

## Communication Skills: Lecture No. 11

### Module 4

### Lecture 2

## LISTENING SKILLS

In this Lecture, You will learn about —

**Types of Listeners**

**Barriers to Listening**

In the previous lectures of this module, I discussed with you the importance of effective listening and cleared certain misconceptions about listening.

In this lecture, I will begin with the types of listeners and proceed to discuss in detail the barriers to listening.

## TYPES OF LISTENERS

Listeners are of four types, namely, active listeners, passive listeners, non-listeners and evaluative listeners.

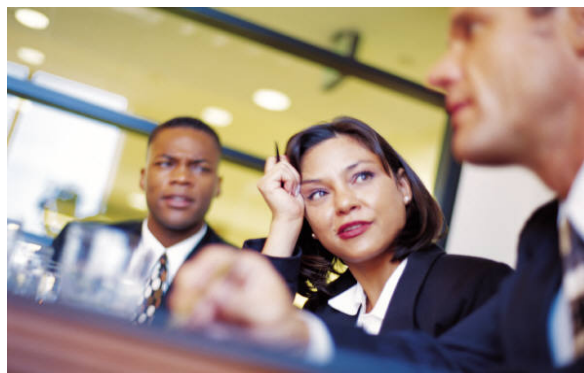
### Types of Listeners

- Active Listeners
- Passive Listeners
- Non-Listeners
- Evaluative Listeners

Let us briefly look at those traits that typify these listeners.

### ACTIVE LISTENERS

As the term implies, active listeners involve themselves *actively* in the communication process by keenly listening not only to the message but also to the way it has been delivered. They focus on the content as well the manner in which it is delivered. This means that they will take note of the verbal content along with its nonverbal subtexts. They will not hesitate to seek clarifications, ask leading questions, show their approval by nodding head, and summarize to clearly indicate that they fully follow the



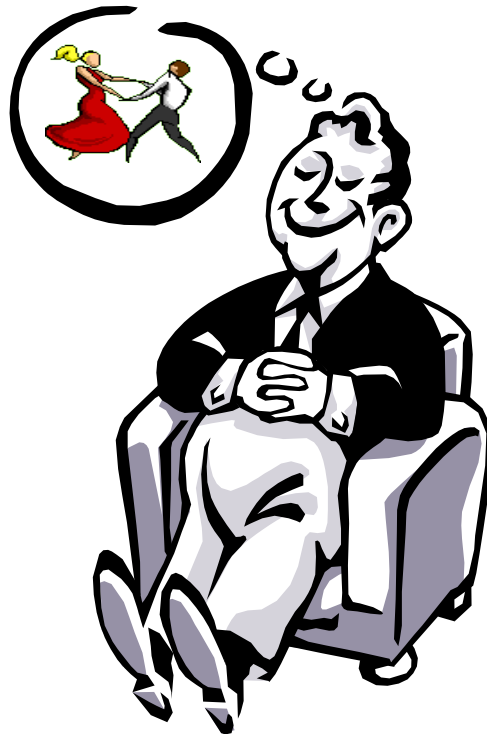
speaker. In this way, the active listeners are quiet sensitive towards the feelings of others, they understand the mood of the audience. They show empathy and make the audience or the other person cared for. Once the audience get the feeling that they are being cared for, they will devote themselves fully to the communication process. Once there is mutual involvement, there will be hundred per cent success in terms of communication. The message sent will be received correctly and feedback is given in a favorable manner. So it leads to a win-win situation and causes effective communication. Contrarily, if the audience would sense that the speaker is insensitive towards their feelings, they would remain cold and distant.

### PASSIVE LISTENERS

Passive listeners exhibit exactly the opposite behavioristic traits of active listeners. They pay attention only to *partial* message and lack sensitivity to the nuances, inner meanings, nonverbal subtexts involved in communication. They allow someone to speak, without interrupting or seeking clarifications. They do not make notes, nod their head in approval, maintain eye contact and keep themselves idle. Passive “listening,” is actually *hearing not listening!* Since passive listeners keep their minds closed, communication with them is futile and incomplete.

