HUMAN COMMUNICATION

The Basic Course

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## LISTENING IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION

### CHAPTER TOPICS

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<td>THE LISTENING PROCESS</td>
<td>4.2 Explain the five stages of listening and apply the suggestions for increasing accuracy at each of these stages.</td>
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<td>4.5 Explain the major cultural and gender differences found in listening and assess their influence on your own communication/listening.</td>
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*Listening is a survival skill.*
There can be little doubt that you listen a great deal. On waking, you listen to the radio or television. On the way to school, you listen to friends, people around you, screeching cars, singing birds, or falling rain. In school, you listen to the instructors, to other students, and to yourself. You listen to friends at lunch and return to class to listen to more instructors. You arrive home and again listen to family and friends. Perhaps you listen to music on your phone, news on the radio or your computer, or dramas and sitcoms on television. All in all, you listen for a good part of your waking day.

Traditionally, listening is concerned with spoken messages (Emmert, 1994; Brownell, 2010; Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, 2012). However, in light of Facebook, Twitter, wikis, and blogs, we need to expand this traditional definition of listening as the receiving and processing of only auditory signals. If posting messages on social media sites is part of human communication (which it surely is), then the reading of these messages must also be part of human communication and most logically a part of listening. Listening, then, may be defined as the process of receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding to verbal and/or nonverbal messages.

In this chapter we will look at the importance of listening, the nature of the listening process, the varied styles of listening you might use in different situations, and some cultural and gender differences in listening. Throughout this chapter, we’ll identify ways to avoid the major barriers to listening and provide guidelines for more effective listening.

4.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING: TASK AND RELATIONSHIP BENEFITS

Regardless of what you do, listening will prove a crucial communication component and will serve both task and relationship functions. For example, one study concluded that in this era of technological transformation, employees’ interpersonal skills are especially significant; workers’ advancement will depend on their ability to speak and write effectively, to display proper etiquette, and to listen attentively.

And in a revealing survey of 40 CEOs of Asian and Western multinational companies, respondents cited a lack of listening skills as the major shortcoming of top executives (Witcher, 1999).

It’s also interesting to note that the effective listener— to take just a few examples of both task and relationship benefits—is more likely to emerge as group leader, a more effective salesperson, a more attentive and effective health-care worker, and a more effective manager (Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993; Johnson & Bechler, 1998; Kramer, 1997; Lau, 2003; Levine, 2004; Stein & Bowen, 2003). And medical educators, claiming that doctors are not trained to listen to their patients, have introduced what they call “narrative medicine” to teach doctors how to listen to their patients and to help doctors recognize how their perceptions of their patients are influenced by their own emotions (Smith, 2003; Ubel, 2013).

Another way to appreciate the importance of listening is to consider its many benefits. Here are some, built around the purposes of human communication identified in Chapter 1.

- **Learning.** Listening enables you to acquire knowledge of others, the world, and yourself, so as to avoid problems and make better-informed decisions. For example, hearing Peter tell about his travels to Cuba will help you learn more about Peter and about life in another country. Listening to the difficulties of your sales staff may help you offer more pertinent sales training.

- **Relating.** Through attentive and supportive listening, you can gain social acceptance and popularity. Others will increase their liking of you once they see your genuine concern for them.

- **Playing.** Listening can be enjoyable, letting you share pleasurable thoughts and feelings. Really listening to the anecdotes of coworkers will allow you to balance the world of work and the world of play.

- **Helping.** Listening often is vital in efforts to assist others. For example, listening to your child’s complaints about her teacher will increase your ability to help your child cope with school and her teacher.

- **Influencing.** Listening can help you change the attitudes and behaviors of others. For example, workers are more likely to follow your advice once they feel you’ve really listened to their insights and concerns. You’re also likely to be more influential when you listen with power, a topic addressed in Table 4.1, on page 80.

4.2 THE LISTENING PROCESS

The process of listening can be described as a series of five overlapping stages: (1) receiving (hearing and attending to the message), (2) understanding (deciphering meaning from the message you hear), (3) remembering (retaining what you hear in memory), (4) evaluating (thinking critically about and judging
As will become clear in the following discussion of the five stages, listening is not a process of transferring an idea from the mind of a speaker to the mind of a listener. Rather, it is a process in which speaker and listener work together to achieve a common understanding.

As you read this discussion of the five stages of listening, realize that listening can go wrong at any of the five stages. At the same time, you can enhance your listening ability by strengthening the skills needed at each listening stage.

Stage 1: Receiving

Unlike listening, hearing begins and ends with this first stage—receiving. Hearing is something that just happens when you open your ears or when you get within earshot of auditory stimuli.

Listening is quite different. Listening begins, but does not end, with receiving messages the speaker sends. In listening you receive both the verbal and the nonverbal messages—not only the words but also the gestures, facial expressions, variations in volume and rate, and lots more, as you’ll discover when we discuss messages in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. For improved reception:

- **Focus attention** on the speaker’s verbal and nonverbal messages, on both what is said and what is not said.

### Table 4.1: Listening Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening Behavior</th>
<th>Powerless</th>
<th>Powerful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responding</strong></td>
<td>Too little response says you aren’t listening; too much response says you aren’t listening critically.</td>
<td>Backchanneling cues—head nods and brief oral responses that say you’re listening—are especially helpful in communicating power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptors</strong></td>
<td>Adaptors—for example, playing with your hair or clicking a pen—may signal discomfort and hence a lack of power.</td>
<td>The absence of adaptors makes you appear in control of the situation and comfortable in the role of listener.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posture</strong></td>
<td>Covering your face, chest, or stomach with your hands may be interpreted as signaling defensiveness or vulnerability and hence powerless.</td>
<td>Maintaining a posture that is comfortable, that demonstrates attention and a willingness to listen will help to communicate power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Note Taking</strong></td>
<td>Taking too many or too few notes may communicate a lack of ability to identify what is really important.</td>
<td>Taking a modest amount of notes on information you’ll need to refer to later demonstrates competence and power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eye Focus</strong></td>
<td>Maintaining a low level of eye contact while talking and a higher level while listening will reduce power.</td>
<td>Maintaining a high level of eye contact while talking but a lower level while listening will increase power.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The table above provides a summary of how to listen with power through the behaviors listed. This is a circular process, with responses from person A serving as stimuli for person B, and so on. As will become clear in the following discussion of the five stages, listening is not a process of transferring an idea from the mind of a speaker to the mind of a listener. Rather, it is a process in which speaker and listener work together to achieve a common understanding.

As you read this discussion of the five stages of listening, realize that listening can go wrong at any of the five stages. At the same time, you can enhance your listening ability by strengthening the skills needed at each listening stage.

