

Hearing—the process, function, or power of perceiving sound.

Listening—to pay attention to sound. To hear with thoughtful attention.

ANALYZING FACTORS THAT AFFECT LISTENING

1. **Your Physical and Mental State**—Attentive listening requires energy and focus.
 - A. Listening can be affected by personal problems
 - B. Listening can be affected by your physical state
 1. hunger
 2. fatigue
 3. illness
2. **Speaker**—Some people base their willingness to listen on how well they respond to the personality of the speaker
 - A. personality
 1. traits
 2. attitudes
 3. habits
 - B. Some people attract us; some annoy us.
 - C. Good listeners prefer dynamic speakers, but you could miss some entertainment or knowledge if you respond only to a speaker's personality and characteristics or to the manner of delivery.
3. **Your Prejudices**—a “judgment” or a bias—a belief you already formed that may not be grounded in facts.
 - A. It is natural to have opinions about ideas, events, and issues.
 - B. Don't let your opinions block out real listening by starting out with fixed ideas of what is right or wrong, interesting or boring.
4. **Environment**—physical setting affects listening
 - A. Temperature
 - B. Light
 - C. Noise
 - D. Space
 - E. Seating
 - F. Other people

HOW TO CONTROL FACTORS THAT AFFECT LISTENING

1. **Be energetic and focused.** Whenever you must be prepared to listen well, eat and sleep beforehand. As you listen, push aside distracting thoughts, plans, or worries.
2. **Focus on the message.** Listen to what is being said. Try to overlook distracting mannerisms that the speaker may have or annoying qualities of the speaker's voice.
3. **Keep an open mind.** Don't shut out any topic or viewpoint. Be ready to learn something new or deepen your appreciation of your own position.
4. **Do what you can to adjust the physical environment.** When you can, choose your position in the room. Adjust the temperature and lighting, if this possible. Block out noises or other interferences as much as you can.

BAD HABITS THAT MAKE FOR BAD LISTENING

1. Tuning out dull topics

Many listeners decide early on that a topic is simply not interesting. This decision leads to the (“My eyes Glaze Over”) syndrome. The writer G.K. Chesterton once said that there is no such thing as an uninteresting subject; there are only uninterested people.

Don’t let yourself become a lazy listener. If what you are listening to doesn’t seem immediately appealing, listen for something you want or need—an idea, a quote, a story, or even a joke. An energetic listener can 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 the person, we pretend to pay attention, though all the while our minds are 1000 miles away. Don’t assume that all a speaker really wants from us is that we look like we are listening.

The listener who is faking attention usually looks as if he were made of cement. When the speaker finishes, the faker awakes with a jerk of the head and a dazed look. Meanwhile, good listeners lean forward with interest, maintain good eye contact, and react in a natural way with smiles, nods, or questioning looks.

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 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 of activity around us instead of the speaker in front of us. How often have you let your parents’ words fall on deaf ears while you were busy watching television?

If possible, choose a suitable environment for your communication—someplace relatively free of noise and commotion (it’s easy to pull someone aside, even at school, for a relatively private conversation). But if that’s not possible, do what you can to change the environment—shut the door, close the window, or ask your neighbors to quiet down.

4. Criticizing delivery or physical appearance.

Many people abandon their good listening habits when they become overly critical of the speaker’s physical appearance or delivery. Regardless of who the speaker is, the content of his message is always far more important than the form of his delivery. Don’t use poor physical appearance or speaking style as an alibi for not listening. Don’t let yourself be put off by someone’s manner, accent, or clothing. Be generous enough to overlook lisps, slurs, and mumbles.

You can’t expect the speaker always to be coherent. Listen for patterns or key words. Try to find an underlying structure in what the person is saying to help you sort out the important ideas from the details. The fact that a speech is unorganized doesn’t mean that it isn’t worth something. There may be valuable ideas lurking in the muddle, but you will have to work that much harder to find them.

