**Listening Skills**

**See Also:**[**Active Listening**](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/active-listening.html)**and**[**Ineffective Listening**](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/ineffective-listening.html)**.**

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process.

Listening is key to all effective communication, without the ability to listen effectively messages are easily misunderstood – communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated.

If there is one communication skill you should aim to master then listening is it.

**Listening is so important that many top employers provide listening skills training for their employees.  This is not surprising when you consider that good listening skills can lead to: better customer satisfaction, greater productivity with fewer mistakes, increased sharing of information that in turn can lead to more creative and innovative work.**

**Many successful leaders and entrepreneurs credit their success to effective listening skills. Richard Branson frequently quotes listening as one of the main factors behind the success of Virgin.**

Effective listening is a skill that underpins all positive human relationships, spend some time thinking about and developing your listening skills – they are the building blocks of success.

See our pages: **[Employability Skills](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/general/employability-skills.html)** and **[Customer Service Skills](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/general/customer-service.html)** for more examples of the importance of listening in the workplace.

**Good listening skills also have benefits in our personal lives, including:**

A greater number of friends and social networks, improved self-esteem and confidence, higher grades at school and in academic work and even better health and general well-being.

Studies have shown that, whereas speaking raises blood pressure, attentive listening can bring it down.

**Listening is Not the Same as Hearing**

Hearing refers to the sounds that you hear, whereas listening requires more than that: it requires focus.  Listening means paying attention not only to the story, but how it is told, the use of language and voice, and how the other person uses his or her body.  In other words, it means being aware of both verbal and non-verbal messages.  Your ability to listen effectively depends on the degree to which you perceive and understand these messages.

See our pages: **[Listening Misconceptions](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening-misconceptions.html)** and **[Types of Listening](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening-types.html)** for more information.

*The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen.  Just listen.  Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention.*

Rachel Naomi Remen

**We Spend a lot of Time Listening**

Adults spend an average of 70% of their time engaged in some sort of communication, of this an average of 45% is spent listening compared to 30% speaking, 16% reading and 9% writing. (Adler, R. et al. 2001).

Time Spent Communicating
A 'pie in pie' chart to show the significance of listening.
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Based on the research of:*Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L. and Proctor, R. (2001)*  
*Interplay: the process of interpersonal communicating (8th edn), Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt*.

Effective listening requires concentration and the use of your other senses - not just hearing the words spoken.

Listening is not the same as hearing and in order to listen effectively you need to use more than just your ears.

**The 10 Principles of Listening**

A good listener will listen not only to what is being said, but also to what is left unsaid or only partially said.

Effective listening involves observing body language and noticing inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal messages.

**For example, if someone tells you that they are happy with their life but through gritted teeth or with tears filling their eyes, you should consider that the verbal and non-verbal messages are in conflict, they maybe don't mean what they say.**

**01**

**Stop Talking**

“*If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear.*” Mark Twain.

Don't talk, listen.  When somebody else is talking listen to what they are saying, do not interrupt, talk over them or finish their sentences for them.  Stop, just listen.  When the other person has finished talking you may need to clarify to ensure you have received their message accurately.

**02**

**Prepare Yourself to Listen**

**Relax.**

Focus on the speaker.  Put other things out of mind.  The human mind is easily distracted by other thoughts – what’s for lunch, what time do I need to leave to catch my train, is it going to rain – try to put other thoughts out of mind and concentrate on the messages that are being communicated.

**03**

**Put the Speaker at Ease**

**Help the speaker to feel free to speak.**

Remember their needs and concerns. Nod or use other gestures or words to encourage them to continue.

Maintain eye contact but don’t stare – show you are listening and understanding what is being said.

**04**

**Remove Distractions**

**Focus on what is being said.**

Don’t doodle, shuffle papers, look out the window, pick your fingernails or similar. Avoid unnecessary interruptions.  These behaviours disrupt the listening process and send messages to the speaker that you are bored or distracted.

**05**

**Empathise**

**Try to understand the other person’s point of view.**

Look at issues from their perspective.  Let go of preconceived ideas.  By having an open mind we can more fully empathise with the speaker.  If the speaker says something that you disagree with then wait and construct an argument to counter what is said but keep an open mind to the views and opinions of others.

See our page: **[What is Empathy?](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/empathy.html)**

**06**

**Be Patient**

**A pause, even a long pause, does not necessarily mean that the speaker has finished.**

Be patient and let the speaker continue in their own time, sometimes it takes time to formulate what to say and how to say it. Never interrupt or finish a sentence for someone.

**07**

**Avoid Personal Prejudice**

**Try to be impartial.**

Don't become irritated and don't let the person’s habits or mannerisms distract you from what the speaker is really saying. Everybody has a different way of speaking - some people are for example more nervous or shy than others, some have regional accents or make excessive arm movements, some people like to pace whilst talking - others like to sit still. Focus on what is being said and try to ignore styles of delivery.

**08**

**Listen to the Tone**

**Volume and tone both add to what someone is saying.**

A good speaker will use both volume and tone to their advantage to keep an audience attentive; everybody will use pitch, tone and volume of voice in certain situations – let these help you to understand the emphasis of what is being said.

See our page: **[Effective Speaking](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/effective-speaking.html)** for more.

**09**

**Listen for Ideas – Not Just Words**

**You need to get the whole picture, not just isolated bits and pieces.**

Maybe one of the most difficult aspects of listening is the ability to link together pieces of information to reveal the ideas of others. With proper concentration, letting go of distractions, and focus this becomes easier.

**10**

**Wait and Watch for Non-Verbal Communication**

**Gestures, facial expressions, and eye-movements can all be important.**

We don’t just listen with our ears but also with our eyes – watch and pick up the additional information being transmitted via non-verbal communication.

See our page: **[Non-verbal Communication](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/nonverbal-communication.html)**.

Find more at: [http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening-skills.html#ixzz4KlgUeFS0](http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening-skills.html" \l "ixzz4KlgUeFS0)