

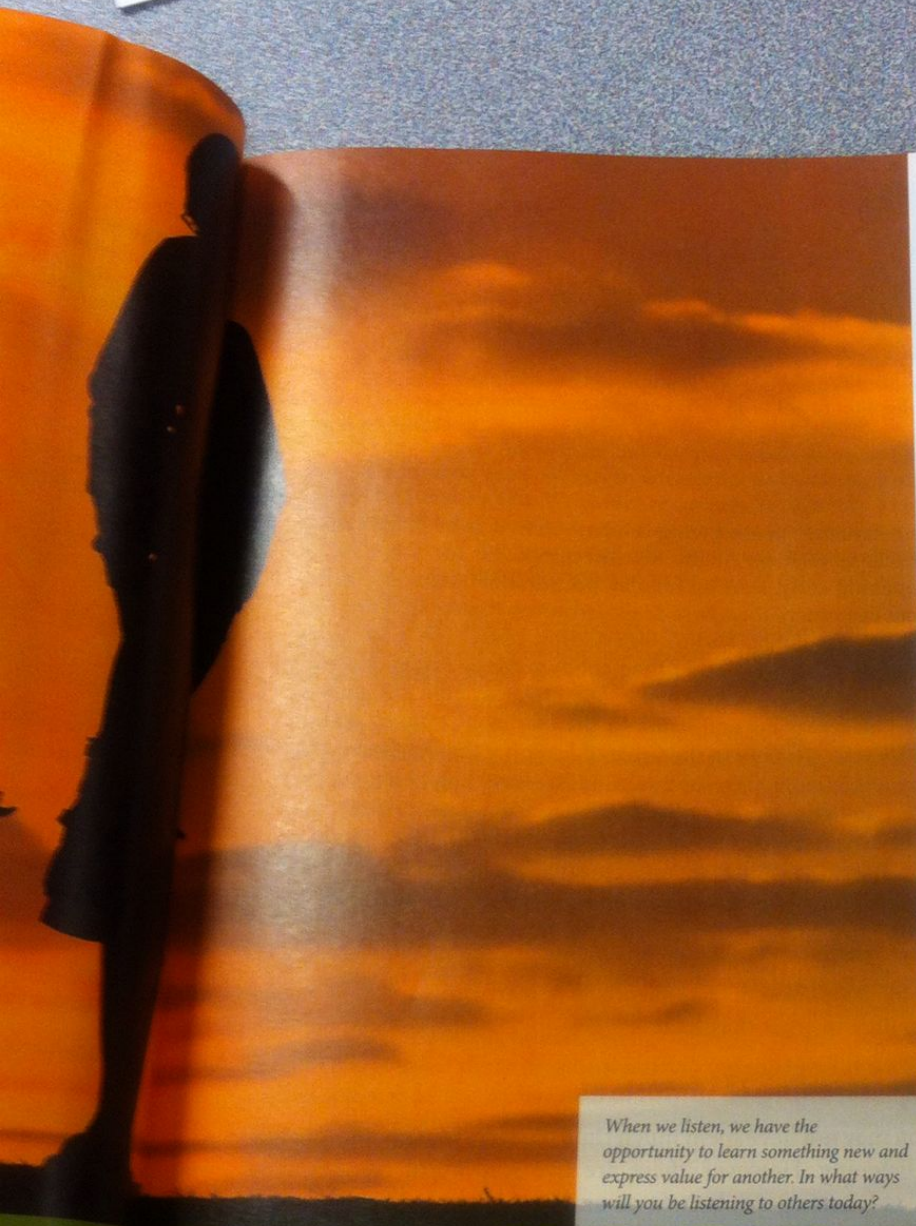


LISTENING

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN TO:

- Explain how listening helps us learn and understand.
- Understand the difference between listening and hearing.
- Understand why sometimes we fail to listen.
- Describe a variety of listening styles.
- Explain the types of speaker interferences.
- Listen critically and civilly to new ideas and information.

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- Why Listening Is Important
- Facts About Listening
- Why We Sometimes Fail to Listen
- Differences in Listening Styles
- Speaker Interference
- How to Listen Effectively

Jason Edwards/National Geographic

When we listen, we have the opportunity to learn something new and express value for another. In what ways will you be listening to others today?

When you cover issues in faraway cultures, you arrive as a complete outsider. It's essential to find something in common with people, some way to connect.

—Bobby Model, photographer, climber, and National Geographic Emerging Explorer



The day after Thanksgiving is often referred to as Black Friday because retailers finally become profitable for the year by opening early, starting holiday promotional sales, and giving customers their best deals. However, thanks to Dr. Drew Isay, founder of National Public Radio's StoryCorps, people are now encouraged to do something other than shop on Black Friday: they are encouraged to "listen."

Isay asks Americans to take an hour out of their day to record an interview and listen to the stories of a loved one. In fact, Isay believes so strongly in the value of listening that he created the National Day of Listening. Tens of thousands of Americans have participated by listening to the stories of their families, friends, and communities. Although Isay asks Americans to spend one day per year reporting the National Day of Listening, research reveals that we actually spend a good portion of every day listening. During an average day of communicating, we spend 55 percent of the time listening followed by speaking (17 percent), reading (16 percent), and writing (11 percent) (Emanuel et al., 2008). You may be surprised to learn, however, that most people retain little of what they hear.

Why Listening Is Important

Until now, you may not have spent much time considering the importance of effective listening. However, there are five important reasons why being "good" at listening can benefit us and our communities: listening helps confirm others, helps us understand, helps us learn, promotes social engagement, and promotes social justice.

Listening Helps Confirm Others

Communication is a central component of building and maintaining relationships with others. For communication to be successful, we must first be willing to truly listen to others. *Listening in order to recognize, acknowledge, and express value for another person* is the process of **confirming**. The process of confirming lets others know that you are paying attention and acknowledging their message.

confirming

listening in order to recognize, acknowledge, and express value for another person

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER TIP

Aziz Abu Sarah

Emerging Explorer and Cultural Educator

Tell us about an experience where active listening made a difference in one of your speaking engagements. For example, did someone in the audience tell a story that you listened to that changed your thinking or how you made your next presentation?

