

# Active Listening

Communication & Presentation Skills

# Active Listening

- Listening is an important skill
- We can define listening as follows
  - Listening is a process of receiving, interpreting, and reacting to a message received from the speaker.
- No communication process is complete without listening
  - According to Management guru Tom Peters, listening is an essential management and leadership skill

# Active Listening

- Similarly effective listening is extremely important for students, as they spend most of their time listening to lectures
- An Example
  - In a biology class, the teacher asked the students to refer to the book entitled “Origin of Species” by Darwin. One of the students sincerely rummaged through the library bookshelves looking for “Orange and Peaches”, but to his utter dismay, he just could not find it.
- In reality this is an embarrassing situation that could happen to any of us who do not listen attentively.

# Active Listening

- Several studies have indicated that Business people spend almost 45% of their working time in listening
- Hearing and listening are not the same
- People often use these two words interchangeably.

# Active Listening

- Hearing is dependent on the ears, and everyone can hear without deliberate effort
- Hearing is merely the vibration of sound waves on the eardrums followed by the firing of electro-chemical impulses in the brain
- On the other hand, listening requires voluntary attention and then making sense of what is heard
- It requires a conscious effort to interpret the sounds, grasp the meanings of the words, and react to the message
- The interpretation of sound signals is a cognitive act, which completely depends on the knowledge of the listener and also on his attitude towards the sender and the message

# Types of Listening

## 1. Appreciative listening

- ▶ This is listening for deriving aesthetic pleasure, as we do when we listen to a comedian, musician, or entertainer

## 2. Empathetic listening

- ▶ When we listen to a distressed friend who wants to vent his feelings, we provide emotional and moral support in the form of empathetic listening.
- ▶ When psychiatrists listen to their patients, their listening is classified as empathetic listening

# Types of Listening

## 3. **Comprehensive listening**

- ▶ This type of listening is needed in the class room when students have to listen to the lecturer to understand and comprehend the message.
- ▶ Similarly, when someone is giving you directions to find the location of a place, comprehensive listening is required to receive and interpret the message.

## 4. Critical listening

- ▶ When the purpose is to accept or reject the message or to evaluate it critically, one requires this type of listening.
- ▶ For example
  - ▶ Listening to a sales person before making a purchase order
  - ▶ listening to politicians making their election campaign speech involves critical listening
  - ▶ Similarly, when you read a book with the objective of writing a book review, you use your critical abilities.
- ▶ Although all these types of listening are important, we mainly involve ourselves comprehensive and critical listening.
- ▶ Even as students, you are primarily involved in these two types of listening during classroom lectures or communicating work.



# Traits of a Good Listener

## 1. **Being Non-evaluative**

- ▶ Listener's verbal and nonverbal behavior should suggest the speaker that he is being properly heard and understood
- ▶ Don't evaluate the speaker for the ideas and feelings
- ▶ Behavior should convey the impression that speaker is being accepted without making any judgment of right or wrong, good or bad, suitable or unsuitable

# Traits of a Good Listener

## 2. Paraphrasing

- ▶ One can simply paraphrase what the speaker has said and enquire from the speaker whether you have heard it accurately
- ▶ Use phrases like the following ones to ensure that you have paraphrased the information correctly:
  - ▶ ‘As I gather, you want to tell...
  - ▶ “So you mean to say that. ..
  - ▶ “Oh! your feeling towards.. .
  - ▶ “Do you mean that. ..

# Traits of a Good Listener

## 3. Reflecting Implications

- ▶ One should go a bit beyond the contents of the speaker indicating him your appreciation for his ideas and where they are leading
- ▶ You can use phrases like:
  - ▶ “I am sure if you did that, you would be in a position to.. “So this might lead to a result which. .
  - ▶ “So you are suggesting that we might..
  - ▶ “Will that help us to alleviate the problem of. .

# Traits of a Good Listener

## 4. Reflecting Hidden Feelings

- ▶ Sometimes, you have to go beyond the explicit feelings and contents of what is being said to unravel the underlying feelings, intentions, beliefs, or values that may be influencing the speaker's words
- ▶ You try to empathize or identify yourself with the speaker, to experience what he or she feels
- ▶ You can express your sentiments by using phrases such as:
  - ▶ “If I were in your place, I would not have handled the situation so well.”
  - ▶ “That must have been a satisfying experience.”
  - ▶ “If I was in such a situation, I would have sought the help of seniors.”
  - ▶ “If that had happened to me, I'd have been very upset.”

