

Unit : 2 :Developing Listening skills

2.1 Listening vs. Hearing

Though often used interchangeably, listening and hearing are quite different in terms of process, intention, and outcomes.

◆ Hearing:

Definition: The passive act of perceiving sound by the ear.

Nature: Physiological — it happens automatically if you are not deaf.

No effort is required.

You may or may not understand or pay attention to the sound.

Examples:

Hearing a car horn on the street.

Hearing people talking while you're scrolling your phone.

◆ Listening:

Definition: The active process of making meaning out of another person's spoken message.

Nature: Psychological and cognitive — it requires focus and mental engagement.

Requires attention, concentration, and interpretation.

Examples:

Listening to a teacher during a lecture.

Listening to your friend share a personal problem.

2.2 Effective Listening

◆ What is Effective Listening?

Effective listening is the ability to actively understand information provided by the speaker, and display interest and provide feedback. It involves attention, understanding, evaluation, and response.

It's a key skill in both personal and professional communication.

◆ Characteristics of Effective Listening:

1. Active Engagement – Being mentally and emotionally involved in the conversation.

2. Focused Attention – Avoiding distractions to give full attention to the speaker.
3. Understanding the Message – Interpreting the speaker’s words, tone, and body language.
4. Responding Thoughtfully – Asking questions, giving feedback, or paraphrasing to show understanding.
5. Retaining Information – Remembering the key points for future reference or action.

◆ Types of Listening:

1-Type Description

- Active Listening: Fully concentrating and responding to the speaker.
- Empathetic Listening: Understanding the speaker's emotions and perspective.
- Critical Listening: Analyzing and evaluating the message.
- Appreciative Listening :Listening for enjoyment (e.g., music, poetry).
- Selective Listening: Listening to specific parts of a message, often unconsciously.

◆ Barriers to Effective Listening:

1. Distractions – External noise, interruptions, or internal thoughts.
2. Prejudgment – Assuming what the speaker is going to say.
3. Emotional Filters – Letting anger, stress, or bias distort understanding.
4. Lack of Interest – If the listener finds the topic boring, attention drops.
5. Poor Listening Habits – Interrupting, daydreaming, or multitasking.

◆ Tips for Becoming an Effective Listener:

1. Pay full attention to the speaker — avoid multitasking.
2. Maintain eye contact to show interest.
3. Don’t interrupt — allow the speaker to finish.
4. Give feedback — nodding, summarizing, or asking clarifying questions.
5. Observe non-verbal cues — body language, facial expressions, and tone.
6. Be empathetic — try to understand the speaker’s feelings and point of view.

2.3 Process of Listening

The listening process is an active, multi-step method that involves more than just hearing sounds. It includes mental engagement and interpretation to fully understand the message.

◆ Steps in the Listening Process:

1. Receiving (Hearing)

The first step is the physical act of hearing the sound or words.

The listener becomes aware of the speaker's message.

Challenge: Noise or distraction can interfere.

2. Understanding

The listener assigns meaning to the words and sentences.

This step requires language skills, vocabulary, and contextual understanding.

Example: Understanding a joke vs. A serious comment.

3. Evaluating

The listener analyzes and forms an opinion about what has been said.

Determines whether the message is reliable, logical, or biased.

4. Responding (Feedback)

The listener gives verbal or non-verbal feedback (e.g., nodding, saying "I see").

Shows that the message was received and understood.

5. Remembering

The ability to store and recall information later.

Good memory reflects the effectiveness of the previous steps.

2.4 Types of Listening

Listening can be categorized based on purpose, context, and approach. Understanding these types helps improve communication in different situations.

◆ Major Types of Listening:

Type	Description	Example
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- Active Listening : Fully engaged, giving feedback, asking questions. In a job interview or counselling session.
- Empathetic Listening: Understanding the speaker's emotions and perspective. Listening to a friend talk about a problem.
- Critical Listening : Evaluating the message for truth, bias, or quality. In a debate or business meeting.
- Appreciative Listening : Listening for enjoyment or pleasure. Listening to music or a story.
- Selective Listening : Listening only to parts of the message that interest you. Ignoring advice and only hearing praise.
- Passive Listening : Hearing without engaging or giving feedback. Daydreaming while someone speaks.
- Reflective Listening : Repeating or paraphrasing what the speaker said to confirm understanding. Used in therapy or conflict resolution.

2.5 Barriers to Effective Listening

Barriers are obstacles that prevent us from fully understanding or engaging with a speaker's message. These can be internal (mental/emotional) or external (environmental).

◆ Types of Listening Barriers:

A. Physical Barriers

Noise, poor acoustics, distance, or hearing impairments.

Example: Construction noise outside a meeting room.

B. Psychological Barriers

Mental distractions like stress, worry, or anger.

Example: Thinking about a deadline while someone is speaking.

C. Language Barriers

Use of unfamiliar jargon, complex vocabulary, or accents.

Example: Technical terms in a medical report confuse a non-medical audience.

D. Emotional Barriers

Letting feelings affect how you interpret the message.

Example: A person who dislikes the speaker may not listen objectively.

E. Cultural Barriers

Misinterpretations due to different cultural norms or communication styles.

Example: Eye contact may be seen as respectful in one culture but rude in another.

F. Lack of Interest or Motivation

When the listener finds the topic boring or irrelevant.

Example: A student tuning out during a repetitive lecture.

◆ Ways to Overcome Listening Barriers:

Create a quiet and focused environment.

Stay mentally present and avoid multitasking.

Clarify by asking questions.

Be open-minded and empathetic.

✅ Conclusion

The listening process involves several active steps: receiving, understanding, evaluating, responding, and remembering.

Different types of listening serve different purposes, from learning and evaluating to empathizing and enjoying.

Being aware of and addressing listening barriers is key to improving both personal and professional communication.