When we speak to groups or individuals, the most important thing is to be able to listen—and not only to listen to the words. We have to listen to what is behind the words. We use active listening because there's an emotional component to what people are saying. So we listen to why they are upset, why they're angry, why they're ashamed, why they're sad or happy about what was just shared. And by doing that we avoid a lot of fights and unproductive conversations.

For example, when I was speaking in an Israeli classroom just a couple months after a suicide bombing had happened, I was speaking with an Israeli partner of mine. We told our stories and how we should try to overcome anger, bitterness, and hatred and begin to work together. But one of the students was very, very angry. And he interrupted us throughout the speech and was pretty verbally violent. And so we stopped, and we asked him to tell us what was bothering him. And eventually he shared that his uncle was in a suicide bombing just a couple months earlier, and he was very angry, and he had never met a Palestinian before. I was the first Palestinian he had met, and all his anger just came at me. He shared how he was just waiting to get a chance for revenge. But we started this conversation, and it ended up going on for a couple of hours, and we just listened. We listened to his position, and we learned where he was coming from, and we heard his pain. I think he needed somebody from the other side to yell at. And for me, that was fine. I think he needed to get all his emotions out, because after that we ended up having a very productive conversation. And at the end of our conversation, he said that he—although he was confused because he had a chance to say everything he wanted to say and because we listened—he was not as angry as he was earlier. And without us listening to the emotions and the pain, I think that would have been impossible to get to that point.



Listening Helps Us Understand

When we pay close attention to a message, we do so with the desire to *understand* what someone is attempting to communicate. The goal of understanding a message provides us the opportunity to ask questions to seek clarification or gather more information when necessary.

Listening Helps Us Learn

When we listen, we have the ability to learn important information. When we listen in order to learn, we may discover more about the likes and dislikes of our friends and family members, how to master a new skill, or the positions held by political candidates during an election campaign. In each of these situations, the process of listening to learn allows us to grow as individuals because we learn new things.

Listening Promotes Civic Engagement
Listening can provide us the information we need to identify and address issues of public concern. When we listen, we can make informed decisions about the positions we hold on contentious issues, candidates we support for public or political office, and practices that may benefit or harm our families, workplaces, communities, states, countries, and continents. Listening allows us to be more fully engaged with our communities, organizations, and political concerns.

Listening Promotes Social Justice
Listening can provide the means necessary to create social change. When we listen to stories of injustice such as cases of homelessness, poverty, hunger, discrimination, or bullying, we have the ability to recognize how we can act to improve the lives of those who are experiencing hardship or injustice. When we confirm, learn, understand, and engage with others, our listening helps us sort out complex ethical, moral, and social issues that affect the people we live and work with, as well as those we may not come in direct contact with.

After listening to a ten-minute oral presentation, the average person understands and retains only 50 percent of the information presented. Forty-eight hours after the presentation, those same listeners will only remember 25 percent of the information (Steil, Barker, & Watson 1993). Imagine that you could improve your listening skills. You would be able to participate in the public dialogue of your communities on topics you had learned about in school, work, and through news media. You would acknowledge value for another person's ideas by paying attention to their presentations. You might even improve your grades by recalling more information on exams. In this chapter, we will explore why listening is important, why our listening sometimes fails, and how to listen carefully, critically, and ethically. Learning the importance of listening effectively and communicating clearly can help improve our relationships with others and teach us about ourselves.

Facts about Listening

You may have heard that listening and hearing are not the same thing. Did you know that listening is not a natural process? It takes effort and understanding to listen effectively.

Listening Is Not the Same as Hearing

Although some people believe that hearing and listening are the same thing. The two processes are actually quite different. **Hearing** refers to the *vibrations of sound waves on our eardrums and the impulses that are then sent to the brain*. Hearing is a passive process. Assuming a person does not have a hearing impairment or an object blocking the eardrum, sound waves will automatically transmit to the brain. We hear many sounds and noises throughout the day without paying much attention to them. We may hear the sound of an air conditioner turning on, a car driving down the street, or people murmuring in the

distance. We typically pay attention on the other hand, is *another person's words* when we focus on a teacher confiding in us, or attention through the media.

Listening Is Not a Natural Process

Many people believe listening is without a great deal of effort. It is more complex than the act of hearing. It actually requires effort. The act of listening contains the *act of listening*. The act of listening is *listening*, we must focus on others are saying.

Why We Struggle to Listen

Think about recent situations where you were not willing to confide in someone. You are able to understand someone's words. Nichols, a listening expert, says we struggle because "the simple act of listening requires work, and we often fail to pay attention on another person's words."

We often fail to pay attention to anything that is *anything that is*. Although interference can capture our attention, it is often internal interference from openly receiving different kinds of interference.

Pseudolistening

Pseudolistening is when we appear to be listening or paying attention to the message. Pseudolistening is often nonverbal feedback, such as nodding or smiling at the speaker, but we do not seem interested. Pseudolisteners are often thinking of other thoughts. Pseudolistening is much at all) in listening on the speaker. Pseudolistening occurs when listening is not occurring or preoccupied.

distance. We typically pay little attention to these sounds. **Listening**, on the other hand, is the process of giving thoughtful attention to another person's words and understanding what you hear. This occurs when we focus on a teacher's presentation, pay attention to our friend confiding in us, or attempt to understand the messages delivered through the media.

Listening Is Not a Natural Process

Many people believe listening is a natural process, something that occurs without a great deal of effort. However, the process of listening is more complex than the act of physically receiving messages. The act of listening actually requires effort on behalf of the listener. Notice that the definition of listening contains the phrase "giving thoughtful attention" to another. The act of listening is an active but not necessarily natural process. When listening, we must focus, attempt to understand, and respond to what others are saying.

Why We Sometimes Fail to Listen

Think about recent situations in which you were expected to listen. Were you willing to confirm some people but not others? Similarly, were you able to understand some speakers but not able to follow others? Michael Nichols, a listening researcher, reveals that we sometimes fail to listen because "the simple art of listening isn't always so simple." Listening requires work, and "to listen well we must forget ourselves" and focus our attention on another (Nichols, 1995, p. 3).

We often fail at listening for many reasons. **Listening interference** is anything that stops or hinders a listener from receiving a message. Although interference can be external to the listener (such as noises that capture our attention or visual distractions), there are also many forms of internal interference (distracting thoughts or feelings) that hinder us from openly receiving a message. We will explore the most common of kinds of interference here.

