

Basic listening skills

Listening is one of the biggest keys to personal evangelism. If you can't listen, why should someone listen to what you have to say?

Listening requires us to listen from the other person's point of view rather than from our own. Each one of us has opinions, so when we are listening, we are sometimes tempted to jump to conclusions.

What is the difference between listening and hearing?

Answer: listening is wanting to hear.

It is wrong to assume that hearing and listening are the same thing.

Jesus says (Luke 8:18):

- Therefore take heed how you hear. NKJV
- Therefore consider carefully how you listen. NIV
- Take care then how you hear. ESV

A computer Bible dictionary, leaving aside the obvious reference to our ears, says to hear is:

- to attend to, consider what is or has been said
- to understand, perceive the sense of what is said.

Poor listening habits include:

- Being in a hurry
- Not paying attention
- Constantly interrupting
- Feeling defensive or guilty
- Having preconceived ideas as to what the other person will say
- Wanting to offer 'advice' or 'solutions'

Listening to people can be of greater help than rushing to their aid practically.

The minute we begin to listen, we are *communicating* acceptance, respect and validation of them and their worth.

The person who is known to be a *listener* will most likely be a person who is listened to!

The secret of listening is to reflect on what we have heard and record it in our minds as *highlights*, which are summaries of what we have heard.

Brian's story: 'We went to town on Friday evening... we had a great time, but we missed the last train home, so we had to stand around waiting for a taxi... I was wearing the suit that I had just bought for work... it cost me a fortune... well, it was raining and it made a complete mess of it.'

Highlight: Brian wore his expensive new suit for the first time and it was ruined!



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Listening helps us to:

- Build and develop relationships
- Explore the other person's world or point of view
- Understand what is happening to them
- Encourage
- Make well-informed decisions
- Show love and respect

Effective listeners are:

- Attentive, giving undivided attention, removing distractions
- Patient, not interrupting or trying to complete sentences for the one who is speaking
- Aware of their own body language, and those who are speaking to them
- Not afraid to clarify, to show and establish true understanding
- Genuine
- People who regard what they hear as confidential

It has been recorded that we spend 70% of our waking hours in verbal communication, and of all the time we spend in communication, the greatest is spent in listening.

So, 16 hours awake = 11.2 hours in verbal communication. This means that over a quarter of one's waking time is spent listening!

Amount of time we spend in each aspect of the communication process

Skill	Waking hours communication
Listening	40%
Talking	35%
Reading	16%
Writing	9%

Adapted from:

<http://www.leadershipletters.com/2003/08/15/why-listening-is-important/>

And there we are, thinking that we are the ones who have to do most of the talking!

'Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak...' James 1:19 (KJV)

Body language is an important part of our listening skills. A lot of communication – in both directions – is non-verbal. Even when we are not talking but listening carefully we are still in 'communication mode'.



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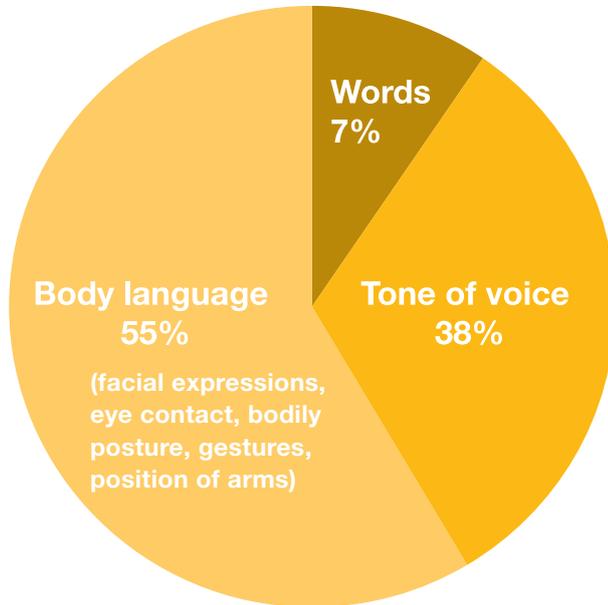


