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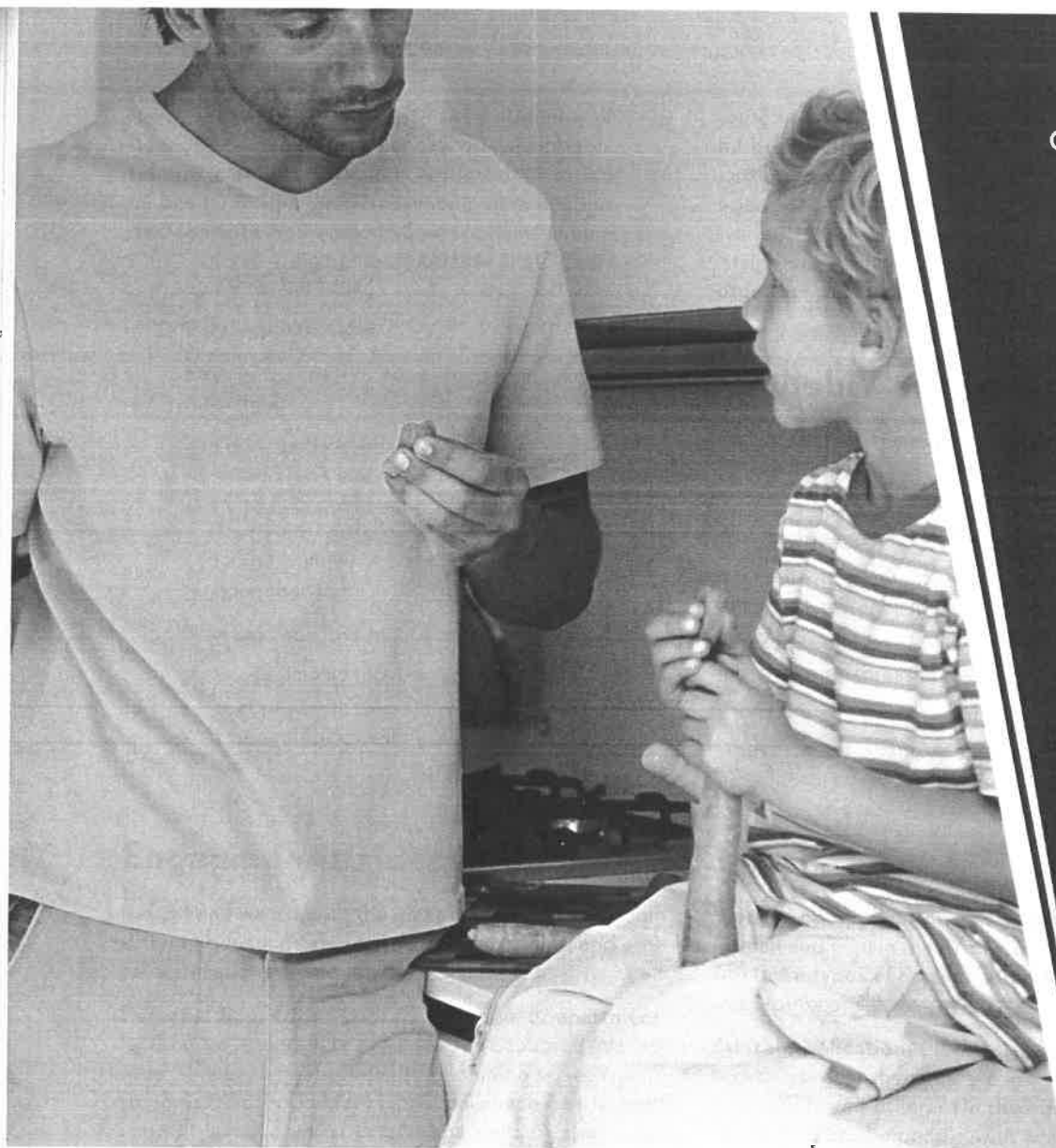


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MINDFUL LISTENING

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- The Listening Process
- Obstacles to Mindful Listening
- Forms of Nonlistening
- Adapting Listening to Communication Goals
- Social Media and Listening
- Guidelines for Effective Listening

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe six elements in the listening process.
- List major external and internal obstacles to mindful listening.
- Identify your own nonlistening behaviors.
- Identify your reasons for listening during a typical day.
- Recognize how social media can hinder mindful listening.
- Apply chapter guidelines to enhance your listening skills.

Anna Deavere Smith is a playwright, an artist in residence at MTV, a recipient of the MacArthur Foundation "genius" award, and a professor at New York University. She's won high praise for her one-woman shows: *Fires in the Mirror*, which dealt with ethnic turmoil in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and *Twilight: Los Angeles*, which focused on the riots that erupted following the acquittal of the police officers accused of beating Rodney King. She also played the president's secretary in *The American President* and a paralegal in *Philadelphia*, and she had a continuing role in the television series *The West Wing*.

Anna Deavere Smith lists another professional accomplishment on her résumé—teaching medical students at Yale and law students at New York University. You might wonder what qualifies her to instruct medical and law students. After all, she's neither a doctor nor a lawyer.

Anna Deavere Smith is a virtuoso listener. That's why she was hired to teach medical and law students. Doctors and lawyers need to listen, and conventional medical and legal training doesn't teach listening. That's why the schools turned to Anna Deavere Smith. She says, "Listening is not just hearing what someone tells you word for word. You have to listen with a

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heart. ... It's very hard work" (Arenson, 2002, p. 35). In her teaching prospective, Smith emphasizes that true listening depends on being fully present with others.

Doctors and attorneys aren't the only ones who need to listen well. We all do. In your normal day, listening—or trying to listen—takes up at least half your waking time (Wolvin, 2009). You listen in classes, listen to acquaintances in casual conversation, listen to your parents during phone calls, listen to clerks in stores, listen to your supervisor when you're at work, and listen to friends when they talk about their lives. But how much of that listening is effective?

In this chapter, we discuss listening and how to listen effectively. First, we consider what listening involves. Next, we identify obstacles to effective listening and how we can minimize them. We also consider some common forms of nonlistening. The fourth section of the chapter explains different types of listening and the distinct skills needed for each. We then apply the ideas we have covered to social media. To wrap up the chapter, we identify guidelines for improving listening effectiveness.

THE LISTENING PROCESS

Listening is a complex process that involves far more than our ears. To listen well, we rely on our ears, minds, and hearts. The multifaceted aspects of listening are reflected in the Chinese character shown in Figure 6.1, which includes the symbols for the eyes, ears, and heart.

Although we often use the words *listening* and *hearing* as if they were synonyms, actually they are different. **Hearing** is a physiological activity that occurs when sound waves hit our eardrums. People who are deaf or hearing-

impaired receive messages visually through lip reading or sign language. Listening has psychological and cognitive dimensions that mere hearing, or physically receiving messages, does not.

The International Listening Association (ILA) (2011) emphasizes that listening is an active process, which means we must exert effort to listen well. We can define **listening** as an active process that consists of being mindful, physically receiving messages, selecting and organizing messages, interpreting messages, responding, and remembering.

Communication in Everyday Life

WORKPLACE

Good Listening = Career Advancement

The costs of poor listening in the workplace can be very high. Doctors who don't listen fully to patients may misdiagnose or mistreat medical problems (Christensen, 2004; Joshi, 2015; Scholz, 2005; Underwood & Adler, 2005; Wen & Kosowsky, 2013). For this reason, an increasing number of medical practices hire communication specialists to provide listening workshops for doctors. They'd rather pay the consultants' fees than the legal fees for malpractice suits that can result from poor listening.

Doctors aren't the only ones who need to listen well. Senior executives in a number of fields identify listening as a necessary job skill more often than they identify any other skill, including managerial ability and technical competence (Darling & Dannels, 2003; Gabric & McFadden, 2001; Landrum & Harrold, 2003).

