

Role of Listening Skills in Enhancing Professional Communication

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Abstract

"It is the province of knowledge to speak, and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen."

As we all know listening skill is the most important skill among all four skills ; reading ,writing ,speaking and listening . But surprisingly this skill is very neglected skill among students The purpose of this article is ; first a theoretical discussion about listening skills and second is to provide some guidelines for the improvement of listening skills for students .Effective listening is conscious listening when the listener hears both verbal and non-verbal communication that is being transmitted by the sender . It also through some Light on Understanding of Facts /Filters That Influence Effective Listening Among Students.

KEYWORDS: listening skills; effective listening; fallacies about listening; types of listening;

INTRODUCTION

Oliver Wendell Holmes in USA says that multiple studies have been conducted with different populations on how much time is spent on listening and communicating. It is thought that almost 2\3 of our time devoted to listening. So, no communication process is complete without listening. Many studies reveal that business people spend nearly 45% of their working hours in listening. According to management guru Tom Peters, listening is an essential management and leadership skill.

Listening is an everyday affair, despite that, or probably owing to that, many of us do not pay attention to listening. Listening is the counterpart of speech because without hearing, the speech has no meaning. Listening skill is related to auditory senses whereas the speaking ability is related to lingual sense. These skills functions simultaneously and both are interrelated. The speech generates a sound which reaches to the audio sense. The sound makes sense or meaning by the mental understanding of the listener. If the listener is attentive to the sound, he can understand the sense and meaning of the speaker.

ART OF LISTENING

Listening is different from hearing. We hear many sounds throughout the day out registering most of them. Cars honking, birds chirping, kids playing and people talking are examples of such sounds. In such cases, we do not pay attention to those sounds because we are not interested in them. Listening is as important as talking. In good listening, one should encourage the speaker. Listening needs lot of energy. Therefore, it is necessary to spend some time on the skill of listening. Effective listening depends upon our understanding of the speaker, his attitude, his purpose and many other qualities.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEARING AND LISTENING

Listening is different from hearing. According to Aristotle, a listener wants to know three things about the speaker: his wisdom, his personality and the degree of his good will. If the speaker does not possess any one of these qualities, he cannot expect to get a favourable hearing. Many of us think listening and hearing is the same thing, but there is much difference between them. The hearing is a psychological process involving the vibration of sounds waves on our ear drums and reacting to the electrochemical impulses carried from the inner ear to the central auditory system of the brain. The brain transmits this sounds of what we hear. This process is automatic and fast. So, hearing means, that some sounds going around us and our ears catching that sound. However, listening is something more than that. Your ears permit you to listen to sounds, but your mind enables to recognize some of these sounds as words and expressions and interprets them into thoughts or ideas. Your interpretation ability helps you to react to the hearing. For listening, you require physical cues but for hearing you do not need physical cues regarding eyes and gestures- to get the message efficiently. Many times, we do not consider physical cues at the time of listening, but sometimes these cues are important to hear; speaker's body language, facial expressions may alter the meaning of the message. Therefore, we can define listening as hearing with understanding interpreting and then respond to that.

THE NEED OF BETTER LISTENING:

"We have two ears and one tongue so that we may hear more and speak less".

---Diagenes.

We have four skills in communication skills: Reading, writing, speaking, and listening. For professionals, we always emphasize and give instructions on writing, reading and speaking. We always neglect listening skills. Various studies explain the significance of listening as an important communication skill. Researches show many of us spend seven out of ten minutes, in some form of communication out of these seven minutes (70% of the time we are awake) 10% is spent writing, 15% reading, 30% speaking, and 45% listening.

So, by going through this study, we can understand that we spend maximum time of our communication in listening, but very few of us practice to be an effective listener. Those who do regular practice can increase learning potential, safety, enrich personal relations, grasp and understand the matter spoken by the speaker very quickly.

Effective listening is required in many fields of our life. Like air force, consider missile crew members who have the capability to unleash weapons of incredible destruction. The primary communication authorizing their launch is a coded spoken transmission. Consider also command post, security police, and medical personnel who receive information. Primarily through the spoken word. A simple listening error in any of these areas could result in lost man-hours, equipment and our lives.

