

5. Why is it important to listen to the entire message before passing judgment?
6. List some ways you can be an empathetic listener and offer support to another.
7. Define paraphrasing and interpreting. How are they similar? Different?

KEY CONCEPTS

hearing
listening
external noise
internal noise
jargon

message overload
active listening
passive listening
informational listening
critical listening

empathy
questioning
paraphrasing
interpreting

SUMMARY

Listening is the process of giving thoughtful attention to what we hear. It goes beyond hearing, which is our ability to perceive sounds. Hearing sounds alone can create a lack of understanding between the sender and receiver. Variables that interfere with our ability to listen effectively include noise, delivery, language, message overload, and perceptions of self and others. Despite the barriers discussed in this chapter, the barrier discussed in this chapter is the most difficult to overcome. It is possible to become an effective listener. One way to achieve this is by becoming an active listener, which means listening with a sense of purpose and involvement. There are several factors to consider when listening. These factors help us to become more effective listeners. These skills include questioning, paraphrasing, and interpreting and relate factors to interact with the sender. Active listening that we learn to remember the nonverbal communication. It is essential to all and display sensitivity to the sender's verbal and nonverbal cues. Active listening requires us to evaluate the speaker's message and interpret it to gain knowledge. Critical listening requires us to evaluate the speaker's message and interpret it to gain knowledge. Critical listening requires us to evaluate the speaker's message and interpret it to gain knowledge. Critical listening requires us to evaluate the speaker's message and interpret it to gain knowledge.

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REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the differences between hearing and listening?
2. Describe the factors that interfere with our ability to listen.
3. Why is it important to listen to the entire message before passing judgment?
4. What is the goal of informational listening?



Serving Your COMMUNITY

Effective Listening Skills

In an effort to improve your listening skills, please engage in the following activity:

- Interview someone who volunteers at an organization such as a hospital, day care, Habitat for Humanity, or Red Cross. The purpose of the interview is to find out his or her motivation for volunteering and the specific values or goals of the organization.
- Using the listening skills of questioning, paraphrasing, and interpreting, respond to this person using language to show that you are listening and trying to understand his or her position.
- How did this process help you recognize the importance of effective listening? What parts of your frames of reference did you find you have in common with the person you interviewed? How did you overcome your differences in order to effectively listen?

SUMMARY

Listening is the process of giving thoughtful attention to what we hear. It goes beyond hearing, which is our ability to perceive sounds. Poor listening skills can create a lack of understanding between the sender and receiver. Variables that interfere with our ability to listen effectively include noise, delivery, language, message overload, and perceptions of self and others.

Despite the barriers discussed in the first part of the chapter, it is possible to become an effective listener. One way to achieve this is by becoming an active listener, which means listening with a sense of purpose and involvement. Passive listening requires nothing from the receiver. There

are three types of active listening: informational, critical, and empathetic. Informational listening is used to gain knowledge. Critical listening requires us to evaluate the speaker's message or intent. Empathetic listening requires that we take the focus off of ourselves, avoid being judgmental, and display sensitivity to the sender's verbal and nonverbal communication. It is essential to all active listening that we listen to remember the message for later use. Note taking can help us do this.

Responsive listening skills help us to become effective listeners. These skills include questioning, paraphrasing, and interpreting and require listeners to interact with the sender.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the differences between hearing and listening?
2. Describe the factors that interfere with our ability to listen.
3. Why is remembering the message an essential part of active listening?
4. What is the goal of informational listening?

Kevin: No, not at all. I think you are a very dedicated worker.

Dave: Then are you saying that I'm too focused on the work and not enough on my relationships with my colleagues in the office?

Kevin: No. I'm saying that we need to stop spreading you so thin; we need to give you an opportunity to focus more on your work, instead of trying to handle so many other responsibilities.

Dave: So you are saying that the company realizes the stress I've been under and wants to help me reduce the stress?

Kevin: Yes. It's the company's responsibility to hire additional employees so that you can work in your area of expertise.

Dave: Gotcha. I had interpreted your comment as a criticism. I'm sure glad I asked you about it. Thanks.

In this interaction, both parties paraphrased the other's questions and concerns. By doing so, they were able to listen more effectively and understand each other better.