Pseudolistening

Pseudolistening occurs when listeners act like they are listening or pretend to be paying close attention to the message. Pseudolisteners appear to be focused on the speaker. They make eye contact, provide nonverbal feedback such as nodding in agreement or smiling at the appropriate times, and genuinely seem interested in the message; however, pseudolisteners are actually distracted by other thoughts. Internally, these listeners are thinking of other things (or not thinking much at all) instead of actually focusing on the speaker's message. Pseudolistening occurs when listeners are bored, disinterested, or preoccupied with other thoughts.

listening

process of giving thoughtful attention to another person's words and understanding what you hear.

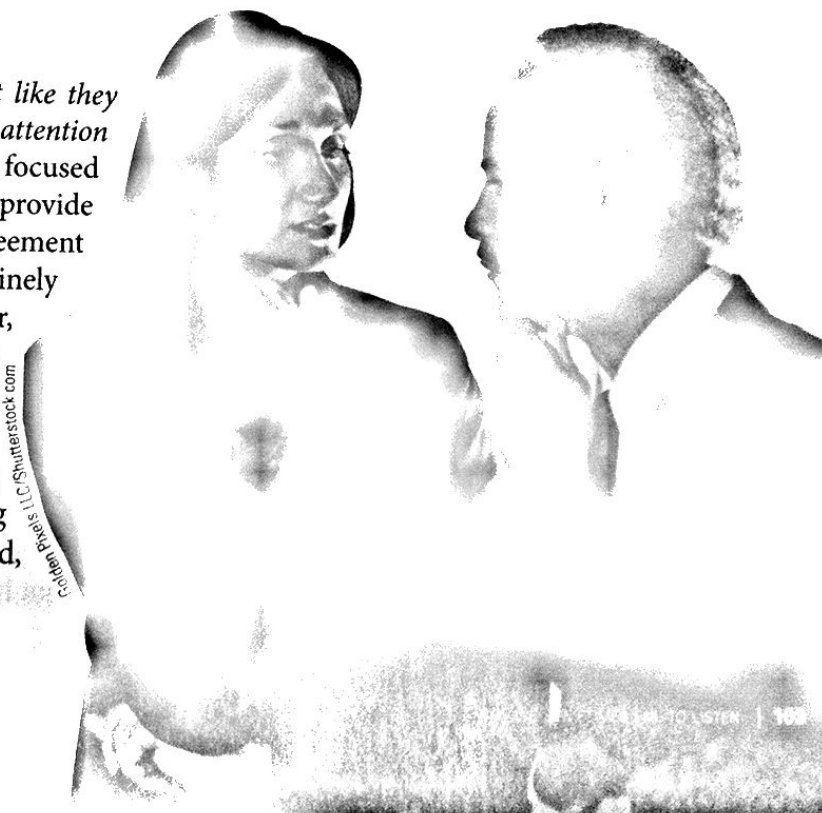
listening interference

anything that stops or hinders a listener from receiving a message.

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when listeners act like they are listening or pretend to be paying close attention to the message.

Listening requires effort on the part of the listener. What signs are these two people giving that indicate they are actively listening to one another?



Robert Preiss / iStockphoto.com

COMMUNICATION AT WORK

Employees of Different Generations Working Together

Generation Y (born in the 1980s and 1990s) consists of approximately 71 million young people who are tapped into technology and media, and are now entering the workforce. This is the first time in history that four generations—those who lived through World War II, baby boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1980), and Generation Y—are working together (Belkin, 2007). Generation Y, however, brings a new dynamic to the work environment. Its members rely heavily on technology to socialize, think, and work through tasks.

U.S. Army Colonel Lonnie G. Hibbard explains that members of Generation Y “are accustomed to immediate feedback and thrive in a rapidly changing environment because they have grown up with information at their fingertips due to computers and smartphones. This immersion in technology and being connected 24/7 has caused this generation to change the definition of how interpersonal communication takes place as more people turn to social networking as a means to communicate” (Hibbard, 2011). Members of Generation Y are also accustomed to instant feedback and virtual problem solving, whereas older

generations continue to expect annual reviews and face-to-face meetings (Armour, 2011).

The reliance on technology and the expectation of constant immediate feedback can cause some tension and confusion among employees of different generations working together. In fact, according to a report by Lee Hecht Harrison (2011), more than 60 percent of employers say they experience tension between employees of different generations, and 70 percent of older employees are dismissive of younger workers’ ability. Although the differences in expectations are neither right nor wrong, it does illustrate some of the challenges that multiple generations face when working together.

What Do You Think?

1. How might listening practices help reduce conflict between employees from different generations?
2. Can technology bridge rather than expand the gap between Generation X and Generation Y employees? In what ways?

selective listening

when listeners only pay attention to particular parts or sections of a message.

Selective Listening

Selective listening occurs when listeners only pay attention to particular parts or sections of a message. Selective listeners may tune out commercials or only pay attention to parts of a lengthy message that seem the most interesting to them. They may turn the radio on only to listen closely to the weather report or road conditions. In class, selective listeners may perk up and pay close attention after a teacher says, “Be sure to write this down,” or, “This will likely be on the test,” and then tune out again after they get the information. When listening to a lengthy speech such as the state-of-the-union address, selective listeners may only listen to the parts of the speech that directly and immediately affect their lives and selectively tune out other parts.

defensive listener

listener who perceives a message as a personal attack or a form of criticism.

Defensive Listening

Defensive listeners perceive a message as a personal attack or form of criticism. A person who listens defensively makes the judgment that the speaker does not like or respect him or her. Defensive listeners also assume there are negative motives behind the communication act. A student who is worried about his grade in class may listen defensively when

a teacher asks reasons for a teenager's behavior when parents are present every day, he has a distrust rather than an interest. Despite the fact that some others are invited, even the intention of hearing communication challenges a lack of respect.

Ambushing

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a teacher asks about absences or reasons for late assignments. A teenager may listen defensively when parents ask questions about her day, hearing the questions as mistrust rather than curiosity or interest. Defensive listeners assume others are being mean spirited, even when that is not the intention of the speaker, and they hear comments and questions as challenges or as demonstrations of a lack of respect.