Now think of it, if you are not an effective listener, you cannot do most routine off communication and office activities efficiently. Higher officers give directions to office personnel. If you ask for office clarifications- you will be considered inattentive, obtuse and sluggish. So, you have to listen attentively at the first time. Surveys show that air

force managers always have effective listening skills and they also want same in their subordinates.

Not just air force managers but business organizations are also recognizing the value of listening. Many senior officers are accepting that poor listening is a major problem nowadays. They accept that listening is very crucial skill to get success. Similarly, effective listening is imperative for students, as they spend most of their time listening to lectures. Listening has its importance in many places, in the home, office, social gatherings at school, college in clubs, etc. it is important because there is a lot more to listening than just understanding the meaning of words.

Fallacies about listening

People have many misconceptions regarding effective listening. They think their listening skills are good; They do not have any problem with listening that is why they do not put efforts for the improvement of their listening skills. By discarding the following myths you can avoid this trap:

Fallacy one: Listening is not my problem:

People think there are better listeners in comparison to their family members and friends. As I am a teacher, I think students must listen to their teacher to understand the subject. When I asked them to do a self-analysis of their listening skill out of 10 they give themselves 7.5 and when I asked them to let your group members there rated them 4.1. All students think that listening is a problem belonging to someone else. They should understand listening is not just someone's problem- it is ours.

Fallacy 2: Listening and hearing are the same:

If you hear efficiently, it does not mean you are a good listener. Having good hearing does not facilitate one's perception of sound, but good listeners focus on meaning. Hearing is a reception of sound, listening is to understand the meaning to the sound. Hearing is passive, listening is active. So, one should know the basic difference between hearing and listening.

Fallacy 3: Good readers are good listeners:

Many people mistakenly believe that all good readers are necessarily good listeners. When we read the document, factors like margins, pictures, graphs matter. On the other hand, listening is influenced by the speakers reading style, vocal emphasis, pauses. So, fact is that being a good reader does not necessarily mean that you are a good listener.

Fallacy 4: Smarter people are better listeners:

People think smarter people are better listeners. Those who are having limited intelligence are unable to understand the information contained in the message. Reversely, those who are having high intelligence levels can understand the process easily. This is not true. So, the fact is, smarter people are not necessarily better listeners.

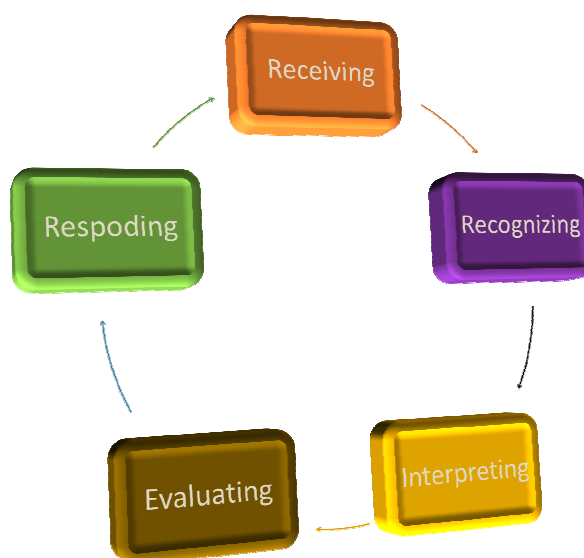
Fallacy 5: Listening improves with age:

This is not true because our listening ability decreases due to our bad listening habits. These are some common bad habits like self-centeredness stereotyping, preoccupation prejudice, etc., so there is no role of age in listening.

Fallacy v: Listening skills are difficult to learn:

Actually, listening is not difficult but learning to apply the skills consistently does take hard work. However, to become an expert of listening one has to do hard work and continuous practice.

The Process of Listening:



1. Receiving:

It is physically hearing the message. It refers to the response caused by sound waves stimulating the sensory receptors of the ear; hearing is a perception of sound waves; you must hear to listen, but you need not listen to hear. Basic live listener selects those words that he thinks are important and converts it into message. At that time, his/her mind is open for any inflow of information. The brain selects important messages according to the listener's priority.