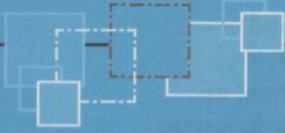
Interpreting

Interpreting a message is similar to paraphrasing. Interpreting requires that you clarify the meaning of a message but also allows you to offer an alternative perception. Because we all view things differently, an interpretation could help the speaker see things from your point of view. For example:

Shaunna and her best friend Tasha are sitting in the campus cafeteria discussing their computer class and their instructor, Professor Howard. Shaunna says, "I know he doesn't like me. I have stayed after class the last two sessions to ask him a question about using PowerPoint, and he just blows me off and tells me to stop by during his office hours. He really doesn't want to help me." Tasha responds, "I heard you two talking, and I also noticed that he was looking at his watch. It did seem as if he was in a hurry and couldn't spend the time helping you. But don't you remember he told us on the first day that he teaches two classes back-to-back and the classes are in different buildings? He's probably not able to help you because he had to run to his next class. Why don't you go during his office hours and see if he can help you then?"

Tasha is offering an alternative view of the situation to Shaunna. Tasha's interpretation may help Shaunna to see her interaction with Professor Howard differently.

All the responsive listening skills just discussed increase our understanding of another person's message by directly involving us in the communication process. The opportunity to express our understanding communicates to the sender that we have been attentive listeners. We are able to check our perceptions of the message and clarify any misunderstandings. Furthermore, as listeners provide feedback through questioning, paraphrasing, and interpreting, speakers find out how effectively they have communicated their message.



EMBRACING DIFFERENCE

Listening with Empathy

Erica has a strong belief about reproductive freedom for women. She has always felt that a woman should have control over her body. The Right to Life group on campus invited Father Jones, a conservative priest for the Catholic Church, to give a lecture on the belief that life begins at the time of conception. Erica felt that she needed to hear a different point of view, so she attended the lecture. In order to really listen to a different perspective, she engaged in the following behaviors:

- a. She attempted to listen without judgment.
- b. She listened to the message from the perspective of the speaker.
- c. She focused on the nonverbal behavior of the speaker.

While Erica did not change her position, she did gain an appreciation for the Right to Life perspective.

1. By embracing difference, how has Erica enhanced her ability as a communicator?
2. How can listening with empathy enhance your confidence as a communicator?
3. How can Erica's experience help you understand the importance of embracing difference?

the points charged to the buyer?" "Under what circumstances is an adjustable mortgage most advantageous?"

The questions asked by Taylor help her to clarify the information in Carlos's presentation. In addition, the feedback provided by Taylor's questions indicates to Carlos how well the material is understood by the audience.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing means restating another person's message in our own words. Paraphrasing forces us to digest the sender's message and then ask for confirmation that we have understood that message. The benefit of this skill is that we receive immediate feedback from the other person—either we have understood or misunderstood the message. This process gives us a better understanding of the sender's message. Consider the following interaction between Dave and Kevin. Kevin is Dave's supervisor at a large engineering firm. They are meeting to discuss Kevin's recent evaluation of Dave.

Dave: I have a question about this evaluation.

Kevin: O.K. (pause). Is there a problem?

Dave: I don't understand what you mean by this comment, "I am concerned about Dave's attitude." Are you saying I have an attitude problem?

Specifically, “Students in the podcast group performed relatively poorly on the quiz and reported that they knew less, understood less, experienced more difficulty with the material, and a marginally, learned less than did students in the text condition” (Daniel & Woody, 2010, p. 202). Retaining information through active listening is a difficult skill. Taking notes can help us to remember a speaker’s message. Although this may not be practical with empathetic listening, note taking is a useful tool in other listening situations. Whether you are listening to a professor’s lecture, a supervisor’s report about company profits, or sitting on a jury, note taking can increase your ability to remember information. Note taking requires that you become an active participant in the process. It also helps you to stay focused on the speaking situation and avoid internal noise. Here are some guidelines for effective note taking:

1. Write down any words or terms you don’t understand.
2. Try to determine the speaker’s argument or thesis statement. In other words, what does the speaker want you to remember?
3. Determine the speaker’s main ideas.
4. Write down anything the speaker repeats several times or has on a visual aid. Repetition signals that something is important.
5. Formulate questions about the message that you could ask the speaker later.
6. Don’t get caught up in all the details. Look for the overall message (Rademacher, 2001).

