

listening 5



In 2008, Bernie Madoff was arrested for a massive 20-year investment scheme that defrauded his investors of billions of dollars. Many of his victims lost their entire life savings in the scheme, and a year later, Madoff was sentenced to 150 years in prison. While this is a tragedy in its own right, the truth is that if the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) had simply listened to a financial expert, Harry Markopolos, in 2000, many of the victims would still have their life savings. In his book *No One Would Listen: A True Financial Thriller* (2010), Mr. Markopolos writes about how the SEC repeatedly ignored his formal complaints about Madoff time and again.

While we cannot be sure why individuals at the SEC did not listen to Mr. Markopolos, it is suspected that the SEC and other regulatory agencies were pressured against going after big investment firms (Lewis & Einhorn, 2009). In other words, the investigators at the SEC did not pay attention to Mr. Markopolos because they let biases and distractions get in the way. Instead, they simply ignored the information.

With all the information you receive on a daily basis in the Communication Age, it is important to learn to listen critically. Doing so will let you learn to distinguish between information you need to know and information you can ignore. Hopefully, you are never involved in a situation like Mr. Markopolos in the Madoff scandal. However, we all face instances where we could have been better listeners and more conscious about our choices. This chapter will teach you how to improve your listening ability by critically listening to messages.



Think about the last class you attended. How long ago was it? A day or a few hours? Do you remember anything specific that your professor said? Even in the Communication Age, in which our laptops and smartphones enable us to take better notes, send faster e-mails, and stay in constant touch with faraway relatives, listening is as important as speaking. With a plethora of technological sources competing for our listening attention, we constantly have to shift our awareness and attention (Bentley, 2000; Lodge, 2010). Some fear that people have lost the ability to focus on a single message for any length of time. These fears are well founded. In this chapter, you will learn about listening and ways to become a better listener in the Communication Age.

HEARING VERSUS LISTENING

Because listening is such a routine part of our day, it is easy to take it for granted without realizing how much work is required. Think about a simple lunch date with a friend. The restaurant is crowded, and the music is a little too loud. You did not eat breakfast, so your stomach is turning with hunger. Your waiter is busy with other customers and has not noticed that your water glasses are empty. Your friend sits across from you telling you about a problem she is having at work and asking for your advice. How much effort does it require for you to really listen to her? What other things are demanding your attention? You might be able to hear your friend over the music and other customers' voices, but are you listening to her? Consider another example:

It is Sunday night, and your favorite show is on. The commercial break is almost over, and just as the show returns, your roommate calls from the kitchen that the garbage is starting to smell and that it is your turn to take it out. You give him a mumbled "OK, sure" and continue watching your show. When the show is finally over and you get up to head to bed, your roommate asks why you have not taken care of the garbage. You vaguely remember that he said something about the garbage but really have no idea what he's talking about, and the two of you proceed to argue about the chore. Have you ever experienced a misunderstanding like this? The problem is that while you may have heard your roommate, you were not really listening. Listening is essential to being connected and engaged with others. We spend most of our day listening in some form. In everyday talk, we use the words *hearing* and *listening* as if they have the same meaning. However, these words convey distinct processes.

In the Communication Age, **listening** is an active process of receiving and understanding messages received either through listening to words



Video Link 5.1
Communication in
Action



**Reference
Link 5.1**
Listening

or by reading text. Listening is about attending to messages and making meaning, and it involves several simultaneous mental processes that occur during communication. **Hearing**, on the other hand, is what happens when sound waves are received by the ear and brain. Just because you hear someone does not mean you listened. You may have heard your friend tell you about her job, and you may have heard your roommate asking you to take out the trash, but did you listen? Why is it sometimes so difficult to listen? In the following section, you will learn about why it is difficult to listen and problems that can arise with listening.



Technology can compete for our attention in interpersonal face-to-face interactions.

LISTENING PROBLEMS

Listening can be hard at times. Distractions come in many different shapes and forms. We might be hungry and thinking about what to eat. We might be worrying about how much work we have left to do. We might strongly disagree with what a person is saying. We might simply be bored with the conversation. By understanding these potential problems, it is possible to listen better.

Situational Distractions

Listening is often hard because we fail to limit our distractions. We all have many things going on at once, and it can be difficult to forget these distractions and focus on one message. As you read this book, you might also have music or the TV on in the background. Your phone may occasionally vibrate or deliver a push notification. Your eyes could wander periodically from the book to your devices or out the window. All of these presences in your environment are **situational distractions** and have the potential to distract you from your reading. The crowded restaurant, your growling stomach, and attempts to get the waiter's attention are also examples of situational distractions.

