

Effective Listening

“Most people don’t listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

Stephen R. Covey



Warm up

- When was the last time you felt someone *wasn't* listening to you? What happened?
- When was the last time someone really *listened* to you? How did it change the situation?
- Why do people pretend to listen? (phones, stress, multitasking...)
- Do you think you're a good listener? What do you find most difficult when listening?
(for example: following long explanations, not interrupting, not judging, or not thinking about your reply)
- When do you find it hardest to really listen to someone, and why?
(for example: when you're busy, tired, stressed, or under time pressure)



1. Look at the jobs below. For each one, decide how important listening skills are and explain why. Then add two more jobs of your own.



Police Officer



Software Developer



Chef



Construction Worker



Taxi Driver



Film Director

Police officer – Very important, because they must understand people clearly in serious situations.

Software developer – Important, because they need to understand requirements and feedback.

Chef – Important, because orders and instructions must be followed correctly.

Construction worker – Very important, because safety instructions must be understood.

Taxi driver – Important, because they need to understand destinations and requests.

Film director – Very important, because they work with many people and ideas.



2. Read the article and answer the following questions.

How Companies Turn Listening Into Profit (And Power)

Most people think listening is just a personal skill. This article shows that successful companies treat listening as an active, intentional strategy that shapes decisions, products, and reputation.

💡 Starbucks, Chick-fil-A, and McDonald's all run large “social listening” teams whose only job is to monitor online conversations. They track customer complaints, frustrations, trends and even jokes or memes. One famous example: For years, people joked online about wanting “adult Happy Meals.” McDonald's noticed the trend, partnered with a streetwear brand, and launched a limited-edition adult Happy Meal with retro toys. It went viral instantly and sold out nationwide, all because the company listened.



🏠 Ritz-Carlton trains employees to listen for unspoken needs, not just spoken requests. A family returned home from holiday and realised their child's stuffed giraffe, *Joshie* was missing. The father called the Ritz-Carlton and explained that he'd told his son Joshie had “decided to stay on vacation.” The staff found the toy, then took photos of Joshie enjoying his “holiday”: relaxing by the pool, getting a spa treatment, working in hotel security. A few days later, they mailed the giraffe back along with a handwritten note and a small photo album.

🍏 Apple also listens quietly but strategically. The company collects patterns from support calls, online forums, and repair centres. Years ago, customers repeatedly complained about short battery life. So, Apple redesigned its entire power-management system and added much larger batteries to new models. They never advertised this as “we listened,” but the change came directly from user feedback.

🧩 LEGO used listening to completely change its business. Global data revealed that adults, not kids, were increasingly buying their products. Instead of ignoring the trend, LEGO leaned into it and created lines like LEGO Architecture, LEGO Botanical, and complex adult-only sets. Today, adult fans are one of LEGO's strongest markets.

💬 Across industries, the pattern is the same: When people feel listened to, they become more cooperative, loyal, and open-minded. When they feel ignored, trust collapses, sometimes overnight. In other words, listening isn't "soft." It becomes powerful when it is active, deliberate, and acted on.

- a. Why do you think the Adult Happy Meal succeeded?
(possible answers) Because the company noticed an online trend and acted on it. / Because it listened to customers and turned a joke into a real product. / Because it appealed to adult nostalgia.
- b. Apple changed its battery system because of customer complaints. Do you think companies should admit when they make changes based on feedback? Why or why not?
(possible answers) Yes, because it builds trust and shows customers they are listened to. / No, because companies may not want to publicly admit mistakes.
- c. LEGO discovered adults were buying their products. Do you think companies should always follow trends even if it means potentially losing their identity?
(possible answers) No, companies should follow trends carefully and stay true to their brand. / Yes, if the trend fits their values and long-term goals.
- d. Which company in the text used listening the most intelligently, in your opinion?
(possible answers) Ritz-Carlton, because they understood an unspoken emotional need. / Apple, because they noticed repeated complaints and made a major change. / LEGO, because they adapted based on real customer behaviour.
- e. What happens when customers or employees feel ignored? Can you think of a real-life example?
(possible answers) Trust breaks down and people become frustrated or disengaged. / Customers may stop buying from a company or complain publicly. / Employees may lose motivation or leave.
- f. Which industry do you think benefits the most from active listening: hospitality, tech, retail, or fast food?
(possible answers) Hospitality, because customer experience is central. / Tech, because feedback helps improve products. / Retail, because listening helps understand changing needs.
- g. Do you think listening can ever go too far? For example by tracking social media or analysing customer behaviour.
(possible answers) Yes, if it invades privacy or feels intrusive. / No, as long as data is used responsibly and transparently.
- h. If your workplace or school listened better, what small change would make the biggest impact?
(possible answers) More regular feedback. / Clearer communication. / Taking suggestions more seriously.