■ Responsive Listening Skills and Checking Our Perceptions

We have just concluded a section that described active listening and the techniques to accomplish this skill. There are other skills that can enhance your listening effectiveness. These are known collectively as responsive listening skills and require us to interact with the sender. In other words, as listeners, we provide the sender with feedback about the message by questioning, paraphrasing, and interpreting his or her statements and by offering support that encourages the sender to speak. In addition, these skills help us to check our own perceptions of the meaning of the speaker’s message.

Questioning

Questioning is a communication skill designed to help us understand another person’s message. It also keeps us involved in the interaction. Questions should be specific about the speaker’s message. Consider the following situation:

Carlos is a mortgage loan officer at First American Savings and Loan. He is scheduled to speak at this month’s library program, “Refinancing Your Home.” In his talk he explains the different types of mortgages—fixed rate and adjustable—and points out the advantages and disadvantages of each. Taylor, who is attending the talk, has done her best to avoid message overload and has listened for all the central ideas, but she still is confused by some of the terminology. At the conclusion of the presentation, Taylor asks Carlos a few questions: “How does the lending institution determine

messages that support verbal statements. Such efforts help them get to the heart of the sender's message. For example:

Libby is telling her neighbor, Elana, about a job performance appraisal she has scheduled for tomorrow with her supervisor. Elana can see that Libby is nervous about the appraisal not only by listening to what she says about her supervisor and about the job she has done, but also by the fact that she is talking faster than usual and she keeps jumping up from the kitchen table where they are having a cup of coffee.

By taking into account nonverbal as well as verbal communication, the active listener can construct a more accurate picture of the sender's message.

Supportive behavior is communication designed to assist or encourage speakers to express their feelings. It communicates to them that we are involved in the interaction and that we are making an effort to understand their position. In fact, according to Wendy Samter (1994), supportive or comforting communication is considered one of the most important interpersonal communication skills. While we would think that supportive communication must be face-to-face, researchers have found that online support groups can also be very effective (Aakhus & Rumsey, 2010).

On the other hand, according to Brant Bureson (2003), insensitive but well-meaning messages of support can be harmful to the receiver because the messages intensify the receiver's hurt and undermine his or her ability to cope with the problem. For example, parents who have recently lost a child are often given advice from friends and family (Toller, 2011). This kind of communication is frustrating and not supportive.

Supportive listeners are involved verbally and nonverbally. Additionally, they avoid making judgments about the sender's feelings; instead, supportive listeners communicate a sense of caring or empathy. For instance, the remark, "I understand why you acted the way you did" lends support to the person who has just finished telling you why she broke up with her boyfriend. This statement does not judge the other person's actions.

We also can offer support to others through the use of nonverbal communication. Appropriate nonverbal communication demonstrates our involvement in the listening process. One way to show that we care about another person's message is to use direct eye contact. Along with a supportive nod, direct eye contact demonstrates our support and communicates to others that we are listening.

■ Remembering: An Essential Part of Active Listening

Active listening requires that we take the focus off of ourselves and pay attention to the message and the speaker. With effective listening, we hope to gain knowledge, evaluate a message, or offer support to a friend. In each situation, it is necessary for us to retain the message for later use. For example, in a recent study, students said they preferred to listen to a podcast of the course material rather than read the text. Not surprisingly, the students who listened to the material did much more poorly than the other students on a quiz testing their retention of the information.

■ Critical Listening

Critical listening begins with informational listening. Before we listen to evaluate, we must first listen to the message. **Critical listening** asks us to evaluate the speaker's message or intent. For example:

Wendy has been selected to sit on her first jury. Wendy is nervous about the idea of making a final judgment of guilt or innocence. As the lawyers present their opening arguments, Wendy listens carefully to each presentation, paying close attention to the facts and arguments. Although she thinks the defendant may be guilty, she forces herself to suspend judgment until all the facts have been presented.

With critical listening, you may also be asked to offer constructive feedback to the speaker. Like Wendy, be sure to postpone judgment until you've heard the entire message. Also, be sure that your feedback is focused and will ultimately be helpful to the speaker. As you listen to evaluate, pay close attention to your frame of reference and your perceptions of the speaker and his or her message. Your biases could cloud your judgment. As with informational listening, try to keep an open mind and suspend your judgment until you have heard the entire message.

