

Here are six types of listening, starting with basic discrimination of sounds and ending in deep communication.

## **Discriminative listening**

Discriminative listening is the most basic type of listening, whereby the difference between difference sounds is identified. If you cannot hear differences, then you cannot make sense of the meaning that is expressed by such differences.

We learn to discriminate between sounds within our own language early, and later are unable to discriminate between the phonemes of other languages. This is one reason why a person from one country finds it difficult to speak another language perfectly, as they are unable distinguish the subtle sounds that are required in that language.

Likewise, a person who cannot hear the subtleties of emotional variation in another person's voice will be less likely to be able to discern the emotions the other person is experiencing.

Listening is a visual as well as auditory act, as we communicate much through [body language](#). We thus also need to be able to discriminate between muscle and skeletal movements that signify different meanings.

## **Comprehension listening**

The next step beyond discriminating between different sound and sights is to make sense of them. To comprehend the meaning requires first having a lexicon of words at our fingertips and also all rules of grammar and syntax by which we can understand what others are saying.

The same is true, of course, for the visual components of communication, and an understanding of body language helps us understand what the other person is really meaning.

In communication, some words are more important and some less so, and comprehension often benefits from extraction of key facts and items from a long spiel.

Comprehension listening is also known as *content listening*, *informative listening* and *full listening*.

## **Critical listening**

Critical listening is listening in order to evaluate and judge, forming opinion about what is being said. Judgment includes assessing strengths and weaknesses, agreement and approval.

This form of listening requires significant real-time cognitive effort as the listener analyzes what is being said, relating it to existing knowledge and rules, whilst simultaneously listening to the ongoing words from the speaker.

## **Biased listening**

Biased listening happens when the person hears only what they want to hear, typically misinterpreting what the other person says based on the [stereotypes](#) and other biases that they have. Such biased listening is often very evaluative in nature.

## **Evaluative listening**

In evaluative listening, or *critical listening*, we make judgments about what the other person is saying. We seek to assess the truth of what is being said. We also judge what they say against our [values](#), assessing them as good or bad, worthy or unworthy.

Evaluative listening is particularly pertinent when the other person is trying to persuade us, perhaps to change our behavior and maybe even to change our [beliefs](#). Within this, we also discriminate between subtleties of language and comprehend the inner meaning of

what is said. Typically also we weigh up the pros and cons of an argument, determining whether it makes sense logically as well as whether it is helpful to us.

Evaluative listening is also called critical, judgmental or interpretive listening.

### **Appreciative listening**

In appreciative listening, we seek certain information which will appreciate, for example that which helps meet our **needs** and **goals**. We use appreciative listening when we are listening to good music, poetry or maybe even the stirring words of a great leader.

### **Sympathetic listening**

In sympathetic listening we care about the other person and show this concern in the way we pay close attention and express our sorrow for their ills and happiness at their joys.

### **Empathetic listening**

When we listen **empathetically**, we go beyond sympathy to seek a truer understand how others are feeling. This requires excellent discrimination and close attention to the nuances of emotional signals. When we are being truly empathetic, we actually feel what they are feeling.

In order to get others to expose these deep parts of themselves to us, we also need to demonstrate our empathy in our demeanor towards them, asking sensitively and in a way that encourages self-disclosure.

### **Therapeutic listening**

In therapeutic listening, the listener has a purpose of not only empathizing with the speaker but also to use this deep connection in order to help the speaker understand, change or develop in some way.

This not only happens when you go to see a therapist but also in many social situations, where friends and family seek to both diagnose problems from listening and also to help the speaker cure themselves, perhaps by some cathartic process. This also happens in work situations, where managers, HR people, trainers and coaches seek to help employees learn and develop.

### **Dialogic listening**

The word 'dialogue' stems from the Greek words 'dia', meaning 'through' and 'logos' meaning 'words'. Thus dialogic listening mean learning through conversation and an engaged interchange of ideas and information in which we actively seek to learn more about the person and how they think.

Dialogic listening is sometimes known as 'relational listening'.

### **Relationship listening**

Sometimes the most important factor in listening is in order to develop or sustain a relationship. This is why lovers talk for hours and attend closely to what each other has to say when the same words from someone else would seem to be rather boring.

Relationship listening is also important in areas such as negotiation and sales, where it is helpful if the other person likes you and trusts you.

There are several different types of listening, based on how deeply you are listening to the other person. If you can identify these, then you can choose which you want to use.

### **False listening**

False listening occurs where a person is pretending to listen but is not hearing anything that is being said. They may nod, smile and grunt in all the right places, but do not actually take in anything that is said.

This is a skill that may be finely honed by people who do a lot of inconsequential listening, such as politicians and royalty. Their goal with their audience is to make a good impression in very short space of time before they move on, never to talk to that person again. It is also something practiced by couples, particularly where one side does most of the talking. However, the need for relationship here can lead to this being spotted ('You're not listening again!') and consequent conflict.

### **Initial listening**

Sometimes when we listen we hear the first few words and then start to think about what we want to say in return. We then look for a point at which we can interrupt. We are also not listening then as we are spending more time rehearsing what we are going to say about their initial point.

### **Selective listening**

Selective listening involves listening for particular things and ignoring others. We thus hear what we want to hear and pay little attention to 'extraneous' detail.

### **Partial listening**

Partial listening is what most of us do most of the time. We listen to the other person with the best of intent and then become distracted, either by stray thoughts or by something that the other person has said.

We consequently dip inside our own heads for a short while as we figure out what they really mean or formulate a question for them, before coming back into the room and starting to listen again.

This can be problematic when the other person has moved on and we are unable to pick up the threads of what is being said. We thus easily can fall into false listening, at least for a short while. This can be embarrassing, of course, if they suddenly ask your opinion. A tip here: own up, admitting that you had lost the thread of the conversation and asking them to repeat what was said.

### **Full listening**

Full listening happens where the listener pays close and careful attention to what is being said, seeking carefully to understand the full content that the speaker is seeking to put across.

This may be very active form of listening, with pauses for summaries and testing that understanding is complete. By the end of the conversation, the listener and the speaker will probably agree that the listener has fully understood what was said.

Full listening takes much more effort than partial listening, as it requires close concentration, possibly for a protracted period. It also requires skills of understanding and summary.

### **Deep listening**

Beyond the intensity of full listening, you can also reach into a form of listening that not only hears what is said but also seeks to understand the whole person behind the words.

In deep listening, you listen between the lines of what is said, hearing the **emotion**, watching the **body language**, detecting **needs** and **goals**, identifying **preferences** and **biases**, perceiving **beliefs** and **values**, and so on.

To listen deeply, you need a strong understanding of human psychology (which this site seeks to give you) and to pay attention not just to the words by the whole person. Deep listening is also known as 'Whole person' listening.