

Communication Skills: Lecture No. 10

Module 4

Lecture 1

LISTENING SKILLS

Communication Skills



**Module 4:
Lecture 1**

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Have You
Heard?

Listening Skills

In this Module, You will learn about —

Listening as an integral part of
Communication Skills

Significance of Effective Listening

Types of Listeners

Barriers to Listening

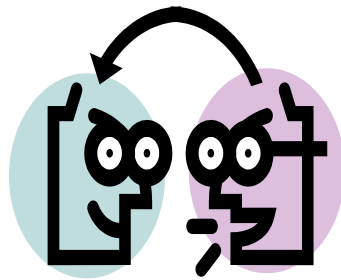
Listening as an Integral Part of Communication Skills

Having learnt from the previous lectures about the significance of effective communication, the process of communication, barriers to communication, and nonverbal communication, you need to learn now about listening as an integral part of communication skills.



Communication is basically important for nurturing human relationships. In fact, communication and human relations go hand in hand. You can develop positive relationships only to the degree and intensity of your communication. It is also the other way round—the more intense is a relationship, stronger will be the communication. Due to lack of adequate communication, people create mental walls and emotional fences in relationships. It is only by removing such walls and fences, you can let other people in your life. Remember: when you remove your fence, you are not only free to go out but also open to allow people to come in. To

do so, you should have a clear perception of the function of communication. In order to have a clear perspective on communication, you first need to clear your misconceptions of it.



Many people think that *speaking is* communication, that is, they treat speaking as synonymous with communication.

Thus, they misconceive fluent speakers as effective communicators. So much so that many people have the other misconception that talkative people communicate better than calm and silent people. Still worse, such



people think that to be a good speaker, you do not have to be a listener.

These are, by and large, the misconceptions of poor communicators too. People who speak more cause more ‘noise’ in communication. ‘Noise’ in a communication sense, refers to unintelligible or indistinct messages. People who keep on talking without listening to others will soon become unpopular. Such people fail to understand that communication is a two way process and one’s efficacy of communication is directly proportional to one’s ability to listen carefully to others. That is why, good communicators know already that good listening is the key. And effective communicators focus on *active* listening.

Misconceptions about Listening

Let us look at some misconceptions associated with listening. Generally, people think that only intelligent people can listen. However, the fact is that active listening is a cultivated behavior. So people can be trained to become good listeners. Similarly, some people think that speaking is more important than listening. Perhaps, that is the reason why they tend to speak more and listen less. But the truth is both are equally important in effective communication. Another interesting misconception is that people think that speaking consumes energy, whereas, listening does not consume energy at all. This is wrong because active listeners spend as much energy as a speaker. If the subject is complex, active listeners pay intense attention and spend an amount of energy equal to that of a jogger. Another funny misconception is that many think listening is an unconscious process. The fact is that listening is an active mental process; the mind is consciously involved in the process. Finally, there are people who think that good speakers can make their audience listen to them hundred per cent. This is an incorrect notion because no speaker, however good s/he may be, cannot make his/her audience really listen, that is, if the audiences do not want to listen to the speaker. There is no way the speaker can force the audience to listen to his/her talk. The speaker may use some gimmicks to capture the attention of the audience temporarily, but to retain it s/he needs cooperation of the audience. The audience should be motivated to listen to

him/her. The audience should be able to see a purpose in listening to the lecture, they should not be distracted. In short, they should not have any barriers to listening.

To become an effective communicator, one should pay equal importance to all the four basic skills: Reading, Listening, Writing, and Speaking. All the skills are integrated. The more one reads, the more one knows; and the more one knows, the more one writes; the more one writes, the more one reflects; the more one reflects, the more one listens; the more one listens, the more one learns; the more one learns, the more one speaks; the more one speaks, the more one communicates!

Good Communication is Good Listening

Both listening and speaking are top skills for winning through job interviews and group discussions. A person with poor listening skills will not listen properly to the questions in the interview and give irrelevant answers, owing to which s/he will be rejected. In group discussions, marks are given for active listening. Listening is the “receiving” part of communication. And listening is all about receiving information through your ears and eyes! Active listeners, besides paying full attention to verbal communication, keenly observe the nonverbal cues for grasping the message completely. Good listening is an active, integrated communication skill that demands energy and know-how. It is purposeful, powerful and productive. A good communicator is essentially a good listener. S/he modulates various verbal/nonverbal symbols which she displays depending on the feedback s/he gathers through simultaneous listening. Research shows that effective communication involves 50% more listening than talking. So, it is more important to realize that listening is not just paying attention to the other person’s words but also to his tone, facial expressions, and body language.