■ Empathetic Listening and Being Supportive

Empathy, the ability to understand what someone else is feeling, involves looking at a situation from the other person's perspective. Empathetic listeners strive to take the focus off themselves, to avoid being judgmental, and to display sensitivity to the sender's nonverbal communication. As empathetic listeners, our utmost concern is to understand the sender's message, even though our efforts might dictate that we hold in check our own feelings about a topic. Consider the following:

Sarah's mother has just been diagnosed with breast cancer. She is devastated by the news and is anxious about her mother's upcoming treatment and her long-term prognosis. Sarah calls her best friend, Joy, to share the news. Joy's mother battled breast cancer several years ago, and Sarah knows that Joy will understand how she feels. When the two friends talk, Joy listens intently to Sarah and intentionally does not mention her own mother's battle with cancer until Sarah asks about it. Joy knows that the best thing she can do for her friend now is to listen.

In this example, Joy is able to take the focus off of herself and concentrate on Sarah. Part of empathy involves being nonjudgmental. As empathetic listeners, we try to avoid judging the statements of others; instead, we strive to keep an open mind while the other party is speaking (there is always time afterward to evaluate the entire message). If we mentally criticize what the other person is saying, we risk missing part of the message.

Listening with empathy also demands that we pay attention to the sender's nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication is communication without words (this topic is discussed in Chapter 5). Active listeners look for nonverbal

ETHICS in Communication

The Skill of Listening

In the beginning of the chapter, we read about Angela, the store manager, and her interactions with two customers, William and Olga. Each wanted to return a color printer and asked for a full refund. Angela gives William his money back but only offers to exchange Olga's printer.

Angela's frame of reference influences how she listens and responds to these two customers with the same problem. She sees only the differences between William and Olga, such as their outward appearance (age and gender) and ability to articulate their problem. Angela fails to see the similarities and lets their differences dictate how she communicates with them. Ethical listening requires that we strive to understand

the other, despite his or her differences, and actively participate in the interaction by ignoring distractions and using our responsive listening skills. As you think about Angela, William, and Olga, answer these questions:

1. What makes Angela an effective listener during her interaction with William? How does her perception of William affect her listening skills?
2. What interferes with Angela's ability to listen carefully to Olga? How does her perception of Olga affect her listening skills?
3. Have you ever been in Angela's, William's, or Olga's situation? Describe your communication behavior.

emergency operations), and the office manager (to discuss office procedures and regulations). Paul comes to the orientation with a large three-ring binder, legal pad, and several pens. As each speaker presents his or her material, Paul takes careful notes, asks questions, and files all the handouts in his binder.

Paul knows that he must stay focused on the message by taking notes and staying organized. There are three specific types of active listening. They are informational, critical, and empathetic. We will discuss each in some detail.

■ Informational Listening

One of the primary reasons we engage in communication (as we learned in Chapter 1) is to learn new ideas or to transmit information. In these situations, we use informational listening. **Informational listening** allows us to focus on the content of the message in order to gain knowledge. We use this kind of listening in the classroom, for example. Paul, in the preceding example, is using informational listening in his orientations from personnel, the safety marshal, and the office manager. Informational listening requires that we keep an open mind while we listen to the entire message. This can be difficult, especially if a message argues against something we feel strongly about. Another difficulty with informational listening, as we discussed earlier in the chapter, is message overload. Be sure to focus on the main ideas or arguments of the message.