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**Figure 4.1: A Five-Stage Model of the Listening Process**

This model, which depicts the various stages involved in listening, draws on a variety of previous models that listening researchers have developed (e.g., Alessandra, 1986; Barker, 1990; Brownell, 2010; Stell, Barker, and Watson, 1983). In what other ways might you visualize the listening process?
Look for feedback in response to previous messages as well as feedforward (Chapter 1), which can reveal how the speaker would like his or her message viewed.

Avoid distractions in the environment and focus attention on the speaker rather than on what you’ll say next.

Maintain your role as listener and avoid interrupting the speaker until he or she is finished.

In this brief discussion of receiving (and in this entire chapter on listening), the unstated assumption is that both individuals can receive auditory signals without difficulty. But for the many people who have hearing impairments, listening presents a variety of problems. Table 4.2, on page 82, provides tips for communication between those with and those without hearing problems.

Stage 2: Understanding

Understanding is the stage at which you learn what the speaker means. This understanding must take into consideration both the thoughts that are expressed and the emotional tone that accompanies them—the urgency or the joy or sorrow expressed in the message. For improved understanding:

Relate new information to what you already know.

See the speaker’s messages from the speaker’s point of view. Avoid judging the message until you’ve fully understood it—as the speaker intended it.

Ask questions to clarify or to secure additional details or examples if necessary.

Rephrase (paraphrase) the speaker’s ideas in your own words.

In addition to these few suggestions, consider the specific situation of listening in the classroom. Table 4.3, on page 83, provides a few suggestions unique to listening for understanding in the classroom.

Stage 3: Remembering

Effective listening depends on remembering. When Joe says his mother is ill, the effective listener remembers this and inquires about her health later in the week.

Perhaps the most important point to understand about memory is that what you remember is not what was said but what you remember was said. Memory for speech is not reproductive; you don’t simply reproduce in your memory what the speaker said. Rather, memory is reconstructive; you actually reconstruct the messages you hear into a system that makes sense to you.

If you want to remember what someone says or the names of various people, this information needs to pass from your short-term memory (the memory you use, say, to remember a phone number just long enough to dial it) into long-term memory. Short-term memory is very limited in capacity—you can hold only a small amount of information there. Long-term memory is unlimited. To facilitate the passage of information from short- to long-term memory, here are FOUR suggestions:

Focus your attention on the central ideas. Even in the most casual of conversations, there are central ideas. Fix these in your mind. Repeat these ideas to yourself as you continue to listen. Avoid focusing on minor details that often lead to detours in listening and in conversation.
### Between People with and without Hearing Difficulties

**General Communication Tips**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you have unimpaired hearing:</th>
<th>Specifically</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Set up a comfortable context.</strong></td>
<td>Reduce the distance between yourself and the person with a hearing impairment. Reduce background noise. Make sure the lighting is adequate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoid interference.</strong></td>
<td>Make sure the visual cues from your speech are clearly observable; face the person squarely and avoid smoking, chewing gum, or holding your hand over your mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speak at an adequate volume.</strong></td>
<td>But avoid shouting, which can distort your speech and may insult the person. Be careful to avoid reducing volume at the ends of your sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phrase ideas in different ways.</strong></td>
<td>Because some words are easier to lip-read than others, it often helps if you can rephrase your ideas in different words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoid overlapping speech.</strong></td>
<td>Similarly, direct your comments to the person with hearing loss himself or herself; don’t talk to the person through a third party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ask for additional information.</strong></td>
<td>Ask the person if there is anything you can do to make it easier for him or her to understand you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don’t avoid common terms.</strong></td>
<td>Use terms like <strong>hearing</strong>, <strong>listen</strong>, <strong>music</strong>, or <strong>deaf</strong> when they’re relevant to the conversation. Trying to avoid these common terms will make your speech sound artificial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use nonverbal cues.</strong></td>
<td>Nonverbals can help communicate your meaning; gestures indicating size or location and facial expressions indicating feelings are often helpful.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you have impaired hearing:</th>
<th>Specifically</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do your best to eliminate background noise.</strong></td>
<td>Reduce the distance between yourself and the person with a hearing impairment. Reduce background noise. Make sure the lighting is adequate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Move closer to the speaker if this helps you hear better.</strong></td>
<td>Alert the speaker that this closer distance will help you hear better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ask for adjustments.</strong></td>
<td>If you feel the speaker can make adjustments, ask the speaker to repeat a message, to speak more slowly, or to increase volume.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position yourself for best reception.</strong></td>
<td>If you hear better in one ear than another, position yourself accordingly and, if necessary, clue the speaker in to this fact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ask for additional cues.</strong></td>
<td>If necessary, ask the speaker to write down certain information, such as phone numbers or website addresses. Carrying a pad and pencil will prove helpful for this and in the event that you wish to write something down for others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** These suggestions were drawn from a variety of sources including the Rochester Institute of Technology, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, the Division of Public Affairs, and Department of Labor websites.
In addition to following the general guidelines for listening, here are a few additional suggestions for making your classroom listening more effective. After all, if you're going to spend the time, you might as well spend it efficiently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Principle</th>
<th>Specific Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepare yourself to listen.</td>
<td>You listen with your eyes as well as your ears, so sit up front where you can see your instructor and any visual aids clearly and comfortably.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid distractions.</td>
<td>Distractions are all around us; try to avoid distractions caused by mental daydreaming as well as physical distractions like your laptop, cell phone, or newspaper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay special attention to the introduction.</td>
<td>The introduction will often contain a preview and will help you outline the lecture. Listen for key words and phrases such as “another reason,” “three major causes,” and “first.” Use these cues to help you outline the lecture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take notes in outline form.</td>
<td>Listen for headings and use these as major headings in your outline. When the instructor says, for example, “there are four kinds of noise,” you have your heading and you will have a numbered list of four items.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assume relevance.</td>
<td>Assume what is said is relevant. It may eventually prove irrelevant (unfortunately), but if you listen with the assumption of irrelevancy, you’ll never hear anything relevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen for understanding.</td>
<td>Avoid rehearsing in your own mind your arguments against what the instructor is saying. When you do this, you run the risk of missing additional explanation or qualification.</td>
</tr>
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Table 4.3  LISTENING IN THE CLASSROOM

When you remember a message, do you remember it as it was spoken, or do you remember what you think you heard? The common-sense response, of course, would be that you remember what was said. But before accepting this simple explanation, try to memorize the list of 12 words presented below, modeled on an idea from a research study (Glucksberg & Danks, 1975). Don’t worry about the order of the words; only the number of words remembered counts. Take about 20 seconds to memorize as many words as possible. Then close the book and write down as many words as you can remember.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dining room</th>
<th>table</th>
<th>milk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cafeteria</td>
<td>shopping</td>
<td>hungry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>green beans</td>
<td>steak</td>
<td>saucer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>satisfied</td>
<td>knife</td>
<td>menu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Don’t read any further until you’ve tried to memorize and reproduce the list of words.