5. **Jumping to conclusions.**

Be patient. Even if you think you know what the other person is going to say, restrain yourself. Many listeners are quick to judge before they have carefully heard and understood what is meant. Be sure you understand before you criticize.

Occasionally, personal biases against a speaker's background or position 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, "grade point average," "overdue report," or "parent conference," you might experience a strong emotional reaction, one that blocks out your ability to listen. In such cases, you need to make an extra effort to resist making judgments until the speech is over. Your memory of key facts or arguments may be wiped out by the first rush of hot blood.

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 threatens our deepest feelings or convictions, our brains become over stimulated and our ears go temporarily deaf. Instead of listening, we lay plans to trap the speaker or try to think of a question that will embarrass them. Perhaps we simply turn to thoughts that support our own feelings and tune the speaker out. In any event, listening comes to screeching halt.

When you feel your emotional barriers begin to rise, stay calm. Wait until the talker has finished. Then, and only then, review the speaker's main ideas and make up your mind how to respond.

7. **Interrupting**

"The reason why so few people are agreeable in conversation," wrote the French philosopher La Rochefoucauld, "is that each is thinking more about what he intends to say than about what others are saying, and we never listen when we are eager to speak." To try to find out if you spend most of your listening time thinking about what you want to say. Interrupting someone is an almost certain sign that you don't know or care about what the other person is saying. Check yourself to see if you interrupt people often or try to change the subject frequently. We all risk becoming first-class bores when we interrupt.

Why We Don't Listen?

Message Overload—The amount of speech most of us encounter every day makes careful listening to everything we hear impossible. Many of us spend almost half the time we're awake listening to verbal messages—from teachers, co-workers, friends, family, salespeople, and total strangers, not to mention radio and television. This means that we often spend five hours or more a day listening to people talk. It's impossible to keep our attention totally focused for this amount of time. Therefore, we have to let our attention wander at times.

Preoccupation—Another reason we don't always listen carefully is that we're often wrapped up in personal concerns that are of more immediate importance to us than the messages others are sending. It's hard to pay attention to someone else when you're anticipating an upcoming test or thinking about the wonderful time you had last night with good friends. Yet we still feel we have to "listen" politely to others.

Rapid Thought—Listening carefully is also difficult for a physiological reason. Although we're capable of understanding speech at rates up to 600 words per minute, the average person speaks between 100 and 140 words per minute. Thus, we have a lot of "spare time" to spend with our minds while someone is talking. The trick is to use this spare time to understand the speaker's ideas better rather than letting your attention wander.

Effort—Listening effectively is hard work. The physical changes that occur during careful listening show the effort it takes: the heart rate quickens, respiration increases, and body temperature rises. Notice that these changes are similar to the body's reaction to physical effort. This is no coincidence, for listening carefully to a speaker can be just as taxing as more obvious efforts.

External Noise—The physical world in which we live often presents distractions that make it hard to pay attention to others. The sound of traffic, music, **other's speech**, and the like interfere with our ability to hear as well. Also, fatigue or other forms of discomfort can distract us from paying attention to a speaker's remarks.

Hearing Problems—Sometimes a person's listening ability suffers from a physiological hearing problem.

Faulty Assumptions—We often make incorrect assumptions that lead us to believe we're listening attentively when quite the opposite is true. When the subject is a familiar one, it's easy to think that you've "**heard it all before**" although in fact the speaker is offering new information. A related problem arises when you assume that a speaker's thoughts are too simple or obvious to deserve careful attention when the truth is that you ought to be listening carefully. At other times just the opposite occurs: You think that another's comments are too complex to be able to understand (as in some lectures), and so you give up trying to make sense of them. A final mistake people often make is to assume that a subject is unimportant and to stop paying attention when they ought to be listening carefully.

