



# UNIT

# 2

## Person to Person

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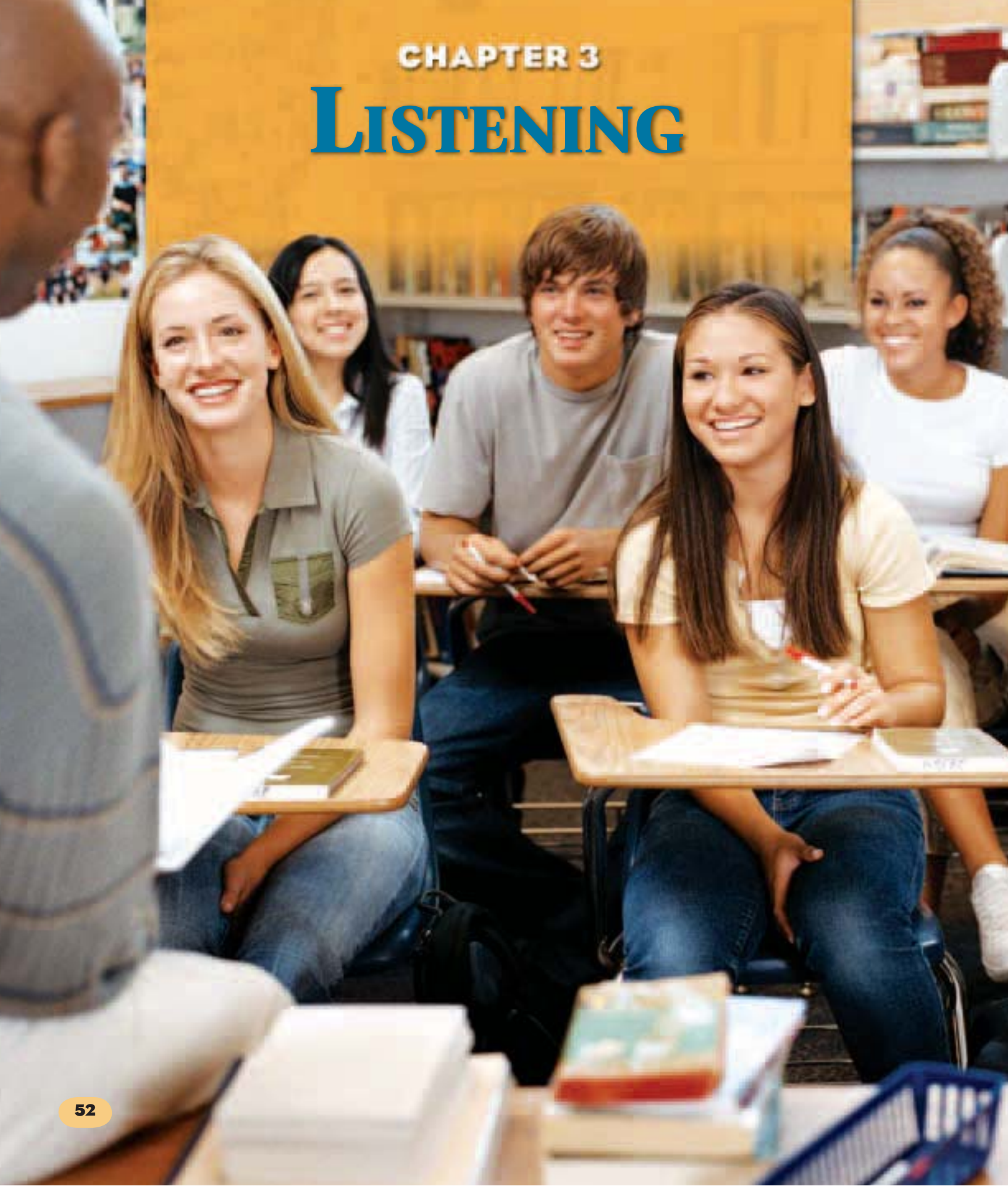
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CHAPTER 3

# LISTENING



*Nobody ever listened himself out of a job.*

—President Calvin Coolidge

## Learning Objectives

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**A**fter completing this chapter, you will be able to do the following.

- Explain the difference between hearing and listening.
- Identify the components of the listening process.
- Describe four different kinds of listening.
- Explain why good listening habits are important.

## Speech Vocabulary

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**I**n this chapter, you will learn the meanings of the speech terms listed below.

passive listening	testimonial
active listening	false comparison
listening spare time	jump on the band-
appreciative listening	wagon
discriminative listen-	stack the deck
ing	name calling
empathic listening	paraphrase
critical listening	summarize
filter	

## Chapter Outline

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**F**ollowing are the main sections in this chapter.

- 1 Listening Is More Than Hearing
- 2 Roadblocks to Good Listening
- 3 Effective Listening Strategies

## Academic Vocabulary

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**E**xpanding your academic vocabulary will help you become a more effective communicator. Listed below are some words appearing in this chapter that you should make part of your vocabulary.

excursion	peripheral
disintegration	bias
sounding board	propaganda
vulnerable	rhetorical
gluttony	retention
avarice	acronym
sloth	

## Looking Ahead

In one of Shakespeare's most famous lines, Mark Antony calls on his fellow Romans to "lend me your ears." In this chapter, we will ask you to lend us your ears for some retooling.

Most of us, it seems, are poor listeners—an unfortunate situation that can often lead to mistakes, misunderstandings, and even disaster. Yet listening is a skill that you can master if you are willing to adopt the right attitude and practice a few simple techniques. As good listeners, we not only can help ourselves gain knowledge and success, but we can also help the speaker. He or she will be encouraged by our attention and will gain confidence from our interest.

In a sense, the message of this chapter is, "What you get out of listening depends on what you put into it." Here you will learn how to evaluate yourself as a listener and how to recognize communication barriers that keep us from listening. You will also learn how to develop good listening habits such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and note-taking.

## Introduction

You don't know how it happened. You think you were paying attention when your friend started to tell you about an argument she had with her father. But at some point, your eyes glazed over, and her voice became a dull hum. When you finally shook yourself out of your trance, she was asking, "So what should I do?" Poor listening has gotten you in hot water.

As listeners, we tend to think that the responsibility for successful communication lies with the person doing the talking. This attitude causes us to become lazy or **passive listeners**. We let the talker do all the work while we go along for the ride. We tolerate distractions—putting up with a noise in the hall, for instance, instead of getting up to shut the door. We pay more attention to how someone looks or talks than to what she or he has to say. And we generally fail to respond to the talker's message by asking questions or remembering things that were said.