*What purposes of listening
will be most relevant to your
planned career?*

Mindfulness

The first step in listening is to make a decision to be mindful. **Mindfulness** is being fully present in the moment. It's what Anna Deavere Smith teaches medical and law students. When we are mindful, we don't check text messages, let our thoughts drift to what we plan to do this weekend, or focus on our own feelings and responses. Instead, we tune in fully to another person and try to understand what that person is communicating, without imposing our own ideas, judgments, or feelings (Lipari, 2014). Mindfulness grows out of the decision to attend fully to another. Physically, this is signified by adopting an involved posture, keeping eye contact, and indicating interest in what the other person says.

Because mindful listening involves taking the perspective of another, it fosters dual perspective—a cornerstone of effective communication. In addition, mindfulness enhances the effectiveness of the other person's communication. When people sense we are really listening, they tend to elaborate on their ideas and express themselves in more depth.

Mindfulness is a choice. It is not a technique, nor is it a talent that some people have and others don't. No amount of skill will make you a good listener if you don't make a commitment to attend to another person fully.

I always thought I was a good listener until I spent 2 years living in Japan. In that culture there is a much deeper meaning to listening. I realized that most of the time I was only hearing others. Often, I was thinking of my responses while they were still talking. I had not been listening with my mind and heart.



Figure 6.1

The Chinese Character for the Word "Listening"

MARISA

Physically Receiving Messages

The second process involved in listening is hearing, or physically receiving messages. As we noted earlier, hearing is a physiological process in which sound waves hit our eardrums so that we become aware of noises, such as music, traffic, or human voices. For people who have hearing impairments, messages are received in other ways, such as writing, lip reading, and sign language.

Hearing impairments are not the only restriction on physically receiving messages. Hearing ability tends to decline when we are fatigued. You may have noticed that it's harder to pay attention in classes that run 75 minutes than in classes that run 50 minutes. Background noise can also interfere with hearing. It's difficult to hear well if loud music is playing, a television is blaring, cell phones are chiming, or others are talking nearby.

Women and men seem to differ somewhat in their listening. As a rule, women are more attentive than men to the whole of communication. Thus, many men tend to focus their hearing on specific content aspects of communication, whereas women generally are more likely to attend to the whole of communication, noticing details, tangents, and relationship-level meanings. This difference may be influenced by the brain's hemispheric specializations (Pearson, 1985). Women usually have better-developed right lobes, which govern creative and holistic thinking, whereas men typically have better-developed left lobes, which control analytic and linear information processing.

MARK

My girlfriend amazes me. We'll have a conversation, and then later one of us will bring it up again. What I remember is what we decided in the talk. She remembers that, too, but she also remembers all the details about where we were and what was going on in the background and particular things one of us said in the conversation. I never notice all of that stuff, and I sure don't remember it later.

Communication in Everyday Life

SOCIAL MEDIA

The Illusion of Competence

Do you think you get more done when you multitask? Do you think you can absorb a class lecture while texting friends and checking eBay's latest offerings? Think again. Researchers have amassed considerable evidence that multitasking doesn't increase efficiency or productivity. In fact, it's very clear that the human brain simply isn't capable of engaging in two conceptual tasks simultaneously (Brown, 2010; Gallagher, 2009; Rubinstein, Meyer, & Evans, 2001). When you think you are multitasking, actually your brain is switching quickly from one task to another. Each time the brain switches, it has to reorient itself, which takes time and mental energy. Again and again, experiments show that people perform tasks more quickly and accurately when they do them one at a time rather than trying to do them simultaneously (Klingberg, 2008; Foerde, Knowlton, & Poldrack, 2006; Nass & Yen, 2010; Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009; Rubinstein et al., 2001).

Many people feel they are operating at peak level when they multitask. They get a buzz from jumping in and out of tasks. That's what David Glenn (2010) calls the "illusion of competence," and he says it is particularly evident in students who often send text messages and check Facebook while in classes. They feel hyped and assume they've absorbed what happens in a class. But when it comes to recalling information or synthesizing and analyzing it, they're at a disadvantage because they didn't really grasp the information.

The human brain uses two parts of the brain for learning. When working on a single task, the hippocampus takes over helping us to acquire information in ways that we can recall and apply. When the brain is asked to work on two or more tasks at the same time, it relies more on the striatum, which controls habitual learning and is limited in its ability to apply the information (Foerde et al., 2006). Thus, when a person tries to do more than one thing at a time, he or she is relying on a part of the brain that is less able to manage information flexibly and complexly.

How often do you try to multitask? Do you ever feel the "buzz" described above?

Selecting and Organizing Material

The third process in listening is selecting and organizing material. As we noted in Chapter 3, we don't perceive everything around us. Instead, we selectively attend to only some messages and elements of our environments. What we attend to depends on many factors, including our interests, cognitive structures, and expectations. Selective listening is also influenced by culture; even in utero, fetuses become attuned to the sounds of their language ("Babies Seem to Pick Up Language in Utero," 2013). Thus, people who learn a second language later in life may have difficulty recognizing sounds that weren't in their first language (Monastersky, 2001).

We can monitor our tendencies to attend selectively by remembering that we are more likely to notice stimuli that are intense, loud, unusual, or that otherwise stand out from the flow of communication.

This implies that we may overlook communicators who speak quietly and don't call attention to themselves. Intan, an Asian American student, once told me that Americans often ignore what she says because she speaks softly and unassertively. If we're aware of the tendency not to notice people who speak quietly, we can guard against it so that we don't miss out on people and messages that may be important.

I had to have outpatient surgery on my knee last year. My doctor told me to bring an adult with me for the surgery. I said my friend Jake was going to bring me and come back to pick me up. The doctor said, "No, he must stay here with you the whole time." The doctor explained that I wouldn't be able to listen carefully to instructions because of anxiety and the anesthesia. I thought he was wrong, but he wasn't. After the surgery, I thought I was alert and normal when the doctor explained how to take care of the knee and what was normal and not normal after this surgery. By the time Jake drove me home, I couldn't remember a thing the doctor had said.



CHAD

Once we've selected what to notice, we then organize the stimuli to which we've attended. We try to understand not just content but also the person speaking. Is he or she anxious or calm, open to advice or closed to it, and so forth? Does he or she want to vent and may not want advice until after having had a chance to express his or her feelings? Finally, we decide how we should proceed in the conversation.

It's important to remember that *we construct others and their communication* when we use our schemata to make sense of situations and people. In other words, we create meaning by how we select and organize communication. Remembering this reminds us to keep perceptions tentative and open to revision. In the course of interaction, we may want to modify perceptions.

Interpreting Communication

The fourth process in listening is interpreting others' communication. The most important principle for effective interpretation is to be person centered so that you understand another person's perspective on his or her terms. Certainly, you won't always agree with other people's ideas or how they see themselves, others, and situations. Engaging in dual perspective doesn't require you to agree with others' perspectives; however, it does require you to make an earnest effort to understand them.

To interpret someone on his or her own terms is one of the greatest gifts we can give another. Too often, we impose our meanings on others, try to correct or argue with them about what they feel, or crowd out their words with our own.

BART

I'd been married and working for years when I decided I wanted to come back to school and finish my degree. When I mentioned it to the guys I worked with, they all came down hard on me. They said I was looking for an easy life as a College Joe and trying to get above them. My dad said it would be irresponsible to quit work when I had a wife and child, and he said no self-respecting man would do that. It seemed like everyone had a view of what I was doing and why, and their views had nothing to do with mine. The only person who really listened to me was Elaine, my wife. When I told her I was thinking about going back to school, the first thing out of her mouth was, "What would that mean to you?" She didn't presume she knew my reasons, and she didn't start off arguing with me. She just asked what it meant to me, then listened for a long, long time while I talked about how I felt. She focused completely on understanding me. Maybe that's why we're married.