If you’re like most people, you not only remembered a good number of the words on the list, but also “remembered” at least one word that was not on the list: perhaps, eat, dine, fork, or some such word relating to the theme of the list. Most people would recall the extra words as being on the list (whether they read the list as you’ve done here or hear it spoken)—but, as you can see, they’re not. What happens is that in remembering you don’t simply reproduce the list; you reconstruct it. In this case you gave the list meaning, and part of that meaning included the word eat or some related word. Memory for speech, then, is not reproductive—you don’t simply reproduce in your memory what the speaker said. Rather, memory is reconstructive: You reconstruct the messages you hear into a system that makes sense to you but, in the process, often remember distorted versions of what was said.

Working with Theories and Research

Log on to your favorite database or search engine and search for articles dealing with false memory. In what types of situations is false memory found? What are some of its implications for communication?
PART 1 Foundations of Human Communication

- **Organize** what you hear; summarize the message in a more easily retained form, but take care not to ignore crucial details or qualifications. If you chunk the material into categories, you’ll be able to remember more information. For example, if you want to remember 15 or 20 items to buy in the supermarket, you’ll remember more if you group them into chunks—say, produce, canned goods, and meats.

- **Unite** the new with the old; relate new information to what you already know. Avoid treating new information as totally apart from all else you know. There’s probably some relationship, and if you identify it, you’re more like to remember the new material.

- **Repeat** names and key concepts to yourself or, if appropriate, aloud. By repeating the names or key concepts, you in effect rehearse these names and concepts, and as a result they’ll be easier to learn and remember. If you’re introduced to Alice, you’ll stand a better chance of remembering her name if you say, “Hi, Alice” than if you say just “Hi.”

**Stage 4: Evaluating**

Evaluating consists of judging messages in some way. At times, you may try to evaluate the speaker’s underlying intent. Often this evaluation process goes on without much conscious thought. For example, Elaine tells you that she is up for a promotion and is really excited about it. You may then try to judge her intention. Does she want you to use your influence with the company president? Is she preoccupied with her accomplishment and thus telling everyone about it? Is she looking for a pat on the back? Generally, if you know the person well, you’ll be able to identify the intention and therefore be able to respond appropriately.

In other situations, evaluation is more in the nature of critical analysis. For example, in listening to proposals advanced in a business meeting, you will at this stage evaluate them. Is there evidence to show that these proposals are practical and will increase productivity? Is there contradictory evidence? Are there alternative proposals that would be more practical and more productive?

In evaluating, try to:

- **Resist evaluation** until you fully understand the speaker’s point of view.

- **Assume that the speaker is a person of goodwill**, and give the speaker the benefit of any doubt by asking for clarification on issues that you feel you must object to (are there any other reasons for accepting this new proposal?).

- **Distinguish facts from inferences** (see Chapter 5), opinions, and personal interpretations by the speaker.

- **Identify any biases, self-interests, or prejudices** that may lead the speaker to slant unfairly what is presented.

**Stage 5: Responding**

Responding occurs in two phases: (1) responses you make while the speaker is talking and (2) responses you make after the speaker has stopped talking. These responses are feedback—information that you send back to the speaker and that tells the speaker how you feel and think about his or her messages. Responses made while the speaker is talking should be supportive and should acknowledge that you’re listening. These include what researchers on nonverbal communication call **backchanneling cues**: “I see,” “yes,” “uh-huh,” and similar signals that let the speaker know you’re attending to the message.

Responses made after the speaker has stopped talking are generally more elaborate and might include expressing empathy (“I know how you must feel”), asking for clarification (“Do you mean that this new health plan is to replace the old one, or will it just be a supplement?”), challenging (“I think your evidence is weak here”), and agreeing (“You’re absolutely right on this, and I’ll support your proposal when it comes up for a vote”). For effective responding:

- **Be supportive** of the speaker throughout the speaker’s talk by using and varying backchanneling cues; using only one backchanneling cue—for example, saying “uh-huh” throughout—may make it appear that you’re not really listening.

- **Express support** for the speaker in your final responses.

- **Be honest**: the speaker has a right to expect honest responses, even if these express anger or disagreement.

- **State your thoughts and feelings** as your own, using I-messages. For example, say “I think the new proposal will entail greater expense than you outlined” rather than “Everyone will object to the plan for costing too much.”
In listening, you normally assume that the speaker is telling the truth and seldom even ask yourself if the speaker is lying. When you do wonder about a speaker’s truthfulness, research shows, it may be because the speaker exhibits behaviors that often accompany lying. As you review these behaviors, ask yourself if you use these cues in making assumptions about whether or not people are telling the truth. Be careful that you don’t fall into the trap of thinking that just because someone emits these cues, he or she is therefore lying; these cues are often used by truth-tellers as well and are not 100 percent reliable in indicating lying.

In one study participants who held stereotypical views of how liars behave (for example, liars don’t look at you or liars fidget) were less effective in detecting lying than were those who did not hold such beliefs (Vrij & Mann, 2001).

From a combination of research studies, the following behaviors were found to most often accompany lying (Al-Simadi, 2000; Andersen, 2004; Burgoon, 2005; Burgoon & Bue, 2003; O’Hair, Cody, Goss, & Krayen, 1988; DePaulo et al., 2003; Knapp, 2008; Knapp & Hall, 2010; Leathers & Eaves, 2008; Bond & Atum, 2000).

- **Liars hold back.** They speak more slowly (perhaps to monitor what they’re saying), take longer to respond to questions (again, perhaps monitoring their messages), and generally give less information and elaboration.
- **Liars leak.** Very slight facial and eye movements (what we referred to earlier as micromomentary movements) may reveal the person’s real feelings, a process referred to as leakage. Often this is the result of what has come to be called “duping delight”—the pleasure you get when you feel you’re putting over a lie. Here you may leak your lying through slight movements in your lips or eyes.
- **Liars make less sense.** Liars’ messages contain more discrepancies, more inconsistencies.
- **Liars give a more negative impression.** Generally, liars are seen as less willing to be cooperative, smile less than truth-tellers, and are more defensive.
- **Liars are tense.** The tension may be revealed by their higher-pitched voices and their excessive body movements.
- **Liars exhibit greater pupil dilation, more eyeblinks, and more gaze aversion.**
- **Liars speak with a higher vocal pitch.** Their voices often sound as if they are under stress.
- **Liars make more errors and use more hesitations in their speech.** They pause more and for longer periods of time;
- **Liars make more hand, leg, and foot movements.**
- **Liars engage in more self-touching movements.** For example, liars touch their face or hair more and engage in more object touching, for example, playing with a coffee cup or pen.