Effective listeners, by contrast, play an active role by guiding the talker toward common interests. *Active listening* is a valuable skill. *Fortune* magazine rates listening as the top management skill needed for success in business. Employers constantly say

that what they want most are employees who listen, understand, and follow directions.

Listening is also critical to a healthy family life and among friends. Good listeners do well in school—they follow directions better and don't waste time finding out what the assignment was. Put another way, good listening helps you keep things in perspective: "Nature has given us one tongue, but two ears," wrote the Greek philosopher Epictetus, "that we may hear twice as much as we speak."

**Effective listeners are active listeners.**





# Listening Is More Than Hearing

Listening is the “receiving” part of the communication process, but simply sensing what was said is just the beginning. We receive a message from someone talking when sound waves set off vibrations in our ears. Hearing, however, is only an automatic reaction of the senses and nervous system. By contrast, listening is the vastly more complicated process of understanding what was said.

When you listen, according to Webster’s *New World Dictionary*, you “make a conscious effort to hear.” Clearly, listening takes effort—it’s a voluntary act in which we use our higher mental processes.

Some people think listening is not a skill at all, but something we do naturally. Unfortunately, we don’t do it very well. Studies show that we remember only about 25 percent of what we hear; in other words, we forget, ignore, distort, or misunderstand the great majority of incoming messages. Are we hard of hearing or hard of listening?

The cost of poor listening is high. Poor listening may keep you from doing well on an exam, but it can cost all of us much more. One researcher put it this

way: “If each of America’s more than 100 million workers prevented just one \$10 mistake by better listening, their organizations would save \$1 billion.”

Do workers make many \$10 mistakes? You bet. A \$10 mistake is as simple as missing a meeting (by not listening when the boss mentioned the time), putting an item of stock in the wrong place (day-dreaming), or having to retype a letter (thinking about the weekend).

Have you ever heard people say they don’t have time for something—taking a walk, visiting a sick friend, or writing someone a note? Not true. We all have the same 24 hours each day; what they mean is that something isn’t important enough to make time for.

The same is true for listening. We will be poor listeners until we make up our minds to change. Listening keeps you informed, up to date, and out of trouble. It also increases your impact when you speak. It gives you an edge and power and influence. It makes other people like or even love you. But you have to train yourself to listen well.



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## Listening with Time to Spare

One reason listening can be troublesome is that our minds and mouths work at different rates. Although most people speak about 120–180 words per minute, we can listen about six times as fast. Our brains simply work faster than our mouths. This “rate gap” helps explain why our minds sometimes start to wander while we listen.

At the rate a speaker normally talks, you can sandwich many thoughts between her words, and still not miss a thing she says. In other words, most of us find ourselves with a little **listening spare time** on our hands.

Stray thoughts may take you away from the speaker briefly, but they don’t keep you from grasping her meaning. So you continue jumping back and forth, tuning in, tuning out, tuning in as you think some of your own thoughts, and then turning back to the speaker—a bit like the way a computer can do multitasking.

These private *excursions* away from the speaker can be troublesome. Let’s imagine that you are speaking with a teacher and the teacher mentions

your best friend. For just a moment, you start thinking about what you and your friend are planning to do this weekend. You follow that thought longer than you intended and then suddenly remember the teacher. “Whoops! What did he just say?”

Unfortunately, you discover you’ve missed a critical part of the message. The *disintegration* of your listening has begun. Eventually you give up; it’s simply too hard to catch up. You nod your head occasionally for the sake of courtesy, but this is not listening. You’ve switched over to cruise control.

Fortunately, spare listening time can also be a listener’s best friend. We can train ourselves to use it to improve our listening skills. Think of yourself as the rabbit in the fable of the tortoise and the hare. The tortoise represents the speaker, who moves down a path at a steady pace without ever speeding up, stopping, or taking a detour. The hare represents you, the listener, who can dash ahead, stop awhile, fall behind, and then catch up again.

The hare loses the race in the fable, but you’ll be a winner if you can make the most of listening opportunities. In a later section, we’ll show you how to do just that.

### The Rate Gap Between Speaking and Listening



We speak  
at 120 to  
180 words  
per minute

BUT  
We hear and  
process much  
quicker

Hear 50 words  
Tune in and  
think about them  
Hear next 60 words  
Tune out and  
mind wanders  
Hear next 70 words  
Tune back in and  
think about them

Because our brains can process words more quickly than they are delivered, we have to learn to use the “rate gap” to improve our listening skills.



**Four Ways to Listen** An air-traffic controller straining to hear a “Mayday” call from a plane in trouble isn’t listening the way you are when your Aunt Bessie calls from Des Moines to chat. We listen most carefully to what we feel is important to us.

We say we’re “all ears” when the coach announces the starting lineup or the music teacher names soloists for a big performance, but somehow our ears jam up when Mom or Dad wants to talk about household chores. The fact is, we have different listening styles for different occasions. How successful we are as listeners may depend in part on choosing the right listening style for the situation.

Perhaps the most basic listening style is **appreciative listening**. We listen appreciatively when we enjoy music, a bird’s song, or the murmur of a brook. We need a different style, one called **discriminative listening**, when we want to single out one particular sound from a noisy environment. You discriminate, for example, when you listen for a friend’s voice in a crowded room.

The third listening style is more complex. **Empathic listening**, the style practiced by counselors, psychiatrists, and good friends, encourages people to talk freely without fear of embarrassment. Friends act as our *sounding boards* when we just want someone to listen. The empathic listener in a conversation with a troubled friend accepts what is said, tries hard to understand, and, above

### Appreciative Listening



## INSTANT IMPACT

### The Ship That Couldn't Be Sunk

One of the greatest tragedies in the history of sea travel occurred on the night of April 12, 1912, when the crew of the *Titanic* refused to listen to repeated warnings of icebergs. The crew had been led to believe that this brand-new passenger liner was “unsinkable,” and few doubted that boastful claim. Even after the ship struck an iceberg and was slowly sinking, some of the passengers ignored the captain’s orders to get into the lifeboats.

When the ship finally began tilting dangerously, it was too late. There weren’t enough lifeboats for all the passengers and, worse still, the *Californian*, the only other ship in the area (about ten miles away), made no attempt to reach the wreck. Her radio operator had gone off duty. As a result, more than a thousand people needlessly lost their lives.

all, makes no judgments. He listens without offering any solutions.

The fourth style, **critical listening**, is the one we will examine most closely. Critical listeners evaluate what they hear and decide if another person’s message is logical, is worthwhile, or has value. We need to be critical listeners when someone wants us to buy something, vote a certain way, or support a particular idea. We also need to be critical listeners in school, where *listening* and *thinking* are closely linked.

