**Listening**

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process.

Listening is key to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood. As a result, communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated.

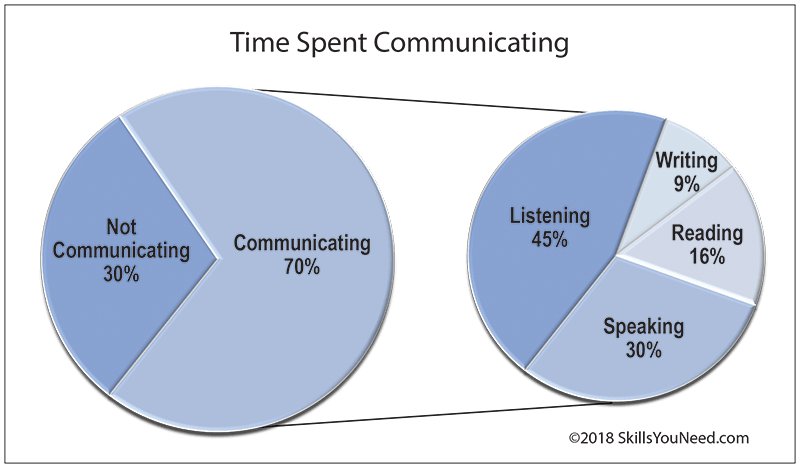
If there is one communication skill you should aim to master, then listening is it.

Listening is so important that many top employers provide listening skills training for their employees. This is not surprising when you consider that good listening skills can lead to better customer satisfaction, greater productivity with fewer mistakes, and increased sharing of information that in turn can lead to more creative and innovative work

**We Spend a lot of Time Listening**

Adults spend an average of 70% of their time engaged in some sort of communication.

Of this, research shows that an average of 45% is spent listening compared to 30% speaking, 16% reading and 9% writing. (Adler, R. et al. 2001). That is, by any standards, a lot of time listening. It is worthwhile, therefore, taking a bit of extra time to ensure that you listen effectively.



Based on the research of: *Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L. and Proctor, R. (2001)*   
*Interplay: the process of interpersonal communicating (8th edn), Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt*.

### The Purpose of Listening

Listening serves a number of possible purposes, and the purposeof listening will depend on the situation and the nature of the communication.

1. To specifically focus on the messages being communicated, avoiding distractions and preconceptions.
2. To gain a full and accurate understanding into the speakers point of view and ideas.
3. To critically assess what is being said. (See our page on [**Critical Thinking**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/learn/critical-thinking.html) for more).
4. To observe the [**non-verbal signals**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/nonverbal-communication.html) accompanying what is being said to enhance understanding.
5. To show interest, concern and concentration.
6. To encourage the speaker to communicate fully, openly and honestly.
7. To develop an selflessness approach, putting the speaker first.
8. To arrive at a shared and agreed understanding and acceptance of both sides views.

**8 Tips To Improve Your Listening Skills For Better Communication**



Even when we have the best of intentions, we can easily become distracted when trying to listen to others. If we can learn how to practice active listening, which involves not only offering attention but also [communicating our comprehension](https://www.thelawofattraction.com/engage-productive-positive-conversations/), we can look smarter, feel better, and [enhance all of our interpersonal relationships](https://www.thelawofattraction.com/18-communication-tips-will-make-people-love/) at work and at home.

So, whether you’re working to manifest [the job of your dreams](https://www.thelawofattraction.com/how-to-use-the-law-of-attraction-when-seeking-your-dream-job/), the ideal romantic partner or that active social life you’ve always wanted, keep in mind these 8 powerful tips that will help you be a good listener.

**1. Demonstrate Your Listening Skills By Paraphrasing**

Paraphrasing and summarizing are both fantastic communication skills that help you to make sense of a speaker’s points and also allow you to demonstrate that you are listening closely.

For example, if your colleague talks for five minutes about her current difficulties on your shared project, you might try saying something like “So, you’re feeling very frustrated that your feedback isn’t being taken into account, and you’re hoping to organize our team in a way that facilitates more frank discussion”.

Although this sounds like a simple listening technique, it can really show that you “get” the other person. It can also go a long way toward preventing misunderstands and misattributions.

**2. Make Consistent Eye Contact**

Learning how to listen isn’t just about what you say to others. Body language also has a major role to play.

Although it’s off-putting if you stare at your interlocutor and refuse to blink until they’ve stopped speaking, it is important to hold their gaze at least most of the time. It is an encouraging way to communicate interest, understanding, and focus.

Be sure to tailor your eye contact to the needs of others, too. If you’re dealing with someone anxious, cut back on direct stares and focus on other active listening skills that are less confronting to [shy people](https://www.thelawofattraction.com/8-things-need-know-introverts/).

**3. Adopt An Open Posture**

Another tool in your attentive listening skill set involves paying close attention to the way you’re standing or sitting.