In detecting lying be especially careful that you formulate any conclusions with a clear understanding that you can be wrong and that accusations of lying (especially when untrue but even when true) can often damage a relationship to the point where it’s beyond repair.

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**Working with Theories and Research**

Can you recall a situation in which you made the assumption that someone was lying on the basis of such cues (or others)? What happened? Should you want to learn more about lying, search for such terms as “lying,” “deception,” “poker tells,” and “falsehood.” It’s a fascinating subject of study.

Table 4.4, on page 86, identifies some types of difficult listeners—listeners who don’t follow the suggestions for each of the five listening stages—and their problem-causing ways of responding.

### 4.3 LISTENING BARRIERS

In addition to practicing the various skills for each stage of listening, consider some of the common barriers to listening. Here are just four such barriers and some suggestions for dealing with them as both listener and speaker, as both speaker and listener are responsible for effective listening.

#### Distractions: Physical and Mental

Physical barriers might include, for example, hearing impairment, a noisy environment, or loud music. Multi-tasking (watching TV and listening to
someone) with the aim of being supportive, say, simply doesn’t work. As both listener and speaker, try to remove whatever physical barriers can be removed; for those that you can’t remove, adjust your listening and speaking to lessen the effects as much as possible. As a listener, focus on the speaker; you can attend to the room and the other people later.

Mental distractions are in many ways similar to physical distractions; they get in the way of focused listening. These barriers are often seen when you’re thinking about your upcoming Saturday night date or becoming too emotional to think (and listen) clearly. In listening, recognize that you can think about your date later. In speaking, make what you say compelling and relevant to the listener.

Review this table and try to see if it includes some of your own listening behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem-Causing Responses</th>
<th>Corrective Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The static listener gives no feedback, remains relatively motionless, and reveals no expression.</td>
<td>Give feedback as appropriate, smile, nod, and otherwise appropriately respond to the content and feeling of the message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The monotonous feedback giver seems responsive, but the responses never vary, regardless of what is said.</td>
<td>Give varied feedback that is relevant to the conversation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The overly expressive listener reacts to just about everything with extreme responses.</td>
<td>React in a tone consistent with the speaker's message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The eye avoider looks all around the room and at others but never at you.</td>
<td>Look at the speaker; don’t stare but make the speaker your eyes’ main focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The preoccupied listener listens to other things at the same time, often with headphones turned up so loud that it interferes with the speaker's thinking.</td>
<td>Show the speaker that he or she is your primary focus; shut down the smartphone and the television; turn away from the computer screen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The waiting listener listens for a cue to take over the speaking turn.</td>
<td>Hear the speaker out; refrain from giving cues that you want to speak while the speaker is in the middle of saying something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The thought-completing listener listens a little and then finishes the speaker's thought.</td>
<td>Allow the speaker to complete his or her thoughts. Completing someone's thoughts often communicates that you find the speaker too predictable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The critical listener evaluates everything you say, often negatively.</td>
<td>Avoid criticism, unless the situation calls for it, and always stress the positive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The advising listener gives advice at the first mention of a problem or decision.</td>
<td>Avoid giving advice unless specifically asked and resist what is supposedly the male tendency to solve problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The never-ending listener just wants the speaker to keep talking, often long after the speaker has said what he or she wants to say.</td>
<td>Exchange speaking and listening roles frequently; they are each best when relatively short. Avoid unnecessarily prolonging conversations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Communication Choice Point**

**Listening Cues**

Friends have told you that people don’t address comments directly to you because you don’t give listening cues to let the other person know that you’re listening and interested. What are some of the things you can do to help change this perception?
Biases and Prejudices

Biases and prejudices against groups or individuals who are members of such groups will invariably distort listening. For example, a gender bias that assumes that only one sex has anything useful to say about certain topics will likely distort incoming messages that contradict this bias. Be willing to subject your biases and prejudices to contradictory information; after all if they’re worth having, they should stand up to differences of opinion. When as a speaker you feel your listener may have certain prejudices, ask for a suspension of bias: “I know you don’t think women are knowledgeable about sports, but just hear me out about why I think the team’s offense isn’t working…”

Another type of bias is closed mindedness, which is seen, for example, in the person who refuses to hear any feminist argument or anything about gay marriage. As a listener, assume that what the speaker is saying will be useful in some way. As a speaker, anticipate that many people are closed minded on a variety of issues and it often helps to simply ask for openness: “I know this is contrary to what many people think, but let’s look at it logically…”

Lack of Appropriate Focus

Focusing on what a person is saying is obviously necessary for effective listening. And yet, there are many influences that can lead you astray. For example, listeners often get lost because they focus on irrelevancies, say, on an especially vivid example that conjures up old memories. Try not to get detoured from the main idea; don’t get hung up on unimportant details. Try to repeat the idea to yourself and see the details in relation to this main concept. As a speaker, try to avoid language or examples that may divert attention from your main idea.

At times you might listen only for information with an obvious relevance to you. This type of listening prevents you from expanding your horizons; it’s quite possible that information that you originally thought irrelevant will eventually prove helpful. As a speaker, be sure to make what you say relevant to your specific listener.

Another misplaced focus is often on the responses a listener is going to make while the speaker is still speaking. Anticipating how you’re going to respond or what you’re going to say (and even interrupting the speaker) prevents you from hearing the message in full. Instead, make a mental note of something and then get back to listening. As a speaker, when you feel someone is preparing to argue with you, ask them to hear you out: “I know you disagree with this, but let me finish and we’ll get back to that.”

Premature Judgment

Perhaps the most obvious form of premature judgment is assuming you know what the speaker is going to say and that there’s no need to really listen. Let the speaker say what he or she is going to say before you decide that you already know it. As a speaker, it’s often wise to assume that listeners will do exactly this, so it may be helpful to make clear that what you’re saying will be unexpected.

A common listener reaction is to draw conclusions or judgments on incomplete evidence. Sometimes, listeners will stop listening after hearing, for example, an attitude they disagree with or some sexist or culturally insensitive remark. Instead, this is a situation that calls for especially concentrated listening so that you don’t rush to judgment. Instead, wait for the evidence or argument; avoid making judgments before you gather all the information. Listen first; judge second. As a speaker, be aware of this tendency, and when you feel this is happening, ask for a suspension of judgment. A simple “Hear me out” is often sufficient.

4.4 STYLES OF EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Before reading about the styles of listening, examine your own listening habits and tendencies by responding to the following statements with the following scale: 1 = always, 2 = frequently, 3 = sometimes, 4 = seldom, and 5 = never.