**Why Listening Matters** Good listeners are popular everywhere. You will make more friends by listening than by speaking. Good listeners encourage speakers to do their best. Listening is a way of saying to the talker, “You are important, and I am interested in what you have to say.” And after a while, good listeners actually get to know something.





## Empathic Listening

Effective listening involves not only tuning in to others, but tuning in to ourselves as well. Listening carefully to what we say and how we say it can teach us an immense amount about ourselves. Statements we make often reflect our own self-concepts. If, for example, you heard yourself making the following statements, what would you conclude?

- “I can’t handle angry people.”
- “Someday I’m going to get organized.”
- “I’d like to tell my boss how I feel, but I can’t.”

Listening is, in the final analysis, a thinking skill, because it requires us to be selective with our attention, to classify and categorize information, and to sort out important principles and concepts from a stream of facts, jokes, and stories.

Good listening skills are especially important in a society that grants freedom of speech to all people, whatever their views or causes. In the remainder of this chapter, we will focus on how to get rid of bad listening habits and how to acquire good ones.

## SECTION 1 REVIEW

### Recalling the Facts

1. What is the difference between active and passive listening?
2. Name and briefly identify four listening styles.

### Thinking Critically

1. Give descriptions of well-known people—perhaps people you are studying in other classes—and have your classmates guess their names.
2. Consider the empathic role of listening. Why would nonjudgmental listening be so valuable? Why is it that we can sometimes share our feelings freely with a stranger (someone we sit next to on the bus, for instance) but have difficulty being open with close friends or family?

### Taking Charge

1. Record a portion of a radio talk show or call-in program. Play back what you have

recorded several times so that you know it well, and make a list of specific questions about the information presented. Then play the segment for your classmates and ask your list of questions to check for understanding. Next, ask your classmates what feelings they remember being expressed in the segment. Have they listened better for facts or feelings? What do feelings sound like?

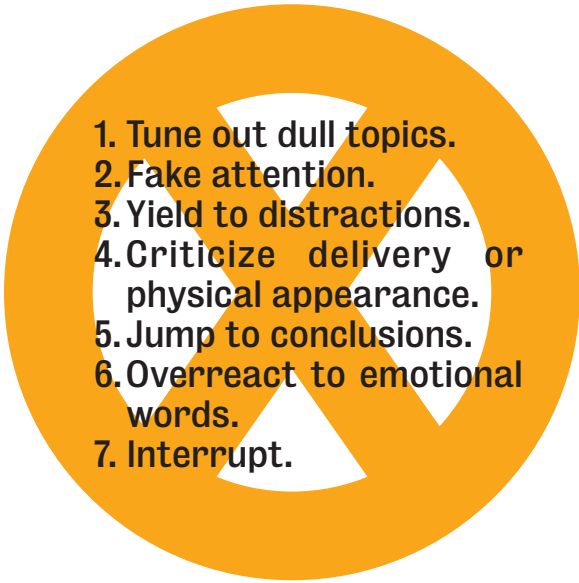
2. How many times have you heard a student ask a question and then the next student with her or his hand raised asks the very same question? To help your classmates listen to each other more attentively, stage a class discussion on some controversial topic. Each speaker must restate the previous speaker's point (to that speaker's satisfaction) before giving his or her own opinion. For example, you might say, "I understand you believe that watching TV can be a good way to learn about history. Let me explain why I disagree."

# Roadblocks to Good Listening

Even Shakespeare, whose words have been heard by millions all over the globe, regretted poor listening. He had one of his characters lament, “It is the disease of not listening . . . that I am troubled withal.” Part of the reason listening is difficult is that we spend so little time working on it. Most of the communication instruction we get in school is geared toward reading, despite the fact that we listen about three times as much as we read. Are we paying more attention to what reaches our eyes than to what reaches our ears?

## A Small Price to Pay

Good listening costs us something. To really listen we must *pay* attention. In listening, we pay out our most personal assets—our time, interest, and effort—to receive something in return: information, entertainment, and perhaps even comfort. Listening is hard work, which is why we do not give our attention easily.

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1. Tune out dull topics.
  2. Fake attention.
  3. Yield to distractions.
  4. Criticize delivery or physical appearance.
  5. Jump to conclusions.
  6. Overreact to emotional words.
  7. Interrupt.

But while we are paying attention, we must also exercise judgment; as listeners, we risk being deceived. The spoken word seems to affect us much more powerfully than the written word. Researchers say that many of our most deeply held convictions come from things we hear, not things we read. A committee of the National Council on the Teaching of English concluded that students’ “political ideals and ethical standards are influenced, if not largely determined, by their listening.”

Unfortunately, professional persuaders such as politicians, advertisers, and con artists of every kind know this too. They have learned that people are most *vulnerable* when they are listening. Remember that while you should be willing to listen to almost anything, you must not give up your ability to think for yourself.

## Why Is Listening Difficult?

Among the biggest hurdles to good listening is the very human desire to speak. Most of the time when someone is speaking to us, we’re thinking of what we want to say next, not listening at all. We prefer speaking to listening. Good listeners must learn to let go of their egos. Train yourself not to worry about what you want to say until the other person has finished talking.

Our very busy lives (not to mention MTV, the Internet, and video games) have also caused us to develop extremely short attention spans. Our tiny attention spans and impatience sometimes lead us to assume we know what someone will say next. This is an especially poor habit because you’re likely to shape what you do hear to fit what you expect. You will only hear, in other words, what you want to hear.



## Bad Habits Make for Bad Company

During the Middle Ages, people worried about committing the seven deadly sins—*gluttony*, anger, greed, lechery, envy, *avarice*, and *sloth*. Today we should learn to avoid seven habits of bad listening. Any one of them will keep you from becoming an effective listener.

### 1. *Tuning out dull topics*

Many listeners decide early on that a topic is simply not interesting—“Class, let’s review our procedures for a fire drill.” This decision rapidly leads to the MEGO syndrome (“My Eyes Glaze Over”).

Don’t let yourself become a lazy listener if what you are listening to doesn’t seem appealing. Instead, listen for something you can use yourself—an idea, a quote, a story, or even a joke. An energetic listener can nearly always find something of value in what another person is saying.

### 2. *Faking attention*

It’s no sin to be courteous, but sometimes we take good manners to an unfortunate extreme. When we find someone’s conversation boring but are too polite (or too afraid) to risk offending him, we pretend to pay attention, though our minds are a thousand miles away. Don’t assume that all a speaker really wants from us is that we look as if we’re listening.

