



5 Listening

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Activity 1: An Analysis of Poor Listening

Purpose

1. To analyze poor listening
2. To identify ways to improve listening

Instructions

1. Choose one situation in which you listened poorly.
2. Answer the following questions to carefully analyze each factor that affected your listening.

An Example of Poor Listening:

Describe the **context**—where you were, who else was there, what was happening and why it was important to listen well, even though you didn't.

As a listener, I was not attending (paying attention to) the message because of interference of the following factors.

Describe your particular **needs** and how they adversely affected your listening.

Describe your particular **wants/desires** and how they adversely affected your listening.

Describe your particular **interests** and how they adversely affected your listening.

Describe your particular **attitudes** and how they adversely affected your listening.

Describe your particular **goals** and how they adversely affected your listening.

Describe your particular **past experiences** and how they adversely affected your listening.

Describe your particular **habits** and how they adversely affected your listening.

I was selectively listening for _____ and that affected my listening adversely because

- _____ I did not understand the syntax.
- _____ I did not understand the semantics.
- _____ I did not understand the pragmatics.
- _____ I did not exert effort to listen.
- _____ I was not motivated to listen.
- _____ The message was not clear to me.
- _____ The channel was not familiar to me.

My own responses were less than desirable because I: (check all those that apply)

- ☐ lacked eye contact.
- ☐ failed to lean forward.
- ☐ didn't stop other activities to listen.
- ☐ didn't turn toward speaker/turned away from speaker.
- ☐ showed an inappropriate facial expression.
- ☐ failed to use paraphrasing.
- ☐ asked irrelevant or threatening questions.

Other problems were that:

- ☐ I was experiencing message overload because
- ☐ I used my spare time unwisely by
- ☐ There was too much psychological noise because
- ☐ There was too much physical noise such as
- ☐ I have a hearing problem that made this difficult

I bought into some of these faulty assumptions while listening:

- ☐ I assumed I'd heard this all before because
- ☐ I assumed the speaker was too simple because
- ☐ I assumed the speaker was too complex because
- ☐ I assumed the speaker was unimportant because

Summarize what you have learned from this analysis that may help you prevent these listening problems in the future. If you were to give yourself one piece of advice, what would it be?

Name _____

Activity 2: An Analysis of Good Listening

Purpose

1. To analyze good listening
2. To identify strengths in listening

Instructions

1. Choose one situation in which you listened well.
2. Answer the following questions to analyze each area and tell how or why each factor affected your listening in a positive way.

Describe the **context**—where you were, who else was there, what was happening, and why it was important to listen well.

As a listener, I was attending (paying attention to) the message.

Describe your particular **needs** and how they positively affected your listening.

Describe your particular **wants/desires** and how they positively affected your listening.

Describe your particular **interests** and how they positively affected your listening.

Describe your particular **attitudes** and how they positively affected your listening.

Describe your particular **goals** and how they positively affected your listening.

Describe your particular **past experiences** and how they positively affected your listening.

Describe your particular **habits** and how they positively affected your listening.

I was selectively listening for _____ and that affected my listening positively because

- _____ I understood the syntax.
- _____ I understood the semantics.
- _____ I understood the pragmatics.
- _____ I exerted effort to listen.
- _____ I was motivated to listen.
- _____ the message was clear to me.
- _____ the channel was familiar to me.

My own responses involved (check all those that apply)

- ☐ eye contact.
- ☐ leaning forward.
- ☐ stopping other activities to listen.
- ☐ turning toward the speaker.
- ☐ showing an appropriate facial expression.
- ☐ paraphrasing.
- ☐ asking non-threatening questions.

I avoided message overload by _____

I used my spare time wisely by _____

I minimized psychological noise by _____

I minimized physical noise such as _____

by _____

I do _____ do not _____ have a hearing problem which made listening difficult.

