

UNIT II

INTRODUCTION

Most misunderstandings that arise in our daily lives occur because of poor listening habits. Poor listening skills can create serious personal, professional and financial problems. For students, poor listening can result in incorrect assignments, missed appointments, misunderstood directions, lower grades and lost job opportunities. Therefore, listening is a skill that one needs to be competent in. To enhance your listening competence you will need to understand the importance of effective listening, the stages of effective listening, the functions of listening, the most common barriers to listening, how to analyze and evaluate what you listen to and specific steps to improve your listening.

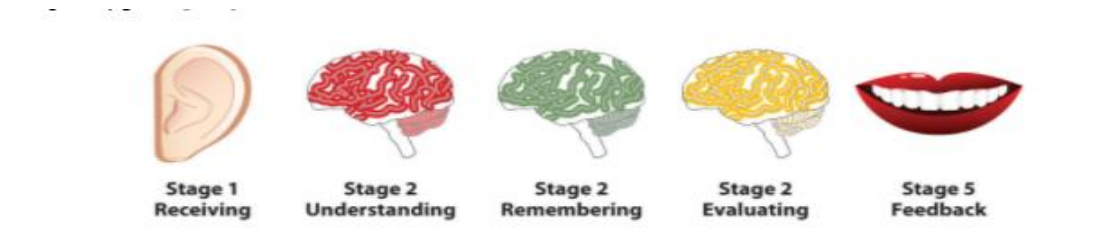
Whether you realize or not, you have spent listening almost every time of your waking day. If you are not talking or reading, you are probably listening to something or someone. Communication scholar Larry Barker and several colleagues found that students spend nearly half of their time listening, almost one-third of it speaking and less than one-third of it reading and writing.

Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear. The listening process involves five stages: receiving, understanding, evaluating, remembering, and responding.

LISTENING PROCESS

- The receiving stage of listening is the basic stage where an individual hears a message being sent by a speaker.
- The understanding stage of listening occurs when a receiver of a message attempts to figure out the meaning of the message.
- The remembering stage of listening is when a listener either places information into long-term memory or forgets the information presented.

- The evaluating stage of listening occurs when a listener judges the content of the message or the character of the speaker.
- The responding stage of listening occurs when a listener provides verbal or nonverbal feedback about the speaker or message.
- During the responding stage of listening, listeners can provide speakers with two types of feedback designed to help a speaker know whether a listener is understanding and what the listener thinks of a message. Formative feedback is given while the speaker is engaged in the act of speech making. Summative feedback is given at the conclusion of a speech.



1. **Receiving**

It's another annual employee survey at your workplace. But have you ever thought about how HR arrives at conclusions? By practicing the stages of listening! The first of these is the receiving stage. HR listens to the employees' complaints and takes appropriate actions to resolve the concerns.

And this happens because of these steps throughout the receiving stage:

- Focuses on what the employee is saying
- Interprets the message with proper context
- Ensures that no information is missed

2. **Understanding**

‘What would you have done had you been in my place?’ This is a question you must have heard sometimes with family, friends, or colleagues.

This simple sentence shows the importance of the stages of listening. It is a sign of desperation on the speaker’s part to make himself understood. It is usually used when the speaker feels that the listener is not getting what he is trying to convey.

Pose questions to the speaker to make sure you have understood things correctly, especially in the workplace.

3. **Evaluating**

The appraisal month is a busy time at workplaces every year. The reporting manager or HR calls everyone for face-to-face conversations. This is the time when employees can raise the issues or problems they face in the workplace.

However, have you ever thought about how the manager decides whether an employee is deserving or not? It is through careful evaluation. That is why all this comes under the evaluation stage of the listening process.

In this stage, the manager assesses the information about you such as your performance, team spirit, and the initiatives taken. The manager then determines whether the supporting points from the speaker, which in this case is the employee, are:

- Well-constructed or muddled
- Prejudiced or impartial
- Valid or invalid

4. **Responding**

Once you have received, understood, and evaluated the information, it's time to formulate a response or give feedback. Don't be that silent listener in the room who does nothing but only listens. As Charles Dickens once said, "The worst of all listeners is the one who does nothing but listens."