Limiting your exposure to possible distractions can facilitate better listening. When you are reading your textbook, turn off your phone or the TV. Allow yourself to check your text messages every 30 minutes. Check the scores for your favorite sports teams every hour. There are no clear rules for when you should look up from the textbook, but set out to limit your situational distractions so that you can devote full attention to the task at hand.



Video Link 5.2
The Power of Listening

communication **HOW-TO**

Becoming Aware of Situational Distractions



1. Go with a friend to a crowded place (a restaurant, coffee shop, or shopping mall might be a good place to try this).
2. Sit down somewhere near the center of the room, or anywhere there are obvious distractions, and talk to one another about your day.
3. After 10 minutes, stop talking and make a list of all of the situational distractions you noticed during your conversation. Do this quickly without thinking too much about it.
4. Make another list of the things your friend talked about while you were listening. Again, don't spend too much time thinking about it. Write down what comes to mind.
5. Compare your lists. Is your list of distractions longer than the list of things you remembered from the conversation? How could you have limited these distractions to better listen to your friend?

Source Distractions

Distractions do not only come from our environment. Sometimes the very person or mediated message we are trying to listen to can be the distraction. **Source distractions** occur when the person or mediated message we are listening to exhibits a behavior that inhibits our ability to listen. Have you ever traveled outside of the country and spoken with an individual from somewhere else in the world? Even if he or she spoke English, you may have struggled to keep up with an accent or a rate of speech you were not used to. Have you ever received an e-mail that contained digital stationery (like flowers at the bottom of the message) or perhaps a text message written in ALL CAPS FOR NO REASON? These visual additions to the e-mail or text message might keep you from carefully reading the message because the source itself is the distraction. Have you ever tried to have a conversation with someone who uses dramatic hand gestures while speaking? Perhaps the constant movement of his or her hands kept you from truly listening to what was said. It can be difficult, but when faced with any of these distractions, it is important to maintain focus on the person's message and try to put any distracting behaviors out of your mind. Often, by noticing the distracting part of the message and then moving on from it, you will be able to focus on the message.

Medium Distractions

Like static coming through a TV screen, sometimes listening distractions can come from the channel itself. The same is true in real life. Picture your graduation ceremony: Everyone is seated in a large auditorium, and the president of your university or college stands on stage, ready to give the commencement address. You can see that her mouth is moving, and you hear faint sounds, but the microphone is failing to pick up her voice and carry it throughout the room. **Medium distractions** occur when the channel through which the message is delivered obstructs our ability to receive the message clearly.

In the Communication Age, the number of medium distractions we encounter has increased with each kind of new technology. Downed wireless networks, overcrowded servers, malfunctioning devices, and even normally functioning multitasking devices—all these things can keep us from listening carefully. Have you ever been having a phone conversation when another call or text message beeped in and distracted you? Many times medium distractions are beyond your control, but it is important to limit them as much as you can. When you are taking an important phone call, simply turn off notifications for Facebook, Groupon, new e-mails, text messages, and so on. If you are delivering a presentation, make sure the volume for the microphone is up high enough for all to hear.