1. I listen actively, communicate acceptance of the speaker, and prompt the speaker to further explore his or her thoughts.
2. I listen to the literal meanings that a speaker communicates; I don’t look too deeply into hidden meanings.
3. I listen without judging the speaker.
4. I listen without active involvement; I generally remain silent and take in what the other person is saying.
5. I listen objectively; I focus on the logic of the ideas rather than on the emotional meaning of the message.
The art of effective listening is in making appropriate choices along the following five dimensions: (1) empathic and objective listening, (2) nonjudgmental and critical listening, (3) surface and depth listening, (4) polite and impolite listening, and (5) active and inactive listening. These dimensions exist on a continuum with, say, extremely empathic at one end and extremely objective at the other end. Most, if not all, listening exists somewhere between these extremes. Yet, they’ll be an emphasis toward one side or the other depending on the specifics of the communication situation. Let’s take a look at each of these dimensions.

### Empathic and Objective Listening

To understand what a person means and feels, listen with *empathy* (Rogers, 1970; Rogers & Farson, 1981). To empathize with others is to feel with them, to see...
Avoid prejudging. Delay your judgments until you fully understand the intention and the content the speaker is communicating. Avoid both positive and negative evaluation until you have a reasonably complete understanding.

■ Avoid filtering out or oversimplifying difficult or complex messages. Similarly, avoid filtering out undesirable messages. Clearly, you don’t want to hear that something you believe in is untrue, that people you care for are unkind, or that ideals you hold are self-destructive. Yet it’s important that you reexamine your beliefs by listening to such messages.

■ Recognize your own biases. These may interfere with accurate listening and cause you to distort message reception through the process of assimilation—the tendency to integrate and interpret what you hear or think you hear to conform to your own biases, prejudices, and expectations. For example, are your ethnic, national, or religious biases preventing you from appreciating a speaker’s point of view?

■ Avoid uncritical listening when you need to make evaluations and judgments. Recognize
and resist the normal tendency to sharpen—a process in which one or two aspects of a message become highlighted, emphasized, and perhaps embellished. Often the concepts that are sharpened are incidental remarks that somehow stand out from the rest of the message.

- **Recognize fallacies**—ways of using language to subvert instead of clarify truth and accuracy—and don’t be persuaded by their pseudo-logic. Here are just a few types of words to which you’d want to give special critical listening:

  - **Weasel words.** These are terms whose meanings are slippery and difficult to pin down (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1989). Good examples can be easily found in commercials such as those claiming Medicine A works “better” than Medicine B but failing to specify how much or in what respect Medicine A performs better. It’s quite possible that Medicine A performs better in one respect but less effectively according to nine other measures. Other weasel words are help, virtually, as much as, like (as in “it will make you feel like new”), and more economical. Ask yourself, “Exactly what is being claimed?” For example, “What does ‘may reduce cholesterol’ mean? What exactly is being asserted?”

  - **Euphemisms.** These terms make the negative and unpleasant appear positive and appealing as in an executive’s reference to the firing of 200 workers as “downsizing” or “reallocation of resources.” Often euphemisms take the form of inflated language designed to make the mundane seem extraordinary, the common seem exotic (“the vacation of a lifetime,” “unsurpassed vistas”). Don’t let words get in the way of accurate firsthand perception.

  - **Jargon.** This is the specialized language of a professional class, the language of the computer hacker, the psychologist, or the advertiser. When used to intimidate or impress, as when used with people who aren’t members of the profession, jargon prevents meaningful communication. Don’t be intimidated by jargon; ask questions when you don’t understand.

  - **Gobbledygook.** This is overly complex language that overwhelms the listener instead of communicating meaning and usually consists of extra-long sentences, complex grammatical constructions, and rare or unfamiliar words. Some people just normally speak in complex language. But others use complexity to confuse and mislead. Ask for simplification when appropriate.

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**Surface and Depth Listening**

In Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, Marc Antony, in giving the funeral oration for Caesar, says: “I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. / The evil that men do lives after them; / The good is oft interred with their bones.” And later: “For Brutus is an honourable man; / So are they all, all honourable men.” But if we listen beyond the surface of Marc Anthony’s words, we can see that he does indeed come to praise Caesar and to convince the crowd that Brutus was dishonorable—despite the fact that at first glance his words seem to say quite the opposite.

In most messages there’s an obvious meaning that you can derive from a literal reading of the words and sentences. But there’s often another level of meaning. Sometimes, as in these famous lines from *Julius Caesar*, the deeper level is the opposite of the literal meaning. At other times it seems totally unrelated. In reality, most messages have more than one level of meaning. For example, suppose Carol asks you how you like her new
haircut. On one level, the meaning is clear: Do you like the haircut? But there’s also another, perhaps a more important level: Carol is asking you to say something positive about her appearance. In the same way, the parent who complains about working hard at the office or in the home may, on a deeper level, be asking for an expression of appreciation.

To appreciate these other meanings, engage in depth listening. If you respond only to the surface-level communication (the literal meaning), you miss the opportunity to make meaningful contact with the other person’s feelings and needs. If you say to the parent, “You’re always complaining. I bet you really love working so hard,” you fail to respond to the call for understanding and appreciation. In regulating your surface and depth listening, consider the following guidelines:

- **Focus on both verbal and nonverbal messages.** Recognize both consistent and inconsistent “packages” of messages, and use these as guides for drawing inferences about the speaker’s meaning. Ask questions when in doubt. Listen also to what is omitted. Remember that speakers communicate by what they leave out as well as by what they include.

- **Listen for both content and relational messages.** The student who constantly challenges the instructor is, on one level, communicating disagreement over content. However, on another level—the relationship level—the student may be voicing objections to the instructor’s authority or authoritarianism. The instructor needs to listen and respond to both types of messages.

- **Make special note of statements that refer back to the speaker.** Remember that people inevitably talk about themselves. Whatever a person says is, in part, a function of who that person is. Attend carefully to those personal, self-reference messages.

- **Don’t disregard the literal meaning of messages.** Balance your listening between surface and the underlying meanings. Respond to the different levels of meaning in the messages of others, as you would like others to respond to yours—sensitively but not obsessively, readily but not over-ambitiously.

**Polite and Impolite Listening**

Politeness is often thought of as the exclusive function of the speaker, as solely an encoding or sending function. But politeness (or impoliteness) may also be signaled through listening (Fukushima, 2000).
thoughts and feelings by giving responses that show this level of understanding—smiling or cringing or otherwise echoing the feelings of the speaker. If you echo the speaker’s nonverbal expressions, your behavior is likely to be seen as empathic.

- **Maintain eye contact.** In much of the United States this is perhaps the single most important rule. If you don’t maintain eye contact when someone is talking to you, then you’ll appear to be not listening and definitely not listening politely. This rule, however, does not hold in all cultures. In some Latin and Asian cultures, polite listening would consist of looking down and avoiding direct eye contact when, for example, listening to a superior or much older person.