Active Listening Language

Echoing Keyword Technique

Repeat one key word the speaker used to encourage them to continue.

- “Your boss *snapped* at you?”
- “The meeting was *chaotic*?”
- “She got a *promotion*!”

Reflecting Emotions (Emotion Mirror)

You reflect *what they might be feeling* — not what you think about the situation.

- “That sounds really stressful.”
- “You seem disappointed.”
- “I can hear you were really excited about it.”

Clarifying the Facts (Micro-Checks)

Short, quick checks that confirm details without interrupting the flow.

- “Wait, so this was yesterday?”
- “At your old job or your new one?”
- “You mean the client from France?”

Summary Shot (One-Line Paraphrase)

A tiny, one-sentence summary to show real understanding.

- “So basically, you tried your best, but the manager didn’t notice.”
- “So the problem is the workload, not the job itself.”
- “So in the end, the miscommunication wasn’t your fault.”



3. Take turns starting a short dialogue using the topics below and respond with active listening language.

Your manager added two more tasks today, even though you had already said you were at capacity. This has happened before, and you feel overwhelmed.

You shared something personal with a friend. They joked about it in front of other people and later said they didn’t mean it badly. You still feel hurt and embarrassed.

After three weeks preparing a pitch for a new pushchair, the client rejected everything without explanation. You feel frustrated and discouraged.

A team meeting turned tense over a project deadline as two colleagues argued most of the time. You tried to calm things down, but no decisions were made.

Your boss gave you negative feedback today but no examples.

You really wanted a promotion, and your manager hinted it might happen. Someone else got the role instead, with no explanation.



4. Match these words to their definitions. You will hear them at the end of the lesson in a short video.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| a. attentiveness | 6 | 1. questions that invite longer answers rather than "yes/no" |
| b. open-ended questions | 1 | 2. to stop someone from speaking |
| c. summarize | 4 | 3. extra information that helps you understand something better |
| d. clarification | 3 | 4. to briefly restate the main points in your own words |
| e. psychological safety | 5 | 5. feeling safe to express yourself without judgment |
| f. to interrupt | 2 | 6. paying close, careful attention to someone |



5. Fill in the gaps with the vocabulary from exercise 4.

- Many conflicts could be avoided if people showed more *attentiveness* instead of planning their next argument while the other person is talking.
- Some managers believe multitasking makes them efficient, but even small *distractions* — a buzzing phone or an open email tab — can destroy real connection.
- In meetings, people often lose confidence when a colleague repeatedly *interrupts* them mid-sentence.
- Therapists and great leaders both use *open-ended questions* because they invite real honesty rather than yes/no answers.
- In difficult conversations, it can help to *summarize* what the other person said so they know you understood before you respond.
- Asking for *clarification* isn't a sign of weakness — it shows you care enough to get someone's meaning right.



6. Watch the TED Talk video [4 Things All Great Listeners Know](#)¹ and answer the following questions using short phrases or key words only.

- a. According to the video, what is the core purpose of listening in a conversation?
To make the other person feel understood.
- b. According to the video, which behaviour may look like listening but doesn't really work?
Just smiling and nodding without really understanding.
- c. What physical object should you remove before starting an important conversation?
Your phone.
- d. What type of questions help the speaker go deeper into their thoughts?
Open-ended questions.
- e. What does summarising the speaker's words show?
That you are trying to understand them.
- f. What should you do if you lose focus and miss something?
Ask the speaker to repeat it.
- g. What effect does good listening have in the workplace?
It increases trust and reduces burnout.
- h. What does psychological reactance mean when trying to change someone's mind?
Trying to force someone to change makes them defend their opinion more.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3ku5nx4tMU>