Ambushing

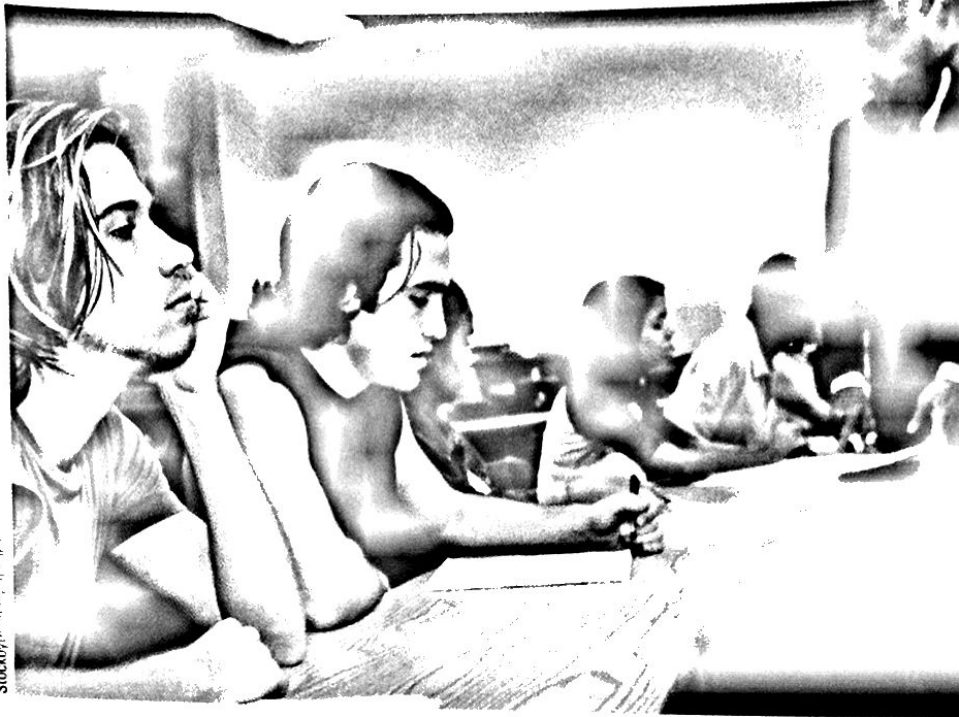
Ambushing is listening carefully to information in order to attack what the speaker has to say. When prosecutors cross-examine witnesses in court, they often use ambushes to attack what a witness has said. Politicians may ambush during a debate when they listen to their opponent and then attack their arguments. In our interpersonal relationships, we sometimes listen to those we are in a conflict with to find ways to attack their reasons or arguments rather than understand them.

Insulated Listening

Insulated listening is purposefully avoiding listening to specific pieces of information. Insulated listening is the opposite of selective listening; instead of listening to key parts of information, insulated listeners will choose to ignore any undesirable topic that arises. For example, when a parent explains the reasons a teenager needs to have a curfew or when a roommate provides a numbers of reasons why making a chore chart is important to help keep the apartment clean and the division of labor fair, the teenager or roommate may decide she or he does not want to listen to the explanations and insulates her- or himself by ignoring those reasons.

Insensitive Listening

Insensitive listeners pay attention to the content or literal meaning of the message without attending to the relationship level of the meaning. When listeners fail to acknowledge the relationship level or other subtle meanings in a message, they are insensitive to others' feelings on the topic. For example, Ivy tells her professor that she will be missing two weeks of class because her mother is having major surgery and needs additional help at home. Hoping for a sympathetic response, Ivy is surprised when her professor states that the absences will not be excused and she should plan to e-mail the assignments so they



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What listening behaviors do these students exhibit? What type of listeners would you describe them as?

ambushing

listening carefully to information in order to attack what the speaker has to say.

insulated listener

listener who purposefully avoids listening to specific pieces of information.

insensitive listener

listener who pays attention to the content or literal meaning of the message without attending to the relationship level of the meaning.

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stage hogging
 when people make the conversation about themselves instead of showing interest in the person who is talking.

will not be graded as late. Ivy feels the professor is insensitive by not showing concern for her new responsibility at home and her mother's well-being.

Stage Hogging occurs when people make the conversation about themselves instead of showing interest in the person who is talking. Stage hogging can occur in two ways. First, it occurs when a person redirects the conversation back to him- or herself. For example, when you share with a friend your dismay at having your hours cut at work and are hoping for sympathy and even solutions to cope with your reduced income, your friend is stage hogging if she begins to lament the fact that she never has enough money to do the things she wants and never responds to another to focus attention back on her- or himself. For example, Stan wants to share what happened at last night's hockey game with Omar. Stan begins his story only to find that Omar interrupts to tell him about all the outstanding hockey games he has been to, hogging the stage and never making time for Stan to finish his story. Stage hogging can have a negative impact on relationships because the person who began to share something feels his or her opinions are not being heard or validated.

Technology
 Although technology can open up avenues for listening to others when we are surrounded by technology we can easily fail to listen. Text messaging during class or at work, surfing the Internet with our laptops instead of listening to a spouse or co-worker, participating in multiple online chat discussions at the same time, or walking across campus with our earphones on can prevent us from listening to others. This often has serious negative consequences: we miss important information, fail to hear what others are saying to us, ignore friends who might be trying to get our attention, or even fail to hear important sounds, such as sirens, trains, or horns.



Corbis/Fritz/Alamy

Do you believe cell phones create additional interference in the classroom? What message is this student sending about listening?

Differences in Listening Styles

Consider the following examples:

- Loretta loved her geology class. She was excited to spend class time touching and examining samples of rocks and minerals as her professor lectured. On field trips, she eagerly stood in front of the group, exploring the different soils and formations with her hands. When she studied for an exam, she could visualize the soil, rock, or mineral and remember its content and formation process.
- Phillip is a nutrition major. He enjoys learning about different nutrients that help the body grow and develop. Although Phillip's nutrition courses require him to read several textbooks on the subject, Phillip learns best when he hears his professor discuss the



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Bob Pool, Getty Images

information in detail. When Phillip tells his parents what he is learning at school, he often repeats much of the information he has heard in class.

- Sierra was an art history major. She enjoyed taking art history courses from the professors in the department who showed examples of the different artists' work. Sierra knew that without actually seeing the artwork, she would struggle understanding the different periods and artists. For Sierra, seeing was the easiest way for her to learn.