Responding

Effective listening also involves **responding**, which is communicating attention and interest. As we noted in Chapter 1, interpersonal communication is a transactional process in which we simultaneously listen and speak. We don't respond only when others have finished speaking; rather, we respond throughout interaction. This is what makes listening such an active process. Good listeners let others know they are interested throughout interaction by adopting attentive postures, nodding their heads, making eye contact, and giving vocal responses such as "mm-hmm" and "go on." These nonverbal behaviors demonstrate engagement. On the relationship level of meaning, responsiveness communicates that we care about the other person.



Remembering

The final aspect of listening is **remembering**, which is the process of retaining what you have heard. We remember less than half of a message immediately after we hear it (Adler & Proctor, 2014). As time goes by, retention decreases further; we recall only about 35% of a message 8 hours after hearing it. Because we forget about two-thirds of what we hear, it's important to make sure we retain the most important third. Effective listeners let go of a lot of details to retain the more important content. Later in this chapter, we discuss strategies for retaining material.

OBSTACLES TO MINDFUL LISTENING

We've seen that a lot is involved in mindful listening. Adding to the complexity are hindrances to effective listening. There are two broad types of barriers to mindful listening: obstacles in the communication situation and obstacles in the communicators. (Did you notice that ideas to be discussed in this section were organized into two broad classes to aid your retention of the basic content?)

External Obstacles

Many barriers to mindful listening are present in communication situations. Although we can't always control external obstacles, we can be aware of them and try to compensate for them.

Message Overload The sheer amount of communication we engage in makes it difficult to listen fully all the time. Think about your typical day. You go to classes for 3 hours. How much you learn and how well you do on examinations depend on your ability to listen mindfully to material that is often difficult. After listening for 50 minutes in a history class, you listen for 50 minutes in a communication class, followed by 50 more minutes in a business class. A great deal of information comes your way in those three periods. After classes, you read three texts from friends; you need to remember them and respond before the day ends. You start doing research online and find more than 300 sites for your topic. How can you possibly process all the information they offer? Then you go to work, and your supervisor informs you of a new procedure. Feeling rushed, your supervisor describes the procedure quickly, and you are expected to understand and follow it.

We often feel overwhelmed by the amount of information we are supposed to understand and retain. To deal with the overload, we often screen the talk around us, choosing to listen carefully to some talk and superficially to other talk (Todorov, Chaiken, & Henderson, 2002).

I've been married nearly 30 years, so I've figured out when I have to listen sharply to Edna and when I can just let her talk flow in one ear and out the other. She's a talker, but most of what she talks about isn't important. But if I hear code words, I know to listen up. If Edna says, "I'm really upset about such and such," or if she says, "We have a problem," my ears perk up.



RAYMOND

Message Complexity The more detailed and complicated the message, the more difficult it is to follow and retain it. People for whom English is a second language often find it hard to understand English speakers who use complex sentences with multiple clauses or slang expressions. Even native speakers of English often

feel overwhelmed by the complexity of some messages. It's tempting to tune messages that are filled with technical words, detailed information, and complex sentences. If we let a message's complexity overwhelm us, however, we may perform poorly in school or on the job, and we may let down friends and intimates.

When we have to listen to messages that are dense with information, we should summon up extra energy. In addition, taking notes and asking questions for clarification may help us understand and retain difficult information. A third strategy to group material as you listen, organizing the ideas in ways that make later recall easier.

Noise A third impediment to effective listening is physical noise. Perhaps you've been part of a crowd at a concert or a game. If so, you probably had to shout to the person next to you just to be heard. Although most noise is not as overwhelming as the roar of crowds, there is always some noise in communication situations. It might be music or television in the background, other conversations nearby, pagers that are beeping, or thunder or traffic sounds from outside.

GREGORY

I've been in sales for a long time, and I know when clients are really interested and when they're not. If someone answers a phone when I'm in his or her office, I know they aren't focused on what I'm saying. Taking calls or leaving the door open for people to drop in communicates that they're not interested in me or the service I represent.

Communication in Everyday Life

SOCIAL MEDIA

Technological Overload

Our era is dominated by digital and online communication. We can reach others faster than ever before, and we can find them even if they are in transit or on vacation. Many people feel overloaded by the relentless stream of information that technology makes possible.

You don't have to be hopelessly outdated to wonder whether communication technologies impede meaningful communication between people. Does being wired all the time diminish how we interact with people we are with in any given moment? Can we really engage others if we have a smartphone handy and answer it when it rings? Can we listen well to someone else if we keep one eye on our phone to see if there are new texts?

How does our continuous engagement with technology affect our ability to attend to others? Consider these facts (Brooks, 2016; Manjoo, 2017; Sullivan, 2016):

- Two billion people use Facebook, and there are billions of "likes" in response to Facebook posts.
- Forty-six percent of Americans say they could not live without their smartphone.
- Many people use their phones 85 separate times a day.
- People check their phones, on average, every 4.3 minutes.
- People upload 400 hours of video on YouTube every minute.

Gregory reminds us that allowing distractions communicates a lack of interest on the relationship level of meaning. Good listeners do what they can to minimize environmental distractions. It's considerate to turn off a television or lower the volume of music if someone wants to talk with you. It's also appropriate to move away from a noisy area to cut down on distractions. Likewise, it is courteous to turn off the ringers on cells when attending lectures, concerts, meetings, or other events in which a ring tone could distract others who have come to listen. But others aren't the only ones who are distracted by ring tones. Cognitive psychologists report that the sounds notifying you of the arrivals of texts, emails,

and calls distracts you and your ability to give full attention to the person with you (Begley, 2009).

Controlling distractions is also important in the workplace. Nearly one in five workers has been reprimanded for poor manners because they used electronic devices during meetings (Williams, 2009). Some organizations, including United Talent Agency and Creative Artists Agency, ban smartphones in all meetings.

Internal Obstacles

In addition to external obstacles, five barriers inside us can hinder listening: preoccupation, prejudice, reacting to emotionally loaded language, lack of effort, and not recognizing or adapting to diverse listening styles.

Preoccupation When we are absorbed in our own thoughts and concerns, we can't focus on what someone else is saying. Perhaps you've attended a lecture right before you had a test in another class and later realized you got almost nothing out of the lecture. That's because you were preoccupied with the upcoming test. Or maybe you've been in conversations with coworkers and realized that you weren't listening at all because you were thinking about your own concerns.

I think my biggest problem as a listener is preoccupation. Like when my friend Marta came to me the other day and said she wanted to talk about her relationship with her boyfriend. I followed her for a few minutes, but then I started thinking about my relationship with Ted. After a while—I don't know how long—Marta said to me, "You're not listening at all. Where is your head?" She was right. My head was in a totally different place.

DAWN

When we are preoccupied with our own thoughts, we aren't fully present for others; we're not being mindful. In describing how she stays mindful in intense interviews, Anna Deavere Smith says, "I empty out myself. While I'm listening, my own judgments and prejudices certainly come up. But I know I won't get anything unless I get those things out of the way" (Arenson, 2002, p. 35). It's natural for our thoughts to wander occasionally. When they do, we should note that our focus has wandered and actively call our minds back to the person who is speaking and the meaning of his or her message.



Andersen Ross/Photodisc/Getty Images

Communication in Everyday Life

WORKPLACE

Cookbook Medicine

Cookbook medicine is what Doctors Leana Wen and Joshua Kosowsky (2013) think is causing a lot of misdiagnoses and unnecessary tests. In their book, *When Doctors Don't Listen*, Wen and Kosowsky point out that doctors increasingly rely on algorithms, or flow charts, to diagnose patients. A patient who has chest pain will be treated by a heart attack algorithm; a patient with fever and cough is treated by a pneumonia algorithm (Zuger, 2013). This makes sense in many cases, and it increases efficiency in treating patients.

