

Developing Listening Skills

Listening Exercise 1

Objective

To test listening skills and observe how participants select, record, remember facts from a fairly intricate statement.

Procedure

Tell participants that you will shortly be reading a short statement.

They must listen and each be prepared to answer a question at the end.

They can make notes if they wish.

Read statement - crisply

Go round group asking questions in sequence.

Note answer on flip chart.

If someone fails to answer offer to group and fill in other answers. Then check results.

Listening Exercise 1 - the statement

STATEMENT

You are a yachtsman with 10 years sailing experience of class1 schooners and captain of the yacht Marietta sailing from your home port of Bristol. You are about to embark on a round trip solo voyage around the world.

You are attempting to beat the previous world sailing record of 140 days made in September 2002.

The course will follow the prevailing wind East to West. This route is due to take you down to Cape of Good Hope, South Africa then across the Atlantic through the Magellan Straits at Cape Horn, over the Pacific and Indian oceans, round Cape Hope to Bay of Biscay then home. Taking advantage of updated meteorological knowledge you have decided to leave in early May, which you hope will provide the best conditions throughout the journey. The yacht left port at 09.00 AM and voyage is expected to last 135 days. The weather conditions are described as fair with clear visibility and wind speeds at normal.

About 30 days into the journey 360 miles South East of the African Coast, a hurricane which has lasted for five days has caused the spinnaker sail to be lost.

With no replacement available the speed attainable will be reduced, thereby increasing the risk of failure by 50 per cent. However contact made via your GPS communications system has confirmed that landfall could be made in Punto Arenas, Argentina, where a replacement sail may be obtained. Although this would add extra 50 miles to the journey it would be possible to make up time and finish as intended.

You then have three options :

- a. To return which will take 50 days
- b. To attempt to reach port where a replacement sail will be obtained
- c. To continue and hope to achieve completion within previous record

Listening Exercise 1 - Questions and Answers

Q1.	How many years sailing experience?	A1	10 years
Q2.	What is the name of the yacht?	A2	Marietta
Q3.	What was the previous record?	A3	140 days
Q4.	What is the expected journey time?	A4	135 days
Q5.	How many passengers on board?	A5	None-“Solo”
Q6.	What prevailing wind direction is being followed?	A6	East to West
Q7.	What time did the yacht leave port?	A7	09.00am
Q8.	How many miles from the African coast?	A8	360 miles
Q9.	What direction from coast?	A9	South East
Q10.	What was lost? sail	A10	Spinnaker
Q11.	What is the increased risk of failure?	A11	50%
Q12.	What is the name of the communications system?	A12	GPS
Q13.	How long will it take to return to port?	A13	50 days
Q14.	Where is the landfall port for replacement sail?	A14	Punto Arenas
Q15.	Where would you return if voyage completed?	A15	Bristol

Learning Points

- need to listen carefully;
- don't rely on memory for complicated data:
- making notes; Questions not sequential!!
- use a simple logical method /shorthand
- concentrate on nouns, facts and figures
- recheck and amplify notes immediately before memory fails
- avoid subjective opinions/views

Discussion Points

- How accurate was the feedback?
- Pace and amount of information
- What helped people remember?
- How do they feel when things are not remembered?
- Selective listening – discuss
- Active listening converting & using information eg passengers; return home.

-What factors can influence the level of listening?

- Environment - Noise, Layout, Location, Comfort
- Behaviour - Anxieties, Emotion, Language, Interests
- Timing
- Complexity

-What influence can note taking have in interview/discussion?

- Loss of contact-
- Fail to pick up signals
- It is possible to remember without notes, although some of us may find it easier than others.
- There may be circumstances when it is more difficult to remember than others.
- There may be concern about what notes used for
 - what contained in notes –accuracy – summarise?

-Not saying that note-taking is wrong. It is important, though, not to become too dependent on note-taking too much.

Can people think why? (eg lack of eye contact, feels like collecting evidence).

On the other hand, notes can be valuable. How could a co-mediating pair go about taking notes?

What steps might you take to minimise possible negative effects of notetaking?

