

## Role of Listening Skills in Our Daily Life

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**ABSTRACT:** English language consists of four types of skills e.g. reading, writing, speaking and listening. Listening is an important skill because it helps us to learn and understand different things. Usually, a person who listens properly is able to react appropriately to a particular situation or towards a particular person. Listening skills are very important to enhance our understanding as well as overall abilities in life. Listening helps to establish a positive working relationship with your colleagues and bosses. It also encourages trust and helps in building a good rapport. Listening Skills are vital for interpersonal communication. Good listening skills add up more to our knowledge and personality.

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Listening is the ability to accurately receive messages in the communication process. Listening is key to all effective communication, without the ability to listen effectively messages are easily misunderstood – communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated.

Listening is so important that many top employers give regular listening skills training for their employees. This is not surprising when you consider that good listening skills can lead to: better customer satisfaction, greater productivity with fewer mistakes, increased sharing of information that in turn can lead to more creative and innovative work. Many successful leaders and entrepreneurs credit their success to effective listening skills. Richard Branson frequently quotes listening as one of the main factors behind the success of Virgin. Effective listening is a skill that underpins all positive human relationships, spend some time thinking about and developing your listening skills – they are the building blocks of success.

**Listening as a process:** When one tries to perceive what one has heard, then one is involved in the process of listening. Such type of involved and attentive listening is also known as perceptible listening. Listening is carried on with the purpose of gathering information. Suppose, there is a declamation competition going on in a school, the people judging that event will focus on all the nuances of language and will also try to hear, judge and evaluate each participant's speech. Thus the judges will be actively involved in the process of listening. In the words of Sharma and Mishra, "the process of listening comprises of hearing, interpreting, and then responding".

### I. Modes of Listening

There are three modes of listening:

**1. Combative mode:** When the listener concentrates on his or her views and ideas without paying much attention to the speeches. He or she is in combative mode of listening. The listener wants to be heard and thus he or she tries to catch an opportunity to express his or her views. This kind of listening lacks maturity as it cannot bring about meaningful listening.

**2. Attentive mode:** In this mode the listener believes every word of the speaker blindly. He or she at no point, critically evaluates the words of the speaker. This sort of listening lacks independent judgment and evaluation.

**3. Reflective listening:** This is the best mode of listening as in this mode the listener is smart, alert and active. He is actively involved in the process of listening, paying attention to all the words and pauses of the speaker. He or she summarizes each word of the speaker, recalling all that the speaker said. On the basis of his reflective thinking and judgment, he or she forms an opinion.

### II. Phases of Listening

There are three phases of Listening:

**1. The pre-listening phase:** In this phase, the speaker involves the learner in an activity. Thus the activity provides the listeners with a purpose for listening. On some occasions, the speaker might also ask the listeners to predict what they are going to hear.

**2. The while-listening phase:** Ideally, the listeners must be motivated to gather as much information as they can from the passages, recorded conversations etc. while they are listening. During this phase the listeners will be

asked to complete the activity. Hence the focus of the learners should be on the message provided by the presentation.

**3.The post-listening phase:** In this phase it helps the listeners to examine and evaluate the approach applied by them to understand the message . It arrives when the listeners finish their activities.

### III. Types of Listening

There are four types of Listening:

**1.Appreciative listening:** When we listen to our favorite song on the radio or derive aesthetic pleasures out of listening to a sitar recital, it can be termed as appreciative listening.

**2.Emphatic listening:** It is done to provide solace to an emotionally distressed friend or relative in times of dire need or crises. When we listen to a friend who has suffered a break up in relationship, it is an example of emphatic listening.

**3.Comprehensive listening:** Detailed and conscious listening is known as comprehensive listening. Students are required to listen to their professor in a comprehensive manner when the professor delivers a lecture in the classroom.

**4.Critical thinking:** When one critically evaluates a talk, a speech, or a verbal message after listening to it, then its known as critical listening. A judge listening to participants in a debate competition is involved in critical listening.

### IV. Difference between Listening and Hearing

Hearing refers to the sounds that you hear, whereas listening requires more than that: it requires focus. Listening means paying attention not only to the story, but how it is told, the use of language and voice, and how the other person uses his or her body. In other words, it means being aware of both verbal and non-verbal messages. Your ability to listen effectively depends on the degree to which you perceive and understand these messages. *"The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention."* Rachel Naomi Remen

### V. Real listening is an active process that has three basic steps.

- **Hearing.** Hearing just means listening enough to catch what the speaker is saying. For example, say we were listening to a report on zebras, and the speaker mentioned that no two are alike. If we can repeat the fact, then we have heard what has been said.
- **Understanding.** The next part of listening happens when we take what we have heard and understand it in our own way. Let's go back to that report on zebras. When we hear that no two are alike, think about what that might mean. We might think, "Maybe this means that the pattern of stripes is different for each zebra."
- **Judging.** After we are sure we understand what the speaker has said, think about whether it makes sense. Do we believe what you have heard? we might think, "How could the stripes to be different for every zebra? But then again, the fingerprints are different for every person. I think this seems believable."