But sometimes a rock that fell on a person caused the chest pain; sometimes fever and a cough are caused by bronchitis. The problem, say Wen and Kosowsky, is that algorithms depersonalize medicine. They urge doctors to spend more time listening to patients before prescribing diagnosis tests or assuming what the problem is. Just as good cooks don't unthinkingly follow recipes, good doctors don't let cookbook medicine substitute for listening to individual patients.

Prejudgment Another reason we may not listen effectively is that we prejudice others or their communication (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2016; O'Keefe, 2002). Sometimes we think we already know what is going to be

said, so we don't listen carefully. Recalling our earlier discussion of mind reading, you'll realize that it's unwise to assume we know what others think and feel. At other times, we decide in advance that others have nothing to offer us, so we tune them out. In a study of doctor-patient communication, doctors asked patients to describe medical problems, then interrupted the patients after an average of 23 seconds. That was how long it took doctors to decide the patients had no more information to offer (Levine, 2004).

When we prejudge, we disconfirm others because we deny our own preconceived mindset. This devalues them. Prejudgments also reduce what we learn in communication with others. If we decide in advance that others have nothing worthwhile to say, we foreclose the possibility of learning something new.

Reacting to Emotionally Loaded Language A fourth internal obstacle to effective listening is the tendency to react to emotionally loaded language—words that evoke strong responses, positive or negative. You may find some words and phrases soothing or pleasant. Certain other words and phrases may summon up negative feelings and images for you. When we react to words that are emotionally loaded for us, we may fail to grasp another person's meaning.

Politicians often rely on voters to respond emotionally to particular words. In recent years, many politicians have referred frequently to *family values* and *environmental responsibility* because so many voters respond to those terms with strong positive emotion. Some politicians count on voters not to think critically about what they mean by *family values* or *environmental responsibility* but simply to vote for them and support their policies because the terms evoke positive feelings.

When we react to emotionally loaded language, we don't learn what another person has to say. We give up our responsibility to think critically about what others say, to consider their words carefully instead of reacting unthinkingly to particular words. One way to guard against this is to be aware of words and phrases that tend to trigger strong emotional reactions in us. If we bring these to a conscious level, then we can monitor our tendencies to respond unthinkingly.

Lack of Effort It is hard work to listen mindfully—to focus closely on what others are saying, to grasp their meanings, to ask questions, and to give responses so that they know we are engaged. It's also hard to control situational noise and perhaps fight fatigue, hunger, or other physiological conditions that can impede listening.

Because active listening takes so much effort, we can't always do it well. We may want to listen but have trouble summoning the energy needed (Brady, 2015). When this happens, you might ask the other person to postpone interaction until a time when you will have the energy to listen mindfully. If you explain that you want to defer communication because you really are interested and want to be able to listen well, he or she is likely to appreciate your honesty and commitment to listening.

Failure to Adapt Listening Styles A final internal hindrance to effective listening is not recognizing or adjusting to the need for different listening styles. How we listen should vary, for two reasons. First, different skills are needed when we listen for information, to support others, and for pleasure. We discuss these kinds of listening later in the chapter. A second reason for having diverse listening styles is differences between cultures and speech communities. In some cultures, listening means quietly attending to others. In other cultures, listening means participating while others are talking. In the United States, it is considered polite to make frequent, but not constant, eye contact with someone who is speaking. In other cultures, continuous eye contact is normative, and still other cultures severely restrict eye contact.

Even in the United States, there are differences in listening rules based on membership in gender, racial, and other speech communities. Because feminine socialization emphasizes conversation as a way to form and develop relationships, women tend to maintain eye contact, give substantial vocal and verbal feedback, and use nods and facial expressions to signal interest (Tannen, 1990; Wood, 2010b). Masculine speech communities, with their focus on emotional control, teach most men to provide fewer verbal and nonverbal signs of interest and attentiveness. If you understand these general differences, you can adapt your listening style to provide appropriate responses to women and to men.

I used to get irritated at my boyfriend because I thought he wasn't listening to me. I'd tell him stuff, and he'd just sit there and not say anything. He didn't react to what I was saying by showing emotions in his face or anything. Several times, I accused him of not listening, and he said back to me exactly what I'd said. He was listening, just not my way. I've learned not to expect him to show a lot of emotions or respond to what I say as I'm talking. That's just not his way, but he is listening.

JENNIFER

Race also shapes listening style. Most Caucasians follow the communication rule that one person shouldn't speak while another is talking, especially in formal speaking situations. In some African American communities, however, talking while others are talking is a form of showing interest and active participation. Thus, some African Americans may signal that they are listening intently to a speaker by interjecting comments such as "Tell it" or "I know that's right." Many black churches

are more participatory than most white churches, with members of the congregation routinely calling out responses to what a preacher is saying.

Because speech communities cultivate different communication styles, we shouldn't automatically impose our rules and interpretations on others. Instead, we should try to understand and respect their styles and listen effectively to them on their terms, not ours.

FORMS OF NONLISTENING

Now that we've discussed obstacles to effective listening, let's consider forms of nonlistening. We call these patterns *nonlistening* because they don't involve real listening. We discuss six kinds of nonlistening that may seem familiar to you because most of us engage in them at times.

Pseudolistening

Pseudolistening is pretending to listen. When we pseudolisten, we appear to be attentive, but really our minds are elsewhere. We engage in pseudolistening when we want to appear conscientious, although we really aren't interested or when we are familiar with what is being said so do not need to give concentrated attention (O'Keefe, 2002). Sometimes we pseudolisten because we don't want to hurt someone who is sharing experiences.

A lot of students pseudolisten in boring classes. I know I do. I answer emails or check my networking sites or shop, but I look up at the professor every minute or two to make him think I'm taking notes.

Olivia might be surprised to learn that her professor probably isn't fooled. Most faculty members know that many students using laptops are, at best, only partially attending to the class. Superficial social conversations and dull lectures are two communication situations in which we may consciously choose to pseudolisten so that we seem polite even though we really aren't interested. Although it may be appropriate to pseudolisten in some situations, there is a cost: We run the risk of missing information because we really aren't attending.

Pseudolisteners often give themselves away when their responses reveal that they weren't paying attention. Common indicators of pseudolistening are responses that are tangential or irrelevant to what was said. For example, if Martin talks to Valaria about his job interviews, she might respond tangentially by asking about the cities he visited: "Did you like New York or Atlanta better?" Although this is related to the topic of Martin's job interviews, it is tangential to the main issue, which she didn't grasp because she wasn't really listening. An irrelevant



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response would be, "Where do you want to go for dinner tonight?" That response is completely unrelated to what Martin said.

Monopolizing

Monopolizing is continuously focusing communication on ourselves instead of listening to the person who is talking. Two tactics are typical of monopolizing. One is conversational rerouting, in which a person shifts the topic back to himself or herself. For example, Ellen tells her friend Marla that she's having trouble with her roommate, and Marla reroutes the conversation with this response: "I know what you mean. My roommate is a real slob. And that's just one of her problems! Let me tell you what I have to live with. ..." Rerouting takes the conversation away from the person who is talking and focuses it on the self.

Another monopolizing tactic is interrupting to divert attention from the speaker to ourselves or to topics that interest us. Interrupting can occur in combination with rerouting—a person interrupts and then directs the conversation to a new topic. In other cases, diversionary interrupting involves questions and challenges that disrupt the speaker. For example, Elliot says that the Social Security will be bankrupt by 2030, and Paul responds by saying, "What makes you think that? How can you be sure? The President says we're fixing the system." Having interrupted Elliot, Paul might then reroute the conversation to topics that interest him more: "Speaking of the President, do you think he'll manage to get Congress to approve the changes he wants to make in national security?" Both rerouting and diversionary interrupting are techniques for monopolizing a conversation. They are the antithesis of good listening. The following conversation illustrates monopolizing and also shows how disconfirming of others it can be:

Chuck: I'm really bummed about my Econ class. I just can't seem to get the stuff.

