

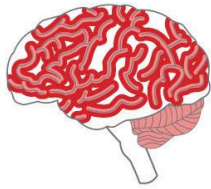
Unit 4

Listening and Feedback

Stages of Listenening



**Stage 1
Receiving**



**Stage 2
Understanding**



**Stage 2
Remembering**



**Stage 2
Evaluating**



**Stage 5
Feedback**

As there are many factors that can interfere with listening, so you need to be able to manage a number of mental tasks at the same time in order to be a successful listener. Author Joseph DeVito has divided the listening process into five stages: receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding.

Receiving

Receiving is the intentional focus on hearing a speaker's message, which happens when we filter out other sources so that we can isolate the message and avoid the confusing mixture of incoming stimuli. At this stage, we are still only hearing the message. Notice in Figure 4.3 "Stages of Feedback" that this stage is represented by the ear because it is the primary tool involved with this stage of the listening process.

One of the authors of this book recalls attending a political rally for a presidential candidate at which about five thousand people were crowded into an outdoor amphitheater. When the candidate finally started speaking, the cheering and yelling

was so loud that the candidate couldn't be heard easily despite using a speaker system. In this example, our coauthor had difficulty receiving the message because of the external noise. This is only one example of the ways that hearing alone can require sincere effort, but you must hear the message before you can continue the process of listening.

Understanding

In the understanding stage, we attempt to learn the meaning of the message, which is not always easy. For one thing, if a speaker does not enunciate clearly, it may be difficult to tell what the message was—did your friend say, "I think she'll be late for class," or "my teacher delayed the class"? Notice in Figure 4.3 "Stages of Feedback" that stages two, three, and four are represented by the brain because it is the primary tool involved with these stages of the listening process.

Even when we have understood the words in a message, because of the differences in our backgrounds and experience, we sometimes make the mistake of attaching our own meanings to the words of others. For example, say you have made plans with your friends to meet at a certain movie theater, but you arrive and nobody else shows up. Eventually you find out that your friends are at a different theater all the way across town where the same movie is playing. Everyone else understood that the meeting place was the "west side" location, but you wrongly understood it as the "east side" location and therefore missed out on part of the fun.

The consequences of ineffective listening in a classroom can be much worse. When your professor advises students to get an "early start" on your speech, he or she probably hopes that you will begin your research right away and move on to developing a thesis statement and outlining the speech as soon as possible. However, students in your class might misunderstand the instructor's meaning in several ways. One student might interpret the advice to mean that as long as she gets started, the rest of the assignment will have time to develop itself. Another student might instead think that to start early is to start on the Friday before the Monday due date instead of Sunday night.

So much of the way we understand others is influenced by our own perceptions and experiences. Therefore, at the understanding stage of listening we should be on the lookout for places where our perceptions might differ from those of the speaker.

Remembering

Remembering begins with listening; if you can't remember something that was said, you might not have been listening effectively. Wolvin and Coakley note that the most common reason for not remembering a message after the fact is because it wasn't really learned in the first place (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). However, even when you are listening attentively, some messages are more difficult than others to understand and remember. Highly complex messages that are filled with detail call for highly developed listening skills. Moreover, if something distracts your attention even for a moment, you could miss out on information that explains other new concepts you hear when you begin to listen fully again.

It's also important to know that you can improve your memory of a message by processing it meaningfully—that is, by applying it in ways that are meaningful to you (Gluck, et al., 2008). Instead of simply repeating a new acquaintance's name over and over, for example, you might remember it by associating it with something in your own life. "Emily," you might say, "reminds me of the Emily I knew in middle school," or "Mr. Impiari's name reminds me of the Impala my father drives."

Finally, if understanding has been inaccurate, recollection of the message will be inaccurate too.

Evaluating

The fourth stage in the listening process is evaluating, or judging the value of the message. We might be thinking, "This makes sense" or, conversely, "This is very odd." Because everyone embodies biases and perspectives learned from widely diverse sets of life experiences, evaluations of the same message can vary widely

from one listener to another. Even the most open-minded listeners will have opinions of a speaker, and those opinions will influence how the message is evaluated. People are more likely to evaluate a message positively if the speaker speaks clearly, presents ideas logically, and gives reasons to support the points made.

