



# Listening Skills Manual

FOR GRADES 5-8

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# Listening vs. Hearing

*“Are you listening to me?”*

How many times have you heard your mom or dad say that? About a hundred thousand times, I’m guessing.

What it means is, “Did you understand what I said? Are you paying attention to what I’ve said?”

They know you heard it, but they think, as my mother used to say to me and my three brothers, “Did what I said just go in one ear and out the other?”

She had her reasons to believe it did. She told us to make up our beds, pick up our rooms, and put away the dishes. She told us to do our homework. She told us not to throw the baseball in the house. She told us to turn off or turn down that infernal noise we called music.

But did we do it? Not always.

We heard her, of course. But we weren’t listening.

Does this ring a bell?

OK, now let’s take this scenario into your classroom. Your teacher is explaining the importance of the 1944 D-Day. Unless you’re a huge history fan or a World War II buff or a “Saving Private Ryan” fanatic, you’re probably not listening that closely. The lecture may sound something like this: “Yak yak yak. Germans. Hitler. Blah blah blah. Normandy. France. Beaches. Yadda yadda yadda. General Dwight D. Eisenhower. June 7, 1944.”

You jot down a few details but don’t really understand what all the fuss is about because you aren’t really listening to the lecture. You are listening to that catchy but irritating song that’s stuck in your head, or the sound of your mother’s voice reminding you to give the dog a bath when you get home, or a conversation you had earlier in the day with a good friend. You’re not really listening to the teacher, and so you leave the room mostly confused and with that catchy but irritating tune bobbling about inside your head.

# Why we listen

## ■ WE LISTEN TO DISTINGUISH.

This kind of listening is developed at a very early age – perhaps even before birth, in the womb. It’s called “discriminative” listening. You learn to tell one thing from another. It is the most basic form of listening and does not involve the understanding of the meaning of words or phrases but merely the different sounds that are produced.

For example, in early childhood, you learned the difference between the sound of your mother’s voice as opposed to your father’s voice or your brother’s voice.

As you grow older and develop and gain more life experience, your ability to distinguish between different sounds improves and sharpens. Not only can you recognize different voices, but you also develop the ability to recognize tiny differences in the way sounds are made and what they mean.

For example, you learn to recognize in your mother’s voice when she’s angry and when she’s happy. You know when she’s serious and when she’s joking — just by the sound of her voice.

Eventually, you learn to recognize Spanish from English, French from Chinese. You can tell a Texas accent from a New York accent. Finally, you can learn to pay attention to non-verbal clues that reveal what the speaker is thinking and feeling.

In short, by listening closely and paying attention to body language, you can generally tell when a person is happy, angry, frightened or stressed out, regardless of what he or she is actually saying or how he or she is saying it.



Listening to distinguish allows you to determine who is talking — and even in which language.

## Tips on taking notes

👉 Write down only key facts and concepts, not entire sentences. Listen for key words: dates, places, names, anything the reader specifically targets. Generally, when the reader wants you to know a fact, he or she will slow down and say the fact slowly and carefully. Often, the fact will be repeated.

👉 Don't overdo it. You'll drive yourself crazy if you try to write down every word. It's better to listen carefully while writing less, than it is to write more and miss essential information.

👉 Come up with your own shorthand: abbreviations, initials, acronyms. If you have a long word like "organization," abbreviate it to "org." In the sample contest script on Page 17, the word "domesticate" is used often. Abbreviate it to "DOM." You could even abbreviate dogs to "D" and wolves to "W." By the way, researchers have measured the average rate of speech at two or three words per second, while the average handwriting speed is only .2 to .3 words per second.

👉 Write as legibly as possible. You will need to be able to read the notes later, so scribbling furiously will result in chaos.

👉 Use plenty of space. In fact, double space. Don't cram everything into one corner of a page. Number your pages before you begin so you'll know how information was presented chronologically.

👉 Listen for verbal cues that might include phrases such as, "The **MAIN** arguments are..." "A **MAJOR** development was..." or "This was an **EXAMPLE** of..."

👉 Practice. Practice. Practice.

## Listening activities 5/6

- **READ A STORY** several times to your class so it becomes familiar. Try using a well known fairy tale. Reread the story, this time changing certain words to something silly so that the story doesn't make sense. Students must listen closely for the wrong word and clap when they hear it. Alternatively, choose a key word that appears several times in the story. Again, students must listen carefully as you reread the story and then clap when they hear the key word.
- **STUDENTS WILL** need to listen to each other carefully to succeed in this simple game. Have students sit in a circle so that they can see and hear each other easily. Explain that students will need to be very quiet. Tell them that you are going on holiday and have some unusual items in your suitcase. Start off by saying, "in my suitcase I packed" and then add an item. The child sitting next to you repeats what you said and adds another item. The next child again repeats what has been said and adds yet another item. Encourage your students to add odd and unusual things.
- **"ITEMS FROM A LIST"** tests the memories of small groups of people by either showing them pictures or showing them a list of items. Divide people into groups of three. Show each group a large color photograph of a room filled with furniture and accessories and let them focus on it for ten seconds. Give each group one minute to write down as many items as they can remember from the picture. The groups must work together to recall what they saw from the picture. The group that accurately remembers the most items wins. Alternatively, you can do this with just a list long list of items and no pictures.
- **DIVIDE STUDENTS** into groups of four. Tell them to choose one person to write and another person to report. The students in each group will write a short paragraph that tells about an event. The paragraph should have at least one statement of fact and one statement of opinion. When everyone has finished, ask the reporter in one group to read the group's paragraph. Call on people in the other groups to tell which sentences in the paragraph are factual and which ones are statements of opinion. Proceed in this way with the other groups, guiding them as needed.