Sally: Well, I know what you mean. Econ was a real struggle for me too, but it's nothing compared to the Stats course I'm taking now. I mean, this one is going to destroy me totally.

Chuck: I remember how frustrated you got in Econ, but you finally did get it. I just can't seem to, and I need the course for my major. I've tried going to review sessions, but ...

Sally: I didn't find the review sessions helpful. Why don't you focus on your other classes and use them to pull up your average?

Chuck: That's not the point. I want to get this stuff.

Sally: You think you've got problems? Do you know that right now I have three papers and one exam hanging over my head?

Chuck: I wonder if I should hire a tutor.

Sally shows no interest in Chuck's concerns, and she pushes her own conversational agenda. Chances are good that she doesn't even understand what he is feeling because she isn't really focusing on what he says; she isn't really listening.

Monopolizing is costly not only to those who are neglected but also to the monopolizers. A person who dominates communication has much less opportunity to learn from others than does a person who listens to what others think and feel. We already know what we think and feel, so there's little we can learn from hearing ourselves!

It's important to realize that not all interruptions are attempts to monopolize. We also interrupt to show interest, to voice support, and to ask for elaboration. Interrupting for these reasons doesn't divert attention from the person speaking; instead, it affirms that person and keeps the focus on him or her. Research indicates that women are more likely than men to interrupt to show interest and support (Anderson & Leaper, 1998; Stewart, Stewart, Friedley, & Cooper, 1990).

Selective Listening

A third form of nonlistening is **selective listening**, which involves focusing only on particular parts of communication. As we've noted, all listening is selective to an extent because we can't attend to everything around us. With selective listening, however, we screen out parts of a message that don't interest us and rivet our attention to topics that do interest us. For example, students become highly attentive when a teacher says, "This will be on the test." Employees zero in on communication about raises, layoffs, and holidays. People who own beach property become highly attentive to information about hurricanes.

Selective listening also occurs when we reject communication that makes us uneasy. For instance, smokers may selectively not attend to reports on the dangers of smoking. We may also screen out communication that is critical of us. You may not take in a friend's comment that you are really judgmental; you may selectively tune out your boyfriend's or girlfriend's observation that you can be selfish. We all have subjects that bore us or disturb us, yet it's unwise to listen selectively when doing so could deprive us of information or insights that could be valuable.

Defensive Listening

Thelma bakes a cake for her friend Louise's birthday. When Louise sees the cake, she says, "Wow, that's so kind of you. My mom always made a special cake for my birthday, and she would decorate it so elaborately." Thelma replies, "Well I'm sorry that I didn't decorate the cake extravagantly." Thelma's response illustrates **defensive listening**, which is perceiving personal attacks, criticism, or hostility in communication that is not critical or mean spirited. When we listen defensively, we assume others don't like, trust, or respect us, and we read these motives into whatever they say, no matter how innocent their communication may be.

Some people are generally defensive, expecting criticism from all quarters. They perceive negative judgments in almost anything said to them. In other instances, defensive listening is confined to specific

It's hard *not* to be a defensive listener in Gordon Ramsay's *Hell's Kitchen*.



topics or vulnerable times when we judge ourselves to be inadequate. A worker who fears he or she is not performing well may hear criticism in benign comments from coworkers; a student who fails a test may hear doubts about his or her intelligence in an innocent question about how school is going. Defensive listening can distort our perceptions of others' communication.

Ambushing

Ambushing is listening carefully for the purpose of attacking a speaker. Unlike the other kinds of nonlistening we've discussed, ambushing involves very careful listening, but it isn't motivated by a genuine desire to understand another. Instead, ambushers listen intently to gather ammunition they can use to attack a speaker. Krista listens very carefully to her teammate Carl as he describes a marketing campaign. When Carl finishes, Krista pounces: "You said we could get a rough draft of the whole campaign by the end of the month. You forgot that we lose 2 work-days for the annual retreat next week. Besides, your plan calls for some outsourcing. Where are you getting the funds for that?" Krista's response shows that she listened to Carl's ideas not to understand them and work with him but to identify weak spots and attack them.

My first husband was a real ambusher. If I tried to talk to him about a dress I'd bought, he'd listen just long enough to find out what it cost and then attack me for spending money. Once, I told him about a problem I was having with one of my coworkers, and he came back at me with all of the things I'd done wrong and didn't mention any of the things the other person had done. Talking to him was like setting myself up to be assaulted.

KRALYN

Not surprisingly, people who engage in ambushing tend to arouse defensiveness in others. Few of us want to speak up when we feel we are going to be attacked. In Chapter 8, we look more closely at communication that fosters defensiveness in others.

Literal Listening

The final form of nonlistening is **literal listening**, which involves listening only for content and ignoring the relationship level of meaning. As we have seen, all communication includes content as well as relationship meaning. When we listen literally, we attend only to the content level and are insensitive to others' feelings and to our connections with them. Lindsay's commentary provides a good illustration of literal listening that deals only with content-level meaning.

When I found out I had to have wrist surgery, I told my boss and said I'd be needing some time off. He listened and then explained the policy on sick leave. He didn't say he was sorry, ask if I was worried, tell me he hoped the surgery was successful, nothing.

LINDSAY

Literal listening may disconfirm others. When we listen literally, we don't make the effort to understand how others feel about what they say or to endorse them people.

We have seen that there are many obstacles to effective listening. Situation obstacles include message overload, message complexity, and noise. In addition to these, there are five potential interferences inside of us: preoccupation, prejudice, unthinking reactions to emotionally loaded language, lack of effort, and failure to adapt our style of listening. The obstacles to effective listening combine to create six types of nonlistening: pseudolistening, monopolizing, selective listening, defensive listening, ambushing, and literal listening. What you've learned prepares you to think now about how you can listen more mindfully.

ADAPTING LISTENING TO COMMUNICATION GOALS

The first requirement for listening effectively is to determine your reason for listening. We listen differently when we listen for pleasure, to gain information, and to support others (DeVito, 2016). We'll discuss the particular attitudes and skills that contribute to each type of effective listening.

Listening for Pleasure

Often, we engage in **listening for pleasure**. We listen to music for pleasure. We may listen to some radio programs for enjoyment. Because listening for pleasure doesn't require us to remember or respond to communication, the only guidelines are to be mindful and control distractions. Just as being mindful in lectures allows us to gain information, being mindful when listening for pleasure allows us to derive full enjoyment from what we hear. Controlling interferences is also important when we are listening for pleasure. A beautifully rendered Mozart concerto can be wonderfully satisfying but not if a television is on in the background.

Listening for Information

When we are **listening for information**, our goal is to gain and evaluate information. We listen for information in classes, at political debates, when important news stories are reported, and when we need guidance on everything from medical treatments to directions to a new place. In each case, we listen to gain and understand information in order to act appropriately.

Be Mindful First, it's important to choose to be mindful. Don't let your mind wander when



PhotoDisc/Digital Vision/Getty Images

information gets complicated or confusing. Instead, stay focused on the information, and take in as much as you can. Later, you may want to ask questions about material that wasn't clear even when you listened mindfully.

Control Obstacles You can also minimize noise in communication situations. You might shut a window to mute traffic noises or adjust a thermostat so that the room's temperature is comfortable. You should also try to minimize psychological distractions by emptying your mind of concerns and ideas that can divert your attention. Let go of preoccupations and prejudgments that can interfere with effective listening. In addition, it's important to monitor the tendency to react to emotionally loaded language. We have to make a very deliberate effort to cultivate an inner silence that allows us to listen fully to others.

Ask Questions Asking a speaker to clarify or elaborate the message may help you understand information you didn't grasp at first; it also deepens insight into content that you did understand. "Could you explain what you meant by ...?" and "Can you clarify the distinction between ...?" are questions that allow you to extend your understanding. Questions compliment a speaker because they indicate that you are interested and want to know more.