Unfortunately, personal opinions sometimes result in prejudiced evaluations. Imagine you're listening to a speech given by someone from another country and this person has an accent that is hard to understand. You may have a hard time simply making out the speaker's message. Some people find a foreign accent to be interesting or even exotic, while others find it annoying or even take it as a sign of ignorance. If a listener has a strong bias against foreign accents, the listener may not even attempt to attend to the message. If you mistrust a speaker because of an accent, you could be rejecting important or personally enriching information. Good listeners have learned to refrain from making these judgments and instead to focus on the speaker's meanings.

Responding

Responding—sometimes referred to as feedback—is the fifth and final stage of the listening process. It's the stage at which you indicate your involvement. Almost anything you do at this stage can be interpreted as feedback. For example, you are giving positive feedback to your instructor if at the end of class you stay behind to finish a sentence in your notes or approach the instructor to ask for clarification. The opposite kind of feedback is given by students who gather their belongings and rush out the door as soon as class is over. Notice in Figure 4.3 "Stages of Feedback" that this stage is represented by the lips because we often give feedback in the form of verbal feedback; however, you can just as easily respond nonverbally.

Formative Feedback

Not all response occurs at the end of the message. Formative feedback is a natural part of the ongoing transaction between a speaker and a listener. As the speaker delivers the message, a listener signals his or her involvement with focused attention, note-taking, nodding, and other behaviors that indicate understanding or failure to understand the message. These signals are important to the speaker, who is interested in whether the message is clear and accepted or whether the content of the message is meeting the resistance of preconceived ideas. Speakers can use this feedback to decide whether additional examples, support materials, or explanation is needed.

Summative Feedback

Summative feedback is given at the end of the communication. When you attend a political rally, a presentation given by a speaker you admire, or even a class, there are verbal and nonverbal ways of indicating your appreciation for or your disagreement with the messages or the speakers at the end of the message. Maybe you'll stand up and applaud a speaker you agreed with or just sit staring in silence after listening to a speaker you didn't like. In other cases, a speaker may be attempting to persuade you to donate to a charity, so if the speaker passes a bucket and you make a donation, you are providing feedback on the speaker's effectiveness. At the same time, we do not always listen most carefully to the messages of speakers we admire. Sometimes we simply enjoy being in their presence, and our summative feedback is not about the message but about our attitudes about the speaker. If your feedback is limited to something like, "I just love your voice," you might be indicating that you did not listen carefully to the content of the message.

There is little doubt that by now, you are beginning to understand the complexity of listening and the great potential for errors. By becoming aware of what is involved with active listening and where difficulties might lie, you can prepare yourself both as a listener and as a speaker to minimize listening errors with your own public speeches.

Key Takeaways

- 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.

Listening vs Hearing

Hearing is an accidental and automatic brain response to sound that requires no effort. We are surrounded by sounds most of the time. For example, we are accustomed to the sounds of airplanes, lawn mowers, furnace blowers, the rattling of pots and pans, and so on. We hear those incidental sounds and, unless we have a reason to do otherwise, we train ourselves to ignore them. We learn to filter out sounds that mean little to us, just as we choose to hear our ringing cell phones and other sounds that are more important to us.

Hearing

- Accidental
- Involuntary
- Effortless

Listening

- Focused
- Voluntary
- Intentional

Listening, on the other hand, is purposeful and focused rather than accidental. As a result, it requires motivation and effort. Listening, at its best, is active, focused, concentrated attention for the purpose of understanding the meanings expressed by a speaker. We do not always listen at our best, however, and later in this chapter we will examine some of the reasons why and some strategies for becoming more active critical listeners.

Benefits of Listening

Listening should not be taken for granted. Before the invention of writing, people conveyed virtually all knowledge through some combination of showing and telling. Elders recited tribal histories to attentive audiences. Listeners received religious teachings enthusiastically. Myths, legends, folktales, and stories for entertainment survived only because audiences were eager to listen. Nowadays, however, you can gain information and entertainment through reading and electronic recordings rather than through real-time listening. If you become distracted and let your attention wander, you can go back and replay a recording. Despite that fact, you can still gain at least four compelling benefits by becoming more active and competent at real-time listening.

You Become a Better Student

When you focus on the material presented in a classroom, you will be able to identify not only the words used in a lecture but their emphasis and their more complex meanings. You will take better notes, and you will more accurately

remember the instructor's claims, information, and conclusions. Many times, instructors give verbal cues about what information is important, specific expectations about assignments, and even what material is likely to be on an exam, so careful listening can be beneficial.