I avoided these faulty assumptions while listening

☐ Instead of thinking, "I heard this all before," I was thinking

☐ Instead of thinking, "The speaker is too simple," I was thinking

☐ Instead of thinking, "The speaker is too complex," I was thinking

☐ Instead of thinking, "The speaker is unimportant," I was thinking

Summary What have you learned from this analysis that you will use again in the future?

Describe, design, or draw a model or symbol that represents effective listening.

Activity 3: Paraphrasing

Purpose

To practise paraphrasing and observe the process of paraphrasing

Instructions

1. Form a group of three and designate yourselves *A*, *B*, and *C*.
2. *A* should choose one of the following quotations to discuss, preferably one which *A* feels strongly about. After reading the quotation, *A* begins by commenting and giving opinions and feelings about it. [At this time *C* is observing both *A* and *B* and filling out the Observer Form on the following page.]
3. *B* now paraphrases what *A* said to *A*'s satisfaction before adding to the discussion. Then *B* expresses a feeling/opinion about that same quotation and *A* paraphrases before adding to the discussion. Except for *A*'s first comment, no one speaks until the other person has paraphrased to the satisfaction of the person who made the comment.
4. After about five minutes of discussion, *C* reports his/her observations on the listening skills of *A* and *B*.
5. Repeat the steps above with *B* starting a conversation, *C* listening and responding, and *A* observing. Then repeat the steps above with *C* starting a conversation, *A* listening and responding, and *B* observing.
6. When you have finished three rounds (two as listeners/one as observer), fill out the Analysis of Exercise individually. After you have finished, share your responses with each other.

Quotations to choose from:

- "The coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to the man who needs it." —St. Basil
- "From what we get, we can make a living; what we give, however, makes a life." —Arthur Ashe
- "Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city." —George Burns
- "Patriotism is the willingness to kill and be killed for trivial reasons." —Bertrand Russell
- "Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction." —Antoine de Saint Exupéry
- "There are two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it." —Oscar Wilde
- "Sometimes it's a little better to travel than to arrive." —Robert Pirsig (*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*)
- "Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." —Robert Frost
- "There's a fine line between being on the leading edge and being in the lunatic fringe." —Frank Armstrong (*Preparing for Tomorrow's Challenges*)
- "Education is not filling a bucket but lighting a fire." —William Butler Yeats

The one who chooses the quotation will give his or her comments first. From then on, speak only after paraphrasing the other to his/her satisfaction.

Observer Form

As you observe both persons, try to comment on each of these factors:

Person's name

Did it appear that effort was exerted? _____ There was motivation to listen? _____

Was there appropriate (check all those that apply)

_____ eye contact?

_____ forward lean?

_____ lack of distracting behaviors (pencil tapping, foot tapping)?

_____ body orientation (turned toward speaker)?

_____ facial expression?

_____ paraphrasing of facts?

_____ paraphrasing of feelings?

_____ asking non-threatening questions?

What would you say are this person's strength as a listener?

If you could make one comment on something for this listener to improve on, what would it be?

Analysis of Exercise

After your conversation, fill in the following:

1. What was your **initial** reaction to the exercise?
2. What non-verbal behaviours did you observe in yourself and your partner initially?
3. Did these change as time went on? How?
4. What **effect** did paraphrasing have on your conversation?
5. How did this conversation differ from other, more typical conversations? If you hadn't paraphrased, predict the direction and tone of the conversation that might have ensued.
6. What are some phrases you and your partner used to paraphrase?
7. How did you **feel** when your partner tried to paraphrase your answers and tried to understand what you were saying?
8. Were there any ways that your self-concept or your own perception influenced how you understood or misunderstood what your partner was saying? Explain.
9. How would you summarize what you learned from this exercise?

Activity 4: Paraphrasing Practice in Dyads

Purpose

To provide you with an opportunity to practise and sharpen listening and paraphrasing skills. The goal of this assignment is **not** self-disclosure, assistance, or friendship, but rather a clearer understanding of the **process** and requirements of listening actively.

Setting

Carry out the dyad interview in a place that is comfortable for you—cafeteria, outdoor tables, etc. Focus on the interview and try to tune out distractions.