Use Aids to Recall To understand and remember important information, we can apply the principles of perception we discussed in Chapter 3. For instance, we learned that we tend to notice and recall stimuli that are repeated. To use this principle to enhance your retention, repeat important ideas to yourself immediately after hearing them. Repeating names of people you meet can save you the embarrassment of forgetting their names.

Another way to increase retention is to use mnemonic (pronounced "knee-MON-ic") devices, which are memory aids that create patterns. You probably already do this in studying. For instance, you could create the mnemonic MR SIRR, which is made up of the first letter of each of the six parts of listening (mindfulness, receiving, selecting and organizing, interpreting, responding, remembering). If your supervisor asks you to code and log in all incoming messages, you might remember the instruction by inventing CLAIM, a word that uses the first letter of each key word in your supervisor's instructions. If you meet someone named Kit and want to remember something about the person, you might associate something about Kit with each letter of her name: Kit from Iowa is going to be a Teacher.

Organize Information A fifth technique for increasing retention is to organize what you hear. For example, suppose a friend tells you he's concerned about a current math course that he's finding difficult. Then he wonders what kind of jobs his history major qualifies him for and whether graduate school is necessary to get a good job, and says he needs to line up an internship for this summer. You could reduce the complexity of this message by regrouping the stream of concerns into two categories: short-term issues (the math course, setting up an internship) and long-term issues (jobs for history majors, graduate school). Remembering those two categories allows you to retain the essence of your friend's concerns even if you forget many of the specifics. Repetition, mnemonics, and regrouping are ways to enhance what we remember.

Poor listening causes mistakes and problems, which explains why many companies now require employees to attend listening workshops. Starbucks, for instance, requires employees to learn to listen to orders and rearrange customer requests in the sequence of size, flavoring, milk, and caffeine. That's helpful when customers blurt out orders like "double-shot decaf grande," or "iced, skim, cappuccino, small."

Listening to Support Others

We engage in relationship listening, **listening to support others**, when we listen to a friend's worries, hear a romantic partner discuss our relationship, or help a co-worker sort through a problem (Bender & Messner, 2003; Welch, 2003). Specific attitudes and skills enhance relationship listening.

Be Mindful The first requirement for effective relationship listening is mindfulness. You'll recall that this was also the first step in listening for information and pleasure. When we're interested in relationship-level meanings, however, a different kind of mindfulness is needed. Instead of focusing on information, we concentrate on what lies between and behind the content in order to understand what another is feeling, thinking, needing, or wanting in a conversation.

Be Careful of Expressing Judgments When listening to help another person, it's usually wise to avoid judgmental responses, at least initially. Imposing our own judgments separates us from others and their feelings. We've inserted something between us. Yet there are times when it is appropriate and supportive to offer opinions and to make evaluative statements. Sometimes, people we care about genuinely want our judgments, and in those cases we should be honest about how we feel. Particularly when others are confronting ethical dilemmas, they may seek the judgments of people they trust.

Once, my friend Cordelia was asked to work for a presidential candidate, but she had already agreed to take a different job. She talked to me about her quandary and asked me what I thought she should do. Although it was clear to me that she wanted to join the campaign, I couldn't honestly tell her I approved of that. I told her that, for me, it would be wrong to go back on my word. I then offered to think with her about ways she might approach her future employer about starting at a later date. After a long talk, Cordelia thanked me for being honest. Part of being a real friend in this instance was making a judgment. That's appropriate only if someone invites our evaluation or if we think another person is in danger of making a serious mistake.

If someone asks our opinion, we should try to present it in a way that doesn't disconfirm the other person. I could have said to Cordelia, "How can you even think of breaking your word? That would be unethical." Whew—pretty disconfirming. Many times, people excuse cruel comments by saying, "Well, you asked me to be honest" or "I mean this as constructive criticism." Too often, however, the judgments are harsher than honesty requires. If we are committed to supporting others, we use honesty to support them, not to tear them down.

I hate the term *constructive criticism*. Every time my dad says it, what follows is a putdown. By now, I've learned not to go to him when I have problems or when I'm worried about something in my life. He always judges what I'm feeling and tells me what I ought to feel and do. All that does is make me feel worse than I did before.

LOGAN

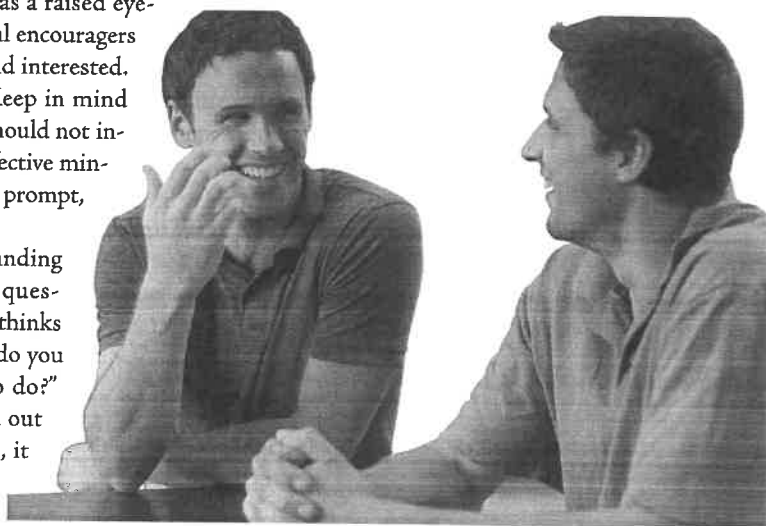
Understand the Other Person's Perspective We can't respond effectively to others until we understand their perspective and meanings. To do this, we must focus on the words and nonverbal behaviors that give us clues about how others feel and think.

Paraphrasing is a method of clarifying others' meaning or needs by reflecting our interpretations of their communication back to them. For example, a friend might confide, "I think my kid brother is messing around with drugs." We could paraphrase this way: "So you're really worried that your brother's experimenting with drugs." This allows us to clarify whether the friend has any evidence of the brother's drug involvement and also whether the friend is, in fact, worried about the possibility.

The response might be, "No, I don't have any real reason to suspect him, but I just worry, because drugs are so pervasive in high schools now." This clarifies by telling us the friend's worries are more the issue than any evidence that the brother is experimenting with drugs. Paraphrasing also helps us figure out what others feel. If a friend screams, "This situation is really getting to me!" it's not clear whether your friend is angry, hurt, upset, or frustrated. We could find out which emotion prevails by saying, "You seem really angry." If anger is the emotion, your friend would agree; if not, he or she would clarify what he or she is feeling.

Another strategy for increasing understanding of others is to use **minimal encouragers**, which gently invite others to elaborate by expressing interest in hearing more. Examples of minimal encouragers are "Tell me more," "Really?" "Go on," "I'm with you," "Then what happened?" and "I see." We can also use nonverbal minimal encouragers, such as a raised eyebrow, a head nod, or widened eyes. Minimal encouragers indicate that we are listening, following, and interested. They encourage others to keep talking. Keep in mind that these are *minimal* encouragers. They should not interrupt or reroute conversation. Instead, effective minimal encouragers are brief interjections that prompt, rather than interfere with, another's talk.

Another way to enhance your understanding of another person's perspective is to ask questions that yield insight into what a speaker thinks or feels. For instance, we might ask, "How do you feel about that?" or "What do you plan to do?" Another reason we ask questions is to find out what a person wants from us. Sometimes, it isn't clear whether someone wants advice, a shoulder to cry on, or a safe place to



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vent feelings. If we can't figure out what's wanted, we can ask the other person, "Are you looking for advice or a sounding board?" Asking direct questions signals that we want to help and allows others to tell us how we can best do that.

Express Support Once we understand another's meanings and perspective, it's important to communicate support. This doesn't necessarily require us to agree with the other person's perspective or feelings, but it does require that we express support for the person. We may express support in a number of ways without agreeing. For example, you can say that you appreciate the difficulty of a friend's situation, that you realize what a tough decision this is, or that you understand your friend's feelings (even if your feelings are different). Perhaps the most basic way to support another is by listening mindfully, which shows that you care enough to attend fully to him or her.