### VI. Tips for being a good listener

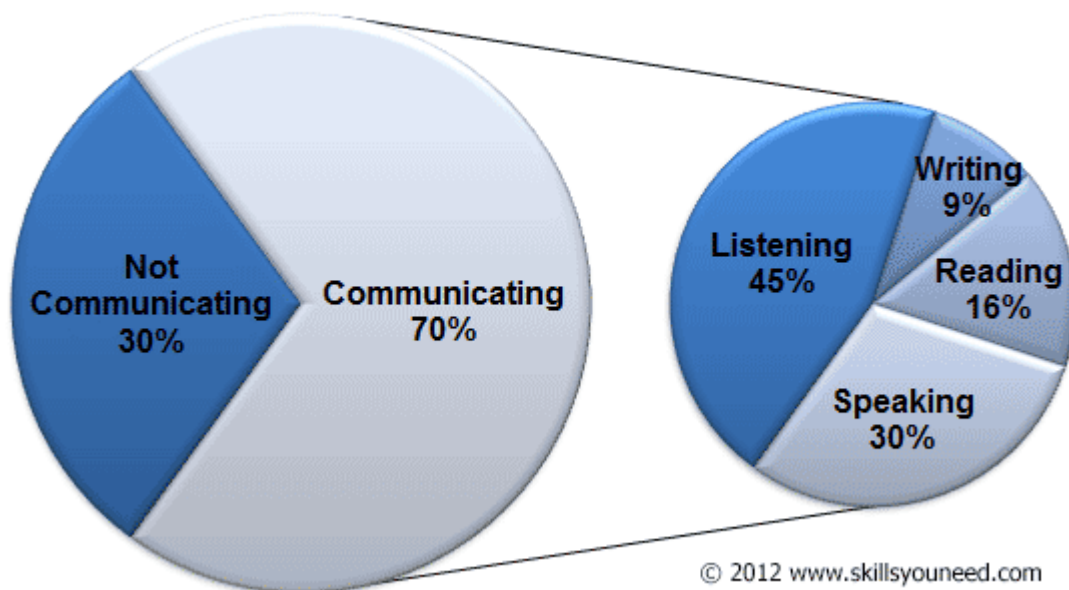
- Give your full attention on the person who is speaking.
- Make sure your mind is focused, too. It can be easy to let our mind wander if you think we know what the person is going to say next, but we might be wrong! If we feel our mind wandering, change the position of our body and try to concentrate on the speaker's words.
- Let the speaker finish before you begin to talk. Speakers appreciate having the chance to say everything they would like to say without being interrupted. When we interrupt, it looks like you aren't listening, even if we really are.
- Let our self-finish listening before we begin to speak! We can't really listen if we are busy thinking about what we want say next.

- Listen for main ideas. The main ideas are the most important points the speaker wants to get across. They may be mentioned at the start or end of a talk, and repeated a number of times. Pay special attention to statements that begin with phrases such as "My point is..." or "The thing to remember is..."
- Ask questions. If we are not sure we understand what the speaker has said, just ask. It is a good idea to repeat in our own words what the speaker said so that we can be sure our understanding is correct. For example, we might say, "When we said that no two zebras are alike, did we mean that the stripes are different on each one?"
- Give feedback. Sit up straight and look directly at the speaker. Now and then, nod to show that we understand. At appropriate points you may also smile, frown, laugh, or be silent. These are all ways to let the speaker know that you are really listening. Remember, you listen with your face as well as your ears!

### VII. We spend a lot of Time Listening

Adults spend an average of 70% of their time engaged in some sort of communication, of this an average of 45% is spent listening compared to 30% speaking, 16% reading and 9% writing. (Adler, R. et al. 2001).

### Time Spent Communicating



Based on the research of: Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L. and Proctor, R. (2001)  
*Interplay: the process of interpersonal communicating (8th edn), Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt.*

### VIII. PRINCIPLES OF LISTENING

#### 1. Stop Talking

*"If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear."* Mark Twain  
Don't talk, listen. When somebody else is talking listen to what they are saying, do not interrupt, talk over them or finish their sentences for them. Stop, just listen. When the other person has finished talking we may need to clarify to ensure we have received their message accurately.

#### 2. Prepare Yourself to Listen

Relax. Focus on the speaker. Put other things out of mind. The human mind is easily distracted by other thoughts – what's for lunch, what time do I need to leave to catch my train, is it going to rain – try to put other thoughts out of mind and concentrate on the messages that are being communicated.

#### 3. Put the Speaker at Ease

Help the speaker to feel free to speak. Remember their needs and concerns. Nod or use other gestures or words to encourage them to continue. Maintain eye contact but don't stare – show you are listening and understanding what is being said.

#### **4. Remove Distractions**

Focus on what is being said: don't doodle, shuffle papers, look out the window, pick your fingernails or similar. Avoid unnecessary interruptions. These behaviours disrupt the listening process and send messages to the speaker that you are bored or distracted.