To help yourself stay on track, create a mental paraphrase of what the speaker is saying—that is, translate the speaker’s thoughts into your own words. And repeat key points to yourself periodically throughout the conversation. Both steps will help you maintain an attitude of genuine interest.

### 3. *Yielding to distractions*

*Peripheral* noises or movements often can affect our concentration. A window drops shut, someone sneezes, a book falls to the floor. All too often, we give our attention to the hubbub around us instead of to the speaker. How often have you failed to hear your parents’ words while you were busy playing a video game? The truth is that we

## INSTANT IMPACT

### Gender Talk

**D**o you get irritated when people interrupt? Or are you the one doing most of the interrupting? Studies show that there may be significant differences between the sexes when it comes to stopping a speaker in mid-sentence.

When a man and a woman are talking, for example, the man makes about 96 percent of the interruptions.

Men appear to have a few other gender-specific habits regarding speech. Some researchers say that many men have been taught since childhood to become problem solvers. As a result, men tend to enter a conversation too quickly, and usually with a ready answer. They fail to draw out the speaker with questions or to listen for more information before jumping to a conclusion.

Deborah Tannen, author of a popular book on conversational styles called *You Just Don’t Understand*, argues that most women use “rapport talk” as a way of establishing connections and relationships. From childhood, she writes, women tend to listen for things they have in common with others.

Men, on the other hand, use “report talk” to preserve their independence and maintain status. They do this primarily by showing knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through storytelling or joking. From childhood, men learn to use talking as a way to get and keep attention. Consequently, they have a harder time learning to be good listeners.

can block out almost any distraction when we concentrate.

### 4. *Criticizing delivery or physical appearance*

Many people abandon their good listening habits when they become preoccupied with a speaker’s physical appearance (“He must have

found that shirt in his dad's closet") or delivery ("Let's count how many times she says 'like'"). Regardless of who the speaker is, the content of his message is what counts. Don't use poor physical appearance or speaking style as an excuse for not listening. And don't let yourself be put off by someone's manner, accent, or clothing. Be generous enough to overlook lisps, slurs, and mumbles.

#### 5. *Jumping to conclusions*

Be patient. Occasionally, personal *biases* against a speaker's background or position ("Does this old man really know anything about hip hop?") interfere with listening. Such biases may cause a listener to ask too many

questions, interrupt too often, or try to pick an argument. Again, withhold judgment until you're sure you know the speaker's position.

#### 6. *Overreacting to emotional words*

We all react from time to time to certain words or phrases that push our "hot buttons." If a speaker says, for example, "liberal," "abortion," or, even worse, "grade point average," you might experience a strong emotional reaction that can either block out or perk up your ability to listen. In such cases, you need to make an extra effort to remain objective. Your memory of key facts or arguments may be wiped out by the first rush of hot blood.

## COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

### Thoughts During a College Lecture

College students may look as if they're listening to the day's lecture, but their minds may be elsewhere, says Paul Cameron, an assistant professor of psychology at Wayne State University. To prove his point, Cameron fired a gun (blanks) from time to time during a lecture and then asked students what they were thinking when they heard the shot. He found that

- About 20 percent of the students were thinking about someone of the opposite sex.
- Another 20 percent were thinking of a memory.
- Only 20 percent were actually paying attention to the lecturer (just 12 percent described themselves as active listeners).
- Of the rest, some were worrying, some daydreaming, some thinking about lunch, and 8 percent were thinking about religion.

Cameron obtained these results in a nine-week course in introductory psychology for college sophomores. The gun was fired 21 times at random intervals, usually when Cameron, who was himself the lecturer, was in the middle of a sentence. We would guess no one speaks out of turn in his class!

#### Questions

1. How well do you listen to classroom instructions or lectures?
2. What other things do you think about while you're listening?
3. What could you do to help focus your listening skills during class time?

Our emotions have a lot to do with our ability to listen. At times, they act as filters to screen out things we don't want to hear. If we hear something that attacks our deepest feelings or convictions, for example, our ears go temporarily deaf. Instead of listening, we make plans to trap the speaker or think of a question that will embarrass her. Perhaps we simply turn to thoughts that support our own feelings and tune the speaker out.

In any event, listening comes to a screeching halt. When you feel your emotional barriers begin to rise, stay calm. Wait until the speaker has finished. Then, and only then, review the speaker's main ideas and make up your mind how to respond.

### 7. *Interrupting*

"We never listen when we are eager to speak," wrote the French philosopher François La Rochefoucauld. Try to find out if you spend most of your listening time thinking about what you want to say. The natural result of this habit is for you to interrupt—an almost certain sign that you don't know or care about what the other person is saying.

## Filters That Distort

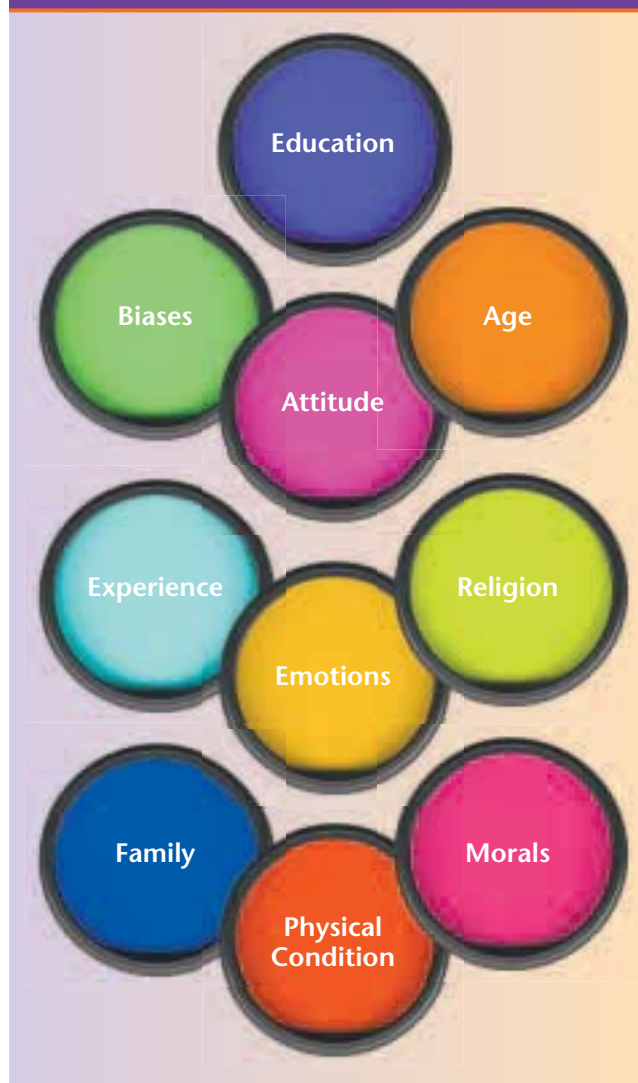
Information goes through many **filters** when it passes from speaker to listener. Listeners filter what they hear based on their backgrounds and personalities. Just as sunlight becomes weaker as it passes through a tinted window, communication can become distorted when it passes through personal filters. When you tell your father that you totaled the car, his reaction will be affected by whether he ever had a bad accident himself. Or, when you listen to a coworker's decision to quit, your own attitudes about work will influence your reaction.