Responding properly will show your interest and involvement in any conversation. However, that doesn't mean you have to come up with a smart question or feedback every time. Even simple verbal cues such as saying 'yes' and nonverbal ones like smiling and nodding your head will do the trick.

5. **Remembering**

Remembering all the information is crucial among the steps of listening to be able to move forward in a conversation or take any action. Research shows a high possibility of forgetting up to half of what we hear within the first eight hours of listening to it.

We can develop memory capability by using the information at the earliest or by relating it to a context or previous conversation.

TYPES OF LISTENING

TYPE	GOAL / WHEN	BEHAVIORS
Active	GOAL: Confirm understanding WHEN: All the time—the basis of all other types of listening.	“So, what you’re saying is . . .” “What I think you’re telling me is . . .”
Critical	GOAL: Drive for meaning WHEN: Listening to facts, data, incidents, concepts. When you need to grasp what you are hearing.	Clarifying questions. “How many were there?” “How would those go together?” “What would the impact be?”
Empathic	GOAL: Drive for connection WHEN: Listening to people’s feelings, beliefs, values, core issues.	Open-ended questions. Without judgement. “Tell me more about that.” “How was that for you?” “That sounds upsetting.”
Results-oriented	GOAL: Closure WHEN: Decisions need to be made. Action is required. Negotiations.	“What are you recommending?” “How long will that take?” “When can we expect an answer?”
Expansive	GOAL: Explore ideas WHEN: Brainstorming. Envisioning the future. Creating new possibilities.	“What would that look like?” “How would it be if we . . .?” “What if we had unlimited resources?”



Critical listening



critical listening occurs when you still want to understand what the other person is saying, but also have some reason or responsibility to evaluate what is being said to you and how it is being said

Stages

5 Stages of the Critical Listening Process



'In empathic listening you listen with your ears, but you also, and more importantly, listen with your eyes and with your heart. You listen for feeling, for meaning. You listen for behaviour. You use your right brain as well as your left. You sense, you intuit, you feel.'...

'You have to open yourself up to be influenced'.

— *Stephen Covey* —

9

Strategies to Develop EMPATHIC LISTENING

- 1. It's not about you**
- 2. Put away your phone**
- 3. Be an active listener**
- 4. Refrain from criticism**
- 5. Adjust your body language**
- 6. Paraphrase your conversation partner**
- 7. Ask open-ended questions**
- 8. Stop giving unsolicited advice**
- 9. Don't 'fill up' the silence**

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Results-oriented listening

The variation of critical listening is called results-oriented listening. We do it when we're negotiating or getting directions or understanding a process. We do it when we want to get things done.”

THE RRP LISTENING STYLES

- The audience are interested in :
- The Reason-oriented listeners want to know, why your ideas are good?
- The Result-oriented listeners want to know, what you are going to do?
- The Process-oriented listeners want to know, how you will do it?
- Try to get feedback from the audience and react according to that feedback.

Expansive listening

Expansive listening is listening with someone. In this type of listening, the listening itself is the journey. It is the point. This is creative listening, chatting for the sake of connection, brainstorming or listening without an agenda.

Skill # 3



Three Levels of Listening



2. *Expansive Listening*

- Being fully present and feeling free to explore possibilities
- Listening with all my senses
- Noticing whatever wants to be noticed and offering it to the other person without attachment



BARRIERS OF LISTENING

It is common, when listening to someone else speak, to be formulating a reply whilst the other person is still talking. However, this means that we are not really listening to all that is being said.

Even good listeners are often guilty of critically evaluating what is being said before fully understanding the message that the speaker is trying to communicate. The result is that assumptions are made and conclusions reached about the speaker's meaning, that might be

inaccurate. This and other types of ineffective listening lead to misunderstandings and a breakdown in communication.

Even if we are not formulating a response whilst listening, we may still be thinking of other things, albeit subconsciously. During a conversation, how often have thoughts such as "*What am I going to have for my dinner*", "*Will I have time to finish that report?*" or "*I hope I am not late picking the kids up*" crossed your mind? At such times, we are distracted and not giving our full attention to what is being said. In other words we are not actively listening to the speaker.