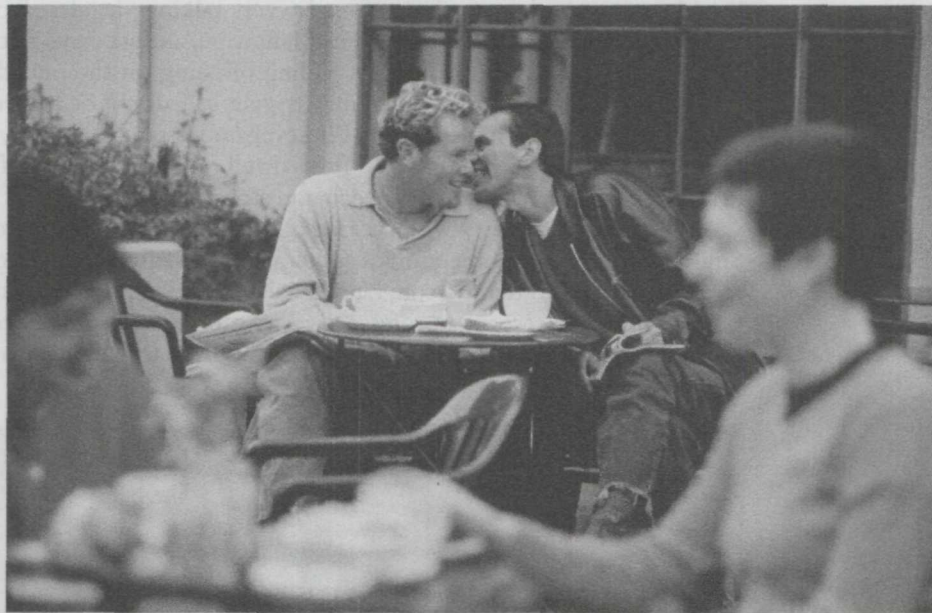
EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Despite the stumbling blocks to effective listening we have discussed so far—noise, delivery, language, message overload, and our perceptions of ourselves and others—it is possible to become a good listener. What is necessary is an understanding of the factors that contribute to effective listening, accompanied by our commitment to develop the ability to listen effectively. These factors include recognizing the importance of active listening and implementing responsive listening skills. First, let's discuss the types of listening: active and passive.

■ Active and Passive Listening

Active listening is listening with a sense of purpose and involvement. This is a sharp contrast to **passive listening**, in which the only party involved in the message is the sender. Watching television, for example, requires no more of you than that you be a passive listener; there is no need to provide feedback regarding the message being televised. With active listening, you decide in advance that it is important for you to focus on the sender's message; you therefore make every effort to stay involved in the interaction. For example:

Paul is beginning his new job today as an internal sales representative for a pipe fitting firm. Part of his first day includes extensive orientations from personnel (to discuss employee benefits), the safety marshal (to discuss



In our significant relationships, we use active listening.

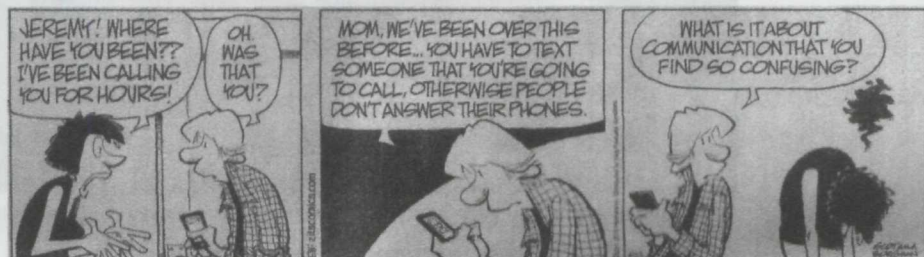
SKILL BUILDING

Perception and Listening

1. Identify an individual with whom you feel uncomfortable.
2. How do you react when this person speaks to you?
3. Evaluate how you listen to this person. Do you interrupt this person? Do you let your mind drift?
4. Name someone whom you admire.
5. How do you react when this person speaks to you?
6. Evaluate how you listen to this person.
7. Describe the differences in how you listen to this person and to the individual identified in #1.
8. What accounts for the difference in the way you listen?
9. How can understanding the relationship between perception and listening enhance your confidence as a communicator?

feel insecure or inadequate. When these feelings surface, they affect our ability to listen. For an example, let's go back to the issue of jargon, a form of language interference. Nearly all of us have been in situations where others used jargon, whether it is doctors spouting medical terms, lawyers talking "legalese," or actors critiquing a performance in their own special language, and we have felt like an outsider. What sometimes accompanies this feeling of being on the outside are feelings of frustration or intimidation, which may trigger self-doubt or a lowered self-esteem. "I'm not as smart as these doctors. I'll never understand what they're talking about or feel comfortable around them." If we dwell on our lowered self-esteem, we may drift from the conversation or speech and stop listening.

In addition, the way we perceive others affects our desire to listen to them. Simply stated, if our perception of someone is basically a positive one, we are likely to want to listen to that person; a negative perception hampers our desire to listen. Conversely, if we respect a professor, we are more likely to listen to him or her and act on his or her advice to read a particular book or to pursue an advanced degree.