### NON LISTENERS

The non-listeners do not listen at all because they are genuinely disinterested in the subject. These people pretend to follow the speaker while they are actually preoccupied with something else. So, they will fake attention, but they could easily be recognized by their blank stare, impatient and nervousness mannerisms. They might be suffering from rigidity of thinking and egotism. Their complete insensitivity and insensible nature makes them incapable of understanding others. In fact, they do not even make an effort to hear what the other person is saying. You will find non-



listeners among authority figures who will do most of the talking and will not let their sub-ordinates easily express their ideas. Although, they frequently interrupt by saying “I understand,” and “I know,” they actually do not know anything or understand the subject!

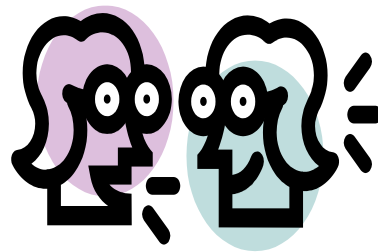
### MARGINAL LISTENERS

Impatient to listen to the main ideas, marginal listeners pay superficial attention, and are interested only in the bottom line. They merely *hear* the sounds of words, but fail to grasp their meanings. They do not go to the deeper level in arguments. They use external distractions to excuse themselves from conversations. They will not have the patience to sit through complex technical presentations, and jump to findings and conclusions. It is risky to communicate with marginal listeners because they are not focused on the main ideas and often misunderstand their import.



### EVALUATIVE LISTENERS

Evaluative listeners literally assess the verbal content on the basis of words not paralinguistic or nonverbal cues. Generally, they use logic to understand the content, hence, they distance themselves emotionally from the subject. As a result, they do not show empathy or sensitivity to the speaker. They are mostly prejudiced and judgmental as they presume the meaning before actually the speaker completes a sentence.



Now, you will be surprised to know that most of us are evaluative listeners! If we observe ourselves carefully, most of the times we behave like evaluative listeners. Without paying full attention to the content, we



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always evaluate what somebody is trying to tell us. Those of us in a professional environment, actually assess the message in terms of its usefulness and mentally reject the speaker even before the speech is delivered to us.

Having discussed the various types of listeners, you may wonder which type you should aspire to become. Obviously, you should become *an active listener*. All effective communicators, for that matter, are active listeners.

### WHAT MAKES AN ACTIVE LISTENER?

An active listener is serious about the whole process of communication. S/he pays attention to the speaker's stance, perspective, point of view, bias and prejudices. S/he is intensely involved in the interaction and expends maximum energy to have full comprehension of the subject matter. through their eye contact, receptive body language, and appropriate facial expressions and nonverbal affirmations, they make the speakers feel delivering message to them a pleasing and pleasurable experience.



**Active Listener**

**Abandons distractions**

- **Grasps the message**
- **Fully understands the intent, its purpose, & significance**



Nonetheless, there are some barriers which impede one's efforts to become an active listener. Communication theorists list eight fundamental barriers to action listening.

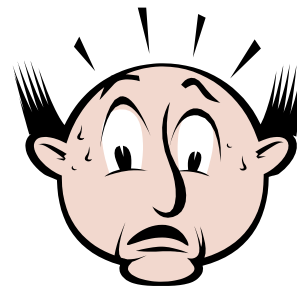
Let us look at those barriers in detail.

## **BARRIERS TO ACTIVE LISTENING**

- **Inadequate language base**
- **Partial Listening**
- **Disinterestedness**
- **Pre-judging the Speaker/the Speech**
- **Negativity towards the Speaker**
- **Diffidence**
- **Over-enthusiasm/Intolerance**
- **Deep-rooted beliefs**

### **INADEQUATE LANGUAGE BASE**

Sufficient language background is required to fully understand the speaker. Despite one's best efforts to intensely participate in the communication process (a lecture delivered, for instance), inadequate language base will act as a deterrent. Weak language proficiency, lack of technical vocabulary, combined with fear and shyness, will hinder the progress of learning a new subject.