Check with the speaker that it is OK to take notes

Say what the notes are for and what will happen to them

Check back if you feel you have not got everything

record key facts

Ensure your notes are observations not interpretations

Do not allow note-taking to form a barrier between you and the speaker

Always feed back your version to the speaker.

Handout

Some Difficulties in Listening

Here are some of the difficulties which have been expressed by participants in exercises in listening and speaking, and from observations in groups :-

1. I listen least when I am most anxious to speak.
2. I tend to stop listening when I think I know what the other person is going to say.
3. I tend to evaluate what is being said according to my evaluation of the speaker as a person.
4. When my emotions are upset or the atmosphere is tense I find I cannot really concentrate on what is being said.
5. When I am trying to divide my attention between two people or one person and writing etc none of us benefits.
6. The longer another person speaks the harder I find it to assimilate what he says or to concentrate on what he is saying. 10-15 minutes continuous at most. Break up longer talks .
7. If a discussion develops into an argument I become more interested in not losing the argument than trying to listen to and understand the other point of view, particularly when the other view is directly opposing to my own.
8. I stop listening when I identify a minor inaccuracy of what the speaker is saying and wait to use it to >score points= rather than pick up the essential message.
9. I stop listening when I feel that the speaker is hiding his true feelings behind the words he uses.

Listening Exercises 2

A series of exercises designed to illustrate good and bad listening behaviour; active and empathetic listening skills; paraphrasing and asking questions. You will need to photocopy the exercises and handouts for the group. The exercises should take about two hours.

Effective Listening

Worksheet 1

Based on your experience of people listening to you, individually write down your idea of what you consider to be a 'nightmare' and a 'dream' listener.

MY NIGHTMARE LISTENER

MY DREAM LISTENER

Handout 1

Effective Listening

Here is a list of characteristics of 'nightmare' and 'dream' listeners.

DREAM LISTENER	NIGHTMARE LISTENER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is attentive • Is interested • Acknowledges what is being said in a non-committal way • Creates a positive atmospheres with their non verbal behaviour • Reflects what they are hearing • Asks clarifying questions • Makes encouraging noises • Makes eye contact • Listens for feelings • Invites more input and elaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrupts • Changes the subject • Rehearses in their head what you will say • Doesn't indicate acknowledgement • Interrogates • Teaches or gives advice • Gets emotionally 'hooked' • Is judgemental • Tries to comfort • Yawns • Gets distracted • Is defensive • Exhibits negative body language • Has no eye contact

A 'dream' listener listens actively and empathetically.

Handout 2

Active And Empathetic Listening

What is it?

It is verbal and non verbal behaviour which lets people know that they are being heard, understood and are being taken seriously. Apart from trying to understand what they are saying you should: attempt to tap into their emotional state of mind; encourage them to share feelings and make them feel that it is acceptable to express their feelings.

Where can it be used ?

To:

- Establish trust
- Reduce tension
- Build an atmosphere of mutual respect
- Encourage co-operation and improved communication
- Encourage people to listen attentively
- Communicate respect

What are the advantages?

Empathetic listening can:

- solve problems, by giving the individual the chance to talk through their problems, which can help to clarify their thinking about a topic.
- Reduce tension, by giving people the chance to explain their problems and express their views.
- Promote effective communication. Often communication breaks down because neither party has learned to listen actively.
- Listeners who try to understand the feelings behind the word of the speaker need to develop an active mind.
- Enhance the self concept. Empathetic listening assumes that other people have worth, dignity and something to offer. This attitude can make other feel good about themselves.