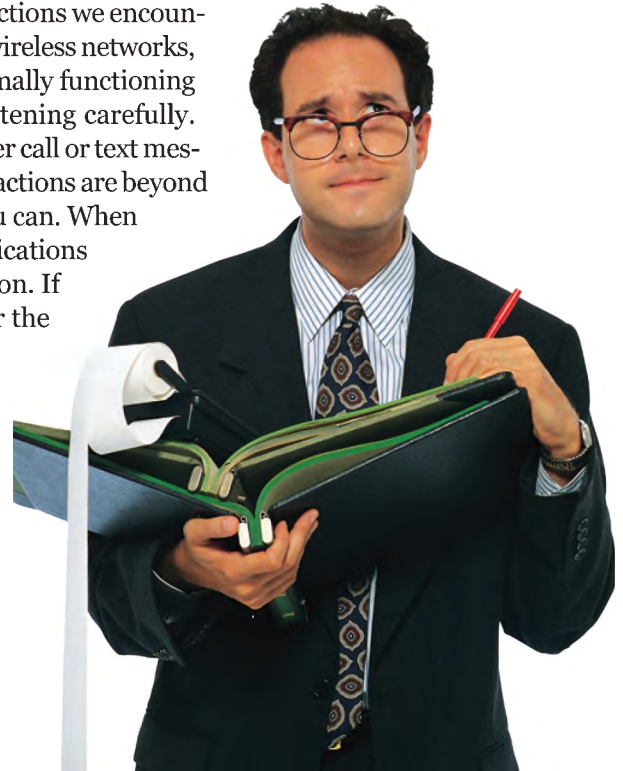
Failure to Focus on the Message

Sometimes you will fail to focus on the message. Have you ever heard a speaker and counted the amount of “ums,” “likes,” or “you knows”? Or, have you let your mind wander to your to-do list or started counting the ceiling tiles? Maybe you are thinking about an argument you had with a friend or roommate earlier in the day. Perhaps you are chatting with several friends online at the same time and cannot really focus on any one chat. Focusing on the message can be exceptionally hard in the Communication Age. While technology has allowed for new ways to find information and communicate with others, it has also created even more ways to fail at focusing on the message.

Sometimes listeners fail to focus on the message because the words are too complicated or they contain too much technical jargon. When it takes a lot of cognitive work to simply understand the meaning of a word let alone the conversation, listeners are distracted. When speaking to others, try to avoid technical jargon so that your listeners can better focus on the message. If you must use specialized language, be sure to define it clearly for your listeners. Studies have demonstrated that in a health care setting the use of technical jargon can bring misunderstanding and hurt the rapport between the patient and health care providers (Roter, 2011). Sometimes we fail to focus on the message because we do not like the other person or we think that his or her speaking style is boring. Whatever the case, focusing on the message takes skill and practice.

Bias

Bias is any assumption or attitude about a person, an issue, or a topic that is made before we have heard all of the facts. Biases are a major barrier to effective listening, and it is best to limit them in order to be more effective at listening. If you see a political ad about a candidate that misrepresents the facts of an issue that you feel very strongly about, it is possible that you will be biased against that candidate the next time you hear her speak. That bias may prevent you from listening to what the candidate has to say, and you may miss important information. Bias is



Video Link 5.3
[Who's on First?](#)



Audio Link 5.1
Active Listening Skills

not limited to individuals; it can also apply to groups. If you are pro-life, you may refuse to listen to any pro-choice argument no matter who it comes from. Effective listening requires us to put our biases aside and regard the other as having a valid point of view worthy of our time and careful attention. However, it is impossible to completely set our own bias aside (Bodie, 2010). You need to acknowledge that bias exists and make your decisions with this knowledge.

Judging Too Soon

Being part of the Communication Age, you have many ways to get information, and you may have winnowed the selection of sources down to your favorites. As a result, you simply watch the same TV shows, read only a few websites, or listen to one or two radio stations exclusively. But when you limit your own exposure to news and information, you may not get a full picture and may end up judging contrary information or jumping to conclusions too soon. This happens to all of us. We may believe we are listening to the message and yet fail to recognize that we are judging the topic of conversation or issue too soon without hearing all the evidence and facts. Bias plays an important role in judging a message too soon. This is because bias can occur outside of our conscious awareness (Aarts, Custers, & Veltkamp, 2008). Our brains are capable of making split-second decisions about people and issues, and we may not even realize we are making these decisions.



Judging too soon can also happen in more personal contexts. Samantha has a friend, Steve, who she knows is not a good driver. Steve calls Samantha to tell her about a recent car accident where he hit another vehicle. While hearing this story, Samantha may unconsciously blame him for the accident and ignore the part of the conversation in which he tells her that the other car ran a red light and crashed into him. In this example, Samantha judged the message too soon without hearing all the facts. In order to be good listeners, we have to wait until we have all of the information before forming judgments or assumptions. It takes a lot of effort and patience to put aside our own quick thinking and really listen to the other, but you can improve this with practice.

Listening Anxiety

Have you ever been nervous about listening to a presentation or being involved in a conversation? Perhaps your boss is giving you specific directions about a complicated work task. Or, you might be sitting in a lecture trying to learn difficult material that will be on the next exam. In both cases, you might be apprehensive about listening to the speaker. This feeling is called listening anxiety. **Listening anxiety** is when a listener has anxiety that triggers the inability to process and interpret messages being sent by others (Schrodt & Wheelless, 2001). Examples of listening anxiety include a fear of not processing new information correctly and a fear of being judged on one's ability to correctly remember specific information (Wheelless, Preiss, & Gayle, 1997). Research has



Journal Link 5.1
Behavioral Approach to Listening

Assess *Your* Communication

LISTENING ANXIETY

The following statements apply to how various people feel about listening to others. Indicate if these statements apply to how you feel, noting whether you (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) are undecided, (2) disagree, or (1) strongly disagree.