### PARTIAL LISTENING



Partial listening occurs when people happily indulge themselves in multitasking and allow themselves to be distracted easily. For instance, when talking over the phone during a conversation, many people are habituated to flip through a book, or surf through the internet due to which they fail to pay full attention to the speaker. Because the mind is involved in too many things, important details are missed in partial listening.

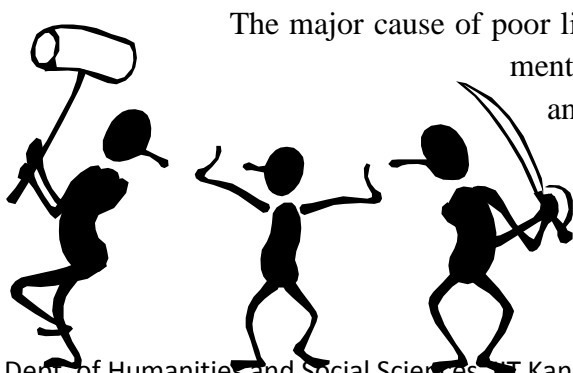
### DISINTERESTEDNESS

Lack of interest in the subject prevents one to pay complete attention. Students, for instance, may remember a pop song more easily than the name of an author. So, due to disinterestedness in the subject, during a conversation, the listener may focus on other interesting subjects.

### PRE-JUDGING THE SPEAKER/THE SPEECH

The listeners form biased opinions by looking at the speaker's look, dress and mannerism. The bias against the speaker can be formed due to one's own gender and colour preferences. Even the status of the speaker, depending on whether it is high or low, can affect the logical thinking of the listener.

### NEGATIVITY TOWARDS THE SPEAKER



The major cause of poor listening is due to the listener's emotional, mental and psychological mind-set. If there is any dislike for the speaker and disapproval to his/her ideas, the listener will certainly reconstruct distorted and negative

message. When there is negativity, the listener shows animosity, undermines the speaker’s capabilities, and keeps disagreeing with the speaker’s viewpoints. The listener will even go to the extent of ridiculing, insulting, and humiliating the speaker in public.

### DIFFIDENCE

Some listeners suffer from a defeatist attitude. Hence, underestimate their self-capabilities and decide in advance that they cannot understand what they are going to hear. Mostly, new students and participants in a conference suffer from this kind of self-diffidence and affect the listening process.



### OVER-ENTHUSIASM/INTOLERANCE

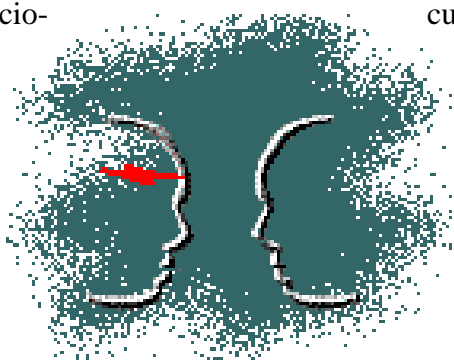
There are listeners who often become over enthusiastic and intolerant and start supplying gaps in the speaker’s ideas. This generally comes out of impatience from the listener’s side who finds the speaker slow to communicate his/her ideas. So the listener advances the questions and interferes quickly preventing the speaker to finish the talk on his/her own pace. In the process, the listener assumes the speaker’s flow of thoughts in advance and impedes his/her own mind from active listening.



### DEEP-ROOTED BELIEFS

Sometimes one tends to become close minded due to one’s own deep rooted beliefs and convictions. Socio- and convictions become rooted in one’s minds thoughts and fresh has a deep rooted system based arranged

culturally embedded beliefs so strong and firmly and act as barriers to new ideas. For instance, if one conviction on caste marriage, then the person





will not be able to openly listen to a talk on the benefits of inter-caste love marriage. Such deep-rooted beliefs lead to superficial listening and cause disagreement with the speaker's stance and view point.

*Now it's time for you to introspect.* Make an honest estimate of your barriers to active listening and take constant efforts to overcome them. In the next and the final lecture of this module, I will throw light on active listening techniques and the benefits of effective listening.

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