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GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

Yang Chou, a representative from a Chinese manufacturing company, invites Sara Rogers, Vice President of International Relations for an American company that exports parts to China, to tour his plant. During the tour Yang comments that the plant is not operating at full capacity because of some technical difficulties. Because Sara understands the modesty inherent in the Chinese culture, she realizes that Yang is attempting to minimize the accomplishments of the plant. She is looking at Yang's response from his perspective. She is listening to Yang with sensitivity and therefore realizes that Yang is enormously proud of the plant. When Sara responds with a supportive nod and a compliment, Yang is visibly pleased.

1. How did Sara demonstrate her appreciation of cultural difference?
2. How did Sara listen with empathy when communicating with Yang?
3. How does listening with empathy enhance your communication when interacting with people from different cultures?

Communication and TECHNOLOGY

iPods and Social Isolation?

In the 14 weeks prior to the December 2011 holidays, Apple sold over 37 million iPhones, 15 million iPads, and 15 million iPods, according to their quarterly report (2012). More likely than not, you own one or more of these devices and may even be listening to it as you read this textbook. White “earbuds” (the label for the headphones) are everywhere: at the grocery store, on the treadmill at the gym, in line at the post office, on the bus or plane, and in the college classroom.

Most of us use our iPod, iPhone, or iPad for entertainment, as the use of earbuds gives the illusion that we are “enveloped” in our own world of music, video, or games. Experts warn us, however, that iPods can create social isolation. We are spending our time listening to music or watching videos instead of communicating with others. Jacqueline Whitmore states, “Some people think this technology can make us more productive. But it’s not helping us with social skills. It’s alienating us from other people” (quoted in

Shrieves, 2006). Furthermore, according to Richard Lachmann, a sociology professor, “The danger is that we start losing touch with the people in our lives—even if it’s just the cashier because we won’t get off the phone or take off headphones to exchange pleasantries” (quoted in Shrieves, 2006). In other words, we walk around “in a kind of fog of technological insulation” (Burke quoted in Shrieves, 2006). Furthermore, according to Pearson et al. (2009/2010), “students who report greater feelings of loneliness are more likely to use the MP3 player and the computer for companionship.” Yet one study found that iPod use actually increases the productivity of some workers. Spherion, an employment agency, found that “80 percent of workers listening to iPods reported increased job satisfaction and productivity as a result of listening to their music. So how can iPods cause both increased distraction and productivity? By cutting people off from what they perceive as their main distraction: their co-workers” (Starr, 2008).

This is an example of language interfering with the listening process. Messages that include words or phrases that offend us, such as ethnic or racist slurs, slanderous comments, sexist and homophobic comments, profanity, or condescending references, often trigger a negative reaction that actually prevents us from listening to the sender's complete message.

In addition to offending listeners, language can alienate, frustrate, or annoy listeners, and by doing so, diminish our ability or desire to listen. For instance, **jargon**—highly specialized words used and understood by specific groups of people—might intimidate or frustrate listeners unfamiliar with the profession or activity associated with such language. Bankers talk about “Fannie Maes,” “balloon versus fixed rates,” and “negative amortizations” when describing loans; however, to those who have never applied for a home or business loan, these terms may be intimidating. Feeling like an outsider can affect how we listen: “I’ll never be able to understand what they’re talking about. Why should I listen?”

When we are faced with this kind of interference, we should strive to understand the message by taking detailed notes (discussed later in the chapter) so that we can ask questions of the speaker later. We can also confront the speaker about his or her use of phrases or words that offend us. Perhaps the speaker never intended to offend us and perceives the meaning of a specific word or phrase differently.

■ Message Overload

Message overload can also hinder us from becoming effective listeners. **Message overload** refers to our attention to details instead of the main ideas of the message. The extent to which we concentrate on the details of the message, instead of the major points, can actually interfere with our ability to listen. Consider the following situation:

Adel’s manager has mandated that all employees become proficient in all company software, including PowerPoint, Word, and Excel. Adel decides to attend the beginner’s workshop on word processing, primarily because he feels intimidated by the prospect of working with computers. As soon as the instructor begins her introduction, Adel starts taking copious notes. By doing so, he fails to listen for her main ideas, which form the foundation of word processing. At the end of the workshop, Adel’s notes are filled with details, yet his understanding of word processing remains sketchy.