- **Give positive feedback.** Throughout the listening encounter positive feedback will be seen as polite and negative feedback as impolite. If you must give negative feedback, then do so in a way that does not attack the person; for example, first mention areas of agreement or what you liked about what the person said and stress your good intentions. And, most important, do it in private. Public criticism is especially threatening and will surely be seen as a personal attack.

A somewhat different slant on politeness and listening can be seen in “forcing” people to listen when they don’t want to. Generally, the polite advice is to be sensitive to when the other person wants to leave and to stop asking the person to continue listening. Closely related to this is the “forced” listening that many cell phone users impose on others, a topic addressed in Table 4.6.

### Active and Inactive Listening

One of the most important communication skills you can learn is active listening. Consider the following interaction. You say: “I can’t believe I have to redo this entire budget report. I really worked hard on this project, and now I have to do it all over again.” To this, you get three different responses.

**Andy:** That’s not so bad; most people find they have to redo their first reports. That’s the norm here.
CHAPTER 4 LISTENING IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION

TABLE 4.6 POLITENESS AND THE SMARTPHONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Rule</th>
<th>Specifics</th>
<th>Adjustments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoid using cell phones where inappropriate.</td>
<td>Especially avoid calling in restaurants, hospitals, theaters, museums, commuter buses or trains, and the classroom.</td>
<td>If you must make or take a call when in these various situations, try to move to a less public area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence your cell phone.</td>
<td>Put your phone on vibrate mode, or let your voicemail answer and take a message when your call might interfere with others.</td>
<td>When you can’t avoid taking a call, speak as quietly as possible and as briefly as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid unwanted photo-taking.</td>
<td>Don’t take pictures of people who aren’t posing for you, and erase photos if the person you photographed requests it.</td>
<td>Of course, if there’s an accident or a robbery, you may want to photograph the events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid extended talking when your reception is weak.</td>
<td>Talking on your cell on a crowded street will probably result in poor reception, which is annoying to the other person.</td>
<td>In an emergency, caution trumps politeness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider the other person.</td>
<td>It’s easy to assume that when you have nothing better to do, the person you’re calling also has nothing better to do.</td>
<td>As with any phone call, it’s wise to ask if this is a good time to call—a strategy that helps maintain the autonomy (negative face) of the person you’re calling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Connie: You should be pleased that all you have to do is a simple rewrite. Peggy and Michael both had to completely redo their entire projects.

Greg: You have to rewrite that report you’ve worked on for the last three weeks? You sound really angry and frustrated.

All three listeners are probably trying to make you feel better. But they go about it in very different ways—and surely with very different results. Andy tries to lessen the significance of the rewrite. This well-intended and extremely common response does little to promote meaningful communication and understanding. Connie tries to give the situation a positive spin. In their responses, however, both Andy and Connie are also suggesting that you should not be feeling the way you do; they’re saying that your feelings are not legitimate and should be replaced with more logical feelings.

Greg’s response, however, is different from the others. Greg uses active listening. Active listening owes its development to Thomas Gordon (1975), who made it a cornerstone of his P.E.T. (parent effectiveness training) technique. Active listening is a process of sending back to the speaker what you as a listener think the speaker meant—both in content and in feelings. Active listening, then, is not merely repeating the speaker’s exact words, but rather putting together into some meaningful whole your understanding of the speaker’s total message. And, incidentally, when combined with empathic listening, it proves the most effective mode for success as a salesperson (Comer & Drollinger, 1999).

Active listening helps you check your understanding of what the speaker said and, more importantly, of what he or she meant. Reflecting back perceived meanings to the speaker gives the speaker an opportunity to offer clarification and to correct any misunderstandings. Active listening also lets the speaker know that you acknowledge and accept his or her feelings. In the sample responses given above, Greg listened actively and reflected back what he thought you meant while accepting what you were feeling. Note too that he also explicitly identified the feelings (“You sound angry and frustrated”), allowing you the opportunity to correct his interpretation. Still another function of active listening is that it stimulates the speaker to explore feelings and thoughts. Greg’s response encourages you to elaborate on your feelings and perhaps to understand them better as you talk through them.

Three simple techniques may help you master the process of active listening: paraphrasing the speaker’s meaning, expressing understanding, and asking questions.
Paraphrase the speaker’s meaning. Stating in your own words what you think the speaker means and feels helps ensure understanding and demonstrates your interest. Paraphrasing gives the speaker a chance to extend what was originally said. In paraphrasing, be objective; be especially careful not to lead the speaker in the direction you think he or she should go. Also, don’t overdo paraphrasing. Paraphrase when you feel there’s a chance for misunderstanding or when you want to express support for the other person and keep the conversation going.

Express understanding of the speaker’s feelings. In addition to paraphrasing the content, echo the feelings the speaker expressed or implied (“You must have felt horrible”). This expression of feelings will help you further check your perception of the speaker’s feelings and will allow the speaker to see his or her feelings more objectively (especially helpful when they’re feelings of anger, hurt, or depression) and the opportunity to elaborate on these feelings.

Ask questions. Asking questions ensures your own understanding of the speaker’s thoughts and feelings and secures additional information (“How did you feel when you read your job appraisal report?”). Ask questions to provide just enough stimulation and support so that the speaker feels he or she can elaborate on these thoughts and feelings.

A summary of these listening choices appears in Table 4.7.

### 4.5 LISTENING, CULTURE, AND GENDER

Listening is difficult, in part, because of the inevitable differences in the communication systems between speaker and listener. Because each person has had a unique set of experiences, each person’s communication and meaning system is going to be different from every other person’s. When speaker and listener come from different cultures or are of different genders, the differences and their effects are naturally so much greater. Let’s look first at culture.

#### Culture and Listening

In a global environment in which people from very different cultures work together, it’s especially important to understand the ways in which cultural differences can influence listening. Four of these listening influences include: (1) language and speech, (2) nonverbal behaviors, (3) feedback, and (4) credibility.

### TABLE 4.7 Summary of Listening Style Choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice A</th>
<th>Choice B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathic—generally the preferred mode for people in close relationships</td>
<td>Objective—to listen dispassionately and more as a scientist than a friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonjudgmental—useful in expressing supportiveness</td>
<td>Critical—essential when decisions need to be made or when alternative courses of action need to be evaluated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface—useful for initially surveying your various options</td>
<td>Depth—when you really want to know what the person is thinking and feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite listening—makes the individual feel important and in control of his or her own behavior</td>
<td>Impolite listening—when you want to turn people off and offend them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active listening—useful for checking your perceptions and expressive support</td>
<td>Inactive listening—rarely worth even the little effort expended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In A Nutshell

Here is a summary of the listening choices you normally have available; the appropriate mode will vary with the situation, the context, the participants, the goal of the interaction, and a host of factors considered throughout this text.