# Traits of a Good Listener

## 5. Inviting Further Contributions

- ▶ In a situation where you haven't heard or understood enough yet to respond with empathy and understanding, prompt the speaker to give you more information
- ▶ Phrases such as the following can be used:
  - ▶ Can you throw more light on.
  - ▶ “It would be great if you can expand more on this.”
  - ▶ ‘ that, what happened?’
  - ▶ “How did you react when.. .

# Traits of a Good Listener

## 6. Responding Non-verbally

- ▶ Show as an active listener by adopting certain postures and sending non-verbal signals which communicate your interest in what the speaker is saying
- ▶ These include:
  - ▶ regular eye contact (without staring),
  - ▶ body leaning slightly towards the speaker;
  - ▶ head nods and a slightly titled head.
  - ▶ You can also occasionally use some receptive utterances as 'yes', 'un-hum', to indicate that you are following what the speaker is saying.
- ▶ But be careful not to over do the uh-huh's
- ▶ Attentive silence is more effective than too many grunts

# Active Listening Vs Passive Listening

- Listening to various forms of communication in an unconscious manner is passive listening
  - e.g., While at the dining table, we glance at the television while busy eating or talking to someone else and some sounds enter our ears
- Be alert to fully follow the dialogue and develop the ability to listen to others patiently and carefully
- Show keenness in the speaker and speech by his expressions, alertness, and by asking questions about the speech if required

# Active Listening Vs Passive Listening

- Exercise can certainly help you to improve your listening skills:
  - Concentrate on the theme, supporting ideas, and also the digression (departure from subject), if any, in the speech.
  - write down the gist of what you heard.
  - A person's body language, or non-verbal communication is involuntary and therefore, more truthful.
  - Pay considerable attention to the physical messages conveyed by a speaker in order to assess the accuracy and sincerity of his speech.



# Dealing with Distractions

- Train yourself to avoid physical distractions and concentrate on the message fully
- An **attractive face** in the room, sometimes even the fragrance of perfume, can be the reason for distraction
- A careful listener **has to exercise a great deal** of mental discipline to remain focused on the message
- Sometimes **noise distracts** the attention of the listener.

# Continuous Listening

- Often, after a period of **continuous listening**, people get tired and start losing interest in the message
- Many a time, such a problem arises because of '**brain time**'. On an average, a person speaks around 130—150 words per minute but has the capacity to listen to 600—700 words per minute.
- Since a listener's capacity to absorb information is much more than a speaker's ability to talk, a lot of time is available for the listener to evaluate the message
- Sometimes a listener focuses on the message in fragments and hence complete attention is lost
- Effective listening is only possible if the listener patiently listens to the complete speech
- Listeners require mental preparedness and energy to concentrate on the speaker's words as well as his non-verbal cues of communication like posture, gesture, eye contact, facial expressions, etc.

# Implications of Effective Listening

- While working in an organization, you will use your listening skills in a variety of situations:
  - listening to distressed and dissatisfied workers,
  - listening during telephonic conversations,
  - listening while taking instructions,
  - conducting meeting, seminars, presentations,
- Listening patiently to employees enables the managers to feel the pulse of the organization

# Implications of Effective Listening

- ▶ **Demoralization** sets in, leading to lowered productivity.
- ▶ Effective listening is very vital for the **success of an open-door policy**.
  - ▶ When employees are encouraged to freely walk into a manager's room and encouraged to speak up, they no longer **harbor negative feelings**.
- ▶ **Improves working conditions** and nurture harmony and cohesion in the organization if both management and employees listen to each other's messages patiently
- ▶ The **morale of the organization** as a whole is thereby boosted, resulting in increased productivity

# Tips for Effective Listening

## Do's

- Be mentally prepared to listen
- Evaluate the speech, not the speaker
- Be unbiased to the speaker by depersonalizing your feelings
- Fight distractions by closing off sound sources
- Be open minded
- Ask questions to clarify and corroborate thoughts
- Paraphrase from time to time
- Send appropriate non-verbal signals from time to time

## Don'ts

- Pay undue emphasis to the vocabulary as you can use the context to understand the meaning
- Pay too much attention to the accessories and clothing of the speaker
- Prepare your responses while the speaker is speaking
- Avoid preconceptions and prejudices.
- Get distracted by outside influences
- Concentrate too hard
- Interrupt too often
- Show boredom even to an uninteresting speaker



Next Lecture  
Interviews