Time

45–75 minutes

Instructions

1. Statements should be completed in the order in which they appear.
2. You may decline to answer any question; just say “pass.”
3. Treat information with respect and confidentiality; **take no notes**, listen and paraphrase for better understanding.

Opening: First, one person completes statement 1; then the second person completes the same statement. Do the same for statements 2–4. Alternate speaking and listening roles throughout the exercise.

1. One thing I like or dislike about my name is . . .
2. When we got this listening assignment I thought . . .
3. When we got this listening assignment I felt . . .
4. When I hear the word “listen” I think . . .

Body: From here on, one person will **complete** a statement and **expand** on it. The other person will listen and then **paraphrase**. Use your **own different words** to paraphrase what you think the other person is saying. Paraphrase both **thoughts and feelings**. The other person must either **verify** that he or she has been correctly paraphrased or **clarify** what the listener paraphrased so the “listener” can correctly paraphrase. The “listener” must correctly paraphrase to the satisfaction of the “speaker.” **Switch roles** so each person completes and expands on the same statement before going on to the next.

5. The best role model of listening I’ve ever known is/was . . . because . . .
6. If you ask my friends, they’d say that in terms of listening I . . .
7. When someone is really listening to me, I know they are listening because. .
8. When someone really listens to me I feel . . .
9. When someone isn’t listening to me I feel . . .
10. When someone isn’t really listening to me, I know they aren’t listening because. .
11. I find it very difficult to listen when . . .
12. I find it very difficult to listen to . . .
13. I find it easy to listen when . . .
14. I find it easy to listen to. . .

Break: Now stop and talk about how you're doing. Then practise paraphrasing some more.

15. If parents really listened to children, I think the impact on families would be that . . .
16. If world leaders listened to each other, I think the world would . . .
17. If bosses really listened to employees, I would predict that . . .
18. If politicians really listened to constituents, I would predict that . . .
19. For me, the hardest thing (barrier) about listening to significant others is that . . .
20. I do/don't think that listening is related to academic success because . . .
(Do you believe that students who get better grades are smarter?)
(Do you believe that students who get better grades listen better?)
(Do you believe that student success is dependent on listening ability or motivation?)
21. Listening courses should/should not be required in school because . . .
22. Listening courses should/should not be required of college instructors because . . .
23. In order to graduate, students should [not] demonstrate listening skills by . . .
24. Much of what I know and believe about listening I learned from. . .

Conclusion:

25. When I think of how we've completed this exercise I think/feel . . .

Now, thank your partner, and individually and apart from each other fill out the response form below.

Response Form

After your conversation, fill in the following:

1. What was your **initial** reaction to the exercise?
2. What non-verbal behaviours did you observe in yourself and your partner initially?
3. Did these change as time went on? How?
4. What **effect** did paraphrasing have on your conversation?
5. How did this conversation differ from other, more typical conversations? If you hadn't paraphrased, predict the direction and tone of the conversation that might have ensued.
6. What are some phrases you and your partner used to paraphrase?
7. How did you **feel** when your partner tried to paraphrase your answers and tried to understand what you were saying?
8. Were there any ways that your self-concept or your own perception influenced how you understood or misunderstood what your partner was saying? Explain.
9. How would you summarize what you learned from this exercise?

Activity 5: Listening Styles

Purpose

1. To identify various listening styles.
2. To evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each style in particular contexts.

Instructions

1. Read each of the following scenarios.
2. Construct a response that represents each of the styles of listening.
3. Consider the consequences of each style by responding to the questions.

Scenarios

1. Your best friend is telling you about his/her concerns about the person he/she has been seeing for two years. They had always planned to marry after college, but now your friend says, "I'm just feeling like we never really dated anyone else seriously. I love Pat, but I wonder if we should see other people while we're still in college. I don't think we'll know if we're right for each other if we don't really know anyone else."
 - advising response
 - judging response
 - analyzing response
 - questioning response
 - supporting response
 - prompting response
 - paraphrasing response

As a listener, which types of responses do you think would harm your relationship with the person you are listening to? Why?