We can easily pick up bad habits when it comes to listening - we examine some of the barriers and bad habits of listening - enabling you to address and correct them. Listening is a key interpersonal skill and a prerequisite to many other communication skills – by learning to listen more effectively you can improve the quality of your professional and personal life.

Common Barriers to Listening

There are many things that get in the way of listening and you should be aware of these barriers, many of which are bad habits, in order to become a more effective listener. Barriers and bad habits to effective listening can include:

- **Trying to listen to more than one conversation at a time**, this includes having the television or radio on while attempting to listen to somebody talk; being on the phone to one person and talking to another person in the same room and also being distracted by some dominant noise in the immediate environment.
- **You find the communicator attractive/unattractive** and you pay more attention to how you feel about the communicator and their physical appearance than to what they are saying. Perhaps you simply don't like the speaker - you may mentally argue with the speaker and be fast to criticise, either verbally or in your head.
- **You are not interested** in the topic/issue being discussed and become bored.

- **Not focusing** and being easily distracted, fiddling with your hair, fingers, a pen etc. or gazing out of the window or focusing on objects other than the speaker.
- **Feeling unwell or tired**, hungry, thirsty or needing to use the toilet.
- **Identifying rather than empathising** - understanding what you are hearing but not putting yourself in the shoes of the speaker. As most of us have a lot of internal self-dialogue we spend a lot of time listening to our own thoughts and feelings - it can be difficult to switch the focus from 'I' or 'me' to 'them' or 'you'. Effective listening involves opening your mind to the views of others and attempting to feel empathetic. (See our page: **What is Empathy?** for more information)
- **Sympathising rather than empathising** - sympathy is not the same as empathy, you sympathise when you feel sorry for the experiences of another, to empathise is to put yourself in the position of the other person.
- **You are prejudiced or biased** by race, gender, age, religion, accent, and/or past experiences.
- **You have preconceived ideas or bias** - effective listening includes being open-minded to the ideas and opinions of others, this does not mean you have to agree but should listen and attempt to understand.
- **You make judgements**, thinking, for example that a person is not very bright or is under-qualified so there is no point listening to what they have to say.
- **Previous experiences** – we are all influenced by previous experiences in life. We respond to people based on personal appearances, how initial introductions or welcomes were received and/or previous interpersonal encounters. If we stereotype a person we become less objective and therefore less likely to listen effectively.
- **Preoccupation** - when we have a lot on our minds we can fail to listen to what is being said as we're too busy concentrating on what we're thinking about. This is particularly true when we feel stressed or worried about issues.
- **Having a Closed Mind** - we all have ideals and values that we believe to be correct and it can be difficult to listen to the views of others that contradict our own opinions. The key to effective listening and interpersonal skills more generally is the ability to have a truly open mind - to

understand why others think about things differently to you and use this information to gain a better understanding of the speaker.

Non-Verbal Signs of Ineffective Listening

Although with all non-verbal signals a certain amount of error has to be expected, generally signs of inattention while listening include:

- **Lack of eye contact with the speaker** – listeners who are engaged with the speaker tend to give eye contact. Lack of eye contact can, however, also be a sign of shyness.
- **An inappropriate posture** - slouched, leaning back or ‘swinging’ on a chair, leaning forward onto a desk or table and/or a constantly shifting posture. People who are paying attention tend to lean slightly towards the speaker.
- **Being distracted** - fidgeting, doodling, looking at a watch, yawning.
- **Inappropriate expressions and lack of head nods** - often when a listener is engaged with a speaker they nod their head, this is usually an almost subconscious way of encouraging the speaker and showing attention. Lack of head nods can mean the opposite – listening is not happening. The same can be true of facial expressions, attentive listeners use smiles as feedback mechanisms and to show attention.