1. _____ While listening, I get nervous when a lot of information is given at once.
2. _____ I get impatient and anxious when listening to someone discuss theoretical, intellectual issues.
3. _____ I have avoided listening to abstract ideas because I was afraid I could not make sense of what was said.
4. _____ Many classes are annoying and uncomfortable because the teacher floods you with detailed information in the lectures.
5. _____ I feel agitated or uneasy when someone tells me there is not necessarily a clear, concrete way to deal with an important problem.
6. _____ While listening, I feel tense when I have to analyze details carefully.
7. _____ It is frustrating to listen to people discuss practical problems in philosophical and abstract ways.
8. _____ When I hear abstract material, I am afraid I will be unable to remember it very well.
9. _____ I experience anxiety when listening to complex ideas others tell me.
10. _____ When I listen to complicated information, I often fear that I will misinterpret it.
11. _____ I do not feel relaxed and confident while listening, even when a lot of information is given at once.
12. _____ Listening to complex ideas is not a pleasant, enjoyable experience for me.
13. _____ When listening, I do not feel relaxed and confident that I can remember abstract ideas that are being explained.

Add all scores together: _____

The higher the score, the higher your listening anxiety.

Note: This is a modified version of the Listening Anxiety Test.

From "Receiver Apprehension, Informational Receptivity, and Cognitive Processing," in *Avoiding Communication: Shyness, Reticence, and Communication Apprehension* by L. R. Wheelless, R. W. Priess, and B. M. Gayle, 1997, Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, pp. 151–187.

demonstrated that people with high listening anxiety tend to have more problems with information processing and general listening effectiveness (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001) and are more verbally aggressive in their communication (Schrodt & Wheelless, 2001). Additionally, students with higher levels of listening anxiety report less motivation to succeed in the classroom (Schrodt, Wheelless, & Ptacek, 2000).

In any communication situation, the listeners are just as important as the speaker. The listener has a vital role to play, and this role can cause some to be nervous. Take the “Assess Your Communication: Listening Anxiety” survey to see how you score in this regard. The higher your score, the more likely you have listening anxiety. Toward the end of this chapter, you will learn about specific listening strategies to help you reduce receiver apprehension.



Video Link 5.4
Entrepreneurial
Listening Skills

BENEFITS OF BEING A GOOD LISTENER

As you remember from Chapter 1, communication is the collaborative process of using messages to create and participate in social reality. Being a good listener is an important part of this definition. We cannot create or participate in social reality if nobody is listening. In short, listening is what makes communication a collaborative process. In the following section, you will read about four key benefits of being a good listener.

Relationship Satisfaction

Of all the skills required of a good partner in a relationship, listening is one of the most important (Bodie, 2011). The ability to listen to a significant other, spouse, supervisor, parent, child, or friend will contribute to a healthy and close relationship (Bodie, in press). How many times have you had an argument in which the other person said something like “You are not listening to me!” or “I need you to hear me out”? In positive and healthy relationships, we value the listening contribution of the other person. Listening is crucial for providing social support in times of distress or need (Jones, 2011). Being a good listener in a relationship takes work and the ability to not judge or evaluate the other person in the moment.

Community Activism

Listening to others about the needs of your community will help you find ways to be more involved in the community. John Dewey (1927), an important American philosopher of education and communication theory, argued that listening is a vital skill for a democracy to flourish. He believed that social problems can only be resolved through listening to those around us in our communities. Who better to understand the problems in a local community than those who live within it? Being part of an engaged community requires good listening abilities. This is why politicians, business leaders, and community activists often go on listening tours. A **listening tour** is when a person

travels to different communities specifically to listen to the concerns and ideas of the people who live there. Listening tours allow a leader or another interested party to gain better insight into the lives of those in the community. Listening to as many people as possible may open the door to more efficient, practical, and workable solutions.

Media Awareness

Living in the Communication Age, listening to media is only increasing, and it is important to become more aware. **Media awareness** is the ability to selectively attend to and evaluate messages in the media. By working to develop our listening skills, we will be better able to cut through the potential noise and distractions and truly focus on messages that need our attention. Additionally, learning to be good listeners will help us know when something we view or listen to online is worthy of our time and effort. Because of all the potential media we could view, we simply have to make better choices, and listening critically to media will help us do so (Van de Vord, 2010).

