

listen in

IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS THRU LISTENING

The average talking speed is 125 to 150 words per minute. Research suggests that most of us are capable of listening to 1,000 words per minute. It is no surprise, therefore, that our concentration sometimes wanders off. Even when we are listening we do so to different degrees. There are six recognised levels of listening

1. Not listening	ignoring or switching off from whomever is speaking
2. Selective listening	picking up phrases and themes in alignment with own view or needs
3. Listening for information	understanding some facts and processing them like a computer
4. Mirror Listening	using a summary, combining key words from the speaker and own words to verify understanding
5. Reflective Listening	picking up on how the speaker feels (and thinks) while spotting some non-verbal cues
6. Listening behind emotion	active listening to establish why a speaker feels as they do

Given that the majority of communication is non-verbal (by some people's estimates, over 90%), the value in listening at levels 4 to 6 can be enormous. As well as the wide range of non-verbal techniques there are well established verbal techniques which help both listening and being seen to listen:

1. Questioning - probing further to discover more or gain greater insight.
2. Reflecting - providing a mini-summary, using different words but articulating the same meaning.
3. Building - adding to what has been said, often with an illustration of the point being made.
4. Introducing feelings - adding an emotion, eg, excitement or surprise, to the dialogue
5. Encouragers – using "Uh, huh", "yes..."
6. Clarifiers - questions to test your (the listener's) understanding and drawing out more from the speaker.
7. Summarising - repeating the main point(s) verbatim
8. Echoing - repeating the speaker's last word or two (can be particularly annoying if done too often)
9. Feedback – telling others what your reaction is to what has been said by stating your understanding and expressing your own feelings.

On average 40% of our waking time is spent listening. Even with all this practice it doesn't mean that we're all great listeners. To discover how good a listener you are, complete the following questionnaire. Complete (honestly!) deciding, for each statement, whether it is true: Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, or Never:

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No.	Question	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1.	I allow the person to express their view without interrupting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I avoid becoming hostile or excited if a person's opinion differs from mine.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I repeat the essential details of a conversation back to the person to confirm understanding.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I tune out distractions whilst listening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I make an effort to show interest in the other person's conversation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	I sound as if I am listening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I look for non-verbal forms of communication, such as body language.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I look as if I am listening in personal encounters.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	I listen for cues to what is driving the person's emotion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	I try to understand a situation before I start to evaluate it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	I increase the level of my active listening when communicating with difficult people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	I use selective silence in meetings to purposefully gain insight into the breadth of views being expressed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	I listen to understand rather than simply listen to reply.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	I am very aware of my "hot" buttons, and hold responding until I've processed my own emotions, and then am able to express both thoughts and feelings effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	I use open questions to clarify assumptions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16.	I express how much I value the relationship/s when actively listening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17.	I avoid bringing up past issues which I wasn't happy about into current discussions/disagreements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18.	I do not use sarcasm or jokes when responding to critical issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19.	I do not respond to a complaint with a complaint, or criticism with a criticism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20.	I do not interrupt others when they are speaking, even if I strongly disagree.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21.	I respond to suggestions and ideas by finding ways to value-add, before offering alternatives.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22.	I tend to summarise all contributions of the group to help myself and others see alignments and consensus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23.	I express how I feel on issues rather than allowing my body language only to signal these emotions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24.	I ask others about their feelings and thoughts rather than make assumptions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25.	I refrain from responding with criticism or insults, especially when dealing with tense situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26.	I refrain from sideway conversations with another when someone is speaking to the whole group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27.	I listen intently and receptively to feedback from others (either positive or constructive).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28.	I listen receptively to others disagreements and follow this by questioning what they would need to be able to move to agreement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29.	If I sense a discrepancy between what someone is saying and what I'm reading in their body language I ask questions of clarification to help overcome any distractions from listening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30.	I am able to ask questions from a genuine place of not knowing the answer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Score your answers to the questionnaire as follows: Always = 10; Often = 7; Sometimes = 5; Rarely = 2; Never = 0

- * 250 - 300 - you could become an oracle
- * 200 - 250 - great listener and probably much loved for it
- * 150 - 200 - good listening with lapses - you could gain more with application
- * 100 - 150 - you do listen but it is not your strong suit
- * 50 - 100 - you're missing out on a lot
- * 0 - 50 - you could be a brick wall

Up to 90% of communications can be visual. You're receiving not only words but, most importantly for relationships, you're receiving body language and tone. Most often body language prevails over words. Learn to listen with empathy, openness and awareness. Nod your head occasionally as you listen and maintain eye contact to show interest in what others are saying. If you sense a discrepancy between what is being said and what you see, ask for clarification.

