

Listening Skills

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1. First of all, what do we mean by "listening"?

- It is more than just hearing, which is only the first part of listening, the physical part when your ears sense sound-waves.
- There are three other parts that are equally important. There is the interpretation of what was heard that leads to understanding or misunderstanding.
- Then comes the evaluation stage when you weigh the information and decide how you will use it.
- Finally, based on what you heard and how you evaluated it, you react. That is listening.

1. why people talk to each other.

- There are four basic types of verbal communication. There is the "getting-to-know-you" or the "building of relationships" kind of talk, which is called phatic communication.
- Next, there is cathartic communication, which allows the release of pent-up emotion and often amounts to one person spilling his or her troubles on concerned, caring ears.
- Then there is informative communication in which ideas, data, or information is shared.
- Last of all is persuasive communication where the purpose is to reinforce or change attitudes or to produce action.

3. Listening is our primary communication activity.

Studies show that we spend about 80% of our waking hours communicating. And, according to research, at least 45% of that time is spent listening. In schools, students spend 60-70% of their classroom time engaged in listening. And, in business, listening has often been cited as being the most critical managerial skill.

4. Most individuals are inefficient listeners.

Tests have shown that immediately after listening to a ten-minute oral presentation, the average listener has heard, understood, properly evaluated, and retained approximately half of what was said. And, within 48 hours, that drops off another 50% to a final 25% level of effectiveness. In other words, we quite often comprehend and retain only one-quarter of what is said.

5. Some of the benefits of good listening:

- Encourages the speaker
- Promotes trust and respect
- Enables listener to gain information
- Improves relationships
- Makes resolution of problems more likely
- Gains cooperation
- Promotes better understanding of people

6. Ten Keys to Effective Listening:

The good listener	Key to effective listening	The ineffective listener
Tunes out dry subjects	Find areas of interest	Opportunist: Asks "What's in it for me?"
Judges content; skips over delivery errors	Judge content, not delivery	Tunes out if delivery is poor
Does not judge until comprehension complete	Hold your fire	Tends to enter into argument
Listens for ideas Listens for facts Listens for central themes	Listen for ideas, facts, themes	
Takes intensive notes Uses 4-5 different systems, depending on the speaker	Be flexible	Takes fewer notes Uses only one system
Works hard, exhibits active body state	Work at listening	Shows no energy output; Attention is faked
Fights or avoids distractions, tolerates bad habits, knows how to concentrate	Resist distractions	Distracted easily
Uses heavier material as exercise for the mind	Exercise your mind	Resists difficult expository material
Interprets emotional words;	Keep your mind	Reacts to emotional

does not get hung up on them	open	words
Thought is faster than speech: challenges, anticipates, mentally summarizes, weighs the evidence, listens between the lines to tone of voice.	Capitalize on fact	Tends to daydream with slow speakers

Listening Self-Assessments

Here are three self-assessments in which you are asked to rate yourself as a listener. There are no correct or incorrect answers. Your responses, however, will extend your understanding of yourself as a listener and highlight areas in which improvement might be welcome, both to you and to those around you. When you have completed the tests, please turn to the Profile Analysis to see how your scores compare with those of thousands of others who have taken the same tests before you.

#1. How well do you listen? A personal profile . . .

A. Circle the term that best describes you as a listener.

Superior Excellent Above Average Average Below Average Poor Terrible

B. On a scale of 0-100 (100 = highest), how would you rate yourself as a listener?

#2. How do you think the following people would rate you as a listener? (0-100)

Your best friend _____
 Your boss _____
 A colleague/peer _____
 A co-worker _____
 Your spouse or significant other _____

#3. As a listener, how often do you find yourself engaging in these ten bad listening habits? First, check the appropriate columns. Then tabulate your score using the points indicated.

Listening Habit	Frequency					Score
	Almost always (2 points)	Usually (4 points)	Some-times (6 points)	Seldom (8 points)	Almost never (10 points)	
Calling the subject uninteresting						
Criticizing the speaker's delivery or mannerisms						
Getting over-stimulated by something the speaker says						
Listening primarily for facts						
Trying to outline everything						
Faking attention to the speaker						
Allowing interfering distractions						
Avoiding difficult material						
Letting emotion-laden words arouse personal antagonism						
Daydreaming						
						Total

Profile analysis: This is how other people have responded to these same questions.