Other common traits of ineffective listening include:

- **Sudden Changes in Topic:** When the listener is distracted they may suddenly think about something else that is not related to the topic of the speaker and attempt to change the conversation to their new topic.
- **Selective Listening:** This occurs when the listener thinks they have heard the main points or have got the gist of what the speaker wants to say. They filter out what they perceive

as being of key importance and then stop listening or become distracted. (See also: Types of Listening)

- **Daydreaming:** Daydreaming can occur when the listener hears something that sets off a chain of unrelated thoughts in their head – they become distracted by their ‘own world’ and adopt a ‘far-away’ look.
- **Advising:** Some people want to jump in early in a conversation and start to offer advice before they fully understand the problem or concerns of the speaker.

IMPROVING LISTENING ABILITIES

In today's high-tech, high-speed, high-stress world, communication is more important than ever, yet we seem to devote less and less time to really listening to one another. Genuine listening has become a rare gift—the gift of time. It helps build relationships, solve problems, ensure understanding, resolve conflicts, and improve accuracy. At work, effective listening means fewer errors and less wasted time. At home, it helps develop resourceful, self-reliant kids who can solve their own problems. Listening builds friendships and careers. It saves money and marriages.

Step 1: Face the speaker and maintain eye contact.

Talking to someone while they scan the room, study a computer screen, or gaze out the window is like trying to hit a moving target. How much of the person's divided attention you are actually getting? Fifty percent? Five percent? If the person were your child you might demand, "Look at me when I'm talking to you," but that's not the sort of thing we say to a lover, friend or colleague.

In most Western cultures, eye contact is considered a basic ingredient of effective communication. When we talk, we look each other in the eye. That doesn't mean that you can't carry on a conversation from across the room, or from another room, but if the conversation

continues for any length of time, you (or the other person) will get up and move. The desire for better communication pulls you together.

Do your conversational partners the courtesy of turning to face them. Put aside papers, books, the phone and other distractions. Look at them, even if they don't look at you. Shyness, uncertainty, shame, guilt, or other emotions, along with cultural taboos, can inhibit eye contact in some people under some circumstances. Excuse the other guy, but stay focused yourself.

Step 2: Be attentive, but relaxed.

Now that you've made eye contact, relax. You don't have to stare fixedly at the other person. You can look away now and then and carry on like a normal person. The important thing is to be attentive. The dictionary says that to "attend" another person means to:

- be present
- give attention
- apply or direct yourself
- pay attention
- remain ready to serve

Mentally screen out distractions, like background activity and noise. In addition, try not to focus on the speaker's accent or speech mannerisms to the point where they become distractions. Finally, don't be distracted by your own thoughts, feelings, or biases.

Step 3: Keep an open mind.

Listen without judging the other person or mentally criticizing the things she tells you. If what she says alarms you, go ahead and feel alarmed, but don't say to yourself, "Well, that was a stupid move." As soon as you indulge in judgmental bemusements, you've compromised your effectiveness as a listener.

Listen without jumping to conclusions. Remember that the speaker is using language to represent the thoughts and feelings inside her brain. You don't know what those thoughts and feelings are and the only way you'll find out is by listening.

Don't be a sentence-grabber. Occasionally my partner can't slow his mental pace enough to listen effectively, so he tries to speed up mine by interrupting and finishing my sentences. This usually lands him way off base, because he is following his own train of thought and doesn't learn where my thoughts are headed. After a couple of rounds of this, I usually ask, "Do you want to have this conversation by yourself, or do you want to hear what I have to say?" I wouldn't do that with everyone, but it works with him.

Step 4: Listen to the words and try to picture what the speaker is saying.

Allow your mind to create a mental model of the information being communicated. Whether a literal picture, or an arrangement of abstract concepts, your brain will do the necessary work if you stay focused, with senses fully alert. When listening for long stretches, concentrate on, and remember, key words and phrases.

When it's your turn to listen, don't spend the time planning what to say next. You can't rehearse and listen at the same time. Think only about what the other person is saying.

Finally, concentrate on what is being said, even if it bores you. If your thoughts start to wander, immediately force yourself to refocus.

Step 5: Don't interrupt and don't impose your "solutions."

Children used to be taught that it's rude to interrupt. I'm not sure that message is getting across anymore. Certainly the opposite is being modeled on the majority of talk shows and reality programs, where loud, aggressive, in-your-face behavior is condoned, if not encouraged.