You Become a Better Friend

When you give your best attention to people expressing thoughts and experiences that are important to them, those individuals are likely to see you as someone who cares about their well-being. This fact is especially true when you give your attention only and refrain from interjecting opinions, judgments, and advice.

People Will Perceive You as Intelligent and Perceptive

When you listen well to others, you reveal yourself as being curious and interested in people and events. In addition, your ability to understand the meanings of what you hear will make you a more knowledgeable and thoughtful person.

Good Listening Can Help Your Public Speaking

When you listen well to others, you start to pick up more on the stylistic components related to how people form arguments and present information. As a result, you have the ability to analyze what you think works and doesn't work in others' speeches, which can help you transform your speeches in the process. For example, really paying attention to how others cite sources orally during their speeches may give you ideas about how to more effectively cite sources in your presentation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Hearing is the physiological process of attending to sound within one's environment; listening, however, is a focused, concentrated approach to understanding the message a source is sending.
- Learning how to be an effective listener has numerous advantages. First, effective listening can help you become a better student. Second, effective listening can help you become more effective in your interpersonal relationships. Third, effective listening can lead others to perceive you as more intelligent. Lastly, effective listening can help you become a stronger public speaker.

Effective Types of Listening

Often, people may naturally gravitate towards one listening style or another, but each of these listening skills is useful, depending on the situation. When you are aware of these different listening styles, it will make you a more effective communicator and help prevent miscommunication. You can also identify the ones you often employ and discover new types to improve your listening skills. Here are some of the main types of active listening that you may encounter or practice in the workplace:

Comprehensive listening

Comprehensive listening is listening to learn the content. Also known as informational listening, you listen to comprehend and absorb the information presented. This type of listening is commonly used in day-to-day lives, where you would use comprehensive listening along with verbal cues to understand the message being communicated. This listening style requires concentration and a conscious effort to understand. In comprehensive listening, you would distinguish the main point or idea from the details. While attending a presentation or lecture, this is the most critical listening skill you need to have.

When two different people listen to the same message, they understand its meaning differently. A significant reason is that comprehensive listening involves cognitive skills, where people may interpret and understand the meaning of a message based on their knowledge, outlook and experiences. To improve comprehensive listening, you have to work on your vocabulary, language skills, knowledge and cognitive skills.

Discriminative listening

This type of listening identifies the variation in tones and sounds. It interprets the verbal cues to understand what the speaker is truly saying. The nuances in their voice will help you to distinguish what emotions they are going through. Discriminative listening is a basic type of listening skill developed quite early on in life, where different sounds of the words are recognised without understanding their meaning. For example, if your client speaks in a foreign language that you have difficulty understanding, you can use discriminative listening skills to comprehend what is going on to some extent, based on their tone, mannerisms or body language.

Empathetic listening

Empathetic listening is a way of listening for emotional support and improves mutual trust and understanding. Listening with empathy means that you place yourself in the speaker's situation. A major quality of empathic listening is to give support and encouragement rather than advice or criticism. This type of listening will help you to learn about a person's perspective regardless of how different it is from your own.

Counsellors and other professionals use empathetic listening to understand and help their clients. In this type of listening, you do not make unnecessary judgments or offer advice; instead, you gently encourage the speaker to describe and elaborate on their emotions and feelings. An example would be, when a customer expresses dissatisfaction with a product, you can use empathy to ascertain how you might feel in their position and understand how their expectations were not met.

Critical listening

Critical listening is listening to scrutinise or analyse the idea being expressed. Here you make mental judgments based on what the other person is saying and evaluate the trustworthiness of the message and the speaker. This type of listening involves more active listening, and it usually includes some sort of decision-making or problem-solving. When you listen critically, you examine the facts and compare the message presented with the knowledge you may already possess about the subject and then form your own interpretation of it.

An important element of critical listening is to have an open mind without any preconceived ideas or stereotypes. This will help you become a better listener and broaden your knowledge and improve your interpersonal skills. This type of listening skill enables professionals to conduct brainstorming sessions, debate strategies and develop new and innovative solutions.

Appreciative listening

Appreciative listening is when the listener seeks certain information which they will appreciate since it meets their needs or goals. You may listen appreciatively to good music, podcast or an inspiring speech of a great leader. This type of listening will make the speaker feel valued and appreciated. For example, if a coworker is giving a presentation, you can use eye contact and nodding to show that you are listening intently.