Handout 3

Active And Empathetic Listening Checklist

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a listening environment – remove barriers, such as furniture • Mirror the speaker's mood • Be conscious of personal space • Be open minded • Keep listening even if you think you've heard it all before • Be patient and courteous • Keep listening even if you disagree with what you are hearing • Cultivate a caring attitude toward the speaker • Be sensitive to gestures and body movement • Make notes when appropriate • Make time available • Summarise • Help the speaker to relax • Focus on the speaker's tone, stresses, speed, pitch and volume of voice • Allow silences • Make mental summaries • Mentally relate the speaker's ideas to your own experience • Be conscious of emotional obstacles to listening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain absolutely still and unmoved • Stereotype • Shut out ideas which are expressed in an offensive manner • Give your point of view • Divert to your own problem • Argue • Belittle • Allow interruptions

Handout 4

Ways The Listener Can Be In Control

Clarifying Check

Purpose:

- To clarify what has been said
- To attempt to get further information
- To attempt to explore matters further

How

- Use HOW, WHAT and WHEN questions
- Thereafter restate what you heard

Accuracy Check

Purpose

- To confirm what was said
- To encourage further discussion
- To let the speaker know that you are grasping at what was said and that you are interested

How

- Restate what was emphasised by the speaker, including the basic facts.

Feeling Check

Purpose

- To ensure the speaker that you are listening to and encouraging him or her
- To reduce anxiety, anger and other negative concerns and feelings

How

- Paraphrase what has been said
- Match the parties' emotions, depth of feeling and meaning given to what is said

Summarising Check

Purpose

- To focus on the discussion
- To take the discussion process to another level
- To focus on the main points

How

- Restate, reflect and summarise major ideas and feelings

Non-Committal Acknowledgement

Purpose

- To focus on the discussion
- To take the discussion to another level
- To focus on the main points

How

- Don't agree or disagree with what is said
- Use non-committal words with a positive tone, eg elaborate, substantiate, continue, meaning, I hear you

Worksheet 2

Paraphrasing

In pairs, choose a statement from the list below, or a topical item currently in the news. Try to find a statement or item that you disagree with. One person must argue for the subject and the other person against it. Choose who should start the exercise. That person must explain their views on the subject for approximately two minutes, without any interruption, and the other should attempt to paraphrase. Then swap roles. Do not swap roles until the first person is satisfied that their views have been correctly paraphrased.

STATEMENTS

- The Royal Family should be abolished
- The USA has the right to bomb countries that harbour terrorists that threaten it
- Britain should leave the EEC
- 'Rip off Britain' is a reality
- Britain should restore the death penalty
- It is a good idea to expand the number of 'faith schools'
- The wages of professional footballers in Britain should be 'capped'

Handout 5

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is a crucial aspect of active listening. It entails summarising and 'playing back' the message/meaning contained in a speaker's statement in order to:

- Show that you have understood them
- Ensure that the speaker is aware of what they have said
- Assist in other listeners in 'hearing' the message.

Paraphrasing

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen empathetically and use paraphrasing to clarify • Focus on the speaker and what they are saying • Be brief and to the point • restate in your own words your understanding of what the other person has said • include both the facts and the feelings-try and match the emotional intensity of the speaker • determine whether you have paraphrased correctly before responding with your point of view • paraphrase manageable amounts of information • reframe negative comments into positive ones, without losing the emotion of what is being said 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate, give an opinion or judge what is said while paraphrasing • Manipulate what is being said or conveyed and destroy the meaning • Simply repeat what you have heard – get to the meaning • Make stereotypical responses • Reframe to suit your position • Interrupt inappropriately • Overstate the use or feeling • Patronise • Over-use the same opening words, e.g. 'What I hear you say is' • Provide solutions

Handout 5

Asking Questions

Open ended questions

Open ended questions are used to elicit as much information as possible. An open ended question is one which cannot obviously be answered by a 'yes' or 'no' or short one-word answer. Very often, open-ended questions will take on the form of an invitation to expand or add to what they have said up to that point. Some examples of open-ended questions are:

- 'Tell me more about'
- 'Then what happened ?'
- 'How do you feel about that?'
- 'Is there anything you would like to add?'
- 'What alternatives did you consider?'
- 'What made you choose that alternative?'
- 'What did you mean by?'
- 'What would be the consequences be if?'
- 'What other possibilities are there?'
- 'Why is that very important to you /'

Closed questions

Closed questions are used to limit conversation and to bring out specific factual information. Some examples are:

- 'What time is it?'
- 'Do you have a season ticket?'
- 'How much money is outstanding?'
- 'Where did it happen?'
- 'Who was there?'

Closed questions are useful if you wish to focus discussion and clarify facts.