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10 Steps To Effective Listening

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Abstract: Given that all methods of learning to listen and understand in a foreign language are related to specific needs, it is pointed out that all methods of language teaching are determined by the purpose for which it is assigned. In the later stages of the development of the education system, great importance is attached to the teaching of English. At the current stage of development of the republic, radical qualitative changes are taking place in all spheres of life of our society. This is closely related to the correctness of education. This article discusses how to learn listening comprehension. They are short and limited in size, rich in content written in prose in form.

Keywords: Effective, speaker, attentive, on open mind, listen, picture, skills.

Introduction

In today's high-tech, high-speed, high-stress world, communication is more important than ever, yet we seem to devote less and less time to really listening to one another. Genuine listening has become a rare gift—the gift of time. It helps build relationships, solve problems, ensure understanding, resolve conflicts, and improve accuracy. At work, effective listening means fewer errors and less wasted time. At home, it helps develop resourceful, self-reliant kids who can solve their own problems. Listening builds friendships and careers. It saves money and marriages. Here are 10 tips to help you develop effective listening skills.

1. Face the speaker and maintain eye contact.

Talking to someone while they scan the room, study a computer screen, or gaze out the window is like trying to hit a moving target. How much of the person's divided attention you are actually getting? Fifty percent? Five percent? If the person were your child you might demand, "Look at me when I'm talking to you," but that's not the sort of thing we say to a lover, friend or colleague. In most Western cultures, eye contact is considered a basic ingredient of effective communication. When we talk, we look each other in the eye. That doesn't mean that you can't carry on a conversation from across the room, or from another room, but if the conversation continues for any length of time, you (or the other person)

will get up and move. The desire for better communication pulls you together.

Do your conversational partners the courtesy of turning to face them. Put aside papers, books, the phone and other distractions. Look at them, even if they don't look at you. Shyness, uncertainty, shame, guilt, or other emotions, along with cultural taboos, can inhibit eye contact in some people under some circumstances. Excuse the other guy, but stay focused yourself.

2. Be attentive, but relaxed.

Now that you've made eye contact, relax. You don't have to stare fixedly at the other person. You can look away now and then and carry on like a normal person. The important thing is to be attentive. The dictionary says that to "attend" another person means .

-be present

-give attention

-apply or direct yourself

-pay attention

-remain ready to serve

Mentally screen out distractions, like background activity and noise. In addition, try not to focus on the speaker's accent or speech mannerisms to the point where they become distractions. Finally, don't be distracted by your own thoughts, feelings, or biases.

3. Keep an open mind.

Listen without judging the other person or mentally criticizing the things she tells you. If what she says alarms you, go ahead and feel alarmed, but don't say to yourself, "Well, that was a stupid move." As soon as you indulge in judgmental bemusements, you've compromised your effectiveness as a listener.

Listen without jumping to conclusions. Remember that the speaker is using language to represent the thoughts and feelings inside her brain. You don't know what those thoughts and feelings are and the only way you'll find out is by listening. Don't be a sentence-grabber. Occasionally my partner can't slow his mental pace enough to listen effectively, so he tries to speed up mine by interrupting and finishing my sentences. This usually lands him way off base, because he is following his own train of thought and doesn't learn where my thoughts are headed. After a couple of rounds of this, I usually ask, "Do you want to have this conversation by yourself, or do you want to hear what I have to say?" I wouldn't do that with everyone, but it works with him.

4. Listen to the words and try to picture what the speaker is saying.

Allow your mind to create a mental model of the information being communicated. Whether a literal picture, or an arrangement of abstract concepts, your brain will do the necessary work if you stay focused, with senses fully alert. When listening for long stretches, concentrate on, and remember, key words and phrases. When it's your turn to listen, don't spend the time planning what to say next. You can't rehearse and listen at the same time. Think only about what the other person is saying. Finally, concentrate on what is being said, even if it bores you. If your thoughts start to wander, immediately force yourself to refocus.

5. Don't interrupt and don't impose your "solutions."

Children used to be taught that it's rude to interrupt. I'm not sure that message is getting across anymore. Certainly the opposite is being

modeled on the majority of talk shows and reality programs, where loud, aggressive, in-your-face behavior is condoned, if not encouraged. Interrupting sends a variety of messages. It says:

- "I'm more important than you are."

- "What I have to say is more interesting, accurate or relevant."

- "I don't really care what you think."

- "I don't have time for your opinion."

- "This isn't a conversation, it's a contest, and I'm going to win."

We all think and speak at different rates. If you are a quick thinker and an agile talker, the burden is on you to relax your pace for the slower, more thoughtful communicator—or for the guy who has trouble expressing himself. When listening to someone talk about a problem, refrain from suggesting solutions. Most of us don't want your advice anyway. If we do, we'll ask for it. Most of us prefer to figure out our own solutions. We need you to listen and help us do that. Somewhere way down the line, if you are absolutely bursting with a brilliant solution, at least get the speaker's permission. Ask, "Would you like to hear my ideas?"

6. Wait for the speaker to pause to ask clarifying questions.

When you don't understand something, of course you should ask the speaker to explain it to you. But rather than interrupt, wait until the speaker pauses. Then say something like, "Back up a second. I didn't understand what you just said about..."