Job Success

Being a good listener is one of the most important skills in the workplace (Flynn, Valikoski, & Grau, 2008). You will spend most of your time in the workplace listening to others. It might be your supervisor telling you about the next assignment, a coworker discussing a media plan for a project, or a customer complaining about the service. Learning to listen to your work team is an important skill to acquire (Johnston, Reed, & Lawrence, 2011). Think about your own college experience. You spend most of your time listening to your instructor with the goal of being able to remember and critically think about the classroom material. Success in the classroom is based on your ability to listen (Cooper & Buchanan, 2010). The same is true in the workplace.

TYPES OF LISTENING

The kind of listening you engage in is different depending on the situation or what your needs are in the moment. You would listen differently to a friend talking about a serious health problem than you would the “Time to Work Out” playlist on your phone. It is important to have a **listening goal**, what you are trying to accomplish with listening in a particular context or situation. In this section,



Audio Link 5.2
Becoming a Better Listener



make a DIFFERENCE

STORYCORPS

We know that learning to listen well is an important part of our jobs, our classes, and our relationships, but can it also affect our sense of community?

Listening is how we gather important information we need, but it is also a way of connecting with others. How might it change our communities if we took the time to listen to each other's stories? A nonprofit organization, StoryCorps, is answering these questions. StoryCorps's mission is to give people from every background and belief system the chance to record their life stories and preserve them in the U.S. Library of Congress. One way StoryCorps accomplishes its mission is by creating the National Day of Listening. The idea is for citizens in any community to interview people in their lives and record the interview so it can be passed down to others. It could be a family member, a friend, a veteran, or a stranger who is willing to sit down and tell his or her story. The most important aspect of the interview is that both parties take the time to *listen* to each other's stories. So many of us have stories to tell, but we stay silent because we do not believe that anyone wants to listen. But with the help of



StoryCorps and its archives of interviews, we now know that our stories can have a large and willing audience.

You can participate in the National Day of Listening by visiting nationaldayoflistening.org and learning how to record your own interview. You can also listen to others' interviews and get help with a list of questions to ask your partner. Who would you like to interview in your community? Who in your community needs someone to truly listen to him or her? This interview can be just between the two of you, or you can record it so that people from other communities can benefit from it. Whose story do you think needs to be told?

let's discuss five basic types of listening, each with a different goal (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996).

Discriminative Listening

Discriminative listening involves the ability to understand the different stimuli around us in order to process the meaning. If you have ever been around a baby for any length of time, you start to realize how the sounds of various cries can mean that the baby is in need of a diaper change, feeding, or just human touch. In the Communication Age, this type of listening goal is important due to all the auditory and visual stimuli that occur all around us. We have to be good at discriminative listening before we can engage in other types of listening goals.

Critical Listening

Critical listening occurs when you need to evaluate an argument or a stance and develop an opinion based on evidence. This type of listening is the most

demanding because you must simultaneously listen to the message and analyze its content. Think back to the example of listening to the political candidate running for office. Not only do you need to listen to get all the facts; you are also being asked to make a decision regarding the candidate's ability to do the job well. While you gather the information from the speech, you also must ask yourself, is the candidate being truthful? Is he or she an ethical leader? What are his or her abilities, and is there any reason the candidate may not perform his or her job well? Are there other candidates who may do the job better? You may gain answers to a few of these questions from listening carefully to the candidate's message, but you will likely have to draw from past messages and experiences to form a complete picture and make your choices. Engaging in critical listening will help you make these decisions. Listening requires us to constantly monitor our own listening and to be open to the ideas we are hearing (Richmond & Hickson, 2002).



Critical listening is especially important during election times. How do you practice critical listening when you are making important decisions?



communication HOW-TO

Critical Listening

1. Pay close attention to the message and notice things that distracted you during the presentation or conversation.
2. Write down any previous knowledge or opinions you had about the person speaking. Think about how those opinions affected how you listened.
3. Reflect on what you learned in the presentation or conversation.
4. Evaluate the evidence and arguments presented in the message. Does the evidence make sense? Is it compelling? Are the arguments logical?



Journal Link 5.2 Listening at Work

Taking the time to enjoy music may seem easier than other types of listening, but it still requires time and effort.