1A. Eighty-five per cent of all listeners questioned rated themselves as Average or lower. Fewer than five per cent rate themselves as Superior or Excellent.

1B. On the 0-100 scale, the extreme range is 10-90; the general range is 35-85; and the average rating is 55.

When comparing the listening self-ratings and projected ratings of others, most respondents believe that their best friend would rate them highest as a listener.

And that rating would be higher than the one they gave themselves in self-assessment #1, where the average was 55.

How come? We can only guess that best friend status is such an intimate, special kind of relationship that you cannot imagine the friendship ever happening unless you were a good listener. If you were not, you and he or she would not be best friends to begin with.

Going down the list, people who take self-assessment #2 usually think their bosses would rate them higher than they rated themselves. Now part of that is probably wishful thinking. And part of it is true. We do tend to listen to our bosses better - whether it is out of respect or fear or whatever does not matter.

The scores for colleague and job subordinates work out to be just about the same as the listener rated himself -- that 55 figure again.

But when you get to spouse -- husband or wife -- something really dramatic happens. The score here is significantly lower than the 55 average that previous profile-takers gave themselves. And what is interesting is that the figure goes steadily downhill. While newlyweds tend to rate their spouse at the same high level as their best friend, as the marriage goes on -- and on -- the rating falls. So in a household where the couple have been married 50 years, there could be a lot of talk. But maybe nobody is really listening.

The average score in self-assessment #3 is 62, 7 points higher than the 55 that the average test-taker gave himself in Quiz 1. Which suggests that, when listening is broken down into specific areas of competence, we rate ourselves better than we do when listening is considered only as a generality. Of course, the best way to discover how well you listen is to ask the people to whom you listen most frequently -- your spouse, boss, best friend, etc. They will give you an earful

Assessing Your Listening Habits

The following inventory is a self-assessment tool to help you identify how well and how often you practice good listening habits. Circle the number that best corresponds to your current practice, with 1 representing seldom, 3 representing usually, and 5 representing almost always. In the Comments/Actions space note what steps you might take to improve your listening habits.

Good Listening Habit	Current Level of Practice					Comments/Action
I avoid the tendency to make assumptions or let my personal feelings about others or what they say interfere with my ability to listen	1	2	3	4	5	_____
I avoid the tendency to decide ahead of time that others don't know what they are talking about.	1	2	3	4	5	_____
I avoid the tendency to decide ahead of time that others are going to attack, making me too defensive to really listen.	1	2	3	4	5	_____
I avoid the tendency to get over stimulated to the point of preparing a rebuttal while others are talking.	1	2	3	4	5	_____
I hold back on making judgments about others or what they are saying until I have listened and tried my best to understand from their perspective.	1	2	3	4	5	_____
I avoid the tendency to determine ahead of time that my mind is set and that what others have to say is irrelevant	1	2	3	4	5	_____
I avoid the tendency to decide ahead of time that what others are saying is uninteresting, too difficult to understand, or unimportant.	1	2	3	4	5	_____
I avoid the tendency to listen only for what I want or expect to hear	1	2	3	4	5	_____

as opposed to all of what others are saying.

I avoid the tendency to daydream, tune out, or fake attention to others when what they are saying seems either too difficult to understand or irrelevant to me.

1 2 3 4 5

I listen not only for the obvious. I pay attention to the verbal and nonverbal messages being sent and to the factual and emotional content.

1 2 3 4 5

I listen with my entire body. Relaxed body positions and lack of eye contact (during face-to-face communication) are not conducive to effective listening.

1 2 3 4 5

Whenever possible, I do something about the distractions and interruptions that might be making it difficult for me to listen.

1 2 3 4 5

I listen with empathy, I attempt to put myself in others' shoes.

1 2 3 4 5

I listen actively. I reflect back on what has been said in my own words to indicate my understanding of what others have said and felt.

1 2 3 4 5
