

Effective Listening Skills

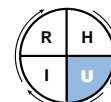
Listening is a vital part of effective oral communication. In fact, a good listener can actually *help* the speaker deliver his or her message more effectively. Good listening, however, takes commitment and practice. We must learn to “hear” what the speaker is really saying, select information to interpret, and then respond—all in a few short seconds. A four-step continuous-improvement process will help you develop important listening skills. The steps, illustrated to the right, are HEAR, UNDERSTAND, INTERPRET, and RESPOND. A system that can be used to help you become a better listener appears on the reverse side.

1. HEAR



Be attentive.

2. UNDERSTAND



Get clear on the message.

3. INTERPRET



Get a sense of meaning.

4. RESPOND



Confirm the message.



1.

HEAR

► Be attentive.

- Be “present” and tune in to the speaker’s message.
- Minimize distractions and give them your full attention.
- Establish eye contact.
- Use positive body language.
- Build trust by conveying that you have the time to listen.



► Allow the story to unfold.

- Use conversation starters to open communication.
- Use attentive silence.
- Give minimal responses while the story unfolds.
- Ask a few questions to help the speaker paint a clear picture.
- Show interest by not interrupting.



► Become aware of posture and gestures.

- Observe the speaker’s gaze and eye contact.
- Listen for vocal expression.
- Observe the speaker’s body movements and gestures.
- Take note of the way they use personal space.
- Communicate non-verbally that you have seen and heard.



► Build rapport.

- Acknowledge the other person’s feelings.
- Accept the speaker’s experience as real and important.
- Be sensitive to your own reactions.
- Understand the other person by imagining yourself in their “shoes.”



2.

UNDERSTAND

► Get clear on the message.



- Clarify what the speaker is saying to be sure you understand the message.
- Paraphrase and repeat the speaker’s statements.
- Reflect the feelings of the speaker in order to build understanding.
- Summarize and put into words the speaker’s message.



► Remember the message.



- Concentrate on what is being said in order to learn from, pass on, or use the information.
- Take notes so you can accurately keep track.
- Get clear on the content and feelings being expressed.

3.

INTERPRET

► Get a sense of meaning.

- Consider the purpose or motive behind what is being said.
- Avoid jumping to conclusions.
- Don’t read things into the message.
- Convey understanding.
- Recognize that people differ in the ability to get their meaning across.



► Suspend judgment.

- Consider the speaker’s viewpoint before replying.
- Don’t devalue the speaker’s ideas, problems, wants, or concerns.
- Avoid giving opinions, providing instructions, making suggestions, moralizing, or criticizing.



4.

RESPOND

► Confirm the message.



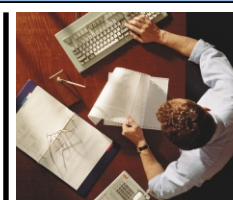
- Show that you have been paying close attention.
- Become aware of barriers to listening that might interfere with understanding.
- Evaluate whether the speaker’s words, tone, and body language all told the same story.
- Verify the message back to the speaker.

► Respond to the sender.



- Assess whether or not your listening style is a bridge to clear communication.
- Let the speaker know what you heard and how you heard it.
- Deliver an appropriate and confident response.
- Give feedback verbally and/or non-verbally (body language).

► Review aspects of the listening process.



- Recognize that listening is a skill and a gift that anyone can give.
- Review each phase in the listening process: Hear, Understand, Interpret, Respond.
- Evaluate your listening habits and identify steps to improve your listening skills.
- Practice listening skills in order to master them, and reap the rewards.

Listening: Template



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