Filters become a problem when they interfere with good listening habits. For example, you may have trouble listening to older people. You may lose patience with their style of speech or perhaps you just think to yourself, "This person was young so long ago, she can't possibly understand what I'm going through." In this case your age acts as a filter to prevent communication from taking place.

Improving your ability to listen is largely a matter of mental conditioning. Anytime you feel your emotional barriers or filters start to rise, make a conscious effort to:

- Refrain from judging or evaluating the speaker.
- Focus your attention on the message (make the problem under discussion the enemy; that way you and the speaker are on the same side).
- Search for areas where you agree.
- Keep an open mind. (If someone says something that bothers you, write it on a slip of paper.

## Some Filters That Can Distort







## Keep Emotions in Check

Specialists say that strong emotions can be powerful obstacles to good listening. When we become too emotionally involved in a situation, we tend to hear what we *want* to hear—not what is actually being said. Our emotions keep us from focusing on the real message.

Race horse trainer Phil Johnson discovered how much of a problem emotions can be when he gave his jockey last-minute instructions before the start of an important race at New York's Belmont Park. Johnson told the rider to hang back at the beginning of the race and then make a run for the front in the home stretch. But as he talked, he noticed that the jockey wasn't looking at him. Instead, the jockey kept staring at one of the other horses in the paddock, a horse the jockey had ridden in a previous race. "I have to beat that horse," the rider said, interrupting Johnson.

When the starting gate sprang open, Johnson quickly learned he had not been heard by the jockey. Much to his disappointment, he watched as his jockey dashed to the front, running neck and neck with the horse the jockey had ridden before. Eventually Johnson's horse tired and finished well back in the field.

Three weeks later Johnson entered the same horse in another race but this time with a different jockey. This jockey followed Johnson's instructions carefully and won, earning a nice reward for less than two minutes of listening.

### Questions

1. Can you think of a situation where your emotions might keep you from listening attentively to someone?
2. Why is it important to try to remain objective and open-minded when listening to people with whom you may disagree?

You can ask a question about it later when the speaker finishes—because it's safely stored, you don't have to think about it anymore.)

People from different ethnic backgrounds or people whose first language is not English can also bump up against your filters, and you can bump up against theirs. Again, special care must be taken to be a responsible listener. When this happens, you should:

- Be patient.
- Pay closer attention to body language.

- Hold your temper when you disagree.
- Put yourself in the speaker's position.

To become successful in life and work, you should learn as much about your own filters. The more you recognize them, the more you will be able to listen carefully when you hear something that you might usually ignore. But no matter how much your filters affect your listening, you should always show respect for others' point of view.



Try to keep an open mind as you listen to others.

## SECTION 2 REVIEW

### Recalling the Facts

1. List two reasons why listening is difficult.
2. Name and briefly describe five bad listening habits.

### Thinking Critically

1. Many people accept the failure of poor listening. "I can look at a person and never hear a word he says," they say with little or no embarrassment. Could part of the reason be that we never practice? Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, notes that "we spend years learning how to read, write, and speak, but we hardly get any training in listening." How could we train people to listen well?

2. Make a list of all the different kinds of distractions—both internal and external—that can interfere with good listening. What strategies can you suggest to overcome these distractions?

### Taking Charge

Try an experiment in your classroom with distractions. Arrange with your teacher to have several distractions occur sometime during a class presentation—have a classmate deliver a pass from the office, "plant" a classmate who will drop a book, and so on. Ask one of your classmates to monitor what happens to the class's attention during each distraction. Discuss how these distractions affected attentiveness.

# Effective Listening Strategies

**Y**ou can learn to be a good listener. Studies have shown that a little bit of knowledge and a lot of practice can lead to improved listening. To practice well, however, takes the attitude that you will make the effort to become a better listener.

To become a good listener, you must stay alert on several fronts at once, working with ears, eyes, and your whole being. Total body listening means, for starters, adopting the right posture for listening: Face the speaker, establish eye contact, and block out distractions. Lean forward and nod occasionally. Good listening requires all of our senses and plenty of mental energy.

## Listening to a Speech

Just as there are times to bear down and times to ease up, you should listen more carefully at some times than others. Your attention may lag in driver's education class, for example, as the teacher explains

a formula for converting the safe following distance from seconds to feet. When it comes time to listen for directions on your driver's test, though, you will summon your most intense concentration.

Listening to speeches and presentations works the same way. Knowing how speeches are usually organized, for example, can make us smarter listeners because we will be sure to listen most intently when it matters the most. The following discussion illustrates how to listen during each of the three major parts of a speech. (A thorough discussion of how to organize a speech appears in Chapter 9.)

**The Beginning** Many people with good intentions try to listen hardest at the beginning of a speech. Actually, this is not the best strategy. The beginning may be the most entertaining part of the speech—because the speaker is doing her utmost to gain your attention—but it is usually not the most important. Often, listeners get so caught up in the



Good listeners use not only their ears but also their other senses.



speaker's jokes, stories, and examples that they forget to be alert for the key idea.

Somewhere shortly after the beginning of a speech, the speaker will state the main idea of her talk. Once you find the main idea, your listening job becomes much easier. Now you will recognize the facts and details in the rest of the speech as strengthening or reinforcing the main idea. If you miss the main idea, these facts and details will keep you asking yourself, "Now how does this connect to what was said before?"

Rather than hanging on every word as a speech begins, you should think about the title of the speech and make a few guesses about what direction the speaker might take. This is a key to good listening. You should constantly try to figure out what the speaker's main point is and test hypotheses until you pounce on the main idea when it pops up. This approach differs from that of someone who assumes he knows what the speaker will say and, on that assumption, stops listening.

