

3.2 Listening Skills

The Listening Process

What is the most frequent form of communication—reading, writing, speaking, or listening? If you said listening, you are correct. Research indicates that many people spend more than half of their waking time communicating. Much of this time is spent listening. Managers often spend much of their workday listening. Generally, the higher your position in a company, the more time you may spend listening to others.

The listening process involves hearing, focusing attention, understanding, and remembering. These steps are described in Figure 3-3. Listening also requires noticing nonverbal cues. The speaker's tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions, and posture can add meaning to a message. The following situation provides an example of the steps used in listening.

1. Jose sends a message by speaking to Betty.
2. Betty listens to Jose's words and to the way he uses them. She also watches the nonverbal cues sent by Jose's face, hands, and so forth.
3. Betty analyzes the verbal and nonverbal messages and decides what she thinks Jose is saying.
4. Betty summarizes to Jose what she thinks was his intended message.

OBJECTIVES

After completing Section 3.2, you should be able to:

1. Explain the listening process.
2. Identify types of listening and describe the reasons for which they are used.
3. List barriers to effective listening.
4. Describe effective listening techniques.

Figure 3-3 listening involves hearing and understanding a message.

THE LISTENING PROCESS	
Hearing	Detecting sounds. In an office, you may hear people talking, telephones ringing, a door closing, or other sounds.
Focusing Attention	Concentrating on the speaker and what he or she says. You must ignore unrelated sounds, background noise, and other distractions.
Understanding	Attaching meaning to the speaker's message.
Remembering	Recalling a message you have seen or heard.

5. Jose decides whether Betty's summary is correct. If Betty is correct, Jose signals that it was correct. If Betty's summary is incorrect, Jose restates the message. At this point, Betty repeats steps 2 through 5. This process is repeated until Jose agrees with Betty's summary.

Types of Listening

People listen for many reasons—to relax, obtain information, express interest, and discover attitudes. When you listen to music, usually you are listening to relax. Listening to directions for a task, taking part in an interview, and getting feedback from a customer are examples of listening to obtain information. You listen to let people know that you are interested in what they have to say and that they are important. Listening and responding to friends during lunch sends the message that their thoughts and feelings are important to you. Attitudes often are expressed in the nonverbal cues of a message. Alert listeners observe these cues and try to identify the speaker's real feelings.

People use different types of listening when listening for different purposes. The listening may be casual or active.

Casual Listening

Casual listening is hearing and understanding a message but not trying to remember the message in the long term. Casual listening is sometimes called passive listening. Listening while watching a movie or making small talk at lunch are examples of casual listening. The casual listener expends little energy or effort. Although the listener may understand the message, remembering it for a long time is not important. Casual listening is relaxed. When you are talking with others, however, you must be careful not to listen so casually that others think you are not paying attention.

Active Listening

Active listening is hearing and trying to understand and remember a message. It has purpose. Active listening may be informative, evaluative, emphatic, or reflective.

Key Point

People listen to relax, obtain information, express interest, and discover attitudes.



Casual listening is relaxed and involves little energy or effort

Informative Listening

Informative listening is used to obtain specific information or understand a message. Doctors use informative listening when talking with their patients. Interviewers actively listen to what an applicant says. These are examples of informative listening. Recall a time when you listened very intently because you had something to gain from what was said. You listened actively because you were motivated by your interests.

Evaluative Listening

Evaluative listening involves judging the importance or accuracy of what a speaker is saying. Suppose you listen to a presidential candidate's speech. As you listen, you judge the sincerity and truthfulness of the message. You are using evaluative listening. This type of listening is also called critical listening.

Emphatic Listening

Emphatic listening involves trying to understand the speaker's point of view, attitudes, and emotions. The listener is trying to understand something about the person as well as the spoken message. This type of listening can be important in resolving conflicts or disputes. Suppose a customer calls a help support line to complain about a printer that does not work properly. The support person might say, "I understand how disappointing it can be when a new product does not work properly. Let me ask some questions to learn what the problem might be." The support person is showing understanding of the customer's frustrations with the new printer. This understanding makes resolving the problem easier.

Key Point

Critical listening involves judging the importance or accuracy of what a speaker says



Diversity

Cultural differences make effective listening—understanding and recalling a message—more challenging.

Reflective Listening

Reflective listening involves understanding and restating the speaker's message. A reflective listener responds to the speaker with genuine concern. However, the listener does not try to give a different point of view or judge the speaker or the message. The listener simply lets the speaker know that the message has been understood. The listener may repeat or paraphrase what was said or make statements that reflect the speaker's feelings. This type of exchange is also known as parallel talk. Parallel talk can help the listener understand the speaker and help the speaker clarify thoughts or feelings. A guidance counselor may use reflective listening when talking with a student about career goals. This approach may help the student clarify his or her thoughts about this topic.