The students described here “listen” in different ways. Loretta is an **experiential listener**. She *learns best when she can touch, explore, and participate in what is being described*. She is the type of person who often says, “Let me try that,” in order to learn the material. In the second example, Phillip is the “explain it to me” person. He is an **auditory listener** because he *needs to hear verbal descriptions and explanations*. Even if he reads the textbook, he understands the material better after hearing the professor talk about it. In the final example, Sierra *needs to see something to understand it* because she is a **visual listener**. Visual listeners often use the phrase “Show me” in order to fully comprehend new information (Kolb, 1984; Sims & Sims, 1995).

Many people “listen” best by seeing something in order to understand it. Others understand best when they hear something explained. What mode of listening suits you best?

experiential listener

listener who learns best by touching, exploring, and participating in what is being described

auditory listener

listener who needs to hear verbal descriptions and explanations.

visual listener

listener who needs to see something in order to understand it.



What styles of listening are these students displaying? Do they people-oriented, content-oriented, action-oriented, or time-oriented? What cues give you this sense?

listening style
preferred approach to understanding a message.

people-oriented listener
listener who is concerned about the feelings and emotions of other people as well as the quality of interpersonal relationships.

content-oriented listener
listener who pays close attention to the facts and details of a message.

action-oriented listener
listener who wants speakers to provide clear, detailed, and straight-to-the-point information.

Our senses can determine how we best listen and comprehend information: some of us prefer to listen to others to listen, and still others to learn in order to listen best. In addition to stimulating our senses, we also listen for specific types of information. These *listening styles* depend on the context surrounding the act of listening. There are four listening styles that influence how we listen and what we pay attention to.

Listening Styles

Each of us has an individual listening style or preferred approach to understanding a message. Some of us listen as a way to enhance the quality of a relationship, but others may listen to obtain as much information and detail as possible before making an informed decision. Researchers have identified four primary listening styles, which we will explore in the following paragraphs (Johnson, Weaver, Watson, & Barker, 2000).

People-oriented listeners are concerned about other people's feelings and emotions as well as the quality of the interpersonal relationship. Individuals using a people-oriented listening style can "read" others' emotions, so they focus on the emotional and relational aspects of the message. Listeners adopting this style tend to notice peoples' moods, understand the emotional meaning of a message, and display empathy toward other people. Although people-oriented listeners tend to be less apprehensive about communicating in groups and interpersonal situations, they may lose their ability to critically reflect on the information presented (Chesebro, 1999; Sargent, Weaver, & Kiewitz, 1997).

Content-oriented listeners pay close attention to the facts and details of a message. Content listeners obtain as much information about an issue as possible. They excel at understanding and analyzing various positions on a topic. They take time to collect as much information as possible, giving priority to expert opinions and other credible resources. They ask pointed questions, dismiss unreliable facts, and explore all perspectives and points of view. Content-oriented individuals often play the role of devil's advocate as a way to obtain information and explore different viewpoints, thus taking time before coming to a conclusion. There are many advantages to this approach, but it also can create an environment that seems disruptive, hostile, or even threatening to others if not used carefully.

Unlike content-oriented listeners who enjoy taking their time to learn about multiple perspectives on a topic, **action-oriented listeners** want speakers to provide clear, detailed, and straight-to-the-point information.

Action-oriented listeners care of business and are specifically for the information to accomplish a task. They are impatient if a speaker includes tangential information, digresses, or follows a tangent. Action-oriented listening can be an important part of a task completed, but it may also avoid acknowledging important emotional concerns in a message.

Time-oriented listeners view listening as a commodity and do not want it wasted. These listeners are action-oriented listeners who want the speaker to be clear, succinct, and to the point. However, unlike action-oriented listeners, time-oriented listeners have guidelines for conversational behaviors to follow to end the interaction. Time-oriented listeners may verbally check for understanding constantly. This listening style also makes speakers deliver their messages more quickly.

Although most people have a strong listening preference, the people-oriented style is best suited for most situations. The content-oriented style may be more appropriate for a communication act. For example, if an instructor is expecting a content-oriented listener who has a relationship just ended, a time- or action-oriented listener may hurt her feelings. However, a people-oriented listener may even humor her.

Special
As you have seen, each listening style has its own culture and understanding. Listener in... However, t...

Action-oriented listeners want to take care of business and are listening specifically for the information necessary to accomplish a task. They may grow impatient if a speaker includes nonessential information, digresses, or follows a tangent. Action-oriented listening can be an important part of getting a task completed, but these listeners may also avoid acknowledging important emotional concerns or cues of the message.

Time-oriented listeners view time as a commodity and do not want to have it wasted. These listeners, similar to action-oriented listeners, want speakers to be clear, succinct, and to the point. However, unlike action-oriented listeners, time-oriented listeners may set time guidelines for conversations or use particular behaviors to indicate their desire to end the interaction. Time-oriented listeners may verbalize that they only have “10 minutes to meet,” may constantly check their watches, or even abruptly end conversations. This listening style can be quite effective in meeting deadlines, but it can also make speakers feel uncomfortable or insulted if they feel rushed to deliver their message.

Although most of us have a distinct listening style, or at least two strong listening preferences, it is important to consider which listening style is best suited for different types of interactions. Because each of the four listening styles has distinct advantages and disadvantages, one may be more appropriate than another for the context of a specific communication act. For example, you may be an active listener in class when an instructor is explaining a new assignment and then become a people-oriented listener when your roommate reveals that her romantic relationship just ended. If you were to approach the roommate’s breakup with a time- or action-oriented approach, then you might unintentionally hurt her feelings. Similarly, if you approach your instructor’s explanation from a people-oriented style, you may cause considerable confusion or even humor in the discussion.

Speaker Interference

As you have learned, there are many reasons why listeners have difficulty understanding and remembering information presented to them. Listener interference and listening styles are two important factors. However, there are times when listeners have difficulty listening to a

PRACTICING HUMAN COMMUNICATION

How Can You Listen More Effectively?

Take a few minutes to evaluate your listening skills.