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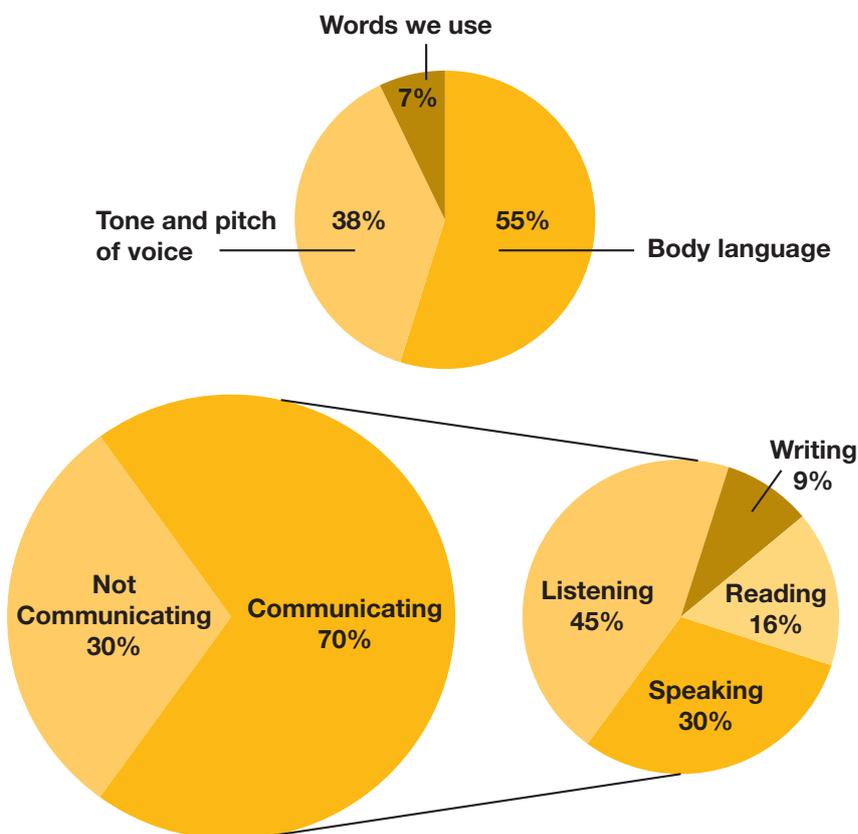
We need our ears and eyes open when we are listening.

Someone has written: The reading of nonverbal communication... is one of the most significant skills of effective listening.

An approximate division of the communication process is:



Time spent communicating





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To think about:

1. Do you know of an interesting or even embarrassing example of when a misunderstanding arose because of poor listening?
2. Do you know someone whom you appreciate as a good listener? How does it feel when you talk with them?
3. In what ways would an improvement in your listening skills help your personal witness for Jesus?

Group exercises:

1. Remain silent for 2 minutes and write down every sound you hear. This will teach you something about *active hearing* rather than *passive hearing*. Share what was heard. You will be surprised at what you missed and others heard (and vice versa!).
2. Each person has a number. Number 1 begins by giving one sentence on the subject, 'How someone becomes a Christian disciple.' Number 2 adds another item/point, then Number 3.

After Number 3, the leader will call out a number and that person must add a further item/point. This will continue until a few items are mentioned. No repetitions are allowed, so careful listening will be important.

To conclude someone will summarise the whole!

3. This needs preparation – slips of paper with information about a Bible character listed (say 10 points) with one false item. The papers are picked out of a box. In pairs, person A will read the list. Person B will listen carefully and at the end of A's speaking will (a) guess who is the Bible character and (b) what was the false piece of information (c) repeat the list of true information.
4. Each person writes down the directions from their house to the shops – including every turn and significant landmark (probably up to 10 details). In pairs, person A will read the journey details. Person B will listen and memorise as much as possible, stopping person A if he/she has reached 'memory-capacity'. Person B will then repeat to person A the route/details. Reverse the speaking/listening roles.

Listening with love

Plutarch, the Greek philosopher, who lived just after Christ, said, 'Know how to listen and you will profit even from those who talk badly.'

Listening is very important. Sometimes I have been known to 'hear' but not 'listen' to my wife!

When we are children, we have 'selective' hearing or listening; we listen to what we want to hear, even though our two small ears may well hear most of what's going on around us.

We need to study to encourage listening, listening to God, to our family, friends and those around us too. In so doing, we will have our lives changed and help change the lives of those around us too – for the good.

If we want to know where people stand spiritually, emotionally and psychologically, we will need to listen to them as they share. Only after having listened will we be in any position to be of help to them.

A marriage counsellor, Sue Crookes, has given several points that will help us in such situations.

1. Listen and reflect

Listening attentively is difficult enough. To restrain from speaking after listening, in order to reflect on what has been said, whilst the person continues on another point, is quite an art.

2. Accept

Accept the person just as they are and accept what they are saying or have said as being how they really feel at the moment.

3. Grasp the whole story

If you are not sure you are getting the whole story, speak up briefly with a, 'Correct me if I'm wrong...' or, 'It seems to me that you are saying...', type of interjection, to clarify your diagnosis of the person's spiritual condition.