2. Recognising:

in this step listener recognises the pattern of sounds. He tries to recognize every word and symbol. In listening, verbal and nonverbal symbols are very difficult to understand

i) Verbal symbols: verbal communication means communicating through is spoken and written medium. Some barriers Abstract for the understanding of verbal communication the same words mean different things to different people. This is a very common barrier. It may occur when two people communicate. Different words sometimes mean the same thing. These barriers can be overcome by realizing the following facts: meanings are not in words, meanings are in people. We listen very attentively when we considered the message about its source. Good listeners pay attention to who is the speaker. This factor motivates the listener to understand the message.

ii) Non-verbal symbols: Sometimes, apart from verbal communication we tried to convey a message by non-verbal communication. We communicate nonverbally through action factors, non-action factors and vocal factors. Some barriers are involved in this process:

a. Sometimes we misinterpret non-verbal symbols. Our facial expressions, gestures movements affect their meaning. Sometimes we can be misinterpreted by the clothes we wear, the cars we drive. The things we use at our working place convey messages about us.

b. Sometimes, through quality or variety of voice, we can be misinterpreted.

3. Interpreting:

Now listener starts decoding the message to derive meaning. For interpreting the message, the listener employs his/ her ideas, values and beliefs. Multiple barriers occur at this stage.

4. Evaluating:

For this stage, I would say that those who actually participate in the listening process can take part in this process. The listener, after understanding what the message actually means, draws inferences. A great critical listening takes place at this stage.

5. Responding:

At this stage the listener response to the message. He/ She provides valuable feedback to the speaker by showing acceptance or rejection, understanding or confusion or even indifference through his/ her nonverbal cues.

Types of listening:

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Active | The message is assimilated through the listener's participation |
| Marginal | Superficial listening |
| Projective | Listening within the listeners on frame of reference |
| Sensitive | Attempt made to match the receiver's perception |
| Attentive | Showing attention, listening carefully |
| Passive | Hearing but not listening |
| Critical | It is the process of listening to understand to make evaluations and judgement about the content of the message |
| Appreciative | For deriving Aesthetic pleasure, as we do when listening to a comedian, musician, or entertainer. |
| Empathetic | Ability to listen to others and feel for the other person. when will listen to distrust friend who wants to vent his feelings, we provide emotional and moral support in the form of empathetic listening. When psychiatrist listens to their patients, their listening is classified as empathetic listening. |
| Discriminative | Listener distinguishes between verbal and nonverbal. |
| Relationship | Listen to develop or sustain relationship. |
| Dialogic | Listening through conversation and engaged in interchange of ideas and information in which we actively seek to learn more about the person and how they speak. |

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Therapeutic | Seeking to understand what the other person is feeling, demonstrating empathy. |
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How to develop Listening Skills:

Effective communication is not just sharing your ideas and feelings with others. It is called active listening because with this skill, you can understand what others are saying. So, for professional life everyone has to develop listening skills. Because if you listen carefully, then you can solve many issues. Today we have lots of new techniques to improve listening skills .

1. Maintain (Inviting) body language:

Always have your body language like a person to whom people can come and discuss. If you sit your arm in front of your chest, it means you do not want to make Conversation. Moreover, if during conversations, you keep yawning and busy to talk to another person, the speaker can assume that you are not listening. Here are some body language tips to show that you are listening.

- If you understand and agree on some point, you can nod your head.
- Tilt your head when hears a new and interesting information.
- At appropriate time, you can laugh and smile. raising your eyebrows every once in a while

2. Maintain eye contact:

The old saying that "The eyes are a reflection of your inner self" holds true in most cases. Surprisingly, eye contact is a sign of good listener. When you keep eye contact with the speaker, it means that you are focused and are paying attention. Maintaining eye contact is a way of letting the speaker know that the audience is paying attention and respect to the speaker.

3. Listen without distraction:

For good listening, one should minimize the distractions. Distractions can be in the form of unwanted sound. Noise is an unwanted sound. It is a great impediment to make communication. Masquerade and assort from the background noises like Telephone Bell or fire brigade alarm on the road, room is too hot or too cold, seats are not comfortable, lighting of the room, etc.

Remedy: Eliminate source of noise whenever possible. Turn off cell phones and television sets.

4. Listening to body language

Through body language, one can convey lot more messages rather than actual words. By observing the body language of the speaker, you can judge what is speaker is trying to communicate besides what their words convey.

Maybe you do not have the knowledge of every subject or topic, but listening with proper attention you can learn other points of view different from your own, and you can cultivate listening skills in your personality.