Comprehensive Listening

Comprehensive listening refers to trying to understand and make meaning of the message. For example, listening to your instructor lecture on a theory of communication would involve comprehensive listening. You might take notes, pay attention to the presentational slides, and ask questions. Asking for clarification and further explanation is an important part of comprehensive listening and is useful if you need to recall the information at a later date. Think about shopping for a new apartment. You may make several appointments to tour various apartments, and at each new location, a building manager will tell you about the available amenities, benefits, and possible challenges. In this case, if you engage in comprehensive listening by taking notes and asking detailed questions (does it have a dishwasher; are the neighbors quiet; did the previous tenant smoke or have pets?), you are more likely to remember which apartment best suits your needs. And, of course, engaging in comprehensive listening in class will make you more likely to pass your test!

Appreciative Listening

Appreciative listening is listening for pleasure. This could involve listening to music, public radio, slam poetry, an interesting speaker, or any entertaining show. You may also enjoy listening to books in an audio format. Appreciative listening depends very much on the individual, but the key is enjoyment. However, that does not mean that appreciative listening is effortless. It can take a great amount of skill and focus to appreciate the nuances of a great album or the message of a great speaker, especially if there are other people or issues demanding our attention.

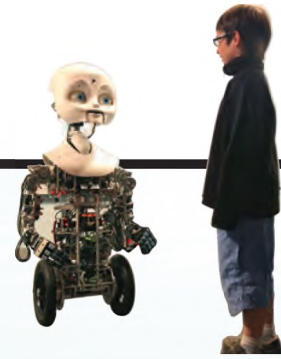
Empathic Listening

The last type of listening is **empathic listening**, or listening to others by responding nonjudgmentally to their needs (either physical or emotional). When



communication

FRONTIER



HUMAN-ROBOT INTERACTION

We all have seen the classic movie plot in which robots rise up against humanity. Despite these movie fears, the use of robots for a variety of tasks is growing every year. Recently, researchers have started to investigate human-robot interaction. These social robots are programmed to interact with humans in a variety of ways. Take for example the social robot, Nexi, developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Nexi is designed to mimic facial features of human emotional displays and have basic conversations. More advanced social robots will be used for therapy with autism, as companions for children in hospitals, or as general personal assistants. This might seem way off in the future, but researchers believe in the next 10 years we will start to see social robots in all sorts of public settings. Fong, Nourbakhsh, and Dautenhahn (2003) argued that in order for social robots to be integrated into society they would need to “capitalize on feelings evoked when humans nurture” or care for them, “proactively engage” with humans, and communicate with high levels of dialogue (p. 145). In other words, social robots need to be able to listen.

The key problem to solve with human-robot interaction involves listening. Developers have

created robots that can recognize and respond to human speech, and the machines are becoming more advanced each year. But human communication is far more complicated than current human speech recognition technologies. Will a social robot be able to follow the complexities of human communication? Will a social robot be able to engage in appreciative listening or empathic listening? Does your social robot get its own Facebook and Twitter account to interact with your friends too? Only the future will tell, but it will be extremely interesting to pay attention to the development of human-robot interactions. Let’s just hope they do not start a human-robot war like in the movies.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

1. What are the key features about listening that would need to be present for a robot to really listen?
2. Could you interact with a robot? Could you develop a friendship with a robot? Why or why not?

we say, “I need someone to listen to me,” it’s usually empathic listening that we are seeking. We are hoping to be able to “lay it out” for someone who will let us talk and make us feel “heard” and less alone. Think about that lunch date with the friend who wanted advice about a problem going on at work. Remember all the possible distractions present in that situation? To be a truly empathic listener we must be able to put aside all of those distractions and focus entirely on the other person (Rogers, 1962). Empathic listening also requires demonstrating support, caring, and warmth. To do it well, the listener should put aside judgments of what is being shared. Don’t judge the person’s feelings or situation, but instead offer support and understanding. Virtues such as patience and humility can go a long way when listening to others (Rice & Burbules, 2010).

By understanding the type of listening we are engaging in and its goals, we have a better chance at being successful and responsive to the communication situation. In the next section, you will learn about ways to become a better listener. As you read this section, think about each type of listening goal and how you can improve.



Journal Link 5.3
Empathic Listening

BECOMING A BETTER LISTENER

Becoming a better listener takes work, especially with all the distractions around us. To be better at listening, remember this acronym: **HURIER**. HURIER refers to a six-step listening process: hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating, and responding (Brownell, 1994). The following sections discuss each step in the HURIER process.