4. Empathise and sympathise

Empathy is that emotional effect which impels the listener to actually feel as if the problems and reactions of the person to whom he or she is listening are actually their own.

Sympathy is similar; an expression of our fellow feeling and desire to help, but empathy is by far the better of the two!

The best thing that Job's three friends did for him was that they 'sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No-one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.' Job 2:13

Ezekiel empathised with God's people in their need: 'And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days – overwhelmed'. Ezekiel 3:15



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When we get close enough to those around us and begin to share their grief, don't be afraid of silence. Don't fill it with words just because it seems like a long time! God wonderfully speaks in quietness when we get out of the way!

5. Keep it confidential

If anything is told you in confidence, it should not be passed on to anyone else, not even a husband or wife! It may cause you grief, but it's better than not keeping your word.

6. Scripture and prayer

We must be able to bring in both scripture and prayer, but only when appropriate. It will have a lasting, effective help to those we are listening to.

Dean Rusk once said, 'One of the best ways to persuade others is by listening to them.' All that frantic talking we've done in the past that has got us nowhere! Listening with love is far more effective.

Our Lord didn't just sympathise or empathise with us in our desperate need: 'He too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death' (the devil!) '...and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.'

Hebrews 2:14-15

In that same chapter we are told, 'Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.' Hebrews 4:15 adds: 'For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin.'

We as evangelists can know and experience the Lord's 'grace to help us in our time of need.' In turn we can be like Jesus in listening with love and, at the right moment, share the good news of salvation.

There may be many types of things we will need to listen to; they might shock us if we are unaware of what goes on in society today. But we must be unshockable, and in so doing, 'be aware of the devil's schemes'. He would want to throw us into a panic as we hear what he has been doing in the lives of those we meet.

The Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale lists, in order of intensity, the stress ratings of events that happen in our lives:

	Rating
1. Death of a spouse	100
2. Divorce	73
3. Getting married	50
4. Redundancy	47
5. Retirement	45
6. Pregnancy	40
7. Trouble with the boss	23



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Our friends may have few places or people to turn to as they face such stresses. But Jesus wants us to go and meet, befriend and listen to such folk – whether they come to trust Christ as Saviour and Lord is not up to us.

We are to find ‘common ground’ with our unsaved friends and chance contacts, ‘so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him.’ 1 Corinthians 9:22b (Living Bible)

We should take note of how Jesus saw the people around Him and react as He did – ‘When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.’ Matthew 9:36

Will we give people a listening ear today?



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First impressions count

The way you approach a house and what the occupier sees when they open the door, can either have a negative or a positive effect even before you open your mouth.

Think about what you wear – dirty or scruffy clothing can put people off. On the other hand if you are dressed in a suit they will probably think that you are a Mormon or a Jehovah's Witness.

Consider that wearing a hat can obscure the face and create caution. It is an old-fashioned courtesy to remove the hat when talking to someone.

Always wear some identification and have with you information leaflets that are relevant to the church you are visiting on behalf of.

When approaching or leaving a property never step over a garden fence or hedge or walk across the garden. Always use the gate and paths provided, even if it means a long detour to the next property.

Always shut the gate, even when entering a property; if a child or dog escapes you will be in trouble.

It is advisable when visiting flats to start on the top floor and work downwards.

If someone is not dressed properly, is on the phone or holding back a dog, say that you understand the time is not convenient and will return at another time.

Accept the occupier's right to say they are not interested, if possible change the subject, but always leave a good impression and if possible, a piece of literature.

If it is raining, consider that this might not be the best time for doorstep evangelism. Opening the door to a drowned rat with soggy tracts or church leaflets will not give the positive impression that you hoped for.

Codes of Practice

- Be cleared by the Criminal Records Office
- Always remember that you are representing the local church when visiting in the community.
- Heed warnings.
- Avoid spin.
- Maintain a sense of humour.
- Be courteous at all times, even when you are being cold shouldered.
- Remember that body language is important at all times.
- Be a good listener, if we listen to people long enough they will tell you how to evangelise them.



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- Be friendly – never argue or condemn.
- Offer appropriate literature but never force it on those who refuse.
- Decline a child's invitation to enter their home.
- Be wise when dealing with members of the opposite sex.
- Never take personal details without permission.
- Do not break confidences.
- Respect people's privacy.
- Never outstay your welcome. It is better for us to close a conversation.
- Be careful about accepting an invitation in the home of someone of the opposite sex or of someone considered to be vulnerable.
- Always be careful around dogs, especially when posting literature through letter boxes. Do not put your fingers through!



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