#### **5. Empathize**

Try to understand the other person's point of view. Look at issues from their perspective. Let go of preconceived ideas. By having an open mind we can more fully empathize with the speaker. If the speaker says something that you disagree with then wait and construct an argument to counter what is said but keep an open mind to the views and opinions of others.

#### **6. Be Patient**

A pause, even a long pause, does not necessarily mean that the speaker has finished. Be patient and let the speaker continue in their own time, sometimes it takes time to formulate what to say and how to say it. Never interrupt or finish a sentence for someone.

#### **7. Avoid Personal Prejudice**

Try to be impartial. Don't become irritated and don't let the person's habits or mannerisms distract you from what they are really saying. Everybody has a different way of speaking - some people are for example more nervous or shy than others, some have regional accents or make excessive arm movements, some people like to pace whilst talking - others like to sit still. Focus on what is being said and try to ignore styles of delivery.

#### **8. Listen to the Tone**

Volume and tone both add to what someone is saying. A good speaker will use both volume and tone to their advantage to keep an audience attentive; everybody will use pitch, tone and volume of voice in certain situations – let these help you to understand the emphasis of what is being said.

#### **9. Listen for Ideas – Not Just Words**

We need to get the whole picture, not just isolated bits and pieces. Maybe one of the most difficult aspects of listening is the ability to link together pieces of information to reveal the ideas of others. With proper concentration, letting go of distractions, and focus this becomes easier.

#### **10. Wait and Watch for Non-Verbal Communication**

Gestures, facial expressions, and eye-movements can all be important. We don't just listen with our ears but also with our eyes – watch and pick up the additional information being transmitted via non-verbal communication.

### **IX. Active Listening**

Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well we listen has a major impact on our job effectiveness, and on the quality of our relationships with others.

- We listen to obtain information.
- We listen to understand.
- We listen for enjoyment.
- We listen to learn.

The way to become a better listener is to practice "active listening." This is where we make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, try to understand the complete message being sent. In order to do this we must pay attention to the other person very carefully.

We cannot allow our self to become distracted by whatever else may be going on around us, or by forming counter arguments that we'll make when the other person stops speaking. Nor can we allow our self to get bored, and lose focus on what the other person is saying. All of these contribute to a lack of listening and understanding.

To enhance our listening skills, we need to let the other person know that we are listening to what he or she is saying. To understand the importance of this, ask our self if we've ever been engaged in a conversation when we wondered if the other person was listening to what we were saying. We wonder if our message is getting across, or if it's even worthwhile continuing to speak. It feels like talking to a brick wall and it's something you want to avoid.

Acknowledgement can be something as simple as a nod of the head or a simple "uh huh." We aren't necessarily agreeing with the person, we are simply indicating that you are listening. Using body language and other signs to acknowledge we are listening also reminds us to pay attention and not let our mind wander. We should also try to respond to the speaker in a way that will both encourage him or her to continue speaking, so that we can get the information if we need. While nodding and "uh huhing" says you're interested, an occasional question or comment to recap what has been said communicates that we understand the message as well.

## **X. Becoming an Active Listener**

There are five key elements of active listening. They all help you ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.

### **1. Pay Attention**

- Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.
- Look at the speaker directly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts.
- Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.
- "Listen" to the speaker's body language.

### **2. Show That You're Listening**

- Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.
- Nod occasionally.
- Smile and use other facial expressions.
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.

### **3. Provide Feedback**

- Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.
- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is," and "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 comments periodically.

### **4. Defer Judgment**

- Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.
- Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.
- Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

### **5. Respond Appropriately**

- Active listening is a model for respect and understanding.
- Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
- Assert our opinions respectfully.
- Treat the other person in a way that we think he or she would want to be treated.

## **XI. Barriers to Listening**

Our environment is surrounded by or rather enveloped in noise. There are different types of noises that engulf us. It cannot be denied that noise is the most common factor for passive or poor listening. For instance,

students talking or whispering into each other's ears create noise when the teacher is teaching in the class. Use of cell phones also can act as a barrier to listening. Time is a crucial factor for effective listening. For e.g., when students are made to stay after the college hours to attend a lecture, they listen to the teacher half-heartedly. Other factors like mental state of a person can also affect listening. If a person is sad or depressed, he may not be very active listener. Similarly, people from different cultures might not find it easy to understand each other. For e.g., a Punjabi listening to a south Indian might find difficult to understand the south Indian because of the difference in tone and accent in their manner of speech.

## **XII. CONCLUSION**

In the end, I wish to conclude that listening is an important skill in our daily life. Listening must be effective. Effective listening takes place in a conducive environment. In order to be an effective listener, speak less and concentrate on what the other person is saying. To be not just heard but listened to in a proper fashion, prior appointment or permission must be sought. A good listener should be able to give a positive feedback to the speaker with the help of vocal cues such as eye contact and nodding of head. It is to be remembered that listening is not just for the sake of hearing but to be listened and perceived in the right light.

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