

## **LISTENING ON THE JOB**

Listening is the soul of the oral communication. It is **Hearing with Attention.**

According to Wilga Rivers (1981) listening is used twice as much as speaking and four to five times as much as reading and writing. We listen to obtain information, to understand, for enjoyment and finally to learn. Difference between Hearing & Listening: -

- Hearing is involuntary while listening is voluntary.
- Hearing happens automatically whereas listening requires conscious effort.
- Hearing is a passive process while listening is an active process.
- Hearing is one-way process while listening is a two-way interactive process engaging the speaker & the listener.
- Hearing is a mere physical activity but listening is a physical + mental activity.

### **Process of Listening:-**

The process of listening consists of following five steps:

#### **Hearing:**

It relates to the sensory perception of sound. Here the communicator expects the receiver “to lend his ears”. There should be a certain attentiveness in receiving the messages, so that they can be sent for further processing.

#### **Decoding:**

This step involves sensing & filtering of the messages. It is a conscious exercise. It also involves filtering, whereby the message received can be classified as wanted or unwanted. The listener’s capacity to judge and his/her sense of appeal come into play during this phase as here the listener tries to decipher the code.

**Comprehending:**

In this level filtered message assumes a meaning. The message received has been heard, sensed, filtered & interpreted. In doing so the listener has brought into play the listener's own knowledge, experience, perception & cognitive power. The verbal message apart, the non-verbal communication has also been studied & noted.

**Remembering:**

Messages received are meant, quite often not just for immediate consideration & action, but also for future use. Memorizing the message, therefore assumes meaning. In this phase the assimilated message is stored in memory for future recall.

**Responding:**

Response of the listener may take place at the end of the oral communication or even earlier. If the listener intends to provide feedback to the speaker, response usually occurs at the end. If there is a need to seek clarification or empathize with the speaker, it may take place earlier.

**Types of listening**

Depending upon the extent to which listening becomes effective, it can be classified into following three types –

- I. Passive listening
- II. Selective listening
- III. Active listening

**Passive listening** - It is inert or indifferent listening since the listener is only physically present and is not participating in the process of communication. Quite often passive listening stops at hearing only as there is no conscious effort to further process the message. The message is not absorbed and the passive listener is not in a position to recollect the message at a future date.

It leads to misunderstandings for the communicator who would be under the impression that the receiver has grasped the message as intended. Passive listening occurs due to constraints like: fatigue, ill health, and disregard for the speaker or lack of interest in the subject or the failure of the speaker or listener to match the wavelength of each other.

**Selective listening** - Here listening is done partially as people listen only what they want to. The attention is not focused. The listener lets the mind wander and the message is not thoroughly processed. The constraints are almost the same as we see in passive listening.

**Active listening** – Adrian Doff (1988) calls it Focused listening or 'Intensive listening'. It is the most desirable form of listening. Here the listener makes a conscious effort to listen attentively. The receiver of the messages shows regard for the speaker, concentrates on what is being conveyed, motivates the speaker to continue with the message. It is also known as reflective listening or Empathic listening. Active listening precedes effective feedback because it goes to the root of the concern i.e. the other person's perspective.

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**Barriers to listening:-**

According to a survey, American adults listen at only 25% efficiency; most adult listeners are preoccupied, distracted and forgetful nearly 75 percent of the time” (quoted in journal article by Mary Renck Jalongo, 1995, “Promoting Active Listening in the Classroom”, Childhood Education, Vol. 72)

Warren H. Reed says that reason of such barriers include distractions, insufficient vocabulary, and limited attention span. The barriers can basically be of three types; physical or external, physiological and psychological.

**External** – Extraneous noise, malfunctioning of the microphone and other such mechanical devices. If the speaker speaks in an accent that is

incomprehensible for the listener or uses jargons that the listener is not familiar with.

