

Interactive Listening and Comprehension

Listening is our primary communication activity, and is a skill of critical significance in every aspect of our lives. Listening, as Howatt and Dakin (1974) define, is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This involves understanding a speaker's accent and pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary and grasping his meaning. Listening is our main tool to access knowledge and understanding. We need to listen carefully to build and maintain relationships with our family members, friends, and colleagues at school or work. We need to listen to follow instructions when we travel, go to the market, or follow directions to get someplace.

Though listening is one of the most important life skills, it is surprisingly, one that is never taught. We teach our children how to read, write, count, and develop other skills like being able to draw, recite poetry, or play a sport, but we never teach a child how to listen. This is because it is generally assumed that listening is a passive skill that does not need to be taught - it is as automatic as breathing. All a person needs to do to listen is to be quiet. And this is where the confusion sets in – listening is not the same as hearing. Though we commonly regard the words “hearing” and “listening” as synonyms, they are totally different and distinct processes. Hearing is the act of perceiving sounds through your ears. Anyone who has normal hearing hears sounds. Listening on the other hand means not only listening to sounds (especially words and phrases) that you hear with your ears, but concentrating on them attentively, so that you decipher and understand their meaning. Listening is an active process. Many people in the modern world are not ‘hard of hearing’ but are in danger of being ‘hard of listening’. Listening is a skill that we are all in danger of losing in a world of digital distraction and information overload

Do you know that among our various skills,

Listening is learned first, used (45%), taught the least.

Speaking is learned second, used (30%), Taught next least.

Reading is learned third, used (16%), Taught next most

Writing is learned fourth, used least (9%), Taught the most.

Therefore, our listening habits are not the result of teaching or training, but rather, the result of the lack of it. This is why many people are inefficient and ineffective listeners, and this deficiency robs them of many opportunities for success and progress.

Listening is composed of six distinct components. They are:

Hearing: The physiological process of receiving sound and/or other stimuli. Hearing is necessary for listening, but we do not listen to every sound that our ears automatically pick up.

Attending: The conscious and unconscious process of focusing attention on external stimuli. When this part of listening is deficient, people's attention may wander, so they may not fully grasp the significance of the words being spoken.

Interpreting: The process of decoding the symbols or behaviour attended to. If there is a deficiency in this part of listening, people may hear what was said, yet be unable to grasp its meaning.

Evaluating: The process of deciding the value of the information to the receiver. Deficiency in this area of listening means that people may hear and understand the message, yet be unclear if they agree with what they have heard.

Remembering: The process of placing the appropriate information into short-term or long-term memory. Deficiency in this area of listening means that people may interpret the message accurately, yet forget it.

Responding: The process of giving feedback to the source and/or other receivers. Deficiency in this area of listening means people may fully understand what was said, yet may be confused and respond inappropriately.

The words 'silent' and 'listen' are spelt with the same letters

DEEP LISTENING

Aboriginal people practice deep listening, an almost spiritual skill, based on respect.

Sometimes called 'dadirri', deep listening is inner, quiet, still awareness, and waiting.

Aboriginal people passed on stories orally as they knew no writing. Listening to the story teller was vital to reproduce the story accurately to the next generation of story-tellers.

The aboriginal people are completely at home with silence. They have lived for thousands of years with Nature's quietness. They recognise and experience in this quietness, the great Life-Giving Spirit, the Father of us all."

HOW LISTENING CAREFULLY OVERTHREW A KING AND BROUGHT AN EMPIRE

In the early stages of their alliance, Chandragupta along with his guru and mentor Chanakya had to suffer defeat in their battle against the Nanda king whom they were trying to overthrow. Chandragupta began his fight in the middle of the kingdom. He was defeated. Then he changed his strategy. And this is how it happened.

A spy of Chandragupta was moving around in a village. He happened to be in a hut where a woman was giving a chapati to her child. The boy ate the middle portion and threw away the edges.

"You eat the chapati in the fashion of Chandragupta waging his war," said the mother.

"How did Chandragupta wage the war?" the boy asked.

The spy now listened very carefully.

"You ate only the middle portion of the chapati and threw away the edges. Now Chandragupta wants to be king. Instead of beginning his attack from the borders of the kingdom, and conquering the towns on the way, he has begun the fight in the central parts. His army is encircled and beaten into bits," the mother explained.

These words reached Chanakya through the spy. He was impressed with this clever but simple idea, and changed the method of his attack. Soon, the kingdom was won for Chandragupta.

Chandragupta's grandson the Great Emperor Ashoka was a king who was always aware of the importance of listening. He knew that one of the vital things a king had to always remember was that he had to have his ears to the ground all the time. Under the gateways to his city, there were long, specially built tunnels that led into the city. Every night, after the gates were closed, secret agents from the king's very efficient espionage system entered and left the capital with messages from every part of his kingdom! Sometimes, the king himself used to wear a disguise and mingle with the common people in the bazaar to know what was going on in his kingdom.

ACTIVITY TO TEST YOUR LISTENING SKILLS

You are driving a bus. At the first stop, five people get on the bus. At the next stop, three people get off the bus, and two people get on.

At the next stop, ten people get on the bus, and six people got off.
What was the bus driver's age?