7. Ask questions only to ensure understanding.

At lunch, a colleague is excitedly telling you about her trip to Vermont and all the wonderful things she did and saw. In the course of this chronicle, she mentions that she spent some time with a mutual friend. You jump in with, "Oh, I haven't heard from Alice in ages. How is she?" and, just like that, discussion shifts to

Alice and her divorce, and the poor kids, which leads to a comparison of custody laws, and before you know it an hour is gone and Vermont is a distant memory. This particular conversational affront happens all the time. Our questions lead people in directions that have nothing to do with where they thought they were going. Sometimes we work our way back to the original topic, but very often we don't.

When you notice that your question has led the speaker astray, take responsibility for getting the conversation back on track by saying something like, "It was great to hear about Alice, but tell me more about your adventure in Vermont."

8. Try to feel what the speaker is feeling.

If you feel sad when the person with whom you are talking expresses sadness, joyful when she expresses joy, fearful when she describes her fears—and convey those feelings through your facial expressions and words—then your effectiveness as a listener is assured. Empathy is the heart and soul of good listening. To experience empathy, you have to put yourself in the other person's place and allow yourself to feel what it is like to be her at that moment. This is not an easy thing to do. It takes energy and concentration. But it is a generous and helpful thing to do, and it facilitates communication like nothing else does.

9. Give the speaker regular feedback.

Show that you understand where the speaker is coming from by reflecting the speaker's feelings. "You must be thrilled!" "What a terrible ordeal for you." "I can see that you are confused." If the speaker's feelings are hidden or unclear, then occasionally paraphrase the content of the message. Or just nod and show your understanding through appropriate facial expressions and an occasional well-timed "hmmm" or "uh huh." The idea is to give the speaker some proof that you are listening, and that you are following her train of thought—not off indulging in your own fantasies while she talks to the ether. In task situations, regardless of whether at work or home, always restate

instructions and messages to be sure you understand correctly.

10. Pay attention to what isn't said—to nonverbal cues.

If you exclude email, the majority of direct communication is probably nonverbal. We glean a great deal of information about each other without saying a word. Even over the telephone, you can learn almost as much about a person from the tone and cadence of her voice than from anything she says. When I talk to my best friend, it doesn't matter what we chat about, if I hear a lilt and laughter in her voice, I feel reassured that she's doing well. Face to face with a person, you can detect enthusiasm, boredom, or irritation very quickly in the expression around the eyes, the set of the mouth, the slope of the shoulders. These are clues you can't ignore. When listening, remember that words convey only a fraction of the message. It's not time to look at the text just yet. Many learners make the mistake of turning to the text too quickly. However, the point here is to practice your listening skills so just stay focused on listening for the time being. On the first listen, you'll probably have identified one or two key words or ideas. As you repeat the audio, listen carefully and see if you can pick out words or phrases you may have missed the first time. By now you may already have some idea what this piece of audio is about, so use the context to your advantage. If you can't figure out exactly what's going on, don't worry. Just note down any keywords you do understand or words that seem important. At this stage, I'd suggest listening at least three more times. With each listen, you can add a little more to your comprehension. Your goal should be to try and use all of your current knowledge in the language to understand as much as possible from the audio before you read the text. When you feel you've reached a point where there's nothing more you can take from the recording, it's time to move onto the next step.

11. Get Reading

Now it's time to look at the text. Read through it and check how much you understood from your listening. Did you get the 'gist' of it? As you read through the text, identify any new words you come across. See if you can guess the meaning of the words from their context; otherwise, look them up in a dictionary. If there are any new words that you think will be particularly useful for you in conversation, write them down and add them to your list of new vocabulary to learn.

As well as new words you haven't seen before, you'll also likely find words in the text that you already know but didn't understand! Some words can sound quite different when spoken together and at native level speed. Pay careful attention to these words and be sure to listen out for them when you repeat the audio.

12. Listen With the Text

Once you've read through the text a few times and looked up any words you didn't understand, you should be confident about its meaning. Next, I suggest listening again a couple of more times while you read along with the text. This is the one time during the process that you're using aural and visual stimuli together, so take advantage of it. Try to connect the written words to the sounds and pay special attention to phrases or groups of words and how they're pronounced. If there were a lot of new words in the text you're working on, trying breaking the audio down into smaller chunks as you continue to repeat it. Rather than repeating the whole recording at once, you can work through paragraph by paragraph if you prefer.

13. Listen Again Without the Text

Finally, go back and listen again a few more times without the text. By this point, you should be able to understand almost everything quite well even without the visual aid of the text. Over the next few days, it's good to listen back to the clip again whenever you have a chance. Download the recording to your phone so you can have a quick listen any time you get a few free minutes. With each extra repetition your comfort level will grow. Because you're now

able to understand the words and phrases you studied without any visual aid, you'll also find it easier to recognise this vocabulary when it comes up conversations or in other recordings you listen to.

Listening Skills Exercise: Summarize, Summarize, Summarize!

For at least one week, at the end of every conversation in which information is exchanged, conclude with a summary statement. In conversations that result in agreements about future obligations or activities, summarizing will not only ensure accurate follow-through, it will feel perfectly natural. In conversations that do not include agreements, if summarizing feels awkward just explain that you are doing it as an exercise.

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