Hearing

Remember the difference between hearing and listening? Hearing is the physical process where auditory stimuli enter the ears. The first step toward better listening is making sure you can properly hear the other person. In other words, can you receive the message? Perhaps you need to sit close to the speaker. In the case of a speech, often other audience members can be distracting. We all have that friend who likes to talk and comment during a speaker's presentation or during a movie. This can severely limit our ability to hear the message. If you need to truly hear the message, it might be best to not sit by your friends. There might be something in the environment, like a noisy fan or a loud TV, that prohibits you from hearing your friend during an important conversation. Being able to actually process the auditory stimuli is the first step toward being a good listener.

Understanding

Attaching meaning to the words you hear is the process of understanding. We often do this unconsciously. For example, if your professor is telling a story about her dog, your brain immediately conjures a mental image of a dog, allowing you to understand her message. Understanding a message requires that we can first hear the message, but it also includes being able to understand the speaker's use of language and the basic context of the information. An important part of understanding is to be mindful during the presentation or conversation. **Mindfulness** is the ability to remain in the present moment and fully be aware of the speaker, the environment, and the message. Studies have demonstrated that when a person practices being mindful, the person is better able to process information (Zeidan, Johnson, Diamond, David, & Goolkasian, 2010). To be mindful, remember to check your bias and be conscious of it, focus on staying in the current moment, and notice the other person as a unique being.

Remembering

Remembering the message so that it can be used for later interpretation is the next step. Listening not only requires us to be present in the moment and to be mindful, but also necessitates anticipating future interactions. If your professor decides to connect her dog story to some class material later

on, remembering the previous story will help you make a stronger connection to the concept she is demonstrating. By understanding the message, we are better able to remember the message. We often remember the first thing and last thing we hear, and we will often not remember the information in the middle of the message. That is why it is important to create a mental outline (or even write it down) to help reduce the issues associated with these effects.

Interpreting

The next step in the HURIER process is to make sense of the verbal and nonverbal codes and to assign meaning to the information received. This is referred to as interpreting. You may hear a friend say, “I’m fine,” when you ask how she is doing. You have an understanding of what “fine” means, but you must also interpret that statement. The friend may, in fact, mean exactly what she says, but you might gain clues from her expression or the context in which she says it. Interpreting is an important part of the collaborative process of communication, and this is where miscommunication is likely to happen. Basically, are you interpreting the message as the other person intended you to interpret the message? Asking this type of question will help you better interpret the message as the other person intended it to mean.

Evaluating

Weighing the credibility and accuracy of the message to make an assessment about the information requires evaluation. If you determine from your interpretations that your friend means something other than “I’m fine,” you must evaluate what your friend really *does* mean. Does she want you to leave her alone to her thoughts, or is she hoping you will pick up on her nonverbal behaviors and question her further? When you evaluate a public speech, you consider the strength of the argument presented. Is the speaker giving good evidence to back her claims? Is she credible to speak about the particular subject? Is she separating fact from fiction?

The increased use of technology to communicate with others amplifies potential problems associated with evaluating a message. You might have noticed that sometimes you have a hard time evaluating the true meaning of a text message. Was the message sarcastic? Did the sender of the message mean to sound rude, or was it the lack of face-to-face cues that made the text message cryptic? While text messages are good for sending short and targeted messages, they cannot convey complex emotional communication. This lack of capacity can lead to problems with evaluation.

Critically evaluating a message despite many of the listening problems discussed earlier in the chapter can be difficult. Learning to evaluate a message free of bias, various distractions, apprehension, or misunderstanding due to gender differences takes time and patience. In fact, these potential issues exist for us all, and we all make mistakes when it comes to good listening. However, knowing



ETHICAL connection

THE BEER SUMMIT

In 2009, Harvard University Professor Henry Gates was arrested at his home by a local Cambridge, Massachusetts, police officer named Sgt. James Crowley. Crowley was responding to a 911 call about two men breaking into the Gates home. Dr. Gates was returning from a trip to China when he discovered that his door would not open. Gates and his driver were trying to force the door open when a neighbor saw this and called 911, thinking someone was breaking in. After Sgt. Crowley approached Dr. Gates and realized that Dr. Gates was indeed the home owner, they got into a heated argument about race. Gates accused Sgt. Crowley of racism and stated that he was only accused of burglary because he was a “Black man in America.” The police officer arrested Dr. Gates for disorderly conduct. The charges were dropped a few days later.