**The Middle** Be a critical listener during the body of the speech. Your main goal, of course, is to understand the speaker's message and intent. But this is also the time to test the strength of the speaker's message. Question the support that the speaker uses to defend assertions. How recent are the speaker's examples? How relevant are his quotes? What is the source for his statistics—or has he even given a source? In other words, evaluate the accuracy and fairness of what you hear.

Another part of evaluating the accuracy and fairness of what you hear is determining any bias in a speech. You may hear bias when a speaker defends a point of view without giving any support for his opinions. A speaker may use emotional approaches to argue against another point of view. The speaker may also show prejudice toward a person or a group of people. Listen carefully to what the speaker says to be sure he is approaching the topic in a fair and evenhanded way as well as properly supporting his point of view throughout the speech.

**The End** During the last part of a speech, the listener must be on guard for emotional appeals and *propaganda*, or material designed to distort the

truth or deceive the audience. You can tell that a speech is nearly over when the speaker repeats the main idea, summarizes her most important support, or says "in conclusion" or words to that effect. Speakers often end their speeches by trying to appeal to the listener's feelings. Your job as a listener is to recognize whether the speaker is trying to mislead you.

This is when to be most alert for *rhetorical* devices, that is, tricks of language. Such techniques might include **testimonials** ("You should agree with me because many famous celebrities do"), **false comparisons** (comparing unlike things such as apples with oranges), or suggestions to **jump on the bandwagon** ("Everyone's doing it—don't be left out"). As a speaker ends her speech, ask yourself whether she has earned whatever acceptance or support she is asking you to give.

## Use Your Listening "Spare Time" to Advantage

As mentioned earlier, you can listen much faster than anyone can speak. This means that during a speech you can easily fall victim to what listening expert Sally Scobey calls the "meandering mind menace." As our minds race ahead of the speaker, we may begin to daydream—fretting over old worries or thinking about other projects. But we can train ourselves to use this extra time more usefully. For example, here are four ways to keep your mind fully engaged.

**Explore** One way to use your spare listening time is to explore what lies ahead in the speech by asking, "What does this person want me to believe?" If you guess correctly, your understanding and *retention* will be strengthened. If you guess wrong, you can quickly compare the point you expected with the one the speaker actually made, and then consider why the speech surprised you. Bad listeners guess what the speaker is going to say and stop paying attention; good listeners guess too, but they listen intently to find out if their guess was correct.



## The Silent Listener

Once when President Calvin Coolidge was in the White House, he had a visitor from his home state of Massachusetts. The visitor, Channing Cox, had succeeded Coolidge as governor and had come to ask him a question about the business of government. Cox asked Coolidge how he had been able to see so many visitors each day as governor.

"I've heard you always left the office at 5 P.M.," Cox said. "I never leave that early, and often I'm there 'til 9. Why the difference?"

Coolidge thought for a moment and then replied in his usual abrupt manner: "You talk back."

**Analyze** Another way to spend your listening spare time is to analyze the speaker's message. As the speaker makes arguments and defends assertions, ask yourself, "Are these reasons, examples, and facts convincing? Are things exactly as he says they are? Does this information match what I already know? Is he leaving anything out?"

Many clever speakers may try to mislead you with deceptive reasoning. They may **stack the deck** against a particular person or idea by giving only one side of the story. They may use **name calling** (giving someone a negative label without any evidence) or many other unbalanced arguments to convince you. But a good listener is a hard sell.

**Review** Every so often you should review what you have heard. Speakers usually allow time for listeners to catch their breath. They may pause, for example, to make a transition: "Now let me talk about . . ." These moments give you a perfect opportunity to review.

Mentally run over the points already made, stopping a split second to examine each. Reviewing helps you remember. Tell yourself that you will have to give a report on this speech sometime, and begin mentally preparing your report while the speech is still going.

Planning to share what you have heard with others is a great way to motivate yourself to remember.

**Search for Hidden Meanings** Throughout a speech, lecture, or presentation you should "listen between the lines" in search of hidden meanings. Are there shortcomings the speaker should admit but doesn't? Pay attention to any cues the speaker might give, such as changes in the pace of his or her speech. Does the speaker's silence on something indicate it might be a sore point? A speaker's body language and nonverbal behavior can offer big clues to what he is really thinking. (We will take a close look at body language in Chapter 4.) Often what a person doesn't say may be as important as what she does say.

Here is a handy *acronym* that might help you remember these suggestions. Think EARS:

- E** for **explore**. Think ahead of the speaker.
- A** for **analyze**. Consider carefully what's being said; look at it from several angles.
- R** for **review**. Take advantage of your spare listening time to review.
- S** for **search**. Be alert for hidden meanings.

## Ask for Explanations

In many situations, you will find you need more information. When you ask for an explanation, you help the speaker make his message more understandable. To get additional information, you might say something like, “Would you please clarify that?” Other useful comments include

- “Would you say that again?”
- “I don’t understand what you mean.”
- “Could you be more specific?”

People are usually happy to help, but if you suggest that they *need* help, they may get angry. When you are confused, be sure to say something like “Maybe I misunderstood,” and not “You aren’t being very clear.”

## Paraphrase the Message

You can also help others by trying to **paraphrase** a message, or repeat in your own words what you think you heard. Your boss, for example, may give you detailed instructions on how to close the store for the evening or describe several errands you must run. In either case, paraphrasing goes a step beyond just asking for a further explanation.

Paraphrases often begin like this:

- “What I hear you saying is . . .”
- “Correct me if I’m wrong, but . . .”
- “In other words, your view is . . .”

When you paraphrase, you restate the speaker’s message as a way of checking its accuracy. When you paraphrase someone, try to capture only the essence or main points of the message. Be selective rather than exhaustive. Try, too, to focus on the content of

### A good listener will do the following:

- ✓ 1. Provide encouragement.
- ✓ 2. Ask for explanations.
- ✓ 3. Paraphrase the message.
- ✓ 4. Summarize the message.
- ✓ 5. Put it down on paper.



By asking for explanations or paraphrasing, you can be sure you understand what your manager and others want you to do.

what was said rather than any feelings expressed. This can help defuse a potentially emotional situation.

## Summarize the Message

You can go one step beyond a paraphrase by trying to **summarize** what you see as the main idea in a speech or conversation. Summaries are especially important when you need to relay a message from one person to another. The manager may ask you, for example, to convey her instructions to your coworkers.

When you summarize something, you condense the important points into a brief comment. Some typical summary statements might begin this way:

- “What the manager said so far is . . .”
- “Your key ideas, as I understand them, are . . .”
- “Recapping what you have been saying . . .”