5. Be open minded:

For effective listening, do not make any opinion about the speaker at the starting. Wait until the speaker is finished. If once you imagine someone to be benighted, non-commonsensible, or shoal, you immediately stop listening to that person. You may disagree with someone, but you should not find out until you listen to their ideas and opinions.

6. Sympathizing rather than empathizing:

Sympathy is not the same as empathy. Your sympathies when you feel sorry for the experiences of another, to empathize, put yourself in the shoes of the other person.

7. Use an active listening attitude:

By using an active listening attitude, you can motivate yourself for positive listening practices. Active listening attitude means admitting that listening is also important as speaking in communication, the realization that listening is important for professional development.

8. Don't interrupt:

We should not interrupt the speakers. If we do so, it sends a negative feeling like the speaker's message is not important. You do not have time to hear how you think or feel.

9. Determine the central idea of message:

To be an effective listening one should listen in such a way that you can summaries what you gleaned to be the central idea(s).

10. Give feedback appropriately:

To show that you understand give some non-verbal clues like uh-huh, nod etc.

11. Become a whole-body listener:

In her book the fine art of small top Debra Fine encourages readers to listen with their eyes and heart "Listening is more than just hearing." Fine writes. It is a level of involvement that goes beyond reacting the contents of the conversation.

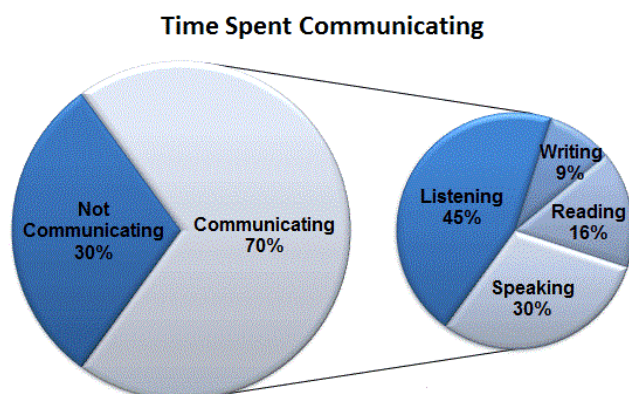
12. Practice and practice:

If your listening skills are not good, try to include listening activities in your daily schedule. Engage yourself:

-You can ask questions for clarification when the speaker has finished

Barriers to listening:

. Here are some common barriers to active listening. However, with some practice, they can be overcome. Moreover, the average person spends 70% in communication and 30% listening.



The following factors can create barriers to listening:

1. Content: When listeners are already having lot of knowledge, less knowledge about the contain they do not pay attention

Remedies:

- Have positive attitude towards the message
 - select your area of interest in the message
 - to motivate yourself to learn new concepts
 - do not sit just like a passive listener
2. Speaker:

a. Delivery: Delivering a message is also an important art. When a speaker delivers his/her message, his /her accent, tone, emotions, speed, clarity affect the interpretation of the message.

b. Attitude towards the speaker: Your listening depends on your attitude towards speaker than the information presented.

Remedy: Your focus should be on "what" of the message, not the "who or how".

3. Medium:

Distance and circumstances: For this different types of listening are required:

when speaker is not visible → Least effort

when is, speaker is visible but not physically present → Lots of effort

in face to face interaction → Maximum effort

This is due to variety of both verbal and nonverbal stimuli increase.

Remedy: Recognise the importance for better understanding, and develop listening effort.

4. Distractions: Some listeners have very poor concentration while listening. Psychological studies indicate that a listener's attention span is sometimes not

more than 2 or 3 seconds. They get distracted even with the slightest sound of the opening and closing of doors, people whispering to each other, vehicle outside, voice inflexions, lights, etc.

Remedies:

- Identifying distractions
- Increasing concentration

5. Mindset:

Our attitude is made by physical, emotional and mental characteristics. Try to avoid getting emotional at the time of review situation because the review is about the reviewee, not you.

Remedy

- Respect others freedom of beliefs and values
- You should realise the fact that when you are listening, it does not mean that you agree with it. To understand the speaker's point of view you should not have personal biases.

6. Different language and accent:

Language is a significant barrier to listening. For example, Indian audience can follow British accent easily, whereas people of America can follow American accent easily.

