

## LISTENING SKILL IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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**Abstract:** Strong communication skills are a valued trait in every industry and listening skills are essential part of effective communication. It can be beneficial to assess and strengthen one’s listening skills in professional situations and beyond. In this article, we discuss why listening skills are important and observe ten effective ways you can improve your own listening skills.

**Key words:** Listening, essential, basic understanding, influence, serve, motivate, interaction, enables, operate efficiently, cultivate patience, conjure up.

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is key to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood. As a result, communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated. If there is one communication skill students should aim to master, then listening is it. Good listening skills also have benefits in our personal lives, including: A great number of friends and social networks, improved self-esteem and confidence, higher grades at school and in academic work, and even better health and general well-being. Studies have shown that, whereas speaking raises blood pressure, attentive listening can bring it down. Listening is not the same as hearing. Hearing refers to the sounds that enter your ears. It is a physical process that, provided you do not have any hearing problems, happens automatically. Listening, however, requires more than that: it requires focus and concentrated effort, both mental and sometimes physical as well. Listening means paying attention not only to the story, but how it is told, the use of language and voice, and how the other person uses his or her body. In other words, it means being aware of both verbal and non-verbal messages. Your ability to listen effectively depends on the degree to which you perceive and understand these messages. Listening is not a passive process. In fact, the listener can, and should, be at least as engaged in the process as the speaker. The phrase “active listening” is used to describe this process of being fully involved.

Ways to improve your listening skills

It can be beneficial to evaluate your current listening skills to determine areas for improvement. Here are some ways to improve your listening skills:

#### 1. Maintain eye contact with the speaker

When you are listening to someone talk, you should avoid looking out a window, texting or scrolling through your phone, or scanning a computer screen. Limit any unnecessary distractions, provide the speaker with your undivided attention and make an effort to look at them. This provides them with a nonverbal cue that you are interested in what they are saying, which encourages them to continue expressing themselves.

Consider that the speaker may not look at you because they might be shy, feel uncertain, or their culture may not use direct eye contact for communication. You should continue to face the speaker even if they do not look at you.

Related: [How To Improve Your Eye Contact](#)

#### 2. Visualize what the speaker is saying

Try to conjure up mental images of what the speaker is talking about while you are listening to help retain information. This may be a literal picture or other concepts that relate to the topic. This will help you to remember keywords and phrases when you listen for long periods. Visualizing what the speaker is saying will also help you to not have to prepare for what to say next. If you happen to lose focus, make sure to immediately refocus.

Related: [15 Visualization Techniques To Help You Achieve Your Goals](#)

#### 3. Limit judgments

Listen without criticizing the speaker in your mind while they talk. Even if the message causes you agitation or alarm, try to avoid thinking about negative or judgmental comments because this compromises your ability to listen. You also want to listen with an open mind and understand that the person is giving you their perspective. You may realize that they make more sense as they continue to talk to you, and you won't know the full story without listening.

#### 4. Don't interrupt

Everyone speaks and processes information at different rates. If someone is delivering their message slowly, try to cultivate patience and wait for them to finish before trying to rush them along by guessing the next thing they are going to say or replying before they have finished talking. Interrupting sends the wrong message to the speaker. It may suggest that what you have to say is more important, that you don't care about what they are saying or that the conversation is a competition.

It is also important to refrain from offering solutions. Most often people just want you to listen. However, if you have a brilliant idea, you may consider asking if you can share your ideas before you offer your solution.

Related: [11 Strategies To Use When Someone Cuts You off in Conversation](#)

5. Wait for a pause to ask questions

You may not understand everything someone says to you. It is best to wait until they pause to ask them to back up and provide clarification for the topic or phrase you misunderstood.

6. Ask clarifying questions

Asking clarifying questions helps to keep the conversation on topic. You only want to ask questions that pertain to your understanding rather than ask a question about something that is not related to the main idea the speaker is trying to get across. When you ask clarifying questions without interrupting, it shows that you are listening, paying attention and willing to discuss things further.

7. Empathize with the speaker

Empathy is essential to effective listening. You should mirror the emotions the speaker has. For instance, if their face conveys sadness or joy then your facial expressions and words should also convey similar emotions. Empathizing with the speaker takes concentration and expends energy, but it allows for open communication and establishes relationships.

8. Pay attention to nonverbal cues

Some of the communication that takes place between individuals is nonverbal. You can learn a great deal about someone through their body language and tone of voice when they are communicating with you. It is easy to detect boredom, enthusiasm or irritation on someone's face when they talk depending on their eyes, mouth and position of their shoulders. Therefore, listening also includes paying attention to nonverbal cues. It helps you to make inferences based on what a person means when they are talking to you.

Related: [Understanding Body Language and the Workplace](#)

9. Provide the speaker with feedback

Feedback can be verbal and nonverbal. You can use verbal feedback by saying things like, "I understand that must be difficult," or "OK." You can use nonverbal cues such as nodding your head and using appropriate facial expressions.

The goal is to send signals to the speaker so they know that you are actively listening. In a situation where someone is giving you tasks, make sure to repeat the task list back to the speaker so they know you understand what to do. Writing down what they say also shows attentiveness.

Related: [10 Examples of Constructive Feedback in the Workplace](#)

10. Practice listening

You can practice listening by being aware of what you do when someone is talking to you. Do this by writing down what you heard, understood and acknowledged after an in-person interaction with someone, or listen to audiobooks or podcasts without any text in front of you. Try listening to no more than four-minute clips and replay them to see how much information you can retain. This will help you to become more aware of your role as a receiver of information and it can enhance your overall communication skills.