Lack of Apparent Advantages—It often appears that we have more to gain by speaking than by listening. One big advantage of speaking is that it gives you a chance to control others' thoughts and actions. Whatever your goal—to be hired by a prospective boss, to convince others to vote for the candidate of your choice, or to describe the way you want your haircut—the **key to success seems to be the ability to speak well**. Another apparent advantage of speaking is the chance it provides to gain the admiration, respect, or liking of others. Tell jokes, and everyone will think you're a real wit. Offer advice, and they'll be grateful for your help. Tell them all you know, and they'll be impressed by your wisdom. But keep quiet...and you think you'll look like a worthless nobody. Finally, talking gives you the chance to release energy in a way that listening can't. When you're frustrated, the chance to talk about your problems can often help you feel better. In the same way, you can often lessen your anger by letting it out verbally.

Lack of Training—Even if we want to listen well, we're often hampered by a lack of skill. **A common but mistaken belief is that listening is like breathing—an activity that people do well naturally.** The truth is that listening is a skill much like speaking: Virtually everybody does it, though few people do it well.

TYPES OF NONLISTENING

Pseudolistening—is an imitation of the real thing. Good pseudolisteners give the appearance of being attentive. They look you in the eye, nod and smile at the right times, and may even answer you occasionally. Behind that appearance of interest, however, something entirely different is going on, for pseudolisteners use a polite façade to mask thoughts that have nothing to do with what the speaker is saying. Often they ignore you because of something on their mind that's more important to them than your remarks. Other times they may simply be bored or think that they've heard what you have to say before and so tune out your remarks. Whatever the reasons, the significant fact is that pseudolistening is really counterfeit communication.

Stage-hogging—Stage-hogs are interested only in expressing their ideas and don't care about what anyone else has to say. These people will allow you to speak from time to time, but only so that they can catch their breath, use your remarks as a basis for their own babbling, or keep you from running away. Stage-hogs really aren't having a conversation when they dominate others with their talk; they're making a speech and at the same time probably making an enemy.

Selective Listening—Selective listeners respond only to the parts of your remarks that interest them, rejecting everything else. All of us are selective listeners from time to time, as, for instance, when we screen out radio or TV commercials waiting for the music or TV show to commence again.

Insulated Listening—Insulated listeners are the opposite of selective listeners. Instead of looking for something, these people avoid it. Whenever a topic arises that they'd rather not deal with, insulated listeners simply fail to hear or acknowledge it. You remind them about a problem, perhaps an unfinished job, poor grades, or the like, and they'll nod or answer you and then promptly forget what you've just said.

Defensive Listening—Defensive listeners take things you intended as innocent comments as personal attacks. The teenager who perceives his parents' questions about his friends and activities as distrustful snooping is a defensive listener, as is the insecure breadwinner who explodes any time his mate mentions money or the touchy parent who views any questions about their children as a threat. It's fair to assume that many defensive listeners are suffering from shaky presenting images and avoid admitting it by projecting their own insecurities onto others.

Ambushing—Ambushers listen carefully to you, but only because they're collecting information they'll use to attack what you say. The cross-examining prosecution attorney is a good example of an ambusher. Needless to say, using this kind of strategy will justifiably initiate defensiveness in the other person.

Insensitive Listening—Insensitive listeners offer the final example of people who don't receive another person's messages clearly. As we've said before, people often don't express their thoughts or feelings openly but instead communicate them through a subtle and unconscious choice of words or nonverbal clues or both. Insensitive listeners aren't able to look beyond the words and behavior to understand their hidden meanings. Instead, they take a speaker's remarks at face value.

Speech Questions
(part A, pages 1 thru 4)

Please answer on your own paper!!

1. List and describe four factors that affect listening.
2. What four things should one do to control factors that affect listening.
3. What are seven habits that make for bad listening.
4. List each of the “bad” habits and describe what one should do to in each case to overcome that “bad” habit.
5. List and describe nine reasons we don’t listen.
6. List and describe the seven types of “nonlistening”.