

Listening Skills

The average person spends about three times as much time listening as reading, yet instruction in listening is rare. Skill in listening, just like any other skill, is a matter of training. Studies have shown also that the development of better listening skills leads to improved academic performance.

Problem

The major difficulty in listening is the tremendous speed at which people can think. The average talking speed is about 125 words per minute, but it has been estimated that our thoughts can cover as much as 60,000 words per minute. This means that when you listen to a speaker or a lecturer, your thoughts, unless you control them, are moving far ahead or away from the words of a speaker.

To become a more efficient listener, a listening formula has been developed. There is evidence that the four steps involved organize the whole listening process, and this organization makes for improved listening comprehension.

1. Tuned in

- The first step in the listening formula involves preparing yourself for what is to be said. Good lecturers will help you in this step by telling you what they are going to talk about. This will enable you to quickly go over what you know of the topic and prepare yourself for the new information to be presented. Tuning in also involved being comfortably seated, looking at the speaker, and being ready to give your undivided attention to the lecturer when they speak.
- **Think about:**
 - The specific meaning of the title of the lecture.
 - The core thoughts relevant to the title from past experience.
 - The value of the lecture in the present and in the future.
 - The authority and bias of the lecturer.

2. Question

- The second step in the formula involves asking questions. The sort of questions you might ask are: What is the specific purpose in listening? How does what is being said tie in with what I already know? What is the evidence for that particular statement? And so on. Questioning is most important because by asking questions, you involve yourself, and this involvement makes you listen more effectively. Asking yourself questions should help you keep your thoughts, which travel far faster than the lecturer's words, on the particular topic of the lecture.

3. Listen:

- Listen actively to find core thoughts relevant to the question.
- Listen actively to prevent your thoughts from wandering.
- Listen actively ahead of the lecturer to anticipate his next core thought.

4. Review

- Summarize what has been said, compare it with what you thought was going to be said and evaluate the worth of what has been said.
- Experiments have shown that in a concentrated course, the listening proficiency of students can be improved by as much as 40%.
- Application of this listening skill formula can motivate and heighten your interest in a subject which may be dull. However, we must all guard against the hazard of allowing our minds to



wander when we are listening. To stop our minds from wandering, we should always concentrate on asking ourselves questions connected with the topic being communicated.

What Causes Poor Listening?

1. External Factors
 - Poor physical environment—excessive heat or cold, intruding noises, distracting movements, overcrowded rooms
 - The speaker's technique—gestures or mannerisms which distract or annoy; poor enunciation or pronunciation; poor voice control; wrong tone, pitch, or volume
 - The speaker's message—content or vocabulary too easy or too difficult
2. The Listener
 - Physical—in poor health or tired
 - Lack of concentration
 - Lacking interest or motivation
 - Wrong techniques—concentrating too much on details and not on core thoughts
 - Distracted—by the speaker's voice, appearance, or mannerisms
 - Not understanding—somehow at cross purposes with lecturer



Ways to Become a Better Listener

- Direct and hold your attention—stop your mind from wandering
- Learn to adjust to different environments and speakers—a good place to practice is the group discussion, public meetings, etc
- Develop your auditory memory—close your eyes and listen to lists of sounds, words, or numbers. Open your eyes and write down the order; Check
- Get clues from key words
- Pick feelings and moods from key words; the way certain words are delivered will give clues to the true nature of the message
- Be sensitive to phrasing, emphasis, and inflection
- Adjust to rate of speech and volume
- Draw inferences; think around or between each line
- Work out a pattern—see how the message is put together: where the topic sentences and core thoughts are, and how the paragraphs are organized
- Evaluate and make judgments—try to see what the speaker is trying to achieve, whether their logic and reasoning are sound and whether their arguments are supported
- Beware of propaganda—try to sort out the objective facts from the emotional feelings and value judgments about those facts

