



UNIT-5

Listening Skills

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Develop stronger skills in listening actively and empathetically to others
- ✓ Understand the limitless value of advanced listening skills
- ✓ Better-interpret spoken information communicated by other

Unit 5

Listening Skills

How Do You Rate Your Listening Ability?

One reason listening is so important is that we do so much of it every day. We know that good communicators spend far more of their time listening than they do talking. Like asking questions, listening is a skill that we can develop. In an age when we are inundated with media messages and portable devices, we can choose to be listening more than people did in the past.

Answer each of the following questions.

Question	Yes	No	Points
1. Do you enjoy listening?			
2. Is it easy for you to listen with interest to a large variety of subjects?			
3. Do your friends seek you out to discuss a problem or decision when they need help?			
4. Does your attention usually stray toward other groups or people entering or leaving the room?			
5. Do you interrupt?			
6. Are you more apt to be thinking ahead to what you will say next rather than weighing what you are being told?			
7. Do you stop listening to everything when you strongly disagree with the speaker on one point?			
8. Do you assume or anticipate regarding the other person's views?			
9. Do you feel you can judge most people quite quickly before hearing them out?			
10. Do you generalize (All old people think... all redheads... all college kids...)?			

11. Do you encourage others to elaborate or clarify points you have misunderstood?			
12. Do you listen to what is not said, such as the obvious omission?			
GRAND TOTAL			

Scoring

- Ñ Give yourself 2 points if you answered “Yes” for question 1. You enjoy listening as much as you enjoy talking.
- Ñ Give yourself 2 points if you answered “No” to questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.
- Ñ Give yourself 2 points if you answered “Yes” to questions 2, 3, 11, and 12.

Interpretation

If your score is **20 or more**, you've already developed some strong communication skills. You have the ability to listen to people, understand what they are saying, and communicate your understanding back to them. Use your listening and communication skills to help others.

If your score is between **10 and 18**, you're within the average range. Use this quiz to help you identify where you're doing well and where you would like to do better.

If your score is **less than 10**, it's time to start learning! Use this quiz to help you set some goals. Start with one or two things that you would like to improve on, such as empathizing, paraphrasing, or asking good questions. Then, we'll work on setting an action plan, and you'll be on the road to being a better listener, and a better communicator.

Active Listening Skills

The problem is that listening and hearing are not the same thing. Most of us were fortunate to be born with hearing, but listening is a skill that must be learned and practiced in order to use it successfully. When you **hear** something, sound enters your eardrum, passes through your ear canal, and registers in your brain. **Listening** is what you do with that sound and how you interpret it.

Here are some tips for successful listening:

- Ñ Listen intentionally for people's names.
- Ñ Listen with interest.
- Ñ Try to get rid of your assumptions.
- Ñ Listen for what isn't said.

Listening is hard work. When other people are listening to us, they have the same difficulties we do in trying to focus on a message. Our minds wander, noises or thoughts distract us, and we can be thinking about what to do next.

Active listening means that we try to understand things from the speaker's point of view. It includes letting the speaker know that we are listening and that we have understood what was said. This is not the same as **hearing**, which is a physical process, where sound enters the eardrum and messages are passed to the brain. Active listening can be described as an attitude that leads to listening for shared understanding.

When we make a decision to listen for total meaning, we listen for the content of what is being said as well as the attitude behind what is being said. Is the speaker happy, angry, excited, sad...or something else entirely?

Responding to Feelings

The content (the words spoken) is one thing, but the way that people feel really gives full value to the message. Responding to the speaker's feelings adds an extra dimension to listening. Are they disgusted and angry or in love and excited? Perhaps they are ambivalent! These are all feelings that you can reply to in your part of the conversation.

Reading Cues

Really listening means that we are also very conscious of the non-verbal aspects of the conversation.

- Ñ What are the speaker's facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture telling us?
- Ñ Is their voice loud or shaky?
- Ñ Are they stressing certain points?
- Ñ Are they mumbling or having difficulty finding the words they want to say?

Demonstration Cues

When you are listening to someone, these techniques will show a speaker that you are paying attention, provided you are genuine in using them.

Physical indicators include making eye contact, nodding your head from time to time, and leaning into the conversation.

You can also give **verbal cues** or use phrases such as "Uh-huh," "Go on," "Really!" and, "Then what?"

You can use **questions** for clarification or **summarizing statements**. Examples:

- Ñ "Do you mean they were charging \$4.00 for just a cup of coffee?"
- Ñ "So after you got a cab, got to the store, and found the right sales clerk, what happened then?"

Tips for Becoming a Better Listener

- Ñ **Make a decision to listen.** Close your mind to clutter and noise and look at the person speaking with you. Give them your undivided attention.
- Ñ **Don't interrupt** people. Make it a habit to let them finish what they are saying. Respect that they have thoughts they are processing and speaking about, and wait to ask questions or make comments until they have finished.
- Ñ Keep your **eyes** focused on the speaker and your **ears** tuned to their voice. Don't let your eyes wander around the room, just in case your attention does too.
- Ñ Carry a **notebook** or start a conversation file on your computer. Write down all the discussions that you have in a day. Capture the subject, who spoke more (were you listening or doing a lot of the talking?), what you learned in the discussion, as well as the who, what, when, where, why, and how aspects of it. Once you have conducted this exercise 8-10 times, you will be able to see what level your listening skills are currently at.
- Ñ Ask a few **questions** throughout the conversation. When you ask, people will know that you are listening to them, and that you are interested in what they have to say. Your ability to summarize and paraphrase will also demonstrate that you heard them.
- Ñ When you demonstrate good listening skills, they tend to be **infectious**. If you want people to communicate well at work, you have to set a high example.

What is Said and What is Heard

What we say isn't always what the other person hears. Our message goes through a complicated system of filters and outside influences before it reaches the recipient. We must always clarify that the person has received the message that we intended to send.



Test Your knowledge

What would you do if you were trying to talk to someone...

In a noisy workplace

Visual distractions

You felt really tired

They had a very strong accent

They were speaking too fast for you to understand, or too slowly or softly

They kept using jargon words or terms you didn't understand

They appeared to be very stressed

They were using emotionally charged words or statements

They were verbally attacking you

Further Reading:

- ✓ Cialdini, Robert. *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. Collins, 2006.
- ✓ Davis, Martha, Patrick Fanning, and McKay Matthew. *Messages: The Communication Skills Book*. New Harbinger Publications, 1995.
- ✓ Decker, Bert. *Communication Skills for Leaders: Deliver a Clear and Consistent Message*, 4th Ed. Axzo Press, 2009.