

1315 - Listening

Listening is the most important communication skill, yet it receives the least attention.

One study indicated that college students spent the following averages of their communication time engaged in the activity listed:

Writing	14%
Speaking	16%
Reading	17%
Listening	53%

Listening is also divided into two sub-categories:

Mass Media (radio, television)	21%
Face-to-face	32%

In the business world, studies show that most employees in major corporations spend 60% of the workday listening to others.

ELEMENTS IN THE LISTENING PROCESS

Hearing - the physiological dimension of listening.

Attending - the process of filtering out some messages and focusing on others. We attend to messages that stand out from background noises as well as messages that have a perceived "pay-off".

Understanding - occurs when we make sense of a message. It is possible to hear and attend and still not understand a message. It is also possible to misunderstand a message.

Responding - consists of giving observable feedback to the speaker. One major difference between effective and ineffective listening is the kind of feedback offered. Nonverbal and Verbal responses demonstrate attention. Good listeners maintain eye contact and react with facial expressions. They also make verbal responses (answering questions, exchanging ideas, etc.)

Remembering - the ability to recall information. Research indicates that people remember only half of what they hear **immediately** after hearing it, even if they work hard at listening. Within two months, half of the half is forgotten, resulting in 25% retention. The loss doesn't take two months to start. People start forgetting immediately (within eight hours the 50% remembered drops to 35%). The **residual message** (what is remembered) is a small fraction of what we hear.

FOUR TYPES OF LISTENING (Lucas)

Appreciative Listening: Listening for pleasure or enjoyment

Empathic Listening: Listening to provide emotional support for a speaker

Comprehensive Listening: Listening to understand the message of a speaker

Critical Listening: Listening to evaluate a message for purposes of accept or rejecting it.

FOUR CAUSES OF POOR LISTENING (Lucas)

Not Concentrating

Listening too hard

Jumping to conclusions

Focusing on Delivery and Personal Appearance

REASONS WHY WE DON'T LISTEN

Message overload - it is impossible to listen effectively to every message around us.

Preoccupation - we are often wrapped up in personal concerns that hold more importance to us than the messages being sent by others.

Rapid Thought - People are capable of understanding speech at a rate of 400 - 800 words per minute, yet the average speaker speaks at a rate of 120 to 150 wpm. The lag time allows daydreaming, thinking about personal interests, planning a rebuttal (response), etc. The goal is to spend that time processing the speaker's message.

Effort - Listening effectively is hard work. The physical changes that occur during careful listening show the effort it takes. The heart rate quickens, respiration increases, and body temperature rises.

External Noise - There are always distractions. The environment plays a vital role in effective listening.

Hearing Problems - Damage to the physiological process results in loss of listening effectiveness. Sometimes it is undiagnosed, resulting in frustration on the part of both listener and speaker.

Faulty Assumptions - We often make incorrect assumptions that lead us to believe we're listening attentively when the opposite is true. When it is a familiar topic, we can think that "we've heard it all before", even though the speaker is offering new information. Also, there are times when we assume that the information is too simple or too complex to deserve attention.

Lack of Apparent Advantages - It often appears that we have more to gain by speaking than by listening. Speaking allows control, it provides a chance to gain admiration, respect, or liking, and it gives you a chance to release energy that listening can't. Just remember that listening can pay-off, too. Willingness to listen gains you respect and liking from others. Also, the willingness to listen often becomes reciprocal.

Lack of Training - Listening is a skill which requires training.

POOR LISTENING HABITS: PROBLEM-LISTENERS:

Pseudolistening - a imitation of the real thing. Good pseudolisteners give the appearance of being attentive:

They make eye contact, nod and smile at the right times, and may even answer you occasionally. Reasons for pseudolistening vary. Reasons can include having other things on the mind, having heard the story before, boredom, etc.

Stage-Hogging - Stage-hogs (communication narcissists) try to turn the topic of conversation to themselves instead of showing interest in the speaker.

Stage-hogging strategies include:

Shift-response

Interruptions

Responses to Stage-hogs can be passive (gradual withdrawal - talking less, tuning out the speaker, showing disinterest nonverbally, and leaving the conversation) and/or active (trying to recapture the floor, hinting about the stage-hog's dominance, or confronting the speaker about his/her narcissism)

Not all interruptions are stage-hogging - Study indicates that men typically interrupt conversations more than women. Their goals are usually to control the discussion. Women interrupt for different reasons: to communicate agreement, to elaborate on the speaker's idea, or to participate in the topic of conversation.

Selective listening - selective listeners respond only to what interests them.

Insulated listening - These people avoid listening to topics they don't want to deal with. They simply fail to hear or acknowledge the topic.

Defensive listening - defensive listeners take things you intend as innocent comments as personal attacks.

Ambushing - Ambushers listen carefully for information they can use against you.

Insensitive listening - These listeners are unable to look beyond the words and behavior to understand their hidden meaning. They don't read the nonverbal clues. They take the speaker's remarks at face value.

HOW TO BECOME A BETTER LISTENER (Lucas)

Take Listening Seriously

Resist distractions

Don't be diverted by appearance or delivery

Suspend Judgement

Focus your listening

Listen for main points

Listen for evidence

Listen for technique (organization, motivational appeals, etc.)

Develop Note-Taking Skills

Key-work outlines

KEYS TO IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EVERYDAY LISTENING

Talk Less - We have two ears and one mouth, therefore we should listen twice as much as we speak. Avoid the tendency to be a stage-hog and shift the conversation to your ideas.

Get Rid of Distractions - Try to eliminate external and internal distractions as much as possible. (Radios, daydreaming, hunger, etc.)

Don't Judge Prematurely - Avoid making snap judgments - Listen to the entire message before making a decision.. *Listen first. Make sure you understand. Then evaluate*

Look for Key Ideas - Look for the central idea of the message. If it is difficult to determine, ask questions for clarity.

Ask Questions - Questions can be beneficial, but not all questions are equally helpful. There are **sincere questions that are aimed at understanding others, and there are counterfeit questions** that are really disguised attempt to send a message, not receive one. Counterfeit questions come in several varieties:

- Questions that trap the speaker - (You didn't like that, did you?)
- Questions that make statements - (Are you going to stand up to him and give him what he deserves?)
- Questions that carry hidden agendas. (Are you doing anything this weekend?)
- Questions that seek "correct" answers. (Honey, do you think I look fat in this outfit?)
- Questions based on unchecked assumptions (Why aren't you listening to me? What's the matter?)

Sincere questions are genuine requests for new information that clarifies a speaker's thoughts or feelings.

There are two reasons why people do not use this technique:

1. The reluctance to show ignorance by asking for an explanation on what should be obvious.
2. People think they already understand the speaker.

Paraphrase - Restate what you think the speaker meant to seek out clarification of meaning and feelings.

Paraphrasing won't always be accurate. But even if your restatement is off-base, it will give the other person a chance to make a correction.