Which response do you think would be best? Why?

2. Two friends have been advised by their physician that they fit the profile of someone at higher-than-average risk for Hepatitis B. Their health plan won't pay for the vaccines (about \$250). They are considering getting the vaccine, but are concerned about the cost. One says to you, "I know I'm in a high risk group, but I'm not sure there's much chance of getting it. I haven't really known anyone who has. What would you do?"
 - advising response
 - judging response
 - analyzing response
 - questioning response
 - supporting response
 - prompting response
 - paraphrasing response

As a listener, which types of responses do you think would harm your relationship with the person you are listening to? Why?

Which response do you think would be best? Why?

3. Your supervisor is considering allowing some employees (including you) to experiment with flexible hours. She is discussing the idea with you and a few other employees before work one morning. She says, “I’d really like to have some of you try flex hours and see the impact on morale and productivity. I know some of you have concerns about transportation and child care, and others are trying to take classes and work. But if some are allowed to try flex hours and all aren’t, it could create more hard feelings. I can’t make it department-wide without my district manager’s okay, and he’s not willing to try it. But I do have leeway to experiment on a small scale. I wonder what would be best.”
- advising response
 - judging response
 - analyzing response
 - questioning response
 - supporting response
 - prompting response
 - paraphrasing response

As a listener, which types of responses do you think would harm your relationship with the person you are listening to? Why?

Which response do you think would be best? Why?

4. A co-worker with whom you must coordinate projects says, “Ever since my brother was killed in that car accident, I just haven’t felt like this job is important. I haven’t felt that much of anything is important. I can’t focus or concentrate very well, and nothing matters much. I’m sorry I’ve caused you to miss some deadlines, too.”
- advising response
 - judging response
 - analyzing response
 - questioning response
 - supporting response
 - prompting response
 - paraphrasing response

As a listener, which types of responses do you think would harm your relationship with the person you are listening to? Why?

Which response do you think would be best? Why?

Activity 6: Exploring the Web

Listening Competencies

The National Communication Association has developed a document entitled [“Speaking and Listening Competencies for College Students”](#) which outlines a set of listening competencies, or behaviours and listening skills that are expected of students. Look at. Scroll down to **II. Listening Competencies** (page 9).

Compare and contrast the definition of listening given in your text with the definition in the paragraph at the beginning of the Listening Competencies.

1. What are the four competencies listed under **A. Attend with an open mind?**
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
2. Do you think there are others that should be listed? Explain.
3. List the competencies associated with being able to listen with critical comprehension (A through J).
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
 - e)
 - f)
 - g)
 - h)
 - i)
 - j)
4. In your own words, what does competency J-1 mean?
5. What term used in your book for a type of listening parallels the term “literal comprehension” as used in these competencies?
6. What term used in your book parallels the NCA’s term “critical comprehension”?
7. Compare and contrast the competencies shown for literal and for critical comprehension.
8. How would you explain the fact that there are ten competencies under critical listening compared to only four under literal comprehension?

9. Now, look at the standards (numbers 13–15) for [competent listeners in grades K–12](#) as defined by NCA (page 7). Do you think it is realistic for high school students to be able to have and demonstrate this knowledge? Why or why not?
10. Randall S. Davis, experienced ESL instructor, has put together over 100 listening quizzes at various levels of difficulty. Test your listening skills by visiting [Randall's Cyber ESL Listening Lab](#).

Name _____

Activity 7: Listening Self

Purpose

To apply the steps of listening to our lives to our own actions

Instructions

Keep a listening diary for one day. Pay close attention to the types of listening you must do, and the kinds you choose to engage in.

Name _____

Activity 8: Listening: Other

Purpose

To apply the steps of listening to the actions of someone close to us

Instructions

Think of the person whom you choose to confide in the most. Using your newly-learned modes of analysis, explain what listening styles they employ and why they work to make you want to utilize them as a sounding board or comforter.