Full listening

Full listening happens when you pay careful attention to what the other person is saying. In this type of listening, you aim to understand the entire content that the speaker wants to convey. This may be a very active form of listening, where you may pause for summaries or paraphrase to ensure that what you understood was correct. When the conversation is concluded, the speaker and you may probably agree that you have fully understood the content of the conversation. Full listening is a useful skill to have when trying to understand a lecture or presentation.

Ineffective types of listening

Similar to effective communication, there are several ineffective types of communication as well. You can avoid these types by understanding what they are and how they hinder communication. Below are some of the primary listening skills that fall into this category:

Selective listening

In selective listening, you filter the message too quickly, concentrating only on certain aspects. This may affect your ability to understand the whole intent of the message and leads to miscommunication. When you filter out some of the messages, it may reinforce your bias for future communications.

Partial listening

In partial listening, you have the intention to listen to another person but are distracted. You may be distracted by your phone, noise or preoccupied with stray thoughts or other issues. You may start by listening to the message but may drift off. This type of listening may impact a person's ability to answer a question or follow instructions accurately.

This can lead to critical issues, especially when the speaker has moved on and you are unable to pick up the message. In such a situation, when confronted, it is best to admit that you have lost the flow and ask them to repeat the conversation.

Biased listening

Biased listening is a type of listening when people hear only what they want to hear and form opinions based on a stereotype they may have against the speaker or message. They may misinterpret what the speaker says based on their bias.

False listening

In false listening, you pretend to listen to the other person but do not really listen or comprehend the message. These listeners may be pretending to listen with the help

of appropriate gestures like smiling and nodding. This type of listening will undoubtedly impact your ability to be effective in your job.

Listening comprehension is a quite complex beast as it consists of lots of smaller sub-beasts, or sub-skills if you will. As you will see in a moment, almost everything can affect your level of listening comprehension.

Variables affecting listening

1. Your pronunciation

For every word you encounter, you create your internal phonetic representations (i.e., how you think that a word should be pronounced). Next, you confront them with the external representations (i.e., how the words are really pronounced).

If they overlap considerably or are identical, and you can fish them out from the recording, you should be able to understand a given word.

This is the exact reason why you might understand a typical accent from a given country but you will struggle with a dialect. Simply, at this point, your internal representations are not broad enough to encompass new external representations.

2. Your grammar

It's much more difficult to understand the deeper meaning of an utterance if you don't know how different words come together. Don't worry. You don't have to concentrate on learning every single grammar construction in your target language. Simply start with the functional grammar.

3. Knowledge of how sounds merge or get reduced

Unfortunately, not everything is what it seems. It certainly seems to be the case with sounds. In almost any language there is a tendency of different sounds to be reduced (e.g. vowel reduction) or to be merged (read more about phonological changes).

If you don't grasp how these changes happen, it will take you much longer to decipher the ongoing stream of speech.

4. Your overall listening time

It happens way too often that I get an e-mail from one of my readers who complains about their listening skills. Asked how much time they devote to their listening practice, I get a shy "10 minutes per day".

What a fantastic pace and dedication! Call me in 2045 to tell me whether you can finally understand your first movie dialogue.

Listening takes a lot of time. That's just the way it is.

5. Visual support

Listening becomes much easier once you can see somebody's body language. A lot of things which would get lost in the tangle of speech seem more understandable on the screen once you catch a glimpse of an ironic smirk.

Plus, nobody can take away from you the pleasure of fantasizing about starting a new life with a main actor/actress. And calling your first child, "Chad." What? No, obviously, it has never happened to me. Mind your own business!

6. Vocabulary size

It's as clear as day. The more words you know, the easier it is to fish them out of a recording. If your current vocabulary is, say, 1000 words and you can't figure out why you don't understand much, this might be the reason.

7. Concentration

As much as I like the idea of listening to recordings in the background, you won't get far if you can't focus on the activity at hand. You have to strap your butt to a chair and listen.

Just for the record, I want you to know that in the literature, you can find a couple of other factors that affect your listening comprehension – for example, problems with interpretation, inability to identify signals, and such. I decided to skip them as they have so little bearing your ability to understand. I don't want to expand this article artificially.

Developing Effective Listening Skills

Listening skills along with speaking skills are essential parts of effective communication. Good communication is valued throughout most jobs in various industries. You may need to consider improving your listening skills to fully apply your communication skills in your workplace and beyond.

