

# Listening

Conversation is a two way process and it is necessary for those involved to be competent listeners.

Listening is used in a wide variety of different situations and can serve specific purposes. It is useful to distinguish between these different types of listening so that we can be aware of the demands they make upon the listeners.

## Interactive listening

Interactive listening takes place during a discussion where the role of the speaker and listener changes rapidly. In these circumstances participants exercise 'bidding' skills using body language, for example:

- raising a hand;
- sitting more upright and forwards; and
- starting to move their lips.

Some individuals will not have acquired these tacit skills and thus find it difficult to draw attention to the fact they want to join in. Others may find it hard to notice subtle moves by group members and therefore may not 'let others in'. An effective way to develop these skills is through role-playing discussions, with exaggerated conversational 'vices'.

## Reactive listening

Reactive listening is where listeners follow a set format, for example:

- a set of instructions may be given which participants are then expected to act upon; or
- an extended input of information may be provided which the listeners are expected to take in and then respond to.

In interactive and reactive listening the emphasis is on following the meaning of the speaker. Differences are often in the degree of formality and the status of the speaker.

## Discriminative listening

Discriminative listening is where listeners have to discriminate between and identify sounds rather than meaning, for example:

- phonic sounds for spelling or reading purposes; or
- environmental/musical sounds.

## Appreciative listening

Appreciative listening is where listeners listen for aesthetic pleasure, perhaps to musical or environmental sounds, for example:

- the rhythm or sounds of words in poems and stories; or
- other languages or accents.



## Exercise

### Paired listening

Participants get into pairs. One of them talks for two minutes about what they did the night before and their plans for the evening.

The other is instructed to either listen using the listening skills that can be outlined in a discussion prior to the exercise, or to act as if they are not listening, using body language that would suggest they are uninterested in the speaker.

The group then discuss the exercise.

Prompts are used such as:

'How did you know you were/were not being listened to?'

'How could you tell?' 'What skills did you use to show someone you were listening?'

'How did it feel if you weren't being listened to?'

This exercise gets participants thinking about what is important when listening and how to show someone you are listening to them.

Consider the following levels, which one do you use?

1	Passive Listening	Noise in the background – not listening	
2	Pretend Listening	Responding with nods, smiles and grunts but not really taking it in	
3	Biased Listening	"Selective" - Selecting the bits you want to hear and ignoring the other person's views.	
4	Misunderstood Listening	unconsciously overlaying your own interpretations and making things fit when they don't	
5	Attentive Listening	personally-driven fact gathering and analysis often with manipulation of the other person	
6	Active Listening	understanding feelings and gathering facts for largely selfish purposes	
7	Empathetic Listening	understanding and checking facts and feelings, usually to listener's personal agenda	
8	Facilitative Listening	listening, understanding fully, and helping, with the other person's needs uppermost	