

# Be a Serious Listener

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn additional methods for improving your listening skills. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Resisting Distraction
2. Active Listening

## 1. Resisting Distraction

Distractions can come in all shapes and sizes. To be serious, effective listeners, people must learn how to resist the distractions that cross their path so they can better focus in on what they are trying to hear.

Distractions and noise come in two broad types: internal and external.

External distractions often come in the form of physical noise in the physical environment. Auditory and visual distractions are often the most easily identifiable types of external distractions. Loud or extraneous noises can inhibit effective listening, as can unnecessary or excessive images. Think about trying to have a meaningful conversation with a friend while someone else is watching an action movie in the same room. Pretty impossible, right?

Internal distractions often refer to psychological and emotional noise. Distractions can also originate internally or can be physical responses to the environment. Feeling hungry, upset, or physically uncomfortable can be just as detrimental to effective listening as extraneous things in the physical environment. If a speaker is nervous about presenting a speech, he or she may have a litany of negative thoughts in his or her inner monologue, or the "little voice in your head." Internal distractions also occur when someone is thinking about plans for after your speech, or thinking about topics and things completely unrelated to the speech at hand. These are all examples of internal distractions.

In order to best focus in on a speaker's message, try to eliminate as many possible distractions as possible. Turn off all mobile devices, relocate to a quiet space, and close unnecessary windows on the computer.

## 2. Active Listening

**Active listening** is a communication technique that requires the listener to feed back what they hear to the speaker. Most often, listeners will do this by re-stating or paraphrasing what they have heard in their own

words. This activity confirms what the listener heard and, moreover, confirms that both parties understand each other. It is important to note, however, that by paraphrasing the speaker's message, the listener is not necessarily agreeing with the speaker. Paraphrasing also helps the listener better retain that information for future access.

If someone is actively listening, then he or she is typically not distracted. Speakers can also cultivate the habit of avoiding distractions (for example, by addressing questions after the presentation, not during).

In addition to internalizing what a speaker says, active listening also involves observing and assessing the speaker's behavior and body language, and relaying that information back to the speaker as well. Having the ability to interpret a speaker's body language lets the listener develop a more accurate understanding of the speaker's message. When the listener does not respond to the speaker's nonverbal language, he or she engages in a content-only response that ignores the emotions that guide the message; this can limit understanding.

The ability to listen actively demonstrates sincerity on the part of the listener and helps to make sure that no information is being assumed or taken for granted. Active listening is most often used to improve personal relationships, reduce misunderstanding and conflicts, strengthen cooperation, and foster understanding.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Active Listening

A particular communication technique that requires the listener to provide feedback on what he or she hears to the speaker.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that distractions can be internal or external. External distractions include auditory, visual, or physical noise. Internal distractions may be psychological or emotional. In order to best focus in on a speaker's message, try to **resist distractions** and even eliminate as many of them as possible. **Active listening** is a communication technique that requires the listener to feed back what they hear to the speaker. Active listening also involves observing and assessing the speaker's behavior and body language.

Source: Source: Boundless. "Be a Serious Listener: Resist Distractions and Listen Actively." Boundless Communications Boundless, 2 Mar. 2017. Retrieved 28 Jun. 2017 from <https://www.boundless.com/communications/textbooks/boundless-communications-textbook/learning-to-listen-and-helping-others-do-the-same-5/enhancing-your-listening-32/be-a-serious-listener-resist-distractions-and-listen-actively-143-4212/>



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