

# Listening skills

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Effective communication dramatically distinguishes humans from other forms of life. It allows us to organize and work together in groups and develop a civilized society. In fact, without communication, there can be no social organization. Besides being important in today's changing business environment, effective communication is vital for personal satisfaction and success. Through communication, people are able to clarify their concepts and ideas. It enables us to understand, persuade, and work with other people. In many ways, our success in personal and corporate life is based on our ability to communicate effectively.

After having laid so much importance on communication, we must also understand that communication is never one way. Communication in simple terms can be defined as 'the process of sharing by which messages produce responses' (Munter, 1987). It is always a two-way process with a 'sender' sending a message and a 'receiver' providing a feedback of its reception. The success of an effective communication therefore rests on the 'receiver' who is at the listening end.

A research proves that "Communication is 85 percent listening and 15 percent talking" (Pierce and Palmer, 2006). Not denying the significance of effectively putting across your message, listening to others is equally important and surprisingly difficult skill. We have to be an effective listener when we are brainstorming ideas with others, collecting data, talking on the telephone, resolving conflicts, attending lectures and even while conversing with our kids. We must remember that the person who is talking can sense whether listener is attentive or not.

So, how to improve our listening skills? Various researchers have given various techniques to be an effective listener. There is however consensus on first removing the internal and external blocks which may be affecting our concentration. A major internal block stems from our ability to think so much faster than a speaker can possibly talk. People on average talk at about 125 words per minute but our brain can process information at more than 600 words per minute (Munter, 1987).

With so much extra time available in our brain, we tend to wander to completely unrelated topics. Another important internal block to listening is emotional. It's hard to resist jumping to conclusions, defending our own position, contesting new ideas, and indulging into a thought process of preparing our own response. The external blocks on the other hand can be your uncomfortable seat, distractions caused by various sounds, a glance at papers in our hands/desk or even some pleasant smell of perfume or food coming from nearby. Of all the external blocks, time is probably the most important. Removing all such blocks is the first step to effective listening.

The second step in developing listening skills is adopting a suitable posture or 'how we look' when we are listening. A good listener needs to stand or sit with an 'open posture' that is facing the other person and looking alert. On the other hand 'closed or aggressive postures' like keeping the arms crossed, turning away, bowing shoulders or keeping hands on hips do not give a positive feedback to the person who is talking. Similarly 'nervous gestures' such as cleaning fingernails, drumming with fingers or keeping hands on or near the face tend to make the talker feel uncomfortable.

Another aspect of improving the nonverbal signs of listening is the facial expression. A good listener needs to avoid a deadpan and stony face. Instead, look interested; raising and lowering of eyebrows, occasionally smiling or nodding can help establish rapport. Perhaps the most important signal of attentive listening is maintaining the eye contact. Staring should be avoided however constantly looking away is also interpreted as lack of interest. The appropriate distance between the talker and listener also indicates the level of interest and involvement. The distance may be appropriate for conversational listening. Altogether, the importance thing to keep in mind about nonverbal signals of listening is how they make the speaker feel (Knapp, 1980).

We can not fake good listening by merely adopting a suitable posture and maintaining an eye contact. Good listening must be sincere. The third step of improving listening skills is therefore embedded in controlling our feelings and thoughts (Knapp, 1980). Controlling our feelings is often difficult. We tend to interrupt or disagree before the person speaking is finished. To improve our listening skills, we need to be patient and give the speaker time. A good listener should avoid interrupting and do not block communication by arguing, criticizing or becoming angry too soon.

To control your feelings, you must avoid prejudging either the topic or the speaker. Moreover, do not be overly affected by the initial impressions the topic or the speaker make on you. The best way to control our feelings is to empathize with the talker that is by putting ourselves in his or her shoes. Besides controlling the feelings, a good listener should think objectively and analytically. A good way of analyzing is to take notes mentally, write down

key words, mentally summarize what the talker has said so far and weigh the evidence. Besides listening to the speaker's content, a good listener will always analyze the speaker's feelings so as to evaluate the motivation/intention behind his or her talk. Listen not only to what the speaker is saying, but how she or he says it. Be aware, in other words, of the speaker's voice, volume, facial expression, and body language. Sometimes, people say one thing but a good listener can hear that they really mean something else.

The last step to effective listening is 'what to say.' Obviously, most of the time you are listening you are not saying anything. Humans by nature prefer talking to listening. A good listener should however learn to tolerate silence. Instead of feeling uncomfortable with silence, think of it as a chance to let other person be heard. Although the most important listening skill is to listen and remain silent, however a good listener might have to say few things to encourage the other person to talk.

Asking for clarifications, rephrasing/restating ideas for confirmation and asking few questions when given an opportunity to speak are few techniques not only to enhance own receptivity but are also indicative of the listener's interest and involvement in the talk. For encouraging the speaker to talk, use small phrases such as "I see," "Uh-huh," and "Go on." These phrases are not considered as interruptions rather these help to portray your interest in what the speaker is saying (Barker & Watson, 2000).

To conclude, listening skills are important not only for a successful career, but are very helpful for becoming good students, parents, and friends. Its importance is much more highlighted in the corporate world which relies on <https://assignbuster.com/listening-skills-research-paper-samples/>

good leadership and as it is pointed out that “ Good leaders build teams by being willing to hire people better than themselves, staying secure in their own roles and by listening” (Maxell, 2006). The four step approach to effective listening discussed in this paper is not a final word on such an important aspect of human life but it gives a guideline for developing this skill in a methodological manner.

In nut shell, to be an effective listener we need to first remove or minimize various internal and external blocks to listening, concentrate on how we look by adopting a suitable gesture, feel, analyze the content and intentions of the speaker and should know what to say at what time. We must remember that if we will not listen to people around us, under us or in our homes, they will take their ideas or problems elsewhere; subordinates may feel discontended if they are not properly heard; colleagues and friends may even stop sharing their feelings with you; customers may take their business elsewhere, and at homes you will never get to know your children.

## References

Barker, Larry & Watson, Kittie. (2000). Listen Up: How To Improve Relationships, Reduce Stress. NY: St. Martins Press.

Knapp, K. (1980). Essentials of Nonverbal Communication. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Maxwell, J. (2006). The 360-Degree Leader. Business book review library, 23 (11), 1-11.

Munter, Mary. (1987). Business Communications: Strategy and Skill. Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

<https://assignbuster.com/listening-skills-research-paper-samples/>

Pierce, E., & Palmer, L. (2006). 24 Things Experts are Dying to Tell You. Redbook, 206 (6), 102-111.