1. Describe when you felt the most engaged with a face-to-face conversation this week. What was engaging about the conversation? Did you or the other person exhibit active listening?
2. At what point in the face-to-face communication did you feel most distant from what was happening? Explain what type of interference there was or other reasons why you felt distanced.
3. Consider what your responses indicate about your listening style and preferences. Also notice what types of interference may hinder your ability to listen. Now consider what you can do to listen more effectively in face-to-face communication (Brookfield, 1995).

time-oriented listener

listener who views time as a commodity and does not want to have it wasted and wants speakers to be clear, succinct, and to the point.

message because of speaker interference. To understand listening, we need to know how we might minimize speaker interference, whether we are listeners or speakers, we will explore the four most common types of speaker interference next.

Interference Caused by Information

Sometimes we simply stop paying attention to a message. Perhaps the speaker talked for a long period of time without taking a break, or the information presented was too technical to understand, or you were bored with the simplicity of the message. Communication that is drawn out, overly complicated, or too simplistic can create interference. When we experience interference caused by information, we are likely to give up on listening. There are three types of information interference: message overload, message complexity, and message simplicity.

Message Overload Klemmer and Snyder's classic study (1972) indicates that we spend an average of 70 percent of our day in some form of communication: attending meetings or class, talking or texting on the phone, reading or listening to the news. Today's college students spend a large portion of their day attending classes and listening to professors present information for fifty minutes, seventy-five minutes, or even two and a half hours. Yet research indicates that adult learners are unable to stay focused for more than fifteen to twenty minutes at a time—so we often are subjected to message overload (Johnstone & Percival, 1972; Middendorf & Kalish, 1996).

In addition to listening to information presented in class, students are often required to conduct their own research to complete assignments. But sometimes our initial research into a subject yields more than 1,000

results for our keyword search, and we have to deal with yet another form of information overload. Then we consume many messages outside of our responsibilities as students. We communicate at work, likely have the television turned on while we are at home, listen to the radio in the car, surf the Web, or pay attention to our cell phones for incoming messages all day. Most of the time, we simply cannot absorb this much information throughout our day.

Message Complexity When information is presented that is too complicated for us to understand, we likely give up on listening. Imagine the following scenario.

You walk into a biology class. The professor transiently activates the Schwann cells that will form a myelin sheath. The phosphate can mimic axonal conduction. (Jargon," n.d.). Undoubtedly, you consider dropping the class.

When messages are too complex, we have to focus our attention elsewhere. To maximize our education, friends and speakers should take into account the times, defining terms, providing examples, and directions of the information.

Message Simplicity When messages are too complex, listeners may become bored. Here are some examples:

- Martin was asked to give a presentation and chose to present a "Jelly Sandwich."
- Jacki delivered a presentation on Dr. Seuss's *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*
- Jorge was invited to give a presentation and informed them that he was a "Jelly Sandwich."

In each of these situations, the speaker is not speaking for the audience. When we speak to them, they can become bored. To make sure our information is clear, we need to ensure that our information is clear.

Interference Caused by Speaker Interference

Interference can also be caused by speaker interference that is too formal, too casual, or too complex for listening to be effective.

Too Formal As discussed in the previous section, used by professionals. If you do not know what a professional is, as your doctor tells you that you are a patient then you can become difficult to understand.

Too Casual Large amounts of information are easy to fall into. If the information is too casual for our needs, casual is when it is too casual. If you are telling her your name after another song after another way to describe

How much time do you spend communicating with others on an average day?



Yellow Dog Productions/Getty Images

You walk into a biology class and hear the professor say, "Axonal signals transiently activate the expression of the transcription factor Oct6 in Schwann cells that will form myelin, and cyclic adenosine monophosphate can mimic axonal contact in vitro" ("Understanding Scientific Jargon," n.d.). Undoubtedly, you already feel behind on the material and consider dropping the class.

When messages are too complex for us to understand, we may decide to focus our attention elsewhere. When this happens, we may jeopardize our education, friendships, or ability to learn. On the other hand, speakers should take into account audience knowledge on the subject. At times, defining terms, providing examples, or showing visual representations of the information can help listeners stay focused.

Message Simplicity When information is too simple for the audience, listeners may become bored and stop listening. Consider the following examples:

- Martin was asked to deliver an informative speech in class, and he chose to present a speech titled "How to Make a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich."
- Jacki delivered a speech at her high school graduation and read Dr. Seuss's *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* to her senior class.
- Jorge was invited to speak to a group of computer scientists and informed them about the history of computers.

In each of these situations, the messages presented were too simplistic for the audience. When listeners already possess the information provided to them, they can become bored or easily distracted. As speakers, we need to make sure our information is appropriate for our audience. We need to ensure that our information is neither too complex nor too simplistic.

Interference Caused by Language

Interference can also be caused by language that is unclear. Language that is too formal, too casual, too noninclusive, or too cluttered makes it easy for listening to fail.

Too Formal As discussed in Chapter 4, jargon refers to *technical language used by professional groups*. Jargon can be confusing for listeners who do not know what a particular word or acronym means. Imagine listening as your doctor tells you that "if you experience pain in your upper quadrant then you can take medicine PRN." When language is too formal, it becomes difficult to understand the message.

Too Casual Language can be difficult to listen to if it is too casual. It is easy to fall into our familiar, everyday language patterns, which may be too casual for our audience. One common way for language to be too casual is when it uses slang, or *informal nonstandard language*. A teenager telling her parents that the "band raised the roof with one totally sick song after another" and a student saying "she was hotting me up" as a way to describe someone interfering in his business are clear examples of

slang that may be confusing to some people. When our language is too casual, people may not be able to follow the ideas we are communicating or may feel uncomfortable.

Noninclusive Language Listening can break down when you use noninclusive language or language that refers only to certain groups of people. When people hear language that excludes those who are not in the “in-group,” they may be offended and tune out. Common examples of noninclusive language are *chairman*, *mailman*, and *police officer*. **Spotlighting** or the *practice of highlighting a person’s race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or physical disability* also can be a form of noninclusive language. When we spotlight, we describe a friend as an “Asian American friend,” a professor as a “gay professor,” or a neighbor as a “disabled neighbor.” Spotlighting is often used by members of the dominant culture to mark differences as being atypical or unusual; most of the time, marking difference is intended to mean that something is surprising or abnormal.

spotlighting

practice of highlighting a person’s race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, or physical disability.

