation.
3. *Apply general ethical principles to how you respond.* Planning your responses so that you are respectful to others is an example of how your personal ethics can influence your listening behaviors.
4. *Adapt to others.* Recognize that other people also have unique communication styles and that you might need to adapt your listening behaviors so that you can fully understand what they are trying to say.⁴⁴

be ready... for what's next

Taking Notes with Apps

One of the most important skills that you will develop in college is note taking. Good notes now may impact your performance on a test or assignment; good notes after graduation may impact your job performance. Using your smartphone, tablet, or laptop, there are a variety of apps that can be used for note taking. Many people use these apps because they are efficient and provide a secure storage option for important notes.

Researchers from Princeton and UCLA have found that digital note taking may not be as effective as tried-and-true pen-and-paper options. Their study found that although digital note takers recorded more notes, they performed more poorly on application-based exam questions than their analog counterparts. The researchers reason that digital note takers tend to record information verbatim whereas longhand note takers tend to think about information before writing something down. In short, handwritten notes might stimulate better information processing. This evidence might lead you to question whether your laptop or smart device is the best alternative.

Source: Muller, P. A., & Oppenheimer, D. M. (2014). The pen is mightier than the keyboard: Advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological Sciences*, 25, 1159–1169.

Chapter Review & Study Guide

Summary

In this chapter, you learned the following:

1. Listening is an important skill because it is one of our most common communication activities, it helps us build and maintain relationships, and it is essential for success in most professional situations.
2. Listening is a process that includes different types of behaviors.
 - Hearing is the physical act of receiving a sound. We hear all of the noises around us. Listening is the active process of receiving, paying attention to, assigning meaning to, and responding to sounds. Listening is an active process, whereas hearing is reflexive.
 - Listening is generally divided into active, empathic, critical, and enjoyment listening. Active listening, which is listening with a purpose, includes both empathic and critical listening. Empathic listening occurs when you are attempting to understand another person. Critical listening requires evaluating a speaker's message for accuracy, meaningfulness, and usefulness. We also listen to things, such as music, for enjoyment purposes.
3. A variety of internal and external barriers prevent many of us from being effective listeners.
 - One barrier is noise, which includes both physical and internal distractions.
 - Physical distractions are any audible noises in the communication environment.
 - Internal distractions can include mental, factual, or semantic distractions.
- Perceptions of others and your own behaviors can also become barriers to effective listening.
4. Developing your critical thinking, nonverbal, and verbal skills will help you become a more effective listener.
 - Critical thinking involves the careful analysis of both the communication situation and the speaker's message. To analyze the message, you should evaluate the arguments and supporting material presented by the speaker and whether or not the speaker is credible.
 - Being nonverbally responsive, using positive facial expressions, making direct eye contact, and providing positive vocal utterances are effective nonverbal strategies.
 - Asking questions, inviting additional comments, using descriptive responses, and providing affirming statements are all examples of effective verbal strategies.
5. Effective listening in the workplace, classroom, and mediated environment requires you to adapt the nonverbal, verbal, and critical thinking skills discussed in the chapter.
6. Ethical listening means that you should recognize and monitor your own communication style, apply general ethical principles to your responses, and adapt your communication style to others.

Key Terms

Active listening
Automatic attention
Critical listening
Critical thinking
Empathic listening
First-person observation
Hearing

Information literacy
Lecture cues
Lecture listening
Listening
Listening for enjoyment
Long-term memory
Schemas

Second-person observation
Selective attention
Short-term memory
Social media listening
Source credibility
Working memory