SHERYL

I think the greatest gift my mother ever gave me was when I told her I was going to marry Bruce. He isn't Jewish, and nobody in my family has ever married out of the faith before. I could tell my mother was disappointed, and she didn't try to hide that. She asked me if I understood how that would complicate things like family relations and rearing kids. We talked for a while, and she realized I had thought through what it means to marry out of the faith. Then she sighed and said she had hoped I would find a nice Jewish man. But then she said she supported me, whatever I did, and Bruce was welcome in our family. She told me she'd raised me to think for myself, and that's what I was doing. I just felt so loved and accepted by how she acted.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND LISTENING

How does our discussion of listening apply to social media? There are at least three ways that the ideas in this chapter are relevant to social media. First, some online communication requires listening. When you Skype or have face time with a friend or family member, you need the same listening attitude and skills that you do to listen to someone face-to-face (f2f).

Second, our increasing engagement with social media can be an obstacle to effective listening. In fact, tech companies use the term *growth hackers* to describe experts who tweak apps and sites to hook consumers into returning and staying longer (Singer, 2015). Leslie Perlow, who is on the faculty of Harvard's Business School, is the author of *Sleeping with Your Smartphone* (2013), in which she asserts that our devices threaten to overtake our lives. She recommends that professional teams have blocks of time when they are entirely disconnected so that they can concentrate on listening and working together. People need to get back to talking f2f, really looking at each other and getting energy from each other (Lipari, 2014). Highly creative work environments depend on listening—truly listening (Brady, 2013; Korkki, 2013).

Third, we need to exercise critical thinking when communicating online. As we have noted earlier, anyone can post anything online, so accuracy is not guaranteed. When you read blogs and tweets, you should ask critical thinking questions such as: What qualifies this person to have an informed stance on this issue? Does this person have any vested interest or any ties to others who have stakes in the issue? What is this person's track record of accuracy? Another way to keep your critical thinking sharp is to check other sources of information on the same issue to see if there is a consistent opinion. Consistency doesn't necessarily equal right, but it gives you one way of assessing what you read online.

Communication in Everyday Life

INSIGHT

Listener of the Year

Established in 1979, the International Listening Association is dedicated to improving listening in personal, social, political, and professional contexts. The highlight of each year's annual conference is the announcement of the Listener of the Year. Here are some of the people who have won this coveted honor:

Jimmy Carter	Alex Haley	Ann Landers	Barack Obama
Billy Graham	Michelle Obama	Jack Nicklaus	Oprah
Suzy Yehl Marta	Howard Schultz	Hugh Downs	Javier Perez du Cuellar

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Three guidelines summarize our discussion and foster effective listening.

Be Mindful

By now, you've read this suggestion many times. Because it is so central to effective listening, however, it merits repeating. Mindfulness is a choice to be wholly present in an experience. It requires that we put aside preoccupations and preconceptions to attend fully to what is happening in the moment. Mindful listening is one of the highest compliments we can pay to others because it conveys the relationship-level meaning that they matter to us. Being mindful requires discipline and commitment. We have to discipline our tendencies to judge others, to dominate the talk stage, and to let our minds wander. Mindfulness also requires commitment to another person and to the integrity of the interpersonal communication process. Being mindful is the first and most important principle of effective listening.

Adapt Listening Appropriately

Like all communication activities, listening varies according to goals, situations, and people. What's effective depends on our purpose for listening, the context in which we are listening, and the needs and circumstances of the person to whom we are listening.

When we listen for pleasure, we should be mindful and minimize distractions so that we derive as much enjoyment as possible from listening. When we listen for information, a critical attitude, evaluation of material, and a focus on the content level of meaning enhance listening. Yet when we engage in relationship listening, very different skills are needed. We want to communicate openness and caring, and the relationship level of meaning is at least as important as the content level of meaning. Thus, we need to adapt our listening styles and attitudes to different goals.

Effective listening is adapted to others. Some people need prompting and encouragement to express themselves, whereas others need us only to be silent and attentive. Paraphrasing helps some people clarify what they think or feel, whereas others don't need that kind of assistance. We need to be skilled in a variety of listening behaviors and to know when each is appropriate. Recall from Chapter 1 that the ability to use a range of skills and to exercise judgment about which ones are called for is fundamental to interpersonal communication competence.

Listen Actively

When we realize all that's involved in listening, we appreciate what an active effort it is. To listen effectively, we must be willing to focus our minds, to organize and interpret others' ideas and feelings, to express our interest on both the content level and the relationship level of meaning, and to retain what a speaker says. In some situations, we also become active partners by listening collaboratively and engaging in problem solving. Doing this is hard work!

Recognizing that mindful listening is an active process prepares us to invest the effort needed to do it effectively. To listen mindfully, you may find it useful to paraphrase and use minimal encouragers. Both of these skills signal your interest and involvement with the person to whom you are listening.

INTERACTIVE VIDEO ACTIVITY

Continuing the Conversation



When you've watched the video online, critique and analyze this encounter based on the principles

MindTap®

Watch the video and do the Interactive Video Activity.

you learned in this chapter. Then compare your work with the author's suggested responses. Online, even more videos will let you continue the conversation with your instructor.

Christina is visiting her family for the holidays. One evening after dinner, her mother comes into her room, where Christina is typing at her computer. Her mother sits down, and the following conversation takes place.

- Mom:** Am I disturbing you?
- Chris:** No, I'm just signing off on email.
- Mom:** Emailing someone?
- Chris:** Just a guy.
- Mom:** Someone you've been seeing at school?
- Chris:** Not exactly.
- Mom:** [Laughs] Well, either you are seeing him or you're not, honey. Are you two dating?
- Chris:** Yeah, you could say we're dating.
- Mom:** [Laughs] What's he like?
- Chris:** He's funny and smart and easy to talk to. We're interested in the same things, and we share so many values. Brandon's just super. I've never met anyone like him.
- Mom:** When do I get to meet him?
- Chris:** Well, not until I do. [Laughs] We met online, and we're just starting to talk about getting together in person.
- Mom:** Online? And you act as if you know him!
- Chris:** I do know him, Mom. We've talked a lot—we've told each other lots of stuff.
- Mom:** How do you know what he's told you is true? For all you know, he's a 50-year-old mass murderer!
- Chris:** You've been watching too many movies on Lifetime, Mom. Brandon's 23, he's in college, and he comes from a family like ours.
- Mom:** How do you know that? He could be lying.
- Chris:** So? A guy I meet at school could lie, too.
- Mom:** Haven't you read about all the weirdos that go to these online matching sites?
- Chris:** Mom, Brandon's not a weirdo, and we didn't meet in a matching site. We met in a chat room where people talk about politics.
- Mom:** Chris, you can't be serious about someone you haven't met.
- Chris:** I have met him, Mom, just not face to face. I know him better than lots of guys I've dated for months.
- Mom:** This makes me really nervous, honey. Please don't meet him by yourself.
- Chris:** Mom, you're making me feel sorry I told you how we met. This is why I didn't tell you about him before. Nothing I say is going to change your mind about dating online.
- Mom:** [Pauses] You're right. I'm not giving him—or you—a chance. Let's start over. Tell me what you like about him.
- Chris:** Well, he's thoughtful.
- Mom:** Thoughtful? How so?
- Chris:** If I say something one day, he'll come back to it a day or so later, and I can tell he's thought about it, like he's really interested in what I say.
- Mom:** So he really pays attention to what you say?
- Chris:** Exactly! So many guys I've dated don't. They never return to things I've said. And when I come back to things he's said with ideas I've thought about, he really listens.
- Mom:** Like he values what you think and say?
- Chris:** Exactly! That's what's so special about him.
1. Identify examples of ineffective and effective listening on the part of Chris's mother.
 2. What do you perceive as the key obstacle to listening for Chris's mom during the early part of this conversation?
 3. Identify specific listening skills that Chris's mother uses once she chooses to listen mindfully.
 4. Is Chris's mother being unethical by not continuing to state her concerns about Chris's safety?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In an interview with Dan Rather, Mother Teresa offered wisdom about listening (Bailey, 1998, p. C5):

Dan Rather: What do you say to God when you pray?