Watch the Video “Adapting to Serve a Client” at MyCommunicationLab

Explore the Exercise “Paraphrasing to Ensure Understanding” at MyCommunicationLab

Explore the Exercise “Expressing Understanding” at MyCommunicationLab

Explore the Exercise “Checking Understanding” at MyCommunicationLab

Explore the Exercise “Building Understanding” at MyCommunicationLab
Language and Speech

Even when speaker and listener speak the same language, they speak it with different meanings and different accents. No two speakers speak exactly the same language. Speakers of the same language will, at the very least, have different meanings for the same terms because they have had different experiences.

Speakers and listeners who have different native languages and who may have learned English as a second language will have even greater differences in meaning. Translations are never precise and never fully capture the meaning in the other language. If your meaning for the word house was learned in a culture in which everyone lived in their own house with lots of land around it, then talking about houses with someone whose meaning was learned in a neighborhood of high-rise tenements is going to be difficult. Although you’ll each hear the same word, the meanings you’ll each develop will be drastically different. In adjusting your listening—especially in an intercultural setting—understand that the speaker’s meanings may be very different from yours even though you’re speaking the same language.

Nonverbal Behaviors

Speakers from different cultures have different display rules—cultural rules that govern which nonverbal behaviors are appropriate and which are inappropriate in a public setting. As you listen to other people, you also “listen” to their nonverbal cues. If these are drastically different from what you expect on the basis of the verbal message, you may see them as a kind of noise or interference or even as contradictory messages. Also, of course, different cultures may give very different meanings to the same nonverbal gesture; for example, the thumb and forefinger forming a circle means “OK” in most of the United States, but it means “money” in Japan, “zero” in some Mediterranean countries, and “I’ll kill you” in Tunisia.

Feedback

Members of some cultures give very direct and honest feedback. Speakers from these cultures—the United States is a good example—expect the feedback to be a forthright reflection of what their listeners are feeling. In other cultures—Japan and Korea are good examples—it’s more important to be positive than to be truthful, so people may respond with positive feedback (say, in commenting on a business colleague’s proposal) even though they don’t actually feel positive. Listen to feedback, as you would all messages, with a full recognition that various cultures view feedback very differently.

Credibility

What makes a speaker credible, or believable, also will vary from one culture to another. In some cultures people would claim that competence is the most important factor in, say, the choice of a teacher for their preschool children. In other cultures the most important factor might be the goodness or morality of the teacher. Similarly, members of different cultures may perceive the credibility of various media very differently. For example, members of a repressive society in which the government controls television news may come to attribute little credibility to such broadcasts. After all, these listeners might reason, television news is simply what the government wants you to know. This reaction may be hard to understand or even recognize for someone raised in the United States, for example, where traditionally the media have been largely free of such political control.

Gender and Listening

Men and women learn different styles of listening, just as they learn different styles for using
Part 1: Foundations of Human Communication

Foundations of Human Communication

Differences women seem to be more engaged in listening than do men. Tannen argues that men listen less to women than women listen to men. The reason, says Tannen (and on this not all researchers agree, see Goldsmith and Fulfs, 1999), is that listening places the person in an inferior position, whereas speaking places the person in a superior position. Men may seem to assume a more confrontational posture while listening and to ask questions that are argumentative or seek to puncture holes in the speaker's position as a way to play up their own expertise. Women are more likely than men to ask supportive questions and offer constructive criticism. Men and women act this way to both members of the same and of the opposite sex; their usual ways of speaking and listening don't seem to change depending on whether the person they're communicating with is male or female. Gender differences are changing drastically and quickly; it's best to take generalizations about gender as starting points for investigation and not as airtight conclusions (Gamble & Gamble, 2003). Further, as you no doubt have observed from your own experiences, the gender differences—although significant—are far outnumbered by the similarities. It's important to be mindful of both similarities and differences.

Verbal and nonverbal messages. Not surprisingly, these different styles can create difficulties in opposite-sex interpersonal communication.

Rapport and Report Talk
According to Deborah Tannen (1990) in her best-selling You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation, women seek to share feelings, build rapport, and establish closer relationships, and they use listening to achieve these ends. Men, on the other hand, play up their expertise, emphasize it, and use it to dominate the interaction. Their focus is on reporting information. Tannen argues that in conversation a woman seeks to be liked, so she expresses agreement. The goal of a man, on the other hand, is to be given respect, so he seeks to show his knowledge and expertise.

Listening Cues
Men and women give different types of listening cues and consequently show that they're listening in different ways. In conversation, a woman is more apt to give lots of listening cues—interjecting “Yeah” or “Uh-huh,” nodding in agreement, and smiling. A man is more likely to listen quietly, without giving lots of listening cues as feedback. Women also make more eye contact when listening than do men, who are more apt to look around and often away from the speaker (Brownell, 2010). As a result of these differences women seem to be more engaged in listening than do men.

Amount and Purposes of Listening
Tannen argues that men listen less to women than women listen to men. The reason, says Tannen (and on this not all researchers agree, see Goldsmith and Fulfs, 1999), is that listening places the person in an inferior position, whereas speaking places the person in a superior position. Men may seem to assume a more confrontational posture while listening and to ask questions that are argumentative or seek to puncture holes in the speaker's position as a way to play up their own expertise. Women are more likely than men to ask supportive questions and offer constructive criticism. Men and women act this way to both members of the same and of the opposite sex; their usual ways of speaking and listening don’t seem to change depending on whether the person they’re communicating with is male or female.

Gender differences are changing drastically and quickly; it’s best to take generalizations about gender as starting points for investigation and not as airtight conclusions (Gamble & Gamble, 2003). Further, as you no doubt have observed from your own experiences, the gender differences—although significant—are far outnumbered by the similarities. It’s important to be mindful of both similarities and differences.
CHAPTER 4 LISTENING IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION

Analyzing Video Choices

Sue is at home watching television when her partner Harry comes home from work. He is visibly upset about something, but Sue doesn’t know what or why. She wants to communicate her concern for Harry, but is not sure of what she should say. This video, “A Bad Day at Work,” focuses on the importance of listening in an interpersonal relationship and particularly the various styles of listening (empathic and objective listening, nonjudgmental and critical listening, surface and depth listening, polite and impolite listening, and active and inactive listening) and the effects these styles have on the individuals and on the relationship. Log on to www.mycommunicationlab.com to view the video for this chapter, to see how the choices played out, and then to consider some related discussion questions.

SUMMARY: LISTENING IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION

This chapter discussed the importance of listening, the process of listening, the influence of culture and gender on the way people listen, and the principles for listening more effectively.