However, there are times when including cultural differences is important. When talking about pay equity in the workplace, it is important to recognize that Asian American women earn approximately 88 percent of what a white man earns, whereas African American women earn approximately 70 percent of what a white man makes, and Latina women approximately 61 percent (Villeneuve, 2012; White House, 2012). In this example, spotlighting illustrates important racial and cultural differences.

When you avoid spotlighting while using culturally inclusive and gender-inclusive language, you communicate that you are aware of diversity. Use language that is respectful of the diverse people you are speaking with; this will make listening easier for everyone.

verbal clutter

extra words in sentences that do not add meaning.

Verbal Clutter Sometimes we have difficulty listening when people use **verbal clutter** or *extra words in sentences that do not add meaning*. Although listeners can mentally process more words per minute than speakers can speak (on average a speaker speaks at a rate of 125 to 175 words per minute, but an active listener can process between 350 and 450 words per minute), verbal clutter impedes listening because listeners have to process words that are unnecessary or redundant (Wolvin & Coakly, 1996). Examples of verbal clutter include words and phrases such as *like*, *um*, *you know*, and *stuff like that*. These commonly used words and phrases distract listeners and add no useful meaning.

Similarly, verbal clutter also consists of loading our speech with adjectives and adverbs. Consider the following cluttered sentences and their uncluttered alternatives.

Cluttered: “Good, effective writers use carefully selected, well-planned, and detailed descriptions and stories to vividly portray images and ideas.”

Uncluttered: “Effective writers use vivid stories to present their ideas.”

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The uncluttered example is much easier to listen to and understand. To help reduce clutter in our communication, we must ask ourselves, do the words we use help develop our ideas or make more work for the listener? How many of our words are redundant?

Interference Caused by Differences

Differences between a listener and a speaker can also cause interference with listening. Although we are all similar in many ways, no two people exactly match in appearance, mannerism, values, or background. When we confront differences, we may want to place value on or see those differences on a hierarchy. When we interpret differences as "right" or "wrong," "good" or "bad," we will have trouble focusing on the message. There are four types of differences that are common: speech style, appearance, values, and background and occupation.

Speech Style Accents, tonal and rhythmic qualities, stuttering, and speech patterns of nonnative speakers can affect our ability to listen. When we are unfamiliar with these styles, we may have a difficult time paying attention to the message.

Appearance Styles of dress, height, weight, hair color and style, body adornment, and even a person's mannerisms can affect listening behaviors. When a person's appearance captures our attention, we may not be closely listening to the message.

Values When a listener holds values that differ from the speaker, listening can be difficult. If listeners are convinced that their values are right or best, then they often have trouble listening to understand why someone holds a different position.

Background and Occupation Differences in race, ethnicity, religion, education, occupation, upbringing, and economic status can affect our listening. If we hold assumptions or make judgments about people based on their backgrounds and occupations, we may forget to be open to listening to their experiences.

As listeners, we need to remember that *difference* simply means *different*. When we refrain from focusing on differences and remember to be open enough to listen to others, we can overcome interference caused by differences.

Interference Caused by Technology

The amount of technology constantly available to us can create interference. When a cell phone rings during class; a sporting event is broadcast on television, radio, or the Internet; or a new message is posted to our social media accounts, our attention can quickly turn from the person we are talking with to the technology. Approximately 94 percent of today's college students and 75 percent of today's middle- and high-school students own cell phones (Burns & Lohenry, 2010; Reavy, 2008). With so many people carrying, talking, and texting on their phones, cell-phone etiquette has become an important topic of conversation. Shari Burns and Kevin Lohenry investigated cell-phone use in class and discovered that 73 percent

of respondents admitted that their cell phones rang during class, and 84 percent of faculty claimed cell phones are a source of distraction during class time (Burns & Lohenry, 2010). Cell phones not only are distracting to us as listeners but also can distract others around us.

How to Listen Effectively

When we improve our listening skills, we increase the amount of information we comprehend and retain. To listen effectively, we must first overcome obstacles that interfere with our listening. A **careful listener** overcomes listener interference in order to listen effectively to another person's message. To reduce interference, try the following strategies.

- **Eliminate distractions.** Distractions may be external (auditory or visual distractions) or internal (distracting thoughts or feelings). Turn cell phones off and commit yourself to focusing your attention on the person communicating. Avoid thinking of thoughts outside of what the person is saying.
- **Use effective communication.** Although you may have the urge to interrupt and focus the conversation on yourself, avoid the tendency to dominate the discussion. Instead, ask questions that will help clarify information or demonstrate your understanding.
- **Offer feedback.** Providing appropriate and timely feedback is another important strategy for effective listening. Providing nonverbal feedback such as nodding your head in agreement, smiling at the right moment, and using direct body orientation (facing those who are speaking, maintaining a relaxed, alert, and open body position) can help ensure you are listening carefully to the speaker. In addition, offering verbal feedback can show others you are listening carefully to their message.
- **Ask for clarification.** When you do not understand someone because of language, style, message complexity, or the like, respectfully ask for clarification.

How to Listen Critically

To listen critically means that you assess the strengths and weaknesses of someone's information. Listening critically does not mean that you immediately judge the person or message or listen to find fault with a message. Rather, **critical listeners** listen for the accuracy of content and the implications of a message. This means that critical listeners remain open to new ideas, listen carefully to areas of disagreement, and consider how someone else's ideas affect oneself and one's community.

Guidelines for Critical Listening When we listen critically, we avoid making quick decisions about what is good or bad, right or wrong. Instead, we ask people appropriate questions about their ideas so we can more fully understand a message and explore areas of agreement or disagreement. First, we need to assess a person's credibility to decide if she or he has the authority to present information on the subject. Next, we

careful listener

listener who overcomes listener interference in order to listen effectively to another person's message.

listener

listener who listens for accuracy of content and implications of a message.

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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The Listening Project: What Does the World Think of America?

How well do you think you can listen to what others think of you? Asking the question, "What do you think of America?" four "listeners" traveled to fourteen different countries to hear the answers. Carrie Lennox (seventh-grade history teacher), Bob Roeglin (corrections), Bao Phe (spoken word artist and poet), and Han Shan (trainer of grassroots youth activists) traveled around the globe to ask common people "What's wrong" and "What's right with America?" They made a commitment to be curious and to listen to the answers, and the result is the documentary and award-winning film *The Listening Project*.