Mother Teresa: I listen.

Dan Rather: Well, what does God say?

Mother Teresa: He listens.

In this chapter, we've explored the complex and demanding process of mindful listening. We began by distinguishing between hearing and listening. Hearing is a physiological process that doesn't entail effort on our part. Listening, in contrast, is a complicated process involving physically receiving messages, then selecting, organizing, interpreting, responding, and remembering. To do it well takes commitment and skill.

There are many obstacles to effective listening. External obstacles include message overload, complexity of material, and external noise in communication contexts. In addition, listening can be hampered by preoccupations and prejudgments, reactions to emotionally loaded language, lack of effort, and failure to adapt our listening to fit situations. These obstacles give rise to various types of nonlistening, including pseudolistening, monopolizing, selective listening, defensive listening, ambushing, and literal listening. Also, as we noted in this chapter, social media can interfere with listening. When we are texting during meetings or taking calls when conversing with others, it's likely that we are not mindfully engaged with the people we are with.

We've identified skills and attitudes appropriate to different listening goals. Listening for pleasure is supported by mindfulness and efforts to minimize distractions and noise. Informational listening requires us to adopt a mindful attitude and to think critically, organize and evaluate information, clarify understanding by asking questions, and develop aids for retention of complex material. When we go online to get information on a topic, critical thinking is important since the ease of posting information is not matched by assurances of its quality. Relationship listening also involves mindfulness, but it calls for different listening skills. Suspending judgment, paraphrasing, giving minimal encouragers, and expressing support enhance the effectiveness of relationship listening whether communicating f2f or via social media.

The ideas we've discussed yield three guidelines for effective listening. First, we must be mindful. Second, we should adapt our listening skills and style to accommodate differences in listening purpose and individuals. Finally, we should remember that listening is an active process and be prepared to invest energy and effort in doing it skillfully. We'll revisit some of the ideas covered here as we discuss dynamics in relationships.

Flashcards and Chapter Quiz

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Practice defining the chapter's terms by using online flashcards and take the Chapter Quiz.

ambushing 183
defensive listening 182
hearing 170
listening 170
listening for information 184
listening for pleasure 184

listening to support others 186
literal listening 183
mindfulness 171
minimal encouragers 187
monopolizing 181
paraphrasing 187

pseudolistening 180
remembering 174
responding 174
selective listening 182

APPLICATION ACTIVITIES

MindTap®

REACH OUT

Who is the best listener you know—the person who really seems to focus on you when you talk with him or her? Make a date with that person and ask him or her to explain how he

or she listens and how he or she learned to listen. To what extent do the person's replies confirm the principles of listening discussed in this chapter?

Everyday Skills

Build your communication skills further by completing the following activities here or online.

1. Developing Mindfulness

To develop your ability to be mindful, follow these guidelines in a situation that calls for you to listen:

- Empty your mind of thoughts, ideas, plans, and concerns so that you are open to the other person.
- Concentrate on the person with whom you are interacting. Say to yourself, "I want to focus on this person and on what he or she is feeling and thinking."
- If you find yourself framing responses to the other person, try to push those aside; they interfere with your concentration on the other person's words.
- If your mind wanders, don't criticize yourself; that's distracting. Instead, gently refocus on the person you are with and on what that

person is communicating to you. It's natural for other thoughts to intrude, so just push them away and stay focused on the other person.

- Let the other person know you are attending mindfully; give nonverbal responses (nods, facial expressions), ask questions to encourage elaboration, and keep eye contact.
- Evaluate how mindfully you listened. Did you understand the other person's thoughts and feelings? Did you feel more focused on that person than you usually do when you listen to others?

2. Improving Your Retention

Apply the principles we've discussed to increase your ability to remember content.

- The next time you meet someone, repeat his or her name to yourself three times in a row after you are introduced. Do you remember the name better when you do this?

- After your next interpersonal communication class, take 15 minutes to review your notes. Try reading them aloud so that you hear as well as see the main ideas. Does this increase your retention of material covered in class?
- Invent mnemonics to help you remember basic information in communication.
- Organize complex ideas by grouping them into categories. Try this first in relation to material presented in classes. To remember the main ideas of this chapter, you might use major subheadings to form categories: the listening process, obstacles to listening, forms of non-listening, listening goals, and guidelines. The mnemonic PONGG (process, obstacles, non-listening, goals, guidelines) could help you remember those categories.

3. Hindrances to Mindful Listening

To increase your awareness of extent to which social media can hinder mindful listening, focus on your listening habits over the next few days. Following the example provided below, identify how

Communication Goal	Situation	Effect on Ability to Listen
Example: Listening to support others	I was texting my sister while my friend was telling me about her current fight with her boyfriend.	Even though I used minimal-encouragers like "uh-huh" and nodded my head, my friend got annoyed with me and said I wasn't listening, even though I was. By texting to my sister while I was talking face to face, I gave the impression that I wasn't listening at all.

5. Using Minimal Encouragers

Practice encouraging others to elaborate their thoughts and feelings by developing minimal encouragers in response to each of these comments:

- I'm really worried about getting into grad school.
- I'm not sure whether I'm measuring up to my boss's expectations for new employees.
- I just learned that I'm a finalist for a scholarship next year.

your use of social media impaired your ability to engage fully and actively as a listener.

4. Learning to Paraphrase

Practice effective listening by paraphrasing the following statements:

- I've got so many pressures closing in on me right now.
- I'm worried about all the money I've borrowed to get through school.
- I'm nervous about telling my parents I'm gay when I see them next weekend.
- I don't know whether Pat and I can keep the relationship together once she moves away to her new job.

- I think my girlfriend is cheating on me.

- I haven't gotten any job offers yet, and I've been interviewing for 4 months. I'm beginning to wonder whether I'll get a job at all.
- I'm so excited about how this relationship is going! I've never been with someone as attentive and thoughtful as Chris.

Engaging with Ideas

Reflect and write about the ideas in this chapter by considering questions about personal, workplace, and ethical applications, here or online.

Personal Application Which form of nonlistening do you engage in most frequently? Identify examples of when you engage in this form of nonlistening. Can you recognize a commonality that links the examples—perhaps types of situations or people? How might you reduce your tendency to engage in this form of nonlistening?

Workplace Application Identify different types of noise that are present in a place you work now or worked in the past. To what extent does/did each type of noise interfere with effective listening?

Ethical Application Identify ethical principles involved in listening for information and listening to support others. How do ethical commitments differ for the two purposes of listening?

Thinking Critically

Think and write critically about the ideas in this chapter, here or online.

1. Who is your prototype, or model, of a listener? Describe what the person does that makes him or her effective. How do the person's behaviors fit with guidelines for effective listening discussed in this chapter?
2. What ethical principles can you identify to guide the three kinds of listening? Are different ethical principles appropriate when listening for information and listening to support others?
3. Keep a record of your listening for the next day. How much time do you spend listening for information, listening to support others, and listening for pleasure?
4. Apply the strategies for remembering what we discussed in this chapter. Create mnemonics, organize material as you listen, and review material immediately after listening. Do you find that using these strategies increases your listening effectiveness?
5. The ILA at www.listen.org is a rich resource for learning more about listening and networking with others who recognize its importance in everyday life. Its website features exercises to test and improve listening, factoids about listening, Internet discussion groups, quotes about the nature and value of listening, and a bibliography for those who want to read more.

Additional Interactive Video Activities

Watch the video and do the Interactive Video Activity.