Name _____

Activity 9: Sound to Knowledge

Purpose

To use the steps of listening to experience the ways that data becomes knowledge

Instructions

Take one piece of data from a class and starting from the point of hearing, trace its development as it goes through the five steps to remembering 48 hours later.

Activity 10: Listening to Music as Healing

Purpose

To apply the ideas of empathic listening to music and lyrics

Instructions

1. Have you ever heard of music therapy? Here's a solid place to start doing some research on what music therapy is about: <http://www.musictherapy.org/about/musictherapy>.
2. Do you think music therapy relates to the concepts of empathic listening that we have discussed in this chapter? If so, how? Do you think listening to music and lyrics could contribute to a person's self-awareness, well-being, or perception of self and others? If so, how? Write a short response (200–250 words) outlining your ideas about listening to music as a form of healing.
3. To extend this idea, consider your own relationship with music and lyrics. Do you have pieces of music that you like to listen to when you're in a particular mood? Would you recommend these pieces to others? Why or why not? If you wanted to cheer someone up, what music would you suggest? If you wanted to help someone see another side to a difficult problem, what music would you suggest? Discuss your ideas with a classmate or a member of your study group.

Activity 11: Back-to-Back Listening

Purpose

1. To experience engaged listening
2. To reflect on elements of communication that contribute to active listening
3. To relate listening to verbal and non-verbal communication

Instructions

1. For this activity, you require a partner. One person will be the speaker and one will be the listener. After you have completed the activity the first time, switch places.
2. Stand back to back with your partner and begin talking about a positive experience that has happened to you lately. As you talk, begin to step away from your partner. The partner should stay still but may need to talk to you. Move about five feet away; be sure to remain back to back at all times. Finish your story and then turn around and face your partner. Ask your partner to share his/her feelings at this time. Then talk about how you felt talking as you were moving.
3. Repeat the activity with your roles reversed. One again, when you and your partner are face to face, share your feelings about talking back to back.
4. Once you have completed these steps, do some further reflection. When you talk, do you like to look at your listener's eyes? How easy was it to concentrate on what you were saying? Did you find yourself missing the non-verbal cues of conversation? Is it important to you to be able to observe other non-verbal behaviour? When you were listening, did you have trouble concentrating on what your partner was saying? When you were speaking, were you concerned about what your partner was understanding?

Name _____

Activity 12: Listening to Your Own Insights

Purpose

1. To apply listening style to your own actions
2. To practise communicating reflectively and analytically

Instructions

As the textbook observes, most people use more than one listening style, but tend to have one or two preferred styles. Re-read the descriptions of the listening styles (pp. 192–193) and identify your dominant style(s). It may be easy to identify the strengths of this style, but what challenges does your dominant style pose for you? Pulling from your personal history, write a short anecdote about how your dominant listening style has gotten you into trouble and offer tips for others to avoid similar troubles. Post your writing on your course blog or pitch it to your campus newspaper.

Activity 13: Sharing What You've Learned

Purpose

1. To practise paraphrasing skills
2. To reinforce your learning by teaching someone else

Instructions

Imagine your job is to help train younger students in peer support skills. Paraphrase content from this chapter's section on empathic listening (pp. 204–215) to create a short lesson for students in Grade 5 to learn about listening to support others. Keep in mind the listening skills of a young audience. Then, if you have the opportunity, use the material you've prepared to actually teach some young people to listen empathically. (If you can't teach anyone else, just remember that effective paraphrasing is a valuable skill—in both listening and academic writing—that requires practice to develop.)

Name _____

Activity 14: What We Learn from Significant Others

Purpose

1. To connect concepts from this chapter to earlier learning
2. To examine listening styles analytically
3. To use intrapersonal communication to reinforce learning

Instructions

Think about the listening skills of one of the significant people in your life—an important relative, a former teacher, a coach, a close friend, or someone else who has shaped your self-concept. What has this person modelled to you about listening? How can you use what you've learned from this significant other to help you advance in your academic, personal, or professional goals? If you keep a journal, use this reflection as the starting point for journaling the next time you write.