4.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING: TASK AND RELATIONSHIP BENEFITS

1. Effective listening yields a wide variety of benefits, including more effective learning, relating, influencing, playing, and helping.

4.2 THE LISTENING PROCESS

2. Listening is a five-part process that begins with receiving and continues through understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding.

3. Receiving consists of hearing the verbal signals and perceiving the nonverbal signals.

4. Understanding involves learning what the speaker means, not merely what the words mean.

5. Remembering involves retaining the received message, a process that involves considerable reconstruction.

6. Evaluating consists of judging the messages you receive.

7. Responding involves giving feedback while the speaker is speaking and taking your turn at speaking after the speaker has finished.

4.3 LISTENING BARRIERS

8. Among the barriers to listening are physical and mental distractions, biases and prejudices, lack of appropriate focus, and premature judgments.

4.4 STYLES OF EFFECTIVE LISTENING

9. Effective listening involves adjusting our behaviors on the basis of at least four dimensions: empathic and objective listening, nonjudgmental and critical listening, surface and depth listening, and active and inactive listening.

10. The empathic–objective dimension involves the degree to which the listener focuses on feeling what the speaker is feeling versus grasping the objective message.

11. The nonjudgmental–critical dimension involves the degree to which the listener evaluates what is said.

12. The surface–depth dimension has to do with the extent to which the listener focuses on literal or obvious meanings versus hidden or less obvious meanings.

13. The polite–impolite dimension refers to the presence or absence of civility and courtesy.

14. The active–inactive dimension involves the extent to which the listener reflects back and expresses support for the speaker.

4.5 LISTENING, CULTURE, AND GENDER

15. Listening is influenced by a wide range of cultural factors, such as differences in language and speech, nonverbal behaviors, credibility criteria, and feedback approaches.

16. Listening is influenced by gender: Men and women seem to view listening as serving different purposes.
4.1 Expressing Empathy. Expressing empathy is crucial to meaningful communication, but it is not an easily acquired skill; it takes practice. Here are a few practice examples. For any one or two of the following situations, indicate in one sentence (or more) how you would respond to the speaker with thinking empathy and in one sentence (or more) how you would respond with feeling empathy. Assume that all three people are your peers.

a. “I’ve never felt so alone in my life. Chris left last night and said it was all over. We were together for three years and now—after a 10-minute argument—everything is lost.”

b. “I just got $20,000 from my aunt’s estate. She left it to me! Twenty thousand! Now I can get that car and buy some new clothes!”

c. “A Camry! My parents bought me a Camry for graduation. What a bummer. They promised me a Lexus.”

4.2 Empathy: The Negative Side. There is some evidence to show that empathy also has a negative side. For example, the more empathy you feel toward people who are similar to you racially and ethnically, the less empathy you feel toward those who are different. The same empathy that increases your understanding of your own group decreases your understanding of other groups. So although empathy may encourage understanding, it also can create dividing lines between your group and “them” (Angier, 1995). Have you ever witnessed these negative effects of empathy?

4.3 Regulating Your Listening Style. This exercise will help you see the importance of regulate your listening on the basis of the specific situation in which you find yourself. With specific reference to the five dimensions of effective listening discussed here, what styles would you use in each of the following situations? What types of listening would be obviously inappropriate in each situation?

a. Your steady dating partner for the last five years tells you that spells of depression are becoming more frequent and more long lasting.

b. Your history instructor lectures on the contributions of the ancient Greeks to modern civilization.

c. Your brother tells you he’s been accepted into Harvard’s MBA program.

d. Your supervisor explains the new e-mail system.

e. A newscaster reports on a recent Supreme Court decision.

4.4 Politeness in Social Media. Much of the thinking and research on listening and politeness has focused on them as face-to-face communication skills. How would you describe listening politeness on the phone or on social network sites? Are the same principles applicable or do we need an entirely different set to describe social networking listening politeness?

4.5 Using Active Listening Strategies. Active listening allows you to connect with another person by demonstrating your understanding and support. Here are three situations that might require active listening. For each situation compose an active listening response in which you (a) paraphrase the speaker’s meaning, (b) express understanding of the speaker’s meaning, and (c) ask questions to clarify any potential misunderstandings.

a. Your friend has just broken up a love affair and is telling you about it. I can’t seem to get Chris out of my head. All I do is think about what we used to do and all the fun we used to have.

b. A young nephew tells you that he cannot talk with his parents. No matter how hard he tries, they just don’t listen. I tried to tell them that I can’t play baseball and I don’t want to play baseball. But they ignore me and tell me that all I need is practice.

c. Your mother has been having a difficult time at work. She was recently passed up for a promotion and received one of the lowest merit raises given in the company. I’m not sure what I did wrong. I do my work, mind my own business, don’t take my sick days like everyone else. How could they give that promotion to Helen who’s only been with the company for two years? Maybe I should just quit.

4.6 Your Listening Self. Using the four dimensions of listening effectiveness discussed here (empathic—objective, nonjudgmental—critical, surface—depth, and active—inactive), how would you describe yourself as a listener when listening in class? When listening to your best friend? When listening to a romantic partner? When listening to your parents? When listening to your superiors at work?
4.7 Listening to Complaints. Would you find it difficult to listen to friends who were complaining that the insurance premium on their Bentley was going up? Would you find it difficult to listen to unemployed friends complain that their rent was going up and that they feared becoming homeless? If you do find a difference, to what do you attribute it?

4.8 Selling by Listening. Researchers have argued that effective listening skills are positively associated with salespeople’s effectiveness in selling (Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993). Can you think of examples from your own experience that would support this positive association between effective listening and effective selling?

4.9 Men and Women Listening. The popular belief, as noted in this chapter, is that men listen the way they do to prove themselves superior and that women listen as they do to ingratiate themselves. Although there is no evidence to support this belief, it persists in the assumptions people make about the opposite sex. What do you believe accounts for the differences in the way men and women listen?

4.10 Cell Phone Annoyances. Some researchers have argued that listening to the cell phone conversations of others is particularly annoying because you can hear only one side of the conversation; cell phone conversations were rated as significantly more intrusive than two people talking face to face (Monk, Fellas, & Ley, 2004). Do you find the cell phone conversations of people near you on a bus or in a store annoying, perhaps for the reason given here? For other reasons?

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Throughout this chapter, there are icons that highlight media content for selected topics. Go to MyCommunicationLab for additional materials on the importance of listening, the nature of the listening process, the varied styles of listening you might use in different situations, and some cultural and gender differences in listening. Here you’ll find flashcards to help you learn key communication terms, videos that illustrate a variety of concepts, additional exercises, and discussions to help you continue your study of listening in human communication.