The producers of the film explain: "We had our own very strong feelings about the United States and its place in the world. How do you set that aside? How do you set aside your own personal views and really try to go out and very objectively talk to people and be able to really listen" to views you might not agree with? But the producers and the "listeners" made that commitment. Here is a little of what they heard, when they asked, "When I say 'America' or 'American,' what's the first thing that pops into your head?"

"There is a Japanese saying: To criticize is to help . . ."

"America really influences the world . . ."

"America is what gives to you with one hand and then takes away with both."

"I love America, and I hate America."

"Most Americans don't understand how we live where we live and what is going on. We are not a terrorist people."



"In America, there is a sense that if you've got drive and ambition, you can make it."

"America's role always been to try and make peace."

"You have always been so much involved with wars."

"The Greeks and the Romans—America should learn from history."

"The world is one, one, two, three there we all are."

"Does it really make you so happy to drive home in your Beemer and go out again in your Lexis?"

"There is a saying: 'God has given you two ears and one mouth to listen more than speak.'"

Source: *The Listening Project* documentary (<http://thelisteningprojectfilm.com/>).

What Do You Think?

1. What listening skills do you think *The Listening Project* listeners might have used to really listen to the people they spoke with?
2. Have you been in a situation in which you listened to things you agreed with and did not agree with? What listening strategies did you use?
3. If you could go around and ask people a question with a commitment to hearing answers you might not agree with, what would that question be?

need to analyze whether arguments presented were supported by sound evidence. Finally, we need to determine what effect a message has on our own lives or the lives of others.

- Does the person have the experience, expertise, or ability to access accurate information on the subject? Does he or she have a personal stake in the outcome leading to possible bias on the topic?
- How fully has the person developed an idea? Is the information based mostly on fact or on opinion? Where did the information come from? Is the information recent?
- How does the information fit with what you know to be true? What information is new? What are the implications of the message for you and your community?

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Listening critically means that we ask a series of questions to determine someone's credibility, the quality of the material provided, and the implications for the ideas presented. When we are committed to asking questions first, we are less likely to judge a person's ideas before we listen to the complete message.

How to Listen Civilly

Civil Listeners are open to hearing different views and perspectives even when there is disagreement. Listening civilly does not mean that we have to agree with someone, be persuaded that she or he is correct, or remain silent about our own views. Instead, when we listen civilly we consider views that are different from our own and try to understand those views. When we understand a viewpoint more fully, we can engage in productive conversations about disagreements in our relationships, workplace differences, community challenges, or global concerns.

When we listen civilly, we compare and contrast our beliefs and values with others. By fully listening to other perspectives, we may gain a clearer sense of who we are and what we believe. We may be able to learn about and participate in the discussion of local, state, national, and international issues.

civil listener

listener who is open to hearing different views and perspectives, even when there is disagreement.

Key Concepts

- action-oriented listener
- ambushing (105)
- auditory listener (107)
- careful listener (114)
- civil listener (116)
- confirming (100)
- content-oriented listener
- critical listener (114)

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Chapter Summary

Listening Is Important for Several Reasons

Listening allows us to confirm others, understand a message, and learn something new. Listening also provides us the opportunity to become engaged citizens and possibly work toward improving our communities, relationships, and workplaces.

Important to Understand the Misconceptions about Listening

Idea that listening is a natural process is not accurate; effort to listen. Belief that listening and hearing are the same is also a misconception. Hearing is the physiological process that takes place when sound waves travel in our eardrums; listening is paying close attention to another's words.

Sometimes Fail to Listen for Three Reasons

variations in listening styles and preferences (experiential auditory listeners, visual listeners, people-oriented

listeners, content-oriented listeners, action-oriented listeners, and time-oriented listeners) can impede our ability to understand others.

- There are many types of listener interference that hinder our ability to understand a message fully: pseudolistening, selective listening, defensive listening, ambushing, insulated listening, insensitive listening, stage hogging, and technology.
- Failing to listen can also be caused by speaker interference because of information, language, differences, and technology.

There Are Several Ways to Improve Our Listening

- To listen effectively, we must overcome obstacles that interfere with our ability to listen to others.
- To listen critically, we need to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a person's message.
- To listen civilly, we need to remain open to new ideas and information, even when we may disagree with those ideas.

Key Concepts

action-oriented listener (108)

ambushing (105)

auditory listener (107)

careful listener (114)

civil listener (116)

confirming (100)

content-oriented listener (108)

critical listener (114)

defensive listener (104)

experiential listener (107)

hearing (102)

insensitive listener (105)

insulated listener (105)

listening (103)

listening interference (103)

listening style (108)

people-oriented listener (108)

pseudolistening (103)

selective listening (104)

spotlighting (112)

stage hogging (106)

time-oriented listener (109)

verbal clutter (112)

visual listener (107)



Invitation to Human Communication Online

Speech Communication CourseMate includes an interactive eBook and interactive learning tools including National Geographic Explorer videos, student videos, quizzes, flashcards, and more. Speech Builder Express 3.0 and Speech Studio 2.0 are also available. Go to cengagebrain.com to access your CourseMate for *Invitation to Human Communication* where these resources can be found.

Further Reflection and Discussion

1. Do you ever hold more than one conversation at a time—for example, texting with a friend while also chatting online? Discuss experiences where you were able to listen well or not listen well in this situation. What is lost when holding two conversations at once? What might be gained?
2. Make a list of cell phone etiquette do's and don'ts. Compare them with others in your class and discuss the lists. Can you come to a consensus?
3. Think of a recent experience where your listening failed. What styles were you using? Was there speaker interference? How do you explain why your listening was ineffective?

Activities and Web Links

Visit cengagebrain.com to access the CourseMate for *Invitation to Human Communication* where these activities and web links can be found.

1. Watch this brief humorous video that depicts three people in a listening situation. What listening style does each person use? What types of interference do you notice? Go to *Web link 5.1*.
2. Watch this video clip demonstrating self-centered listening. Now write a brief paragraph explaining what the self-centered listener might have said to show she was a skilled listener and communicator. Go to *Web link 5.2*.
3. Make a list of all the jargon used in your workplace or in the discipline in which you are majoring in college. For examples of scientific jargon, go to *Web link 5.3*.