Interrupting sends a variety of messages. It says:

- "I'm more important than you are."
- "What I have to say is more interesting, accurate or relevant."
- "I don't really care what you think."
- "I don't have time for your opinion."
- "This isn't a conversation, it's a contest, and I'm going to win."

We all think and speak at different rates. If you are a quick thinker and an agile talker, the burden is on *you* to relax your pace for the slower, more thoughtful communicator—or for the guy who has trouble expressing himself.

When listening to someone talk about a problem, refrain from suggesting solutions. Most of us don't want your advice anyway. If we do, we'll ask for it. Most of us prefer to figure out our own solutions. We need you to listen and help us do that. Somewhere way down the line, if you are absolutely bursting with a brilliant solution, at least get the speaker's permission. Ask, "Would you like to hear my ideas?"

Step 6: Wait for the speaker to pause to ask clarifying questions.

When you don't understand something, of course you should ask the speaker to explain it to you. But rather than interrupt, wait until the speaker pauses. Then say something like, "Back up a second. I didn't understand what you just said about..."

Step 7: Ask questions only to ensure understanding.

At lunch, a colleague is excitedly telling you about her trip to Vermont and all the wonderful things she did and saw. In the course of this chronicle, she mentions that she spent some time with a mutual friend. You jump in with, "Oh, I haven't heard from Alice in ages. How is she?" and, just like that, discussion shifts to Alice and her divorce, and the poor kids, which leads to a

comparison of custody laws, and before you know it an hour is gone and Vermont is a distant memory.

This particular conversational affront happens all the time. Our questions lead people in directions that have nothing to do with where *they* thought they were going. Sometimes we work our way back to the original topic, but very often we don't.

When you notice that your question has led the speaker astray, take responsibility for getting the conversation back on track by saying something like, "It was great to hear about Alice, but tell me more about your adventure in Vermont."

Step 8: Try to feel what the speaker is feeling.

If you feel sad when the person with whom you are talking expresses sadness, joyful when she expresses joy, fearful when she describes her fears—and convey those feelings through your facial expressions and words—then your effectiveness as a listener is assured. Empathy is the heart and soul of good listening.

To experience empathy, you have to put yourself in the other person's place and allow yourself to feel what it is like to *be her* at that moment. This is not an easy thing to do. It takes energy and concentration. But it is a generous and helpful thing to do, and it facilitates communication like nothing else does.

Step 9: Give the speaker regular feedback.

Show that you understand where the speaker is coming from by reflecting the speaker's feelings. "You must be thrilled!" "What a terrible ordeal for you." "I can see that you are confused." If the speaker's feelings are hidden or unclear, then occasionally paraphrase the content of the message. Or just nod and show your understanding through appropriate facial expressions and an occasional well-timed "hmmm" or "uh huh."

The idea is to give the speaker some proof that you are listening, and that you are following her train of thought—not off indulging in your own fantasies while she talks to the ether.

In task situations, regardless of whether at work or home, always restate instructions and messages to be sure you understand correctly.

Step 10: Pay attention to what *isn't* said—to nonverbal cues.

If you exclude email, the majority of direct communication is probably nonverbal. We glean a great deal of information about each other without saying a word. Even over the telephone, you can learn almost as much about a person from the tone and cadence of her voice than from anything she says. When I talk to my best friend, it doesn't matter what we chat about, if I hear a lilt and laughter in her voice, I feel reassured that she's doing well.

Face to face with a person, you can detect enthusiasm, boredom, or irritation very quickly in the expression around the eyes, the set of the mouth, the slope of the shoulders. These are clues you can't ignore. When listening, remember that words convey only a fraction of the message.

Listening Skills Exercise: Summarize, Summarize, Summarize!

For at least one week, at the end of every conversation in which information is exchanged, conclude with a summary statement. In conversations that result in agreements about future obligations or activities, summarizing will not only ensure accurate follow-through, it will feel perfectly natural. In conversations that do not include agreements, if summarizing feels awkward just explain that you are doing it as an exercise.