Adel is experiencing message overload. He needs to listen for the central ideas of the presentation and the connections between the ideas to discern the major theme.

■ Perceptions

How does our self-perception act as a barrier to listening? In simple terms, if we find the communication setting or the message threatening in some way, we may become defensive, which, in turn, causes us to do a poor job of listening. Defensive communication is our response to threatening interpersonal or public-speaking situations. (The subject of defensive communication is treated in detail in Chapter 7.) These threatening situations can take many forms, but a common factor is that we

number of variables that can interfere with our ability to listen: noise, delivery, language, message overload, and perceptions. A basic understanding of these obstacles will help us to implement the skills described later in this chapter.

■ Noise

Noise can interfere with our ability to listen because it prohibits us from actually hearing the message, and it can be intentional or unintentional. Incidents of noise fall into two categories: external and internal. **External noise** consists of sounds or visual stimuli that draw our attention away from an intended message. For example, if a road crew is repairing the street directly below the lecture hall where your class is under way, you and your fellow students may have difficulty hearing the professor because of the noisy equipment. Eventually, you all may give up the struggle and simply quit listening to the message.

Internal noise consists of our own thoughts or feelings that prevent us from listening to someone else's message. As you sit in History class, for example, you find yourself thinking about meeting your friends for lunch in 30 minutes and the English essay due next week. In this case, you are thinking about something other than your professor and her message about the writing of the U.S. Constitution.

Similarly, internal noise can hinder our interactions or conversations with others. For example, Professor Shelley is so absorbed in his own thoughts about his father moving to an assisted living facility that he resorts to pat verbal responses, like "Yes, I understand" or "Go on," in order to appear to be involved in his conversation with his student Kamal. Professor Shelley's preoccupation with his own thoughts makes it impossible for him to listen to Kamal's questions about the upcoming unit exam.

In order to become effective listeners, we must do our best to ignore all external and internal noise. Our focus should always be on the speaking situation and especially the speaker and message. This is difficult to do, but if we pay attention to noise, we will undoubtedly miss the speaker's message.

■ Delivery

Another factor that affects our ability to listen is the speaker's delivery style. Many times we can be distracted by the speaker's voice, bodily movement, dress, or appearance. We fail to listen to the message and instead focus on the delivery, good or bad, of the message. Take the speaker who uses "ums," "ya knows," or "like" throughout the presentation. You may find yourself listening for the next "um" instead of listening for the main ideas. On the other hand, you may find the speaker's voice and appearance so credible and authentic that you do not critically listen to the message but instead accept it because of the speaker's delivery style. Either way, you are not focusing on the message but on the speaker's delivery style. Competent listeners don't ignore the speaker's style but focus primarily on the content of the message.

■ Language

Have you ever tried to discuss a problem with a colleague or friend, but his or her choice of words only resulted in you becoming angry, not solving the problem?

that makes Manny an excellent nurse is his listening skills. He is able to focus on the patient's verbal messages, but he also pays close attention to the patient's body movement, clothing, and other nonverbal messages. Recently, a woman with a broken wrist was brought into the emergency room by her boyfriend. The patient said she fell down the stairs. Manny asked her to tell him the story of how it happened. As she spoke, Manny noticed that her voice was shaking and her lip was cut. She also did not make eye contact with her boyfriend. Manny deduced that the woman had not just fallen but was probably pushed by her boyfriend. He informed the doctor, and they were able to find help for the patient from the local battered women's shelter. Had Manny not used his effective listening skills, he would not have been able to help his patient.

In order to be an effective listener, Manny had to focus on his patient and not himself. He had to ignore all the internal and external noise. Many factors influence our ability to be effective listeners.

FACTORS THAT INTERFERE WITH LISTENING

An important part of being an effective communicator is to develop skills in the area of listening. These skills help us to understand the messages others send and ensure that our responses to these messages are appropriate. Later in this chapter we discuss specific skills for effective listening. First, however, we shall consider a



We listen not only with our ears, but with our eyes and heart, as well.

from across the nation, “communication skills” were ranked as the most important cluster of skills needed by new employees. More specifically, over 31% of employers said that “listening effectively” was the most important communication skill (Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, & Fielitz, 2011). So, while clearly presenting ideas and asking good questions were seen as important to employers, effective listening is essential to success in the workplace.