Listening skills are an essential part of good communication. When you are an attentive listener, you can begin to improve relationships, make decisions more effectively and reach agreements with others quickly. Here are some additional reasons why listening skills are important:

1. Demonstrates your ability to pay attention to the thoughts, behaviors and feelings of an individual
2. Increases your power to influence, serve, motivate or develop people effectively
3. Enables an organization to operate efficiently with the information they are given that may cause them to adapt to market trends or consumer needs
4. Enhances basic human interaction
5. Builds personal and professional relationships

Listening skills are also important to many business roles such as:

1. Sales
2. Negotiation
3. Coaching
4. Mentoring
5. Interviewing
6. Marketing research
7. Facilitation
8. Managing

How to improve your listening skills

It is essential to evaluate your current listening skills to select the areas you can improve in. Here are some steps you may take to help improve your listening skills:

1. Maintain eye contact with the speaker

When you are listening to someone talk, you should avoid looking out a window, texting or scrolling through your phone, or scanning a computer screen. Limit any unnecessary distractions, provide the speaker with your undivided attention and make an effort to look at them. This provides them with a nonverbal cue that you are interested in what they are saying, which encourages them to continue expressing themselves.

Consider that the speaker may not look at you because they might be shy, feel uncertain, or their culture may not use direct eye contact for communication. You should continue to face the speaker even if they do not look at you.

2. Visualize what the speaker is saying

Try to conjure up mental images of what the speaker is talking about while you are listening to help retain information. This may be a literal picture or other concepts that relate to the topic. This will help you to remember keywords and phrases when you listen for long periods. Visualizing what the speaker is saying will also help you to not have to prepare for what to say next. If you happen to lose focus, make sure to immediately refocus.

3. Limit judgments

Listen without criticizing the speaker in your mind while they talk. Even if the message causes you agitation or alarm, try to avoid thinking about negative or judgmental comments because this compromises your ability to listen. You also want to listen with an open mind and understand that the person is giving you their perspective. You may realize that they make more sense as they continue to talk to you, and you won't know the full story without listening.

4. Don't interrupt

Everyone speaks and processes information at different rates. If someone is delivering their message slowly, try to cultivate patience and wait for them to finish before trying to rush them along by guessing the next thing they are going to say or replying before they have finished talking. Interrupting sends the wrong message to the speaker. It may suggest that what you have to say is more important, that you don't care about what they are saying or that the conversation is a competition.

It is also important to refrain from offering solutions. Most often people just want you to listen. However, if you have a brilliant idea, you may consider asking if you can share your ideas before you offer your solution.

5. Wait for a pause to ask questions

You may not understand everything someone says to you. It is best to wait until they pause to ask them to back up and provide clarification for the topic or phrase you misunderstood.

6. Ask clarifying questions

Asking clarifying questions helps to keep the conversation on topic. You only want to ask questions that pertain to your understanding rather than ask a question about something that is not related to the main idea the speaker is trying to get across. When you ask clarifying questions without interrupting, it shows that you are listening, paying attention and willing to discuss things further.

7. Empathize with the speaker

Empathy is essential to effective listening. You should mirror the emotions the speaker has. For instance, if their face conveys sadness or joy then your facial expressions and words should also convey similar emotions. Empathizing with the speaker takes concentration and expends energy, but it allows for open communication and establishes relationships.

8. Pay attention to nonverbal cues

Most of the communication that takes place between individuals is nonverbal. You can learn a great deal about someone through their body language and tone of voice when they are communicating with you. It is easy to detect boredom, enthusiasm or irritation on someone's face when they talk depending on their eyes, mouth and position of their shoulders. Therefore, listening also includes paying attention to nonverbal cues. It helps you to make inferences based on what a person means when they are talking to you.

Related: Understanding Body Language and the Workplace

9. Provide the speaker with feedback

Feedback can be verbal and nonverbal. You can use verbal feedback by saying things like, "I understand that must be difficult," or "OK." You can use nonverbal cues such as nodding your head and using appropriate facial expressions.

The goal is to send signals to the speaker so they know that you are actively listening. In a situation where someone is giving you tasks, make sure to repeat the task list back to the speaker so they know you understand what to do. Writing down what they say also shows attentiveness.

10. Practice listening

You can practice listening by being aware of what you do when someone is talking to you. Do this by writing down what you heard, understood and acknowledged after an in-person interaction with someone, or listen to audiobooks or podcasts without any text in front of you. Try listening to no more than four-minute clips and replay them to see how much information you can retain. This will help you to become more aware of your role as a receiver of information and it can enhance your overall communication skills.