This story quickly made national news when President Obama said that the local police acted “stupidly” (Tomsho, 2009). Shortly after this statement, the President invited Dr. Gates and

Sgt. Crowley to the White House for a “Beer Summit” to talk about the confrontation and race relations



in the United States. Obama called the meeting a “teachable moment” and felt that all parties needed some time to listen to each other. The result of the conversation was that all involved had a better understanding of the situation and realized that they each had made comments not ethical about the other person. Many times during a heated conversation, people need to take the time to settle down and listen. Ethical listening can occur when we take the place of the other and think about the consequences of our messages (Tompkins, 2009). It is not ethical to talk and think later. Only through listening to the other person can we be ethical in communication.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that time away from the confrontation allowed for better listening to take place?
2. What could of each party done differently in the moment to avoid confrontation?

that these issues exist only helps us check our own evaluation of a message for potential listening problems.

Responding

The last step is giving a response to the message, either verbally or nonverbally. After interpreting and evaluating the message you must decide how to reply—and others will judge your listening skills by your response. It may seem odd to include your response as part of the listening process, but your response will show the other person just how carefully you were paying attention to the message. Communication would not be collaboration if not for this vital step. If after evaluating your friend’s message you decide to question her about her mood and she tells you about her bad day, your response has confirmed for her that you were indeed listening to the entire message in context rather than merely hearing words. To be better at this step in the listening process, try to use probing or clarifying questions to demonstrate responsiveness. Use nonverbal cues, such as head nods, emotional expressions, or verbal utterances, to show you are listening to the other person.

communication HOW-TO

Becoming a Better Listener

1. Learn and follow the HURIER approach to listening.
2. Decide what type of listening you are engaging in. Is this a critical, comprehensive, appreciative, or empathic listening situation?
3. Turn off all devices that might distract you.
4. For some situations, take careful notes so that you can evaluate and remember the message.
5. Work to suspend all judgment until you are able to fully process the message.
6. Ask questions if possible.
7. Practice paraphrasing what you heard.



LISTENING AND CONVERGENCE

Life in the Communication Age means that we are responsible to a wide variety of sources of messages. Whether it occurs in interpersonal relationships or virtual spaces, listening is an important skill to learn. With the convergence of media, new technologies, and face-to-face communication, listening has become quite tricky in our culture. Even before instant messaging, Skype, video games on demand, Facebook, mobile YouTube videos, and so on, we still had a hard time truly listening to others, but when you add all the additional sources of messages, we have even more things to manage. This is truly a tough task.

As we move through the Communication Age, our job is to learn to listen in many different contexts. Technology can be both a positive and a negative when trying to sort through this information. We have to become skilled at deciding what messages we need to respond to and make judgments of that information. As part of these skills, we often engage in multitasking to listen to multiple messages at the same time to cope with all the information we receive in the Communication Age. However, many research studies are demonstrating that multitasking is detrimental to both learning and focusing (Junco & Cotton, 2011). To become better listeners in the Communication Age, we need to learn to focus and give all of our attention to one message and try to resist the urge to multitask. This is one area of living in the Communication Age that needs serious thought and consideration.




Video Link 5.5 Chapter Summary

Offering your conversational partner a response is an important way to show her you were listening, even if your response is nonverbal.



what we've **LEARNED**

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- 1. Listening requires a lot of work.** Because it is such a routine part of our day, we often take listening for granted. However, if we are to become better listeners, we must become more aware of our listening habits.
 - 2. There is an important difference between hearing and listening.** Hearing is the biological process of the ears and brain receiving sound waves. Listening is a much more active process that involves assigning meaning and responding to messages.
 - 3. Common listening problems include situational distractions, source distractions, medium distractions, failure to focus on the message, bias, judging too soon, and listening anxiety.** Understanding these problems and successfully avoiding them can help you become a better listener.
 - 4. There are five basic types of listening: discriminative listening, critical listening, comprehensive listening, appreciative listening, and empathic listening.** Knowing your listening goals can help you determine which type of listening you need to be doing.
 - 5. The steps to becoming a better listener include hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating, and responding.** You can easily remember these steps by remembering the acronym HURIER.

KEY TERMS

Appreciative listening 122
Bias 115
Comprehensive listening 122
Critical listening 120
Discriminative listening 120
Empathic listening 122

Hearing 113
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Media awareness 119
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