Summaries are useful anytime a speaker becomes especially long-winded or confusing. Suppose a customer of long standing has come to complain about your company’s service. This is what he says:

“Two out of the last six shipments have arrived at least a week overdue. I hope you realize that costs us \$1,000 a day. The last time we ordered parts from you, they were late too—and that’s never happened before. The agents I’ve spoken with have been rude. What’s happening around here?”



## How Well Do You Listen?

Think about your responses to the following statements about your listening skills.

1. I often interrupt people to interject what I need to say.	Y	N
2. I anticipate what someone is about to say and finish the statement.	Y	N
3. During a conversation, I am easily distracted by what is happening around me.	Y	N
4. I feel uncomfortable when I look directly at a speaker for more than a few seconds.	Y	N
5. I “tune out” speakers I don’t agree with.	Y	N
6. I like to focus on a speaker’s clothes and hair instead of what is being said.	Y	N
7. I am turned off by a speaker who uses words I don’t know.	Y	N
8. Sometimes I daydream while people are talking to me.	Y	N
9. During conversations, while the other person is speaking, I like to plan what I want to say.	Y	N
10. I often pretend to be interested in what a speaker is saying even when I’m not.	Y	N

How did you do? If you answered “no” to each statement, you are an excellent listener. If you answered “yes” one to three times, your listening skills could stand a little improvement. If you answered “yes” to more than three statements, you need to work hard on developing better listening habits for greater success at school, at work, or with your friends and family.

You summarize this conversation to your coworkers and manager as follows:

“Mr. Brown feels that we are letting him down all around—shipments, parts, and now service. He wants an explanation.”

Summarizing is especially useful in situations involving conflicts or complaints or when some kind of problem solving is needed. Summarizing is also helpful at the close of a telephone conversation, especially when a variety of points have been discussed or one of the parties is expected to do something.

### Put It Down on Paper

Memory alone can’t guarantee that we will remember an important conversation a week or even a few days later. That’s why note-taking is usually considered a listening skill. It seems that just making the effort to take notes will almost always help improve our listening. Those who take notes understand more and remember more.

For one thing, taking notes improves our attentiveness. “It helps you focus on the highlights of what is being said,” notes Germaine Knapp, a communications consultant. Note-taking also increases the chances that you will review what has been said.

From time to time, a good note-taker looks back on his notes to see if they are complete. Such review is crucial to good listening. And, surprisingly, note-taking often helps the speaker. Speakers feel flattered when people write down things they say. They usually try to be as accurate as possible if they know someone is keeping track.

Keep these tips in mind when you take notes on important meetings or conversations:

- Be prepared. Try to carry a small notepad and pen with you whenever you think you might need to take notes.
- Get it down. Don’t take the time to be neat. You can always recopy your notes later. The important thing is to work quickly—writing just clearly enough so that you can remember what you wrote and why.

- Don't try to write everything. Avoid complete sentences. Draw lines to connect ideas; omit vowels. Develop your own system of shorthand using symbols, pictures, punctuation, and abbreviations. For example, this note:

Glenna, Inch w/HP client, FRI 11:30 @ Macaroni's

means that you and Glenna Douglas (a colleague) have a lunch meeting scheduled with a Hewlett-Packard client on Friday at 11:30 a.m. at Macaroni's restaurant.

## SECTION 3 REVIEW

### Recalling the Facts

1. When are the most important times to listen carefully during a speech?
2. How can you use your listening "spare time" to best advantage?
3. Explain the difference between asking for an explanation, paraphrasing a message, and summarizing a message.

### Thinking Critically

The average person spends 9 percent of his daily communication time writing, 16 percent reading, 30 percent speaking, and a whopping 45 percent listening. Students spend even more time listening—up to 60 percent during school hours, according to some studies. Do these percentages seem accurate? Which classes require the most listening? Which the least?

### Taking Charge

1. Listen to a three-minute presentation by your teacher or a classmate. Use the strategies from this section to help you evaluate

the speaker's intent. What are the main points of the presentation? What techniques did the speaker use to get those points across?

2. Watch one of the courtroom shows on television. Arrange to tape-record the judge's decision and comments, but don't listen. Instead, draw your own conclusions about the case based on what you've heard during the trial. Then compare your ruling with the judge's.
3. Listen to a recorded speech. Note any instances of bias, prejudice, or propaganda that you hear. How do these instances affect how you feel about the speaker's message?
4. Watch a short video or listen to a recording about a subject you're interested in. As you watch or listen, take notes and write down your own comments or observations about what you're hearing. What did you learn from the presentation? What can you take away from it to synthesize with other projects you are working on?

## It's Time to Listen to Teens *by Merry Hayes*

**M**erry Hayes, a student at Lincoln East High School in Nebraska, wrote the following editorial for the school newspaper. The Columbia Scholastic Press Association chose her editorial as the best in the nation. She argues that parents can help their teens cope with stress by listening to them.

These are the best years of our lives.

So we are told.

Correction.

These are the stress years of our lives.

A major problem facing today's teenager is stress. Stress caused by parents, peers, and even society as a whole.

From the very moment of birth, our parents have planned our dreams, hopes, goals, and future—leaving no room for dissent, no room for freedom, no room for failure.

The sons and daughters of the world feel a stifling pressure from their parents to succeed. They fear that not living up to their parents' expectations or up to the image of big brother the football star, or big sister the Harvard graduate, will result in the hideous social disease called failure.

Even our peers, those who are closest to us, those who provide security, and those who understand our problems, put pressure on us.

No one wants to be seen wearing outdated clothes or get caught saying an "in" word that was "out" a long time ago.

Thus, the wheels go round and round. Where will it stop? Nobody knows. This merry-go-round spins so fast for some that they can't get off. They paid for their ticket, and many will keep on paying for it, with their lives. . . .

Society has formed the ideal that success is everything and pressure must be applied to achieve it. People have a right to make their own decisions and their own mistakes without being pushed into it by an outsider. Pressuring someone into using drugs or alcohol is very destructive to that person. Likewise, pushing someone into college who is unprepared or unwilling can be equally ruinous.

However, some stress is good for a person. We all need a little motivation now and then or else nothing would ever get done. But there is only so much a person can take. Teenagers have enough problems as it is without being the rope in a tug of war between parents and peers.

These teenage years should be the best of times, but they will be the worst of times if something is not done to ease the pressure.

Parents and peers should reduce their demands on these young adults and, instead, accept them as they are and encourage them to be what they want, and only what they want. They can start by listening.

### Questions

1. What problems can unrealistic expectations cause?
2. What problems could be solved if both parents and teens listened better?