For example, it’s common knowledge that folding your arms, tapping your feet or pursuing your lips are all ways of showing displeasure, impatience or disinterest.

In contrast, effective listening can be communicated by a soft, open posture. Keep your body loose, and consider learning forward to demonstrate that you’re eagerly taking in information.

**4. Ask Open Questions**

Closed questions are one that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”, while open questions are designed to promote longer, more thoughtful responses.

When you ask closed questions it can seem like you just want to get specific information from the other person. Or, that you only have limited time for them. On the other hand, open questions show your desire to engage in a proper discussion and your interest in getting into the speaker’s mindset.

**5. Remember Past Details**

Take any opportunity you can to add a comment that proves you have listened and remembered something from a past conversation. This makes people feel valued and proves that you really do pay attention.

For example, even something small like remembering that someone doesn’t like a particular type of coffee or that they’ve once visited a specific country can help to cement a mutual bond.

**6. Show You’re A Good Listener By Nodding**

As with eye contact, nodding and smiling can be easily overlooked when you’re thinking about how to improve listening skills, as you might just take it for granted that you do this when you’re talking.

However, if you monitor your body language, you might realize you nod and smile a lot less often than you assume. This is the best way to show you agree and want to hear more, as it doesn’t require interrupting in any way.

**7. Communicate Active Listening With Mirroring**

Further to the above tips on body language, it can be useful to mirror the posture of the person you’re speaking to.

While this can be obvious if taken to extremes, it is an excellent interpersonal skill that works at a subconscious level to convince your conversation partner that you are empathizing with them.

Try small mirroring tricks, such as crossing your legs in the same direction as the other person or folding your hands in the same way.

**8. Listen To Understand**

Finally, it’s vital that you not only act like you’re listening to the other person but that you also bring an authentic desire to listen to your conversations. Many people are just waiting to interject, change the subject to themselves or air their views, and this is obvious to others (even when the speaker thinks it isn’t).

If you go into every interaction with curiosity and genuine interest in others, this will come across in the way your presence feels to the other person.

## How to Improve Your Listening Skills?

Having effective listening skills means being able to display interest in the topic discussed and understand the information provided. In today’s society, the ability to communicate effectively is becoming increasingly important. Although the ability to speak effectively is a highly sought-after skill, developing effective listening skills is often not regarded in the same respect.

In fact, listening is just as important as speaking. Being a good listener helps solve problems, resolve [conflicts,](https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/economics/conflict-theory/) and improve [relationships](https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/careers/soft-skills/office-politics/). In the workplace, effective listening contributes to fewer errors, less wasted time, and improved accuracy. Effective listening helps build friendships and [careers](https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/careers/map/).

### Five ways to improve your listening skills

#### 1. Face the speaker and give them your attention

It is difficult to talk to someone who is constantly looking around. Make sure to face the speaker, maintain eye contact, and give them your undivided attention. In Western cultures, eye contact is necessary for effective communication. Although shyness, uncertainty, or [cultural taboos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taboo) may inhibit eye contact, try your best to make sure the speaker knows that they have your full attention.

#### 2. Keep an open mind

Do not judge or mentally criticize what the speaker is telling you. Doing so can compromise your ability to take in what is being said. Never exhibit judgmental behavior, as it compromises your effectiveness as a listener. You can evaluate what was said after the speaker is finished talking, but don’t do so while you are still listening to them.

Let the speaker finish what they are saying and don’t be a sentence-grabber. Interrupting the speaker or prohibiting them from finishing what they are saying can indicate disrespect to the speaker. Often, interrupting the speaker mid-sentence interrupts their train of thought and can easily destroy a productive conversation.

#### 3. Active listening

Active listening shows the speaker that you’re interested and is an important business communication skill. Using active listening techniques helps to ensure that you correctly understand what is said.

**Active listening techniques:**

* Paraphrasing back to the speaker what was said, to show understanding
* Nonverbal cues (nodding, eye contact, etc.)
* Verbal affirmations (“I understand,” “I know,” “Thank you,” etc.)
* Demonstrating concern and establishing rapport

#### 4. Just listen!

Create a mental model of the information, whether it be a picture or an arrangement of abstract concepts. Listen to keywords and phrases and do not rehearse what you are going to say after the speaker is done talking. Think about what the other person is saying rather than what you are going to respond with. It is difficult to think of what you are going to say while also listening to the speaker. Be attentive and relaxed – don’t get distracted by your own thoughts and feelings.

### The Importance of Listening

Effective listening is a skill that is frequently undervalued in our society. Good communication skills require both effective speaking and listening. By being an attentive listener, you can understand more and improve relationships.

**Make sure to:**

* Maintain eye contact and face the speaker to give them your attention
* Don’t be judgmental while listening
* Don’t interrupt the speaker
* Employ active listening techniques
* Think about what the other person is saying and not what you should respond with