

Listening Skills

You probably spend more time using your listening skills than any other kind of skill. Like other skills, listening takes practice.

What does it mean to really listen?

Real listening is an active process that has three basic steps.

- **Hearing.** Hearing just means listening enough to catch what the speaker is saying. For example, say you were listening to a report on zebras, and the speaker mentioned that no two are alike. If you can repeat the fact, then you have heard what has been said.
- **Understanding.** The next part of listening happens when you take what you have heard and understand it in your own way. Let's go back to that report on zebras. When you hear that no two are alike, think about what that might mean. You might think, "Maybe this means that the pattern of stripes is different for each zebra."
- **Judging.** After you are sure you understand what the speaker has said, think about whether it makes sense. Do you believe what you have heard? You might think, "How could the stripes to be different for every zebra? But then again, the fingerprints are different for every person. I think this seems believable."

Tips for being a good listener

- Give your full attention on the person who is speaking. Don't look out the window or at what else is going on in the room.
- Make sure your mind is focused, too. It can be easy to let your mind wander if you think you know what the person is going to say next, but you might be wrong! If you feel your mind wandering, change the position of your body and try to concentrate on the speaker's words.
- Let the speaker finish before you begin to talk. Speakers appreciate having the chance to say everything they would like to say without being interrupted. When you interrupt, it looks like you aren't listening, even if you really are.
- Let yourself finish listening before you begin to speak! You can't really listen if you are busy thinking about what you want say next.
- Listen for main ideas. The main ideas are the most important points the speaker wants to get across. They may be mentioned at the start or end of a talk, and repeated a number of times. Pay special attention to statements that begin with phrases such as "My point is..." or "The thing to remember is..."
- Ask questions. If you are not sure you understand what the speaker has said, just ask. It is a good idea to repeat in your own words what the speaker said so that you can be sure your understanding is correct. For example, you might say, "When you said that no two zebras are alike, did you mean that the stripes are different on each one?"
- Give feedback. Sit up straight and look directly at the speaker. Now and then, nod to show that you understand. At appropriate points you may also smile, frown, laugh, or be silent. These are all ways to let the speaker know that you are really listening. Remember, you listen with your face as well as your ears!

Thinking fast

Remember: time is on your side! Thoughts move about four times as fast as speech. With practice, while you are listening you will also be able to think about what you are hearing, really understand it, and give feedback to the speaker.

Read more: [Speaking & Listening Skills | Infoplease.com](http://www.infoplease.com/homework/listeningskills1.html#ixzz2eFKikW7b) <http://www.infoplease.com/homework/listeningskills1.html#ixzz2eFKikW7b>