## Looking Back

Listed below are the major ideas discussed in this chapter.

- Hearing is an automatic reaction of the senses and nervous system to sound. Listening, on the other hand, is a voluntary act.
- Poor listening costs us millions of dollars in lost business, mismanaged time, and waste. In places such as construction sites, poor listening could cause accidents or deaths.
- Because we can listen faster than anyone can speak, we have some “spare time” to use to our advantage. We can use this time to explore, analyze, review, and search for hidden meanings.
- Success in listening depends on choosing the right listening style for the situation.
- Seven habits of poor listening are tuning out dull topics, faking attention, yielding to distractions, criticizing a speaker’s delivery, jumping to conclusions, overreacting to emotional words, and interrupting.
- Strong emotions can sometimes prevent us from being good listeners.
- Knowledge of how a typical speech is organized can be helpful to listeners, because different sections of a speech call for different kinds of listening.
- Note-taking can help improve our listening habits.

## Speech Vocabulary

Fill in the blank with the correct term from the list below.

passive listening	paraphrase
active listening	summarize
listening spare time	filter
appreciative listening	testimonials
discriminative listening	stack the deck
empathic listening	name calling
critical listening	jump on the
false comparison	bandwagon

1. We use \_\_\_\_\_ when we listen to someone relate her problems, hopes, or dreams, especially when the person doesn’t want our approval or advice.
2. We can use our \_\_\_\_\_ to explore, analyze, and review a speaker’s message.
3. When we recognize sounds, we are only hearing. If we pay little attention to those sounds, we are using \_\_\_\_\_. But if we try energetically to make sense of those sounds, we are using \_\_\_\_\_.
4. If you buy a CD to enjoy, you use \_\_\_\_\_ but if you intend to write a review of the CD for the school newspaper, you use \_\_\_\_\_.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is the kind of listening that enables you to hear a friend across a crowded room.
6. Some of the propaganda techniques that professional persuaders use are \_\_\_\_\_ (using the name of a celebrity), \_\_\_\_\_ (holding up one candidate against a much older one), \_\_\_\_\_ (“Don’t be left out!”), \_\_\_\_\_ (presenting only favorable evidence), and \_\_\_\_\_ (mudslinging).
7. Our personal biases may cause us to \_\_\_\_\_ out certain messages.



## Academic Vocabulary

Match each of the following terms on the left with a definition on the right that helps explain its meaning.

- |                       |                   |                                  |   |
|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| ___ A. excursion      | ___ G. retention  | 1. ability to remember           | 8. tricks of language                                     |
| ___ B. disintegration | ___ H. acronym    | 2. extreme desire to gain wealth | 9. trip or journey  |
| ___ C. sounding board | ___ I. bias       | 3. excessive eating or drinking  | 10. unprotected   |
| ___ D. vulnerable     | ___ J. gluttony   | 4. on the outside                | 11. word formed from the initial letters of several words |
| ___ E. peripheral     | ___ K. avarice    | 5. fall into fragments           | 12. words designed to distort the truth                   |
| ___ F. rhetorical     | ___ L. propaganda | 6. a person who gives feedback   | 13. a settled or prejudiced outlook                       |
|                       | ___ M. sloth      | 7. laziness                      |   |

## To Remember

Answer the following based on your reading of the chapter.

1. What is the difference between hearing and listening?
2. What are the four basic listening styles?
3. What are three reasons why listening is difficult?
4. Name the seven deadly habits of bad listening.
5. What should your listening strategy be when you feel strongly moved by what a speaker says?
6. What does a good listener look like? In other words, what is the right posture and bearing for a person who wants to listen well?
7. At what point in a formal speech is it important to listen most intently?
8. Give an example of a situation where paraphrasing would be useful. Do the same for summarizing.

## To Do

1. To find out how well or poorly you listen, try this simple exercise. The next time someone begins a conversation, ask yourself, "Am I really listening or am I just waiting my turn to talk?" Pay attention to your own mental processes. Are you:
  - Easily distracted?
  - Faking attention?
  - Interrupting frequently?
  - Daydreaming?
  - Jumping to conclusions?
  - Finding fault with the speaker?
2. Make a list of listening skills and habits, both good and bad. For example, "Do I listen attentively without interrupting?" "Do I listen carefully for main ideas and supporting points?" or "Do I keep my emotions under control?" Then grade yourself on a recent conversation, discussion, or lecture.
  - Thinking of what you want to say?
 If your answer is yes to any of the items on this list, you have fallen victim to a habit of bad listening. What remedies can you suggest?

3. How well do students listen to each other? Appoint an observer. After a student has given a speech to the class, ask the observer to rate the class on its listening skills. What was the typical posture? How attentive were the listeners? Did they give encouragement? Have students form groups to discuss how they could improve their listening skills.
4. Ask several students to prepare short talks. Tell them that they may have to speak under very difficult circumstances but that they should continue no matter what happens.

Ask the speakers to leave the room and then instruct the class to listen very carefully to what each speaker says until a secret signal is given. At that point the students are to stop paying attention, perhaps by reading books or looking out the window. Call the student speakers back, one at a time, and ask them to give their talks. When they are finished, ask them to discuss how they felt when the class withdrew its attention and what changes they made in their speeches as a result.

## To Talk About

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1. What role does listening play in our everyday lives?
2. Certain people seem to naturally command our attention. Researchers say we listen quite willingly to those who have status (celebrities), those with seniority (parents and teachers), those who can do something for us, and members of the opposite sex. Do you agree

- with this conclusion? Are there other categories of people to whom you pay special attention? Is that attention warranted?
3. How well do we listen in different settings—for instance, at a family meal, in class, at a party, or on the job? Discuss the differences you notice in listening styles.

## To Write About

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1. Compile a list of occupations where listening is vital. Examples might include psychologist, counselor, and social worker. Interview someone in your community who works at one of those careers and write a report based on that person's definition of "professional" listening.
2. Examine what topics might cause you to "hear only what you want to hear." Examples

- might include either side of an issue like abortion or gun control. What ideas do you have about getting someone to listen to the other side of an issue?
3. Write about the teacher whose lectures you find easiest to understand. Explain what techniques that teacher uses to be successful.

## Related Speech Topics

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Silence is (or is not) golden.  
Poor listening habits can lead to major problems in business and many other areas of life.  
If we spend 60 percent of every school day listening, why aren't we learning more?  
We are vulnerable to professional persuaders such as politicians and advertisers.

Females are better listeners than males (or vice versa).  
It's not what we say but what we don't say that counts.  
How to take notes well.