Becoming an effective communicator begins with listening. As we discussed in Chapter 1, communicators value diverse approaches to communication. Thus, valuing diversity begins with effective listening skills. As a skilled listener, you can better understand your audience and his or her message and offer appropriate feedback.

HEARING AND LISTENING

What is the difference between hearing and listening? **Hearing** is one’s physical ability to perceive sounds; listening is the process of giving thoughtful attention to what we hear. **Listening** is more complex than hearing because it demands that we concentrate on what others say to us. To listen effectively, we must take the focus off ourselves and focus on the other person. This is difficult to do. We sometimes assume that when we send a message, the other party will listen to it and understand its meaning. If this were true, we would not have conflict or misunderstandings when we communicate with others. Clearly, we don’t always listen, and even when we do, we may not understand the meaning of the message.

Listening takes more than just the use of our ears. We must also listen with our eyes and heart. The Chinese symbol for listening includes the ears, eyes, and heart (Figure 3.1). Effective communicators are able to take the focus off themselves and use their frame of reference to listen to the message. Manny is an example of an effective listener:

Manny has been working as an emergency room nurse for five years. He is very close to finishing his bachelor’s degree in nursing. One of the skills



FIGURE 3.1 The Chinese Character That Symbolizes the Verb “to listen”

At a local electronics store, two customers were attempting to return the same defective color printer. William and Olga bought their printers on sale but found that digital photos did not print clearly. Each wants a refund.

William enters the store and quickly goes to the customer service counter. He is dressed professionally, in a suit and tie, since he is coming home from a long day at the office. Jamal, the clerk on duty, informs William that he can only exchange the printer for a new one because William does not have the receipt. William asks to speak to the manager. When the manager, Angela, arrives, she listens intently to William's description of the photos he tried to print and the additional money spent on replacement cartridges. She asks him to repeat the details so she can take careful notes. Angela empathizes with his story and issues him a full refund. She offers him an apology and hopes he will shop again at the store.

Just as William leaves the counter, Olga approaches with the printer. Olga is in her late seventies and is recovering from a stroke she had a few months ago. Due to the stroke, Olga has difficulty speaking clearly, and walking is also difficult because she is slightly paralyzed on her right side. She tries to explain to Jamal that she would like a refund for the printer because it is defective. He interrupts her in the middle of her explanation and states she cannot have a refund without the receipt. Olga, like William before her, asks to speak with the manager. When Angela arrives, she tries to listen to Olga but is distracted. She should have left for her dinner break 20 minutes ago and is anxious to leave the store. In addition, another customer is waiting to talk to her on the phone about another problem. Angela gets short with her when Olga struggles to clearly articulate the words to explain the problem with the printer. Angela reluctantly offers only to exchange the printer. She does not take notes and offers no apology or offer to shop again at the store as she picks up the phone to talk to the waiting customer.



Why is Angela treating these two customers with the same problem differently? She appears to listen intently to William but interrupts Olga. In this chapter, we will discuss the communication skill of listening and how our frame of reference can affect our ability to listen. We will also discuss how we can improve our listening skills in order to improve our overall communication.

One part of the communication process that we take for granted is listening. Perhaps the reason for this is the attention we so often place on sending messages. Mention that you are taking a communication class to someone, and his or her response is apt to be, "Oh, aren't you scared to death to give a speech in front of a class? I dread getting up in front of others." You are not likely to hear, "Don't you worry about being an effective listener?" While you may chuckle over this illustration, the fact is that listening needs to be taken seriously. Remember, communication is an interdependent process that requires both the sender (speaker) and receiver (listener) to be engaged in the interaction. In this chapter, we focus on the skill of listening and ways to improve our listening skills.

In recent years, both the business community and numerous professions have recognized the importance of effective listening. In a recent survey of employers

CHAPTER

3



Listening

AFTER STUDYING THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD understand

- the differences between hearing and listening.
- how noise interferes with listening.
- how delivery interferes with listening.
- how language interferes with listening.
- how perceptions interfere with listening.
- the types of listening.

be able to

- use the skill of questioning to be a more effective listener.
- use the skill of paraphrasing to be a more effective listener.
- use the skill of interpreting to be a more effective listener.