Remedies:

- One should realise that different words may have different meanings for different people according to the content evaluate the word.
- Remember that message is in mind, not in the word.

7. Listening speed vs. talking speed:

The average speaking rate is 125 to 150 words per minute, whereas thinking speed is in the region of 500 words per minute. We all think faster than we realise. The result is that when we listen to someone, we quickly jump to the conclusion.

Remedy:

- Utilise extra time to think over the message
- Recognise the purpose
- make a list of question for better understanding and feedback

8. Feedback

Often, without fully understanding, we try to give immature comments and evaluations. Such comments, which may be coloured with suspicion and defensiveness can hinder speakers, diverting them into tangents.

Remedy:

You should give supportive feedback through appropriate is smiling Eye contact and animation, nodding, leaning forward, verbal reinforcements such as ' I see", or" yes". These must be timed so as to assist rather than hinder the speaker.

9. Evading the different types:

This is our tendency to listen to easy and familiar messages, while avoiding difficult and unfamiliar messages.

Remedy:

We should train ourselves and develop enough patience to listen.

10. Our excitement:

When will listen to a statement to which we disagree, our mind gets engaged by a chain of thoughts. That is why we spend too much time on thinking about the counter arguments, and we tend to lose track of the speaker's ideas.

11. Fear:

The fear here is a significant barrier to listening. Those who have fear during conversation are not likely to listen.

Remedy:

- Listen without fear because fear can worsen the situation.
- Maintain calmness to face any situation
- Take a deep breath to overcome fear

11. Overload of message:

If the message is lengthy or illogical, It is tough to listen to it with full concentration. Lengthy messages make listening ineffective.

12.ELT Podcasting :
A digital audio file made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device, typically available as a series, new instalments of which can be received by subscribers automatically.

Podcasting has now become popular as an alternative way of providing 'radio' type content that can be listened to whenever, wherever and as many times as the listener wants. The idea that a podcast can be produced by just about anyone with access to the Internet has generated a lot of interest in educational circles. In ELT, the appeal is not only in providing additional listening input for students, but that students themselves can

become involved in recording and producing the podcast.

Types of ELT podcasts

There are various types of podcasts you can use with your students:

- **Authentic** podcasts
Podcasts that are not aimed at ELT students can often be a rich source of listening. Most of these will only be suitable for use with higher level students, but others, such as Sushi Radio are made by non-native speakers of English and their length (5-10 minutes) make them ideal for use with classes.
- **Teacher** podcast
This is produced by the teachers for their students, With this without any confines teachers can reach to their students . one example of teacher podcast is <http://vandita.podomatic.com> .this podcast shows how a teacher in India uses podcasts to help her students prepare for . These podcasts also help students to learn by producing listening content that is not available elsewhere, or that gives a local flavour. The Daily Idiom and Madrid Young Learner podcasts are two very different types of teacher-produced podcast.
- **Student** podcasts
This is Produced by students, but often with teacher help, your students can listen to these and experience the culture and hear about the lives and interests of other students from around the world. An interesting example is the podcast created by the Fudan university high school students in China.

In addition to student podcasts, there are also others that can be useful for teacher professional development.

- **Educator** podcasts
Shows such as Bit by Bit are reflective podcasts that cover methodological matters as well as podcasting for ELT teachers. Ed Tech Talk is a more general show about educational technology, which is recorded live (this is called webcasting) using free Internet telephony and then provided as a podcast.

More podcasts for students can be found by looking at directories such as Englishcaster, which is directed at students and teachers of English, or other more general directories such as Podcast Alley, which has a large educational section.

Using podcasts in class and for homework
Most podcasts use a weblog as their homepage. When you visit the blog you should see links to audio files. Podcasts can then be downloaded and transferred to a portable mp3 player, recorded to CD-ROM for use in class, or students can be directed to them for self-study purposes on the computer. In addition, many of the ELT podcasts come with

transcripts to help understanding.

Conclusion

Great leaders are good listeners Every good communication starts with good listening. That's why one should pay close attention to the facts /filters that inhabit effective listening in the same manner as we listen (teach) other content. Those institutions who are focusing on multilingual and communication elements will be having capability to provide demands of industry and society. . By using effective listening students can achieve their goal efficiently.

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