**Physiological** – If the listener is suffering from a hearing problem, ill-health, fatigue; any of these can act as a serious barrier

**Psychological** – It may relate to bias against the speaker or the topic.

### **Becoming an active listener:-**

A ratio found in a recent study tells us that merely 18% speakers like to speak to people who are good speakers and 82% speakers prefer to talk to people who are good listeners. This ratio makes the significance of listening skill in the task of communication absolutely clear.

Following measures can be adopted for becoming an active listener.

#### **Pay attention:**

- Look at the speaker directly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts.
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors.
- Try to visualize the content.
- “**Listen**” to the speaker’s body language.
- Refrain from side observation.
- Find an area of interest.

#### **Show that you are listening:**

- Nod occasionally
- Smile & use other facial expressions
- Note your gesture & posture & make sure they are open & inviting
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, & uh huh.

#### **Provide feedback:**

- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing, “What I am hearing is...”, & “Sounds like you are saying...” are great ways to reflect back.

- Ask questions to clarify certain points. “What do you mean when you say...?” “Is this what you mean?”
- Summarize the speaker’s comment periodically

**Avoid bias:**

- Allow the speaker to finish
- Don’t interrupt with counter arguments. As Dale Carnegie once said arguments don’t lead us anywhere.

**Respond appropriately:**

- Be candid in your response.
- Assert your opinion respectfully.
- It takes a lot of guts to assume the position of the speaker. For that at least he should be respected.
- Put yourself at the position of the speaker

Apart from these afore-mentioned points, a very useful guidance in this regard is contained in the ‘Ten Commandments of Listening’ as formulated by Keith Davies and John W. Newstorm

**Listening computerization and note taking**

Learners, may be initially very worried about listening skills. Academic listening usually involves trying to follow a lecture or discussion in English and writing adequate notes on it. If the learner has difficulties in doing this, s/he may not be sure whether the problems are listening problems or language problems. In any case, much listening to lectures or similar texts is essential. There is also a need to be aware of the way lectures are organised, the particular kind of language that is used in lectures (Lynch, 1983) and making sure you know the language, particularly the pronunciation of

familiar words, of. The most important skill is to learn to recognise the structure of lectures - the main points and subsidiary points.

### **The learner needs to practise:**

How to take notes.

- Recognizing lecture structure: understanding relationships in the lecture - reference; understanding relations within the sentence/complex sentences; importance markers, signposts.
- Deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words and word groups - guessing.
- Recognising implications: information not explicitly stated; recognising the speaker's attitude. Evaluating the importance of information - selecting information.
- Understanding intonation, voice emphasis etc.
- Listening skills: skimming - listening to obtain gist; scanning - listening to obtain specific information; selective extraction of relevant points to summarise text; learning various ways of making sense of the words one listens.

### **Summarizing and note-taking**

Listening is purposeful. The way the learner listens to something will depend on his/her purpose. S/he listens to different texts in different ways. In everyday life, one usually knows why one is listening. One has a question and one reads to find the answer. One usually knows how the news programmed on the radio are organized - usually a quick headline followed by details. One know the sports results following the main news items, so if one wants to know the sports results, one has to wait until it is time. One does not listen to every word of the news items. When the learner reads a story or a play, it is different. One starts at the beginning and listen till the end. In academic listening, the learner needs to be flexible when s/he listens - one may

need to listen carefully at the beginning to find out what is going to come, then listen

less carefully until one hears what s/he wants to know. General efficient listening strategies such as scanning to find the correct part of the lecture, skimming to get the gist and careful listening of important passages are necessary as well as learning about how texts are structured in the subject.

### Interactive

Listening is an interactive process - it is a two-way process. As a listener you are not passive but active. This means you have to work at constructing the meaning from the sounds heard by your ears, which you use as necessary. You construct the meaning using your knowledge of the language, your subject and the world, continually predicting and assessing. You need to be active all the time when you are listening. It is useful, therefore, before you start listening to try to actively remember what you know, and do not know, about the subject and as you are listening to, to formulate questions based on the information you have. Title, sub-titles and section heading can help you formulate question to keep you interacting.

Useful skills are:

- Distinguishing the main ideas from supporting detail, and extracting salient points to summarise.
- Taking notes.