

Chapter V

Listening

Importance of listening

1. Listening is the first means of acquiring information
2. Listening is the first means of learning new language
3. Helps to solve problems
4. Helps in framing plans and policies
5. Helps to share information
6. Helps in decision-making
7. Helps to know organization
8. Develops better relations
9. Provides encouragement

Nature of listening process:

Listening is such a routine activity that most people do not even realize that they are poor listeners, and are, therefore, in need of developing their listening skills. Others may feel that listening is a very difficult task, perhaps, next to impossible to achieve. But the truth is that good listening habits can be cultivated, and with practice, much can be achieved. Understanding the complex process of listening, itself, may help people become good listeners. Listening involves the following inter-related steps in sequential order:

Receiving-----Attending-----Interpreting-----Remembering-----Evaluating-----
Responding

. **Receiving:** This is a kind of physiological process. The sounds impinge on the listener's ear. It is only when he takes these in that he can go further in the process of getting at the meaning.

. **Attending:** The listener has to focus his attention on the .message. to the exclusion of all other sounds that may be present in the immediate surroundings.

. **Interpreting:** The sounds have to be interpreted, that is, the listener tries to understand the message that is being put across against the background of his own values, beliefs, ideas, expectations, needs, experience and background — and, of course, taking into account the speaker's viewpoint.

. **Remembering:** This involves storing the message for future reference.

. **Evaluating:** The listener makes a critical analysis of the information received, judging whether the message makes sense while separating fact from opinion.

. Responding: The listener gives a verbal or nonverbal response, and takes action accordingly.

Barriers to listening:

1. Distractions
 - a. Semantic - The listener is confused about the actual meaning of a word, as the word has different meanings.
 - b. Physical - This occurs when, for eg., the air-conditioning system or microphones fail; or there is noise in the surroundings; or, someone is constantly tapping on the table with his fingers.
 - c. Mental - This occurs when the listener makes himself the central character of his daydreams and forgets the speaker.
2. Faking attention or pretending to listen –
This usually happens when the message consists of material of a difficult or uninteresting nature. The listener may not want to bother to understand the message. Sometimes this may happen when he is critical of the speaker's looks, style of speaking, or mannerisms.
3. Defensive listening –
This kind of listening takes place when the speaker's views challenge the listener's beliefs.
4. Prejudice – The listener's bias, negative attitude, preconceived notions, fears, or stress adversely affect listening.
5. Constant focus on self - A person's ego may also adversely affect his listening. The Roman playwright, Terence, reveals this aspect of human nature when he says: .My closest relation is myself. A person may believe that he knows everything that the speaker is talking about and, therefore, does not need to listen.
6. Information overload - The listener may be exposed to too many words or points and, therefore, be unable to take in everything. He should learn how to pick up the important ones, and discard the rest.
7. The thinking-speaking rate - The speaking rate is 125 – 150 words per minute, whereas the thinking rate is 400 words per minute. So the listener's mind is moving much faster than the speaker is able to speak. The extra, intervening time, before the speaker arrives at his next point, is usually spent in shifting one's mental focus, or in day dreaming.
8. Short attention span - The natural attention span for human beings is short. This is not easy to rectify, except for making a special effort to concentrate and prolong one's attention span.

Listening strategies:

1. Preparation for listening –
The environment must be made conducive to listening. Noise and disturbance can be kept out by closing doors, or using a soundproof room. Suitable arrangements for microphones and stationery should be made in advance. Interruptions must be prevented. By these means, the physical barriers can be eliminated, and the listener can focus his attention on the speaker.
2. Background knowledge –
The listener should train himself to listen intelligently, bearing in mind the speaker, the topic and the situation.
3. Re-organize the material in mind –
The listener should be able to recognize patterns used by the speaker, and should be able to identify the main / central point, and supporting points; s/he should re-organize the material in his mind according to certain headings so as to facilitate recall.
4. Focusing on the speaker's matter than manner –
The listener should not be prejudiced by the personal or behavioural traits of the speaker or his style, but should focus on the content, intent, and argument of the message.
5. Listening actively –
Listening actively also involves being considerate to the speaker and empathising with him. By adopting an alert listening pose, the listener puts the speaker at his ease and places him in a better position to formulate and express his ideas. The listener should have a positive attitude towards a talk, believing that in every talk there is always at least one point or idea that will be of value and special significance to him.
6. Listen with complete concentration –
The listener should learn to differentiate between argument and evidence; idea and example; fact and opinion. He should attempt to pick out and paraphrase the important points while disregarding unimportant ones.
7. Interaction –
 - a. Do not interrupt - Allow the speaker to finish what he is saying before you begin to talk.
 - b. Do not disturb the speaker by indulging in some undesirable form of activity, like talking to the person next to you, looking at your watch, or walking out, or appearing uninterested or distracted.
 - c. Do not contradict the speaker
 - d. Do not let your mind move on to anticipate what is going to be said next – just listen carefully to what the speaker is actually saying. If you are

busy planning your replies, you are likely to miss important points, and make irrelevant or stupid statements.

- e. Adopt an open-minded attitude –
Be open to new ideas, ask questions, seeking clarification of meaning, ideas, and thoughts; or to gather additional information, or to direct the flow of the conversation.
 - f. Avoid passing comments or making remarks when the speaker is speaking
 - g. Do not let your mind indulge in some other activity
 - h. Only one person should speak at one time.
8. Patience –
Do not get restless or impatient. Be careful not to lose your temper.
9. Motivation –
The experience of listening is more rewarding if the listener is motivated and interested. Confidence and trust in the speaker are necessary.
10. Provide positive feedback –
By maintaining eye contact, using proper facial expressions, nodding from time to time, leaning forward, and so on, you put the speaker at his ease, encourage him and thus enable him to give of his best.
11. Listen for vocal & no-verbal cues –
By noting the speaker's tone of voice or facial expressions, it is possible to get at his meaning more effectively. Pay attention to what the speaker says as much as to what he leaves unsaid.
12. Make good use of the time gap between speaking and thinking –
Spend this 'extra' time reflecting on what the speaker is saying. You could even jot down points or make brief notes on selected topics. Make a kind of mental summary, and evaluate what is being said. You may anticipate what the speaker is going to say next, but it is necessary to listen carefully to find out whether it is exactly what you expected or whether there is some difference. If there is a difference, it is important to consider what the difference is, and the reason for it.
13. Introspection –
The listener must honestly examine his existing listening habits, and consider whether he can improve upon them.
14. Practicing listening skills –
Train yourself to use your listening skills every time you have occasion to listen. Do not abandon the task of listening, especially if you find it difficult. Listening is an act of the will as much as a matter of habit. It depends on mental conditioning. Willingness to make an

effort, therefore, matters.

15. Adopting to different communication events –

Effective listening includes the ability to adapt to several communication events, involving intercultural communication situations. The listener must be aware of factors like culture, gender, race, status, etc., and not allow them to adversely affect his listening. In this connection, tolerance, patience, and empathy are important.

Styles of listening:

1. Empathic listening –

In this case we empathize with the speaker, and understand things from her/his point of view, allowing her/him the freedom to express her/his emotions.

2. Informational listening –

Here, the aim is to receive information. So the listener pays attention to the content, and makes decisions regarding the taking of notes; s/he also watches for related non-verbal cues, asks questions, and focuses on the replies. All this helps her/ him to assimilate the information.

3. Evaluative listening –

We are exposed to a great deal of material intended to persuade us to accept the speaker's point of view; we need to evaluate what we hear, and note only certain points that are of interest or use to us.

4. Appreciative listening –

We use this form of listening when we listen to our favourite music or watch an enjoyable television programme. In these instances, careful listening greatly enhances pleasure and appreciation.

5. Critical listening –

This is when we listen critically and analytically, carefully considering the topic of the argument, the intentions of the speaker, his omissions, his point of view; his credibility and so on.