In a highly fast paced technological world, sadly, people are impatient to listen to others completely. This aspect is poignantly satirized by Simon and Garfunkel in their famous “Sounds of Silence” in the following lines:

And in the naked light I saw

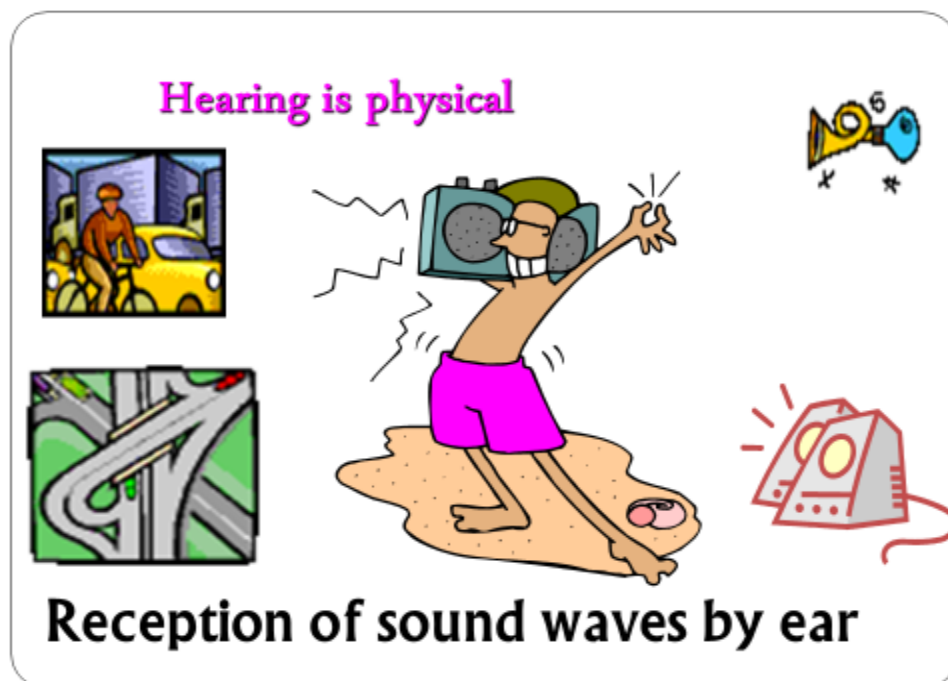
Ten thousand people

May be more

People talking without speaking

People hearing without listening.

People are talking without speaking, making empty chats, making sounds without sense. And they are *hearing* without listening. This brings us to the next important aspect of listening that you should know is that *listening is different from hearing*.



Listening is different from hearing because hearing is basically a *physical* activity. You hear blaring horns and get exposed to noise pollution when you are in a traffic jam. However, listening is a mental activity that involves and uses the brain.



**Listening is
a mental activity**



Apart from just hearing, it involves **Reception,**
Selection, Organization, Assimilation,
Interpretation, Evaluation and Response.



Listening sends signals to the brain for assimilation and for storing and retrieving of information for future use. It involves immense concentration. Besides hearing, it involves reception, selection and processing of ideas in terms of their relevance. The ideas are organized and used later for interpreting, critical thinking, analyzing, evaluating, and responding.

Effective Listening

Let us look at the aspects that will make one an effective listener. To be an effective listener, one has to be *completely involved* in the communication process, and *fully present*. When I say *fully*, I mean *physically, mentally, emotionally, and psychologically* present. A person may be mentally present but then emotionally disturbed by something else. A student may be physically present in the classroom but mentally absent. Probably the student has to go home for vacation and daydreams of the celebration that will take place at home. Similarly, when the teacher announces that she is going to ask questions to students by random selection, psychologically, a weak student will feel intimidated.



For Effective Listening
The Mind should be open...

***“The mind is like a parachute—
it functions only when
it is open!”***



Robert Schuler



To become an effective listener, one should be *attentive* all the time and *actively responsive*. And should be conscious of and in complete control of preoccupations, and distractions. Students often get distracted for very small things especially in the class room. A passerby, or a chirping bird can easily make them lose their concentration. Moreover, as Robert Schuler says, “the mind is like a parachute, it functions only when it is open.” Only when the mind is open, it will be able to receive ideas, receive concepts, assimilate them, interpret and critically think.

To keep one’s mind open, one should train the mind to listen without any prejudice. What is prejudice? Prejudice is forming an opinion in one’s mind even before actually confronting the situation; it is being judgmental before verifying the facts. The following example clearly demonstrates how people tend to keep their mind closed and remain prejudiced most of the times.

Students at the University of California were asked by Mr. L. Agnew of the department of Medical History for their reaction to the following:

“The father has syphilis, the mother tuberculosis. They have had four children—the first blind, the second died, the third was deaf and dumb, the fourth had tuberculosis. The mother is pregnant with her fifth child. The parents are willing to have an abortion. You have to make the decision.”



Most of the students voted in favour of abortion.

Mr. Agnew’s comment to them:

**“Congratulations!
You have just murdered Beethoven!”**

Beethoven was the deaf musical composer, but a child prodigy. His genius for music was recognized when he gave his first public performance as a pianist at the age of eight!

Before I conclude this lecture, let me remind you once again that *listening is an active process!*



Listening is an active process

- **Listening is the process that involves actively hearing what another person is communicating and attending to that communication.**
- **Listening is how we receive the verbal portion of a person's message as well as how we perceive the nonverbal connection.**

In the next lecture I will talk about the types of listeners, barriers to listening and suggest ways in which you can remove those barriers and become an effective communicator.

References

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- Nelson, Paul E. & Judy C. Pearson, *Confidence in Public Speaking*. London: Oxford University Press, 2004.