

The Understanding Stage

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about one of the stages in the listening process. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. The Understanding Stage

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The second stage in the listening process is the **understanding stage**. Understanding or **comprehension** is "shared meaning between parties in a communication transaction" and constitutes the first step in the listening process.

This is the stage during which the listener determines the context and meanings of the words he or she hears. Determining the context and meaning of individual words, as well as assigning meaning in language, is essential to understanding sentences. This, in turn, is essential to understanding a speaker's message.

Once the listener understands the speaker's main point, they can begin to sort out the rest of the information they are hearing and decide where it belongs in their mental outline. For example, a political candidate listens to her opponent's arguments to understand what policy decisions that opponent supports.

Before getting the big picture of a message, it can be difficult to focus on what the speaker is saying. Think about walking into a lecture class halfway through. You may immediately understand the words and sentences that you are hearing, but not immediately understand what the lecturer is proving or whether what you're hearing in the moment is a main point, side note, or digression.

Understanding what we hear is a huge part of our everyday lives, particularly in terms of gathering basic information. In the office, people listen to their superiors for instructions about what they are to do. At school, students listen to teachers to learn new ideas. We listen to political candidates give policy speeches in order to determine who will get our vote. But without understanding what we hear, none of this everyday listening would relay any practical information to us.



HINT

One tactic for better understanding a speaker's meaning is to ask questions. Asking questions allows the listener to fill in any holes he or she may have in the mental reconstruction of the speaker's message.



TERMS TO KNOW

Understanding Stage

The stage of listening during which the listener determines the context and meanings of the words that are heard.

Comprehension

The totality of intentions or attributes, characters, marks, properties, or qualities, that the object possesses; the totality of intentions that are pertinent to the context of a given discussion.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **the understanding stage** is the second stage in the listening process. Determining the context and meaning of each word is essential to understanding a sentence. Understanding what we hear is essential to gathering information. Asking questions can help a listener better understand a speaker's message or main point.

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